

LoveReading Reader reviews of Martyr by Rory Clements

Below are the complete reviews, written by LoveReading members.

Sarah Musk

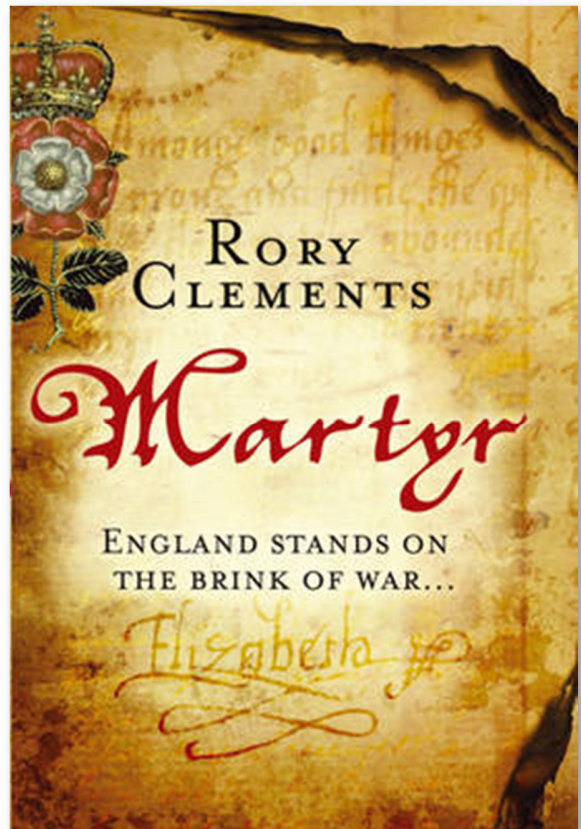
An exciting read with a clever, sympathetic hero and a brutal, psychotic villain set in the turbulent sixteenth century. I can't wait to read the other books in the series.

What an exciting read! I love C J Sansom and I know I am going to love Rory Clements just as much. John Shakespeare (a relative of Will?) who is from Warwickshire, is a clever, sympathetic investigator for Walsingham, who is a close adviser to Queen Elizabeth I. I like the technique using main characters who are involved with historical events and real historical characters but are on the periphery. This means the author has quite a lot of license with their involvement in real-life events. There are some very violent scenes in the book but they were turbulent times involving strong emotions and religious fanaticism.

Shakespeare has a truly evil enemy in Topcliffe. Rory Clements understands that a nasty villain is always needed as a foil to a moral hero and the enmity between these two is obviously going to run on through the series. John Shakespeare's Roman Catholic wife is also definitely going to cause him lots of problems in the future and I look forward to seeing what will happen since I will be buying the next book in the series as soon as possible.

Nicola Lowes

The characters felt real and there were plenty of rogue villains to



keep the intrigue going. I would definitely recommend it.

From the start this was a book that made me want to read on. The characters felt real and the plot developed smoothly. There were plenty of rogue villains to keep the intrigue going through the book. It depicts Elizabethan England vividly and draws you into that world. John Shakespeare is a reliable hero who tries to find the truth in a corrupted world. His story is weaved through authentic historical details which give a fascinating backdrop to the plot. Now I've finished I want to continue with the rest of the books in the series and I would definitely recommend it.

You can follow Nicola on twitter: @NJLowes

Julie Wragg

An enthralling read of suspicion and danger in Elizabethan England.

I found this first in a series of mystery books an enthralling read.

John Shakespeare, older brother of William (who makes a useful appearance) is an investigator charged not only with discovering the identity of the sadistic murderer of Lady Blanche but also to ensure the safety of Sir Francis Drake from an assassin sent by the Spanish king. Shakespeare's every turn is dogged by Topcliffe, a favourite of the Queen, who will stop at nothing to hunt down and execute Jesuit priests.

A fast paced novel which vividly details the suspicions, perils and horrors of a dangerous time in England's history. First of a series, which was completely new to me and not my usual choice of time period for historical fiction, I was quickly absorbed into Shakespeare's world. Although realistically brutal and gory at times, it was an enjoyable, gripping read. I will definitely look out for the next one.

Cleo Bannister

Life in Elizabethan era bought to the reader in Technicolor as Rory Clements paints a picture of the life, times and murder in this page-turner.

Rory Clements book grabbed me from the start, this isn't just a book about the endless politics, or the Spanish Armada it is about people, and I love reading about people and the lives they live, their hopes and their fears.

John Shakespeare is an investigator and we meet him investigating the murder

of a well-connected young woman, the mystery of which he delves into throughout the book. The Setting is Elizabethan England where the likeable John Shakespeare is supposed to be working with the notorious Richard Topcliffe. Shakespeare doesn't approve of Topcliffe's vicious methods and there is already bad-blood between the two men. This only increases as they are both chasing the same Jesuit priest around the web of London safe houses.

