

Lovereading Reader reviews of A Burnable Book by Bruce Holsinger

Below are the complete reviews, written by Lovereading members.

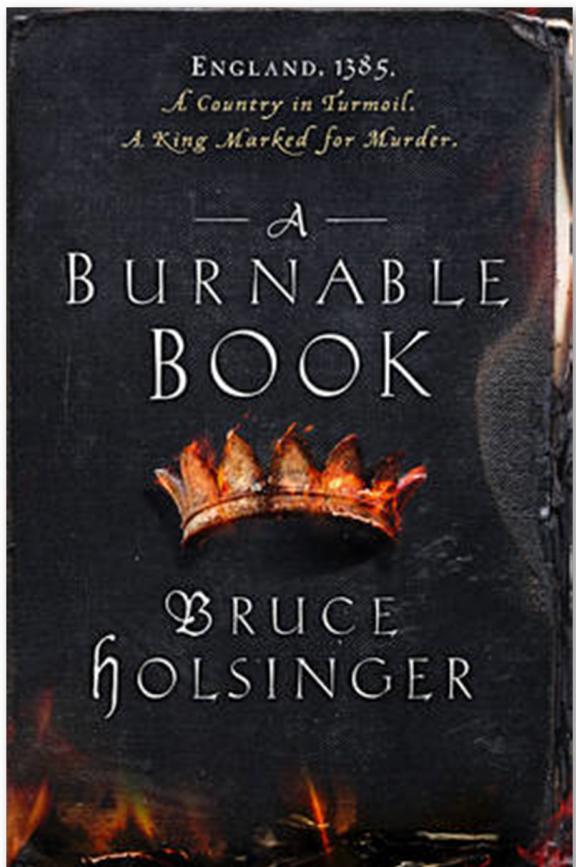
Anita Wallas

London 1385. A missing book filled with dark prophecy. A monarchy under threat. Murder, conspiracy and treason. A debut tour de force which will keep you hooked from the first page.

Chaucer's London is brought vividly to life in this tale of conspiracy, treason, sedition, treachery, secrets and much more. It's epic in scope with a huge cast of characters and is a powerful debut novel by Bruce Holsinger.

I was immediately immersed in the sights, sounds and smells of the medieval capital. There's a strong sense of both place and time captured by detail and use of dialogue with the language and nuance of the time. There's a sense of atmosphere and intrigue which is all pervading. The anxieties and uncertainty around a monarchy headed by a new young king are laid bare by the intricacy of the plot.

Chaucer tasks Gower, whose specialty is trading in secrets, with finding a mysterious book filled with prophecy that threatens the monarchy. Whispers, suspicion, murder and more start the story at a gallop. This search for the book is the central thread which weaves together an impressive cast of characters; from monarchs and courtiers to paupers and prostitutes. Each is carefully crafted with a part to play in a clever, complex and well controlled plot. The pace allows various sub plots to develop along with dead ends and red herrings. The strength of this compelling read is the richness of factual detail. It's a real slice of social history where authentic period details are woven into the story.



Whether its poetry or brothels, bookbinding or code breaking or the politics of the power behind the throne and the dread of prophecy and prediction, it's all there to savour. Engaging and exciting, I loved every page of this and look forward to more.

Fleur Fisher

A wonderful tale of historical intrigue

If I was asked to sum up 'A Burnable Book' in a single sentence, I would describe it as a thriller with solid historical underpinnings, built on classic lines. The story starts with the murder of a young woman and the theft of an ancient book that contains accurate prophecies of the deaths of England's kings including the current monarch, Richard II. Geoffrey Chaucer charges John Gower with finding the book, and his dangerous quest brings him into contact with the lowest and the highest in the land, and it takes him worryingly close to his own home and family. Bruce Holsinger clearly knew and loved his period, and though my own knowledge was sketchy it didn't matter at all. It was easy to pick up what I needed to know along the way, and it was fascinating to see such a rich cross-section of 14th century society. The plot was well thought out, with plenty of twists and turns to keep things interesting, the attention to detail was wonderful, and I could happily recommend 'A Burnable Book' to anyone who enjoys stories of historical intrigue.

You can follow Fleur on Twitter: @FleurinherWorld

Vanessa Wild

Combining fact with fiction, A Burnable Book is a well paced, absorbing and exciting historical thriller set in 14th century London about a treasonous book of prophecies and those who are desperate to get their hands on it.

The story itself has many twists and turns and is cleverly plotted. It is also quite a rollercoaster of an adventure and although it's a little confusing at times, I just sat back and enjoyed the ride. There is a lot of attention to detail. It is well researched and London is vividly depicted. I almost felt I was there - it gave such a great sense of the time and place.

There are many varied and interesting characters, real and fictional, and I found them well drawn and easy to visualise. I will just mention that the 'Cast of Characters' at the front of the book was extremely helpful in jogging the

memory!

*'A Burnable Book' is something of a page turner and I was eager to know what would happen next. I found it an **evocatively written and gripping to the last page**. I would have no hesitation in recommending it to historical fiction and/or thriller fans.*

You can follow Vanessa on Twitter at: *Butterflybiblio*

Teresa Majury

A well-paced but complex story with many twists and turns.

Bruce Holsinger's fiction debut, 'A Burnable Book', is the first in a proposed series of historical thrillers set in 14th century London. This is Chaucer's London, it is 1385, a time of flux especially for the young king, Richard II, whose life may be in danger before he gets the opportunity to rule independently. Rumour has it there is "a burnable book", a treasonous tract the contents of which could overthrow the monarchy and threaten the stability of the whole country.

