



The Sign of the Weeping Virgin

Alana White

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Romance and intrigue abound in The Sign of the Weeping Virgin, an evocative historical mystery that brings the Italian Renaissance gloriously to life.

In 1480 Florentine investigator Guid'Antonio Vespucci and his nephew, Amerigo, are tangled in events that threaten to destroy them and their beloved city.

Marauding Turks abduct a beautiful young Florentine girl and sell her into slavery. And then a holy painting begins weeping in Guid'Antonio's church. Are the tears manmade or a sign of God's displeasure with Guid'Antonio himself?

In a finely wrought story for lovers of medieval and renaissance mysteries everywhere, Guid'Antonio follows a spellbinding trail of clues to uncover the thought-provoking truth about the missing girl and the weeping painting's mystifying—and miraculous?—tears, all pursued as he comes face to face with his own personal demons.

The Sign of the Weeping Virgin Details

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Author : Alana White

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From Reader Review The Sign of the Weeping Virgin for online ebook

Gary Inbinder says

4.5 - 5 stars

An intriguing mystery set in late 15 c. Florence, filled with Machiavellian plots, engaging characters, and plenty of well-researched detail about the milieu of that time and place. Highly recommended, especially for readers interested in all aspects of everyday life and culture in Renaissance Italy.

Kathy Davie says

An historical mystery set in 1480 Florence with an adherent of Lorenzo the Magnificent, Guid'Antonio, investigating again.

Yup, just learned it is a series---the Five Star Mystery. I have no idea why she's calling it the "Five Star" as White has a long way to go to achieve that rating.

For some reason I'm feeling generous in giving White a "3"---must be all the good research and few mechanical errors. It certainly isn't the copious loose threads and wandering storyline.

My Take

Kudos to White for the beautifully researched background for 1480 Florence. She did a lovely job of interweaving history into her mystery. That said, I found the telling of the tale to be very melodramatic and, in some ways, I couldn't wait to be done with it. The writing is immature and needs tightening. White kept dragging it out, and I was getting so bored, although I did enjoy how well she set her scenes.

Her characters need more depth. Lorenzo the Magnificent did not come across all that magnificently, but more as an unsure young man stepping into his father's shoes much too early. Nor was I impressed with the lackadaisical approach of Guid'Antonio and Amerigo to their investigation. It was a lot of talk without much action until the end. What was with their going off to examine the baths and then they turn around before they ever get there? As for questioning the father...that seemed rather obvious, and not something to postpone. Whatever did they discover about the Virgin's tears? Why was Giuliano with the Pazzis anyway?

Okay, so Guid'Antonio has been away from Florence and his family for two years. Nobody writes? Nobody keeps him informed as to what is happening in the city? Nobody says anything to Amerigo?

There are all these hints dropped about Maria's fidelity... The possibility for tension with his wife is set up...and it goes nowhere. I'm not buying Maria's whining about how Guid'Antonio worked for Lorenzo *alone*. If she's been raised in Italy, in Florentine society, she has to know how to keep her bread buttered...! Although, White did provide a LOT of tension in the opening chapters. Teasing me with all these ominous hints of changes and infidelity. I must say, if things really had gotten so bad, wouldn't someone, Cesare?, have mentioned that the men should be careful on their first day back in the city?

Why is the changed lock never explained? I can't imagine that Guid'Antonio has gone off without any

servants, nor that he and Amerigo would be riding alone all that distance. Family boss? White throws out these little barbs from Guid'Antonio about Lorenzo, which also go nowhere. White also makes a point of marking the difference between the rotten food available in the market with the enticing food that appears on the Vespucci table, but we never learn where it comes from. For that matter, where is Elisabetta at dinner? What's with all the story padding with Lorenzo's mistresses and the one who got away from Guid'Antonio? Yes, padding. White throws these tidbits in to bring in the sex, and she'd have been better off concentrating on the love scenes Guid'Antonio has with his wife. Unless, of course, she's setting the stage for future installments. What was the point of the little sojourn off to Lorenzo's farm? Felt like more padding to me. Then after all his promises to Maria, there's that ending. On the plus side, the lack of conflict over it is typical White.

White has set it up to perform as a series. While I appreciate her attention to history and incorporating it accurately into the story, I would love it if she would provide the same attention to her characters and the actual execution of her plot.

