



Cold Tuscan Stone

David P. Wagner

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Rick Montoya has just moved from Santa Fe to Rome, embracing the life of a translator. He's beginning to embrace la dolce vita when school friend Beppo, now senior in the Italian Art Squad, recruits Rick for an unofficial undercover role. Armed with a list of galleries, suspects, and an expense account, Rick would arrive in Tuscany posing as a buyer for a Santa Fe gallery and flush out traffickers in priceless burial urns.

But, before sunset on his first day in Volterra, the challenge intensifies. Rick has one quick conversation with a gallery employee who dies minutes later in a brutal fall from a high cliff. Has the trade in fraudulent artifacts upgraded to murder? Are the traffickers already on to Rick?

The local Commissario and his team consider Rick an amateur, and worse, a foreigner. Plus Rick is a suspect in what proves to be the dead man's murder. While the Volterra squad pursues its leads, Rick and the Volterra museum director continue to interview his list: a top gallery owner, a low-profile import/export businessman and his enterprising color-coordinated assistant, a sensuous heiress with a private art specialty and clientele. When Rick's lover Erica, an art history professor, arrives from Rome to visit him, she rekindles a friendship with an alluring, maybe dangerous, heiress. Has Rick's role made him the target of both cops and criminals?

Cold Tuscan Stone Details

Date : Published September 1st 2013 by Poisoned Pen Press (first published January 1st 2013)

ISBN : 9781464201929

Author : David P. Wagner

Format : Paperback 212 pages

Genre : Mystery, Fiction, Cultural, Italy

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From Reader Review Cold Tuscan Stone for online ebook

Sylvia Dugan says

This is the first book in a series featuring Rick Montoya, an American with an Italian mother and uncle in Rome. He is recruited by a friend from school who is in the Italian Art Squad to help uncover who is trafficking in the sale of priceless Etruscan antiquities in the town of Volterra. In addition to the mystery, we learn a bit about the ancient Etruscans who carved the beautiful funeral urns and sculptures that are being stolen and sold on the black market.

Mary says

"Cold Tuscan Stone" is the first in a series of mysteries set in Italy. David P. Wagner does a good job of establishing the character and setting. Our lead character, Rick Montoya, is a dual-nationality Italian-American. His father was a diplomat and his mother is Italian. Rick has ties to New Mexico, but he is making a living in Rome as a translator. When a school friend who is in the Italian cultural ministry asks Rick to pose as an art buyer in order to unmask illegal antiquities trading, Rick agrees to try.

The bulk of the story is set in a Tuscan hill town, Volterra, which is a center for ancient Etruscan archeology and art discoveries. Rick represents himself as a the connection to a Santa Fe gallery that wants unique items for its wealthy customers. He makes contact with several dealers and exporters in the area. On his first day in Volterra, he is the last person to see alive Capono, a worker in one of the galleries. The police are not sure whether the death is a suicide or a murder. Rick wonders if the death is related to his inquiries. Visits to galleries and museums are mixed with mysterious assignments with go-betweens. As Rick begins to figure out who might have the opportunity and the motive for crime, the local police narrow down the list of suspects in Capono's death. A few red herrings and a beautiful, tempestuous Italian girlfriend make the plot a bit more complicated. It is resolved a bit clumsily, with one big question left unanswered, but Rick is a bit jazzed by the experience and open to future adventures.

I enjoyed this mystery largely because of its well-developed background, with descriptions of art, antiquities, and Italian food.

Jennie says

Loved the setting of this book in a mountain village in Tuscany and the theme of illegal trafficking in ancient artifacts. Brought back memories of a display and presentation on this that I viewed in Rome in 2016 - so the story came across as authentic and contemporary. Reading was good, though perhaps a little more tension would have created a stronger sense of urgency. I will definitely come back to enjoy another adventure of Rick Montoya in his unofficial role as an undercover agent.

Nigel says

A laid-back mystery with some nice local colour that builds slowly and promises more than is actually delivered. Engaging but unmemorable.

Caroline says

I feel the setting and the cultural references place this book in an interesting genre. It is a murder mystery but also provides insights into the township of Volterra and the surrounding area of Tuscany in Italy.

Desiree says

Nice detective story set in Volterra, first in a series about Rick (Riccardo) Montoya, half Italian, half American translator who does some undercover work for the ministry of culture (bene culturali) in the art scene in Volterra to discover the source of illegal Etruscan funerary urns.

He "unearths" more than he set out for.

