



The Hermetica of Elysium

Annmarie Banks

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1494 Barcelona. Thousands of books and manuscripts are lost to the flames as the Black Friars attempt to purge Europe of the ancient secrets of the gods and the bold new ideas that are ushering in the Renaissance. Words are Nadira's life. She is pursued as passionately for her rare skill as a reader of Ancient Greek, Latin, Arabic, and Hebrew, which makes her valuable to men who pursue the *Hermetica* to exploit its magic. Kidnapped by Baron Montrose, she is forced to read from the *Hermetica*. Within its pages are the words that incite the Dominicans to religious fervor, give the Templars their power, and reveal the lost mysteries of Elysium. As Nadira begins her transformation from servant to sorceress, will she escape the fires of the Inquisition, the clutches of the Borgia pope, Alexander VI and the French king, Charles VIII? And will Montrose's growing fear of her powers cause her to lose her chance for love?

The Hermetica of Elysium Details

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Author : Annmarie Banks

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From Reader Review The Hermetica of Elysium for online ebook

Sarah Castillo says

Like it says on the tin, The Hermetica of Elysium (Elysium Texts Series) is set in 1494 Barcelona. A very familiar Barcelona for history buffs, but fear not. The fantasy part of the historical fantasy shows up, and man does it make a hell of an entrance. (When you read the book you'll get that pun.)

I fell in love with our heroine, Nadira, almost immediately. She is a Moor, daughter to a princess-turned-slave, and thus something of a slave herself. Despite this, she has been well educated by her mother and her master. As a woman, she is invisible. As a person who reads Arabic, Greek, Hebrew and Latin, she is valuable. So when a crew of men show up who need someone low-profile and literate, well. That's the story isn't it.

However, this isn't a story where the young heroine is thrust from one situation to another. Well, actually... What did you expect, it's 1494 Barcelona!! But Nadira uses her wits and her courage to get through her trials despite her position as a servant and a woman. Experiencing Nadira come into her own as a deciding force in her own life is amazing, and I really enjoyed watching her outwit her way out of snags.

Another thing I enjoyed was the fact that the people who populate Annmarie Bank's version of the 1490's look like... well, people who populated the 1490's. They're still good guys too! People who spend a lot of time outside have chapped lips and dirty clothes and kind of smell. That's ok! They can still be pretty handsome! Regular people don't have all their teeth. That does not mean they're a villain. Pockmarks are not only on creepy men with greased hair who stand in corners and plot treachery. This might not seem ground breaking, but how many historical books do you read where the main characters don't all have teeth like they stepped out of a cosmetic dentists, and skin like they live in Bath and Body Works? Yea. That's what I thought.

And then, the romance. Yes, there is one. Don't groan. This is one of the best developed romances I've read in a long time. Not once does time stop as they look at each other. No one feels electricity the first time their hands touch. That's not to say it's not momentous and beautiful. It totally is. But it's momentous and beautiful in a normal, natural way. It's love with no illusions and only the every day sort of magic. I think that's the best kind.

This is where I tell you the part that I didn't like. Nothing. I liked the whole thing. If you like fantasy or.. you know what, I'm not doing that this time. If you've liked anything I've suggested, you'll like this book. Buy it. Don't just remember to buy it on December 8th. Click that link and pre-order it now. You're going to want this one.

Check out my other reviews at my blog

Vivian says

Fifteenth century Europe saw the beginning of the Inquisition, the rise of the Borgias (Rodrigo Borgia or Pope Alexander IX, father to the infamous Lucrezia), and the fictional quest into the hidden meaning of a very special book, a *Hermetica*. Nadira, a servant girl in Spain, is the key to this book in **The Hermetica of Elysium** by Annmarie Banks, the first in The Elysium Texts series.

Nadira wasn't born into servitude, but she has spent the majority of her life as a servant/slave. Her mother was sold into servitude when Nadira was a child of five. Fortunately for Nadira, her mother was a learned woman that taught Nadira to speak, read and write several languages including Arabic, Spanish and Latin. Her owner/master Sofir, a spice merchant, had her learn Greek and Hebrew, along with a smattering of English. In a time when most men didn't know how to read one language, much less three or four, Nadira is quite unique, especially since she "worked" as a lowly clerk for a merchant.

