



The Plague Dogs

Richard Adams

Download now

Read Online →

The Plague Dogs

Richard Adams

The Plague Dogs Richard Adams

Richard Adams, the author of *Watership Down*, creates a lyrical and engrossing tale, a remarkable journey into the hearts and minds of two canine heroes, Snitter and Rowf.

After being horribly mistreated at a government animal research facility, Snitter and Rowf escape into the isolation, and terror, of the wilderness. Aided only by a fox they call "the Tod," the two dogs must struggle to survive in their new environment. When the starving dogs attack some sheep, they are labeled ferocious man-eating monsters, setting off a great dog hunt that is later intensified by the fear that the dogs could be carriers of the bubonic plague.

The Plague Dogs Details

Date : Published November 28th 2006 by Ballantine Books (first published September 22nd 1977)

ISBN : 9780345494023

Author : Richard Adams

Format : Paperback 390 pages

Genre : Fiction, Animals, Fantasy, Dogs, Classics, Adventure

 [Download The Plague Dogs ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online The Plague Dogs ...pdf](#)

Download and Read Free Online The Plague Dogs Richard Adams

From Reader Review The Plague Dogs for online ebook

Libbie Hawker (L.M. Ironside) says

I hated this book. I will never read it again, ever, as long as I live. And it absolutely deserves five stars.

The Plague Dogs is one of the most visceral, wrenching, emotional reads you'll ever find. It follows the fortunes of two dogs, Snitter and Rowf, who escape from a medical testing lab. In an attempt to cover up the unnecessary nature of the research done there, the humans running the lab start a media scare about the dogs, claiming that they carry a serious virus which may kill humans. In this way, the dogs find themselves effectively on their own, without a person to turn to for help or kindness.

The dogs fall in with Tod, a fox with a thick Scottish accent, who gives them advice as they attempt to adapt to the harsh realities of living as wild animals. But dogs are not wild animals -- they crave and need the companionship of people; and as Snitter and Rowf try to reconcile their need for humanity with their circumstances as de facto wild animals, they remember and relive the better times, when they were pets, before they ended up at the lab.

It's an emotionally grinding book, bleak and ultimately painful. The final scene is tragic and still brings tears to my eyes as I remember it, more than fifteen years after reading the novel.

It's the kind of story that, once you've visited it a single time, will remain with you, powerfully, for life. And for that, along with Adams' gorgeous writing and deft storytelling, it deserves five stars and more.

But because it's too bleak to read again, I can never really love this book. I can respect very deeply the message it conveys and the skill of the author in telling such an honest, affecting story. But I just can't like this book.

Jackie says

It's not that this isn't a well written, thought provoking book. It is both of those things. It just isn't the kind of book that I like to read, because it's just too...sad. Too painful. Too much for me, with my delicate sensibilities.

It is, in fact, quite a good book. If you like Richard Adams, or if you do not like animal testing and are looking to get emotionally charged up about it, this would be a good book to read. If you are extremely sensitive about unreasonable abuse/violence to animals, you probably should not read this book.

I read it a couple of years ago, so that's all I've got, cause that's all I remember. I hope it helps.

Chris says

I really enjoy Richard Adams. Part of it is his writing - he has an excellent style and a definite gift for description. When he talks about a place, it is immediately obvious that he's actually been there. He uses multiple senses to tell you what a place looks, sounds and smells like, the feeling of the damp earth and the rolling mists, the tastes that seep through the air.... Not surprising when one is writing a book where a pair of

dogs are the primary characters.

And that's another reason I like Adams. Lots of people write books about animals, personifying them and making them into almost-humans. But most of these writers tend to idealize the animals, put them into the sort of "noble savage" category which places humanity immediately in the wrong.

Not Adams. His animals are animals. In *Watership Down*, which was ostensibly a book for children, the animals live through fear, terror, despair and war. There is blood and death and pain, mostly because there is blood and death and pain in the natural world. He does acknowledge that he over-humanizes his characters, but without that, there would be no story.

