



Company of Liars

Karen Maitland

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EMBARK ON A TURBULENT JOURNEY THROUGH A RAVAGED COUNTRYSIDE... WITH ONLY LIARS FOR COMPANY.

In this extraordinary novel, Karen Maitland delivers a dazzling reinterpretation of Chaucer's The Canterbury Tales-- an ingenious alchemy of history, mystery, and powerful human drama.

The year is 1348. The Black Plague grips the country. In a world ruled by faith and fear, nine desperate strangers, brought together by chance, attempt to outrun the certain death that is running inexorably toward them.

Each member of this motley company has a story to tell. From Camelot, the relic-seller who will become the group's leader, the Cygnus, the one-armed storyteller...from the strange silent child called Narigorn to a painter and his pregnant wife, each has a secret. None are what they seem. And one among them conceals the darkest secret of all--propelling these liars to a destiny they never saw coming.

Magical, heart-quickenning, and raw, *Company of Liars* is a work of vaulting imagination from a powerful new voice in historical fiction.

Company of Liars Details

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Author : Karen Maitland

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From Reader Review Company of Liars for online ebook

Jaidee says

5 "fascinating, provocative, emotional " stars !!!

7th Favorite Read of 2017 (tie)

This is a wonderful debut novel that I have been wanting to read for a few years and finally gotten to. I was immersed from beginning to end and was such an interesting combination of genres !

Was this an adult fairy tale, fable, fantasy, historical fiction or what ? It was all of the above and so skillfully done that it made complete and utter sense as I was reading.

The author was able to tell a very dark tale in the most entertaining of ways and I wanted to steal time from chores, work and even conversation from my partner in order to continue to read this.

I was warned to not read the last page by my GR buddy Hanneke but of course I did not listen and in this instance it was ok (often in my case it is not) as the ending worked very well for me but I can understand how it would not work for others.

This book takes place during the 14th century in England where a motley group of travellers come together and wander the countryside in order to escape the plague. However, the metaphorical condition they are trying to escape is shame. Some of them survive, others do not. As I am writing this I realize what a skilled and wise author this would need to be in order to do it in an illuminating, fascinating and entertaining way!

I will definitely be reading more from this author as this book was AWESOME !!

I want to leave you with a quote and I think an important antidote to the internalized shame that many of us carry :

It has taken me months, years perhaps , to fathom the answer. Home is the place you return to when you have finally lost your soul. Home is the place where life is born, not the place of your birth, but the place where you seek rebirth. When you no longer remember which tale of your own past is true and which is an invention, when you know that "you" are an invention, this is the time to seek out your home. Perhaps only when you have come to understand that can you finally reach home

Sit and ponder that my lovelies !!

Laura says

Okay, let's start with the negative, just to get it out of the way. I had read several reviews on Goodreads complaining about the ending before I even picked up the book, so all through the last chapter I kept thinking *Whew! That's not such a bad ending! I can see how it might not please everyone, but I actually kind of like it!* That was quite a relief, considering I adored the book most of the way through, and it had already gone down a bit in my estimation by the final chapter. My relief lasted until the final page and then *BAM*, I suddenly knew exactly what those reviewers were talking about. So yes, add me to the ranks of disconsolate souls

bemoaning the ending. It was formulaic and rather ugly, with a cliched side of "leave 'em hangin'!" and just, *UGH*. Such a let down. I found myself desperately trying to make the ending work in my head, so it wouldn't spoil the book for me. And there is at least one interpretation that "fixes" it, if Camelot can be viewed as an unreliable narrator. Which... I think one can make a fair argument for. It was after all a very superstitious era, and Camelot clearly believes many of the folk beliefs and tales. The aspect of the plot which seems to actually contain supernatural elements could be a fantasy/skewed reality he creates, as he, along with the rest of Europe, struggles to grasp the horrible reality of plague and the violence/tragedy it inspires. If viewed as manifestations of Camelot's troubled psychosis (and perhaps as metaphorical instead of literal) those aspects of the book I disliked actually add power to the story. So, I shall choose to go with that interpretation. :) (Just humor me, okay???)

