

LoveReading Reader reviews of The Raven's Head by Karen Maitland

Below are the complete reviews, written by LoveReading members.

Sarah Warbey

A medieval thriller, creepy and unputdownable.

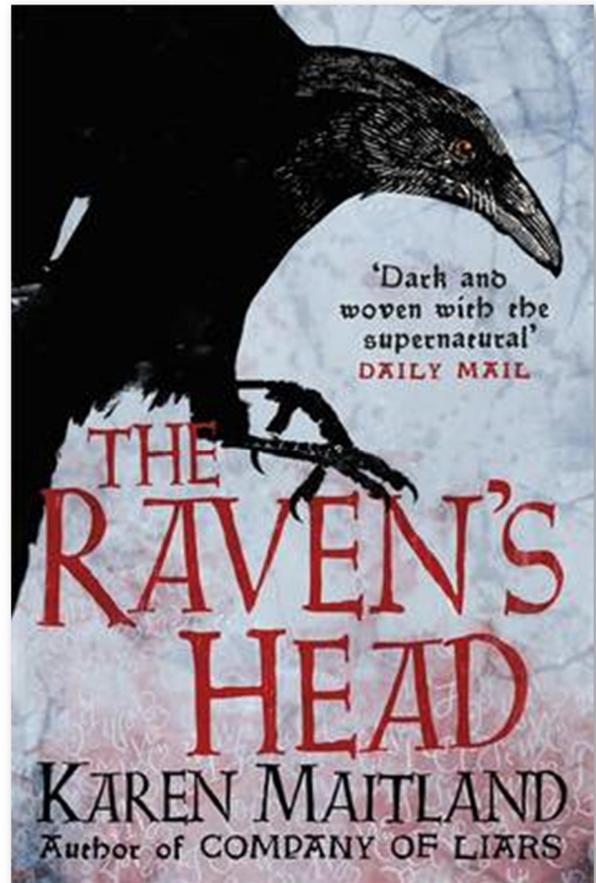
*I have always been a fan of Karen Maitland's, so I was thrilled to be able to review her latest book, 'The Raven's Head'. The plot is centred in the middle ages as we follow the misfortunes of a trio of different people, whose stories all cleverly thread together for the climax of the story. The author has a real talent for making **you feel the filth and smell the stink of the time period, mixed in with a creepy dollop of supernatural horror, all of which build nicely into a corker of a thriller.** Highly recommended!*

Vanessa Wild - twitter Butterflybiblio

A magical, spellbinding and sinister tale involving the dark arts set in medieval England!

When a young librarian by the name of Vincent discovers a secret which could have disastrous consequences for his master, he decides to try a spot of blackmail which unfortunately backfires. He finds himself in desperate peril and on the run with an ornate silver raven's head in his possession which seems to have a life of its own. After several endeavours to be rid of the bird, he eventually comes into contact with the alarming and intimidating Lord Sylvain who has an evil plot on his mind.

This is a fast paced, captivating and atmospheric thriller which is thoroughly



entertaining. It has a mysterious and gothic ambience and is decidedly eerie. It also combines fact with fiction, something I particularly enjoy. The historical aspect is well researched and depicted, whilst the supernatural slant keeps the reader on the edge of their seat. The characters are believable and I like that the ending is quite ambiguous, left to the imagination!

In a nutshell, I loved it, quite enchanted in fact. I'm a big fan of Karen Maitland's work and this was no exception. I thought it was a compelling, absorbing and hair-raising story which I can recommend to those who like historical fantasy. Many thanks to Lovereading.co.uk for giving me the opportunity to read and review this book.

Victoria Whish - www.thewhishlist.co.uk twitter: VicKWhish

*Darkly gothic tale of magic and horror. **Karen Maitland conjures a potent brew of mystery and menace.** Not as spellbinding as 'Company of Liars' but good for a winter's night*

'The Raven's Head' is a strange and unsettling mix of the supernatural and the stark, harsh reality of life in the Dark Ages. The silver raven's head of the title is obtained by nefarious means by Vincent, an apprentice who betrays and blackmails his way out of France to arrive in an England replete with menace and mayhem.

The tone and style is almost Chaucerian at times but the portrayal of the cell of monks and their treatment of the children in their care, is deeply chilling and creepy.

I didn't enjoy this book as much as Karen Maitland's first; 'The Company of Liars' which I thought was excellent but I suppose it's on a par with the other one of hers that I have read; 'The Gallows Curse'

The writing is certainly evocative and atmospheric it just leaves me a bit perplexed as to whether I like the fusion of fantasy and reality to the extent that you find in this book.

I did like the twist at the end and really liked the inclusion of the Historical notes at the end which put things nicely into context.

If you like your fiction dark, earthy and full of foreboding, then you've come to the right place!