This book is about the intersection of animals and man, and asks a very important question: what is humanity's responsibility towards the animals? While he may not know what the true answer is, Adams definitely knows which answers are wrong. The book begins in a scientific research lab, in the quiet hills of northern England, where any number of experiments are performed on any number of animals. Some of them are paid for by outside interests - cosmetics corporations, for example - while others are performed to, in the mind of the lab's directors, further the scope of scientific knowledge. Adams' utter contempt for this kind of activity is immediately evident when you read it, and he spares no detail in describing what happens in these experiments. Animals mutilated, burned, shocked, frozen, exposed to poisons in their air, water and food. Kept awake, asleep, isolated.... all just to see what would happen. And when they die, they are disposed of with no more thought than one might dispose of a burned-out light bulb.

One of the subjects is a large black mongrel dog which is being used to answer the great burning scientific question of, "What would happen if we kept trying to drown a dog but never actually let it die?" Rowf (having never had a master, his name is just the sound he makes) has a single companion in the lab, in the cage next to him - a small terrier who, having had a master before, has a name - Snitter. Snitter has been the subject of a far stranger experiment, and the brain surgery has left a deep scar across his skull and a deeper rift in his mind.

The two dogs manage to escape from the lab into the outside world, where they manage to survive, if only barely.

And normally, that would be the end of the story. But then Adams reveals his antipathy for bureaucracy and the modern media, for where both of these intersect, terrible phantoms and ghouls can arise. Worried farmers, whose sheep are targets of the two hungry dogs, call their representatives to get answers from the recalcitrant lab. The ministers talk and talk about it, and when word leaks out to a well-known London tabloid, the story explodes.

WAS the lab not working with many kinds of animals the night the dogs escaped, it asked. Among those animals, were there not RATS? And were those rats not the subjects of tests involving the horrible BLACK PLAGUE? CAN the laboratory ASSURE the taxpaying public that there is ABSOLUTELY NO CHANCE, none at all that the dogs are not infected with the virulent PLAGUE?

The newspaper's answer, the one that will sell more copies, of course, is NO. And so, the two dogs, who were lucky enough to escape and canny enough to survive, become known nationwide as the Plague Dogs, subjects of a hunt which escalates beyond reasonable proportions.

As much as this is an animal adventure story, a kind of twisted version of *Homeward Bound*, it is also commentary. There's a lot of dog philosophy in here, for one of Adams' gifts is being to get into the heads of the animals he's writing. The two dogs agree on one thing - it is a dog's place in the world to serve humanity. But how? Snitter, who'd had a good master once, believes that they are there to make humans happy, to bring love to a home. Rowf, however, having known nothing other than the laboratory, believes that dogs are there

to be abused by humans for their unknowable purposes, and that by running away from the lab and the water tank, he has become a Bad Dog.

Also, looking at the world from a dog's perspective is interesting. Snitter, for example, believes that the newspaper-boy delivers a paper to the Master's house solely so the Master and Snitter can play a fun game. Isn't that boy nice? And having known only suburbia, he is shocked that humans have ripped up the world and replaced it with all these green things and mountains and deep holes filled with water - which, of course, Rowf believes are used to drown unthinkably huge animals much as he was drowned. Adams asked himself the question, "How would a dog interpret the world?" and got a lot of great ideas from it.

And, as I mentioned before, there's a lot of talk about humanity's responsibility towards the animals. Should we use them for whatever purposes we wish? Of course not. Are we necessarily "better" than the other animals? More skilled, yes, more clever, certainly, but better? No. We are animals, and as such we cannot allow ourselves to place ourselves above the great interconnected web of life. We may never know what our purpose in Nature is, but we can know what our purpose is not.

By the way, there's an animated movie of this one, too, done by the same house that did *Watership Down*. I haven't seen it in years, but if I recall, it's absolutely heartbreaking. The ending to this book is a bit different, but there is a wonderful section near the end where the Writer and the Reader argue about the fate of the dogs. It's a little meta-fictional, but it's an acknowledgment by Adams that he knows how the story should end, and he knows how his readers want it to end.

