



A Plague on Both Your Houses

Susanna Gregory

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In the tradition of Ellis Peters, *A Plague on Both Your Houses* introduces the physician Matthew Bartholomew, whose unorthodox but effective treatment of his patients frequently draws accusations of heresy from his more traditional colleagues. Besides his practice, Bartholomew is teacher of Medicine at Michaelhouse, part of the fledgling University of Cambridge. In 1348, the inhabitants of Cambridge live under the shadow of a terrible pestilence that has ravaged Europe and is travelling relentlessly eastward towards England. Bartholomew, however, is distracted by the sudden and inexplicable death of the Master of Michaelhouse - a death the University authorities do not want investigated. When three more scholars die in mysterious circumstances, Bartholomew defies the University and begins his own enquiry. His pursuit for the truth leads him into a complex tangle of lies and intrigue that causes him to question the innocence of his closest friends, and even his family. And then the Black Death finally arrives and Bartholomew is dragged deeper and deeper into a quagmire which threatens not only his life, but the continued existence of the University and the future of the town.

A Plague on Both Your Houses Details

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Author : Susanna Gregory

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From Reader Review A Plague on Both Your Houses for online ebook

Jenny OH says

I started reading the Matthew Bartholomew series out of order - I think I read the first three in reverse order - but if the same happens to you, don't worry. I didn't feel like this first book gives any deeper grounding in the characters or setting. Which is not to say they're shallow or that the setting is thin, more that each book continues to build onto them in a natural way.

As a fan of historical fiction and a former medieval history student, I loved reading about the development of the university system in Cambridge. I feel like the author captures the feel of 14th century life very well; the character types and their motivations feel very of their time. As far as characterization, I feel the author does a very good job of avoiding stereotypes. Brother Michael is fat and constantly eating, but he's not the stereotypical jolly, vapid fat guy. Matthew Bartholomew has studied with an Arab physician and has modern views on cleanliness and medical treatments, but is not supremely enlightened.

In fact, Bartholomew is often totally confused about what's going on, which is good because the plots of all three books I've read in this series are *so* convoluted that he has to sit down and hash out what's going on several times, so that we can get caught up. I'm still not sure I understood exactly what was going on with the Oxford plot in this book. I've also noticed that, in this series, there tend to be two mysteries that at first seem like aspects of one plot/mystery, but turn out to be unrelated. I'd say half of the one star I didn't give this book is because I like the mystery to be tough to figure out while I'm reading, but I want to be able to actually understand it once it's been revealed at the end!

The other half star off is for two points that I feel are pretty minor but nevertheless kept occurring to me as I read. First, many of the characters' names are similar enough that if I had split the reading up over a week or more, I wouldn't have remembered who was who. Stephen and Swynford, two Stanmores (the fact that there are two is key to the plot), Wilson and William, Alcote and Augustus, Michael and Matthew, etc.

Second, both the title and jacket description led me to believe the book would be more focused on the plague. And while that was a major ingredient in the story, I felt like it was put in the backseat too often. It gave a good pretext for an introductory story about a physician, but I felt like the main mystery/plot as well as the general action and time frame of the book could have centered more on the plague.

Overall, I enjoy the historical setting and characters of this series very much and am not overly concerned that the central mystery frequently is too convoluted to be reasonable.

Miles Atkinson says

This book is an excellent blending of murder mystery with an atmospheric and generally very well written account of the impact of the Black Death on a small English town. A multi-faceted plot brings in academic rivalry, intellectual jealousy and how these are used to advance the personal agendas of ambitious and ruthless men. This comes across particularly well in the plot to destabilise Cambridge University and the way in which this is revealed in its devious complexity. Matthew Bartholomew is an admirable and engaging hero and one I definitely want to hear more from. My only mild quibble is that occasionally he promotes his medical ideas a little more forcefully than might have been wise at the time. Galen's reworking of Hippocrates Four Humours Theory had received the backing of the Church and hence to challenge Galen

was to challenge the Church. Not until Versalius in the mid sixteenth century was Galen openly challenged. Would someone in Matthew's position have been obliged to temper their methods? Possibly his focus on treating the poor is what keeps him below the radar - at least enough to avoid serious attention/censure.

