



# The Z Murders

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## **The Z Murders** J. Jefferson Farjeon

Richard Temperley arrives at Euston station early on a fogbound London morning. He takes refuge in a nearby hotel, along with a disagreeable fellow passenger, who had snored his way through the train journey. But within minutes the other man has snored for the last time – he has been shot dead while sleeping in an armchair.

Temperley has a brief encounter with a beautiful young woman, but she flees the scene.

When the police arrive, Detective Inspector James discovers a token at the crime scene: a small piece of enamelled metal. Its colour was crimson, and it was in the shape of the letter Z. Temperley sets off in pursuit of the mysterious woman from the hotel, and finds himself embroiled in a cross-country chase – by train and taxi – on the tail of a sinister serial killer.

This classic novel by the author of the best-selling *Mystery in White* is a gripping thriller by a neglected master of the genre.

## **The Z Murders Details**

Date : Published September 1st 2015 by Poisoned Pen Press (first published 1932)

ISBN : 9781464204913

Author : J. Jefferson Farjeon

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Genre : Mystery, Crime, Fiction, Classics, Thriller

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## **From Reader Review The Z Murders for online ebook**

### **Angela says**

If you like author John Dickson Carr (Carter Dickson), you will probably enjoy this author.

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### **Jackie says**

Utter drivel. Silly characters & non-existent plot. The author didn't seem particularly keen to reveal the mystery even at the end. Most of the time, even if I hate a book, I'd say that it's just an opinion, read it for yourself & make your own mind up. This? Really, don't bother. A child could come up with a better murder mystery.

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### **Colin Mitchell says**

Published in the British Library Crime Classics series J. Jefferson Farjeon is a largely forgotten author of crime novels, this one first published in 1932. The plot has similarities with the far superior ABC Murders by Agatha Christie. Richard Temperley is caught up in a shooting at a hotel near Euston Station in London where he arrives early one morning by train from the North. Why he is allowed to go unchecked by Detective Inspector James remains a mystery. However the story goes from London to Bristol then Boston, Lincolnshire and onto Whitchurch in Shropshire with only Temperley and a mysterious young woman realising why.

Far fetched and fully of such flowery prose that I might easily have thrown it down but I'm a sucker for punishment and did actually read to the end. No wonder the author was forgotten.

2 stars. At a stretch.

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### **Samantha says**

I've read four or five of these British Library Crime Classics now, and I'm starting to think I may have to build a collection! This one I really enjoyed. It's fast-paced, with plenty of mystery and menace. At times I forgot it was written over 80 years ago. No spoilers from me regarding the plot, but I liked the characters, especially Diggs. I wasn't quite certain who had done what in the final scene, but the outcome was satisfying anyway!

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### **Sarah says**

Abandoned on page 56 of 256. Very atmospheric and written well but more a chase than a murder mystery

with clues. Didn't really care what happened next.

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## **Nikki says**

Reviewed for The Bibliophibian.

J. Jefferson Farjeon has a way with setting the atmosphere of a book that I can't help but love. The first page of each of his books got me right away — and not in the same way, either. There's something in the way he can describe a scene, and his mysteries quickly take over, clever and strange. The only thing I'd say I don't fall in love with is the romance: you can see it coming a mile off, and it's the obvious two people, and you know it's going to end with marriage.

That aside, *The Z Murders* works really well at the suspense throughout. Sometimes the main character is just so stupid it makes me want to bash him over the head (sure, let's not tell the police everything when there's an indiscriminate killer on the loose!), but it kind of works, and the plot would be a bit stuck without it. This is, I believe, one of the earliest serial killer novels — although it's not quite the stereotypical mentally ill killer who does it on a whim. The antagonist does have a reason and an end in mind... although that reason does still seem unhinged.

Overall, Farjeon's books are a pleasure, and I'm sorry I've only got *Mystery in White* left to read of the British Library reissues. The Ben the Tramp books don't seem quite my thing.

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## **Sandy \*The world could end while I was reading and I would never notice\* says**

A perfectly enjoyable romp through the English countryside in pursuit of an elusive killer who leaves a token engraved with the letter Z at the scenes of his crimes.

