



The Cornerstone

Anne C. Petty

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How do you catch a banshee? But more importantly, if you succeed, how can you hope to survive the ordeal? The consequences of such dark magic are high, and if you try to let go once you've got that tiger by the tail, it may cost your very soul!

Atlanta is a cosmopolitan, theater-going city that supports its fair share of the arts. But when a small theatrical company takes on the production of Christopher Marlowe's famous play, Dr. Faustus, in the century-old Janus Theater, things don't go as planned. Unexplained stage effects appear as cast members disappear, accidents seem more than coincidence, and an earthquake splits a busy downtown thoroughfare. Oh, and did we mention the rumored ghost in the basement?

Paramedic Claire Porter thinks her volunteer prompter's job with the company will give her some relief from her stressful day job, and it is fun, at first. But as they say, the Devil is in the details.

The Cornerstone Details

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From Reader Review The Cornerstone for online ebook

Chris says

If you are at all interested in horror, the supernatural, historical fiction or just damn good, imaginative storytelling, you simply must read this book. Yes, it's really that good. It's engaging, suspenseful and hard to put down.

I had never heard of Anne C. Petty before reading *The Cornerstone*, and going in, I had no idea what to expect. The back of the book mentions a banshee, which is cool and different, and Christopher Marlowe, which also piqued my curiosity. But the book is so much more. Without getting too spoilery, we have a one-of-a-kind form of vampirism, 16th century historical figures (notably famed occultist John Dee), ghosts, ancient Irish/European folklore, Shakespeare (or at least his theater), witchcraft, time travel, a cast full of dark, mysterious characters and the most bad-ass reimagining of Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus* imaginable. Petty's writing is gripping, and her descriptions of 16th century life are exceptionally well written, rivaling even the imagination and prose found in Michael Crichton's *Timeline*, which is a huge compliment. I have no doubt she will receive much more acclaim in the near future.

My only complaints are that at times the characters feel a little flat, as we're told more about what they do than why they do it. On a similar note, I'd like to have seen a little more from Claire, the protagonist. She's lived her entire life in a box, never pushing boundaries, yet once she becomes involved in these fantastic events, she seems to become even more withdrawn. If Petty writes a sequel, I hope Claire steps out of her shell a bit. Also, she seemed almost asexual at times. I understand and appreciate the fact that Petty didn't tack on a needless, clichéd romantic interest, but the girl's life consisted entirely of work, caring for her mother and a play she wasn't in. This character really needs some spice in her life. These issues, however, are all very minor, and don't detract from Petty's unique narrative.

I also need to mention that this is my first Journalstone read, and I was very impressed with the quality of the book. Nice, thick pages that turn easily with superior binding that holds up well to use. The cover image is nice, but nothing exceptional, and does little to clue the reader in to the excellent tale found within.

This is the first time I've been awarded a First Reads book, and if this level of quality I can expect from these contests, I'll be signing up for many more in the future.

Bravo, Ms. Petty. You have a new fan.

-- Chris O.

Frank Errington says

Review Copy

Anne C Petty is a Tolkien scholar and specialist in Mythology and Finnish folkore. In *The Cornerstone*, her first novel with JournalStone, she has masterfully blended elements of Christopher Marlowe, John Dee, *The Tragical History of Dr. Faustus*, and Irish prehistory of the Boyne Valley tomb monuments into a beautifully compelling story.

It all starts in the 16th Century when Doctor John Dee -- mathematician, alchemist, Hermetic magician, herbalist, and adviser to Queen Elizabeth, in partnership with Monsieur C, engage Radha O Braonain, a sorceress of great depth and cunning. With her help, the two men believe they can capture a banshee and create a magickal object to keep death at bay.

Soon the action moves to present day Atlanta, Georgia and the aging Janus Theatre, home to the Mummer's Theatrical Company, currently in rehearsal for The Tragical History of Dr. Faustus, written by Christopher Marlowe.

Petty deftly weaves the action between past and present where we get to know the members of the cast and crew. From here, I'd rather not say more, as much of the fun of this tale is in the discovery of it's secrets, hinted at or unveiled as the story progresses.

In the end, I loved how all of the major plot points came together, giving the reader a complete story, told well, with characters I came to love or despise. And despite the subject matter, I completely believed these events may have occurred, as written. There is that ring of truth to the tale.

Once again, the folks at JournalStone have delivered the complete package. A very readable story from Anne C. Petty and kudos to Vincent Chong for his artwork on the cover of The Cornerstone.