The Story

It's been twenty-seven years since Mehmet took Constantinople and the unity wrought by that disaster has evaporated, especially with Sixtus IV needing more and more cities for his family to rule. *Makes me think of Napoleon propping up all those thrones with his siblings' backsides.*

After serving two years as ambassador to the French court of Louis XI drumming up support for the Medicis, Guid'Antonio and his young secretary/nephew, Amerigo, are finally heading home.

The Characters

The forty-four-year-old **Guid'Antonio Vespucci** is both friend and supporter of Lorenzo de'Medici and has a doctorate of law. **Maria del Vigna** is his second wife; **Giovanni** is his five-year-old son. **Mona Alessandra del Vigna**, Maria's mother, is ill. **Cesare Ridolfi** is his manservant. *The one who stayed in Italy while his master went to France.* **Olimpia Pasquale** is the lusty nurse for his son. **Domenica** is Cesare's mother and the household cook.

Amerigo Vespucci is the twenty-six-year-old nephew who accompanied Guid'Antonio to France as his secretary. *Doesn't seem to have learnt much in terms of thinking before he speaks.* **Antonio** is Amerigo's older brother and a notary who has kept the Vespucci businesses earning while Guid'Antonio and Amerigo were in France. **Nastagio** is Amerigo and Antonio's father and very anti-Lorenzo; **Elisabetta** is his bitchy wife. **Brother Giorgio** is another uncle, and he hasn't been told the state of the family finances.

Lorenzo de'Medici is the thirty-one-year-old unofficial head of Florentine government. He is married to **Clarice Orsini**, a Roman, and they have two sons: **Piero** and **Giovanni**. **Giuliano** is his younger brother. **Bianca** is their sister, unfortunately married to **Guglielmo de'Pazzi**, Francesco's brother. **Angelo Poliziano** had been a friend of Lorenzo's until he paid him back with cowardice. **Lorenzino** and **Giovanni** are under Lorenzo's guardianship; too bad he's thieving from them. **Lucrezia Tornabuoni de'Medici** is Lorenzo's powerhouse of a mother.

The government of Florence

Chancellor Bartolomeo Scala is worn down with governing Florence and worrying over his wife **Madalena**'s sixth pregnancy. **Alessandro Braccesi** is Scala's assistant. There are nine Lords Prior including: **Tommaso Soderini**, who is also the Gonfaloniere of Justice and Lorenzo's uncle by marriage---and suspected of plotting against him; **Antonio Capponi**; **Pierfilippo Pandolfini**; and, **Piero di Nasi**.

Palla Palmierie is Florence's chief of police (?). **Sandro Botticelli** is finishing up a fresco in the Ognissanti Church, a commission from the Vespuccis. **Leonardo da Vinci** has just opened his own shop. **Luca Landucci** is an apothecary, who will work on figuring out how the tears work in exchange for advance warning. **Neri Saginetto** owns a pleasant tavern that he runs with help from his beautiful daughter **Evangelista**.

Brother Martino Leone seems to have gone mad with **Brother Paolo** trying to chase him down and both of them guarded by **Ferdinando Bongiovi**. **Roberto Ughi** is the father abbot and a supporter of Sixtus. **Brother Battista Bellincioni** is the almoner.

The beauteous **Camilla Rossi da Vinci** is married to a fat wine merchant, **Castruccio Senso**. **Margherita** is her ancient nurse; **Luigi** is her young slave. **Jacopo Rossi da Vinci** is her very angry father. Senso is doing business with **Salvestro Aboati**.

The enemies of Medici Florence

The Pazzi conspirators

Francesco de'Pazzi struck the remaining blows once **Bernardo Bandini**'s axe fell. **Piero Vespucci**, a relative, is in the Stinche while his son, **Marco**, is exiled.

Pope Sixtus IV wants Lorenzo and the Medicis dead and gone. He's recently completed the construction of the chapel that will come to be known as the Sistine, but he needs the Florentine artisans to make it beautiful. **Count Girolamo Riario** is one of Sixtus' nephews and a vicious, greedy man.

King Ferrante of Naples has allied with the pope. **Prince Alfonzo** leads Ferrante's troops against Florence.

The Cover

The cover has a Renaissance feel to it with an intricate gray-green carved border blending into the waters under the golden-hued bridge outside the city of Florence, and its tinted golden sky blending into the weeping Virgin.

The title terrifies the Florentines into wondering if God has abandoned them when they learn of *The Sign of the Weeping Virgin*.

