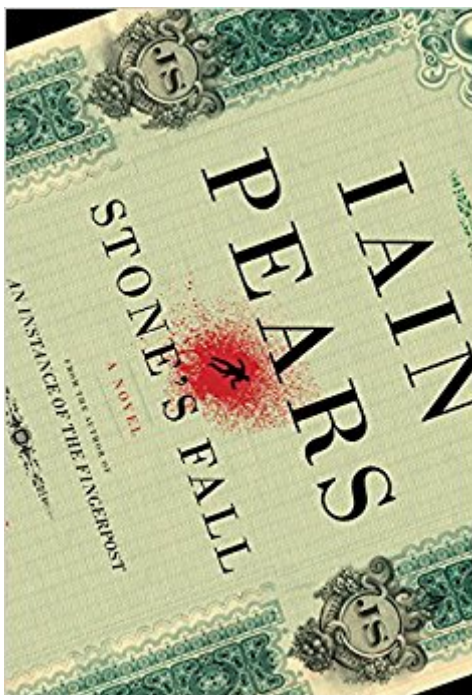


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Stone's Fall: A Novel



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 time— from London in 1909 to Paris in 1890 and finally to Venice in 1867—and the attempts to uncover the truth play out against the backdrop of the evolution of high-stakes international finance, Europe's first great age of espionage, and the start of the twentieth century's arms race. Stone'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

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Customer Reviews

Told from 3 points of view all focusing on one woman. The first after everyone else has died, a reporter tells of his youthful encounter with Lady Elizabeth, which leaves him believing he has been duped and is now in possession of the facts. But he is quite wrong. The second account is from a mysterious man, a spymaster of sorts, who also gets it wrong. The final section contains the notes

of Mr Stone himself, and the mysteries are finally solved. This book is a mystery and a love story, but most interesting of all, a fascinating glimpse into European Economic history in the late 19th and early 20th century.

Industry, finance, courtesan, love, murder it has it all and is well woven together. Set during the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century. England and Europe financial systems in trouble are as modern as our recent banking debacle.

The book is truly interesting it is really 3 books in one. Pears has a wonderful way of weaving a story that wishes you had a life where all you could do is read the book from beginning to end with no interruption. I have had trouble remembering all the characters in the book, but I have a cheat sheet. If anyone is traveling over the holidays or having a vacation on a beach, get this book, the delays in your travel plans will melt away, and the beach will be perfect.

There's no shortage of excellent reasons to recommend this exceptional novel. In my opinion it surpasses even his previous masterwork, "An Instance of the Fingerpost". The ingeniously crafted plot and driving narrative make a wonderfully extended page turner. Once begun, this novel is awfully hard to set down. The scenes are set with an economy of language which belies its 600+ page length. The characters are skillfully brought to life in the parallax of conflicting testimonies of multiple witnesses within the three individual narratives which comprise the novel. The nearly tangibly vivid recreation of historical places and prevailing attitudes is exquisitely understated and the descriptions of 19th century industry and intricacies of Victorian era banking ring as true as one can make them in a novel. The central mystery--the sudden and inexplicable death of a titan of 19th century industry, is but one of many corollary mysteries. Around that question orbit the enigmatic actions and characters of everyone close to him. The eventual resolution is staged with such intelligent craftsmanship that it will haunt the reader long after the final page has turned. Iain Pears has a shrewd respect for the reader's intelligence and avoids the standard mystery novel exposition wherein all questions are gratuitously resolved. Reflecting afterwards, I realized that much of the novel's power derives from offstage dramas left to the reader's imagination after the book is closed which suggest many alternative dramatic sequences which could have produced many of the described events. Even 3 days after finishing Stone's Fall, more keep coming spontaneously to mind. Few novels leave such an exquisite mental legacy.

As excellent a read as I expect from this author. I would not have believed such a (to me) boring topic could make a riveting novel. British industry and banking? At the end of the nineteenth century? Not my usual fare. When the secret was revealed, I actually gasped.

Brilliant, beautifully descriptive historical novel of the late 19th century, centered on the fatal fall from a window of John Stone, an industrial magnate. Did he trip and fall or was he pushed? Written in three voices covering four time periods and several locales (London, Paris, Venice), Pears wonderfully lays down a mosaic of the dramatis personae - their characters, motivations, aspirations - all set in the world of politics and business. Peppared with the occult, the intersection of covert operatives and high society, intertwined with government and financial machinations, this is truly a first class read that kept me riveted and wondering up until the very shocking and surprising end. So cleverly interwoven, I found myself flipping back to refresh my recollection about the characters - I was so sorry when I reached the end! Very satisfying - kudos, Mr. Pears!

When John Stone falls from his window to his death, it's a mystery. The first half of the book revolves around a journalist trying to solve a different mystery presented to him by the widow. The second half of the book is a flashback to John Stone's time in Venice, and here I felt was the best written part of the story. Iain Pears' descriptions of Venice are completely wonderful, and Stone's life and adventures in Venice intriguing. You'll never see the end coming.

The mystery portion of this book is well imagined to draw the reader through a timeline of events that is told from multiple points of view, and the use of this device illuminates the various ways of life that different classes had in pre-war England and Europe. The most interesting aspect of the novel is the use of "follow the money" in an historic context, and seeing the manipulation of investing and banking and the reaping of riches and how things have not changed so very much. Worth a read for a detour into some fascinating lives.

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