Moshe Mikanovsky says

Nice settings though nothing too sophisticated

Lance Wright says

Though there are relatively few suspects in this debut murder mystery set in Tuscany, there are a lot of characters and it helps when they take a break to dine or discuss art, giving readers a chance to get acquainted with them. The storyline itself is nicely crafted, if also a little thinly plotted, but given how well structured the environment in which the investigation plays out it hardly matters. A fine start to this series.

Michael Dunn says

A first effort and it shows.

The book plods along for 150+ pages. mostly is a travelogue for Volterra, the town.

I easily guessed the guilty party when first introduced.

The main character is personable, if a bit naïve, but then he's not a trained investigator.

The girlfriend is an annoying bitch, wonder why the character is sodden with her. I hope she disappears.

The story did contain some good red herrings and such a good twist for the ending, though the final scene was not believable. I like the mentor figure of the uncle, I hope he gets more space. Hopefully the writing and story improves in the subsequent books.

Helen says

E-Reader. Mystery

Rick Montoya moved from New Mexico, he a translator, to Rome, Italy.

An old friend from a school asked Rick to do some unofficial undercover work. To try & find the group who are traffickers in stolen burial urns. His friend nickname is Beppo. He works for the Italian government. He is charge of anyone trying to steal & thing that belongs to Italy. His girlfriend Erica said he should do this job.

Rick has been Tuscany for short time when man died after falling from very high place. The man no reason to commit suicide. He had worked for Voltterra Gallery.

There are so many characters to list in this book.

I will tell you there will be dangerous things will happen in this book.

I you will enjoy this book as much as I did!

Vicky says

Probably more like 3 1/2 stars. This was a new author for me when I picked up a later book in the series [Return to Umbria] and I liked it well enough to go to the library and get the author's first one, featuring American-Italian interpreter/translator Rick Montoya. He is a personable sleuth, along with the Italian police characters. This first one revolves around art theft and forgeries which I always find interesting. The Italian settings are well described and of course the food plays a major role, although not up to the standard of Camilleri's Inspector Montalbano series. But if you like Donna Leon and Camilleri, this series is an enjoyable addition to the genre of mysteries set in Italy.

Brace1737 says

Rick Montoya lives in several worlds. He loves New Mexico and loves Italy. I had a friend with that happy problem. Now in Italy and living in Rome, a friend asks him to take an undercover assignment and go to Tuscany for a few days to investigate the thief of Ancient art.

Sounds like an Italian version of Tony Hillerman's A Thief of Time? Perhaps. This novel is a good first effort. I may read some of the other novels in this series.

Rita says

The first 9 chapters seemed to drag along as the scenes were set and characters introduced to develop the plot line but did it capture my attention at any point early in the story? Not really. I started this back in September and honestly only finished it because I was waiting for my daughter's plane to arrive this past weekend with nothing else to read.

Jill says

This is the first of the Rick Montoya Italian Mysteries and my last. At least 75% of this book could have been written by the Italian Tourist Department. After Wagner finishes discussing each and every detail of each and every meal he then goes into a detailed discussion of the wardrobe of each and every person (including their shoes). Basically it boils down to less than 10% of the novel has anything to do with the mystery.

Victor Gentile says

David P. Wagner in his new book, “Cold Tuscan Stone” Book One in the Rick Montoya Italian Mystery series published by Poisoned Pen Press introduces us to Rick Montoya.

From the back cover: Rick Montoya has just moved from Santa Fe to Rome, embracing the life of a translator. He’s beginning to embrace la dolce vita when school friend Beppo, now senior in the Italian Art Squad, recruits Rick for an unofficial undercover role. Armed with a list of galleries, suspects, and an expense account, Rick would arrive in Tuscany posing as a buyer for a Santa Fe gallery and flush out traffickers in priceless burial urns.

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Rick Montoya relocated from New Mexico and now lives in Rome working as a freelance translator. What a life. Now he has been recruited to be a spy to find what gallery is selling illegal traffickers. Then there is a murder. Rick becomes a suspect. Now we have to find out who really did it before there is another one. Get ready to try to solve a murder, which I am pretty sure you won’t be able to do, all the while enjoying the scenery of Tuscany as if we are on a tourist holiday in this stunningly beautiful town. Danger, art thieves, suspense and murder all figure into this highly complicated plot. Rick Montoya is an engaging new character that has flaws but is so likeable. “Cold Tuscan Stone” is loaded with twists and turns and red herrings that will leave you guessing all the while you are flipping pages to find out what happens next. I am so glad to have discovered David P. Wagner and am so looking forward to more stories with Rick Montoya.

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