ANYWAY, the ending was not enough to ruin this dark, Medieval fairytale for me. I love well written historical fiction complete with gritty historical detail and strong characters, and this book is a splendid example. Maitland has a brilliant grasp of Medieval British history, and I loved the way she wove in all the superstition and belief in/terror of the supernatural that plagued people in that era (especially as they struggled to understand and "prevent" plague). The characters are for the most part wonderfully engaging- I grew deeply attached to many of them (sucks for me) and wanted to jump inside the book to throttle others, so I definitely think Maitland excels there. Overall, I loved it!

Orsolya says

Imagine yourself on a cross-country road trip picking up hitch-hikers at various stops. This adventure would involve danger, suspense, fear, and maybe even growth (emotionally). Adapt this to the 14th century with wanderers on foot attempting to escape the pestilence and you have Karen Maitland's "Company of Liars".

Maitland's novel is a juicy concoction of a medieval historical fiction novel mixed with spiritualism, magic, and mystery dumped into a pot of a fairy tale/fable core served to adults versus the Disney crowd (fear not: it is not a fantasy novel and more on the historical fiction end). "Company of Liars" transports the reader to a dark, rainy, medieval forest on foot with the many characters of the story despite if the sun is shining outside your own window. One can almost hear the thunder clap. "Company of Liars" has a simple plot (various travelers come together by twists of fate passing through England); and yet the novel is gripping and quite entertaining with strong visuals and emotional threads.

"Company of Liars" features a variety of characters (Camelot, Zophiel, Rodrigo, Jofre, Pleasance, Narigorm, Osmond, Adela, etc); each with his/her own personality and quirks. The characters feel real and accessible both in a medieval and modern sense. Maitland retains a level of history but with a readable prose and interpretation.

Undeniably, "Company of Liars" has a fairy tale foundation with recognizable elements (trolls, witches, wolves) but on an adult level (for example: robbers living under bridges that collect tolls --- clear a troll). Again though, don't expect a fantasy novel as "Company of Liars" is certainly not that; but there are subtle hints of childhood tales from the dark side.

Despite some of these familiar undertones; Maitland's text is not predictable or overly foreshadowed. Therein lays a healthy amount of drama with the need to know what happens next. However, there are some much too dramatized and unbelievable moments. These aren't too excessive but when they are apparent, they

sadly take a bit away from the story.

A major issue with “Company of Liars” is the unnatural ease with which the characters accept each other and their mysteries. Yes, there are arguments and disagreements but overall, the loyalties of the strangers to each other are a bit difficult to digest. On the other hand, this adds to the foggy, mysterious allure of “Company of Liars”.

Although minor, there are some errors with the text such as a character leaving the scene and then is said to have spoken but it was clearly meant to be another character. I am not sure if that made sense, but the point is that there are some errors which the editor appears to have missed.

Maitland’s strength of presenting the facts of medieval life in a subtle manner is quite evident in the novel. Readers learn about the time period in a natural and amusing way. Maitland obviously conducted research for “Company of Liars” instead of taking a pure fictional route.

Unfortunately, “Company of Liars” becomes tedious as the story progresses with the plot being repetitive. This is the premise of the tale and therefore must be accepted but readers searching for a more detailed and multidimensional narrative may find themselves to be disappointed.

The final chapters of “Company of Liars” are weak and a bit too far-fetched like a bad horror movie. This picks up again in the last chapter which reverts back to the fairy tale form and dives into the depths of the plot’s morals. However, this then again nose dives – big time—with the concluding lines which will literally have the reader let out a groan accompanied by a, “Come one!” to say the least. Basically, the ending is a let down and takes away from the novel drastically.

Although the conclusion may be unsavory; Maitland’s after word describing the historical merits and liberties of her novel plus a glossary of terms is well-received and notable.

“Company of Liars” is a unique fairy tale-esque novel which will satisfy both HF and medieval mystery readers (except for perhaps the ending). Although Maitland’s piece isn’t perfect, the story is compelling and certainly sweeps the reader away as all good books should do. “Company of Liars” is strongly recommended and much enjoyed.

Annet says

Enjoyed this historical novel! A mystery tale of a band of travelers in The Middle Ages, travelling through England to escape the upcoming pestilence....

Entertaining read! The ending unexpected, at least for me.... Will definitely try more of this author.

As usual... probably more to follow. For those who like historical fiction, recommended!