Cate says

This is this Authors debut novel in the realm of historical fiction and, as much as I enjoy good historical fiction, I just couldn't get into this one at all. I think it was a case of the classic line 'it's me, honestly, not you'.

To say the cast of characters in this book is immense would be an under-statement, and I felt at times it would have helped me along in my reading if there had been a character list printed in the front of the book; I have a sneaky feeling that many other readers who pick up this book may feel the same way too. Although none of the characters stand out in the book, they are interesting to say the least, and the main protagonist is very interesting; he is cranky, complicated, lonely and extremely loyal; all traits which seemed at odds to the world in which he was living, a world where loyalty seemed to be as fleeting as the wind.

Despite the indication in the synopsis that this may have edged into the realms of a genre I never read, I

found there to be little to no romance in this book; there is no love in the traditional sense of the word and no homoerotic longings as can often take place in a novel of this kind. What there is however is political intrigue by the boatload, and this made the book a compelling read and was, for me, the saving grace that earned the rating of 3 thumbs as opposed to it being lower.

It is obvious that the Author has done a lot of research into this era in Florence's history, and I found this interesting and educating as I did not know about some of the historical details touched upon in the novel. I felt this was helped by the fact that the main protagonist was actually a real-life figure in these times, and this added more realism to the descriptions used and the events encountered in the book.

I would recommend this book to lovers of historical fiction but particularly those who like a good solid mystery that is full of political intrigue.

Originally reviewed on: <http://catesbooknuthut.com/2014/04/22...>

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Lynette says

In her impressive historical novel, *The Sign of the Weeping Virgin*, Alana White reprises Florence in the 15th Century through her protagonist, Guid' Antonio Vespucci. As the novel opens, Guid Antonio, accompanied by his nephew Amerigo, has returned to Florence after a diplomatic assignment in France. A respected lawyer and trusted friend of Florence's most prominent citizen, Lorenz di Medici, Guid' Antonio finds some disturbing changes in the city he loves. The city's depleted treasury has created a number of desperately poor citizens. A young woman has disappeared, supposedly abducted by the Turks and sold into slavery. Even more baffling, the painting of the Virgin Mary in the Vespucci family church has begun to weep. This phenomenon is seen by superstitious Florentines as a sign that the city is cursed by God because Lorenzo di Medici refuses to end his war with Pope Sixtus IV in Rome. As a "Medici man," Guid' Antonio must deal with new and as yet, unidentified enemies: "Whatever the circumstances, Florence, Lorenzo, and Guid' Antonio, the Medicis and the Vespuccis, were one and the same."

As Guid' Antonio and Amerigo set out to unravel these mysteries, they are beset by rumors and whispers, as well as political turmoil which escalates as the Turkish king moves to expand his Islamic empire and Pope Sixtus surreptitiously acquires a large tract of land too close to Florence.

In Guid' Antonio Vespucci, Alana White has created an intelligent, compelling protagonist who invites further development in subsequent novels. However, the center of this historical mystery is Renaissance Florence, a vibrant presence painted by the writer in rich lights and shadows, much like the paintings of Sandro Botticelli and Leonardo da Vinci, both of whom appear as characters in the book. From the well-crafted suspense through the political machinations to the domestic details of the Florentines' households, White has painted a luminous and textured portrait of Florence that lingers in the reader's mind long after the end of the novel.

Bebe (Sarah) Brechner says

This is a work of graceful prose that transports you back to Renaissance Italy, with political intrigue and characters that are fully realized and completely fascinating. All the political intrigue is here, with references to known situations, issues, people, and localities. I'm sure those who are familiar with the streets of Florence and environs can trace all the activity of the story, as the environment is superbly described. For aficionados of the Italian Renaissance, this is an enjoyable and rare treat.

Bry Jensen says

Sometimes, when you love a book, you just can't get through it fast enough. You devour its entirety swiftly, and in the blink of an eye, it is complete. Other times when you love a book, you truly need to just savor it slowly, relishing the sensation as if to prolong the experience. *The Sign of the Weeping Virgin* was certainly in the latter category for me; I enjoyed every aspect of this book so much that I took a very long time to complete it.

This book came into my hands when I was contacted by the author, Alana White, who after enjoying my review of another Italian history book, requested that I read hers and share my thoughts. Instantly, I was flattered by her appreciation and respect for my experience and research in Renaissance Italy, and extremely excited that she would think of me in this way. To be recognized by a scholar in the field with far more credentials than myself is a wonderful feeling. Understand that her connection certainly doesn't bias my review, but considering the stories coming out recently about bad-behaving authors, it is nice to acknowledge those who really are gems. Alana White is a gem.

