

LoveReading Reader reviews of Plague Land by S.D. Sykes

Below are the complete reviews, written by LoveReading members.

Evelyn Barrett

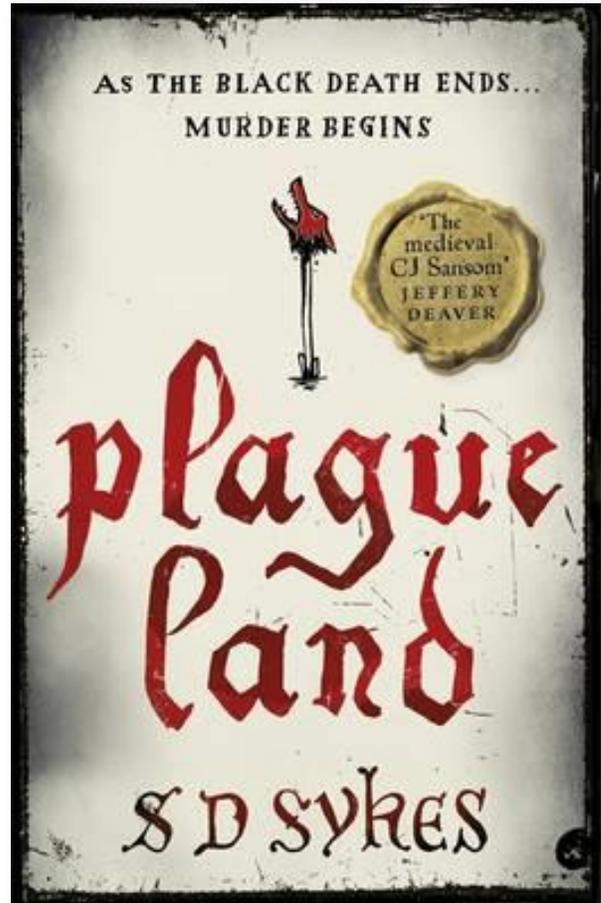
'Plague Land' is a murder mystery set in an English manor in the aftermath of the Black Death, feudal society is breaking down and the peasants have realized that there is a new order.

Returning to his home as Lord of Somerhill Manor is seventeen year old Oswald de Lacy, as a third son, with little hope of inheriting the lands and title of Somerhill, he had been sent to a monastery at the age of seven. When his father and two older brothers succumb to the plague, Oswald is the only choice to inherit the title, run the estate and provide for his mother and sister. Both women express their views about Oswald frequently and with vitriol.

Then two village girls are murdered and a self-serving religious maniac is blaming Satanic 'dog-heads'. It is Oswald's duty to find the real murderer before he or she strikes again.

This is a highly readable book. I found myself firmly on Oswald's side as he negotiated his way through the basics of estate management, managed two very difficult and obstructive women, gradually earned the respect of his tenants and peers, fell in love and solved the murders.

With twists and turns aplenty, lies, family secrets, supernatural murders, a society in flux and one young man needing to grow up very quickly, 'Plague Land' is a memorable book. I really hope S D Sykes shares more of Oswald's life with us.



Victoria Goldman – www.off-the-shelfbooks.blogspot.co.uk

'Plague Land' kept me hooked from the first page. A very well-written historical crime novel, set just after The Black Death. Plenty of twists and turns to keep me guessing.

Oswald has been living at a monastery for 10 years since the age of seven. But following the death of his father and older brothers, he unexpectedly becomes Lord of Somerhill Manor. Returning home, he struggles with his new role in life, as local politics and family matters weigh heavy on his young shoulders. Then a murder on his estate leads him to the darker side of Somerhill Manor. With a local priest spreading rumours of witchcraft and supernatural beings, he realises that it's up to him to find the killer before they strike again.

Many novels set in this time period use modern-day language or try to use old English, which makes it difficult to follow the story. However, the narration in 'Plague Land' made the characters very believable and true to the 14th century, whilst being very readable. The vivid descriptions enabled me to picture the scenes in my mind and I warmed to the characters easily. The plot flowed smoothly, with plenty of twists and turns to keep me guessing.

