



Ashes to Ashes

Melvin R. Starr

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Master Hugh learns of several men of Bampton and nearby villages who have gone missing recently. Most are soon found, some alive, some dead. Master Hugh eventually learns that the bones are those of a bailiff from a nearby manor. Someone has slain him and placed his body in the fire to destroy evidence of murder.

Bailiffs are not popular men; they dictate labor service, collect rents, and enforce other obligations. Has this bailiff died at the hand of some angry tenant? Hugh soon discovers this is not the case. There is quite another reason for murder . . .

Ashes to Ashes Details

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Author : Melvin R. Starr

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From Reader Review Ashes to Ashes for online ebook

Diane Estrella says

I can not express how much I truly enjoy this series.

These books are like the richest of desserts. You want to devour it quickly but know that you should nibble it slowly so as to enjoy it thoroughly from start to finish.

Hugh de Singleton is the Columbo of his day. He just seems to ask the right questions, pause at the right times, and watch the answers come as they may. He definitely has a technique to getting the information he needs to solve the murders and I enjoy seeing the process unfold. It is all done realistically for the time period and methodically to take the reader from point A to B.

Hugh had certainly done all he could do to bring the murderer to full justice in this book. Unfortunately, I don't feel like enough justice was served. In this time period, many crimes were committed that never received any recompense either monetarily or otherwise. So, my sense of complete and total, "Justice has been served" drop the gavel moment did not arrive in this book, but I do feel the ending was fitting to the story and the 1369 systems of law. Otherwise, loved this book and can not wait for book 9, Lucifer's Harvest. Squee!

I received a free copy of this book from Kregel Books, for my honest review. The opinions expressed here are my own.

Voirrey says

Read a bit out of order as this is the volume we happened to have in the shop!

A good read, a mystery unfolding in neat steps and, as usual, Hugh's musings on life are interesting as a man of his times when what God, or Jesus, would think really was an integral part of everyday life.

Victor Gentile says

Mel Starr in his new book, "Ashes To Ashes" Book Eight in the Hugh de Singleton, Surgeon series published by Monarch Books returns us to Oxford in 1369 for another mystery involving the intrepid bailiff and surgeon.

From the back cover: The morning after the festivities of Midsummer's Eve, the villagers of Bampton make a grisly discovery

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Mel Starr has created one of the most interesting detectives ever in Master Hugh. Master Hugh and his wife, Kate, take their family to the Midsummer's Eve, St. John's Day fire- A celebration of summer. Then, the next morning as the people are spreading the ashes in the fields bones are found, which is where we get the title *Ashes To Ashes*. Now Hugh finds out that the deceased was a bailiff, not highly loved, but still deserving of justice and Hugh will go through the possible suspects with all their motives to figure out which one of them did it. "Ashes To Ashes" is a very exciting book that will keep you engrossed in the characters as well as life in England in the 1300's. I have become a huge fan of Mel Starr and am fantastically pleased with his creation: Hugh de Singleton. These mysteries that he gets involved with are highly complicated and thoroughly enjoyable. I think Mel Starr is an extremely talented writer who really knows how to tell a story that will grab you and keep you flipping pages until you find out who did it. I am already looking forward to the next book, "Lucifer's Harvest".

Disclosure of Material Connection: I received this book free from Monarch Books. I was not required to write a positive review. The opinions I have expressed are my own. I am disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255: "Guides Concerning the Use of Endorsements and Testimonials in Advertising."

Spuddie says

Another enjoyable entry in this series featuring Hugh de Singleton, surgeon and bailiff in Bampton, UK in the 14th century. A set of bones are discovered in the remains of the St. John's Eve fire when the farmers come to take the ashes to spread on their fields. As the skull was clearly bashed in, it appears murder has been done and Hugh must investigate as the Bailiff to Lord Gilbert. But when no one is reported missing initially, Hugh begins journeying to nearby villages to look a bit further afield for the identity of his victim-- and the murderer.

Ioana says

Mel Starr delivers another quality medieval mystery set on one of the manors of 14th century England. I've followed the series since #1, and continue to be enchanted by Starr's depiction of "real life" during this historical period. There's so much to learn: from the daily diet of people (loaves, pottage, sometimes cheese or "capon"-chicken) to medieval medicine (lettuce seeds as soporific, surgery as a "lower trade" than medicine, to be practiced by anyone with a knife), to the politics of local land ownership (lords could mete out punishment for non-capital offences; the difference between villeins and tenants, etc).

