



The Unquiet Bones

Melvin R. Starr

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Hugh of Singleton, fourth son of a minor knight, has been educated as a clerk, usually a prelude to taking holy orders. However, he feels no real calling—despite his lively faith—and he turns to the profession of surgeon, training in Paris, and then hanging his sign in Oxford.

Soon after, a local lord asks Hugh de Singleton to track the killer of a young woman whose bones have been found in the castle cesspool. Through his medical knowledge, Singleton identifies her as the impetuous missing daughter of a local blacksmith.

The young man she loved—whom she had provoked very publicly—is quickly arrested and sentenced at Oxford. But this is just the beginning of the tale.

The story of Singleton's adventure unfolds with realistic medical procedures, droll medieval wit, romantic distractions, and a consistent underlying sense of Christian compassion.

The Unquiet Bones Details

Date : Published 2008 by Monarch

ISBN : 9781854248855

Author : Melvin R. Starr

Format : Paperback 252 pages

Genre : Mystery, Historical, Historical Fiction, Fiction, Historical Mystery, Medieval



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From Reader Review The Unquiet Bones for online ebook

Scargosun says

I found it odd that this book was supposed to be in the 'religious fiction' section when I went looking for it. It was recommended to me because I am a fan of the Matthew Shardlake series by CJ Sansom. I thought it was just historical fiction. I bought it anyway even though I am not a fan of organized religion to say the least. The book has some strong religious overtones but it does not overshadow the the story as a whole which I think can be difficult but the author does it well.

The story follows a Medieval surgeon and his quest to solve a few murders for his new employer, a lord he stitched up during a chance encounter. At first, it is all about one body found in the cesspit of the castle but then the bodies start adding up. Hugh must juggle his new career as a surgeon and an appointment by the lord to find out who the bodies are and who killed them.

The book is well written by someone who is well versed in not only Medieval history, but Medieval medical history. It is an easy read but well worth that read. I will definitely be reading the other two in the series.

Moonlight Reader says

I reminded me a little bit of Brother Cadfael. Hugh de Singleton is a pleasant narrator.

Erin says

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Mel Starr's The Unquiet Bones landed in my inbox as most tour books do. I'd not heard of the author and the series was entirely unknown to me, but I like medieval fiction and felt the premise promising enough to take the plunge.

Now I'll be honest, it took me a while to get into this one. Starr's style isn't typical and I was several chapters in before I really got a handle on it, but it was smooth sailing from there on. Hugh de Singleton is an easy protagonist to understand and I liked that he isn't pompous or arrogant. In point of fact, his struggle to gain confidence in himself makes him rather empathetic and relatable.

The mystery itself could have been more complex, but I wasn't dissatisfied with how things played out. I liked the atmospheric quality of Bampton and I felt Starr's treatment of religion quiet interesting. That said, the surgical descriptions were by far my favorite element of the book and I think Starr's attention to detail in regard to the practice of medieval medicine brought something very special to the narrative.

Enjoyable and entertaining, The Unquiet Bones is an engaging tale of a compassionate man in uncertain times. Recommend to fans of Ellis Peters, Umberto Eco and Ariana Franklin.

Alana White says

An entertaining historical mystery set in fourteenth-century England, "The Unquiet Bones" by Mel Starr introduces Hugh de Singleton, the fourth and last son of a minor knight from the country of Lancashire, who, while attending Oxford, decides that rather than law, he will move to Paris and study surgery. And so it is as a surgeon he is called to tend to his patient, Lord Gilbert, lord of Bampton Castle. Impressed by Hugh's skills, Gilbert asks him to look in on two villeins who need care, and then implores him to quit Oxford for Bampton, where he will be the only surgeon for miles around.

Clients! And his own abode, courtesy of the wealthy lord! Hugh readily agrees and soon finds himself examining the bones of a young woman who has been murdered and her corpse hidden in the cesspit at the base of Bampton Castle wall. Reluctantly at first, at Lord Gilbert's request, Hugh agrees to investigate and embarks on a case that will involve not one young lass, but two, a rapacious knight and his squire, and a traveling minstrel show.

The book contains eye-opening forays into medieval surgery, a doomed (we assume) romance for Hugh, justice when it is deserved (but not without some nail-biting along the way), and the promise of more adventures to come. In fact, this is the first chronicle of Hugh de Singleton, surgeon, with the seventh chronicle ("The Abbot's Agreement") coming in November (2014).

Barb says

I'd been looking forward to reading this for a while. It was hard to find a copy locally; I finally got my hands on an ILL through my library.