And for those who don't know this book yet (many have read it here I see):

Midsummer's day 1348... On this day of ill omen, plague makes its entrance. Within weeks, swathes of Engeland will be darkened by death's shadow as towns and villages burn to the ringing of church bells. While panick and suspicion flood the land, a small band of travelers comes together to outrun the pestilence, travelling through the ravaged countryside: amongst others a scarred trader in holy relics, a conjuror, two musicians, and a deformed storyteller.. . But when one of their number is found hanging from a tree, the chilling discovery confirms that something more sinister than plague is in their midst. And as the runes warn of treachery, it appears no one is quite what they seem, least of all the child rune reader, who mercilessly

compels each of her companions to tell their stories and face the consequences...

Kristen says

I imagine that it must be incredibly difficult to write an ending to a novel. Especially one that has been building a sense of mystery, suspense, and dread for a couple hundred pages. Up until the last handful of pages, *Company of Liars* is intriguing and illuminating. I have a soft spot for historical fiction, and an interest in medieval Europe, so I'm already naturally inclined toward this book. The author very deftly avoids the pitfall of writing a sort of Ye Olde Renaissance Faire kind of book, thankfully. If anything, she goes a bit overboard with emphasizing, again and again, how filthy and coarse the physical and emotional medieval world was. Set during the onset of the Plague, the book also conveys just how terrifying that time must have been, nicely illustrating the gradual collapse of social and public institutions, and society as a whole.

Given how much I appreciated this realism, I was dismayed by the conclusion of the book, which seemed like something out of a horror movie. Bleh. Yes, the book has fantastical elements throughout, but they make sense, because they illustrate the medieval mindset. But two out-of-nowhere, basically unexplained massive developments occur in the last few pages of the book, and that's that. A head-scratcher. Oh well.

Srividya says

1.5 stars rounded to 2

“The most important things are the hardest to say. They are the things you get ashamed of, because words diminish them -- words shrink things that seemed limitless when they were in your head to no more than living size when they're brought out. But it's more than that, isn't it? The most important things lie too close to wherever your secret heart is buried, like landmarks to a treasure your enemies would love to steal away. And you may make revelations that cost you dearly only to have people look at you in a funny way, not understanding what you've said at all, or why you thought it was so important that you almost cried while you were saying it. That's the worst, I think. When the secret stays locked within not for want of a teller but for want of an understanding ear.”

Stephen King

Secrets are a part and parcel of our lives and to hide them we often take the help of lies to ensure that these secrets stay hidden and protected. This is almost everyone's story and I honestly feel that each person is entitled to their secrets and lies. What man does not lie? It could be those small white lies said to make others happy or even the big ones, told majorly to ensure some secrets are kept safe and no damage occurs to their lives and the lives of their loved ones? Can these people honestly be blamed for those lies that are often disguised, maybe badly, as ways to help keep their loved ones safe? Can people be blamed for keeping secrets that when revealed would lead to their persecution? Human nature is tuned in such a way that it will do anything, absolutely anything, to escape their own persecution or the persecution of those they love and therefore lying in such a context doesn't seem like a major sin to them. Or maybe they feel that they are justified in telling such lies and don't fear the consequences that they will face because of it. As in the quote above 'a secret stays a secret until it finds an understanding ear'.

So also with these nine people who form the main core group of this group, a company of liars as they are called, secrets are abound and lies are told aplenty. The difference being, they are persecuted because of the lies that they have told or the secrets that they have kept. Karen Maitland's book deals with the onslaught of

persecution of liars in the backdrop of the plague. The fact that each of them dies is something that is given in the blurb. How and why they die is what this book is all about. An extremely interesting premise, which when combined with the fact that it is set in the medieval times and is also called 'a story of the plague', made me extremely excited to read it. And read it, I did, in fact, finished the whole book in a single day, which is quite a thing as I haven't done something like that in ages. However, I was disappointed, completely disappointed with the whole thing. The only thing which made me give it a 1.5 star rating rounded off to 2 was the fact that I loved the way the whole group came together and some of their story telling was fantastical in nature. It had a lilt of poetry and fairy tale in some places, which kind of kept my interest going together with the fact that I wanted to know what happened at the end.