Elizabeth? says

I rarely re-visit books that I start and don't complete in one try. I am so glad that I received this in a book exchange and returned to the adventures of Snitter and Rowf.

These two dogs find themselves in a facility that performs various experiments on all manner of animals. I won't go into details here, but if you are sensitive to this issue, I would recommend skimming certain portions of the book.

Snitter had an owner in his life before the facility and longs to return to this loving environment. He keeps the stories of his man in mind as he and Rowf traverse the countryside. Once the dogs escape, there are a number of people that come to want to see their demise, among them government officials and doctors that work at the facility.

What Adams does here is give voice to not just the dogs in the story, but also everyone involved in what is happening as a result of the two dogs escaping. You hear from a journalist covering the story; a scientist that leaks information to the press; the sister of the owner of Snitter; the military called on to help rid the countryside of the dogs.

There is the use of verse and an interesting narrative Adams employs throughout the book.

I am glad I took this journey with Snitter and Rowf.

Stefan Yates says

If 1/2 stars were available I'd give this book a 2 1/2 instead of 3 star rating. It's not that it was all that terribly bad, I just felt that it was incredible average and quite honestly blah in parts. From what I have heard, and read myself, I feel that this is definitely the low point in Richard Adams' writing.

I think that my two main problems with this book are first the amount of space that Adams uses to push his political agenda down the reader's throat. While I totally agree that the inhumane treatment of animals in research facilities is deplorable and that something definitely must be done about such activities, after a while when reading the novel I began to dread the sections of the book that did not concern themselves directly with the dogs' activities. This leads directly to my second issue, the sections of the book that concern themselves with the dogs begin to get rather droll as well as the dogs never really make any progress towards any sort of productive goal. As a matter of fact, they travel around the countryside for days and end up returning to the same spot that they were in after their first day of freedom following their escape. It gets to be very frustrating. The last fifty pages or so, the pace does change quite a bit and the book does have a satisfying conclusion.

I had no problems what-so-ever with Adams' writing style; he does have a way with putting sentences together that make them flow fairly easily. I also rather enjoyed several of the characters in the novel, especially the two dogs and because of this, really wanted to like the novel, but just simply found it to be more of a chore to read than a pleasure.

C.L. says

Bit of a spoiler following as I am discussing the book, itself, not just the jacket. Also, much of the book resembles the animated film, but the ending is entirely different--the film stops while the novel keeps going.

This novel chronicles medical experimentation in horrific detail. It is depressing, as many have said, but what makes it depressing is that it forces the reader to face profoundly shameful things that happen, or have happened, quite frequently, things that we allow or have allowed to happen to various animals. What I am saying is that much of the book is a kind of propoganda, in the truest sense of the word. Adams shows us where our cosmetics (and medicines and many other things) come from, most effectively with blinded bunnies who act as a kind of symbolic Godhead, "watching" all that happens. He seems to want us to be horrified and ashamed, which makes much of the book difficult to read. Towards the end, though, he does something really interesting. The book is progressing to a logical end, and Adams steps in with a nice postmodern trick and adopts the voice of the reader addressing him, the author. "How can you end it like this?" the reader essentially says. (Aah, Adams may well be saying, how can YOU let it end like this?) Adams then introduces a pair of environmentalists (who discuss Adams own work, not necessarily positively) and appear poised to miraculously change the tide. Adams also goes back and touches on certain characters, one of the scientists, especially, and fleshes them out for the first time, showing the reader a little bit of perspective, which raises the book from propoganda into the novel form. But since the reader has experienced 300 pages of animal torture previous, 15 pages of well-meaning hardly displaces the shame. It is an obviously false happy turn Adams is showing us. I found this fascinating and very well-done. Readers of *Watership Down* (and nothing else), I would think, would be lost and very disappointed with this book. I say this because I am considering *WD* as a sort of advanced YA or kids fiction book. This is definately not that. This is a very complex novel, the sort of thing I wished I'd been able to read in college instead of having to read *Beowulf* 4 times. (Nothing against *Beowulf*, it's the 4 times that got me.) I can't say that I enjoyed this book, but the ending was very well-done. So I'll let it stand and say well done to Mr. Adams.

