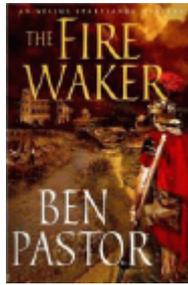


## ***The Fire Waker: An Aelius Spartianus Mystery***



by **Ben Pastor**

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  Reviewed by Tim Davis

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The year is 304 C.E., and the high-ranking Roman officer, imperial envoy, and historian Aelius Spartianus is about to become involved in a profoundly intriguing mystery. According to reports (especially information that comes from one of Aelius' former enemies), a brickyard owner in a remote outpost on the Rhine River in the northern territories has been raised from the dead by a Christian healer named Agnus, also known as Pyrikaios - or **the fire waker**.

With his curiosity piqued and with much at stake since the unstable empire might be further weakened by more problems arising from among the Christians, the agnostic Aelius finds himself wondering about the claims about **the fire waker** and the brick maker. However, when the recently resurrected brickyard owner suddenly dies - apparently not of natural causes - Aelius finds himself thoroughly drawn into the curious enigma.

Complicating matters further, rumors begin to circulate that **the fire waker** wants Aelius dead so that he can then publicly resurrect the Roman officer during the feast of Saturnalia and convert the masses to Christianity. Meanwhile, other rumors about the fire waker's magical abilities suggest that he can be in several places at the same

time.

Only by ultimately locating, confronting, and interrogating the elusive Agnus (and his mysterious assistant, the Christian deaconess known as Casta), can Aelius hope to discover the truth about the fire waker's reputed abilities (and his possible involvement in or knowledge of the brick maker's ultimate and permanent death).

At the same time, though, while pursuing the truth about Agnus (and Casta) and Christianity, Aelius will find himself uncomfortably immersed in the empire's escalating problems: political dishonesty, corruption in high positions, religious persecution, and rumors of a coup d'état.

As an intricate exploration of early 4th century tensions between politics and religion in an increasingly corrupt and fatally flawed Roman empire, and as a novel dominated by the protagonist's complicated interactions with friends, enemies, family, and - especially - women, *The Fire Waker*, at its core, first - and - foremost, is an elaborately crafted and richly detailed historical novel built upon the more slender foundation of a mystery novel. Readers looking for an erudite novel which showcases the declining Roman Empire coping with the challenges posed by the power of Christianity will almost certainly enjoy *The Fire Waker* for its compelling story, its well-rendered characters, and - in a surprising way - its contemporary relevance.