Let's first talk about what I liked in this book. The book had a fascinating array of characters, ranging from a Camelot to a magician to musicians to a healer and a rune teller and some others. Each of them had a hidden secret and each of them were lying about themselves. Moreover, it was set in the backdrop of the plague (oh this is a grouse as well, which I shall dwell upon later) that beset England during the medieval times. And that's about it – that's exactly what I loved about it, the premise. It truly went downhill from there and never recovered.

“Perhaps that is where our choice lies -- in determining how we will meet the inevitable end of things, and how we will greet each new beginning.”

- Elana K. Arnold, Burning

Isn't this a fact of life? With such a motley cast, you would expect the author to create a magnum opus but unfortunately Ms. Maitland disappoints. Her characters, though with a lot of depth thanks to their secrets, are never developed beyond the fact that they reveal their true selves and then die. There is no learning curve, there is no development curve and worse there is no depth to these stories, which at times feel like they were put there just to give these characters something to say or some back history for the sake of it. While some of their stories are almost akin to fairy tales and are quite interesting, some fall flat, especially that of the magician. While the entire book is recited from the point of view of the Camelot, there is much that could have been done but hasn't been. In fact, I felt the lack of different POVs acutely in this book. A book where there are many different characters should ideally have different POVs, which would have made it more interesting and definitely more vibrant. However, it's lack makes the book flat and quite monotonous and often repetitive in nature.

Now to my second and perhaps the biggest grouse about this book. On the cover it is written that this is and I quote 'a novel of the plague'. However, the plague and the medievalism forms the backdrop of the novel and not the main course. It could have been titled 'a novel in the backdrop of the plague' and it would have been more accurate. For the plague forms a reason for these people to band together and doesn't affect them in the least. Of course, the author does talk about the plague raging England at that time and its effect on the populace but it is in passing. It is more to create a path for these people to move along than anything else. Neither are they shown fighting it nor do the actual people form a part of this story. Why then make it a novel of the plague? Honestly, I don't know.

“The plague of mankind is the fear and rejection of diversity: monotheism, monarchy, monogamy and, in our age, monomedicine. The belief that there is only one right way to live, only one right way to regulate religious, political, sexual, medical affairs is the root cause of the greatest threat to man: members of his own species, bent on ensuring his salvation, security, and sanity.”

Thomas Szasz

Being a novel set in the medieval times, it is often difficult not to touch upon the politics and religion and their nexus. However, here again I was disappointed. Don't get me wrong, Ms. Maitland does cover all these topics and more but it is again merely in passing than with any depth. We do get involved with the

exigencies put by the Church on the people, the narrowness of thought during that time, the fear of the Church in the minds of the people, the sheer callousness of the bishops and the priests but what was lacking was depth. It felt like reading a news item where we learn about facts but not the thought process. In a book that is set in the medieval times and a book that is quite lengthy in its prose, I felt that there should have been more information or description rather than mere actions. The facts are so obvious that even a person not well versed in the history of those times will be able to tell you all about them. What makes a book different is how it handles those facts and how it portrays the period. Here again Ms. Maitland disappoints with her pure factual narration that is synced with the story line, making the writing dry and quite unimpressive.

Not all is bad in this book, for the suspense factor is maintained throughout. By this I don't mean that we don't know the murderer, in fact we do. However, the why of those murders and why does this person murder the others is kept a suspense throughout. Unfortunately though, it remains a mystery even at the end. No reason, no conclusion, nothing is provided by the author and it is left to the reader to fathom. While I don't usually mind such narratives, this one irked me a lot. It felt as if the author took us readers for a ride, promising a lot of things but not delivering it. I felt completely let down and felt that I had actually wasted a lot of time reading this book. It was the end that kept me going through all the boring and repetitive parts, it was the hope that there would be some clarifications, but I got naught. In fact, at that point, I would have settled for a fantastical if implausible ending but I didn't even get that. What I got was a stereotyped ending, which did nothing to endear me to this book.

I would end by saying that this book had a lot going for it but it was not followed upon. Most of the twists were something that I had already figured out, so it held no mystery for me. Neither was the writing so great that I could write reams on it. All in all, a disappointment for me. I wouldn't recommend it to anyone but if you feel like taking a dip into these waters, please do so. Who knows, you might end up liking it, as tastes always differ.

PS - My initial rating was 2.5 rounded off to 3 but while writing this review I felt that I had more grouses than likes, which is why I changed it to 1.5 rounded off to 2.

