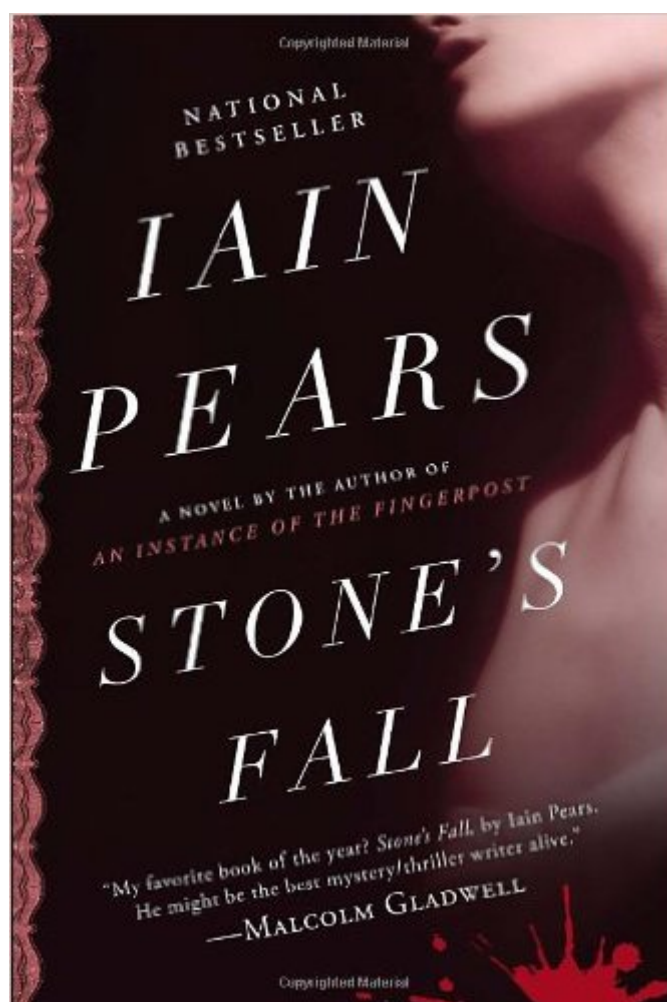


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Stone's Fall: A Novel



Synopsis

At his London home, John Stone falls out of a window to his death. A financier and arms dealer, Stone was a man so wealthy that he was able to manipulate markets, industries, and indeed entire countries and continents. Did he jump, was he pushed, or was it merely a tragic accident? His alluring and enigmatic widow hires a young crime reporter to investigate. The story moves backward in timeâfrom London in 1909 to Paris in 1890 and finally to Venice in 1867âand the attempts to uncover the truth play out against the backdrop of the evolution of high-stakes international finance, Europeâs first great age of espionage, and the start of the twentieth centuryâs arms race. Stoneâs Fall is a tale of love and frailty, as much as it is of high finance and skulduggery. The mixture, then, as now, is an often fatal combination.

Book Information

Paperback: 612 pages

Publisher: Spiegel & Grau; Reprint edition (June 1, 2010)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0385522851

ISBN-13: 978-0385522854

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 1.3 x 8.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 1 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.3 out of 5 starsÂ See all reviewsÂ (178 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #349,826 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #281 inÂ Books > Mystery, Thriller & Suspense > Thrillers & Suspense > Financial #1919 inÂ Books > Literature & Fiction > British & Irish > Historical #3149 inÂ Books > Literature & Fiction > Genre Fiction > Historical > Mysteries

Customer Reviews

Iain Pears' novel *Stone's Fall* is incredibly complex. It is told from the perspective of three narrators, during three time periods, and in three separate settings. It also travels backwards through time. Pears' pieced together a historical mystery that simply broaches espionage, international finance, and military arms production. And this novel also has the heft of a decent sized phone book. Such an ambitious undertaking in the hands of a lesser author could have easily been confusing or tedious, but *Stone's Fall* is a masterwork of literary achievement. The mysteries of the story are artfully unfolded in an intricate plotline. The story opens in London in 1953 where a retired reporter, Matthew Braddock recalls London in 1909 during the time he was hired to investigate the whereabouts of an heir to John Stone, a major player in international finance and military arms

production. The more he probes into the life of John Stone the more questions he has. The next segment of the book opens in Paris 1890, and told by the up and coming British spy Henry Cort. Through Henry we get more insight into the life of John Stone, as we learn of the rise of his wife and the power he commanded in global finance. Finally we are treated to the perspective of Mr. Stone in Venice 1867, as we discover the origins of his business and finally all the loose ends are tied together to the delight of the reader. The characters are slowly rendered, layer by layer, choice by choice. They come and go in each time period revealing more about themselves and the relationships they share with each other. Pears' constantly reinvents his subjects, so that their motivations only become clear after all sides of the story are told.

Iain Pears's "Stone's Fall" opens in France in 1953 with the burial of Madame Robillard, who passed away in her eighties. The first part of the book is narrated by Matthew Braddock who had met Robillard (then known as Elizabeth, Lady Ravenscliff) when she was in her forties. The year was 1909, and twenty-five year old Matthew was a crime reporter for a London newspaper. Elizabeth summons Matthew a fortnight after the death of her husband, John Stone, Lord Ravenscliff, who died after he fell or was pushed out of an open window in his study. She offers Matthew a great deal of money to look into her husband's professional and personal affairs. There are a number of questions that she wants answered: Was Stone's death accidental or a result of foul play? Why did he leave a huge bequest to a child, whom, he states in his will, "I have never previously acknowledged?" Why did Stone grant a legacy to Mrs. Esther Vincotti of Italy? After examining her husband's papers carefully, Elizabeth finds nothing to shed light on these matters. She tells Matthew that, even after twenty years of marriage, she and her husband were very much in love and that he had not been in the habit of keeping secrets from her. That is why she is willing to pay Matthew handsomely to dig deeper and give her the information that she craves for her peace of mind. Thus begins a lengthy narrative that moves backwards in time. Pears takes us to London in 1909, Paris in 1890, and finally, to Venice in 1867. Part Two is narrated by Henry Cort, a shadowy figure who crossed paths with John Stone and Elizabeth and knows a great many of their secrets. Part Three is narrated by Stone himself. The first part is not that compelling and some will be tempted to put the book down after the first hundred pages.

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