Richard Temperley travels south on the overnight train to London where he disembarks, and narrowly misses the murder of the man who had been sharing his compartment in the last leg of the journey.

Add a beautiful but also elusive woman, an extremely accommodating detective, and a villain or two and you have all the makings of a classic murder mystery.

Why then, when I got to the end, did I feel I had missed something? It all rather rushed to a climax, and I found myself having to return and reread some passages.

Thank you to NetGalley and Poison Pen Publishers for the gift of a copy of this book in exchange for an honest review.

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## **Lady Clementina ffinch-ffarowmore says**

This was my first read by the author, and a book I read of course because it was on my TBR, but also for a challenge, part of which required me to read a book/ author with 'Q, X, or Z'.

Our 'hero', Richard Temperley arrives at Euston Station at 5 am after an uncomfortable train journey on which though he had upgraded his ticket to first class to be able to get some sleep, he was unable to as his co-passenger snored. So sleepy and not in the best of moods, Temperley takes up the porter's suggestion to use a hotel smoking room to catch up on some sleep. He steps out of the room to make some inquiries about his luggage, and on his return a beautiful young lady runs past him. In the smoking room he finds his only other companion is the snoring man from the train. But when Temperley settles down to sleep, he notices something amiss, the man is no longer snoring. He's been shot! When the police arrive on the scene they find a red 'z'. And thus begins the mystery of the 'z' murders. Temperley has quite obviously fallen for the beautiful young lady, who is quite obviously on the police's list of suspects. He determines to get to her before the police do, and soon enough finds himself on the trail of the murderer. Meanwhile other 'z' murders take place, seemingly unconnected, and save for one (which happens in front of us), with no visible motive. How does it all connect, and how is the young lady (Sylvia Wynne) connected with it all?

This was a book I ended with mixed feelings about. I enjoyed the writing, and some of the dialogue, the sort of banter between Temperley and DI James, the little insight we get into Temperley's mind working (more so at the start when the effects of fatigue are obvious), and the idea of the mystery certainly. Temperley is the hero and a reasonably bright one, but the author makes him fairly human and fallible, not beyond making mistakes, another thing which I liked. The Inspector and his sergeant(?) Dutton were again characters I quite liked, since while they may well have humoured Temperley, cut him a lot of slack even but they were clearly some steps ahead of him at most times. I wished they had a stronger role in the latter part of the story.

However, while this wasn't a "whodunit", I would have still liked the mystery to be "solved" at the end by the Inspector, or Temperley even, but instead much of the answer is revealed (towards the end of course) but through a conversation of the "villain" himself and his accomplice (and that too before they are tacked down), who we "meet" in a manner of speaking fairly early on. Also, I wasn't entirely convinced on Temperley's reasons for not wanting to work with the police from the start or at least not doing what he did some way in (specifying this might be a spoiler) earlier on. It was the same for the murderer's explanation, his explanation made sense, but I wasn't convinced by the entire thing. But that said, the author did manage to create a fairly sinister image of him. The ending again, partly because of the way the denouement or at least explanation for the "villain"'s actions came about, and partly because it felt almost like an end of a romance/adventure film (a touch silly even), rather than a murder mystery was a tad disappointing. I wouldn't have actually minded the end if the mystery aspect had ended or at least been revealed differently.

Nevertheless, I do have a couple of other books by the author on my TBR and I am still going to be reading them.

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### **Ivonne Rovira says**

Be forewarned! I have read three mysteries by J. Jefferson Farjeon in less than a week's time. Once you pick up one, you won't be able to stop! Yes, they're *that* enticing! How grateful I am that I got the privilege of an ARC of *The Z Murders*, first published in 1932 and soon to be re-released!

Richard Temperley's pretty annoyed with his bad-tempered fellow passenger on the train, who snores like a train himself. (We find out later that the disagreeable old curmudgeon's named John Amble.) But Temperley's not annoyed for long: As soon as Temperley and Amble arrive in fogbound London before dawn and take refuge in a hotel, Amble settles himself into an armchair, goes back to sleep — and never

reawakens. How could he with a bullet in his heart, having been shot through the window while he slept?