Blair says

The second book I've read by this author in as many months, this was just as enjoyable and satisfying as *The Owl Killers*. Maitland is brilliant at bringing the sights, sounds and smells of the 14th century to life, and the cast of characters was fantastic; I imagine it must be very hard to make each member of such a large group distinctive, but every one of the band of travellers was almost immediately memorable. My only problem with the lengthy narrative was that some parts were too similar to others, and this was occasionally confusing; for example, some of the murders that took place appeared, later in the story, to have been 'solved' seemingly without there being any actual confirmation of who the killer was, although it could be that I somehow missed these details in amongst all the other action. The author certainly seems to have found her niche writing stories set in late-medieval England, and if there are more I will definitely read them. I would recommend Maitland's books to anyone who loves historical fiction, and indeed anyone who's interested in getting into it, as they're so accessible and fun to read.

Carrie says

Company of Liars by Karen Maitland is a reinterpretation of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. Set in 14th century England, during a time of fear, religious power, and superstition, it is the story of nine travelers trying to

escape the Plague. As they travel inland, it becomes apparent that each one carries a secret. One by one, the secrets are exposed, with deadly consequences.

There is Zophiel, the traveling magician whose wagon full of boxes is a constant source of worry. No one knows what is in them, but there seems to be someone following them who does.

Osmond and Adela, a young couple expecting their first child, also travel with the group. They seem to be of too high a class to be traveling with the wanderers.

Rodrigo and Jofre are musicians from Italy. Jofre has a hot head and a taste for wine, as he drinks to get away from his own secrets.

Pleasance is a midwife who hides her true identity, while helping to keep the travelers healthy and caring for Adela in her pregnancy.

Narigorm is a white-haired child who enchants everyone who meets her - but there is a darkness in her.

The story is narrated by Camelot, a traveling peddler who sells saints' relics and artifacts. We see and experience the story through Camelot's eyes and only at the end do we realize that his secret is the biggest of all.

Karen Maitland is an amazing writer who digs into the faults and weaknesses of human nature, the things that people prefer to keep hidden. She uses the child Narigorm as a catalyst for the characters to confront their true natures, for better or for worst. The results are disturbing, mystical, and all too believable.

Even though I wasn't completely crazy about this book, I kept reading because of the quality of Maitland's writing, and because I wanted to see how it would end. She does an excellent job of slowly revealing the truths about the nine travelers, piece by piece. The religion and superstition that permeate the book create an eerie atmosphere that becomes terrifying as the book progresses - culminating in an ending that made me shiver. Though the ending was clever in that way, I still didn't care for the twist. But that's just me - and I would still recommend this to any lovers of historical fiction.

3 out of 5 stars

Jeanette says

This is a LLLLLLOOOONG book. It took me ages to read it. But there was never a time when my interest plopped or when the base 9 characters who make the "company" didn't leave me wanting more. Each and every one of those 9 was so finely framed and every line of their emotions, core desires, acting out or vocal habits - all those aspects that are covered by the term "personality"- they were THERE. Karen Maitland has a gift for giving us their onus and their spirit.

This is a book I could react to or describe for 50 paragraphs. But I will not.

Suffice to say that the plague sets the tone. The villages and the English countryside are stench real. And the outcomes, despite the level of the tales told by the company, never seemed to be one of any hope or optimism. Not by this reader.

The white haired mite? From the very first I was repelled. Child NOT!

Anyway, it's tales in a tale. It has some good guys. It has tons of mutilation. Human and animal. It is tooth and claw survival. But it is also the gifts of human mind in the worst of times which hold nothing else but horrendous bleakness and suffering.

Gird your loins for this one though. It is LONG!

I almost subtracted another star for the ideology that Maitland sneaks within some of her chapter headings and paragraph length quotes. Oh, they are definitely quotable. But I will put none of them here. Because some of them are more than incorrect to my life's opinion, and they simply don't come from that plague century either.

Lastly, I have to add this. The ending disappointed me. It was rather a cop out or else she is going to do a sequel. I'm sure the second is a good guess.

Nikki says

I picked up Company of Liars as my fifth book of the readathon, last night, and read half of it in one go. Unfortunately, I couldn't stay up, but I can definitely say this for it: it could distract me from the pain of gallstones when high doses of anti-spasmodics and opiates could not. I think how much it entertains you will depend on how much you buy into the characters: I was prepared to fall for most of them, and to pity those I didn't adore, so I got swept up in their story. It's a relatively slow-paced story, I suppose: the actual threat doesn't come into the open until almost the end.

