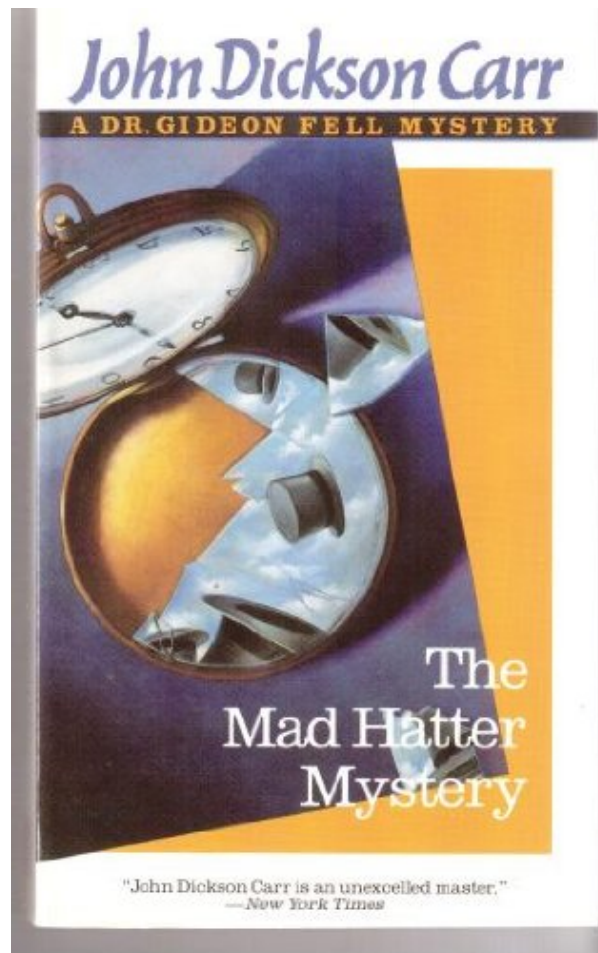


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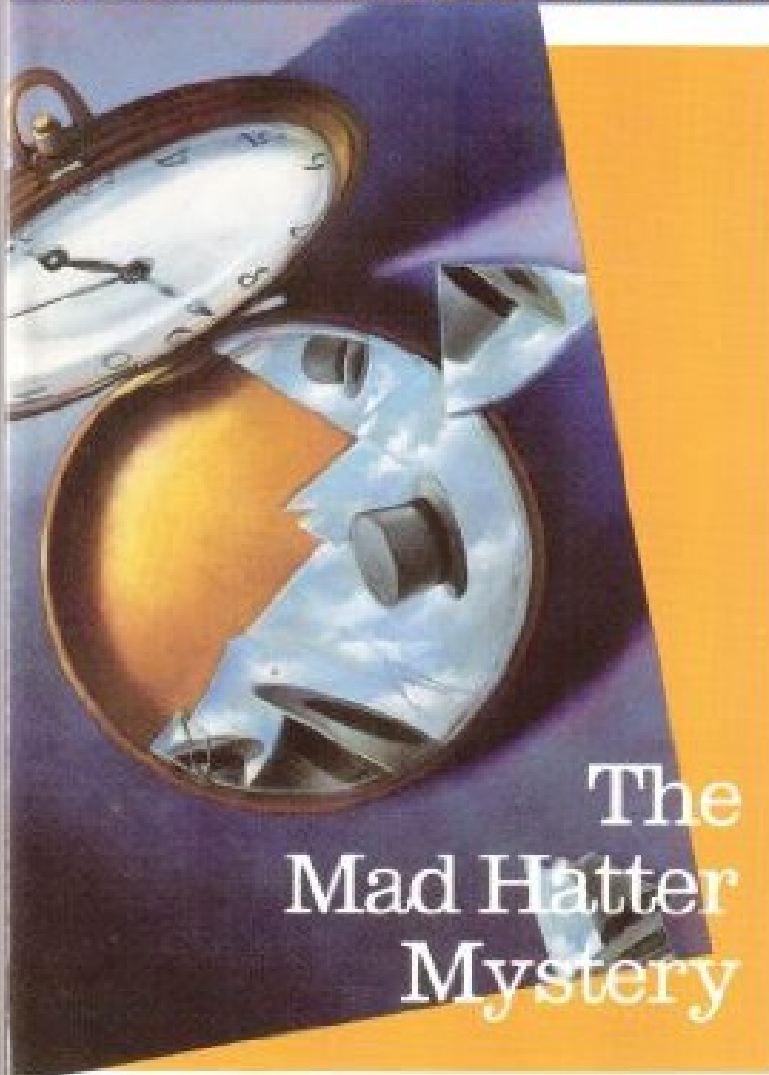


