



The Blind Barber

John Dickson Carr

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The bunk's mattress was soaked with blood.

The old-fashioned razor was folded shut.

But it had been recently used. It was smeared with blood.

A voice broke the terrible stillness in the stateroom: "The Blind Barber Has Been Here Tonight!"

On an Atlantic crossing of the good ship Queen Victoria, a vicious killer is loose, and four high-living characters are hellbent to pin him down. Dr. Gideon Fell soon finds himself up to his chins in misadventure as he wades into a comedy of terrors that boasts a reel of compromising film, an emerald elephant, and a lethal razor for props, murder as the evil deed, and unmitigated mayhem as the comedy relief.

The Blind Barber Details

Date : Published 1984 by Collier Books (first published October 1st 1934)

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Author : John Dickson Carr

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From Reader Review *The Blind Barber* for online ebook

Greg says

Book 48: Mid-20th Century American Crime Readathon

Hook=3 stars: The ocean liner 'Queen Victoria' leaves NY with assorted suspicious characters. Will there be mayhem and murder? Of course!

Pace=2 stars: The days go by, the clues point....nowhere. We veer off course into the unknown.

Plot=2: Murder on a ship. Or not.

People=2: Lifeless marionettes more interesting than the live characters.

Place=1: We could be anywhere, in a hotel, a country house, doesn't matter. No atmosphere.

Summary=My overall rating is 2.0. This is more of a farce than anything else. I like this author, have read work by Carr which is far better. This is a fluke, and on the irritating side. The first 100 pages or so are promising, then it becomes senseless. Perhaps it is because the characters stay drunk the whole time and no one knows what's going on. Recommendation: Pass this one and select another by the same author.

Sharla says

This was a rollicking farce that was almost too much at times. Zany does not begin to describe it. It is a Gideon Fell mystery but the big guy isn't directly involved in the wild ship-board antics. He is called upon to unravel the mystery late in the game, which he does with his customary panache. In spite of the bizarre nature of events, the plot is the usual solid effort by John Dickson Carr. In the end all the clues are presented in logical order and it seems the solution should have been easy to spot if it hadn't been for all the entertaining distractions.

Victor says

This is primarily a comic book rather than a whodunnit. This was my first Carr and can't say he has won me over.

The book is full of madcap characters at the height of their madness and they are all doing inexplicable things one after another.

90% of the book reads like a Wodehouse plot sans the literary nous.

It's not that Carr writes badly or the solution of the mystery is bad but it's just too deep in the mountain of farcical melodrama .

I started this book expecting a whodunnit sprinkled heavily with comic breaks but there was no suspense at all and I got tired of the bumbling idiots infesting the ship.

Towards the end ,once I knew the who, I had very little interest in why and how .

Dr. Fell appears in only 3 or 4 chapters and he basically solves the case by only listening to the narrators verbal description of the events. This plot device is absurd as the narrator apparently is able to repeat telegram messages verbatim with punctuation and Dr. Fell is able to detect double meanings and clues in it without even asking for a repeat performance.!!!

I am assuming this was a non standard and substandard outing for Carr and read a few others before giving up on him.

Bettie? says

[Bettie's Books (hide spoiler)]

Himitsu_no_ai says

It was not a typical Dickson Carr if you ask me, it was more of a comedy than a detective novel. It didn't impress me or anything like that.

There was no locked room murder or an impossible one. In fact the group of friend who are the main characters aren't even sure if what they saw was accurate and if a murder even happened, because all that they could rely on was what they saw after having a few drinks and no passenger was missing after they made inquiries together with the captain of the ship they were sailing on. Anyway, the murder is like a side-theme. The main plot circles around the impossible and hilarious disappearance and reappearance of a jewel and this hobby detective group that was formed on the Queen Victoria ship. They get in to all kind of silly and hilarious situation with brings them in to a lot of trouble with the captain (one of them even spraying accidentally bug powder all over the captains cabin, in his wardrobe and in the poor mans face). So it's quite hilarious but not so much a classic Carr Novel with a lot of deduction.