Robert Montrose may be a Baron, but he is for all intents and purposes a simple man with one purpose, to serve and protect his older brother Richard. After being separated from Richard, he learns of his death when he tracks him to Sofir's home. It is there that he discovers the unique linguistic abilities of Nadira. Robert is illiterate but knows that his brother was on a quest for a special book with special powers, The *Hermetica*. He also knows that he must continue this quest and can only do so with the assistance, voluntary or not, of Nadira. Needless to say, Nadira's master is not keen to release her, so Robert forces the issues and they are off.

What follows is a series of abductions in a search for the hidden truths to the *Hermetica*. First, Nadira is abducted by Montrose and then taken captive by some monks and given to Monsieur Conti in Andorra. She isn't abused but kept in a gilded cage and asked to assist in translating several documents, parchments and books. She does so willingly until she discovers that Montrose is being held captive in a barn-like structure on the estate. His appearance coincides with a visit by several priests. She is able to negotiate Montrose's freedom from shackles but he is still kept a prisoner of Conti. Montrose isn't happy with the situation and realizes that they must escape as quickly as possible. Nadira fears for his health, safety and well-being and asks his patience. Unfortunately, the estate is seized and she is once again abducted and this time taken to Rome and Montrose is left for dead.

During each abduction Nadira learns a little more about the power of the *Hermetica* and is basically taught a type of remote viewing with the assistance of different herbs. While in Rome she is able to view the French king and inform of his intentions. This is beneficial to Pope Alexander IX, but there are those that feel that the pope is in league with the devil and possibly being bewitched by Nadira. Given the political climate of the times, it is quite possible that she may be tortured or burnt at the stake for her abilities? Will she be reunited with Montrose, a man she has come to love and desires to protect at all costs? Will they ever learn the truths hidden in the *Hermetica*?

Ms. Banks has crafted an unusual historical novel with hints at the paranormal. It's not quite magic nor is it true mysticism but more a combination of both with a little bit of help from psychotropic herbs and possibly mushrooms. The elusive *Hermetica* seems to include bits of philosophy and mysticism from all of the great religions and philosophers and supposedly dates back to ancient Egypt, specifically to the Temple of Isis. The basic storyline in **The Hermetica of Elysium** is acceptable, and the majority of the characters are relatively well developed. The fear of torture or worse from the Inquisition for being different, mention of the Black Plague, and other historical references were just enough to provide a believable background for the action. But there was just something about this that didn't keep my attention or interest. Look for more in the

Kelly says

(3.5 stars) The year is 1494. Nadira is a Moorish slave whose late mother taught her to read and write in the hopes of bettering her lot. She lives in Barcelona and keeps the books for her master, Sofir, a recent convert from Judaism to Catholicism. Due to the peculiarities of Nadira's background, she can read and write in a number of languages. Her humdrum existence comes to an abrupt end when an English gentleman, Lord Montrose, takes her away from Sofir and on a dangerous journey. He seeks a book, the *Hermetica of Elysium*, though he cannot read it himself; he is looking for it to fulfill his dead brother's wishes. He will need Nadira's multilingual skills to identify the *Hermetica* when he finds it.

Other men are after the *Hermetica* too — powerful men both secular and religious, desiring the book for a variety of reasons — and they all need Nadira. She is kidnapped multiple times throughout the novel. All these kidnappings can seem a little repetitive, but the real story in *The Hermetica of Elysium* is Nadira's development as a character. She becomes more assertive, using her valuable skills as a bargaining chip to achieve her own ends. She is exposed to philosophy in the course of her translating, and opens her mind to new ideas. Finally, she discovers she has magical power.

The *Hermetica* could be seen as a symbol of knowledge itself. It's seen as incredibly dangerous, and some seek to possess it while others wish to destroy it. Many fear it, believing it can drive its reader insane. Annmarie Banks uses Nadira's situation to illustrate how it becomes harder for an aristocracy or a religious hierarchy to oppress people once they have learned to read, think, and question.