The actual mystery in this installment is ok, just like the others, but it's not the reason to read these books. I

see these rather as a chance to unwind and take a relaxing stroll through life in the medieval 14th century countryside. The story moves at a leisurely pace, as Starr describes every detail of the main character's (a surgeon and bailiff) life from morning to night. Aided by a bit of imagination, this series inspires a true awe and appreciation for a life far "simpler" and much more difficult than ours: imagine a time when nails are a luxury, when instead of loading up on gas, you pull up to a babbling brook to energize your palfrey, when most people spend the entirety of their lives moving about an area the size of a small modern neighborhood, and eat the same thing (pease pottage, mostly) day in and day out.

Another aspect of this series that I love is that Starr uses medieval-ized English - it's not quite 14th century English, I'm sure that would be almost incomprehensible to the modern "lay" reader, it's modern English with a medieval... twang. (I would have no way of knowing if it's accurately representative of the times, as I am no medieval/English scholar, but it sounds plausible).

Overall, loved the respite, and I look forward to Starr's next round, *Lucifer's Harvest*.

Jen says

Ashes to Ashes by Mel Starr is the latest in a series about medieval surgeon Hugh de Singleton. I have not read any of the previous books in the series, but enjoyed this one.

Set in the 14th century, Hugh studied at Oxford and in Paris; for his time, Hugh has a most advanced medical education.

In 1349 and again in the 1360's outbreaks of the Black Death devastated the population, creating a shortage of labor and social upheaval. This post-plague setting adds to the interest of the novel.

Labor is now a valuable commodity and there is more mobility as peasants/serfs/villeins move to find work, leaving behind land they had been bound to for generations. Feudal tradition is still strong, the hierarchy is still firm and powerful, but great changes are in progress.

Some of the previous books cover how Hugh came to settle in the village of Bampton, which is a real village not far from Oxford. Surgeon and bailiff to Lord Gilbert of Bampton Castle, Hugh is an intelligent and mild-mannered man with a young family.

When charred bones are found in the remains of a bonfire, Hugh must discover the identity of the body and whether or not murder was done. The book gives wonderful historic detail about medieval law and justice, the social hierarchy, the way the church and religion affected people's lives, details of "croft and toft," and medical treatment in the late 1300's. The details are woven in to give the reader a feeling of the dynamics of the time.

Just a sidebar--Hugh uses lettuce seed to induce sleep. So did real medieval surgeons.

Character development could be better--especially as there are some interesting minor characters who deserved more depth--but an engaging mystery with great historical detail.

(The title brings to mind the nursery rhyme associated (though inaccurately) with the plague and the bonfire (bone fire) to create allusive references to the effects of the plague.)

Judy Lesley says

This was a very good reading experience for me in the Hugh de Singleton series. I have somehow missed the last several books in this series so it was nice to meet up with where the characters have advanced to since I last read about them.

This book has some very good information for people who may not be familiar with reading medieval mystery novels. Author Mel Starr has included a Glossary in the front of the book to help with information specifically mentioned in this novel such as what dates are represented by Saints days, what foods were served plus with ingredient lists to help understand cooking, words used to describe the occupation of various villagers and what words like toft and marshalsea meant. Even though I read many medieval mystery novels I always appreciate having a refresher for those kinds of information. Besides, Starr does a good job with researching these things where many authors simply leave you on your own to try to figure it out yourself. There is also a very simple map showing the small villages Hugh traveled to while investigating this problem. A distance of as little as a mile and a half often meant that a villager never traveled outside their own home village to the neighboring one. They were much too busy working to ensure their survival to be making trips to other villages.

The bones of an unknown person are found in the cooling ashes of the St. John's day bonfire the morning following the midsummer celebration. As bailiff to Lord Gilbert Talbot at his manor of Bampton, Hugh de Singleton was the one required to investigate. What seemed to be a simple thing of finding who was missing from the village quickly became a much more complex problem. If no person was missing from Bampton, Hugh would have to begin traveling away from his village to find who the unknown person was.

This story didn't seem to include quite as much medical practice as I remember from the other novels, but it was still good information related by the author to show exactly where medical practices were in 1369. Hugh had adopted some forward thinking procedures even if he still could not explain why they worked. The dynamics of the relationship between Hugh, his wife Kate, and their two daughters is well developed as is the relationships of all the people working for and with Lord Gilbert. Being in the employ of the highest placed noble in the area pays dividends when Hugh finds obstacles being put in the way of his investigation.

