



The Mad Hatter Mystery

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The newspapers dubbed the thief the 'Mad Hatter,' and his outrageous pranks amused all London. but the laughter turned to horror when a corpse with a crossbow through the heart was found at the Tower of London in a top hat.

As Dr. Gideon Fell was to discover, the whole case turned on the matter of hats-- in fact, threatened to become a nightmare of hats. For the victim was none other than Sir William Bitton's nephew, dressed in a golfing suit and wearing Sir William's stolen opera hat. And tying Sir William to his murdered nephew with a scarlet thread was the stolen manuscript of a completely unknown story said to be the handiwork of Edgar Allan Poe.

In a tale as freighted with menace as the Traitor's Gate, portly Dr. Fell unravels a crime unique by even his standards of the bizarre.

The Mad Hatter Mystery Details

Date : Published August 1st 1989 by Harpercollins (first published 1933)

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Author : John Dickson Carr

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J.V. Seem says

This book begins quite hilariously with a hat-stealing London thief, but quickly turns sinister with an apparently related murder at the Tower of London.

Victor says

I particularly enjoyed the episode of the Valet Marks ...It was uproariously funny.Dr. Fell is extremely likable here with his mix of sharp intelligence and utter childishness .

However, it seems that the solution of the manuscript theft was impossible without being prescient and Dr.

3.7 is correct rating for this one imho.Its enjoyable enough but not among his best.

A lovely old fashioned murder mystery. I loved the small twists and turns and generally the old style writing. Its a simple story so don't expect something like a modern day crime story.

Benjamin Thomas says

I'm continuing my survey of "Golden Age" mystery writers and so I come to John Dickson Carr. He's an intriguing author because he is fairly well known as one of the great British mystery writers even though he happens to be an American. He did live and write in England for quite a long time so his settings and ambience certainly ring authentic. He is also known as a master of the "puzzle" mystery, meaning his plots are usually quite complex and convoluted. One of his novels was even voted the best "locked-room" mystery of all time (The Hollow Man).

This particular novel features the detective skills of Dr. Gideon Fell, an obese, blustery man who is only able to walk with the aid of two canes. The subplots include a prankster criminal who steals various hats, a stolen manuscript of an unknown story by Edgar Allen Poe, and a corpse discovered in the fog near Traitor's Gate/Tower of London. Pretty cool sounding mystery with some nice characters and complex twists.

Overall I enjoyed reading the novel but found it a little long. Several times I had to resisit the urge to skim just to get on with it. Of course this book was written in 1933 so I am certainly willing to concede the style to the era. I have another book in the series on my shelf and will certainly read it.

Barry Cunningham says

Another Carr puzzler.

Starts out very humorously. After the dead body appears, you'd think the humor would evaporate, but the memorable characters and suspects take up the slack.

Jean-Luke says

The touch of humanity at the end bumped it from four stars to five for me. And I loved that it all took place within twenty-four hours.

Adelaide Blair says

3.5

Leslie says

This Golden Age mystery not only involves a "mad hatter" (someone stealing hats off people's heads and then leaving them prominently displayed elsewhere) but also a murdered man at the Tower of London who is wearing one of these stolen hats.

I enjoyed this very much and found Dr. Fell less bombastic than usual. However, it struck me as an atypical Carr mystery since it wasn't a true locked room or impossible mystery. Everyone was prevented from leaving the Tower once the body was found but there was a period of time when people could come in or go out.

Nancy Oakes says

This book has been widely praised (at least on the Internet) as being one of John Dickson Carr's best. I remember reading somewhere that Dorothy Sayers gave this book rave reviews. So once again I swim upstream against the tide of great reviews because this was one of those books where by the end I just didn't care about who the killer was -- I just wanted to finish the book so I could move on to the next one.

As the story opens, it seems that one Sir William Bitton has been a victim of "the Mad Hatter," someone who goes around stealing hats and leaving them in bizarre places, for example, leaving a barrister's wig on a horse. Bitton also has lost something very valuable: a manuscript that turns out to be the first recorded detective story by Edgar Allan Poe. But these problems are miniscule in comparison to the fact that his nephew has turned up dead at the Traitor's Gate at the Tower of London, done in by a crossbow bolt. It is up to Dr. Gideon Fell and Inspector Hadley of Scotland Yard to get to the root of the problem -- which is difficult because of the number of possible suspects.

The basic mystery here is awesome. There are enough people to give any would-be armchair detective a run for his/her money in trying to solve the mystery. The story tends to drag on (imho) a bit too long, imho, as Carr lays out hints and clues for the reader to follow.

Overall...not bad, but the book prior to this one in the series (Hag's Nook) is much more serious and tends to get down to business a bit more quickly -- my preference in mystery novels precisely. I wouldn't recommend this to people who think they're getting a cozy mystery, because it's not; hard-core and British mystery readers might enjoy it, but do remember it was written in 1933 so the language tends to be a bit overdone and somewhat archaic at times. Overall, not bad; I'll continue the series for sure!

Elizabeth Hunter says

This is another nicely twisted mystery. Carr's formula makes it fairly easy to guess the murderer here, but if you can take the back-and-forth between Hadley and Fell, it's a fun read. Sticking Rampole into the mix feels extraneous, but not fatally so.

Anna Bergmark says

At least some of John Dickson Carr's books are considered to be murder mystery classics, sure... But I don't know...

To a contemporary reader this is rather unpalatable. Everything about it feels forced; the plot, the characters, the dialogue, the humour... "Unrealistic" is one word that springs to mind, "unbelievable" another. It's like watching a really bad stage production, listening to the creaking floorboards while semi-amateurs flap about, trying too hard to deliver lines that wasn't even well written to begin with, the costumes cheap and the

makeup too heavily applied.

I admit to a premature curtain fall. Couldn't sit this one out for all the stolen headwear in England.

(If you really feel an overwhelming urge to see murder done in the Tower of London I recommend Daisy Dalrymple #16 - "The Bloody Tower" by Carola Dunn. It's set in the same era as this mad hatter frenzy, but the author is modern and her labour oozes both atmosphere and lighthearted charm.)

Bill Johnson says

I've always loved the mysteries of John Dickson Carr, ever since my Grandfather brought home a second hand copy of "The Problem of the Green Capsule". The novel featured Dr. Gideon Fell, who has a knack for solving impossible crimes. Between Dr. Fell and Sir Henry Merivale, I prefer the good doctor, but to be honest, they are both curmudgeons (like me) and they are both entertaining in their own way. This was a very clever puzzle, which features the Tower of London, which stirs the heart of the historian in me.