Margaret Freeman - www.booksplease.org

A chilling tale, dark, mysterious and utterly absorbing.

Set in 1224 in France and England this is a dark book. I found parts of it very uncomfortable and disturbing to read and yet also very compelling. Life in the medieval world was cruel and brutal and 'The Raven's Head' describes that world in minute detail, evoking the superstitious fear of the period.

The story is told from the three main characters point of view - Vincent, Wilky, a young boy taken from his family to live in a monastery in Norfolk where unspeakable terrors await him and the other young boys, and Gisa also living in Norfolk, working in her uncle's apothecary's shop. Their lives are connected through Lord Sylvain who is trying to find a way to bring the dead back to life and the abbot, trying to find the elixir of life - both experimenting with alchemy.

I enjoyed the historical setting and even though it took me right to the edge of my comfort zone as far as reading horrific detail the rest of the book made up for that in terms of a well-constructed storyline and believable characters. Once I began I had to finish the book.

Kerry Bridges – www.iamalwaysreading.wordpress.com

Karen Maitland's gothic novels are amongst the best in the genre in my opinion, they are so believable, it's terrifying!

Wilky's parents can't pay their taxes, so some men in white robes come and take him from his parents to be educated as surety; Wilky is only small and he doesn't understand why they never visit him. Gisa is an orphan who lives with her uncle and aunt in their apothecary shop; one day Lord Sylvain comes to ask her uncle to allow her to work with him at the Manor House. Gisa is afraid, but nobody says "no" to Lord Sylvain. Vincent is an apprentice scribe who is sent to deliver the Raven's head by his master, Lord Phillippe; the trouble is the Raven's Head has it's own agenda. 'The Raven's Head' is their story.

I have read several books by Karen Maitland previously and I am always on the look out for the new one as I know I will enjoy them. The darkly, gothic era she is able to evoke is one I have always really enjoyed reading about and I like the fact that her stories are based on the beliefs and happenings of the time, no matter how strange they might be. Some of these I have found almost too fantastic but, with 'The Raven's Head' I think she has returned to some of her best ideas and although some of it is extremely fantastic in content, it is clear that at the time these beliefs would be widespread.

It's quite hard to say too much more without revealing parts of the story. Suffice to say, if you enjoy Karen Maitland's novels, I think this is one of her best; and if you have never read anything by her before, this would be an excellent place to start!

Sara McLaughlin

History, alchemy and treachery are all woven together in a great narrative to makes this a great read. A very enjoyable book – highly recommended.

History, alchemy and treachery are all woven together in a great narrative to makes this a great read.

Although this is set in 1224 the narrative isn't bogged down with any unnecessary historical details. The pacing is fast and with fairly short chapters switching between the viewpoints of each of the characters it's a great read.

The main characters are all very different but very well written: Regulus, the little scared boy in the Abbey, who is terrified of being taken away by the White Canons in the night; Vincent, who is forced to run away from France after a failed attempt to blackmail his master and Gisa who no longer works in her uncle's apothecary shop but is taken to work for Lord Sylvain a mysterious man who is widely disliked and mistrusted in the town.

The alchemy or the 'Royal Art' practiced by Lord Sylvain was an interesting and enjoyable aspect of the story. The supernatural events weren't particularly frightening but these scenes had an oppressive atmosphere that worked very well within the narrative.

A very enjoyable book – highly recommended.

Susan Walsh – twitter @truckermercedes

Love it, love it, love it!

Another fabulous book from Karen Maitland, that will keep you thoroughly captivated throughout.

Of England & France its characters are extremely well portrayed, letting the reader experience the colourful tale as it twists & turns in a delightful way.

10/10 this in my view will be a magnificent bestseller.

"Can't get enough"

Her best novel yet for me.....loved it!

Jennie Thrift

Definitely one to lose yourself in on a rainy afternoon...magic for grown ups!

This book was a pleasure to read and I got through it a lot faster than I expected!

The only down side I would say, is that the main build up of the story is enthralling but then the action happens and it ends far too abruptly. There are a few mini threads of stories, like Peter, which don't get fully explained.

On the whole though, this is a great story and the historical notes at the end mean you actually learn something factual and make you appreciate the research that goes into such work. It whisks you away to a very believable world filled with magic and horror. One to lose yourself in on a rainy afternoon...magic for grown ups!

Tessa Bennett

*Fans of Karen Maitland will not be disappointed with this latest gothic offering. Vincent, Regulus and Gisa all lead very different lives, but as fate intervenes their paths are destined to cross. Karen Maitland expertly weaves the tale that is to ultimately bring them together. As the story progresses **the novel becomes darker and at times chilling, but it is a compulsive read and you'll be eagerly turning the pages to find out who will survive this supernatural masterpiece.***

Sarah Hamid

A lively and engaging read. Well-worth giving it a go even if you think it's not your kind of book. The characters are strong, the plot addictive and there's plenty of squeamish detail!