I enjoyed reading this eighth book in the series and catching up with the characters I had enjoyed in the past. The Glossary was a welcomed help in understanding some aspects of the book and I referred to it often. There is an Afterword where Mel Starr gives information regarding Bampton in modern times and the role it has played in the Downton Abbey television series. There is also an extract from book number nine, Lucifer's Harvest. Fans of the series will be eager to read that extract.

I received an e-ARC of this novel through NetGalley.

John says

I always enjoy Mel Starr's description of medieval life brought to life through Hugh de Singleton.

Rusty says

With the discovery of adult bones in the remains of the Midsummer's Eve fire, Hugh de Singleton finds himself searching for the identity of the bones. His search leads him many directions before he finally unravels the mystery.

This was not one of my favorite reads by the author but I discovered that the author is making Hugh a more religious soul who loves food - particularly the food his lovely wife, Kate, makes. The author seems to be providing more depth to Hugh's palate which is interesting in itself. I do enjoy the key characters in this series very much. Hugh and his wife, Kate, are devoted to each other and their family. Kate finds Hugh's investigations stimulating and often adds thoughts that help him expand his investigations.

Leanne says

My favorite in my long running love affair with this series. Learned more than usual during a very satisfying low key mystery.

Only two volumes left before I catch up to author's output... rationing carefully. :)

Annet says

I'm a fan of this well written and well researched historic Medieval crime series, book 8 already in 'The Chronicles of Hugh de Singleton, surgeon'. Rating will vary between 3.3 (this one) and four stars. The author, Mel Starr, gives an authentic picture of the dark ages and lots of details, including a glossary of terminology. The series features Hugh de Singleton, surgeon and bailiff to Lord Gilbert Talbot at his manor of Bampyon, UK in the Middle Ages. I will look forward to the 9th book, and, as usual, more to follow! I would recommend this series for fans of historical fiction.

Master Hugh, Kate and their children Bessie and Sybil attend the Midsummer's Eve fire. Early next morning, Hugh is summoned. Tenants collecting the ashes have found burned bones. Investigating, Hugh learns that the bones are those of a bailiff from a nearby manor. Bailiffs are not very popular. did this man die at the hand of some angry tenant?....

Melissa Michelle says

My new favorite Author is Mel Starr!!! I have enjoyed this series from the first and look forward to what more he has to write. Thanks Sir.

English says

Although I'm a Cadfael fan, this was the only other Medieval Mystery series I had read until recently. I did recently make a foray into another popular series by an American author, but I prefer this one, as the other seemed a little too OTT.

There is something constant, comfortably reliable about The Chronicles of Hugh de Singleton. Those who have read other books in the series will expect not to find any deep political intrigue in the series, set as it is in fourteenth century rural Oxfordshire, with only occasional visits to the county town. Rather it focuses more on the lives and actions and concerns of more ordinary people, and tends to adopt a slower, gentler pace. The stories usually also involve the exploration of some moral or spiritual theme- as Hugh is a sympathizer of John Wycliffe.

Again, this is a detail I appreciate, considering that many works like this have characters who can be rather too modern in their outlook and attitudes, instead of seeing things the way people at the time might have done.

Some of the previous titles in the series (this is the eighth) have been a mixed bag, but I think the last three have been consistently good, exploring some local drama or family conflict alongside the crime. I for once appreciate how the author incorporates aspects of social, legal and medical history into the stories. Of course, the protagonist and sleuth Hugh de Singleton is a surgeon, and always gets at least one medical emergency, but there's usually something else too. In this one, it's a property dispute involving the inheritance of a manor. As I am currently researching Medieval Legal records relating to landholding, it was something that I could relate to and understand.

I did notice one historical error, a reference to the deposition of Edward II as having occurred 62 years before. The story is set in 1369, which would place the event in 1307, but that was the year Edward came to the throne, not the year of his deposition, which was 1327. Such mix-ups do happen, I just hope the quality of the stories and the underpinning research is not slipping, as I also noticed a few terms and phrases that seemed a bit too 'American' like 'I was some taller'.

My only other issue was that I did not feel justice was entirely served, but Hugh was hampered by circumstances in this case, not being able to prove that certain parties were involved. That has happened before, in other mysteries, and I guess it could be a reflection of real life.

