

The Fire Waker: An Aelius Spartianus Mystery Ben Pastor. St. Martin's Minotaur/Dunne, \$23.95 (304p) ISBN 978-0-312-35391-9

In Pastor's gripping second fourth-century Roman historical to feature Aelius Spartianus, an imperial envoy, historian and military commander who uncovered a conspiracy in Egypt that threatened the empire in *The Water Thief* (2007), Aelius tackles another problem worthy of his sleuthing skills in the province of Belgica Prima. Agnus, a Christian healer known as the fire waker, has supposedly brought brick-maker Marcus Lupus back from the dead, but when Lupus's supervisor finds him stiff in his bed one morning, this time there's no resurrection. Aelius's probe into Lupus's murder soon leads him to another killing—that of a judge who presided over proceedings against Christians—and to a possibly related case of procurement corruption. Pastor vividly depicts the politics of the day, with the four joint emperors (or tetrarchs) vying for power, while the logical solution to the intertwined puzzles will leave readers eager for the next entry in what one hopes will be a long series. (Apr.)