



A Cruel Necessity

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The theatres are padlocked. Christmas has been cancelled. It is 1657 and the unloved English Republic is eight years old. Though Cromwell's joyless grip on power appears immovable, many still look to Charles Stuart's dissolute and threadbare court-in-exile, and some are prepared to risk their lives plotting a restoration.

For the officers of the Republic, constant vigilance is needed. So, when the bloody corpse of a Royalist spy is discovered on the dung heap of a small Essex village, why is the local magistrate so reluctant to investigate? John Grey, a young lawyer with no clients, finds himself alone in believing that the murdered man deserves justice. Grey is drawn into a vortex of plot and counter-plot and into the all-encompassing web of intrigue spun by Cromwell's own spy-master, John Thurloe.

So when nothing is what it seems, can Grey trust anyone?

A Cruel Necessity Details

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From Reader Review A Cruel Necessity for online ebook

Melisende d'Outremer says

Cromwellian England was, during the 1650s, a hot-bed of political intrigue and factionalism, with the execution of King Charles I still a sore-point for many. The government had been rocked by purges, and its sitting membership so reduced it became known as the "barebones parliament". Laws had been introduced to severely curtail and regulate people's behaviour; frivolity and enjoyment were frowned upon as the Puritans dominated all aspects - even Christmas was banned!

"... rebellion is ... a perfectly respectable family tradition ..."

As so we are introduced to our narrator, one John Grey, an idealist young lawyer in the reign of Cromwell, who finds himself in the middle of an investigation into a spy ring, known as the Sealed Knot. The more Grey delves, the more he finds himself on the wrong side of Cromwell's spy-master, John Thurloe, and before long, things are turned around - the hunter becomes the hunted.

This is a well told story with enough action, intrigue, double-dealing and, at times, humour, to keep the reader suitably entertained, and wondering down which path are they being led and to what conclusion.

JJ says

I have read The Herring Sellers Apprentice by LC Tyler and this book is written in the same style.

It may be set in the latter years of Cromwell's rule but I didn't get a sense of time or place.

John Grey is our lead protagonist. After studying law at Cambridge he is back in his village in Essex. On getting drunk reacquainting himself with friends he comes across a mysterious stranger and later a dead body.

Grey undertakes some investigation and also tells everyone he knows virtually everything he learns despite feeling the killer may be someone he knows. This is foolhardy and annoying. Clues have to be virtually pointed out to him. Not that he is stupid but he can't see past the fact that he grew up with these people. His thoughts and discourse can be quite humorous but there is no great suspense and I worked out early on who did it though not why.

Like the Herring books it is very tongue in cheek, the lead females, though a bit abrasive, know more than Grey ever does. Why are they not the lead?

Tyler's books are very popular but I just cannot take to the style.

Deborah Swift says

A Cruel Necessity is unique - crime fiction set during Cromwell's rule after the English Civil Wars. What makes this different is the intentionally humorous twist. This is a period I love, and L C Tyler has done a great job of bringing it to life, in all its grubby glory. The plot includes the spying activities of Thurloe, the nebulously changing factions of Roundheads and Cavaliers, and the sheer difficulty of identifying a murder suspect in the era before forensics. Our main character, John Grey, is a very likeable trainee lawyer, intelligent but naive, and his blundering but well-intentioned attempts to bring the murderer to justice are

thwarted at every turn by men (and women) more world-weary than himself. The delights of this novel lie in the clever and witty dialogue, and in the satisfyingly complex plot, which includes code-breaking and red herrings galore, and even a brief appearance by Pepys. Right up until the end I was as baffled as Grey, but when the resolution came, it was a corker. Clever, witty stuff, and I hope there will be many more in this series.

Agnesxnitt says

John Grey, newly qualified lawyer, returns home to his Essex town to find his part of Cromwell's Commonwealth is steeped in intrigue, hidden faces and murder.

Investigating the death of a stranger in his home town, he finds disinterest from the local magistrate, annoyance from the magistrate's secretary - a popinjay in Royalist feathers called Pope, doubts from his best friend from childhood, and a new frisson of interest from Aminta, a young lady and friend from childhood who is sharper than she seems.

