

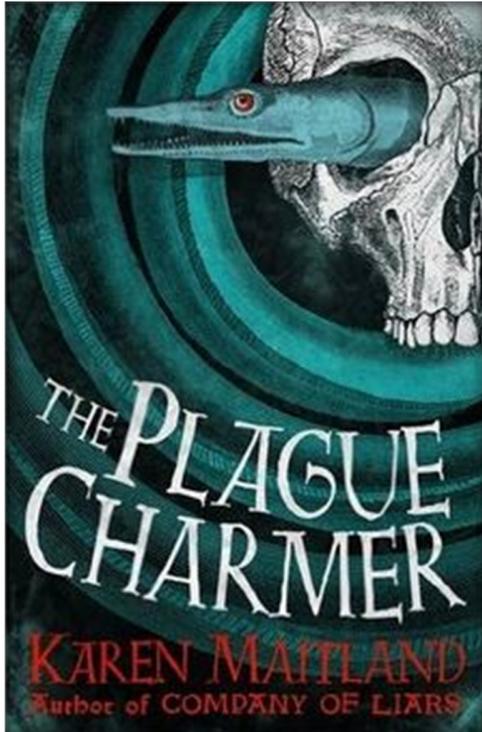


Helping you choose
your next book

headline

LoveReading Reader reviews of **The Plague Charmer** by Karen Maitland

Below are the complete reviews, written by LoveReading members.



Margaret Freeman

Compelling reading, a fascinating medieval tale full of atmosphere and superstition. I thoroughly enjoyed it.

*A story of the plague, set in Porlock Weir in 1361, **The Plague Charmer** is another unputdownable book by Karen Maitland, bringing the medieval world to life in all its brutality and hardship. Following an eclipse of the sun, a ship is blown ashore as a storm rages along the coast, bringing a dark stranger, Janiveer to the village who warns them of the plague and offers to save them - but for a price.*

It's a complex story, told from different characters' perspective, following the lives

of Will, a 'fake' dwarf, Sara, a packhorseman's wife and her family, Matilda, a religious zealot, and Christina at nearby Porlock Manor amongst others. It's a tale of folklore, black magic, superstition, violence, torture, murder, and an apocalyptic cult - and also of love. As the plague spreads and more horrendous deaths pile up families are broken up, and hostilities surface as the village is isolated, left to fend alone.

I thought Will a fascinating character. Subjected to horrific treatment as a baby, strapped into an iron bridle, compressed and deformed as he grew to form a squat little dwarf, he is remarkably free of bitterness and capable of more humanity than most of the other characters. Sara, too shows strength of character as she perseveres in her search for her two missing sons.

I liked the Historical Notes, the information about the medieval riddles that

head Will's chapters and the Glossary, but would also have appreciated details of the sources that Karen Maitland used.

www.booksplease.org

Victoria Whish

This dark tale of plague and suspicion wrapped up with the supernatural is guaranteed to chill the bones on a cold winter's night. Light the candles, lock the doors and prepare to be 'charmed!'

This dark tale of plague and suspicion wrapped up with the supernatural is guaranteed to chill the bones on a cold winter's night. I loved the Westcountry setting of Porlock Weir and felt the dramatic landscape was superbly realised and juxtaposed with the impressive surroundings of Porlock Manor.

This is the story of a small coastal community with most inhabitants having memories of the time that the village was visited by a Great Pestilence so when the threat of something similar gets swept in by the tide, their sense of horror and impending doom is instantly heightened.

As is usual with Karen Maitland's books, there are a long and strange cast of characters. It is easy to get lost in the world Karen creates and the line between superstition and reality is deftly drawn.

I liked the inclusion of the historical notes in the book which explained the differences between the two major plague periods and the fact that the type of victim differed between times. I also found the author's note interesting in that the idea for the novel came partly from contemporary reports of the Ebola virus so the moral dilemmas at the heart of the book, take on a new modern significance.

Light the candles, lock the doors and settle down to be 'charmed' by this book!

www.thewhishlist.co.uk/VicKWhish

Cathy Petersen

A wonderfully entertaining tale of ancient curses and the things people will do when the lives of loved ones are at stake.

What initially seems a straightforward story of saving a village from the onset of plague gradually reveals itself to be so much more. The cast of characters is wide and varied but Maitland handles them skilfully and even the minor ones

come across as distinct from the rest. I loved the main characters of Will and Sara, two people trying against odds to save those they love. Then there was Janiveer, the Plague Charmer who was delightfully ambiguous and I still can't decide if she was a villain or not. There were several story strands here which seem separate initially but are skilfully woven together to produce a vivid plot line that comes together almost perfectly. There were one or two elements I was less convinced by and felt unnecessary but overall those didn't mar the story. Thoroughly enjoyed this and have already passed it on to friends who can't wait till October to read it!

@Cerysthepup

Sue Broom

A fast-flowing action story with lots of historical detail thrown in, entertaining and illuminating, I enjoyed its blend of fact and fiction.

Life in 14th Century England was not for sissies - vulnerable to epidemics of horrible, untreatable diseases, unpredictable storms, floods followed by drought. If that weren't bad enough already, the people living in the isolated coastal community in Karen Maitland's story also have to contend with vengeful sea witches and gigantic bear spirits. They are superstitious in the extreme, hedging their bets between their hellfire and brimstone brand of Christianity and the old pagan beliefs, fearing all unexpected events to be omens of something to come, something very, very bad. Sure enough, something bad often comes their way, though not quite as bad as the Armageddon one group predicts. With narration skipping between the main characters, we follow their struggle to avoid disaster and just survive in their uncertain world.