I was a bit disappointed in the story as a whole, the mystery wasn't very complicated and there wasn't much in the way of character development. The protagonist seems to stumble on to the truth a bit too easily for my tastes and the overall feel to the book is light and fluffy. I am certain I will remember very little of this a year from now.

I like a lot of detail so I can imagine a story and the characters, there weren't enough details to satisfy me. Plot-wise things felt far too predictable to keep me guessing or entertained. I need a little more meat on the bones of a story to feel satisfied.

Kathryn says

I thoroughly enjoyed this book and the others in the series. I have read all five and eagerly await the sixth.

Kirsten says

This is a wonderfully atmospheric and obviously well researched historical mystery taking place in 14th

Century England.

It has an unusual protagonist in that he is a "modern" surgeon for the times. He has what we might consider very enlightened views for a doctor in the Middle Ages. But somehow he stumbles into the job of investigating a couple of murders even though he has no experience.

I really enjoyed the plot and the characters. The author's attention to historical detail is wonderful.

Mieczyslaw Kasprzyk says

I thoroughly enjoyed this book - in fact, I could hardly put it down. It is an easy and enjoyable read (I often feel that people, these days, forget that reading should, on the whole, be a pleasure and not some highly pseudo-intellectual and mis-imagined "spiritual" experience). The hero, Hugh de Singleton, is a likeable lad; a young surgeon newly embarked on his career, full of the uncertainties and humility that a good and skilled man will have (more aware of what he doesn't know than strutting about clothed in the rags he considers to be a fount of knowledge). He is thrust into the investigation of a murder and, as so often happens, begins to find his real self as he unravels the mystery.

Hugh's investigations have their dead-ends and red herrings - I won't spoil the enjoyment of the book by giving anything away - and there is much distracting him during his investigations... Nevertheless, Hugh gets to the truth at the end and, I would like to think, is a more confident and determined man for all that.

This is, as I have said, a very enjoyable read; Melvin Starr is not a bad writer and keeps the story simple. His descriptions are not overlaid with detail but there is enough there to bring very strong images to the mind; the village in snow, the muddy fields, castles and forest coppice all took on a very physical reality in my mind and I could see them and their inhabitants quite clearly.

I hadn't expected this... I had honestly thought that this would just be another, predictable medieval yarn. Instead, I have found an interesting author and a likeable hero to continue to follow.

Theresa says

What do you read after Agatha Christie and Dorothy Sayers?

Melvin Starr, of course!

I found this book by accident. Actually, the librarian recommended it to me... after mistakenly answering my query (for another book) with this author.

"The Unquiet Bones" kept my interest, and was a fast read. Even though I had to use the glossary several times to discover what this or that term meant during my reading, I found that, rather than being annoying (having to interrupt my reading so often to look these terms up), I was enjoying learning more about medieval life (and I thought I knew a lot already!).

The author cleverly disguises a surprise in the last one-third of this book...one I did not see coming!

Not too gory for my taste, plus a mix of suspense (when WILL the main character, whom you cannot help but root for, find the perpetrator of the crime?) and even some religious philosophy and questions that we all

ask ourselves... and just a touch of romance, all make for a novel that keeps me reading and looking for more by this author!

Tiff says

I'm close to giving this book one star. It was a good effort, the premise was good and although the story began with a lot of "telling" rather than showing, it did get better. I didn't realize when I purchased the ebook that it had so much religious connotation, I found it distracting but bearable. The story could have been fleshed out much more fully, another hundred pages or so and the content needed a lot of editing.

What really took away from the book were the constant typos and errors. A good single proof reading would have eliminated many of these obvious oversights. I don't really understand why an e-book can be published without these corrections being made.

Karen Brooks says

What a wonderful surprise this tightly written, historically very accurate and beautifully paced book turned out to be. This novel, set in the 1300s, follows the career of Hugh of Singleton, the youngest son of a knight who, while at university, discovers his calling is surgery. Setting up practice in Oxford, he is soon lured to the small town of Bamford and into the service of local lord, who asks him to track down the killer of a young woman whose body is found in the castle privy.

Unwilling at first to become involved, but understanding he has little choice, Hugh not only learns more about medicine than he ever bargained, but how to track clues and the uncanny ways in which killer's minds operate – all of which put him and others in danger. Added to this is the presence of his lord's lovely but unattainable sister, the fair Joan, a class above him, or is she?

Starr writes sparsely but with wit and an accuracy that pays homage to the period but without ever sacrificing plot or story.

The tale reminded me of C.J Sanson's Shardlake novels, but without the richness of the prose or world-building, but still with a wonderful tone. If you're looking to dip your toes into the medieval period, enjoy a quick murder-mystery (albeit when life was slower and, seemingly, fuller and crueler), then this is perfect. I'm already halfway through his next Hugh the surgeon book and loving it as well.