TheVampireBookworm says

Prepare your tissues just in case... I get always very emotional when it comes to animals so when something happens in a lab that conducts tests on them and the two main canine characters remind me of my own dogs, my eyes get very misty.

But let's talk about the structure first. The book follows multiple participants on the plot so there are moments in which we follow the two main characters who are dogs and experience their inner life (I wish my dogs could hold meaningful conversations like that but this is where the plot gets fairy tale-ish) as well all the people involved. While the dogs struggle to survive, the people take stand either on political life of the county or animal testing and the portrait media paint of it.

It's very interesting to hear so many voices (though I had a problem with the tod... it was just way too far from English) and opinions (there were almost philosophical musings so it kinda clashed with the dogs having voices so I'm not sure how old one can be to read this). However, it was all pretty tied together so that it read very nicely.

The only drawback I see are the overly descriptive paragraphs - I believe if one is from the area where the book is set in, then surely their hearts sing. But if you've never been there, you can imagine a hill, a valley etc. with less words and everything else is just a waste of time. But it didn't spoil the book that much, it's just something I noticed while wanting and dreading to read further.

Bookeater says

I have to disagree with the reviewer who says this is not realistic. I worked in a government lab in California only 2 years ago. Things have *not* changed. There are simply more organizations and welfare groups that have no actual say in day to day operations of labs. It's up to researchers and workers to follow the rules daily, and they always know when the inspections will happen.

Also, animal labs do use and buy animals from shelters for experiments. Back in 2006 for sure, Ingham County Animal Control in Michigan regularly sold animals for \$5-10 to "resellers" who then sold them to Michigan State University. Where it's legal, it happens. Many experiments only require an animal in general, not lab stock, sad to say.

Sadly, there is no daily oversight in labs. Animals are still treated this way. The best line is when Rolf states, "Surely some good must come of this?". Truly, animal labs are a business. They don't want business to go away. This book gives all perspectives - locals, the animals themselves, the military - the good, the bad, the risks, the benefits. I recommend it wholeheartedly.

Keith says

I started this book at least ten times before I could read past the first chapter. This book will destroy the heart of any animal lover. It is the story of two animals that escape from an animal testing lab from the point of view of the animals. While the writing can be hard to absorb as Adams tries to show the mental condition of the characters, the tale is well worth the read. It seems to me to be a good way to step out of what we know and see the world from a different set of eyes.

Sumit Singla says

This is probably the bleakest book I've read all year. It tells the tale of two dogs, Rowf and Snitter, who manage to escape from an animal research facility. The experiments that are being carried out at the facility are barbaric and make for tough reading.

The damaged past that Rowf and Snitter have faced impacts their current lives too, and Rowf has a deep-rooted mistrust of mankind. On the other hand, Snitter suffers from some kind of hallucinations or visions, and some of these seem to be stark mad.

They end up meeting 'Tod' - a fox with a Toon accent. The Tod gives them valuable advice in exchange for meals. Snitter likes The Tod's company, but Rowf is a bit wary and doesn't trust The Tod's sly ways.

The end of the book is quite heartbreaking, along with many other parts as well. But, it's an important book to read to know how we have a lasting impact on animalkind, and to introspect on our own 'humanity'.

Patrick says

There are a lot of things not to like about this book. It seems to go against everything your average Eng Lit graduate would consider 'good' writing. It's rambling, overwritten, loosely edited and willfully biased. It's peppered with gratuitous literary references, weighed down by lengthy passages of leaden political satire, and the whole thing has the slightly ponderous air of the kind of book a retired civil servant would write. (Which is perhaps appropriate because that's exactly what Adams was when he wrote it.)

