



The Harper's Quine

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When newly qualified lawyer Gil Cunningham finds the body of a young woman in Glasgow Cathedral he is asked to investigate. He identifies the corpse as a woman he recognized at the May Day dancing in Glasgow Cross, the runaway wife of the cruel and unpleasant nobleman John Semphill. With Maistre Pierre, a French master mason involved in a new building at the Cathedral, Gil begins his search for the murder weapon in the lanes and yards of the city and to ask some difficult questions. His investigation leads him to Semphill and his household—his mistress and men-at-arms—dealing with the burgh constable, householders and musicians, as well as his feelings for the mason's lively daughter, Alys, whom he has come to find increasingly attractive. The complications of a second murder lead Gil and Pierre to the Isle of Bute. There Gil faces rumors of missing silver, a controversial elopement and the significance of a girl with a toothache, as well as a personal crisis around his family's expectations that he should join the priesthood. When the killer is finally exposed, justice strikes from an unexpected direction. A medieval murder mystery, *The Harper's Quine* picks up where Brother Cadfael left off.

The Harper's Quine Details

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From Reader Review The Harper's Quine for online ebook

Kathleen Schilling says

I really enjoyed this book, it definitely was a good start to the series

Dorian says

This is another book that I picked up because a friend enjoyed it. It's a murder mystery, set in late 15th-century Glasgow, a time and place about which I know pretty much nothing. Which is probably a good thing, because if there are any anachronisms I didn't notice them.

The setting is, in fact, very well drawn; I felt I was seeing a good picture of medieval Glasgow and its habits and customs. Characterisation is strong too, with even the minor characters clearly delineated. And the plot...yes, the plot was well done too, nicely paced and neither too complex nor too simple. Though I was at least as interested in the lives of the characters as in the solution to the mystery.

Marlowe says

I think that anyone who pays some attention to my reviews here would easily be able to guess that I love mysteries and I love historical fiction. So when I came across Harper's Quine as a book that offers both, I had to buy it. But, as is so often the case, it sat on my shelf next to a whole lot of other unread books as I tried mightily to catch my reading rate up to my shopping rate.

Finally, finally, it was time to give Harper's Quine a turn, and I immediately regretted that I had waited so long!

Gil Cunningham is expected to enter the priesthood. But when he becomes mixed in with a murder investigation, he is led to meet the lovely Alys, his future becomes rather less than certain.

I really enjoyed this book for quite a few reasons. The biggest is that the mystery is solvable by the reader – pay attention while Gil gathers clues, and it's possible to figure out the murder rather early on. It's a little frustrating to see Gil continue to stumble about in ignorance, but it's immensely satisfying to be proven correct at the end. These are my favourite sort of mysteries!

Another aspect I really enjoyed was the relationship with Alys. Alys is an active participant in the mystery solving. She's smart, capable, and contributes a lot to the detective work. But at the same time, this doesn't feel anachronistic. Unlike Rowland's Uechi Reiko, Alys is not a modern feminist trapped in the past. She's a strong woman, but she's still plausible. And, as a woman, she has many responsibilities. While her father and lover are out having great adventures, she must remain mindful of her household and its need to be continuously managed. And she can't just "do it all" – there are times when she can't get to a particular task that's relevant to the mystery because she is occupied with being the lady of the house.

If I had to look for a flaw, it would be with the fate of the baddie. I've complained about this before, I know,

but I find it rather distasteful when the baddie(s) meets with a gruesome end. I understand that it's supposed to be cathartic, or some such nonsense, but it just strikes me as barbaric. A simple hanging, while only slightly less brutal, would at least have the benefit of being that age's expression of justice.

But leaving that aside, this was a truly remarkable book, a rare gem. I can't recommend it highly enough to anyone who is a fan of mysteries and/or historical fiction!

Tomgirl deni says

Very enjoyable will be reading more by this author. never really thought of Glasgow being a mediaeval town before.

Aoife says

I am somewhat conflicted about this book. The characters were really great. Gil and Alys both have somewhat modern views for their time but not so extreme that you feel like a 21st century person fell through time and is now enraged by the treatment of the poor/women/children or holds speeches about how capital punishment is wrong.

The mystery itself was quite well done, too. I did figure out who did it about halfway-through but I had no idea about the why and figuring out that together with Gil turned out to be quite fascinating, too. There was a lot of focus on the legal proceedings which is quite unusual for a historical crime-novel but somehow I found it really interesting even though I'm someone who wouldn't touch a contemporary legal thriller with a ten-foot pole. It was quite interesting to learn that at least during the time the book was set in the Scottish legal system was quite modern in many aspects (apparently women could divorce their husbands under certain circumstances and inherit land in their own right).

That was one of the occasions where I'd wished for some kind of postscript that got into some more detail (I must say that the author did a good job at giving the really necessary information in the text without having massive infodumps but I would have liked to know how long these laws had been in effect, if they had really been enforced everywhere etc. and that bit about the harp. There's a scene where Gil explains that as the harper made a formal statement while having the harp in his hand it's legally binding and I would love to know more about the background of that).

Now there is one issue I have with this book and I am not sure if I should retract a star for that:

If you're not a native English-speaker you will need *a lot* of patience and a huge dictionary or preferably the e-book version of this book and an e-reader with a good in-built dictionary.

I do consider myself as quite a good English-speaker (studying the language and all that) and I have never read a book with that many words I'd never heard before.

There is generally quite some archaic language, some specialist terminology (mainly legal and clerical with some architecture thrown in) and then there's a lot of Scots.

I so could not resist that one

Like really A LOT. Not only wee bairns and bonnie lassies, quite a large part were words I couldn't find in my dictionary.

To be fair: The archaic and specialist terms were all in it and most of the Scots I could vaguely guess from the context what it meant (often rather creative insults) but I usually couldn't help myself and just had to

google the exact meaning so again a glossary would have been welcome.