But investigation brings John into danger himself, and his questions soon appear to lead to the death of an orphan stable boy who may or may not have witnessed something sinister, and soon John has to flee to London to take up a post with the Secretary of State's department involved in the interception and decoding of letters from factions loyal to the deposed King's son and his court now living in Exile in the Netherlands. I don't remember reading anything from this author before, and it was alright but I don't know if I will read anything further from him/her.

A library book so to be returned this coming weekend.

Mr Geoffrey Hopkins says

Goodread

I found the book quite hard to get into at first, but slowly it drew me in. The plot has many twists and turns that make it extremely enjoyable.

Maggie Kiely says

Having read many historical mysteries and loved them for example CJ Sansom, SJ Paris. This was not an easy book to get into and it did not hold the interest. The plot is fair but John Grey was quite a bland naive character and did not warm to him.

With so much great fiction available in this category I will not be picking up this author again.

Paula - says

This book is solidly in the middle. It was okay. Nothing about it made me love or dislike it. The story was engaging enough that you wanted to know what happens. But it wasn't a page turner.

Beverly says

This is the first of the series and depicts a young John Grey trying to untangle the mystery surrounding a murder in his village. The outcome is not too surprising but there are a few puzzles left for future installments.

Marlene says

Originally published at Reading Reality

I picked this one up out of simple curiosity – it refers to itself as the “first” John Grey historical mystery, and that caught my attention. Because Diana Gabaldon has written a series of historical mysteries featuring Lord John Grey from her Outlander series, set a century after this John Grey. I wondered how they compared.

While Lord John Grey, by the time we meet him in Outlander, is a bit older and a whole lot cannier than John Grey, erstwhile lawyer, they do have one thing in common. And it is something they have in common with many historical mysteries, starting with Brother Cadfael, set in the 1100s and often considered the progenitor of the current popularity of historical mysteries.

All of these series are set at times of great political upheaval. In Brother Cadfael’s time, England was in the midst of a civil war. Lord John Grey, in the 1740s and onwards, faces the Jacobite rebellion and the run up to the American Revolution.

John Grey, the hero, and sometimes dupe of Tyler’s series, lives in the middle of an equally disruptive political upheaval in the late 1650s. In a way, the issues that swirl around him tie into Lord John Grey and the time of the not-too-distant American Revolution. One of the things that made the American experiment singular at its inception was that the nascent Republic created a method for the peaceful transfer of power.

In John Grey’s 1657, that concept only existed in one form, “the King is dead, long live the King.” Other than in a monarchy, there was no other way to go about it. And not all of those transfers were particularly peaceful. In 1657, Oliver Cromwell’s Protectorate was coming to its inevitable end. Not because there was anything particularly wrong happening, at least not in light of its time, but because the rise and continuation of the Protectorate was focused solely on the life of its creator and Protector, Oliver Cromwell. And no man lives forever.

Cromwell was 50 when the Protectorate was established, and by the opening days of A Cruel Necessity, nearing 60. People on both sides, Royalist and Roundhead, were looking to the future. If Cromwell attempted to pass the Protectorate to his own son, he would be establishing a monarchy, no better than the one he deposed. And possibly worse. Richard Cromwell wasn’t half the man his father was. Possibly not even a quarter.

Granting the Protectorate to one of his generals would set up a military dictatorship – also not a desirable option. No country can afford to be at war forever.

People were starting to look at the third option – invite the son of their deposed and beheaded King back to England to pick up the reins of monarchy, and reign England. And it is A Cruel Necessity indeed that many people were trying to keep a foot in both camps, in the hope of saving their families if not themselves from economic ruin and a traitor's death.

Poor John Grey, back home after a year at Cambridge studying law, is trying to figure out what he wants to do with his life. And he's just a little too honest, and more than a bit too easily fooled, for the villagers to trust him with any of the things that they are doing to deal with that onrushing but uncertain future.

So John keeps trying to do the right thing, even if he can't figure out what that right thing is, or what might be the best way might be. And even though he can't seem to see that everyone around him is lying through whatever teeth they have left.

And so is he.

Escape Rating B: In the end, I liked this story, but not for the things I usually expect in a historical mystery.

