



A Scattering of Jades

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The great fire of 1835 burned most of New York City's wooden downtown and, like many others, Archie Prescott thinks he's lost all that's dear to him. His home is a smoldering ruin and his wife is dead--and next to her body is a child's corpse he assumes was his daughter. It seems as though it's the end of everything...

But it is only the beginning. In the midst of ancient magic, murderous conspiracies, and a crafty Mesoamerican demon-god who is plotting the end of humanity, Archie finds himself with the power to save the world—or drown it in sacrificial blood.

A Scattering of Jades Details

Date : Published July 13th 2003 by Tor Fantasy (first published 2002)

ISBN : 9780765340986

Author : Alexander C. Irvine

Format : Paperback 416 pages

Genre : Fantasy, Fiction, Historical Fiction, Historical Fantasy, Horror, Mythology, Historical

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David says

As a caver, I really enjoyed the parts with Stephen Bishop in and around Mammoth Cave. It was a particular treat as I didn't even realize this was part of the story when I picked up the book.

Daniel says

Bought this book years ago to read after enjoying some of Irvine's short works and reading the reviews and awards this book garnered. I found it difficult to get into, because many critical developments happen off screen; you suddenly encounter a character in a new unfamiliar place and then a few pages later are told what happened to get them there. This became less of an issue as the book went on, and I found the second half much more enjoyable. Irvine excels at writing scenes describing horrific or tragic occurrences. His weakness is in writing fully fleshed characters. Many felt the same to me in their manner of speech and thought. A lot of his avoidance of directly relating critical events in the novel may stem from his realization that he can't write a young girl well.

What is great about this novel is the plot, and its entertainment in mixing fantasy with historical events and archaeology, almost in an Indiana Jones way. The plot centers around a man who is thrown in the middle of two sets of Native American deities: Aztec and Lenape. He is put into the position indirectly by virtue of the date of his daughter's birth, and the actions of a crazed, megalomaniac who seeks to follow through with the true, occult, plans behind Aaron Burr's treasonous plots. Taking place just before the American Civil War, the novel features appearances by PT Barnum and Edgar Allan Poe, a reanimated Aztec mummy in the service (moreso an avatar) of Tlaloc, zombies, circus folk (geeks), the Tammany Society, and Edgar Allan Poe. The majority takes place in New York City and Mammoth Cave, Kentucky.

With all its oddities and earthly creepiness, the novel takes great pains to address the issue of slavery, using an educated slave as a significant (and perhaps only likable) character - much like the servant in Clarke's "Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norrell", and realizations by other characters on who poorly slaves and African American's are treated. Surprisingly, however, with its rich use of Native American culture and legend, there are few human Native American characters, and all things Amerindian are taken as malevolently magical, directly or indirectly.

Michelle says

I'm a wine drinker who happens to dislike beer. I have a buddy who's wired the other way around, and has me taste things when he's sure the sun rises and sets in whatever glass he's in love with at the time. "ah," I say, "this one smells a bit like crushed cherries, with an interesting smoky suggestion to the flavor." "see, you like this one then!" he'll exclaim. "nope," I'll reply, "beer still tastes pretty much like urine, but I understand why you like it."

this book is pretty much that same situation. I'm well read enough to appreciate it on its technical merits, but I just don't have much love for irvine's debut novel. lovingly, lavishly researched, I longed for an annotated

ebook edition just to keep up with the secondary names of avatars of priests of ancient aztec gods. these shifty-named personages work through a richly complicated scheme to bring about...well, some sort of vague new world order setup. we know why the good guy thinks it's a bad plan (ancient aztec gods = human sacrifice and all), but the bad guys are hell-bent on Getting Stuff Done though they have no concrete promises of tangible benefit on the other side. when dealing with creepy dead spirits roaming the earth and god-avatars that can render you instantly into gibbering madness, it might be a good idea to be a bit better prepared.

dense, complex, richly detailed...and collapsing under it's own weight.

Jess says

As it stands, this is a story steeped in Mexican culture and religion with only one Mexican character (who dies early on, what a surprise). I wasn't motivated to like the main character or his daughter, and the antagonist was boring. The pacing was good, and the action was exciting, but I guess I was looking for something a little more emotionally and intellectually substantial. Honestly Stephen was my favourite part of the book and I was much more interested in him than the main plot. Good for reading on the train, but not much lasting power.

April Moore says

Interesting and unusual story, but I'm not sure if it would be to most people's liking. I have some mixed feelings about it myself.

I picked it up years ago because it featured Mesoamerican mythology, caves, history and fantasy, all in one book. But sometimes that did prove to be a confusing mix and the spiritual side of the narrative was occasionally so arcane as to be impossible to follow (even knowing more about the mythos than the average reader). It was also darker than I had anticipated; the human sacrifices were not unexpected and I was prepared for those, but that, layered over the gritty reality of 19th century America plus a few arcane rituals thrown in for fun was occasionally more than I wanted to read about in detail.

Overall I am glad I finally read it and I don't begrudge the time I spent doing so, but I doubt I will feel the need to do so again.

Lynda says

The great New York Fire of 1935 starts the story of a little girl, a grieving man, a slave, Aztec Gods, and a Zombie. Possibly the greatest part of the story is the way it allows the reader to visit the magnificence and eeriness of Kentucky's Mammoth Cave.