There are clues throughout as to what is going to happen, not just what will happen next, but what will unfold throughout the rest of the story. Some of the hints are fairly large; most readers will probably guess ahead of the plot, but it was the pleasure of fitting everything *together* that kept my interest -- this and that I already knew, but what significance it could have...

There are criticisms in other reviews about the range of characters and how well they took each other's secrets: there's little shock and outrage at a character who is gay or characters who commit incest. I felt... it is a little anachronistic, but it also worked for me because all the characters have secrets they dare not reveal, and all of them have weaknesses laid bare to the others in their group. They need each other, and can't afford to have the group fall apart.

I can understand those who found it too slow paced, and those who felt the clues were too obvious. I was a little exasperated by the anagram: (view spoiler) That felt *clumsy*. Still, I bought into the characters and I badly wanted them to do well, and I bought into untangling the mystery. I enjoyed it a lot.

Cphe says

Enjoyed this far more than I expected. Loved the premise of the novel, the journey of nine very different people who band together to attempt to outrun the pestilence that has overtaken the countryside. The lengths that each will go to guard their secrets from each other. Thought that the characters were well presented and appreciated the mystery surrounding the unknown narrator. There were quite a few twists to the plot and characters that were unexpected and I didn't see coming at all.

Haven't read anything by the author before but I did enjoy this.

Hilary says

I've read multiple novels about the Plague (Year of Wonders, Doomsday Book, probably others I can't think of right now). This was a completely different experience. The Plague is, in some ways, huge, and in other ways a minor character. A nod to the Canterbury Tales, this is the story of a motley group of travelers thrown together in their desperate attempt to escape the ravages of the pestilence.

I found this to be a total immersion experience. It doesn't wallow in medieval language, but the vocabulary and ideas are faithful to the period. The characters have great depth as people, but also effectively showcase some controversial issues (without the narrator or the author taking a modern stance).

One of the things I liked best about Company of Liars is its lack of hysteria. The travelers are understandably afraid of the Plague, and of the many other dangers of their time, and many terrible things happen along the way (honestly, this isn't a spoiler, what would you expect of a Plague novel anyway?), but the storytelling is honest and totally lacking in melodrama.

Although I initially balked at the first person narration, it turned out to be completely appropriate and much more emotionally compelling than third person would have been.

While it had a slow start, by the time I was a few chapters in I was completely hooked and burned through this at top speed. Highly recommended!

Susanna - Censored by GoodReads says

I kept envisioning Narigorm as one of the kids from Children of the Corn.

Helen says

Plague has arrived in the north of England. A group of nine find solace together traveling through these hostile times. Winner is harsh, villagers unwelcoming and suspicion behind to fester within the group.

I enjoyed this a lot, well until the last few pages where two events arrived out of nowhere and threw me totally! Were there clues? Not sure how I feel about that part.

Ann says

I have so many wishes. I wish I'd paid less attention to the "stunning reinterpretation of the Canterbury Tales!" part of the book jacket and noticed that all the blurbs were from people who *write scary books*. If you are like me – for whatever reason, I have read A Distant Mirror yet cannot sit through even the most banal mystery book without crapping my pants – then this is not for you. I wish I had the foresight to realize that even though I was rolling my eyes with every other page, I would get completely engrossed in the

(terrifying) last few chapters and barely escape before the pants-crapping could begin. But most of all I wish that Ms Maitland – who obviously put a lot of effort into researching this book and knows her 1348 – had ditched the (oddly, incompletely selective) glossary and spent more time on the actual prose. Why, why, why, as someone writing in 2008, would you make your beloved characters spout chestnuts like “when the lamb lies with the ewe, it is like mother coupling with child” when they are barely developed enough to serve your many, ponderous, and drudgely reiterated themes (hint: liars!), but not enough to make them behave as actual humans who might have once lived? I guess what I’m saying is, I wish it was more like the Canterbury Tales.

Susan Johnson says

I found this book so absolutely riveting that I spent two nights up late reading it. At first I thought it was just a mesmerizing story about the Plague in 1348 but it was so much more. Nine strangers come together, all with secrets, and as they travel to avoid the Black Death, their stories slowly are told.