Lauren says

A Plague on Both Your Houses

3 Stars

The Black Death is slowly making its way across Europe and toward England. At the same time, a series of mysterious deaths at Cambridge University arouses the suspicions of Matthew Bartholomew, a doctor and scholar at Michaelhouse college. As Bartholomew investigates, he uncovers a horrific web of lies and intrigue that makes him question those closest to him and may result in the destruction of the university itself.

The history of the rivalry between Oxford and Cambridge and the descriptions of the advent of the plague in England (symptoms and treatments) are particularly interesting. Unfortunately, the mystery is not as compelling as it becomes overly complex with several convoluted threads and an abundance of characters with a mish-mash of motivations and agendas.

Aside from Bartholomew, none of the characters are fleshed out well and it is difficult to become attached to any of them. Thus, the inevitable deaths due to the plague or murder fails to evoke an emotional response and there is very little tension or suspense.

All in all, a decent enough historical mystery and I may continue with the series, but it isn't a priority.

Susanna - Censored by GoodReads says

Not 40 pages in and so far we have 2 dead academics, a contentious election, and a near riot.

I feel the need for some popcorn.

ETA: Wow, plot doesn't slow down, that's for sure.

JBradford says

Every once in a while I do myself a favor by finding a book that just comes to me by happenstance. This one was in the waiting room at the VA hospital, a pocketbook with the front cover torn off, and it just happened to seem more interesting than the only two other books lying around: a garish romance and a mystery missing the first 136 pages. So I selected it largely because there was nothing else worth reading ... and it turns out to be excellent. The flyleaf lists nine other novels by Susan Gregory, and I will definitely be looking for them.

This one describes the tribulations of Dr. Matthew Bartholomew, a teacher Michaelhouse, a college in the

fledging University of Cambridge in 1348, which historians will recognize as the year that the Black Plague came to England. The story opens just before that awful event, with Bartholomew becoming mired in the vicious politics of university life. Some inexplicable deaths create an air of mystery, giving rise to a theory that agent of Oxford are bent on crippling the development of Cambridge; Bartholomew tries not to become involved, finding himself becoming more interested in a young lady living at a nearby nunnery, but then the plague arrives, and he finds himself stressed beyond measure as he takes care of the sick and dying while the political mystery continues to grow around him.

This novel gives an interesting (and terrifying) view of what life was like in Great Britain in 1348—how people lived and interacted, ate, dressed, and died. At the same time, it also happens to be an excellent mystery, carefully worked out in detail, s Bartholomew gradually begins to resolve who did what to whom.

LJ says

A PLAGUE ON BOTH YOUR HOUSES (Amateur Sleuth-England-1300s) – G

Gregory, Susanna – 1st in series

Time Warner Paperback, 1996- Paperback

Matthew Bartholomew is a physician and teacher at the University of Cambridge, which is suddenly having an epidemic of unexplained deaths that, he is told, relate to a power struggle with College of Oxford. But when the plague comes to Cambridge, Matthew is both trying to save lives and uncover the truth.

*** I had a bit of trouble caring about the supposed motive behind the murders and found it overly complicated. But I did care about the character of Matthew. He is well drawn, interesting and a character I would follow through a series. For me, though, the most interesting aspect was Matt's trying to deal with the plague and its impact, which was beyond imagination. It was a good first book; enough so that I shall read more of the series.

Kate Forsyth says

This is a medieval murder mystery with an unorthodox physician acting as amateur detective as dead bodies pile up all around the University of Cambridge. The story is at times incoherent, with so many characters and plots and sub-plots crossing and re-crossing that it is easy to become confused. However, some of the historical detail was very well done and any book that deals with the Black Death cannot help but be filled with ghoulish appeal. This is the first book in the long-running Chronicles of Matthew Bartholomew and I have been assured the books get better as they go on. It was readable enough that I'm willing to test this hypothesis.

Pammy says

This was the first book I picked up in the Matthew Bartholemew series, and I was hooked from the first chapter.