Laura says

From BBC Radio 4 Extra:

Thriller starring Donald Sinden as Dr Gideon Fell, John Hartley as Superintendent Hadley and Patrick Allen as Lord Sturton.

Amateur sleuth, Dr Gideon Fell is an archetypal English eccentric created by American-born John Dickson Carr.

Dramatised by Peter Ling. Director Enyd Williams.

Robert Henderson says

This was a very poor murder mystery. Mr Carr tried to write a deliberately funny detective story and failed. Because so much of the story was given over to supposedly funny incidences, the real murderer was very clear to see. And worst of all, the humour was dreary. Maybe it was funny in 1934, but I doubt it.

Lynne King says

I was so pleased to see this book reviewed on GR today. I went through a period in the late nineties when I

bought every John Dickson Carr (he also went under the name of Carter Dixon) book that I could lay my hands on. Most of them were second-hand from the States. I paid more for the postage than for the books themselves. I built up a very nice collection of about eighty books, a mixture of paperbacks and hardbacks.

I absolutely adored this American author. His best writing was in the 1930s/1940s and he was regarded as "one of the greatest writers of the so-called 'Golden Age'." His mysteries were complex, plot-driven stories in which the puzzle is paramount. But I recall reading a biography on him (I was a true fan at this stage and still am!) and he always said that the clue was in there to discover the murderer. I could only achieve that on one occasion.

These mysteries had wonderful titles, such as "The Punch and Judy Murders", "The Peacock Feather Murders", "The Red Widow Meadows".

This particular book, "The Blind Barber" involves Dr Gideon Fell, who was in many of these books. All I can say is that this book has to be read.

A taster:

"Before the Queen Victoria had docked, she had been turned upside down in an effort to prevent a diplomatic scandal; a girl with a Greek profile had been murdered in her bath.... and only Dr Fell could deduce the identity of the mysterious Blind Barber who seemed to have been wielding one of a set of seven cut-throat razors to such deadly effect."

Addictive reading, well to me anyway.

Martina Sartor says

Quasi una commedia, ricca di gag e situazioni divertenti. Ingegnosa la spiegazione del dottor Fell, basata solo sul racconto di uno dei protagonisti.

William says

This is kinda fun if you are interested in the history of mystery novels. Carr is a witty writer, funnier (to me) than, say, P G Wodehouse. There are also countless cultural references to the 1930's which somehow I mostly recognized. I was startled to see that people used an ironic "heh heh" way back then.

The plot, and sometimes the prose, are pretty convoluted. Carr insists on conveying dialects phonetically (British, Scottish, Norwegian, working class Britain, etc), though the results did not seem accurate to me. There is also quite a lot of French here and there, none of it translated, all of it simple enough for me to understand, but this might annoy those lacking a background in that language.

There are plenty of clues, all of which I missed, but they are sorted out at the end. This is part intellectual journey, part farce and part social commentary. I can't say the result was wonderful, but I did find it entertaining.

Nancy Butts says

#4 in the Gideon Fell series: and thank goodness I didn't stumble upon this one first, or it would have been the last John Dickson Carr book I ever read. It is nothing at all like the first three books: Gideon Fell only appears in a narrative frame at the start, middle, and end of the book. Most of the action takes place on board a trans-Atlantic cruise ship, with a minor character from Book #3, the detective writer Henry Morgan, acting as the leader of a group of inane, constantly-drunk characters whom we're supposed to think are charmingly madcap. Not!

Reading this book is like watching a Three Stooges movie; most of it is one drunken escapade after another which is meant to be funny—Carr even has Dr. Fell say that the best mysteries are founded on jokes. But perhaps this kind of humor simply didn't survive the passage of time; what was considered funny in 1934 missed the mark completely in 2016. Or maybe it's just me; I didn't find it funny, I found it tedious and kept waiting for the book to end.

Let's hope that Book #5 returns to the spirit and mood of the first three.

March says

Unreadable.