I don't want to spoil it for anyone but there were so many twists that I had to keep reading to find out what was coming next. A very entertaining book that was extremely well-written. I highly recommend it.

Kaora says

I enjoyed this quite a bit.

It is definitely a very slow burn. It starts slow with some foreshadowing and follows the company's travel in great detail, so it isn't a book for people who are looking for a quick read with a lot of action.

However I was quite pleasantly surprised with the detail put into each character, and there are a number of twists and turns that I didn't see coming which made the slow pace well worth it. The author has also put work into creating the atmosphere and sticking as close as she can to the time period and I felt she did a wonderful job with that. It is marked as Fantasy however, and does have some fantastical elements, but those don't detract from the story.

This is my first book by this author so I'm excited to see what else she has out there.

Amy Bruno says

There's not a better way to end the year of great reads in 2008 than to end it with Karen Maitland's first book, Company of Liars. This book has everything: love, death, friendship, witchcraft, deception...it's a little historical fiction mixed with a little fantasy rolled in to one yummy nugget of a novel.

The plot was excellent, the storytelling was just amazing and the characters are ones you are not soon to forget. This is one of those that stay with you a while. I find myself missing Camelot the most.

My favorite quote: "Home is the place you return to when you have finally lost your soul. Home is the place where life is born, not the place of your birth, but the place where you seek rebirth". - Camelot

I recommend Company of Liars to anyone who appreciates good storytelling.

Amy Says: 5 / 5

Karen Maitland's new book, The Owl-Killers is due out in the UK on March 26, 2009.

Amber says

Camelot decides to travel with two musicians, a magician, a painter and his wife, a swan-boy storyteller, and a soothsayer as they travel away from the pestilence a.k.a. "Black Plague" as it ravages and destroys everything in its path. Something evil is following them too. As it begins to kill them off one by one, can they make it to their destination safely even though they are a company of liars? Read on and find out for yourself.

This was a pretty good historical horror mystery novel. I also liked it how it was a unique version of the Canterbury tales too. If you like these types of stories that are set in the dark ages, definitely check it out for yourself. This is available at your local library and wherever books are sold.

LJ says

COMPANY OF LIARS (Hist. Myst-Camelot-England-1348) – VG+
Maitland, Karen – Standalone
Penguin/Michael Joseph, 2008, UK Hardcover – ISBN: 9780718153229

First Sentence: 'So that's settled then, we bury her alive in the iron bridle. That'll keep her tongue still.'

The plague has come to England and nine people have joined together in an attempt to outrun it and find safety. A very disparate group it is: a scarred trader of holy relics, a magician, a musician and his teacher, a storyteller with a deformity, a pregnant couple, a healer and a white-haired girl who reads runes. As they travel, they share stories, face danger and die--one-by-one.

This was a wonderful, unusual, engrossing, compelling book that was so well written, I couldn't put it down. It has an intriguing cast of characters, about each of whom you learn through the story and through the stories they tell. Each has a secret that is revealed through the story. The narrator, Camelot the relic trader, has a wonderful voice and is the steady core of the group. I did like that the books characters aren't the titled or wealthy, but neither are they farmers or peasants, but travelers without a constant base. The distinctive roles provide a real richness and tension to the story. The suspense is very well done. With each death the tension rises. But don't expect this to be your usual murder mystery. It's a story about secrets and lies, and we're dealing with the Middle Ages here.

The sense of time, place and history created by Maitland is so much a part of the story. This was a brutal, ugly time in which to live with the elements so much a part of daily life. It was also a time of fear, superstition and bigotry. In reading the story, at the culmination of our 2008 Presidential election, I realized that not a lot has changed in almost 700 years, although our living conditions are much better and one certainly wouldn't wanted to live back then. The history is well researched and well presented, including a map, historical notes and a glossary. The suspense is very well done all the way to the last sentence. With each death the tension rises. But don't expect this to be your usual murder mystery. It's a story about secrets

and lies, and we're dealing with the Middle Ages here.

Had it not had a prologue which set the mood but had not direct relationship to the story and had it not included portents, which I despise, I would have given it an "Excellent" rating. Don't be put off by the size of the book. It was an absolutely great read and I'm off to find out what else Ms. Maitland has written.