I read a finished copy of *The Hermetica of Elysium* rather than an ARC, so I should mention that there are some issues with the nitty-gritty of the editing: random tense changes; a scene that skips forward several days without transition and would have been less confusing with a line break; a scar that, if I haven't lost my mind, switches from one man's face to another's. The errors were on the level of "mildly distracting." You can't quite ignore them, but nor do they ruin the read.

On the whole, *The Hermetica of Elysium* is an enjoyable debut. I'm reminded of novels such as Judith Merkle Riley's *A Vision of Light*; like that earlier book, *The Hermetica of Elysium* features a strong grounding in history, religious conflict, a little bit of magic, a romance that is down-to-earth and believable, and a heroine who's too smart for her time.

Annmarie Banks is currently writing a sequel called *The Necromancer's Grimoire* which she hopes to release sometime next year.

April Wright says

I just finished reading *The Hermetica of Elysium* by Annmarie Banks and I thought it was fabulous! I typically read paranormal romance, science fiction and fantasy novels -anything to help me turn off my brain and relax, so I was a bit leery of this when I found out it was "historical."

This book opens with the main character, a slave named Nadira interacting with another slave in the home of

her master. Nadira is the daughter of an emir who was deposed. Her mother was a woman of means before the emir's fall from power and the subsequent slavery of his harem by the conquerors. Nadira's mother is disgusted by the new life she leads and ensures her daughter will have skills other than in the bedroom so Nadira is infamous for knowing multiple languages in a culture where people- especially women are uneducated. Events conspire to give her even more knowledge in an illiterate culture.

A series of events has Nadira moving through multiple owners in search of a book called The Hermetica of Elysium. This book is purported to have magical properties and is sought by everyone in Europe with a leaning towards scholarship or a thirst for power. The first jump in owners is to an English Lord named Montrose who ends up getting more than he bargained for.

As the story progresses Nadira learns more about the world around her, power, magic and herself. The thing that amazed me the most about this book was that I found the history interesting and totally pertinent to the story. I didn't feel like I was being 'taught' something, but still ended up learning a lot about the history, culture and social aspects of the time. Had my history classes been more like this in school I would know more about Europe in the 1400s!

I can't wait to read the next book in the series!

Anachronist says

What I liked:

- The subject matter - it is about a hermetical book for heavens' sake!!! A very old book from Egypt, written in several languages, most probably an ancient text, coveted by many alchemists! How not to adore such a premise? It reminded me of The Name of the Rose by Umberto Eco, one of my all time favourites! In fact I suppose the idea of an edible book was taken straight from that novel! Still I didn't mind – not at all!
- The narration was quick-paced and as lively as I like. The book managed to keep me interested till the very end.
- Plenty of knights in their prime, one pretty girl and no insta-love! No insta-lust either! A love triangle? Absent again! Well done and, as you see, it can be done!
- A kick-ass heroine who is not only of Arab descent but also, despite being a slave, doesn't want to follow her mother's fate and remain despondent all her life; she takes difficult decisions but never ones which would be too stupid for her to live. By the way usually in such books it is a Saracen master and a Christian slave; here we have an Arab girl, a Jewish master and a Scotsman...not bad!

What I didn't like:

- In short small inconsistencies. They can ruin even the best premise for me. For example the main heroine, Nadira, once states that she wants to return home to Morocco and several pages later she says 'to Marrakech'. I am not sure whether they were known by their contemporary names in the 15th century. Oh well, you know me...incurably anal...
- It is not a flaw but it bugged me: Richard Longmoor was a kind of prominent scholar while his younger brother, Robert, couldn't read and write at all...correct me if I am mistaken but if you were a Scottish laird who decided to spend some hard-earned coin on exclusive education, hiring a private tutor in the shape of a

monk, you would make sure both of your precious sons got at least some basic schooling... I would understand if Robert knew 'only' Latin or 'only' Old French/Norman but the fact that he could barely sign his own name and couldn't read in any language left me perplexed...what did young Master Robin do when Richard had his lessons? Chased skirts? Shot crows? How come his father didn't intervene?
- I would wish for some three-dimensional baddies...