I highly recommend this one. Even if you're not a horror fan, you may find The Cornerstone, to be something you'll enjoy on a cold Winter's night or a Summer's eve, if you're in Australia.

Mariam says

3.5/5 stars

I won the Cornerstone in a giveaway, and I owe it to Goodreads for sending it to me for free. They are absolutely brilliant. I will seriously keep kissing their butt if I win more giveaways.

The cover design is really intriguing, which is why I was drawn to this book in the first place. Covers like these are appealing to stare at because they give a little information on what the story is about, almost making it unnecessary to read the summary. For instance, the unwielded blade might seem as a weapon of sacrifice to a person, and is therefore important. The intricate symbols on the blood slathered stone and the man placing his hand on it, might suggest that the stone possesses great magic. Lastly, the man's eyes and part of his body are engulfed in darkness. This could mean that he is a person with a dark nature.

Getting on with the overall story, I found The Cornerstone to be enjoyable and even educational. Before reading this book I had never even heard of Christopher Marlowe or his play, Doctor Faustus. I love how the story is filled with many supernatural creatures, such as the banshee and dullahan. I also liked how the author tried to bring hell to life by having some of these creature come together, and even Satan himself...although, I found her descriptions to be more exciting than frightening.

The three characters: Claire, Bayard, and Tom, play a major role in the story. This confused me because in the summary of the book it only mentioned Claire as the main character. I wonder if this was the author trying to get the readers to pay more attention to Claire because she wanted to send a message to the audience through her character. (I am not sure if this correct though. The book I have is an advanced copy so it might not be the case) Still, I think Claire is a really important character and she does send a message to readers, and I think it has something to do with the moral of the story.

Once again, The Cornerstone was an enjoyable book and I am very thankful to Goodreads.

Kathleen Kelly says

Scene 1 starts in the 16th century, Elizabethan England with John Dee, counselor to the Queen, along with Monsieur C who conspire with a witch, Radha O Braonain, to see if they can capture a banshee...the theory is that if they can do this they can live forever.

Fade out to modern day Atlanta Georgia...the Janus Theatre where the Mummer's Theatrical Company is rehearsing for the play, The Tragical History of Dr. Faustus, written by Christopher Marlowe about a man who sells his soul to the devil for power and knowledge.

The primary character is Claire Porter who is a paramedic by day and volunteers with the Mummer's Theatrical Company at night. Things start happening that don't make sense and Claire starts to question the things around her...to the point that her own life and those around her are in danger.

The author blends Celtic mythology with the creepy story of Dr. Faustus to make for a thrilling and suspenseful story. A real page turner...I loved it.

Diane says

The Cornerstone splits its time between telling the tale of the capture of a banshee (and an unsuspecting dark witch) into a magical stone, and a modern day Atlanta theater company, current home to the stone, putting on the Christopher Marlowe play Doctor Faustus. The protagonist, Claire, had to put her life on hold when her father died suddenly and Claire was forced to take over care of her very ill mother. To get out of the house a bit she volunteers as a script prompter for the theater company. She begins to suspect something untoward is afoot in the supposedly haunted theater when the star of the play mysteriously disappears.

There is apparently something about Christopher Marlowe that draws paranormal authors; I've seen him as both a major and minor part of other paranormal books. The original Marlowe play Doctor Faustus is the story of a German scholar who receives instruction in the black arts, and subsequently summons Mephistopheles, a demon. Despite Mephistopheles' warnings about the horrors of hell, Faustus tells the demon to present Lucifer with an offer of Faustus' soul in exchange for twenty-four years of service from Mephistopheles. Lucifer accepts the offer. As the end of the 24 years draws near Faustus regrets his decision and asks for mercy but it is, alas, too late.

There are links between the past and present stories that are represented by the play. There was enough intrigue to keep my interest and I definitely wanted to know how the book ended. I found the back and forth between times choppy and confusing, however. All eventually became clear but I did some re-reading of sections to try and put the pieces together and remind myself of the various players. The characters did not feel fully developed, and while the climax was relatively exciting, I thought the ending was a bit abrupt and unsatisfying.

Book received free from LibraryThing for Early Reviewers.

Britt says

Great story, very gripping. The characters were worked out quite well and the flashbacks to earlier

occurrences were worked into the story nicely.

The story keeps you guessing, giving you different pieces of the puzzle throughout the story, which keeps you involved and makes you want to go on reading.

I liked the mix of occurrences in past times and a modern setting, and the mixing of normal, everyday life and paranormal events. I also very much liked the fact that Petty used actual historical characters and events.