Enter John Gower, part-time poet and friend of Geoffrey Chaucer who has requested Gower's help in tracking down this dangerous tome. What follows is a well-paced but complex story with many twists and turns. Equally complex is the vast range of characters, both real-life and fictional, and I was grateful for the list of characters at the front of the novel in order to frequently remind myself who was who. Holsinger is well respected in the area of medieval research, as attested by his back catalogue of six non-fiction works in this field. Such expertise is evident in the ease with which he brings alive the sights, sounds and smells of medieval London.

This is an accomplished debut novel reminiscent of the sprawling narratives of Ken Follett and C J Sansom. It is slightly too detailed and convoluted for my liking but I think that Bruce Holsinger's first foray into fiction will win him lots of new fans.

You can read Teresa's blog at: www.lovelytreez.com

Or follow her on Twitter: @lovelytreez

Peter Land

A fascinating, fast moving story of intrigue, plot and detection told around King Richard the Second, Chaucer and their peers and told mostly by Chaucer's

friend and fellow poet John Gower. **This book has everything – history, love, deceit, sex and violence and reveals not only the politics of the 14th Century court, but also the politics of the street;** the lords, the lovers, the prostitutes and the soldiers. The expert knowledge of Bruce Holsinger lets him bring the details and realities of medieval existence to life, with all its pageantry but also its squalor. Moving between London, Southwark, Oxford and Florence, the action centres around the hunt for a dangerous and treasonable book and John Gower soon realises that he is not the only person looking for it. As the murder count grows, it becomes apparent that there is more to be concerned about than simply one missing book and Gower's own family and closest friends seem to be involved – but how, and how can he protect them?

Clair Chaytors

Historical writing at its best... If you liked Hilary Mantel you will love Bruce Holsinger...

Set in the 14th Century, 'A Burnable Book' avidly describes and portrays the raw bones of London. Holsinger's London is grimy and dirty, brutal and sinister, full of wrong doings and political underhandedness. Some of the scenes are brutal, due to Holsinger's powerful descriptions, but with each and every one you feel as though you are there in London alongside these characters taking their journey as his writing strongly evokes the senses.

This isn't my usual reading genre but after becoming absorbed in the book only a few chapters in I'm so glad I read this book. The historical information is inspiring and I was amazed at the intelligence and obvious knowledge Holsinger displays throughout. It was a privilege as a reader to read a book on a subject in which the author was so obviously clued up about in terms of his research and knowledge.

This is by no means a quick read and due to a variety of characters it does require a lot of concentration to ensure full understanding of how each character is relevant to the overall storyline but it is well worth the time and effort as this is a one of those very rare and intelligent books that you don't stumble across very often.

Jan Kirkcaldy

At first glance I did wonder if the title was going to prove prophetic when I started this lengthy tome. Fortunately that was not the case, as I became fascinated with the story, told mostly in narrative form by John Gower – a real life character of the time and friend of Chaucer and others – in both high and low stations in life. Set in the 14th century, the period became almost frighteningly real, from the murder, theft of the book and all the events leading to the hunt for it and the ultimate conclusion.

It is not a book for the fainthearted though nor would I suggest those without an interest or knowledge of that time in history. A grim period, it seems, where so many people were corrupt and treated badly. You had to choose sides very carefully to survive. I found the odd sentences in other languages – French, Italian, Latin - and the old English words used much of the time interesting but not entirely necessary. It could discourage some readers. So it did come as a surprise when Chaucer suddenly said to John Gower “Perhaps if you lightened up a bit, adding a dash of humour to your biting satire” – such modern terminology. Deliberate maybe or did the author briefly come out of his time line?

A clever, well written book and a very good social history lesson. I enjoyed it

Linda Birt

Historical fiction at its very best, combining fact and fiction in a page turning debut thriller.

The story to find the Burnable Book, a book of treasonous prophecies take us to 14th century London.

Geoffrey Chaucer is one of a number people searching for the book. Which also includes Royalty and clergy. With many twists and turns the plot takes us into the poorer parts of London and its people.

Why is everyone looking for this book and what does it mean and more importantly who wrote it?

Many people will die trying to find the truth.

I found the characters and story had great depth, and the details of 14th Century London were brought to life by an author who has such historical knowledge of this period. I hope this book is the first of many.

Glynis Elliott

An Insight into Medieval England.

I was very much looking forward to reading ‘A Burnable Book’ which ticked all the right boxes for me. In particular to the fact that it was for fans of CJ Sansom and covered John of Gaunt and Katherine Swynford. A much more readable story told in Katherine by Anya Seyton. Unfortunately although ‘The Burnable Book’ was full of colour and interesting details of the period of Medieval England, it just relied more on this than the actual story of the book and the characters surrounding it.

Worthwhile but not entertaining for me.

Nailah Afghan

This book brings to life medieval England in such a way that you can almost smell it! A fascinating history lesson, as well as an exciting thriller. The intrigue and conspiracy twist and turn, with characters which are brought to life with expert penmanship. The story revolves around a book of prophecy which passes from one innocent and naïve person to another, with mayhem and murder in its wake. Drawing on real historical figures to add depth and realism to the plot, Bruce Holsinger has created a real page turner of a mystery which I would highly recommend.