Final verdict:

Despite some quibbles I did enjoy this book and I would love to read the second part of this series. Alchemy gives me always a powerful tug and this book was based on some alchemical texts...how could I resist it?

Patty says

What a delightful, if sometimes dark tale. It does take place in Spain during the Inquisition so there are going to be unhappy times. The heroine, Nadira is woman stranded in slavery as her mother was taken in a raid. Her mother "was a princess, her father an emir." I wanted to know more about her background - perhaps my questions will be answered in future books - this is the first in a series. But if you ask me wanting to know more is the best you can ask from a book.

Nadira is highly educated for her time; she can read and speak several different languages. When a half dead man is dumped at the feet of her master the men who bring him seek her out for her knowledge of Saracen. This man ultimately dies but leaves Nadira with a message. His brother comes seeking him and Nadira passes the message along. This Lord Montrose wants to take Nadira with him as he fulfills his brothers dying request due to her skills but her master won't let her go. He ultimately steals her away and they are off on an adventure Nadira could never have imagined.

The main characters are quite well drawn and their relationships develop at a very real pace. A mild trust comes first, then a friendship then the love but it takes real time to get there. Nadira, as a slave does not feel like she has any control over her life until she discovers the power inside the book they are seeking. This is the fantasy aspect of the book and it rings true to the story. It does not over reach. It fit right into the story.

My only disappointment occurred when I reached the end of the book and found that this was the first in a series. I did not realize that when I started and now I am anxious for the next book. I want to keep going on adventures with Nadira, Montrose and their band of good knights. This is a magical book in all the right ways.

Amanda says

I liked this book, although it did take me a few chapters to get into it. There were also a couple of continuity issues that had me flipping back and forth through the book trying to figure out what I'd missed. Neither really had any affect on the story. The first was that when Nadira first encountered Baron Montrose, the text reads that he had a large scar on his face. That scar is never mentioned again, but another soldier is repeatedly called, "the scarred man". I looked back at the original scene three different times, but still couldn't find any mention of another man with a scar or find another way to read the scene that might name another soldier as the one with the large facial scar.

There was also a scene in which the Baron and his soldiers entered a room and bolted the door. Then a few minutes later, when they needed privacy, although no one had left the room, he got up and bolted the door. Nothing that changes the story; it just interrupts the flow.

As for the actual story, it started a little slow for me, but picked up quickly. Nadira speaks and reads several languages in a time when most people can't even read. As an educated person, she is thrust from an obscure life as a servant to a life full of danger and intrigue where she will soon come face-to-face with some of the most powerful men in the world. She is kidnapped more than once, and I could almost see her rolling her eyes at one point as she realizes she's been stolen again.

I couldn't really get a handle on Baron Montrose. I'm not entirely sure he's strong enough to be the man that Nadira needs. I like most of the other main characters, though. Nadira picks up a motley crew on her adventures across the continent and I'm curious to see how everyone will work together in the next part of the story.

I received this book free from the publisher in exchange for an honest review.

For more reviews, go to <http://www.livinglearninglovinglife.com>

Lydia Presley says

Original review posted here

I. loved. this. book.

Gutsy heroine? Check. Intelligence? Check. Action and Adventure? Check. A touch of romance? Check. Fantastic setting? Check.

Seriously – everything needed to make a very interesting, historical novel that is very, very, very difficult to put down.

Nadira is a special creature. Yes, she's bartered about the men in her life, but it isn't for her body – oh no, it's for her mind. You see, she speaks quite a few languages, and has been called upon to help with translation. She is treated well by each one of her "captors", and as the story unfolds it becomes apparent that, indeed, she is something special.

I ended up reading quite a few historical novels, set in medieval times this year. There have been a few disappointments, a few surprises, and some books that end up being the best books I've read in quite some time. While *The Hermetica of Elysium* doesn't really rank that high, I will say it's one of the best medieval books I've ever read. I really enjoyed strong Nadira, I loved that the book could be so clean without seeming unbelievable. This author is a definite "must watch" on my list of authors and I cannot wait for book two to be released next year.