Miriam says

This book was not exciting.

Interesting, yes. But when I saw a fantasy set in 1840s New York featuring Aztec mythology, I was excited. And the setting and mythology are done pretty well, but the excitement wore off pretty fast. Even the action scenes, which sound hair-raising in summary -- dead women turned into fire spirits! mummy shape-changers! gang violence! kidnapping! caver explorers lost in utter darkness! -- were not very exciting.

There is a dryness about this book. The characters have some development in that they are given some background and some personality traits and motivations are provided, and they are distinct from one another, but they don't have a great deal of perceptible depth. For some of the traumatic experiences some of them undergo, such as the main character's horrific loss of his wife and child, or the slave-caver's change of masters, there is not enough emotional reaction. If we as reader had not been in the characters' heads this could be excused as Victorian reserve, but we are, and if you, author, tell me a man is so devastated by grief that he collapses into a stupor of alcoholic depression and unemployment for a decade, I need to see the pain rather than just the reaction to the pain. I think it doesn't help that we don't get any time with Archie's wife* and daughter before the fire.

Likewise, the prose is workmanlike but nothing special. A little dry but not distractingly so. Irvine's strong point is his research. He combines a number of topics -- mythology, politics both local and international, social and material changes, economics -- in ways that fit together pretty smoothly and seem to make sense in context despite the unlikeliness of ambitious 19th-century American politicians trying to raise Aztec gods. He didn't quite give me the contemporary feel of the best historical writers, but given the plot I think he was correct in restraining himself from overloading the reader with details (something that good researchers often fail at). Obviously, this will be more or less appealing depending on the individual reader's interest in the subjects in question. If you have no background whatsoever in Mesoamerican mythology the various deities with their multiple names, aspects, and calendar variations may be confusing or boring (I had encountered them before and still found it all a bit hard to keep straight). In short, I would recommend this primarily to people with at least a passing interest in either the political or mythological background.

*Re: wives et al women: they are not in this book. Archie's wife dies in the first few pages after a couple of lines of presence. Stephen is married but that is only mentioned halfway through the book (she's a good cook) and seems to have no significance. Other women occur but have no real role, they are just part of the urban landscape. The only two females who are present for any duration or have any personality are the evil old witch (ancient, unsympathetic, not around that long) and Archie's daughter (prepubescent, hideously scarred). I don't think the book particularly needed sex in it, I just found it interesting how women and sexuality are completely absented from the story...

Peggy says

This is the novel, Not the anthropology, stories, poems and prayers by Khab, Sullivann .. transl of Nahautl, but this little action, adventure is a good read

Kyle says

What a great book! The beginning was a bit hard to follow at first, with various smaller characters disappearing and then reappearing later when you've forgotten who they are. But most of the book is a smooth ride. It has a plot that keeps you guessing and a main character (Archie) whom you can't help but root for during his quest to find his daughter while also being tempted and torn apart by two different ancient Mesoamerican gods. Irvine expertly handles the suspense of the story so much so that the last sixty pages which entail the denouement of the plot and Archie's dangerous travails in Kentucky caverns far below the earth are nail-bitingly exciting. Because of this I'm tempted to give it five stars, but after some consideration four is probably a more accurate rating for the book as a whole. Well worth the read, it's too bad this book is now out of print. It's definitely a keeper in my opinion.

Brett says

Science Fiction

Zeke Gonzalez says

I'm not going to lie, I'm pretty surprised by how much I enjoyed this book. It's something I added to my reading list because it caught my attention on a Buzzfeed Books list, and those normally end up being mediocre recommendations. However, in this case I'm really glad I picked this book up! *A Scattering of Jades* is historical fiction set in the 1840s and deeply infused with Aztec mythology. The characters are sharply wrought, and the story is the culmination of a long-standing, trans-America battle between two supernatural forces. Alexander Irving's writing is empathetic, tightly written, and thrilling in all the right places; however, the details of the plot and story are sometimes unclear and hard to follow early in the novel. The mythology is absolutely fascinating—I'm a huge mythology buff and have been hunting for Aztec myths for a long time! Finally, the story is deeply enthralling and carries powerful themes on family, grief, devotion, freedom, and fatherhood.

Overall, I think Alexander C. Irvine's *A Scattering of Jades* is a fascinating, dark, and epic novel infused with intriguing mythology, a cast of distinctive characters, and moving themes. Though it starts a bit unclear, I think it's well worth the read for mythology buffs and fans of historical fiction!

Lisa Grabenstetter says

The mashup of 1800s North America with Aztec and Lenape mythology is brilliant. I sorta wish this weren't the only book.

Irvine has a didactic bent to his prose, and though it improves as the novel progresses it's admittedly a little hard to get through those first 65 pages. Still, once you do you have monstrous, mummified were-mages and spurned Aztec gods and dead men with vendettas and weird, bulbous grotesques. Who wouldn't be willing to do just a little bit of wading to get to that?

Evan Jensen says

Not sure why, but I really enjoyed this book. Probably the nice world research and setting.

Chris Plambeck says

An amazingly original work, at least in my experience. Caused more outside research as well than any book in recent memory. An excellent tale, and many faceted.

J.R. says

Mix equal parts of history and myth and you get a compelling brew.