The book is one of a series, set in Cambridge, just after the Black Death in the 14th century. Bartholemew is a doctor at Michaelhouse college, who invariably ends up assisting his colleague and friend, the Senior

Proctor, in solving crimes. The pair are a classic crime-fighting partnership, and often quite entertaining.

Bartholemew's character is refreshing in that he is often villified for his "new" ideas regarding medicine and science, yet he is a valued member of Michaelhouse.

The main reason that I chose the book was that it was historical (and extremely accurate), and that I'd enjoyed the Ellis Peters Cadfael mysteries for many years. This book is equally well-written, superbly structured, and kept me guessing right up till the end.

Gregory has a pleasing style, which engages the reader, but is not afraid of approaching the political machinations of a Cambridge college at this time. I was particularly impressed by the amount of research that had obviously gone in to the novel.

Linda says

It is 1348 and the plague is hitting hard. All Brother Bartholomew wants to do at Cambridge is teach and take care of his needy patients. However, the Black Death is not the only death to be found. There are murders to be solved. Brother Bartholomew does not know who to trust so keeps his own counsel but that causes him to even distrust the people he loves. Who are the murderers and why are they causing so many problems? Will the Black Death kill them too?

This book was given to me by a friend because she liked it so well. It is a great read that starts out a little slow but becomes a page turner in short order. The characters are great and very believable. A must read for those who like historical fiction and death and mayhem with puzzles to be solved and people to be rescued!

Hayes says

Okay... pretty good mystery, too much university politics (the hostels vs. the Colleges vs. the townspeople vs. the merchants... I was very confused at times), too many names and characters (serves me right for reading in bed at night! too sleepy to pay attention!)

Well written, likable characters, nice historical backdrop... although the oozing buboes were a little much at times.

3 stars

Laura says

This is the first story on Mathew Bartholomew series when he tries to solve some murder in Cambridge University and treat with some unorthodox ways some patients affected by the Plague. The Oxford-Cambridge also comes out from time to time but it's not fully explored by the author.

Nancy says

Interesting mystery set in the middle-ages (1348-1349) dealing with the early years of Cambridge and the plague. I'm not an expert on this period by any means, so I can only assume that research was done and the basics of life at that time are more or less accurately related. I feel like the author didn't want to bog down an already dense story with speech that would be more representative of the time or with giving a lot of details of the period. So the language is straight forward and I felt like I had a feel for the period without being overrun with description.

The story is chock full of happenings and it doesn't really let up much.

My biggest complaint? The map at the front. If a map is included, I assume it is meant to help the reader understand the geography and get a picture of the relationships between areas mentioned in the story. Instead it was a frustration to me. Many places mentioned, some prominently, aren't even on the map. Sometimes, looking at the map, the description in the story didn't seem to match the map at all. The writing on the map is in an 'olde English' kind of font and tiny, so difficult to read. There are places on the map not mentioned at all in this story, but maybe they will be in subsequent installments as this is a series. I beg of you, use the map correctly or leave it out!

Overall, an interesting story with a decent mystery. I will probably check out the next book in the series.

Kivrin says

An enjoyable mystery read. Set in medieval Cambridge, the story follows a physician as he deals not only with murders and intrigue within the college but also with the onset of the Black Death. I liked Bartholomew a lot and there were several other good characters, but I found the mystery to be a little vague and hard to follow (not really being familiar with how Cambridge was set up in those days!) Still, I liked the setting, and I would probably read another of these mysteries if I came across it.

Samantha says

This was a book that had been recommended to me by several people as I lamented the fact that I had run out of Shardlake books to read. Some elements of Gregory's writing were reminiscent of Sansom's, even if I didn't feel quite the affection for Matthew Bartholomew as I did for Matthew Shardlake.

Bartholomew's story takes place significantly earlier than Shardlake's as well. The plague rages through England in 1348, and he finds himself one of the few physicians willing to treat and comfort the suffering poor. However, the plague is only the backdrop of the mystery that consumes Bartholomew's thoughts and threatens his life.

Residents of Michaelhouse at Cambridge are dropping like flies, and not just of the plague. As the bodies pile up, Bartholomew has suspicions of everyone surrounding him. He is intelligent, if a little naive, but is still shocked to the core when he discovers the truth behind the murders.