A boy taken by force to live in a monastery, a hapless youth in possession of a silver raven's head with mysterious powers, an apothecary's kind-hearted young female assistant, sinister goings on in dark times. Scary but addictive! This book is a surprise! After I agreed to review this book I was dreading reading it, as it is not the type of book I would usually choose. Although the content is stomach-churning and dark at times, it is written in such a lively and

engaging manner that it is impossible to put down. I particularly liked Vincent's strand of the story (the hapless youth). This strand reads like a children's adventure story, with obvious adult elements! It is shot through with humour. The short, snappy chapters add to the pace.

This is a well-researched novel - the author obviously knows a lot about this period of history and she got me interested too. I read the historical notes at the end, and the glossary! This is something I don't usually do!

I'm not sure that I would rush to read any more novels by Karen Maitland in the near future. However, I am in awe of her ability to spin a fantastic tale, laced with suspense and fascinating historical detail. The only other books I have read in this genre are 'The Pillars of the Earth' by Ken Follett and 'Mistress of the Art of Death' by Ariana Franklin.

Jennifer Moville

The book starts in France in 1224 where Vincent hates his master, Gaspard after being beaten and bullied as a slave. Vincent longs for adventure and more excitement in his life. He also secretly has a crush on Amee.

Vincent discovers a secret and tries to blackmail his master but soon finds out he is in grave danger when he is sent to retrieve an object. He escapes to England along with a silver Raven's head given to him by Amee's father Phillippe

Vincent soon learns that the raven's head is a symbol for death and his own life is in peril as he discovers blackmail never works.

This book leads you through a tale of intrigue, mystery, adventure and scary parts to give a rollocking good read.

Vikki Patis – www.dracarya.wordpress.com/2015/02/13/book-review-the-ravens-head-by-karen-maitland-plus-qa-with-the-author

When Karen Maitland's new novel 'The Raven's Head' came up for review on Lovereading, I was ecstatic. I simply had to have it.

I adore Maitland's work. Her books are dark, gritty, and utterly absorbing. I always read her historical notes, finding them fascinating, and extremely informative. Maitland is an utterly brilliant storyteller. Her novels are always full of dark, creepy settings, and captivating characters. 'The Raven's Head' is no different.

'The Raven's Head' introduces us to several interesting characters, from

different walks of life, who come together under the roof of one man – Lord Sylvain. Vincent, an apprentice librarian from France, flees the country after angering his master, who plots to have him killed. In his possession is a beautiful raven's head, which refuses to be sold, as it seeks out its true master.

Gisa, a young woman who lives and works in her uncle's apothecary shop, is soon recruited by Lord Sylvain, for her knowledge of herbs and her innocence. Wilky, a small boy who was offered up by his father as payment for a debt, is taken by the menacing White Canons, and becomes Regulus, the little king. He soon learns a life of hardship and fear.

All three will be useful to Sylvain and the White Canons, as they endeavour to use the power of alchemy to fulfil their wildest dreams.

'The Raven's Head' is yet another triumph for Maitland.

Cathy Petersen - twitter @Cerysthepup

A thrillingly dark and shadowy tale of why you should never try to blackmail an alchemist!

*Set in the thirteenth century this is a wonderfully shadowy tale that brings together history, myth and the 'science' of alchemy with some really great characters. I loved the way she focuses you on the separate characters, each one strong and convincing, then brings them together as the story progresses. Lord Sylvain in particular I found brilliantly realised (he also has most of the best lines). The world she creates is vivid and almost gothic, the supernatural is well done but it's the belief of the people that add that extra edge to the proceedings. **The pace is excellent and while there are some seriously dark elements to this tale it all fits together giving an authentic feel to the novel.** This is my first Karen Maitland novel, it will not be the last.*

Emilie - www.wanderingsights.blogspot.com

'The Raven's Head' is a darkly thrilling tale, taking you back in time to a Europe of the Middle Ages when the possibility and fear of magic and the supernatural were not just the stuff of fiction.

'The Raven's Head' is an atmospheric novel set in the Middle Ages. The story revolves around three very compelling main characters, flipping point of view back and forth between these characters from chapter to chapter.

It is done deftly, and the author manages to involve you emotionally with the plight of all three before eventually merging their tales in a dark and exciting climax.

*I had never read anything by this author, but was intrigued by the storyline. **After reading this, I would definitely like to read her other books, and would recommend this story especially to lovers of tales of the supernatural.** That being said, certain aspects of this novel were a bit too dark for me. There is a main storyline with children that I found very disturbing at times. It adds to the horror of the dark magic and I don't want to take anything away from the story, only that for me on a personal level, I found that I did not look forward to those particular chapters.*