Now, to the book. *The Sign of the Weeping Virgin* begins in Florence two years after the Pazzi Conspiracy. Florentine investigator and Medici man Guid'Antonio Vespucci, has just returned from France and is immediately confronted with major issues that threaten Lorenzo de Medici's ('il Magnifico) grip on Florence, and the stability of the entire city. A well known Florentine woman has gone missing, supposedly abducted by Turks, and if that were not quite enough to cause fear and panic, a Holy painting of the Virgin Mary begins to weep - signifying to some the Virgin's displeasure with Medici rule, causing great unrest. Guid'Antonio must get to the bottom of the disappearance and the 'miraculous' tears, all while attempting to reconcile his own place in this ever changing political landscape.

With reference to the whole, I enthusiastically applaud the author's stylistic choices in presentation. Alana White approaches the history in a way that clearly demonstrates her superior perspicacity of Renaissance Florence, and will thrill and gratify someone who is well educated on the topic. However, it is also expertly presented for a reader who may not have the academic background. She finds a magical middle ground where the information necessary is almost casually expressed, so that it is not overwhelming to grasp context, but fully represents the history and the major powers in play. It takes great skill for any historian to find a concise clear way of outlining one of the most complex and rich eras of history, and she has done so masterfully.

The treatment of massively significant historical figures in this book is also handled with great finesse. The writing manages to be reverent of many immensely influential characters, without over-romanticizing or

essentializing their personalities. Figures like Lorenzo Medici, Amerigo Vespucci, Botticelli, da Vinci, and so many others are presented with genuine personalities and subtleties that make them human, rather than an idealized figure of eras long past. I can appreciate an author that allows a character to speak for themselves through action, without imposing their personal judgement or bias. Additionally, I enjoyed the imagery presented in the writing as both beautiful and accurate. Having been to Florence, many scenes sprung clear pictures to my mind, but even beyond that, descriptions of food, clothing and atmosphere were all quite artful, without being cumbersome.

The Sign of the Weeping Virgin is overflowing with an immense amount of little details to appreciate - so much so, that I will yet likely uncover more on subsequent re-reads. These little moments, often no more than a mere mention or half line, completely enriched my experience, and often left me smiling a giddy history-nerd smile behind the pages. One that stood out to me was the Lorenzo's exasperated interactions with his son Piero, for knowing that Piero will grow up to be widely known as the most disappointing Medici ("Piero the Unfortunate"), gave these brief mentions so much more meaning.

Another huge success of this book is its ability to bring together many varying aspects of Renaissance life. Many authors focusing in a historical context will choose one class - the nobles, or the peasants, and focus all their attention there. This book manages to showcase the lives of the nobles and political figures in the republic, religious life and its immense pressures, as well as the life of a woman in the Renaissance. But it does not stop there, for it also showcases the cultivation of art and culture and the major players of that, as well as the common folk, and even slavery. These personalized insights, however brief some may be, help to extrapolate the entirety of the human Renaissance experience.

This is a book I would recommend not only to historians and fans of Florence, but to all readers who are looking to expand their horizons. It is a fun read, a witty one, and yet will enthrall you with all the richness this historical period has to offer. Do not pass this one up. It will definitely be a favourite of mine for the whole year!

On a side note: Her recommendations for further reading and cited sources make me happy.

Emma says

If I pronounce the word Medici, I bet you will first think about Catherine de' Medici (1547–1559), a Regent Queen of France. By then, the Medici dynasty was actually already a century old and powerful.

The Sign of the Weeping Virgin centers around Lorenzo de' Medici, also known as Lorenzo the Magnificent (1449 – 1492). Living at the time of the Italian Renaissance, he is well known for supporting the arts.

The hero is Guid'Antonio Vespucci (see Alana White's page, in the right column), Lorenzo's friend and supporter; also ambassador to France and to other essential diplomatic missions.

I knew almost nothing about Lorenzo de' Medici and had never heard about Guid'Antonio.

We had lots of history classes in France related to the Papal states and their evolution, but again, presented as something isolated. This book beautifully puts to light the struggles of power between...