This is not a book for the squeamish, there is plenty of violence within the pages as I'm sure in such uncertain times there was. There are whores, a stolen baby, the Queen vacillating whether to order Mary Queen of Scots to death and a determination to stamp out the Catholics still brave enough to follow their faith in England. It is a book for those who enjoy a tautly plotted novel with plenty of action as well as being a fantastic way to learn more about this period of history.

You can read Cleo's blog at: <http://cleopatra loves books.wordpress.com>

Maureen Evans

In a time of fear and torture our hero battles to uncover the identity of Francis Drake's potential assassin. This deservedly award-winning author keeps up the tension right to the end.

A rollicking good read set in the time of Elizabeth I, this first in a series of historical thrillers by Rory Clements, featuring 'intelligencer' John Shakespeare, certainly whetted my appetite to read others.

A plot to assassinate Francis Drake is afoot and Shakespeare must prevent it at all costs. In a time of fear and torture our hero battles to uncover the identity of Drake's potential assassin, whilst also attempting to discover the murderer of a young woman of noble birth. This deservedly award-winning author keeps up the tension right to the end and I look forward to getting my hands on other titles in this series very soon!

You can follow Maureen on twitter at: *Mollye*

Elisabeth Thomas

A gripping Elizabethan mystery.

The year is 1587 in England, Queen Elizabeth I is on the throne. A plot to kill Sir Francis Drake has been uncovered and a high born young woman is discovered dead – her body horribly mutilated. Protestant – Catholic tensions are at an all-

time high with Queen Elizabeth attempting to crush the Catholics in the country attempting to practice their faith.

John Shakespeare is tasked with not only finding the killer of Lady Blanche Howard but also to ensure that Sir Francis Drake stays alive to defeat the threat of a Spanish Invasion.

This is the first book in a series of books featuring John Shakespeare and the first novel by Rory Clements that I had read.

I found that the story gripped me from start to finish with all its twists, turns, family secrets and intrigue. The novel perfectly evokes all the putrid smells and sights of Elizabethan England whilst perfectly conveying the sense of fear and threat that both the Catholics and Protestants must have felt during that period.

A word of warning though, because (due to its excellent descriptions) some of the sights and descriptions of the horrific torture that many suffered during that period mean this book is perhaps not for the faint hearted.

I really enjoyed this first John Shakespeare story and will definitely be reading the other books in the series.

You can follow Elisabeth's blog at: <http://listhebookworm.wordpress.com>

Katie Young

An amazing novel full of twists that had me hooked and brought Elizabethan England to life.

I absolutely loved this novel. There are lots of characters and plots and sub-plots to get your head around but the author does a great job of bringing Elizabethan England and the various characters to life. It would be easy for a novel set over 400 years ago to have characters who were flat and difficult to relate to but that is not the case at all; vivid descriptions, colourful language and a fast moving plot ensure this novel is full of life and had me gripped from the beginning. I look forward to reading many more of John Shakespeare's adventures.

Sarah Harper

An entertaining read which kept me guessing until the end. I will definitely be following up with another John Shakespeare mystery in the future.

An Elizabethan murder mystery is certainly not my usual choice of reading

material but I must say that I thoroughly enjoyed Martyr. The brutal murder of a young noblewoman must be solved by the investigator John Shakespeare (William's brother). I loved the character of John and the way in which he worked. As he pieced together the complex clues and untangled the mystery he drew me into the book. The author sets the scene particularly well which made it easy for me to imagine England at that time. I thoroughly enjoyed the tale and had no idea who the culprit was until all had been revealed. An entertaining read which kept me guessing until the end. I will definitely be following up with another John Shakespeare mystery in the future.

Paula Hall

One of those books you can't put down until it's finished!

The author's writing is so descriptive you can almost see and smell his words. A thrilling read from start to finish.

Cathy Petersen

Great start to a series with religious tensions, murder and conspiracy in a wholly believable Elizabethan London.

Without doubt this has a terrific appreciation of the time and place, particularly the real sense of fear and suspicion brought on by the religious tension of the later Elizabethan years. The different plot strands of murder and conspiracy are woven together convincingly on the whole, although I was mystified by one or two elements which may be resolved in future books. That said I did find this a real chore to read in places and I think this was down to the characters themselves.

Although a well-rounded and interesting character in himself, making the lead character John, a fictional older brother to William Shakespeare was both unnecessary and trite in my opinion lending nothing to the story. More of a problem for me was the fact that I found the villains a little over done and therefore quite obvious which detracted from what was generally a well written story and good start to a series.

You can follow Cathy on twitter at: @Cerysthepup

Lindsey Whittle

Very strong on historical atmosphere and believable characters.

