



Plague

C.C. Humphreys

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WINNER 2015 — Arthur Ellis Award for Best Crime Novel

London, 1665. A serial killer stalks his prey, scalpel in his hand and God's vengeance in his heart.

Five years after his restoration to the throne, Charles II leads his citizens by example, enjoying every excess. Londoners have slipped the shackles of puritanism and now flock to the cockpits, brothels and, especially, the theatres, where for the first time women are allowed to perform alongside the men.

But not everyone is swept up in the excitement. Some see this liberated age as the new Babylon, and murder victims pile up in the streets, making no distinction in class between a royalist member of parliament and a Cheapside whore. But they have a few things in common: the victims are found with gemstones in their mouths. And they have not just been murdered; they've been . . . sacrificed.

Now the plague is returning to the city with full force, attacking indiscriminately . . . and murder has found a new friend.

Plague Details

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Author : C.C. Humphreys

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From Reader Review Plague for online ebook

Becky says

I really enjoyed this one. It reminded me of the Elizabethan theatre mysteries, I think the similarities went beyond the settings of pre- Great Fire theatre. This story offers a very gruesome twist to period murder; with a damaged and psychotic murderer on the loose in London. The murderer is driven by a religious mania and a belief that the end of days is almost upon the world, a belief that is given added weight as plague breaks out across the city of London. The depiction of the damage done to society and to the mental state of individuals by the turmoil of the Civil War, is very well done indeed. Highly believable and interesting characters add depth to the story. The twist as to the identity of the murderer is nicely timed to add to the story. It was also nice to see a few famous faces thrown into the character list, each of these is nicely written in a believable way, and their interaction with the other, purely fictional characters is written seamlessly. It was nice to read a restoration crime mystery that managed to combine some disturbing murders with the usual restoration sex scenes.

Carolyn says

A fast paced crime novel, set in 1665 during the Black Death. the filth of the London streets, the brothels, cockfights, taverns, and terrible prisons gives an atmospheric setting and a subtle history lesson. It was a time of excess, and women were allowed to act on stage for the first time, and the actresses considered ladies of loose morals. The characters of Captain Coke, a highwayman, and Pitman, the thief catcher were well done and entertaining. Was interesting to read about how London coped with the plague, the wealthy fleeing the city and the poor doomed to take their chances. When one person took ill the healthy members of the household were boarded up inside the house also in an attempt to contain the spread of the plague. Religion, such as Puritanism was on the wane, and the loose sexual mores, gambling, drinking and other excesses were changing society. In the story there is a cult who believe the plague portends signs of the imminent end of the world. There is a vicious killer about pursued by Coke and Pittman for different reasons.

A very visual story that put me in the time and place, and was thinking that it would make a good movie minus the graphic scenes of torture. I also thought if I had a time machine this would definitely be a place I would dread visiting.

I was happy to see that there is a later book, Fire, set at the time of the Great Fire of London and am looking forward to further adventures of Coke and Pitman.

Sara says

finished my first Read-a-thon book!

Maria Hill AKA MH Books says

Dick Turpin was one of my favourite characters when I was an adolescent. Add to this a gory murder story, the plague and of course stinky, overcrowded London of the 17th century and this book should have been right up my alley. The plot was fast moving (it would make a good action movie) and the dialogue, for the male characters at least, well written.

Captain Coke is a gentleman Highway man. The thief-catcher is a working class, religious man who is trying to earn enough to raise his every growing family. The ward Dickson was a fun character, learning to read from salacious pamphlets and eating nothing but nuts. All three had some interesting traits and an interesting backstory but needed some character development. The women were very 2 dimensional and I am not surprised some reviewers could not tell them apart.

I have also read that some reviewers found the narrative overly gory. I found the opposite, there was a lack of descriptions that I have become used to. I have gotten used to books that take time to describe the scenery and place settings. I realise that this is not ideal for an action story but now it is something that I miss when it's not there. The simple descriptions of dead cats, hundreds of rats, grass growing through paving stones (that nobody walked on any more due to lack of people during the plague outbreak) give tantalising glimpses into a 17th Century world of plague, pestilence and an ever growing overcrowded London.

Overall recommended for anybody who just wants to escape into a good adventure story.

Ariana says

Disclaimer: I received this book as part of the Goodreads Giveaway.

While this wasn't a tough read, it wasn't a particularly enjoyable one, either. At least Captain Cook and Dickson were fun characters to follow, and though I didn't care much for the plot at least I enjoyed reading their parts in the story.