'Plague Land' is ideal for fans of CJ Sansom. I hope there's another one in the pipeline.

Jo-anne Atkinson – www.pluckedhighbrow.wordpress.com

Entertaining story set in the post-Black Death 14th Century. Murder stalks superstitious Kent, is it Demonic or is the answer more prosaic?

1350 and England is a country recovering slowly from the effects the Plague. In Kent Oswald de Lacy is recalled from his life of contemplation in a monastery to become Lord Somershill – his father and two elder brothers having been killed by the terrible disease. He returns to find trouble, there are few people to work his land and his sister is hostile, but then the body of young girl is found. She has been murdered and the local priest claims it is the work of the 'Dogheads', a group of demons who need to be purged from the land. Beset by enemies among his neighbours and even within his own household Oswald is compelled to investigate the escalating numbers of deaths.

The setting of this book just after the Black Death is quite unusual and the sense of misery and superstition is very well created. Oswald is a young,

inexperienced and naïve protagonist which adds a further dimension to the tale as he makes untold number of 'mistakes'. The gentry are shown to be little better than their villeins, just able to wield more power, and the motivations of the key characters are realistic. The twist in the tale, when it comes, is a good one and, although hinted and alluded, is quite surprising. All told, this is an entertaining read.

Sarah Musk

An enjoyable whodunnit set in 14th century England.

A young lord tries to solve two murders in a superstitious, traumatised land laid waste by The Black Death.

I thought this book conveyed very vividly the devastation the plague of 1348 wrought on England and it's people. The half empty villages, shortage of labour and decimated families trying to carry on with their traumatised lives are portrayed well. The central character, Oswald, only comes into his inheritance because his father and two older brothers have died. He is only eighteen and is thrust into a role he is not prepared for.

The plot centres around the murder of two sisters. Oswald is trying to solve his crime in his new found position as the Lord of the Manor but he is constantly thwarted by the superstitious peasants and unpleasant neighbouring lords.

The main problem that I did find with the plot was that it felt rushed and unevenly paced. A lot of the characters were quite extreme in their ways and there was no subtleties or complexities in their motives or emotions. Everything seemed very black and white and towards the end of the book I felt some of the characters were almost like caricatures.

Nevertheless I did quite enjoy it even though I felt Oswald was a weak not very interesting main character.

Marjorie Lacy

I was very happy with this book when I took it out of its packet. It was a hardback, its cover was appropriate to the subject - the black death.

*The print as a good size too, very clear and easy to read. The story was interesting **I have read a lot of books about this period in history. I think that this is one of the best.** I also had the added interest that it was about my husband's family name, de Lacy.*

With most of his family killed off Oswald de Lacy returns to his homeland as Lord of Somershill Manor, finds the place changed out of recognition, with the exception of the fact of his powerful mother and his sister Clemence. Then the murder of a peasant girl shocks the village, The Church men say it was by demonic dog-headed men.

It becomes a battle of wills between the Church and Oswald, one he is determined to win.

Karen McIntosh

Oswald de Lacy becomes Lord of Somershill Manor at 18 when his father and older brothers die of the Black Death. Set in the 14th Century, 'Plague Land' is a murder mystery with many twists and turns.

Oswald de Lacy becomes Lord of Somershill Manor at 18 when his father and older brothers die of the Black Death. As well as taking on the huge responsibilities of Lord of the manor he is expected to investigate when a murder takes place on his lands.

Set in the 14th Century, 'Plague Land' is a murder mystery with many twists and turns. A young girl is killed but by whom or what? Human or Dog-headed beast? The book gives an interesting insight into life in the 1300s and especially into the religious and superstitious lives of the different strata of society.

*I enjoyed the story and the character development of the main character. **The mystery unfolded slowly at first but the last third of the book was gripping and certainly kept me guessing all the way.** I was surprised at how well the author kept the reader on tenterhooks.*

I would recommend this book and hope that the author decides to write more in the same vein.

