



Paying the Piper

Sharyn McCrumb

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"She's Agatha Christie with an attitude; outrageous and engrossing at the same time."

Steven Womack,

NASHVILLE BANNER

Book four in Sharyn McCrumb's Elizabeth MacPherson murder mystery series.

A motley crew of American and British professionals and amateurs gathers for an archaeological dig into prehistoric burial rites on a small Scottish island. Things already aren't going so well, when one of the strongest in the crew dies suddenly. Afraid for her life, fellow digger and forensic anthropologist Elizabeth MacPherson probes the rocky topsoil for a reason behind the evil aura of death that seems to hover over them. Is the excavation cursed by the ancient dead...or is there a more modern explanation behind the group's strangely rising mortality rate...?

Paying the Piper Details

Date : Published November 13th 1988 by Ballantine Books

ISBN : 9780345345189

Author : Sharyn McCrumb

Format : Paperback 192 pages

Genre : Mystery, Fiction, Cultural, Scotland, Cozy Mystery, History, Archaeology

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From Reader Review Paying the Piper for online ebook

Jennie says

I have read and enjoyed other McCrumb books but this wasn't even worth reading.

Katherine Clark says

This might be my least favorite book in the series. Second (or third) time reading this series, and I am doing it out of order which is, sorry for the rep., against the natural order of things. But it is interesting what I'm gleaning. For one thing, I am not sure if our protagonist, Elizabeth, should be marrying Cameron. Shockers.

Anyway, back to this mystery. Not much of a mystery, and not much of a villain, though sort of. Still, I love the characters (sort of), and the setting is wonderful.

Tina says

I found this story on vacation and gobbled it right up. It's a murder mystery that takes place on a remote, isolated island off the coast of Scotland with a small band of archeologists researching a stone henge type dig. I myself participated on a dig of a henge monument in Scotland back when I was in college. I did not encounter any sinister happenings, but I really could experience the site in the story and what the characters were doing. I loved it. It was my first trip abroad and I was on my own in a foreign country. It was just as I remembered, although my dig was inland and we all lived in a very derelict old estate nearby.

Deanna says

Sharyn McCrumb writes insightful little fluffy mystery novels, and this one is a little more macabre than most. The central character, Elizabeth MacPherson, is a forensic anthropologist, and is participating in an dig on a northern Scottish island while her boyfriend, Cameron, is on a nearby biology research station. Her strange "dig-mates", each with his or her own unique personality, don't make for an enjoyable time, and then death starts to creep in. This is one in a series.

Eileen says

So so, I got the impression the author got bored and finished writing the book quickly

Rae says

A mediocre Scottish Highlands mystery. It was funny but far too contrived for a frequent mystery reader. I have enjoyed other titles by McCrumb much more.

Sarah says

Another Elizabeth McPherson mystery where the ending came really fast, and in this case, the mystery pretty much resolved itself. I was wondering when were going to come back around to Keenan's murder. I guess I should have figured out the killer sooner, since the predicament of everyone being stranded on an island and incommunicado bears a strong resemblance to Agatha Christie's "And Then There Were None." I would really like to see Elizabeth trying to catch a wild seal and get its collar off without getting bitten. Also, the constant shifts in point of view were annoying. You have to get your bearings at the beginning of each section and figure out if it's Elizabeth's travel journal, or Cameron (just talking to himself, I guess), or the semi-omniscient narrator.

Roni says

It takes place on a small Scottish island, full of foreboding atmosphere, naturally, where Elizabeth MacPherson, a forensic anthropologist, and a crew of archaeologists are looking into prehistoric burial rites. Even though it is not related to her field of study, she desires to re-trace of her ancestors from Appalachia in western part of North Carolina to the Scotland Highlands by taking up a site dig for a brief summer. And then, of course, a crew member dies. I tried to play detective along as I read, but Paying the Piper totally faked me out -- the author, Sharyn McCrumb used one of the most brilliant murder methods I've ever come across in my reading in mystery books. I enjoy learning something new about Scotland's and England's culture and history.

Suzanna says

This book was okay. Not as funny as McCrumb's books in this series usually are, not as suspensful as I might have hoped, either. Not a whole lot of the usual "Southern charm" and trivia. Just reasonably entertaining.

I will say she worked in some interesting trivia on anthropology and even more, Scotland. McCrumb herself has some Scottish roots; one side of her family hails from traditional South, the other from Appalachia. Apparently in researching her Appalachian side, she has enjoyed learning about the Scottish piece of that background and has woven it into this series. Elizabeth is obviously Sharyn in many ways.

There is some foreshadowing of what will happen later in this series (I'm not reading it in order), which was an interesting choice. Usually the authors I read foreshadow within a book, but not a series; if you like picking things like that up and are the sort to go back and reread books, or if you don't read in order (like myself), that may be a bonus for you.

Character development-wise, I'm not crazy about Elizabeth's boyfriend (later in the series, husband); he seems flat to me and less thought out than most of her characters. I'm guessing she normally bases characters on folks she knows, but based him more on imagination. Also, I find Elizabeth less likable in this book when she interacts with him. She's a bit of a twit - the kind of girl who makes herself cry so the man she is with

will do things for her.

