



## The Black Hand

*Will Thomas*

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## **The Black Hand** Will Thomas

When an Italian assassin's body is found floating in a barrel in Victorian London's East End, enquiry agent Cyrus Barker and his assistant Thomas Llewelyn are called in to investigate. Soon corpses begin to appear all over London, each accompanied by a Mafia Black Hand note. As Barker and Llewelyn dig deeper, they become entangled in the vendettas of rival Italian syndicates -- and it is no longer clear who is a friend or foe.

## **The Black Hand Details**

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Author : Will Thomas

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## **From Reader Review The Black Hand for online ebook**

### **Karin says**

Another good mystery with the inquiry agent and his assistant.

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### **Joe Santoro says**

This was definitely the best of the series so far... Thomas was able to keep all the things that are great about the series, and cut back on the things that are not so great.

In keeping with the theme of exploring different sections of the city (and different ethnic groups), this time we go to the docks, as our heroes attempt to fend off a mafia invasion. Thomas does a better job describing the Italian and Sicilian culture without bordering on racism here (as he did when exploring the Chinese in The Limehouse Text).

The story itself is the most engaging.. a good mystery with a good twist and interesting historical bits (tossing in using Bertillion and mentioning fingerprints were both really neat!). We also get some excellent back story additions to Barker, without revealing everything and removing his air of mystery.

The only down side is that this was the first book in the series that I think would suffer if you hadn't read the others... there's a lot of tying things together here that I appreciated, but would be lost upon (or confusing to) a new reader.

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### **Loy says**

this was another stellar installment of the Barker and Llewelyn series. Cyrus Barker is an inquiry agent in the late 1800's. the stories are written in his assistant's Llewelyn voice.

In this one, the organized crime - the Mafia- is trying to take over the London. Barker is tasked with stopping them by the Home Office.

This is a tightly woven story. You feel like you are in old London and can hear Llewelyn tell the story. the assistant really comes into his own, being more than a student, saving Barker's life and helping with all the action.

On one slight note, I missed seeing Llewelyn's friends, which he made in the first book. Two young Jewish men that he is very close with. they are mentioned but no scenes with them. Maybe the next book!

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### **Janellyn51 says**

So, number 5 of the Barker and Llewellyn series, did not disappoint. I've enjoyed seeing their relationship mature and learning more about the peripheral characters like Jenkins. I would trust Barker with my life....I kind of wish I had a Barker in my life! I get a big kick out of Llewellyn too.

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### **Colleen says**

I'm going to go out on a limb and give this 5 stars. It is the fifth book after all. And usually by book #5, I expect the author not to care so much, since he already has his readership hooked.

But no! Barker & Llewellyn are as fresh as ever and the book is as good, if not better, than the first one. I now want to read more about the Black Hand/Mafia's beginning in New Orleans (which the book doesn't cover, but the notes at the end mentions). Very enjoyable and a very very fast read. Introduces more slivers of Barker's life--like the Widow and a tiny bit more about his seafaring days in China, but naturally I want to know more.

So really looking forward to the next book.

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### **Jon Frum says**

This one gets four stars at Goodreads? I couldn't get past the second page. The writing is so amateurish that my eyes refused to keep focus any longer. The text reads like a computer read through a pile of mystery genre books and then pulled out phrases randomly and pasted them together. It reminds me of the first Tolkien rip-off I picked up - so poor when compared to the real thing that you wonder how anyone takes it seriously.

My my.... that was negative, wasn't it? Gotta call a spade a spade.

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### **Melissa says**

I enjoy the Barker & Llewellyn series, and I usually eagerly wait for the next book in the series.

Characters: I think this book has some great characters in it. I like that it is from Llewellyn's perspective, the author has written him with a sense of humor, intelligence, curiosity and compassion that makes him an interesting narrator for the story. Like all of the books in this series, there is a wide variety of characters in this book and I like how they interact together even though they are all so very different.

Plot: The mystery in this book was a bit different in that they weren't necessarily pinpointed on one person, while they did want to find the leader of the mob they also had a wider goal of stopping a group of people and an idea of mafia rule from taking root. While I missed the fun of trying to figure out the "who done it" character, I still enjoyed the overall plans of how to stop a mob from getting a strong hold over an area.

Writing: For the most part I enjoy Thomas's writing style, this book had a few slower parts to it but not anything that detracted greatly from the story. When it did slow down it picked back up fairly quickly.

Overall, I enjoyed this book, and I really enjoy the series as a whole. They have different types of cases outside of the typical "dead body, who did it" kind of mysteries you often run into.

I look forward to the next book in the series.

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### **Margaret Kulis says**

not as strong as the other books, but I'll keep on with the series. glad to finally meet the mysterious widow

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### **Carl Brookins says**

Both fun and thoughtful. Real insight into what London at the dawn of Scotland Yard must have been like. And the beginnings of what we know today to be the world of the Private Investigator. This is another Barker and Llewelyn adventure. As the title suggests, they take on the Mafia as the Sicilians attempt to move in on established corruption on the London docks.

