One Corpse Too Many: A Medieval Novel of Suspense by Ellis Peters

Exciting Mediaeval Whodunit

An ingenious killer disposes of a strangled corpse on a battlefield. Brother Cadfael discovers the body, and must then piece together disparate clues—including a girl in boys clothing, a missing treasure and a single flower—to expose a murderer's black heart.

My Personal Review:
With her first Brother Cadfael novel (A Morbid Taste for Bones), English author Ellis Peters introduced us to perhaps, now, the most famous of the medieval detectives! And in her second installment, One Corpse Too Many, we find the erstwhile Benedictine monk up to his neck in another murder mystery, this time involving way too many deaths!

In this episode, Brother Cadfael and his beloved Shrewsbury have the unpleasant task of burying the bodies of 94 soldiers, killed as a result of a battle between Stephen and the Empress Maud, both trying to claim the throne of England. In this ugly civil war, we find the countryside constantly in a flux as to which side is which, as this struggle, which lasted for 12 years, seemed to change shapes and sides all too frequently. In this instance, it is Stephen who has won the day. After the hanging of the holdouts, Brother Cadfael, representing the church and the Abbey of St. Peter and St. Paul in Shrewsbury, goes in to arrange for the proper burial of the dead. He is told there were exactly 94 bodies. Instead, he finds an extra one—that of a young man, unidentified, who has had his throat slashed.

And Brother Cadfael, over the course of the novel, uses all his God-given talents to solve the mystery. And solve it, of course, he does. He wants not only to identify the young man, but to name the murderer. At the same time, Peters, whose real name is Edith Pargeter, lays the foundation for two of her other recurring characters, Aline and Hugh Beringer (This is a nice romantic touch!). Cadfael, himself, is the herbalist to the abbey and uses that skill to help him solve the murder. He is also able to call upon some of the knowledge he learned during his younger days as a Crusader to the Holy Lands. In all, Peters has created a full-blown medieval character—one who is at once ever the romantic, yet is worldly enough to negotiate the foibles of reality. Peters and Cadfael add up to a great literary combination and their numbers prove it!

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