I often confused characters, not being able to remember the difference between Lucy and Sarah, and the constant switch in points of view didn't help, either. I didn't find some scenes necessary, and overall the plot had no sense of urgency to me, but the read was still smooth and I couldn't help but liken my experience to that of watching a movie (especially the comedic parts with Cook and Pitman).

The language was admirable, at least. The way each character spoke fit them well and identified them easily (at least, those characters that I could differentiate). The setting was well established, too; nothing felt like it was out of place, and I was fully immersed in the world.

I wish I was able to enjoy the story more, though, but that may be because I didn't care much for the overall plot. Captain Cook's story was definitely the most interesting, and he was a joy to follow because of how much a gentleman he was all while being the brute he needed to be at times. Dickson's role in the story was the icing on the cake, because even though he wasn't always particularly necessary, with his lewd pamphlets and his love for nuts, he was a fun character .

Though I'm not quite experienced with novels set during the plague, I still liked the story despite my lack of interest in the plot. All I wanted was for Captain Cook to succeed, and in the end that was good enough for me.

Sebastien Castell says

I have a troubled relationship with historical fiction. On the one hand, I love the idea of learning about another time and place through story, but all too often the reams of historical details about trousers and curtain rods lose me within the first chapters. Not so with C.C. Humphreys' *Plague*--a historical adventure which always hones in on characters and their perils and lets the historical details be the means through which we see just how precarious their lives are.

The story centres around two former soldiers, both who have fallen on hard times but who have taken very different paths: Captain Coke has taken to the roads as a highwayman, and Pitman, who has become a thief-taker (a bounty hunter, in effect.) As you might predict, these different roles pit them against each other early on. But worse things stalk the streets of 17th Century London and in the midst of the eponymous Plague, Coke and Pitman are soon forced to work together to find the man responsible for a series of heinous murders.

What I loved about the book was that it lent the classical historical whodunit a twist of adventure. It almost felt as if one of my other favourite heroes, C.S. Forester's Horatio Hornblower, were suddenly forced to investigate a murder. The character of Sarah Chalker also receives a strong showing and she'll be a favourite for many, as will Coke's young sidekick, Dickon. *Plague* spins the story among all these characters and others while inviting the reader down dark alleyways of disease, failed nobility, shifting religious views, and a conspiracy both massive in its implications and yet remarkably personal in its ultimate resolution.

The moment I finished *Plague* I went and bought the sequel, *Fire*. That's something of a first for me.

C.W. says

Restoration England is often portrayed as a licentious romp where Charles II and his bevy of mistresses enjoyed an endless party. The end of the brutal civil war that saw Charles's father beheaded brought about a joyous return to life and art, including a fervor for the theater, where women took the stage for the first time. In C.C. Humphrey's vivid and suspenseful new novel, *Plague*, the first in a trilogy about this fascinating era, the atmosphere is decidedly darker.

Told through the eyes of a traumatized veteran-turned-highwayman; a determined thief-taker dogged by destitution; and a troubled actress lured into a fanatic's deadly obsession, Humphreys brings to bear all his dramatic skills on this compelling tale of mayhem and murder. The fetid labyrinth of London's backstreets are so pungently drawn, you can smell the leavings stuck to your boots, while the advent of the plague that ravaged the city offers a terrifying backdrop to the characters' quest to unmask a savage killer. Yet it is the cast itself, whom Humphreys invests with panache and very human foibles, who are the real draw here. These are people huddled on the fringes of society, where life is cheap and no one is safe, not from hunger, crime, or the disease creeping from the gutters like the relentless hordes of rats.

Humphreys lightens the intensity with his characters' warmth and period-flavored quips; despite the danger at every turn, we cannot help but root for these hardy survivors, though we know going in that not everyone will make it out alive. Well known for his talents in the historical fiction arena, *Plague* may be Humphrey's

best work yet—a triumphant tour de-force that is part adventure, part drama, and full of unexpected thrills.

This review first appeared in the Historical Novels Review, August 2014. Editor's Choice Title.

Stephen says

murder mystery based at the time of the great plague of London 1665 felt like you could touch and smell the grime the way the author sets the scene and really enjoyed it with the characters and a page turner too

Paul says

Not my favourite book by Humphreys but he captures London so well that its hard not to enjoy. I could see and smell the streets with his descriptions. I didn't take to the main characters straight away but Coke and Pitman grew on me as they developed and I'll definitely look forward to their next adventure

Wanda says

4.5 stars

Chris Humphreys is an inspired historical fiction author. I met him last weekend at a literary conference and he is smart, funny, and charming as the devil. He definitely benefits from his acting background, particularly his ease with performing Shakespeare (we got an excerpt from one of the Henry plays during his key-note address). During one of his panel discussions, he mentioned that as an author, one must choose how the dialog will be written—choose your form of “bygone-ese” as he called it. Humphrey’s ease with the English of Shakespeare and his playwright’s ear for what will sound good gives his fiction a feeling of reality, using just enough older vocabulary and never becoming too 21st century.