Laura says

I love historical fiction and mysteries. This book about Hugh de Singleton, surgeon, who also is busy trying to solve a murder for Lord Gilbert. The story opens with Master Hugh learning his trade and eventually moving to Bampton. Here bones are found and he begins to search not only for the killer, but the identity of the body. The story has many interesting twists and turns. A good story that I couldn't figure out the ending. I will be reading the second book.

Annet says

I enjoyed this book. After Child of God by Cormac McCarthy (brilliant, but rather confronting) I selected this one next, purposely. A Medieval story, easy to read, quite good in drawing the atmosphere and environment of those historic times, the crime story in it is pretty predictable, but still. I enjoyed it. 3.5 stars, rounded off to 4 because this was just the right book at the right time for me. And I love history books (from when I was young :-)) Will look for the 2nd one in this series soon.

Manybooks says

Although Melvin R. Starr's The Unquiet Bones is reasonably enjoyable as a historical mystery, the author most definitely is no Ellis Peters and no Susanna Gregory, and Hugh de Singleton is thus also neither a Brother Cadfael nor a Matthew Bartholomew.

And while The Unquiet Bones was a quick read and also rather a fun and diverting read, I certainly did not and do not at ALL feel that same and special sense of historic time and place I always tend to find when I reread my collection of Brother Cadfael mysteries (and almost all of them count as absolute personal favourites) or when I read a new Matthew Bartholomew mystery (or reread my favourites of this oh so appealing and enthralling Mediaeval Cambridge University mystery series). For while I can often even in considerable detail recall the specifics of the latter two series, and have always appreciated that history, that a description of the time, the everyday happenings, the lives of the people, of the characters both presented and alluded to are generally always front and centre with both Ellis Peters and Susanna Gregory, with Melvin R. Starr, while Hugh de Singleton is an appealing enough individual, there is just not that personal and historic connection to and for me (and the only detail that I do actually vividly and more than a bit painfully recall is that the manner in which the author has shown religion is or at least feels uncomfortably preachy, almost as though Melvin B. Starr and by extension Hugh de Singleton were trying to actively convert me to Mediaeval Catholicism, something that I certainly have NOT EVER experienced with either the Brother Cadfael or the Matthew Bartholomew series, and the former is set in a monastery, and the latter at Mediaeval Cambridge University, and at a time where both fellows and students had to at least take minor orders and most of the main university officials were in fact monks or friars). Two stars, and while I do in fact have the entire Hugh de Singleton series (so far) on my to-read list, I am actually not so sure I really want to continue with it.

Meikoyim says

I found myself easily picking up series after series the last couple months, I wonder whether 'tis to do with the deprivation of reading for the months prior. Maybe they are down to my own neglect for other activities but nevertheless I have stopped a good while before I picked up the books again.

And series are just so handy on the Kindle, only one click away... *sigh...*

But I think my Anglophile (better yet, Britophile, which isn't a word but should be) tendency is increasing these days, having developed a renewed liking for the dry humour and wry snark Brit authors insert into their work and give to their characters.

Hugh de Singleton captured my attention first with his fifth book, more specifically, its cover. I looked each of the entries up on both Amazon and Goodreads, and given a series was able to grow onto a fifth instalment with an average rating of above 3.5 for each, I decided I'd get the lot (and thus solveth the mystery of why I'm not a millionaire...).

As with most series (as long as I'm permitted to) I started with the first, and it did not disappoint.

It's entertaining, with one liners of quick wit and dry humour enough to linger for a while. I think the author tried to reach for more, he tried to insert some deep philosophy on theology and religious undertone in the stories and sometimes he's close to succeeding.

I get the philosophic parts, but the religious parts escape my understanding and like most text about the subject I skim through those lines. I like the tone the author chose though, not overtly lecturing and more self-justifying, making it more approachable than most.

I suppose it's down to the setting, back in those days (the 14th century) everyone was religious whether noble or peasant, and those with education had nothing to study but Latin scriptures that was passed down in the school of religion.

Hugh de Singleton reminded me a bit of Adelia, from the Mistress of the Art of Death series, set in Cambridgeshire (if my memory doesn't fail me) almost two hundred years prior. A female doctor before her time and a male surgeon pioneering his era, both in the then heart of England, fighting the old ways that were.

With the passing of Ariana Franklin I was sad that my adventures to that of medieval England would have to cease, now with the arrival of Hugh de Singleton, my travels shall resume. I am thankful for that.

And for such service I'm willing to overlook or even try to understand the theological part included in these chapters and adventures.

The first entry of the series had a simple enough plot with just enough twist to last through the end of the pages. But given it's a first book I'm willing to hold my judgement against this lack of depth until I finish more of the series.