My full review is here:

<http://wordsandpeace.com/2013/02/15/b...>

Darlene says

The Sign of the Weeping Virgin by Alana White is a historical mystery that takes place during the Renaissance era which is one of my favorite time periods so this novel really appealed to me. More intriguing is the mystery of the missing beautiful girl and the painting of the Virgin Mary crying miraculous tears. This novel is rich in historical detail and is beautifully written in such a way that it brings the streets of Florence alive to it's readers.

The novel opens with Guid' Antonio returning home to his wife and child after being away in Rome for two years on political business. Guid' Antonio, a respected lawyer, is a prominent citizen, in part due to his friendship with Lorenzo de' Medici, the city's leader. When he and his nephew Amerigo go to see what has been happening in the city they are surprised to find that their once peaceful city is no longer. It seems that the kidnapping of the girl by the Turks and the tears of the Virgin Mary have the citizens of the city believing it is because of God's wrath against Lorenzo de' Medici and his adamant refusal to end his war with the Pope.

Lorenzo believes it is all a set up as does Guid' Antonio as well so he sets out to investigate along with his nephew. Their investigation takes us on a whirlwind journey from the marketplaces of Florence to the studios of famous painters Leonardo da Vinci and Sandro Botticelli. All the while clues are being discovered that are leading them closer and closer to discovering who is behind the mysterious happenings but can Guid' Antonio stay out of danger with all the upheaval in the city against the de' Medici's long enough to do the solving.

I found the beginning of the novel a bit slow as you are being introduced to all the characters and even the story is slow to start as Guid' Antonio has just arrived home and is familiarizing himself with everything again. However as it got going I became more and more invested in finding out what or who was behind the missing girl and the tears of the Virgin Mary in Guid' Antonio's church. This book is apparently the first in a series featuring Guid' Antonio and the only thing I would say that I'd love to see in future books is more character development in terms of seeing more of Guid' Antonio's family life included as it would give him more of a personal feel to the reader – I didn't feel I got to know him as much as I would have liked. Other than that though I really enjoyed the story and I'm looking forward to hopefully reading more mysteries with Guid' Antonio as the lead character.

If you enjoy historical mysteries and the Renaissance period as I do then my guess is you'd really enjoy this novel. It's a book to take your time with and savor otherwise you may miss the beautiful sights and sounds of Florence that are brought alive on it's pages.

Jessica Brockmole says

A young woman goes missing. On the other side of Florence, a painting mysteriously begins weeping. Investigator Guid'Antonio Vespucci, friend of Lorenzo di Medici and newly returned from a diplomatic mission in France, is determined to get to the bottom of both mysteries. Is the weeping Virgin in the painting a sign of God's displeasure, as the congregation believes, or is it a product of human machinations? Alana White brings to life 15th century Florence with well-placed details and sharp dialogue in this well-researched mystery.

Laura says

"I believe she's an Andalusian," Palla said

"Absolutely, a Spanish breed." Excitement quavered in Amerigo's voice. **"I've heard of them."** With gentle hands, he quieted the mare's restive movements, running his fingers over her back and withers, then down each leg, inspecting the hooves, and then the teeth. He rubbed the animal's shoulder gently. **"Excellent condition. Well fed, and there are few tangles in this extraordinary mass of curling tail and mane."**

Guid'Antonio said, "And yet she's been missing and presumably wandering for almost two weeks."

Palla's dark gaze went to the stable keep. "Do please tell them your explanation for this."

The fellow lifted his hands up in a gesture of helpless wonder. "We are awash in miracles!"

Palla cut a smiling glance toward Guid'Antonio. "Remarkable, isn't it, how suddenly He is so prompt with them?"

The place is Florence, Italy. The year is 1480. Guid'Antonio Vespucci (a well known lawyer) has been recruited by Lorenzo de' Medici to unravel a series of mysteries and miraculous events which have sent Florence's populace into an uproar. First, a beautiful young bride (age 14) has been abducted on her way to the baths in the countryside. She was riding the horse mentioned in the opening quote. Her hysterical nurse and young slave both insist the abduction was the work of marauding Turks. If this wasn't enough, a painting of the Virgin Mary in a Florence church has suddenly begun weeping *real* tears.

Lorenzo, as unofficial (but widely acknowledged) leader of Florence, has been at war with the Pope over land disputes. In retaliation, the Pope excommunicated the ENTIRE city. No one is allowed to baptize babies, marry inside churches, or ritually bury their dead. To a superstitious populace, recent events seem to say that God Himself is raining vengeance down on them. Lorenzo, naturally, is concerned about these events, and enlists Guid'Antonio's aid in solving the mysteries.