If one purpose of a novel is to present a balanced, sympathetic view of a society or culture, then The Plague Dogs fails on that front too. The central topic – vivisection – is something about which the author has absolutely nothing good to say. He also has very little sympathy for the men who perpetuate it. Careering madly through Godwin's Law, Adams goes so far as to trace a comparison between the state of animal testing in the 1970s and experiments carried out by Mengele under the Nazis. Thousands of words are dedicated to descriptions of unpleasant experiments (all of which are taken from true accounts) carried out on dogs, birds, rabbits and monkeys. Very little of this is directly relevant to the central plot, in which a pair of dogs escape from a testing lab and run wild in the Lake District, but then there's quite a lot else in this book that's not really relevant to that either. After a while you get used to it.

And yet I enjoyed the book very much, for all the reasons given above. I may not agree with everything Adams wrote, but I liked the way in which he wrote it. This isn't even about kitsch value: I liked The Plague Dogs because it is so absurdly digressive, so completely unfussed about sticking rigidly to conventional notions of what makes for fine literature. I liked it because one of the main characters is post-operative dog who spends most of the book wandering around with a crack in his skull exposing his brain to the open air.

I liked it because it's shot through with a vein of angry misanthropy, being set firmly in a world where for the most part terrible, incomprehensible things happen to the best of people (and animals). I liked that reading it is like reading a tall story told by an angry old fellow in a pub who's a bit drunk and keeps forgetting what he was talking about if only to buttonhole you regarding the state of the nation. And I liked it because there is some nature writing here which is unquestionably very beautiful.

Andrew Farr says

This book was a major disappointment after loving Watership Down and Tales From Watership Down.

There were a lot of humans in this book. It clouded things quite a bit. In Watership Down we are taken into a new world because the rabbits are wild and they have their own folk-lore, language and interesting little bits of culture. In this book, however, the dogs only know man. They do not know the wild or nature. This keeps the story from truly captivating the reader by bringing him into a different reality. The reality of this book is a reality of humans, and the dogs often wonder why men changed the natural houses into things like unnatural trees and rocks. Furthermore, the author doesn't even attempt to show any use of natural instinct on the dogs' part.

There are huge dialectal barriers as well. Half of the humans in the story, as well as the fox they meet along the way, speak in a very thick accent and strange dialect which is tough to adjust to. Several times I had to keep reading and re-reading sections, eventually giving up on getting anything from them. At times it does become easy to understand, however. The real annoyance is that one of the main character is not always in a sane state of mind, so sometimes he rambles on and on in a sort of nonsense. Between these two huge barriers it was difficult for me to really have any sense of determination to read on.

I treaded along though.

The symbolism of Watership Down is completely abandoned in this book. The reader is taken into a story where he can observe the evil deeds of humans (and there are not many deeds which aren't evil in this book). This book says exactly what it means without allowing the reader to seek out any deeper meaning.

Our heroes never seem to really achieve the respect that title holds. They stumble through this book and never seem to learn much, form any plan or be self preserving. In the end the dogs should have died. I didn't want them to, don't get me wrong, but the entire tone of the novel builds up to an ending that completely disagrees with the entire novel. Adams wasn't brave enough to break our hearts. You do learn to like the main characters, for some reason. Whereas they are not good at what they are doing, and are constantly frustrating the reader with errors, you do feel sorry for them. Their actions are not weighed on as good or bad in any way, only necessary (with that, I will add this is a fairly violent book), and without knowing they had escaped from horrible animal testing practices they would not gain any ground in the readers' hearts.

Mindi says

If you have known me for any period time, you probably know that Watership Down is my all time favorite novel. So, you may be surprised to learn that I have just now read The Plague Dogs. That's odd, right? You would think I would be practically falling over myself to read this, and I did try to, years ago. I think I was in high school when I bought my first copy, and I couldn't even finish the first chapter. This may have been one of my earliest DNFs.

Before I read Watership Down I saw the film as a young child. Years later I learned that the film was based on a book, and I immediately read it. I loved it so much that I was overjoyed to discover that Adams had other novels, and that those books had very good reviews as well. I took my allowance to my favorite independent bookstore and bought my first copy of The Plague Dogs (which I still own).