The “Z” of *The Z Murders* refers to a token that police Detective-Inspector James discovers at the scene of the crime: a crimson-enameled metal Z. What — or who — is Z? Could it be an item belonging to the victim? Or the murderer? Or to a pretty but anguished young woman who Temperley saw fleeing the scene of the crime? At any rate, Temperley’s determined to track down the mystery woman. Needless to say, in tracking down the damsel in distress, Temperley — and Detective-Inspector James, who’s also in hot pursuit — also get closer to the killer.

Three cheers for The British Library and Poisoned Pen Press! They released *Thirteen Guests* (first published in 1937) last year, and will re-release *The Z Murders* and *Thirteen Guests* (1936) on September 1. But what I cannot comprehend is how did Joseph Jefferson Farjeon’s five dozen novels go out of print in the first place? I couldn’t even find them at my public library or second-hand on Amazon! Why is Farjeon not a household name like Dame Agatha Christie, Nicholas Blake, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Ngaio Marsh, Dorothy L. Sayers, Margery Allingham, or Michael Innes? Readers will find he’s the equal of any of them, save Christie and Doyle, and even then, he’s nipping at their heels. Farjeon’s definitely an addiction worth cultivating.

In the interest of full disclosure, I received this book from NetGalley and Poisoned Pen Press in exchange for an honest review.

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### **Lindsay says**

Not all forgotten books need to be remembered - this one would have been much better consigned to the dustbin of history. I can't believe it's by the same person who wrote *Mystery in White*, that book was excellent while this one was absolute bilge.

The characters were dull, the plot was contrived and nonsensical, and nobody behaved with the slightest hint of intelligence from the police to the killer(s) to the main protagonists. It's one of those books that is so bad it makes you angry you bothered reading it. I wouldn't use it to line the cat litter tray. I hate throwing books away, but I honestly don't want to inflict it on anybody else. It's not even worth 10p from a church jumble sale. I'm going to be seething about this for the rest of the day now!

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### **Nick Duretta says**

This is one of those quaint British thrillers from the Thirties that never makes much sense, in which a plucky young man aids a young woman in distress and becomes entangled in a bizarre random killing/jewel heist plot. There's lots of motoring around England and a pervading sense of danger, but I still dare anyone to explain it in any way that sounds logical.

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### **Susan says**

The introduction to this Golden Age classic places this as a serial murder, but actually the reader does not find the police trying to establish correspondence among the victims. Of course, the book takes in a span of 36 hours, so there isn't the buildup of suspense and fear that most serial killings bring. Richard Temperley

discovers a dead man in a hotel smoking room, but is more interested in the beautiful girl who had just left the room. He follows her rather than confide in the police, who are in turn following him. They all travel separately from London to Bristol by train, and then some of them find themselves in taxis speeding to Boston. But that's not where the last act of this sinister revenge drama winds up. Even in the 1920's or 1930's setting, it's not really my kind of book, but it is enjoyable in an old fashioned way.

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## **Niall says**

It's when you read some of the ropier inter-war crime stories that you appreciate why writers like Christie and Sayers are considered to be the masters of the art. I really didn't rate this, though it has its moments, including an intriguing start. If the rationale behind the British Library's Crime Classics series is to give a new lease of life to some of the better Thirties mysteries that have been unjustly neglected, then either the general standard was quite low or they need to choose more carefully. I suppose one might say in its defence that it's not meant to be a conventional whodunit or even a detective story of any kind (there is little detecting and barely any real clueing), but rather a thriller. Even so, it's not to my mind a good example of that genre, or a particularly good story on any terms – at the very least it hasn't aged well. The characters are uninteresting and the novel as a whole is talky, melodramatic and hokey. Exhibit A for this latter point: the chief villain and his implausibly extraordinary abilities.

People behave in bizarrely implausible ways in order to move the plot on, and there is an unwelcome appearance for that old trope of the second-rate mystery: For Dumb Reasons I Cannot Possibly Tell The Police What I Know About This Case Even Though It Would Enable Them To Solve It In Five Minutes And Probably Save Several Lives. The motive behind the central crimes is dull and uninspired, as is the manner of its explanation to the reader, a long and contrived exposition dump.