Bottom line: White has given us a dazzling view into the art, culture, and lives of late 15th century Florence. We get to know several historically important characters (Leonardo da Vinci and Amerigo Vespucci to name a few). The pace flounders a few times, but I didn't have a difficult time staying engaged in the story line. I felt the ending was satisfactory, but at least one of the mysteries wasn't addressed fully (although whether it can be is a completely different matter for debate). I recommend this book as a library check out win, and even recommend shelling out money to buy this offering if you are a fan of renaissance Europe. Given 3.5 stars or a rating of "Very Good".

Beth Turza says

I just won this book from Goodreads and am so excited to read it! Thank you for this opportunity!

Mike Coleman says

Critics are praising Alana White's elegant prose and her skill in weaving a vast amount of historical detail into the plot of this fascinating mystery novel set in Renaissance Florence. I heartily concur, but also must note the considerable wit at work in the book--one of the many qualities that make it such an enjoyable reading experience.

It comes through in dialogue: "God, I've died and gone to heaven," her protagonist Guid'Antonio Vespucci says over a meal of roast pork and fried ravioli. "No, you've come home to Italy," remarks the man's nephew. It comes through in White's cleverly drawn minor characters, especially the all-knowing, sardonic Cesare, Guid'Antonio's manservant. And it comes through in the way White archly points out the parallels between 15th-century Florentine society and our own--the religious zealots whipping the masses into a frenzy of fear and misdirected blame, the deep divide between the haves and have-nots, the very character of Guid'Antonio, as full of angst, including the marital variety, as any male protagonist in contemporary fiction.

I found myself taking an odd sort of comfort in these parallels--the more things change, right? But they also helped deepen my connection to the story, the characters and their way of life so exotic, so different in so many ways from our own.

White takes us everywhere we've ever fantasized about in Renaissance Florence--an upper-class dining room serving up specialties of a fabulous cook, the studiolo of Lorenzo de Medici (where il Magnifico himself is holding forth), even the elegant apartment where Botticelli's Primavera holds pride of place in its original setting, framed and hanging over a daybed. Can you imagine being part of this culture, where so much art was springing up all around you every day? Where you could meet Michelangelo as a resolute little boy holding his father's hand in the marketplace? Where you could share in the suspense as to which artist would actually be chosen to decorate the Sistine Chapel?

White feeds all the fantasies, and teaches us a great deal about Italian history along the way. I also love the unique mystery that drives the plot. It's not a mere murderer her sleuth Guid'Antonio is trying to catch. No, he must save all of Florence. And that is a cause any lover of the City of Flowers can cheer for.

Audra (Unabridged Chick) says

In classic 'it's-me-not-you', I just didn't quite get into this book. It's chock full of historical intrigue, some solid personalities, great sense of place, and a twisty plot that takes in politics, art, loyalty, and the Ottoman Turks -- but it and I didn't click for some reason.

Set in 1480, the story follows Guid'Antonio Vespucci and his nephew, Amerigo Vespucci (yeah, that one), as they return to Florence from a two year ambassadorship to France. Things in Florence are, to put it bluntly, not good: the Pope is gunning for Lorenzo de' Medici, who is the sort of unofficial head of Florence; a local beauty was allegedly kidnapped by roving Turks; a painting of the Virgin Mary has started crying; and

Guid'Antonio's personal life is kind of a mess. Guid'Antonio is deeply loyal to Lorenzo de' Medici, even if most of the townspeople and even his own family are turning against the man. The city is in the grip of a famine, and the common people are getting angry. Lorenzo is being blamed for everything from the famine to the weeping painting, and Guid'Antonio is determined to clear Lorenzo's name.

For those who think historical fiction is just romance with corsets, White's novel will correct your misunderstanding. There's no romance to speak of, unless you count our hero's love for Florence and his patron/friend, Lorenzo de' Medici. (And by love, I'm being cutesy, there is no homoerotic longing happening.) In this novel, there's a metric ton of political machinations so those who enjoy political thrillers might like this unique take on corrupt politicians and dark, decadent, decaying urban locales.

I yearned for a cast list for this book, confusing my Antonio with my Amerigo, my Giuliano with my Giovanni. Cousins, brothers, kinsmen a-plenty. It took me a good ninety pages or so to really get into the story -- White crams a lot into the opening chapters to establish the setting of her story -- and other than Guid'Antonio, the rest of the characters aren't immediately notable. Guid'Antonio, however, was immensely interesting. He's complicated, to say the least: a bit cranky, obstinately loyal (to Lorenzo de' Medici, at least), dogged, lonely, confused.