I pretty much knew most of what was going to happen when I read Watership Down, since the film follows the book rather closely. However, I knew almost nothing about The Plague Dogs, and as a teen I was

completely unprepared for the subject matter.

Even more so than *Watership Down*, *The Plague Dogs* is Adams' opus against animal cruelty. The book starts at a horrendous facility in the Lake District in England called Animal Research (Scientific and Experimental) or aptly, ARSE, for short. In the first few pages, the scientist are testing a dog to see how long it takes him to drown in a pool of water before they resuscitate him and do it all over again the next day. I couldn't read past these pages the first time I picked up the novel, and I've heard quite a few other people say the same thing. Now that I have finished the novel I can finally say that I am so glad I gave it another chance.

As an animal lover, this book is incredibly hard to read, but it is so worth it. Adams' writing is poetic and brilliant, and his message strong and deeply important. Two of the dogs in the research facility manage to escape, and the remainder of the novel involves their fight for survival in the Lake District as one misfortune after another befalls them, and ultimately leaves them hunted by every man in the area, including the government. The story switches between dog and human POVs, and Adams even breaks the fourth wall in the last few pages to address the horrors of animal cruelty.

I didn't know if I would be able to make it through the entire book, but I'm so happy that I did. I cannot recommend this book highly enough. Once again Richard Adams has left me astonished and amazed. This story will stay with me forever.

Bam says

2015 Reading Challenge--week 7: Nonhuman characters.

Well, that was quite an adventure! Not as well done as Adams' more popular classic, *Watership Down*, perhaps but still well worth reading.

Two badly-treated dogs, Rowlf and Snitter, escape from Animal Research, Scientific and Experimental lab (A.R.S.E.--gotta love it!), in the beautiful English Lake District. The dogs have no idea how to survive in the wild but fortunately make friends with a wise fox (tod) who gives them advice and warnings. They band together to hunt, killing sheep and stealing chickens from farmyards whenever they can. Of course, that infuriates the farmers who raise a ruckus.

At first the lab refuses to comment on whether they have lost any dogs, which seems disingenuous and suspicious, but a sharp reporter is assigned to ferret out the news story. Unfortunately, he is more interested in advancing his career and selling newspapers than in telling the truth and spreads the rumor that the lab has been doing bubonic-plague testing and the dogs may have been infected. The resulting panic and a few unfortunate accidents/deaths bring out the heavy reinforcements to hunt down the 'vicious' animals. Lots of heart-wrenching moments and some surprising plot twists/turns make for a very satisfying read.

Rating the book was hard though. I vacillated but settled on 4 stars even though there were several things to criticize about the writing that could have knocked it down to 3 if I hadn't felt such sympathy for the dogs and their plight.

Some bones of contention for me: Conversations in dialect may have been deemed authentic but make for some pretty heavy going, even with the small glossary Adams includes for 'American readers.'

Twenty-nine illustrations of the landscape by A. Wainwright and Adams' beautiful descriptions bring the Lake District countryside to life, but occasionally he doesn't seem to realize when enough is enough. Sadly,

these and several head-scratching digressions tend to slow down the story's momentum.

In a peculiar way, Adams inserts himself into the story now and then, talking to the reader as an aside, which seems a bit strange and jarring while reading a story being told in the third person.

And he takes one notable occasion to harangue about how animals should be treated by humans while building up to the conclusion of an important and emotional scene. The two men involved in this conversation go so far as to mention Richard Adams as a well-intentioned author who knew next to nothing about rabbits! (Tongue-in-cheek joke, I suppose, but still a bit weird at that moment.)

The book was written in the year 1977 which I recall as being a time when there was a big outcry about the cruel way cosmetic products were being tested on animals and gruesome horror stories and photos abounded-which makes me wonder if Adams chose to write this book at that time with perhaps the hope that people would read it and be swayed to become activists for animal rights. PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) was founded shortly thereafter, in March of 1980.

Clair says

This is one of my favourite books ever. My beat-up old copy is one of my prized possessions. I'm planning on rereading it soon, and I swear, more people need to read this book.