Veronica says

"I had chosen to spend my life battling against ignoble death - against wasting disease and injury. But now I found myself in a struggle against the calamity of murder, the death of the young. I felt unequal to the assignment."

This was a leisurely paced story of a young Hugh de Singleton, a newly educated surgeon, hanging out his shingle and getting his new practice started in 1363 England. Fate soon crosses his path with that of a local Lord and before long sets him on the task of solving multiple murders. There's nothing about this story that will clamor for your attention or cause you to stay up way too late into the night to see what happens next, but there is a definite sense of pleasantness about it, the sense you get from a comfortable read, and Hugh makes for a very likable fellow (with a wry sense of humor). The glossary of terms was very much appreciated by this non-expert on anything medieval. How else would I have known that "sixth hour" is

actually noon? *grin* All in all, I liked the characters and the setting and will look for more in the series.

Richard Derus says

Rating: 3* of five

This was an agreeable little mystery. I went with the author to fourteenth century Oxford and Bampton, visiting an England pretty well mapped in fiction by now. Still and all, Mr. Starr's characters made agreeable traveling companions, and his plot kept me interested.

A university trained surgeon goes to set up practice in a small English country village because he accidentally helps the Lord of said village when he suffers a minor injury in Oxford. A murder takes place, and Hugh de Singleton, newly minted surgeon, uses his knowledge and his wits to seek the killer of a local lightskirted lass. More murders occur, and the perpetrator is brought before the law; but Hugh, as Starr has made him, seems unsure if justice was done, or merely the law was served.

Religion looms large in this book, but quite appropriately so, since this is the time of the Catholic Church's greatest power. John Wyclif, he of the vernacular Bible and proto-Reformation figure, was a mere irritation at that point, so the hegemony over spiritual matters and the temporal power of the Church weren't in serious question.

It's agreeably done, this mystery. I'm not sufficiently enamored to seek out others in the series. I don't like pseudo-archaic dialect much, but this isn't egregious. I'd simply prefer to spend my eyeblinks elsewhere in future. Read away, historical mystery fans, nothing here will jolt you.

Burçak K?l?ç Sultano?lu says

Okudu?um ilk orta ça?da geçen polisiyeydi. Cerrahl?k yapan kahraman?z Hugh, Lord'un emriyle kalenin tuvalet çukurunda bulunan kemiklerin sahibini ve suçluyu bulmakla görevlendirilir. Ara?t?rmalar yaparken ba?ka cinayete kurban gitmi? iki adam bulur ve bu 3 cinayetin birbiriyile ba?lant?l? oldu?unu dü?ünerek ara?t?rmalar?na ba?lar.

Günlük gibi bi kitap oldu?u için doktor i?ini yaparken baya?? t?p yöntemi anlat?yor ilgimi çekti eski yöntemler de?i?ikmi? :) Kitap s?km?yor ak?c?yd?. Ve belirtmek istiyorum yazar?n ilk kitab?ym?? bence çok çok ba?ar?l? olmu? buna göre de yarg?lamak laz?m :)

Athena says

3.5 stars: I liked it, but it's clearly a first novel

Well researched and paced, the biggest issue I had with this is the preachiness that comes through from some of main character Hugh's conversations with Oxford Dons and others. The conversations themselves seem stilted and exist not to show us something more of Hugh, but to show us the author's own religious beliefs. A

secondary drawback is the author's habit of pre-shadowing: 'it must've been God's Will that we did thus-and-such' before he takes us through thus-and-such. That's just irritating.

Those issues aside, Starr has done an excellent job of conveying a slice of 14th-century life. His era and people seem realistic and he clearly knows whereof he writes. The mystery itself takes a few unexpected turns and they're well done: clearly the sort of thing that might have (and probably did) happen in that time. There's a very clear sense of the smallness of life in the middle ages: one knew one's neighbors and perhaps a few people within a small radius of maybe a few miles, but very few people had much sense of anything beyond that whether they lived in town or country.

It's the general feeling of the era that Starr conveys which makes me want to read more of his work: I just hope he can leave out some of the overt preaching because it's not necessary to the strength of what he can write.

Mitch McCrimmon says

This sounded like a good read and I wanted to like it but couldn't get past about 10% or less. The long intro on how the main character got started in his profession was boring to me. Would have preferred action earlier, but the killer blow was when the protagonist entering a small town asks: "Do all small English towns have a High Street?" Well, that's a question an American tourist would ask, not a 14th century Englishman. Then in the next paragraph he notes that his arrival is creating a lot of attention so he says "But people in small towns are like that." This throw-away cliche totally put me off and I couldn't continue.