There is, of course, theatre involved in the novel—a subject that the author is knowledgeable and comfortable with. But the variety of characters, from highwayman to serial killer to royalty, gives the story a breadth that I appreciated. As a reader, you are not limited to merely the theatre of 1665, you experience many parts of London. In fact London itself could be counted as a character.

I will be working my way, gradually, through all of Chris Humphreys' works and will definitely look forward to more. Highly recommended.

Delee says

[image error]

Patrick Rooney says

Plague, by C.C. Humphreys, is an excellent historical drama set during the time of the Great Plague in London in 1665. The characters were interesting, unique, and believable, mainly because the author's descriptions accurately depicted the fashions, speech, and mannerisms of the various classes at the time. The author's historical knowledge of the theater is evident throughout the book. For instance, actresses, who are often placed "on a pedestal" by people these days, usually worked as high-class prostitutes for the nobility to earn a living during the time period of the story.

I learned a lot about historical London as the plot progressed, giving me plenty of new places to explore during my next visit. The author provided an excellent map at the front of the book that was very helpful, as well as notes at the end of the story that explained the historical context. I do think adding a bit more context about the Civil Wars fought a few years prior to the plague would have been helpful.

Overall, an excellent historical fiction shrouded in mystery and heartbreak; an accurate portrayal of the pestilence caused by what many people felt was the hand of God at work punishing people for their transgressions. Reading stories like this always makes me appreciate the luxuries we enjoy in our modern world. I am looking forward to reading more stories by this author.

Trelawn says

A really great read. Murder, plague, religious fanatics and a host of great characters. This story has it all. London in 1665 is a riotous place. The monarchy has been restored, women can tread the boards and the plague has reared its pestilential head. Humphreys evokes the sights and sounds of London vividly. He also populates his books with vibrant characters, particularly the protagonists, Pitman and Coke. On opposite sides of the law, both must forge an alliance to apprehend the murderer committing atrocious acts as a section of fanatics heralds the end of days and the coming of the reign of King Jesus. While it takes a while for the action to get going, this is no bad thing. It gives you time to become acquainted with the colourful cast of Restoration London. Now I have to go read Fire.

Magpie says

Anne 2017

Plague CC Humphreys

Anne 2017

Very good book - 5 *****

The plot involves a period of history rich with intrigue and danger- the reign of Charles II in 1665 and London's great Plague attack woven in with the threat the Fifth Monarchs posed to the religious status quo of the day.

It's a thriller and a tender love story and an examination of PTSD rolled into one.

Captain Coke (English Civil War survivor who has turned highwayman, though not deadly as he never loads his guns) with his ward in tow (Tourettes afflicted Dickon) robs the rich and leaves their dignity intact. But mid heist he discovers a coach-load of brutally murdered nobles, religious markings, whispered bible verses and gemstones shoved into mouths. He is not alone. A thief taker called Pitman (another Civil War survivor) thinking Coke guilty, pursues him until they form an unlikely partnership that leads them on ever more dangerous adventures as they pursue the real killer - a madman dressed in finery, bent on destruction and divine forgiveness.

Coke, enthralled by actress Sarah Chalker, and Pitman, doing all for the love of his wife Bettina, get involved in crimes way above their pay grade as the plague and their adversary form a noose around their necks.

Great characters, well paced (occasionally very violent) good historical romance and thriller

M - 2018

Cphe says

Historical crime fiction set against a backdrop of the Black Plague. Took quite a while for the mystery component to unfold due to the introduction of multiple characters. It wasn't until the second half of the novel that the mystery really started to gather momentum.

Had an inkling early on in the novel as to who the culprit would be. Thought the two main characters the highwayman Captain William Coke and the thief - taker Pitman were well presented but it was Croke's ward that I enjoyed reading about. Coke and Pitman worked well together on the page.

Enjoyed the descriptions of London during these times. a little bawdy, gruesome and violent. Also thought that there was room for a sequel as Coke and Pitman while very different characters complimented each other.

This was a "group read", hadn't heard of the author prior to this or the novel. I enjoyed the setting and characters.