It's the tale of two dogs who escape from a laboratory that is very happy to use animals in its experiments. Whilst escaping, Rowf and Snitter pass through a room that is being used for research into the bubonic plague, and break a petri dish, thus convincing the scientists that these dogs have bubonic plague and are a public health menace. What follows is two very sheltered dogs trying to survive on the harsh, unforgiving moors of the Lake District, slowly running out of food, and having to rely on a fox to help them hunt.

This book is also known for having an intensely depressing movie, and it's a fairly faithful adaptation, I'll tell you that.

Hunter: (laying his rifle against his leg) "Here, boy! Come here! I won't hurt you!"

Snitter: (catching his back paw on the trigger as he tries to jump up) "Human! I love humans! They're good people! Just like my master was!"

BANG

To its credit, the book has a MUCH more happy ending than the movie, which ends with a freaking Alan Price song and a realisation that the two dogs have probably just drowned. WHAT THE HELL, Nepenthe Productions? This movie had a theatrical release, and my DVD with the director's cut is only rated PG!

So yes, let's go away from the movie and go back to what I love about this book.

The writing is just gorgeous, and it's especially fascinating reading the interviews as the human characters try

to piece together the full story.

I love how Rowf and Snitter just feel so real, and you really feel for them when horrible things happen. Their mythology is beautifully explained, and goddamn it, I just wanted to hit Annie Mossity in the face with a frying pan. You don't sell an adorable dog like Snitter to a research lab, buy yourself a *fur coat* with the proceeds and then lie to your brother, Snitter's original owner! Gah!

However, this book does have its Achille's Heel. Sometimes the scientists that Rowf and Snitter encounter are just... too evil. The scientists are all cruel and think nothing of putting chimpanzees in isolation containers, drowning dogs and doing other radical experimentation without any thought for the animal's welfare. Hell, it still goes on to this day. In 2009, around 5,923 dogs were used in laboratory experiments on animals. I'm not a hardcore animal rights campaigner, and of course, vivisection has had its uses in the past (such as isolating insulin) and present, but I imagine it was going for 'oh god, look how horrible this is, behind closed doors and kept top secret'.

However, I'm still going to give it a high score. Slightly weak scientist characters be damned, it knows just how to tug at my heartstrings and show off some beautiful writing and mythology. 5/5.

Wanda Hartzenberg says

The Plague Dogs

I honestly do not know if I should recommend this book or warn people off of it. It is a good book but any violence towards dogs, pets in general rubs me the wrong way and this degree of neglect, torture in the name of science etc is extreme.

Note, the true message is awesome. The writing is superb, I have seldom disliked so many characters so violently!

The plot line is intricate and flawless.

But....the poor puppies. Even the rats got to me and trust me, rats, spiders, mice etc should according to my life philosophy not enter my domain as I try to avoid theirs.

If however your easily distressed, then stay clear. If you need a reminder why people turn into tree huggers then by all means, have a listen.

The narrator in this book is part of why this was so hard for me. He made every character unique with a voice all it's own. Brilliant.

WaAr

Yasha says

3 stars for the whole story (because it might be 2 times shorter) and 5 stars for the ending

Bess says

One of the saddest books I have ever read. As an animal lover, especially someone who loves dogs it was very hard to finish-but the ending was appropriate and Adams's gift for storytelling helps soften the blow at the end of the journey.

It did make me hate scientists for awhile, though.

Nicole says

Emotionally over wrought and not very well anchored in the reality of research. This type of book has led to people believing all labs just use any animal of any type for prurient vivisection. I work in labs and there are no animals not bred for lab use by specialists. To compare results the animals must be very limited in their genetic diversity they are not common pet store animals. Of course most were mice but there were rats and rabbits in some labs. My own work with mice was to create knockout mice to model human genetic diseases. Once the mouse line is established studies of the disease etiology and of drug efficacy can be tried. No lab would buy stolen pets that may harbor disease and offer too broad a genetic variance. No one who spends their careers developing medicines to relieve suffering is going to be heartless when it comes to the animals used.