*Set in the most turbulent period of the reign of Elizabeth I, **this story mixes known facts and people with creative imaginings and immaculate research.***

The book description and other reviews will tell you more of the plot, but for me the detective story soon took second place to the immersion in the sights, sounds, smells of London in 1587. To understand more clearly the filth and harshness of existence in a city still struggling to cope with the practicalities and logistics of so many people living so close together; of living in a society where an elite had total power over others; where being affiliated to the wrong faction could get you casually tortured or murdered; where even men with power, money and connections had to tread carefully in what was hidden and what was betrayed – all this made me feel a connection and concern for John Shakespeare in his dangerous work and his dangerous love for a Catholic woman. I'm looking forward to catching up with other books in this series by Rory Clements.

At the back are Background Notes which explain some of the more esoteric mentions in the book, e.g. role of the Jesuits, what Pursuivants were, the importance of weapons and whores. You might find it useful to read these notes before starting the story.

Annette Woolfson

The first in a series of Elizabethan mystery tales – tales of intrigue, murder and danger. John Shakespeare, brother of William, is chief intelligencer in Walsingham's Secret Service, searching out traitors, assassins, and in this case, a well-planned attempt on the life of Sir Francis Drake. Clements manages to capture the smells, sounds and street-life of Elizabethan England well, his characters are believable, and the historical figures blend in well with his story.

I found this to be a thoroughly enjoyable story and look forward to reading the future adventures of John Shakespeare.

Lyn Barrett

'Martyr', the first in a series of Elizabethan whodunnits, is not historical fiction for the faint hearted. Rory Clements does not gloss over the cruelties and injustices of Elizabethan England. Set in the aftermath of the Babbington plot and execution of Mary, Queen of Scots, with invasion by Spain imminent, intelligence has been received about a planned assassination of Sir Francis Drake.

It is up to John Shakespeare, brother of William, lawyer and intelligencer for Mr Secretary Walsingham, to keep Drake safe and unmask the assassin.

Then the body of a young woman is found - Shakespeare struggles to maintain his own integrity in the face of deadly opposition, as he investigates the death. His personal and professional lives become impossibly tangled as he battles to find justice for the deceased and protect his country.

Martyr, with its mix of real and fictional characters, is an impressive beginning to what must surely become a quintessential series for disciples of the genre.

Emilie Di Mario

Go back in time with John Shakespeare as he tramps through the cold, messy streets of London, encountering all manner of Londoners, searching for a murderer, and a hired assassin.

John Shakespeare is an agent in Walsingham's spy network. When the mutilated body of Lady Blanche Howard, cousin to the queen, turns up, Shakespeare must do what he can to discover who is responsible, all while keeping Sir Francis Drake alive.

The Spanish want to be rid of him, and they'll pay handsomely to see that happen. Could it be the Jesuits come to wreak havoc for the Queen? As Shakespeare pieces together the clues, he unearths dark secrets that could put everything he cares about in jeopardy.

I so enjoyed this from start to finish. Every time I had to put it down, I regretted having to leave John Shakespeare's London, and I couldn't wait to get back to it. An engaging, and exciting history mystery.

Magda North

I'm running against the grain in not being a fan of Martyr.

It's well written and brings to life the dirt, brutishness and struggle to survive in sixteenth century London, but it left me a bit cold. I struggled with the volume of characters and found it hard connect with the plot strands as a result. I also got a bit lost with the political machinations. I wanted more heart and less macho maneuvering. Not one for me.

Jodie Robson - <http://geraniumcatsbookshelf.blogspot.com>

Dark deeds and spymasters - an Elizabethan thriller.

Elizabethan England is probably associated in most people's minds with dark deeds, notorious spymasters and religious strife – although things were better under Elizabeth than they had been under her sister Mary, being Catholic was still dangerous and recusants were expected to demonstrate their allegiance to the new church. Conspiracy was rife – England was surrounded by Catholic countries and, with her half-sister Mary Queen of Scots awaiting execution for plotting against Elizabeth, there was a very real danger of invasion. A plot to murder Sir Francis Drake would, if successful, throw the English fleet into disarray and open the way to England's enemies. John Shakespeare (brother of the more famous Will) is chief intelligencer to Sir Francis Walsingham, the Queen's spymaster, and it is his task to uncover the plot. It must be a Catholic conspiracy, but could it be linked to the murder of a young woman who is known to have Catholic sympathies? Thwarting Shakespeare's efforts is the brutal torturer Richard Topcliffe, a man who enjoys his work and despises Shakespeare.

*Although I thought the plot moved a little slowly at times, **there are some gripping moments and loads of period atmosphere, which bodes well for the series.** The third, *Prince*, has just been published.*