Other reviewers have mentioned that some of stories seem to be getting a little bit repetitive, and I am inclined to agree (Hugh gets beaten up again, when going home alone in the evening after investigating- really should have learned not to do that by now), but that did not detract from my enjoyment of the story. I think it may have something to do with the rather narrow geographical setting, and cast of characters. I hear, however, that the next book may be set in France, which might add a new and interesting dimension. I'm just glad that there is going to be at another book, as I had heard this was to be the last one.

I would recommend to lovers of more 'cosy' and light medieval mysteries, those who are interested in the period, and of course as those who are already following the series.

I received a copy of this book free from the publisher in the hope that I would write a review. I was not required to write a positive one, and all opinions expressed are my own.

Lisa Johnson says

Title: Ashes to Ashes (The Chronicles of Hugh de Singleton #8)

Author: Mel Starr

Pages: 224

Year: 2015

Publisher: Lion Fiction

Hugh de Singleton, surgeon, bailiff and fourth son of a knight returns in his eighth adventure. This time a midsummer celebration in the village of Bampton with a huge bonfire is the setting for the beginning of the story. On the morning after the bonfire has burned out, some village men are gathering up the ashes when they discover a human skeleton. Hugh is immediately called as is the coroner. Hugh is given the task of identifying the bones as they are found on Lord Gilbert's property. As Lord Gilbert is Hugh's boss, what Lord Gilbert wants is what Lord Gilbert gets.

Hugh begins to investigate, but has trouble identifying the body as no one claims to know of any missing men in the area. Hugh spreads his search further and thinks he has identified the body only to be proven wrong. Starting over, he begins his questions in a nearby small village and meets with animosity. After questioning again and again, he thinks he knows who the skeleton is. Now he has to determine motive and find proof, which proves to be a daunting task. He is accosted and beaten badly, but refuses to give up. He will see justice done!

Mel Starr deftly recreates life in England in the 1300s in this wonderful series. I like history and mystery, so I get a double dose with Mel's books! Hugh's character continues to develop and I appreciate the questions he poses regarding what the Lord Christ would want him to act or respond in certain situations. Hugh also ponders some great truths of life that apply to life in today's time period as well. I like Hugh's stubborn nature, refusing to give up on seeking justice even if it means sacrificing something of himself. I eagerly look forward to book nine in the series, Lucifer's Harvest, and can't wait to see Hugh in action again.

My rating is 5 stars.

Disclosure of Material Connection: I received one or more of the products or services mentioned above for free in the hope that I would mention it on my blog. Regardless, I only recommend products or services I use personally and believe will be good for my readers. I am disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255. "Guides Concerning the Use of Endorsements and Testimonials in Advertising."

Vera Godley says

I have thoroughly enjoyed each of my journeys into the 1300s in the company of Hugh de Singleton, Surgeon and Baliff. The author, Mel Starr, has a unique style that reads easily; and the prose and droll humor of Singleton makes this reader readily visualize characters as they engage one another and traipse along the countryside solving the mystery and crime of the moment.

Not being encumbered with the fast pace and "stuff" of today's world, Hugh de Singleton thinks deeply and lucidly. Life is more simple in the 1300s than in the year 2015, but the stuff of good and evil still abounds even in the slower pace of life. Men are still evil and some are good.

The church features prominently in the story in that it was prominent in everyone's life, especially in small villages, during medieval times. This is reflected in the heart and mind of Singleton.

Singleton rides his Palfrey (definition: a riding horse with a comfortable gait), eats his maslin loaf or his wheaten loaf (breads of the day), and ends the day sitting in his toft (area around his house planted with vegetables) with his wife whom he loves. And he practices his skills as a professionally (Paris) trained surgeon in addition to seeing that the laws of the village and land are adhered to.

I like that events generate moments of deeper pondering to Singleton. Throughout *Ashes to Ashes*, as in each of his other books, he frequently crosses Shill Brook at which he pauses and ponders.

"I left Arthur and the palfreys at the castle and walked to Galen House [Singleton's home]. Again I stopped at Shill Brook to gaze into the stream. The psalmist has told men that they should "Be still and know that I am God." I admit that in the busyness of the day, I had not considered Him nor sought guidance of the Lord Christ. I amended the fault there upon the bridge."

Singleton is skilled as a Surgeon but he is equally skilled at deduction and detective work ferreting out wrong doers and bringing them to justice.

It is always a pleasure to read Mel Starr's *Chronicles of Hugh de Singleton*.

Disclosure: I received a complimentary copy to facilitate this review.