So considering that the mystery was a bit easy to see through and the language-barrier I only give three stars but with a tendency towards four and I will read the next book in the series in the probably non-to-distant future because I really liked Gil and Alys and if the future cases get a bit less predictable this has the potential to become a good series.

Theresa says

A slow start, but hang in there, the action picks up. Good mystery plot.

Megan says

I love an historical mystery series!!! I'm very excited to find a new series with interesting characters and decent plot. This book was a good start and I'm hoping the series will get even better.

Margaret says

I enjoyed this first book. It was an easy, yet entertaining read; perfect for a cozy winter weekend by the fireplace. I will definitely continue reading this series.

Veronica says

I enjoyed the plot of this novel but found the language used to be difficult to understand at times. The characters are all well developed but there are just too many of them to keep straight.

Jeannen says

Not sure how I heard of Pat McIntosh – possibly one of the Amazon “customers who bought this also bought...” lists. I wasn’t sure I was going to like the first one because of the use of dialect, some of which I still haven’t been able to figure out from the context, but once I got used to it, I really enjoyed it “The harper’s quine” and then went on to “The Nicholas feast.” I am lost in the Scots politics of Campbells and Montgomerys and Hamiltons and Cunninghams – maybe I need to read a history or take notes and draw diagrams. I don’t think I need to know that stuff to enjoy the series, though, of which there are at this point, alas, only two or three more.

Sarai says

Gil Cunningham is a medieval Scottish man tasked with investigating the death of a harper's woman. Learned in law and intended for the church, he is reasonable and does not jump to conclusions. With help from a mason (who has a lively, lovely, single daughter), Gil solves the crime - and finds himself a bride.

This is the first in a series, the rest of which I have not yet read. I was interested to see if I could find something kind of similar to the Cadfael series, but I am not a fan of medieval mystery author Michael Jecks, whose writing style I just can't get into. Pat McIntosh's writing style is not precisely like Ellis Peters, who wrote the Cadfael series and has what I consider a more "dense" style (it takes a while to get into the flow of the prose, and I can't really call it light reading), but it was even and detailed enough for my tastes. Not as light of reading as Agatha Christie, but a nice medium between Peters and Christie. I would recommend it to anyone who likes medieval settings and mysteries but doesn't want to get bogged down in detail and historical accuracy (though I did learn that they used to pack sore teeth with pigeon dung - ugh!).

Maureen E says

by Pat McIntosh

I picked this one up at a recent public library trip after a recommendation from Deb. I was hoping for a satisfying mystery with interesting characters and a clearly drawn setting. I definitely found all of that here.

Gil Cunningham, a young man struggling with his desire to do right by his family and his knowledge that he is not fitted for the priesthood, discovers a dead body. Because the body is on the grounds of Glasgow Cathedral, of which his uncle is a Canon, he is given the task of finding the dead woman's killer.

I'm sure that this book has been compared to Ellis Peter's Cadfael series. Oddly enough, I was more charmed by Gil's story than Cadfael's. I especially liked the sense that Gil's faith was very real to him--I felt that he took it seriously and that McIntosh took his taking it seriously, seriously. While I know the medieval church had its problems, there were some simple devout people. I very much enjoyed the fact that we were given a chance to see one of them.

I do have some lingering questions, mostly about the character of Alys. While I know from my classes that there were extremely intelligent and well educated women in the middle ages, such as Christine de Pizan, or even Heloise, I wasn't clear on how Alys had gained her knowledge. I believe that masons like her father were highly respected and wealthy men, but he didn't seem particularly educated (intelligent, yes, but that's not the same thing). Maybe McIntosh explains it a bit more in later books, but as it was I remained a bit puzzled.

I suppose I kept comparing this to Ellis Peters as I was reading, partly because of the medieval connection and partly because they're both mysteries and so on. While I thought McIntosh did a marvellous job of setting the scene--conveying a sense of the society and time period, I did miss the sense of place that is so intense in Peters.

Final verdict? I'll definitely be continuing with the series as I found this one both enjoyable and well-done.

Book source: public library

This series was definitely my favorite set of mysteries from 2010 (except for Dorothy Sayers, but it's always except for Dorothy Sayers). Set in medieval Glasgow, they depict Scottish life lovingly and take religion seriously. The characters are both interesting and likable. What's not to like? [2010 in books]

Debbi says

I know I am smitten by a good story if it has me seeking out more information on the time or place (Wikipedia has not been helpful this time, however).

Even though I figured out who the murderer was by the middle of the book, it was still quite enjoyable watching Maister Gil untangle the knot too. While I knew "who", I didn't quite figure out "why" until our protagonist did. Intertwined with the story is Gil who is given the duty to ferret out the murderer. He's a newly minted lawyer and on the threshold of the priesthood, but still deeply troubled by this decision. I worried that I'd have another irreverent look at the church, where all those of cloth were judgmental, greedy and selfish, but I was so very pleasantly surprised. It was obvious that McIntosh was trying to be fair-handed. Not to say there weren't a few anachronism in my opinion, but those mostly dealt with women's roles.

I found all the characters to be written with some depth and quite believable. McIntosh weaves quite a satisfying story .

lisa hedges says

Lot to look up

I only found one historical inaccuracy, in this book. It was a hard read because I had to keep looking up words for their meaning; this did not put me off and reminded me of my friends from Glasgow.

This is worth reading for the murder investigation story and the insight into life as it was.

Jeanne says

Meh. I knew from the beginning of the book that Gil wasn't going to be a priest. It was pretty clear who was going to be his wife.

The author did a fair job of concealing the murderer but it wasn't a complete surprise because the hints were so blatant. I'm not interested enough to read anything else by this author