This plot is full of twists and turns, some of which are slightly implausible. I found it a fun read, satisfyingly sprinkled with historical tidbits. At times the story was too convoluted and the "Let's summarize what we

know" moments were annoying, but it was a good enough introduction to make me want to read more about the selfless physician, Matthew Bartholomew.

Manybooks says

This first of Susanna Gregory's Matthew Bartholomew novels still (and after more than fifteen years) ranks amongst my very favourites of this now quite extensive series (my original copy of A Plague on Both Your Houses, I literally stumbled upon in an airport bookstore in August 2000, and I actually managed to read the entire novel on my four hour flight from Calgary to Toronto, so enthralling and interesting the plot and the featured characters proved to be). Full of informative historical details (not only with regard to Medieval Cambridge, but the entire era of the Plague, the Black Death), and presenting an evocative, immediate sense of both time and place, the author introduces, portrays characters who grow on you, characters who become part of you and whom you might even personally enjoy having as friends and perhaps even more (well more characters like Matthew, Brother Michael, and Oswald Stanhope, as of course, the same cannot really be said with regard to some of the lesser and villainous personages, but truly, all of the presented and featured literary figures, both heroes and villains, are portrayed as richly nuanced, and even with those who do end up as scoundrels, as criminals, their villainy, their negativity, is often not all that obvious at the onset, is delightfully and even sometimes rather creepily and strangely hidden).

Combined with an at times horrifying, yet always thankfully realistic ambience and sense of what Cambridge as a university and as a town was like during the Middle Ages, during the first bout of the Black Death, A Plague on Both Your Houses is highly recommended for ANYONE (but especially for historical mystery enthusiasts who are looking for a series that is intelligent, informative and has living and breathing, has authentic seeming persons as its cast of characters and is also not generally not too overly and/or gratuitously violent in scope and nature). And the academic setting of Cambridge University is and always will be a much loved and massively appreciated added bonus, an evocative painting of academic life in Medieval Cambridge, Medieval Britain, both its positives and also its negatives.

Candace says

A medieval mystery during the time of the plague

This is a difficult book in that there are so many characters to keep straight! Most of them are teachers who have taken some form of religious orders and I did not identify with any of them; however, I did find the main character ,Matthew, growing on me during the second half of the book. During this time of medical discovery, most doctors knew that drawing blood with leeches and telling a person's humors by looking at the stars was not going to help the patient . But many doctors still did these things during this time of desperation to earn more money. Matthew stuck to his moral beliefs despite it costing him earnings and patients. I found the historical and medical information to be more interesting than the mystery! The mystery is not well-paced. Clues are laid out nicely in the beginning and then -nothing about the mystery for awhile and the book becomes very slow, and this cycle continues throughout the book. In the end, I would just say the mystery itself is mediocre. I don't know if the series gets better...I would only give book two a try if it fell in my lap,or hopefully on my Kindle, because I needed the Search to keep all of the characters straight.

Melinda says

A great reread. Love this series. Medieval sleuthing at its best.

Ingrid says

Enjoyable

Bettie? says

Cambridge, 1348

THE SCHOLAR WAITED IN THE BLACK SHADOW OF the churchyard trees for the Sheriff's night patrol to pass by, trying to control his breathing.

It has long been acceptable to include first line questions in trivia quizzes, however I see that end lines, other than that of A Tale of Two Cities, are starting to creep in too. So I shall start including them; no, I will not be trawling back but will add as they come up. Here is an end line that I suspect will never be important enough for any quiz:

'Come on, old friend', he said, tugging Bartholomew's sleeve to make him move, 'or you will make me miss my dinner.'

Overall, I have to agree with Hayes, too many characters and too many factions makes for a very muddled story, however being a fan of The Medieval Murderers series, Gregory's depictions of Bartholomew's career settle down into lovely tales.

So for this, a 3*, rounded up from 2.5*

Gretchen says

After finishing this novel, I felt like I had really read two separate novels. It seemed like there was a novel about the plague and a novel about the murders at Michaelhouse. I understand the plague was a big deal in the world at the time of the events of this novel but the way the writer included it took a little bit away from the mystery. The novel was written well enough for me to want to continue on with this series.