A very enjoyable read, definitely recommended for those who like books with magic and paranormal occurrences.

Diane says

This was a book that I'd won for early review.

The story begins with witchcraft, the raising of a banshee by an Irish witch in exchange for the life of her son to be returned. The witch, instead, gets sucked into a cornerstone along with the banshee and the stone is taken possession of.

In present day Atlanta, a man, Kit Bayard, is putting on a production of Faustus, the Christopher Marlowe play from the 16th century. Claire is part of the crew, the script prompter. She is a paramedic in her day job as well as tending for her dying mother and is nearing a burnout point. A new actor, Tom, takes over the role of Faustus when the current actor disappears after an injury. Bayard seems to be the owner of the Cornerstone and must provide it with regular blood sacrifices to keep the spirits in it content and in return, they have provided him with a very long life and successes, as the supernatural contract had agreed.

Little by little, we find out Kit's real identity. Claire suspects there are mysterious goings on in the theatre, possibly in the ever-locked basement. She makes friends with Tom and two other cast members, including one who is a Wiccan and has sensed the spirit in the theatre at times. The spirit is getting restless and strange things are happening. Is the spirit trying to harness a new master for the cornerstone? Is the "Black Carriage" of death finally coming for Bayard? Is Claire losing her mind, hallucinating or are the visions she's having real?

The book keeps up a steady pace, weaving in the background and the past with the present as it draws closer to the climax, on the night of the performance when we find out who Tom is. The characters of Claire, Tom and somewhat Addie are more clearly defined than the fourth actor, Morris who seems to be more or less up to your own interpretation. Bayard has become a tired old soul, far less dynamic than he was but interesting for his journey all the same as his story comes to its inevitable conclusion. It's a pager turner, and the ending was very visually vivid in my mind.

Stuart says

In a local playhouse in Atlanta a group of local actors ready to put on the play Dr. Faustus by Christopher Marlow. At the last minute though, after a freak accident, their leading man leaves the company not to return. But why the sudden rush to leave? The wound he had was serious but not enough to make him want to up sticks and go.

Claire Porter, Paramedic and the groups volunteer line prompter, can't understand what happened and can't leave the nagging suspicion alone that it has something to do with their leader Kit Bayard. Why is he not worried what happened? And why so close to the opening night are strange happenings occurring in the

theater.

The lights show demonic qualities and ghosts appear tempting Claire to kill her sick mother and at the end when the horse and carriage arrives to take away those who need to pay their debt to society then the world, if not ending, will change for ever!

A well written book traveling through 16th century England to Banshees, deals made with the devil and modern day pay back where a fight for survival leads to, for some, the ultimate sacrifice.

Jordan says

There be spoilers (as it's almost impossible to describe what I liked about the book without revealing some).

Finally, faintly, the banshee's wail could be heard riding the wind, a keening scree just at the edge of hearing, then louder. Suddenly it was deafening, a sound so painful it could stop the heart, and it seemed to be inside Dee's own head, as if some raging animal were trapped there and clawing its way out. (15)

The third of the three books I won in the December batch of Librarything Early Reviewers.

I thoroughly enjoyed this historical fiction supernatural thriller, of sorts. I mean, if you kill someone in such a brutal, bloody, unemotional manner in the first ten pages of the book, you've definitely got my attention. Petty suggests an alternate "ending" for Christopher Marlowe - that he gave his soul to the devil in exchange for ongoing life (via a banshee trapped in a stone to whom he must constantly sacrifice lives).

Branching nicely with Marlowe's revamped story of Faustus, *The Tragical History of the Life and Death of Dr. Faustus*, the story begins with the original trapping of the banshee in the cornerstone, by none other than famous historical figure John Dee. John Dee was a trusted scientist in Queen Elizabeth I's court. While involved in the more traditional scientific side, he balanced that with a healthy investigation into the supernatural, especially in the last half of his life. He was also a well-known book collector, which is referenced somewhat briefly in the book. (To learn more about John Dee, and get references to real scholarly information about him, check out his Wiki page.) Little did Dee know, but the witch who helped him to trap the banshee was also consumed by the stone.