The characters are engaging, the setting is nicely defined and the action, while not pell mell, is lively. I thoroughly enjoyed the novel and will look for succeeding stories from this excellent author.

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### **erforscherin says**

I *was* ready to swear off this series, but when faced with a week's worth of computer upgrade work and this book for company, I gave in for one last round.

I don't quite know what to think of this series, really. All the right pieces are in place - I enjoy the historical asides, the main characters and even secondary characters have spirit, and Will Thomas does a fine job at describing settings and taking readers someplace new and fresh each time. But... there's always something *missing* here, and the books never quite live up to their full promise.

Partly it's half-baked plots: some entries are weaker than others (reminiscent of *Star Trek's* "only every other movie is good" curse, you'll want to skip the even-numbered books), but for mystery novels they frankly aren't really very mysterious or suspenseful. But partly it's also lack of character development. For one typical example: finally meeting the fabled Widow in this book should have been a Big Deal, and yet... well, she just seems like a fairly mild-mannered, normal person. She's likable enough, but we never really learn much about her as a person - only portions of her backstory, info-dumped by someone else in passing. That's pretty much how I feel about all the characters in this series! They all have the *potential* to be fascinating people, and yet at the last second we veer off and get a half-hearted third-party info-dump instead. It's tremendously frustrating.

*The Black Hand* isn't a bad book, as such: it's diverting enough in its own right, I enjoyed meeting the Widow (however briefly), and I still enjoy Barker and Llewelyn's dynamic (however briefly that shows its face, too). But as before, I think this series can do better.

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## **Tom says**

Will Thomas always tells a great tale, full of strong characters and ample misdirection! His story of Mafia infiltration into London is both slick and historically reasonable, making it even more attractive to folks like me. Good fun. Good writing. Great characters!

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## **Rade says**

Sherlock Holmes this ain't.

So much wasted potential. It started off with a murder in an unusual way, followed by introduction of the characters and the reveal of the note left for the said characters to go over and decipher.

Then the whole story got old and predictable. It went to another murder, going in hiding, another note, talking, meeting useless characters, more hiding, and a plan for an ending that failed to get a single fuck from me. So terrible.

One thing I liked was the writing which was set in an 1800s and accompanied by a lot of "indeeds", "lads", and "chaps" because it is set in London. I also liked the setting. The author set the scenes quite nicely but most of the scenes were boring, like meetings with characters that don't play a big part in the story or lunch breaks that go nowhere.

I really hated the overall story. It started off so well and by the end it just failed to make me one bit excited at how it will end. I was yawning at a lot of parts and telling the characters to get on. For example, there was a scene where a dog was stolen and one of the main characters runs after the person and gets the dog back. Pointless. Then there was the story of assassin(s) and a plan to take over part of the city. That never went anywhere. Also, the ending was resolved within few pages. Everything that was built up was demolished in less than a chapter. It wasn't even a good ending. It was so cheap and overused which apparently solved every single problem the characters were facing. How convenient.

Imagine reading a story about a child who was adopted and later learned his parents are evil and out to get him only to have their next door neighbor help the child get away because he knew there was something wrong with said parents since they moved there. SO cheap and unoriginal.

One last thing. For the "detectives" who were supposed to be good at what they do, there was no figuring out clues. There was one main detective who keeps his sidekick in the dark about his plans (I HATE this) who go around asking people their know questions and going back home. That's it. Nothing exciting or adventurous about that which is why I found this book very boring and a waste of time.

How can you make a detective story set in 1800s about people getting murdered in strange ways and two sides of people getting into a war boring?

P.S There were some nods to Dickens, Oliver Twist, fingerprinting as a form of criminal identification, and a reference to measuring skulls and other body parts to determine ones tendency to commit crimes, a method

first introduced in the late 1700s by Franz Joseph Gall (1758-1828).

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## **James says**

6/10

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## **Spuddie says**

This series seems to be growing on me a little more, although I still vow to go through and count the number of times the word "lad" is used...it seemed like an awful lot. It's a good series although there is just 'something' off about it, such that I wouldn't call it a favorite. This one in particular wasn't that great since it dealt with the early days of the Mafia in England; the Mafia is one of my least favorite topics in mystery/thrillers.

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## **Kate says**

I have been a devoted fan of this series, but I was disappointed in this last installment. One of the things I enjoy about the series (besides the fact that it allows me to imagine a kung fu master-Sherlock Holmes), is that each book highlights a different ethnic group of Victorian London, and *The Black Hand* fell right in line with that pattern, focusing on the Italian community and the emergence of a nascent Mafia. However, as opposed to the earlier books, Thomas conveys little sense of their community; the only feel the reader gets for early Italian Londoners are the two meals scenes in which Barker and Llewelyn eat at a Neapolitan restaurant. The pacing is also quite slow, a departure from the action-packed adventure style of the first books. I was also disappointed in the mystery itself, the plot twist at the end was tepid and I honestly lost interest in the mystery halfway through, just kept reading, hoping it would get better but didn't. My overall impression was of a watered-down, half-hearted version of my favorite series. But, I'll still read the next one if/when it comes out - I'm not giving up on Barker and Llewelyn.

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