Lynda DeFreitas

Medieval Mystery

The prologue describes a horrendous crime and then the story goes back to how this came to happen.

A young man of good family destined to serve in a monastery, is called back to his childhood home because his father and two older brothers have perished during the Plague He is not ready to take on the onerous duties that the lordship of a manor entail particularly since many of his villagers have also died, and his

workforce has been severely depleted. Then to his dismay two of the young women in the village are murdered and he has to investigate their deaths.

There are false leads and several twists and turns in this story that make it an interesting read.

The novel has been well researched by the author, and the glossary explains all the medieval words found in the book.

Rachel Aygin

The descriptions are so vivid you can imagine the smells, tastes and sounds of the period as well as the sights.

'Plague Land' is a medieval mystery set just after the plague. There has been a murder and the main character Oswald de Lacy is trying to find out who is the killer. The historic setting seems very accurate with the descriptions so vivid that you can imagine the smells, tastes and sounds of the period as well as the sights. The mystery deepens as different people are suspected, with Oswald an unlikely detective as he convinces himself of a suspect's guilt without properly investigating. As the mystery unfolds secrets are hinted at and gradually revealed and a possible wedding is added into the mix.

Ann Alderton

A compelling page-turning murder mystery set in the vividly portrayed and meticulously researched post-plague era of 14th century rural England.

A promising and well-researched debut by S D Sykes, 'Plague Land' transports the reader to the chaotic post-plague era of 1350s Kent and relates an intriguing story through the voice of the likeable, tenacious and introspective hero, Oswald de Lacy, the surviving youngest son, and now Lord, of Somershill Manor.

The imagining of feudal life in 14th century England gives the story an authentic feel and the decision to create a protagonist who has received a monastery education but lives a secular life adds depth and interest to his quest to uncover the truth behind some seemingly demonic murders in the vicinity of his manor. The brutality of medieval life, the influence of religion and superstition and the way the plague affected values and loyalties are well drawn in the book, yet despite this richness of detail, it remains a highly readable page turner that leaves the reader wanting more.

The story ends on a sinister note leaving one of the story lines unresolved. If this means that there is an opportunity for a sequel, I can't wait. With a hero aged just eighteen, there is plenty of opportunity to develop the character further and there is ample material in medieval England to whet the reader's appetite for a series of books.

Peter Baiden

At eighteen, Oswald, through the death of his father and two elder brothers, is catapulted from a monastic life of prayer, work and study of the previous ten years, into the position of 'Lord of the Manor.' He soon realises that to work through the transition will not be easy. In trying to lead the people who now depend on him, he has to face dishonesty, debt, debauchery and evil in its many forms; whilst at the same time find out the truth about himself. Facing the challenge is not easy or straightforward and Oswald has to traverse carefully through the 'minefield' of unpreparedness.

Who can be trusted? Who is a 'true' friend? What are the dark secrets hidden from him?

These and many other questions are revealed and answered, in what 'could' turn out to be the start of a short series of novels, set in the 'dark period' of British history.

Unfortunately, for this reader, 'Plague Land' does not fully satisfy as a 'murder mystery', although it is well researched and well written.

Christine Procter

Propelled into the post plague lands of the 14th century this is a harsh fiction of compelling poverty and strife that you'd expect and much more.

This is the first historical crime novel that I have read. I found the description of a post plague land totally realistic and believable. The level of detail was such that it conveyed the tragic circumstance and the standard of living for poor and landed gentry in the 14th century. I could visualise the land and the poverty that remained through the story. This is no romantic vision but a harsh fiction involving superstition, injustice and betrayal. The story was compelling with plenty of twists and as the reader I felt the frustration along with the lead character. My main criticism is that although the story is set in a post-plague land striven with poverty, the continuous strife and horror left me with a feeling

of depression. It would have benefitted with additional redeeming factors to balance against the well-written descriptions of the crimes and depressed lives of the characters.

Keith Currie

The Black Death is gone, but not forgotten. Kent in the 1300s is under-populated but full of superstition and fear - and murder.