I can't put my finger on my why I wasn't sucked into this book, but it wasn't for lack of trying on White's part. I plan to revisit this one in the future, perhaps when I'm less mushy-brained from winter. For those who like armchair escape, solid mysteries, and political intrigue -- this is your book!

Jessie (Ageless Pages Reviews) says

Read This Review & More Like It On My Blog!

I've always wanted to go to Europe - Italy, and France in particular, which is a big part of why historical fiction is such a favorite of mine. I'm a a major, unrepentant history nerd, and getting to read and see these fascinating locales in new ways through new books, especially ones so vividly drawn like Florence here with *The Sign of the Weeping Virgin*, is always a highlight of reading for me. Alana White's novel of Renaissance Florence is a strong, well-written and full of life, from the characters to the streets they walk. From the first page, the reader is caught up in the life of Guid'Antonio Vespucci, his famous nephew Amerigo Vespucci, and that of Il Magnifico - Lorenzo de' Medici. With a detailed, informative style and a clear voice, White's story is enveloping and vivid; a dense read but one that is rewarding.

The disappearance and assumed death of a young, beautiful Florentine wife, the "miraculous" appearance of the tears from a painting of the Virgin Mary, and the ongoing struggle with Pope Sixtus IV are all important factors to the plot, and the the struggles of the protagonist, Guid'Antonio. A Medici man through and through, one literally haunted by his failure to protect Lorenzo's murdered brother, Guid'Antonio finds himself charged with finding out whether there is a conspiracy to incite Florentines to revolt against their unofficial but powerful Medici leader. Guid'Antonio is a strong protagonist - full of principle, but also internal conflicts and doubts. He didn't develop as much as I would have liked, but this was a solid, intelligent lead for a strong mystery novel.

The Sign of the Weeping Virgin is consistently very evocative of Renaissance Florence. That's a very good thing, and what kept me coming back when I would struggle with the mystery. The vivid imagery is the strongest aspect of the novel, and Florence really comes to life under White's pen. From the neighborhoods

and churches, to the Medici palace, White clearly knows her way around the City of Flowers, and it shows in her sensory language. The characters are solid, even if the secondary personages need a little more definition, the plot is compelling and fresh, and the mystery not easily uncovered, but it is the setting that really makes this novel stand out.

I did think the novel stalled a little bit in the middle. Guid'Antonio understandably has a lot of leads to run down, questions to be answered and people to be found and the pace slowed down enough to make my reading progress a bit difficult. I didn't want to stop reading *The Sign of the Weeping Virgin*, but I did want some faster revelations or progression on the mystery. The mystery is itself well-constructed; the red herrings few but believable until Vespucci disproves them, but it did feel a bit stretched (or ignored, as when Maria's mother takes over the story) at times. However, White is a more than capable author and she found her storytelling footing soon enough and kept me engaged til the end.

If you're a fan of Italy, or of the Italian renaissance, or interested in papal politics, or in the fascinating life of Lorenzo de' Medici, you cannot pass on Alana White's impressive *The Sign of the Weeping Virgin*. Good, convoluted historical mysteries with interesting characters and creative plots can be hard to come across and it will be a while until I find one that measures up to the caliber of White's first novel. Impressive, well-written, and with an excellent use of place-as-character, *The Sign of the Weeping Virgin* was a hit with me.

Jane says

http://www.alanawhite.com/the_sign_of...

An interesting but ultimately unsatisfying mystery of the historical figures Guid'Antonio Vespucci, a lawyer in 15th century Florence and his nephew, the [future] explorer, Amerigo and how they solve the mysteries of a disappeared girl and why a portrait of the Virgin Mary weeps. Guid-Antonio does not feel, like many townspeople, she weeps because of Lorenzo di Medici's trying to grab for power: he IS already the unofficial ruler. There is much intrigue involving the then-pope, Sextus IV, and excommunication of all of Florence. The novel moved slowly until near the end where things were revealed little by little. Doggerel written by Botticelli almost invisibly on his "St. Augustine" contributed to a major breakthrough. A famous portrait exists of Guid'Antonio, a middle-aged man in profile, dressed in his red lawyer's robes among a group of townsmen.
