

Seanan McGuire

"The Black Death"

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Seanan McGuire - The Black Death

The Black Death arrived in Europe back in thirteen
forty-seven
And for several hundred years it just kept sending
folks to heaven,
It spread outward from Messina and struck hardest in
the summer,
And if you were in the path of plague it really was a
bummer.
Well, we blamed it on the rats, and we blamed it on the
fleas;
We were ignoring crucial facts about the spread of the
disease,
And I think it's time we called for a more thorough
inquisition,
'cause it's clear that the Black Death possessed a
droplet-based transmission.
Now, a droplet-based transmission means I sneeze
and then you die,
It's a fairly common vector and we think that's largely
why
The quarantine developed to protect us from diseases
And to help and keep your family from dying of my
sneezes.
The bubonic plague's bacterial, with rat fleas as the
vector,
And the speed of spread's retarded by this animal
infecter,
While the Black Death spread through Europe at a
speed
that was much faster,
So we need a better agent to account for this disaster.
You can't quarantine a rat flea -- no, the rat flea doesn't
care.
If your quarantine's successful, then the virus spreads
by air.
If the Black Death were bubonic, then the quarantines
would fail,
And the fact that they succeeded tells a very different
tale.

The Black Death hit hard in Iceland, and there's something you should know:
That there are no rats in Iceland, 'cause the temperature's too low,
And without rats, there's no rat fleas to infect you with a bite,
So the Black Death had to spread by means beyond their appetite!
Speaking epidemiologically, bubonic plague doesn't make sense to me.
Yersinia pestis makes you dead,
it's true, but it isn't as effective as the common flu.
If you want to wipe out half of Europe's population, you need a better agent for your devastation;
You need a viral agent that that is tried and tragic -- let's take a look at fevers that are hemorrhagic.
Now a hemorrhagic fever is a nasty beast indeed, And we've named it for its tendency to make its victims bleed.
It can trigger cranial swelling often leading to psychosis,
And posthumous study demonstrates internalized necrosis.
It is heavily infectious with a high mortality;
When you put it all together, it sounds like the plague to me!
And best of all, transmission is from one case to another,
So you get it from your sister, then you give it to your brother.
One man gave it to another, or perhaps to four or five, And by the time the summer ended, very few were left alive,
Those survivors spoke of symptoms that were gruesome and quite gory,
And by looking at their memoirs we can learn more of the story.
If you study records chronicling how the plague was spread,
It often started with a stranger who arrived and then got dead.
It would take about a month before another case was spotted,
But once the plague took hold the outbreak's course was plainly plotted.
Each infection would begin with something known as 'latency',
That's when you can pass the plague around, but nobody can see
Any sign that you're infectious and a hazard to their health,

And a droplet-based transmission really helps you spread the wealth.
Once the latency was ended, then the symptoms would appear,
And when you displayed 'God's tokens', then you knew the end was near,
For they were red and hardened patches on your torso, back or legs,
And they don't match a single symptom that attends bubonic plagues!
Speaking epidemiologically, bubonic plague doesn't make sense to me.
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If you want to wipe out half of Europe's population, you need a better agent for your devastation;
You need a viral agent that that is tried and tragic -- let's take a look at fevers that are hemorrhagic.
The bubonic plague takes less than fourteen days from 'catch' to 'kill',
And pneumatic plague is droplet-based, but slaughters faster still,
While whatever caused the Black Death took its time and had some fun:
For it didn't kill in fourteen days -- instead, try thirty-one.
So we're looking at a plague whose symptoms differed from bubonic,
Which swept through for generations in a manner cruel and chronic,
That took far too long to kill you, and by quarantine was thwarted...
Now let's take a moment to consider where it might have started.
If you take a look at all the waves of certified infection, You may see a pattern that demands a delicate inspection,
For it looks as if the Black Death, in the hemorrhagic style
May have started down in Africa and traveled up the Nile.
Once it made its way to Egypt, it jumped to the Middle East,
And with every port of call it found its potency increased,
'Til it last it got to Europe and it really got things started,
Making widows out of nations, leaving empires broken-hearted.
Now I hope that you'll consider all the things I have suggested,

All the reasons that bubonic plague should really be
contested
As the agent that wiped out so many people without
blinking,
And while you may disagree with me, I hope it got you
thinking.
Because history repeats itself, its cycle's never-ending,
And we ought to know the enemies against which we're
defending,
Please consider all I've said today the next time
someone sneezes,
Or we may find, like Messina, we're not braced for new
diseases.

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