This is the first book of which I think will be a successful historical crime series. Oswald De Lacey as the third son of his noble family has been placed in a monastery since age seven, but the Black Death killed both his elder brothers and placed him in a position he had never expected nor been prepared for – lord of the manor. Coming to terms with this new status is one of the delights of the novel as the naïve and gauche ex-monk has to learn how to run an estate and cope with the earthier and more worldly aspects of life outside the cloister.

*What else he did not expect was to have to investigate the murders of two poor sisters who look disconcertingly familiar to him. An under-populated landscape, increasing religious and superstitious paranoia, apprehension for the return of the plague, fear of mythic monsters and of the unknown all contribute to a highly entertaining and satisfying mystery. It could so easily have all gone Monty Python. **The author successfully avoids that pitfall while permitting a significant helping of humour among the blood, terror and death.***

Susan Mooney – twitter: @truckermercedes

From a sheltered life in a quiet Monastery, Oswald must take on the leading role of Lord at his family home, Somershill Manor after his Father & brother die, plenty of excitement follows

Death... but mystery surrounds un natural deaths so it has to be solved... which leads Oswald into unknown territories.

Fabulous Book, loved it from the very start.

Colourful characters, you can easily conjure the whole scene easily. It draws you back in time to the time when Plague had England in its grip.

Wonderfully written, it transports you back into the thick of it, with a rich casting of Nobles & Peasants alike.

Oswald so unlike his Father, is on the Murder Trail to solve who is the real killer,

But proving it is not as cut & dried as he had first thought.

From one of my favourite eras in History, S D Sykes is on a winner with this 10/10.

Superb!

S D Sykes delves into the realm of medieval fiction and takes the reader back to the 14th Century, where the bubonic plague or "Black Death" had swept England with horrific consequences leaving many dead - in some accounts, up to one third of Europe's entire population. Oswald de Lacy is preparing to take holy orders but when the plague strikes, claiming his father and brothers as its victims, Oswald is sent back to his home very reluctantly to take his position as Lord of Somerhill Manor.

Beth

S D Sykes delves into the realm of medieval fiction and takes the reader back to the 14th Century, where the bubonic plague or "Black Death" had swept England with horrific consequences leaving many dead - in some accounts, up to one third of Europe's entire population. Oswald de Lacy is preparing to take holy orders but when the plague strikes, claiming his father and brothers as its victims, Oswald is sent back to his home very reluctantly to take his position as Lord of Somerhill Manor.

Oswald was never prepared to be Lord - after all, he had two older brothers, but at the tender age of seventeen must take command as trouble is brewing and his people are looking to him for decisions, leadership and comfort. A young girl has been brutally murdered and the local priest, Cornwall, who has a lot of sway over the local villagers is insisting that she has been killed by demons with the heads of dogs. Oswald is a sensible man and does not believe in the existence of such creatures but understands the superstitious worries of the peasants and is determined to solve the mystery and ease the fears of his people. When a second girl's body is found, Oswald realises he has become part of a dark and grisly puzzle that he must get to the bottom of. Yet is he fully prepared for what he may unearth?

S D Sykes writes a compelling piece of historical fiction that takes the

reader back to a different time where you can experience the 14th Century in all its unadulterated glory. It is obvious how much research the author has carried out to convey this period of time so distinctly and I loved being part of Oswald's journey as he tried to solve the mystery. I have to admit, I wasn't sure about his character at first as he appeared a bit too reluctant to assume his position, but he acts just as a seventeen year old apprentice monk would do if his whole world was turned upside down, I suppose! The author also writes some fantastic "love to hate" characters such as Oswald's mother and sister, whom I just wanted to shake at times and the intriguing and pompous priest Cornwall. Many characters are not what they seem and the ending reveals a wealth of secrets that I certainly wasn't expecting. **As a debut novel** and a work of historical/medieval fiction **this is a fascinating read that I think fans of Karen Maitland will enjoy and I look forward to seeing what this author does next.**

You can follow Beth on Twitter: [@bibliobeth1](https://twitter.com/bibliobeth1)