Vinay Mehta says

I would say I liked it for it was different. A book worthy of being made into a movie for the fun ride it offers and all the story elements- young, comical, adventure and ending with mystery reveal. The story takes various angles and somehow ends being part of Dr. Fell cases. Very different from other mysteries but suggest readers to go through till the end and not leave it in middle.

Nancy Oakes says

I'll give it a 2.5 because the beginning was good.

"The Blind Barber" started out very well. A group of people, including Henry Morgan, the well-known detective fiction writer of previous books in this series, are on an ocean liner returning to England. One of the people, Curtis Warren, is carrying some reels of film that if found would put some members of the US government in a predicament -- and right away he's given a cosh on the head and a few reels are stolen. Then while Warren and his friends are in the cabin next door, waiting for the attacker to return for the rest, a woman calls out to him and the friends go out in the hall to check it out. They find a woman, badly injured and take her in the cabin. They go to get help and return...but she's gone and the bed has been remade. On top of everything else, an emerald elephant of great value goes missing. So with all of this crime going on, the story should have been very interesting.

However, this series of mysteries rapidly devolved into something a bit farcical and silly. It is not until the ship reaches England that Dr. Gideon Fell is brought into the picture -- and then he is able to do his magic.

I didn't really care much for this book, but it started out well and I was sucked in right away. It goes very well until the last few chapters. I didn't care about any of the characters, really -- they seemed to be just silly and unmemorable.

Would I recommend it? Probably not, even though it got sterling ratings on Amazon (but there again, I'm usually among the lone fish swimming upstream there). You can skip this one if you're reading the series and probably not miss much.

Bev says

I love John Dickson Carr. I love his sometimes complicated, totally mystifying, seemingly impossible crimes. I love Dr. Gideon Fell and his laughing and chortling when the other protagonists can't figure out the clues. I love the humor and wit. But, I'm afraid, I did not love *The Case of the Blind Barber*. It is supposedly one of Carr's finest detective comedies, but it just seemed to me that there it was overly slapstick and mad-dash. It's okay--but definitely not my favorite Carr.

What we have is Henry Morgan, spy novelist and featured character in an earlier novel *The Eight of Swords*, traveling from New York to Southampton aboard the *Queen Victoria*. Along the way he gets involved with Curtis Warren, nephew of a Very Important Person; Warren's girl, Peggy Glenn; and Capt. Thomassen Valvick (Ret.)--of the very heavy accent of apparent Swedish origin. Warren has managed to get himself robbed of more than half of a can of film that will prove very embarrassing to Uncle V.I.P. if it falls into the wrong hands. This happy band sets out to try and recover the film and along the way wind up bashing Captain Whistler (commander of the ship) over the head a few times, finding and losing an injured (and, quite possibly murdered) woman, stealing and losing and finding again an incredibly valuable emerald elephant...oh, and crossing paths with the Blind Barber, a rather nasty, murdering, thievin' sort of bloke who's in disguise. They spend their time sneaking in and out of compartments, dashing about the decks, and trying to unobtrusively hunt for the missing film, missing emerald, and missing girl. They, of course, have no luck and Morgan comes buzzing to see Gideon Fell before the *Queen Victoria* gets properly docked--in the hopes that Fell can see some sort of solution to the jolly mess. And, of course, he can.

There are some good scenes--especially at the beginning. I do like the foursome running around madly after Warren has bashed Captain Whistler a good one in the attempt to convince him that they were running to the rescue. And Captain Whistler is rather nice--when ranting he reminds me of Carr's other protagonist, Henry Merrivale, right down to the "Burn me's." But, in the end, the action just seems too over-the-top and silly to me. In fact, it kind of reminds me of a Scooby Doo episode with all the dashing about...and it even ends with the culprit blaming it all on "those meddling kids." And, there's not nearly enough of Fell. We have him at the beginning when Morgan begins his story, in the middle for an intermission, and then the wrap up. I much prefer the stories where Fell is more involved throughout.

Fairly decent mystery. Too much farce. Two stars.

Quote:

His views were based on the forthright principle that, the more respectable they looked, the more likely they were to turn out dastardly murderers. (p. 87)

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Thanks.