I remember once our 'mouse house' facility received a series of letters from hysterical people seeking their lost pets. They had been informed we did animal work by some local variant of animal rights group, but one that never checked the validity of their reports since all we ever had was lab bred mice. The campaign had to be passed to the police and led only to massive suffering by the pet owners who had been so sadly misled.

Algernon says

"What's a harangue?"

"Well, a harangue," said Mr. Powell, "it's sort of – well, if I make a very intense, excited sort of speech, about animals or something –"

Well, I've been harangued thoroughly by Mr. Adams on the subject of scientific experiments on animals. [not a spoiler] Adams is clearly against it, in all circumstances.

An author is of course entitled to be passionate about his subject, it's even a desirable trait, and I am a big fan of several of his other novels. But with "The Plague Dogs" he sort of lost me with his extremely negative portrait of a research station where all the projects mentioned are not only trivial, but sadistic and gratuitously offensive. Kind of like Richard Dawkins with his fierce attacks on religion, Adams refuses to see any benefit from the practice and believes hyperbole is a good tool to make his point. The scientists are all incompetents or callous brutes, compared repeatedly to Nazis, Emperor Nero or wildlife poachers. I understand the need to make the reader feel sympathy for the victims, especially the two dogs who are effectively tortured for useless experimental data, but such blatant manipulation of information is a major turnoff for me. I guess I should have put the book down once I saw where it was headed, but I do like Adams as a storyteller, and I am always curious to see where a story is headed once I started it.

Freedom – that consuming goal above doubt or criticism, desired as moths desire the candle or emigrants the distant continent waiting to parch them in its deserts or drive them to madness in its bitter winters!

Freedom, that land where rogues, at every corner, cozen with lies and promises the plucky sheep who judged it time to sack the Shepherd!

Rowf and Snitter are two of the animals subject to experiments but, being more resourceful than their mates in the cages, they manage to escape from the concentration camp / research station in an epic struggle that the author describes in terms echoing the style of Dante's 'Inferno'. But the hard won freedom is not at all they expected to find. The Lake District in Northern England may be a tourist paradise in summer, but at the tail end of autumn it is a harsh place for survival and for escaping pursue. Most of the novel is an extremely detailed description of the dog's struggle to find food on the high moors, with side chapters detailing the actions of the local shepherds, baffled scientists, shady politicians and the efforts of the yellow press to turn the story into a series of sensationalist articles. The person responsible for attaching the 'plague' appellation to the escapees is another malicious caricature of an investigative reporter: Digby Driver – *Privacy, reticence and human worth melted before him like ghosts at cockcrow.*

"It's emotions that sell popular newspapers, old boy, not logical arguments, as you very well know."

Adams himself is in the business of selling emotions, and I bought it wholesale in "Watership Down", but this time around I found it very hard to swallow the clear divide between black (scientists, press, politicians) and white (the dogs mostly, with a wild fox thrown in for a dig at traditional hunts).

On the plus side : the love for nature is evident in the lengthy descriptions of the Lake District; the plot sort of holds together in the end; the attempts to create a dog's mythology are occasionally funny:

*"O mutton-bones, chicken and cheese,
they're things that are certain to please,
but what I like the most
is a jolly lamp-post"*

On the minus side: the lecture was extremely slow, with the same descriptions of nature slowing the pacing considerably and with the local dialect used by both humans and animals too thick even for me, who loves to read Scottish and Irish novels for the local slang; I did feel for the struggle of the two animals, but the push from the author in the direction he wanted me to go was I felt heavy-handed.

I think that for ordinary, non-specialist people, a certain amount of anthropomorphism's probably useful in helping them to arrive at feeling and sympathy for animals.

Conclusion: disappointment of the year for me from a favorite author, but your mileage might vary. Adams remains a gifted storyteller, but I got the feeling he is one of those people who would want 'me' to stop going to the zoo, or to the circus or to enjoy my foie-gras because it is against 'his' convictions.