Allison Touchstone says

SPOILER ALERT

The *Hermetica of Elysium* takes a fresh direction on the Inquisition, history, and historical romance. Protagonist Nadira is immediately caught up in a world she didn't know existed – alchemy and magic; mystery and intrigue; and least expected she finds her freedom.

An intelligent, educated woman in a society reminiscent of our Middle Ages, Nadira is a servant to a Jew who has “converted” to Christianity. Her simple life as a bookkeeper is turned upside down when the Black Friars bring a tortured man into her master's home and he breathes his last words to her. The secret entrusted to her thrusts Nadira into a new world. She can read six languages in a world of illiterate men on a race to find a coveted book of secrets, the *Hermetica of the Elysium*. The dead man, Richard, was a member of the English nobility and is shortly followed by his brother, Robert, and his men. Robert convinces her master to release Nadira to him to help him find the book – which Robert intends to destroy at all costs. Brigands, Black Friars, the Pope, clerics, and the French king all play their role in kidnapping, intrigue, and the search for the elusive book. The one person who had the book, a cleric named Henry, is now insane and their only source of information. Racing the Black Friars across the countryside, Nadira and Robert find Henry and are disappointed in what they find. With the few clues gleaned from the insane priest, they plan to follow the book yet again. Betrayal at every turn separates Robert and Nadira yet again, and she finds herself a servant to yet another man, Conti, who is assisted by the cleric William to study a copy of the *Hermetica* and related texts to unlock the secrets. Weeks of study and alchemy make progress, releasing Nadira's spirit to soar across the realms and find the missing Robert, his men Alisdair and Garreth, and the current location of the *Hermetica*. After yet another kidnapping, meeting the Pope, and actually finding the *Hermetica*, Nadira is reunited with Robert, William, Alisdair, and Garreth and along with Malcolm, the newest player, the team is assembled to continue their quest in the sequel, *The Necromancer's Gromoire*.

Annmarie Banks creates an enticing world based in history and spiced with paranormal elements to bring the reader on a flight that will never be forgotten. Her characters possess depth and struggle through life to be able to appreciate the relationships and people in their lives. Unexpected twists and turns in the story bring the reader back daily, ready for more and anticipating where the story will go next. With only part of the puzzle resolved, the story is primed to continue, and I, for one, cannot wait!

Rob says

...My appreciation for the way Banks imparts information is not enough to make *The Hermetica of Elysium* more than mildly entertaining however. I couldn't really connect with the main character and her rather unlikely backstory. add to that the way she is dragged though the story by various other characters and the vague historical context of the novel and you end up with a book that is competently written but not much more than that. Maybe other people will get more out of it but for me it was a slightly disappointing read.

Full Random Comments review

Shellie (Layers of Thought) says

Original review posted at Layers of Thought.

A historical fantasy set in 1494 Barcelona during the Spanish inquisition. It's an exciting novel that contains a strong intelligent heroine and a magical book that has esoteric knowledge which everyone is literally dying to possess.

About: Nadira, is a tiny young woman who barely looks her age. Although in her 20's she appears 17. Of Muslim descent (and called Moorish during this time period), she arrives in Spain as a small child. Abducted from her desert home as the proceeds from war she is sold as a slave along with her mother to a Spanish master.

Amazingly, before leaving her homeland her mother taught her to read and write in their native tongue. Even more unusual is that Nadira's new owner, a once Jewish man, trains her in various other languages. Giving her extraordinary abilities as a reader of Ancient Greek, Latin, Arabic and Hebrew which makes her among the few who have the skills needed to read a controversial and blasphemous book - the Hermetic of Elysium.

When Nadira is "taken" again but now from her new Spanish master by the English lord - Baron Montrose, she is at first resistant. But things change for her rather quickly when she realizes this man is of good character and swears to protect her with his life, if only she will help him avenge his brother's death and decipher the contents of this esoteric book.

Thoughts: An easily read novel that I did not want to put it down, it has a strong female character (my favorite), a strong and likable male lead, and a scattering of interesting side characters which creates an interesting and colorful ride. I particularly liked that there was only light sexual references and romance.