Fast forward to relatively current day. We are at a modern-day theatre, which is presenting a version of Marlowe's *Faustus*. Plucky stage manager (?) Claire has been trying to get more involved, to get a bit of a break from her day job as an EMT. On the first night we meet the theatre crew, a real knife mysteriously replaces the prop knife, and the lead actor, Danny, inadvertently cuts himself. Although she offers to take him to get stitches, the director Kit Bayard (get it? Kit?) takes Danny into his office to tend to his wound. Next rehearsal, Kit tells them all that Danny has decided to leave the show, and the theatre company. There have been lots of suggestions of haunting in the theatre, which is fairly typical of theatre's, really. At first Claire thinks that whatever is haunting the theatre has something to do with Danny's disappearance. And she's not entirely wrong.

Claire seems to be the only one really concerned about Danny's disappearance. She convinces a few of the actors (including practicing Wicca Addie) to help her investigate his disappearance, and explore the much-protected basement.

I did think that the "Kit" continuity there was a bit of a giveaway. Not right away, of course, because your

first thought is not, "Well, that's a 400-year-old renowned playwright." But definitely as you get further into the story, it makes the surprises less. However, even given that, this book kept me completely engaged and constantly guessing as to what would happen next. I thought there were some well-grounded, but still surprising, reveals, which was great and impressively accomplished. Really enjoyed it.

Violet says

Thanks to Goodreads and Anne Petty for my copy of The Cornerstone.

Great short read fast and interesting with an exciting ending. You will enjoy this thriller.

Angie Lisle says

Irish mythology precipitates this fictional tale of Christopher Marlowe's life-after-death. An interesting book that will pique the appetites of those who enjoy history. Readers are encouraged to go off and research minor characters on our own. A little more detail about these historical figures in the story would keep people like me from getting distracted, which is part of why it took me so long to read the story. Readers that don't like research will probably find this book frustrating.

I didn't figure out where the plot was going until Ms. Petty decided to give me that information. The writing is reminiscent of a Gothic Romance written in the 60s and 70s, reminding me of Mary Stewart minus the happily-ever-after couple falling-in-love angle. I was pleasantly surprised to see the main character take a different path at the end of the story than one that a 60s/70s GR-writer would have used.

I received a free copy of this book in exchange for a review.

Mare says

This story dances through history in a completely engaging manner. I enjoyed the historical episodes as much at the current story and thought the characters to be interesting and believable. The settings are well described and, while the writing style was a bit rough here and there, it was a very enjoyable story. I look forward to reading more of this author's writings. I hesitate to say more for fear of letting something slip, but once I started this book it was very difficult to put it down. I did win this review copy, but that has not influenced my opinion of this very entertaining tale.

Nancy says

A 1581 meeting in the woods with a witch to call a banshee. The witch did not want to attend but a long-held secret persuaded her. A life for a life.....but whose? Blood on a stone.

An Atlanta, Georgia, Mummerys theater company in rehearsal of Dr. Faustus. Act Two requires a blood oath on paper. The stage knife is razor sharp and the oath is confirmed. Another death. A stone in the basement? The director much older than he seems??

The past and present blend together smoothly in this novel from a Tolkien scholar who has done a grand job

of plotting out her story with well-written characters. In a classic Marlowe-ian plot, we begin to wonder who is obeying whom down in the theater's basement and what others. I was especially impressed by the way Ms Petty handled her transitions from black-magic to a play rehearsal. Spooky!

Barbara Heckendorn says

The story is starting out in old Irland a couple of hundred years ago as an old pagan fairy tale. This start is important because the whole story which is taking place in our days is based on this inception. The most part of the story takes place in Atlanta at the Janus Theatre where a group is rehearsing the play *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus by Christopher Marlowe*. Like in this play where Faustus sold his soul to Mephistoteles, in the Irish fairy tale had Christopher Marlowe sold his soul, too. He is the owner of the Janus Theatre and the director of this play and also the keeper of an old stone which is in the basement of the theatre. During the rehearsal the old vow from the early Irish time starts to break. An interesting aspect was that it took me a while to find out which characters were from the old time and which are only related to the present.

(3 1/2 stars)

Leesa says

I received this book via LibraryThing's Early Reviewers

This was a dark, moody book delving into the Faustian dilemma on several levels. It sets the mood immediately, sending us to 1581 to witness a sinister conjuring and entrapment to serve selfish needs.

In present day, our protagonist, Claire, takes a break from her paramedic job and caring for her ill mother by working with an acting troupe putting on the Faustus play. When she inquires about a wounded and missing actor, she unwittingly gets caught up in a horrifying situation.

I enjoyed this story, and would have loved to see more of the story filled out to give more details and depth into the stories from the past and present. The mysterious stranger, Tom, was interesting and I want to know more of his story.