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## **Chris says**

J. Jefferson Farjeon may be a name mystery readers recognize, after his *Mystery in White* became an instant bestseller in December 2014. Those record sales are in part responsible for catapulting the British Library Crime Classics series into the limelight, and causing them to increase their number of 2015 releases... including the addition of several more novels by Farjeon. It's an odd twist of fate, considering that Farjeon had fallen into deep obscurity despite a prodigious output---he had penned over sixty books between 1924 and his death in 1955, though aside from a few reprinted in the mid-1980s, few of them remained in print. Dorothy Sayers remarked that he was "unsurpassed for creepy skill in mysterious adventures." Yet it's the Crime Classics series that can be credited with a resurgent interest in Farjeon, and word of mouth over *Mystery in White* fascinated me enough to try another re-release, *The Z Murders*.

As Richard Temperley rode the night train into London, he wished his onerous traveling companion dead. Fate had put them together in the same cabin, the aging man whose incessant snoring keeps Temperley awake, though their arrival at the platform causes Temperley to hope he can escape to some semblance of solitude. Alas, the disagreeable snorer follows Temperley to the same hotel, both having the idea to doze in the hotel waiting room until a room becomes available at 8am. But Temperley is rudely awakened by a sudden realization: the man's snoring has stopped---because he has been shot. The only clue to the crime is a crimson piece of enameled metal in the shape of a "Z." The only other suspect is a beautiful woman whom Temperley had passed when he entered the waiting room.

The police aren't after Temperley per se---they're after him because of his good old-fashioned honor, as he refuses to condemn a mysterious woman (Sylvia Wynne) to police inquiry and suspicion without first hearing her side of the story. With that, he and the police-inspectors compete for the same prize---to learn Sylvia's secret and catch an even more mysterious killer. When Temperley finds her bag at the first murder scene, giving him clues to her location, our amateur hero is off on an overland trek, full of twists and turns and a developing romance between Richard and Sylvia. It's a little far-fetched, but it is very much a Golden Age trope, so I'll roll with it. Heading from London to the English countryside gives the novel plenty of charm; it's also interesting to see the novel start as a more urban mystery before heading out into the countryside for further murders.

I have to say, Farjeon's prose quite impressed me---it's very lively, moreso than some of his contemporaries, with a graceful flow. Farjeon has a distinctive sense of humor, but his writing can be quite compelling, with tense mystery at every turn. Combined with his astute plotting, I'm surprised he is not as well remembered as, say, Dorothy Sayers or Margery Allingham, since Farjeon is nearly the equal of either. There are some awkward elements to his writing---the narrator changes from covert to overt at points, intruding on the story to relay information and display some of Farjeon's humor. But overall the novel is a gem. So not only is it well-written, *The Z Murders* is fairly tense and compelling, a Golden Age thriller I found hard to put down; in particular, there's a car chase following a race-to-a-train that I found hard to put down... especially when the car chase ends on yet another mysterious murder. Farjeon keeps up a brisk pace as both Temperley and the killer race to their final confrontation.

It's easy for me to see why *Mystery in White* became such an overnight success, rocketing an overlooked and long out-of-print author onto the bestseller lists: I imagine its writing is comparable to the excellent *Z Murders*, and it's a seasonal Christmas mystery to boot. *The Z Murders* strikes me as the work of a neglected master, perhaps the distillation of everything good in a Golden Age thriller: strong prose, a stronger mystery, good characterization and dialogue, and a tense, compelling story. Of course, readers accustomed to the modern definition of "thriller" may find it shockingly---maybe refreshingly?---clean and old-fashioned, but it's a treat for vintage mystery fans. *The Z Murders* is a better thriller than the few John Buchan novels I've read, and a mystery on-par with the aforementioned Sayers and Allingham, with a similar (but unique) humorous charm. I will be giving Farjeon much higher priority when picking golden age reads.

Review, and other vintage mystery reviews, on my blog.

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### **Katrina says**

I enjoyed the first half of this book but towards the end it all got too silly and impossible. I suspect the author got fed up with it and just wanted to finish it off.

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