The story feels like it's historical fiction with a thread of the fantastical (which is turning out to be one of my preferred type of fantasy). With writing that is intelligent, imbued with literary and philosophical knowledge, including key issues around human nature, what is good and evil, and a solid definition of ignorance and knowledge. All the while presenting a way for readers (like me) to get some world history without even realizing it. Considering it happens during an intriguing and volatile period there is plenty of opportunity for some very nasty bad guys – the Black Friars, to do horrible inquisition type things.

What didn't I like about this book? Absolutely nothing, since it was just one of those great reads that gave me a needed escape. It's a 4.25 star in my opinion since I could not decide which way to go; 4 star or 4.5 stars. Kudos to this author who apparently self published the book under a different title before finding its current home. But the best yet is there is a sequel coming soon, which I will be excitedly waiting for.

Mieneke says

The Hermetica of Elysium is a historical fantasy, a combination of two of my favourite genres, with a bit of a romantic slant to it as well. It's the first book of a series, though I couldn't find out how many books there will be, and has more historical elements than fantasy. The true fantasy only manifests in the latter half of the book. At the same time, this is not a very detailed historical novel. In the sense that its history is more of a backdrop than an active "participant" in the novel as you might find in a straight historical novel or, for example, a Sansom novel. The history is there and it all fits, but only a few historical elements are necessary to the plot, in other ways the book could have been set a few decades earlier or later. While this doesn't affect the story at all, it might be a put-off for hardcore historical fiction readers.

The main character Nadira is an inhabitant of 15th century Barcelona and of Moorish descent. This makes her an outsider, just by virtue of her background. This is only exacerbated by her uncommon education in languages; an education which wasn't just uncommon for a woman at the time, but for anyone outside of the upper classes and the clergy. I really liked Nadira. She's strong and resourceful, and she makes the best of each situation she's thrown into. My one quibble with her is that she is said to be totally innocent, but why this is so, isn't made exactly clear. It seems to be because she isn't a believer in any one faith, but I'm not completely sure that is the reason. What is refreshing though is that Nadira is literally coveted because of her mind, not her beauty. All the men who capture her – and she does get captured quite a bit in this book – want her because she can read what they can't read and not so they can ravish her.

The cast of characters is a strong one, though the villains sometimes can be a bit formulaic. I loved Montrose, William, Alisdair and Garreth. They are the most important secondary characters and I really liked how they were portrayed. Montrose is gruff, aloof and heroic. I'd like to learn more about his background as an English nobleman, as it seems an interesting one from the hints dropped so far. William is a young monk, sweet and passionate about learning. It also helped that in my mind he kept looking like a young Paul Bettany, which helped his case a lot! The romance of the book was convincing; it took its time to develop and wasn't based on just pheromones. However, it was rather predictable, including the third point of the triangle being devoted but unable to compete. Still, I enjoyed this angle and I was rooting for the eventual pairing. I was less convinced by Di Marco and Sofir, though that might be due to the amount of time spent with them, which is arguably short, but in both cases pivotal to the story. The reason that they couldn't convince me was that they both seemed to be written to be neutral to good characters, but to me they read like either weak (Sofir) or morally very ambiguous (Di Marco) men. Sofir doesn't hesitate to sell Nadira to safeguard himself, even if he pretends to be reluctant and Di Marco is willing to betray his true master for his own ends. Both of these just didn't fit in the role they were seemingly cast for.

The Hermetica of Elysium is a very entertaining book and a good debut. Happily, the book doesn't end on a cliff hanger, but at a natural break-off point: the gang's all together and now we're ready for the next step. I'll be following the series as I really enjoyed it and I am very curious to find out where Nadira and her gang travel next. If you're looking for a light and pleasant read, spiced with fantasy and a bit romance, I recommend you check out *The Hermetica of Elysium*.

This book was sent to me for review by the publisher.

Paul says

1494 Barcelona

As Torquemada lights the fires of religious fervor throughout the cities of Spain, accused heretics are not the only victims. Thousands of books and manuscripts are lost as the Black Friars attempt to purge Europe of the ancient secrets of the gods and the bold new ideas that are ushering the Renaissance.