One of the things that I liked a lot was the way that the historical period and its messes played into the mystery. In another time and place, these events simply wouldn't have happened. But it helped that I already knew the outlines of this history. I have had a lifelong fascination with English history, even though none of my ancestors came from anywhere near there. And while the period I studied centered on the Tudors, I did dip my toes into both the Plantagenets and the Stuarts. The Protectorate bit a chunk out of the Stuart period.

Which is why the review began with a history lesson. I'm not sure how this book will work for readers with no interest or familiarity in the period. I found all the period details absolutely fascinating, but I wonder if some readers will just get lost in them.

Usually in a historical mystery, particularly in a series, it works better if the reader likes and empathizes with the main character. This John Grey is a bit a puzzle in that regard. He's likable enough, but he's also a very great fool. Or simply greatly foolish a great deal of the time. Or perhaps completely socially unaware might be a better description. It's not just that he spends the book being deceived by absolutely everyone, it's that he falls into the trap, over and over, so very easily. And so very often.

It's going to be interesting to see how Grey grows up. If Grey grows up. I know that there is a saying that God looks out for fools, but if that's true, then John Grey is probably keeping him a bit busier than he should be.

Susan says

1657 and John Grey has gone home to Clavershall West, his home in Essex. After a drunken night he wakes up to find a body on the village's dung heap. Faced with the reluctance of the local magistrate to investigate he decides to do so.

In this story Grey seems at times to be naive, so I look forward to find out if he becomes more worldly in his approach to life and its mysteries. But I did enjoy this story.

Kirsty says

More a 3.5, I guessed the murderer early on, think it's a good start to a book but marked down for the book having too many 'I say' in the writing, got quite annoying.

Clemens Schoonderwoert says

Not having read a book by this author before, I have to admit that this wonderful historical novel by L.C.Tyler has certainly exceeded my expectations.

While I'm already following the exploits of Susanna Gregory's "Thomas Chaloner" which is set after the restoration of Charles II as King of England and S.J.Deas's "William Falkland" series which is set within the English Civil War during the Reign of King Charles I, this book is set in the year AD 1657 within the English Republic during the Reign of the Head of State Oliver Cromwell.

This first episode of the John Grey series has certainly been an enjoyment to read and I hope that many books will follow this one.

The book has been written in a very interesting entertaining style and with a certain humorous twist, so much so that it keeps the reader spellbound right till the end.

Like I said before this book is set in the year AD 1657 in a English Republic which is eight years old, but in which many people are already looking for ways to a restoration.

And so when a corpse of a Royalist spy is discovered in Essex and nobody is willing to investigate, John Grey a young lawyer with no clients, starts to investigate the case himself believing in his naive way in justice, but where he will be confronted with a world which is full of plot and counter-plot and a world full of intrigue spun by Cromwell's spymaster John Thurloe.

What follows is an exciting mystery and absolutely a book that I would like to describe as "A Thrilling Opener"!

Soozee says

A really entertaining read, set in the world of Cromwell's republic. The stresses and complications of Royalist versus Cromwellians provide the back drop to this who-dunnit. John Grey is a likeable sleuth, drawn in to find justice for a murdered victim. This portends to be a great series, and we look forward to more about John Grey.

Dorothy says

On the front cover, there's a quote from Ann Cleeves, "I was seduced from John Grey's first scene". So was I! The scene was written from the POV of young John Grey, who's decidedly merry after a night in the pub, and it's a clever piece of writing. We know John is drunk without actually being told, because we're inside John's head and his voice is so clear.

I wish I could say the rest of the book delighted and gripped me as much as that first scene. I felt that it dragged occasionally, and while it was a light, enjoyable read, I don't feel compelled to read the next one.

Jane Irish Nelson says

It is 1657, and John Grey has just returned to his home village from his studies in Cambridge. His mother expects him to continue studying to become a lawyer, but he doesn't think that's where his future lies. When strange happenings occur, he sets out to investigate. First, on his way home from the pub, he meets a stranger on a grey horse, but no one else admits to seeing the mysterious man. Next morning he finds another stranger, this one dead in a muck heap. He reports it to the authorities, but when they do not seem to take notice, undertakes his own rather inept and bumbling investigation. Grey is likable, if rather naive and trusting. This interesting and intriguing mystery is set during what we, the readers, know to be the waning years of the Interregnum. Recommended.