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I do not like thee Dr. Fell

By ealovitt

"The Mad Hatter Mystery" has nothing to do with Alice's Mad Hatter, although it takes place in a locale almost as English as Wonderland, i.e. the Tower of London. As may be guessed from the murder site, Carr relies heavily on atmospherics: shrouds of fog; a corpse with a crossbow bolt through its heart; an unpublished story by Edgar Allen Poe; and above all a mad prankster who steals the headgear of London's elite (everyone wore hats in 1933) and displays his prizes in the most unlikely locations.

When a corpse shows up near Traitor's Gate with a stolen top hat jammed on its head, Scotland Yard automatically enlists Dr. Gideon Fell to solve the bizarre murder.

He solves it of course--but not before an army of suspects each takes his or her turn in the spotlight. Although Carr is most famously known for his locked -room mysteries and 'impossible' crimes, he was also a master of the eerie atmosphere. "The Mad Hatter Mystery" has both in great quantity: lots of macabre touches; and the solution will surprise even the keenest mystery buff. Dr. Fell's tics and grotesqueries aren't as intrusive as in some of Carr's other mysteries starring his massive, eccentrically-dressed detective. The doctor also shows a great deal of restraint (for him) in dropping hints that he already knows the identity of the murderer, even though it's only page forty-five and the reader has two-hundred-and-forty-one pages to go before he or she figures out whodunit.

Supposedly modeled after Carr's idol, G.K. Chesterton, Dr. Fell also resembles a jovial Father Christmas or a President Chester A. Arthur, resting comfortably after a vast meal that was consumed with countless pints of beer. He's not my favorite fictional detective, although he appeared in twenty-three novels culminating in "Dark of the Moon" (1967). However, I do like Carr's atmospheric mysteries so I'll probably end up reading all twenty-three of 'em. This is one of the best, so far.

16 of 16 people found the following review helpful.

A Top Hat Treat

By Gary F. Taylor

He was easily among the most lauded mystery novelists of the 1930s and counted both Agatha Christie and Dorothy Sayers among his many fans--but today John Dickson Carr's novels are, with a very few exceptions,

no longer widely read. This is something of a shame, for at his best Carr's work is second to none, and it would prove tremendously influential for decades to come.

Called in to investigate the theft of a rare manuscript from collector Sir William Bitton, larger-than-life detective Dr. Gideon Fell is greatly amused to find London agog over "The Mad Hatter"--a prankster who steals the hats of the rich and famous from their very heads. But when Bitton's nephew is found dead inside the Tower of London with a stolen hat on his head, Fell's interest quickly turns from manuscripts to murder.

Although it is expertly written and shows his talent for both sly humor and memorable atmosphere, *THE MAD HATTER MYSTERY* is not really among Carr's finest works--largely because the plot unfolds through interviews with and interrogations. Instead of reading about what the characters do, we read about what they say they did. To further complicate the matter, Carr presents his novel in "real time," following Fell and his companions as they ferret out the truth over the course of a very long day. It is an interesting concept, and one that later writers (including Ngaio Marsh) would borrow with great success, but in this instance it feels slightly artificial.

Even so, in terms of the mystery itself Carr keeps the reader guessing right up to the very end, and I recommend the novel as a pleasant way to pass a few hours--and certainly one could do far worse than select *THE MAD HATTER MYSTERY* as an introduction to Carr's work. While it may not be first rank, it is certainly top hat all the way.

GFT, Amazon Reviewer

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful.

One of J D Carr's best mysteries

By ealovitt

"The Mad Hatter Mystery" has nothing to do with Alice's Mad Hatter, although it takes place in a locale almost as English as Wonderland, i.e. the Tower of London. As may be guessed from the murder site, Carr relies heavily on atmospherics: shrouds of fog; a corpse with a crossbow bolt through its heart; an unpublished story by Edgar Allen Poe; and above all a mad prankster who steals the headgear of London's elite (everyone wore hats in 1933) and displays his prizes in the most unlikely locations.

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