Nadira lives a dreary life as servant to a wealthy spice merchant until a dying scholar is brought to the merchant's stable, beaten by mercenaries who are on the hunt for *The Hermetica of Elysium*. To Nadira, words are her life: she lives them as her masters scrivener and dreams them in her mother's poetry. She is pursued as passionately as the fabled manuscript for her rare skill as a reader of Ancient Greek, Latin, Arabic and Hebrew that makes her valuable to men who pursue the book to exploit its magic.

Kidnapped by Baron Montrose, an adventurous nobleman, she is forced to read from the *Hermetica*. It is soon revealed to her that ideas and words are more powerful than steel or fire for within its pages are the words that incite the Dominicans to religious fervor, give the Templars their power and reveal the lost mysterious of Elysium.

As Nadira begins her transformation from servant to sorceress, will she escape the fires of the Inquisition, the clutches of the Borgia pope, Alexander VI and the French king, Charles VIII?

The relationship between the two main characters is at the heart of this novel. Nadira is a strong female in a time where many would consider her little more than a possession. She is far more educated than the majority of her male peers, the greater part being illiterate, and appears to have a great deal more common sense as well. Due to her natural intelligence and skills as a linguist, she is passed from one master to another, having little say in her own fate. Baron Montrose meanwhile, comes across as a bit of an enigma. We don't get to learn a great deal about his early history but I liked the air of mystery that surrounds him. He has all the hallmarks of a quintessential tall dark stranger.

The historical setting is quite evocative. During the 15th century most of Europe was at one another's throats, and this offers the potential for a lot of different factions all vying for power. The central premise that there are texts that are dangerous to read, and that there are various groups trying to control them appeals to me. Power struggles always make for interesting reading. The scenes featuring various members of the Inquisition, and also the Pope's Cardinals, were highlights. This book features appearances by the Pope and the King of France. Perhaps the sequel will feature an appearance by Tomas de Torquemada himself? I think the series would benefit greatly from an out and out villain.

I have to be honest however, and admit that I was hoping for a larger, more obvious fantasy element in this novel. The fantasy is there, but it doesn't really register until three quarters of the way through the narrative. I don't mind a slow build up, but I had expected more evidence of the fantastical much earlier on. I was a little disappointed that it took so long for it to appear. It is a shame, as once the magical forces start to be used they do work well within the confines of the story. As Nadira begins to learn the things she is capable of, the story picks up a pace and my slightly flagging interest was re-ignited.

The set-up for the continuation of this story is certainly intriguing. There are a group of mysterious knights that appear towards the novel's end that immediately caught my attention.

As this book is categorised as Historical Fantasy, I would have expected the fantastical element to be evident a lot earlier. I feel that this category could be misleading if you are a fan of that particular genre. However, if you enjoy historical fiction, and don't mind a modest fantasy element then this could well be the series for you.

The *Hermetica of Elysium* is released by Knox Publishing on 8th December 2011. The sequel, *The Necromancer's Grimoire* is due September 2012.

Alaiel Kreuz says

What an amazing read this was. I have to be honest, I began reading this book a while ago and stopped after a few pages because I had a few problems and then, instead of picking it up again, I went to read something else and never came back for it.

Major. Mistake. Ever. If you begin make sure to read a few chapters and I promise you won't stop. I still can't believe I didn't finish it before because it's AMAZING.

Everything begins in Bercelona, Spain. The year is 1494 when Nadira's master calls for her to translate the last words of a man who has been beaten so badly she can barely look at him. But when this man realizes she can understand him and speak his language he leaves her a precious message that his captors can not understand.

Soon the man dies and she is left with a secret message for his brother who comes and finds out the Nadira can, in fact, speak and translate several languages. And this makes her a valuable asset in their quest to find The Hermetica of Elysium and understand its secrets before the Pope, the Inquisition and a King reach the book to destroy it or use it against the world.

That's why this man, Baron Montrose, kidnaps her and begins an adventure that will take them to the confines of the earth...

And why is this book so important? Because it holds knowledge, important knowledge about the power of words and how to use it. Soon Nadira begins to read from the book and realizes that despite being a woman in a time where the men ruled she could use her skills to get information and wisdom.