A fast-flowing action story with lots of historical detail thrown in, plenty of interesting characters and relationships, and some fascinating ideas of what motivated people in those dark days (and they were dark, no-one ever seems to have enough light to see what's going on, even during the daytime). Entertaining and illuminating, I enjoyed its blend of fact and fiction, and the glossary at the end was particularly welcome.

Kerry Bridges

One wintry night, a woman is pulled from the sea at Porlock Weir. Most people think she is dead, but Sara and her family take the woman in and she is revived. The woman is Janiveer and she is a witch. Suddenly, the plague descends on the

village and Janiveer says she will stop it but only for a price. Is anyone prepared to give their own life to save the others?

I am a fan of Karen Maitland's medieval mysteries and this one did not disappoint. As always, the cast of characters are diverse and interesting whilst remaining true to their time. There are some really awful villains, some clear heroes and one, the dwarf Will, who may well be somewhere in between, but Maitland is able to bring all their characters to life and to make them all interesting and rounded so that one really wants to read more about them. Maitland does not shy away from showing the really difficult lives that the people endured. Nevertheless, endure they do, and come out fighting in the end.

Another great novel by Karen Maitland and another one I highly recommend.

<http://iamalwaysreading.wordpress.com/>

Sue Mooney

*"The sky grew dark, in the middle of the day....that was just the beginning
How will it end?"*

Absolutely brilliant! From the very beginning you simply won't want to put this book down.

Another wonderfully penned book from Karen Maitland, who will take you on a trip back in time, to a sometimes dark place where horrors are a plenty amongst the everyday lives & loves of the folk from Porlock Weir!

Of plague, of new life, of witchcraft, of unconditional love, of terrifying monsters real or imaginedit's all here.

Hunger, Pain & Suffering aplenty, it makes no difference if you're rich or poor, the nightmares can reach you wherever you may be!

How far will you be prepared to go to save yourself or the ones you love, when all around you is falling apart?

Who holds the key to stop it all?

Who has the one thing that can stop it?

*A must read which will keep you wanting more. Fabulous You
@truckermercedes*

Jane Gilman

1361 Porlock Weir Exmoor. The mood is set in this gothic novel by an eclipse of the sun. The villagers are terrified and this omen can only bring death and destruction. Part historical fiction, part suspenseful ghost story this is a modern fairy tale for adults. Full of suspense, twists and turns of plot and spine tingling chills.

*Plague strikes England for the second time in Thirteen Years and no one is safe not even a remote village on the coast. Dependent on the sea for their existence the sea also brings death. Infected children. A strange woman who says she can save them for a terrible price and ghost ships. Who can be trusted? Is anything as it seems. Sara is locked away with her family by neighbours she trusts. As her family starts dying is the cost to save them really so high? Will they be willing to sacrifice a life? **Medieval noir at it's very best. I haven't read Karen Maitland before but I will be ordering everything I have missed. Deliciously frightening.***

Janet Gilliard

*This is a real brick of a book that I struggled to get through but the effort was worth it. The novel is set in 1361; a period in history that I know very little about. Plague strikes England. Sara fears for her children when a stranger appears and offers to help but the price is a human life. **This is a dense historical novel well written and worth persevering with.***

Angela Rhodes

Once again Karen has managed to weave her magic, hold the readers hand and whisk them away, this time, to 1361, Porlock Wier, Exmoor.

Thirteen years have gone by, since the plague hit England and though the villagers are getting on with their lives, it is never far from the backs of their minds. Sara, wife of Elis and mother to her boys Hob and Luke, fears that it will strike again.

A storm hits the little village of Porlock and with it an evil, something dark, something that makes the air feel heavy... but that isn't all it brings, a ship, bashes against the rocks, and a body is seen, only one body, that of a dark haired woman. The men drag her from the sea and Sara nurses her back to health, This is something she soon regrets, as the green eyed witch from the sea

warns them there is a great evil about to visit and she can stop it, but for a price. Her price is one of their own, just one life, when they deny, she warns them they would be sorry. Is she telling the truth or is she just mad and where are the other bodies from the shipwreck??

A gripping, tense story waits for those who enjoy legends and curses and of course romance.

Marjorie Lacy

*I love the books about Medieval times and have read a lot of them. **This one is up there with the greatest!! The author, Karen Maitland knows her subject, her writing is exceptionally good. There not a dull moment on any page.** Her characters are well described and distinct, and very believable. The plot is deep, dark and has twists and turns, where you have to hold your breath until the reveal comes. I like the fact that every chapter has the character who is telling the story is named at the start. Along with a Medieval riddle, I thought they were great fun. At the end of the story, we were given Historical Notes, details and meanings of the Riddles, along with a glossary of words in use at the time. I like a novel based on facts, feeling that I am learning something as well as enjoying a really entertaining and informative book. Well done to Katherine!*

Vikki Patis

*Karen Maitland is known for writing about medieval England in a gruesome, honest way. But the best part, for me, is always her characters. Maitland manages to create realistic, relatable characters, who never fail to thrill and entice you. In 'The Plague Charmer', Will is by far my favourite character. A regular Tyrion, Will is witty yet deep; he is one of those rare characters who, despite living an unfortunate life, is still kind. Sara follows closely behind, a strong woman who does what needs to be done, battling through grief and pain. I always enjoy Maitland's historical notes, paying particular attention to them after I've finished the book. I always come away from reading Maitland feeling as if I've learnt something, as well as having enjoyed a good story. There are many aspects to 'The Plague Charmer', several different situations and a host of characters, and I hesitate to spoil any part of it, so my review is briefer than usual. **But I urge you to read this fantastic addition to Maitland's excellent collection. Dark and atmospheric, Maitland does it yet again with her chilling evocation of the Dark Ages.***

<https://dracarya.wordpress.com/2016/08/29/the-plague-charmer-by-karen-maitland>.