Tom Hooker says

I generally like Sharyn McCrumb's work, but this novel gained no traction until the last few pages. The book was published in 1988, and her work has improved since. This is the story of Elizabeth McPherson, and of her trip to Scotland to be part of an archaeology dig on an offshore island. While in her beloved Edinburgh, she witnesses a murder, then she whisks off with her team-mates to the dig site, where they spend several days enduring the cold and not getting along. Only in the last thirty or so pages (of the 180 page book) does the story come alive. The crisis and resolution is satisfactory, it just should have been set up earlier and in more depth.

Denise says

I thought the book was short and there seemed to be very little character development, probably because the book was short. The whole concept seemed far-fetched, but I did like the American/Scottish /English comparing and contrasting that pointed out the romantic visions we have about England, Scotland, etc. and the idea that Europeans seem to have that we all live in California.

Charlene says

Of the four first books so far, this was not my favorite. A remote island near Outer Hebrides, archaeological dig.

I'm still committed to this series, so will order next book from library.

Kate says

"A motley crew of American and British professionals and amateurs gather for an archaeological dig into prehistoric burial rites on a small Scottish island. The quarters are cramped, cold, and Scottish-summer soggy. Tempers are already simmering when a bagpipe-playing, crime-enthusiast American is found dead in his tent. Then one of the strongest in the crew dies mysteriously.

Afraid for her life, fellow digger and forensic anthropologist Elizabeth MacPherson, in love with myth and Celtic folklore, probes the rocky topsoil for a reason behind the evil aura of death that seems to hang over them. Is the excavation cursed by the ancient dead ... or is there a more modern and sinister explanation behind the group's strangely rising mortality rate?"

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Elizabeth has gotten wetter and wetter. Now she's poor Cameron into getting her on a dig in Scotland, so she can be near him during the summer. She's gone completely potty about her Scottish ancestry, and all things Scottish. All things Scottish, as long as they're coeval with the '45, or thereabouts. She's changed from an

ascetic, witty, sensible young woman into a complete ninny: gazing wistfully out to sea, manipulating Cameron into doing what she wants, whether or not it's sensible. Etc.

Good plot though -- and I didn't see the end coming. Elizabeth did manage to climb out of her romance-induced fog to handle the situation, figure out how to send for help, etc. I would have given the book one less star if she hadn't pulled herself together like that at the end.

As always, a good read -- not too demanding but well written and entertaining.

aPriL does feral sometimes says

What the hell?

The first book in the Elizabeth MacPherson series was terribly written, but it clearly was a cozy satire using the mystery conventions of the 1930's for a platform to entertain the reader with comedic silliness. The second and third novels were truly funny, with extremely hilarious insult repartee, and once again the books were satiric cozy mysteries. Elizabeth was distinctly a bubble-headed dimwit, stumbling her way into murders and accidentally learning who done it.

Number four in the series is a nondescript ordinary cozy featuring a normalized Elizabeth on a dig in Scotland. She has followed her boyfriend, Cameron Dawson, back to his home country where he is conducting research on his favorite subject, seals. She wants to be with him so she's volunteered to dig in dirt for a group of scientists and students interested in scientifically studying an ancient Celt circle of stones in place on an island, near where Dawson is studying his seals.

At first, things proceed normally with the usual minor tensions of camping domesticity on a primitive deserted island where academics who were strangers to each other before must function together in the common cause of archeology and scientific measuring. Then, one member of their party falls off of a cliff, sustaining what seems to be a serious injury, and shortly after he is removed by boat to hospital, a storm settles over the island with a constant drenching rain. Soon after, first one of their party, then another, begin to cough. The group struggles with the boredom of forced inactivity - but one morning, the one with the worst cough doesn't wake up. In fact, he isn't even breathing. Then, the discovery is made that the radio has been sabotaged. They are stranded.

Elizabeth isn't certain, but she wonders if they've been intentionally poisoned. She rejects the idea. Perhaps they were exposed to a toxin from the soil. If she can't think of a way to contact Cameron, on a nearby island, it will be too late for most of them. They are all coughing except her. She was taking penicillin for a cut on her finger, but while she appears to be safe, she doesn't want her new friends to die. Time is running out.

Sigh. Not much comedy this time. The characters are soothingly conventional, and the writing meets the needs of cozy mystery readers looking for an expected adventure which won't tax either the libido or intelligence.

(view spoiler)

Emily says

I didn't like this book until after chapter 10. It was boring and annoying. Elizabeth's character was disappointing...again. It's like she gets more stupid with each book. She's studied sociology, plants and herbs, forensic anthropology, history, and lore and she's still a ditz. Here's this educated, southern woman and half of what she says is wrong as pointed out by her boyfriend. It's embarrassing. And yet she always "knows" what's going on. I don't know how and it isn't explained. She just magically figures it out and bam The End. I will continue to read the rest of the series because it's good enough to read when you have nothing else to read or want/need something light and familiar. I hope Elizabeth "gets smart" in the following books.