Now she is learning from The Hermetica and becoming a sorcerer... but will all that power be enough to stop the plots surrounding her and Baron Montrose to whom she has develop feelings of love? Because it doesn't matter how many times she is kidnapped every captor gives her a new glimpse of the Book's power and helps her fulfill her destiny... Even when she doesn't understand or knows what's going to happen next.

Personal opinion:

My favorite character was, by far, Nadira. We don't really know too much about her past, all we are offered is that her mother was once a princess and her dad an emir. And thanks to her mother and their Master she is well educated. Her best quality is her desire to learn and when she realizes she is an important part in a plot of conspiracy and knowledge she decides to be the one to rule her destiny.

Annemarie Banks has done a wonderful job creating a story where fantasy, adventure, historical romance and history collide in perfect harmony. You won't get tired of anything, you won't even want to stop reading... it's seriously impossible to want to put down the book when all you desire is to know what's going to happen next, what is Nadira going to learn or understand next.

The love part of this book is well developed too, in case you were wondering and since I don't want to spoil anything I'm just going to say that everything happens at the right time and in the right moment. No rush, no craziness.

And the setting is perfectly described: I'm from Spain and I've read tons of books about Barcelona during the Inquisition and I have to say that Annemarie did her homework really well. Thanks for that, Annemarie! I loved reading your descriptions of not only places but also people: they were real (which means they weren't always nice but accurate) and they helped me to create the Barcelona this book needed.

My recommendation? Go and buy it, once at home make a hot beverage and sit down. You can come back and tell me if you liked it or not after you finish it... and then we can wait together for the next book! But never fear, The Hermetica has a proper ending, you will feel at ease with it... but you will want to know what the future holds for Nadira and Montrose too!

Tahlia Newland says

When the publisher approached me with this book and asked if I'd review it, I wasn't sure if I wanted to or not, because historical romance is a genre that doesn't generally interest me. However, the fantasy element and the theme of the power of words and philosophy drew me in and I discovered a rich and surprising read that far surpasses what this book's genre designation would have you expect.

We meet the central character, Nadira in 1494 in Barcelona, where she is a servant to a wealthy spice merchant. A man badly beaten by mercenaries looking for the book, *The Hermetica of Elysium* is brought to the merchant's stable. When his brother comes looking for him, the man is already dead, but he discovers that Nadira can read Ancient Greek, Latin, Arabic and Hebrew making her one of the few people who can read the book they seek.

While the Black Friars are burning heretics and texts in their effort to purge Europe of the ancient secrets of the gods and the bold new ideas that are ushering in the renaissance, Nadira is kidnapped by Baron Montrose, the dead man's brother and eventually is forced to read from the *Hermetica*. 'She soon discovers that words are more powerful than steel and fire, for within its pages are the words that incite the Dominicans to religious fervour, give the Templars their power and reveal the lost mysteries of Elysium' (from the blurb).

But the Baron is not the only man after her services as a reader and the plot has Nadira kidnapped several times by various people. Each captor gives her greater experience of the book and through it she begins to transform from a servant into a sorcerous.

The Christian church of the day sanctioned and propagated torture, cruelty and repression in the name of God and this formed a backdrop of tension to Nadira's increasing empowerment. Not only is she in danger from the Inquisition, Pope Alexander VI and the French king Charles VIII, but her new love begins to fear her.

What I loved about this book were

- the delightful and beautifully portrayed central characters - brooding, noble Montrose and the other members of his party, sweet and earnest Brother William, the scholar Conti and of course Nadira herself who has the wonderful innocence of a mind unspoiled by dogma, a no nonsense, intelligent, gutsy woman.
- The slow growth of the love between Montrose and Nadira
- The snippets of philosophy and major themes eg words & knowledge are power, and freedom of mind is true freedom.
- The feeling of actually being in that era – often not pleasant, but realistic and more than made up for by the main characters.
- Her experiences in reading
- The way the reading empowers her.

There was a lot of gore flying about at certain points, but it was realistic to the time and I liked that it wasn't romanticised or made more gruesome than it needed to be.

The ending was very satisfying, but with enough left open for me to want to read the sequel. I recommend this for all lovers of anything from this period in Europe's history. I give it 5 stars.

