




Exit Stage Left

Adam Croft

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Charlie Sparks had it all. A former primetime television personality, his outdated style has seen him relegated to the scrapheap.

When he collapses and dies during a stand-up routine at a local pub, mysterious bystander Kempston Hardwick is compelled to investigate his suspicious death.

As Hardwick begins to unravel the mystery, he quickly comes to realise that Charlie Sparks's death throws up more peculiar questions than answers.

Exit Stage Left Details

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From Reader Review Exit Stage Left for online ebook

Nancy Silk says

"A Crafty British Murder Mystery"

This is a classic Golden Age British mystery, with the story about Charlie Sparks being on stage when he collapses and dies. He had once been an outdated TV personality. Observing the death of Charlie is Kempston Hardwick and he decides to do a little investigation on his own since he feels the death is suspicious. This novel, written with a splash of humor, may remind you of classic stories of Sherlock Holmes and Hercule Poirot. It's totally humorous and intoxicating. Highly recommend.

Sharon says

As a novella this story introduces a sleuth who reminds the reader of an Agatha Christie/Sherlock Holmes character. I enjoyed the story although quite a simple solution was evident but there were some twists.

Midnight says

I have read and enjoyed Adam Croft's Knight & Culverhouse books - 'Too Close for Comfort' and 'Guilty As Sin', so was intrigued when I noticed Exit Stage Left with a different protagonist in the form of Kempston Hardwick.

We are initially introduced to Kempston in a pub, the Freemason's Arms, where he strikes up a conversation with Ellis Flint. Charlie Sparks, a has been celebrity who at the height of his fame performed at Royal Variety performances, is scheduled to do a live show at the pub that evening.

Kempston is an amateur detective and an alliance is quickly formed with Flint as a sidekick as they become involved in investigating the sudden death of Sparks at the start of his performance.

This novella can comfortably be read in a couple of hours and I read it in an afternoon.

Adam Croft has an excellent writing style, which is becoming more and more refined with each publication - not that it was deficient, it's more his skills are being enhanced with every story!

It is certainly an easy read and it wasn't until I'd almost reached the end - 93 per cent through the story to be exact! - that I had a light bulb moment and worked out exactly how the murder had been committed.

A very clever piece of writing!

Milena Benini says

The whole thing is so self-consciously constructed, it comes off as natural as a cheap plastic rose from the 70s that's been additionally chewed on by one of those head-nodding dogs that used to be all the rage then. The dialogue is dead even before it leaves the characters' mouths, the situation as convincing as an excuse for no homework thought up by a nine-year-old, and the characters strive to be quirky as befits a (semi-)cozy with the determined good cheer of a fifties housewife moments before a nervous breakdown.

Rob Sedgwick says

Hackneyed

This is hackneyed to the point of parody. Genius amateur detective. Dumb sidekick. Stupid police officers. Lots of characters with secrets and even a victim of poisoning. The characters were all stereotypes.

Randy Tramp says

I like the character, Kempston Hardwick. He's down-to-earth, dedicated type of guy. And, he always figures out mysteries.

This was a fast-paced, well-thought-out, suspense-driven, story. I loved it and look forward to more Hardwick novels.

Pat Kozakewich says

I have become totally captivated by Mr. Hardwick. What can I say; he is a bit pompous but in a good way. His sense of humor, along with his minute observations are so entertaining. A very well written story with a very well-rounded cast of characters. Looking forward to reading more books in the same vein by a great author. Thank you, Mr. Croft.

Susan says

Charlie Sparks is reduced to performing his routine in pubs, until it kills him. Kempston Hardwick happens to be there that evening and is convinced it's murder. He decides to investigate.

An enjoyable and quick read, a good start to the series

Bianca says

I received this book as an ARC in exchange of a honest review.Thank you,Adam!

I enjoyed this book.It was an easy and sweet reading,but still I rated with three stars on Goodreads.

There were some parts that were'nt so good.First of all,though is a crime thriller,which I adore,it hadn't this mystery of one.This mystery that keeps you reading ,that makes you hold your breath.I was a little bored reading this book.Don't get me wrong,it was an interesting and exciting read,but not the best one.

Also,the characters aren't very well described.I don't know how do any of characters look like.But the main character,Kempston Hardwick was the typical character of the crime books.He sees everything and he knows everything about someone just by looking at him or her .He is also very smart.The best part of this book is Kempston.

This book was a little too rushed.I mean,some parts passed too fast and I didn't understand them.

But the great part is that Adam has a very easy style-writing which makes the book easy to read.That's why I read 100 in like,3 hours?

Ok,I have to admit that even for 1 briefly second I didn't believe that the "weapon" of the crime is the one that it is.Also ,the end is clever built.

A mysterious crime and a smart investigator.I recommend this book if you're looking for a short ,sweet reading!

Charlie Sparks is a public figure.He has almost everything:a lot of money,a lover wife and a a career in television.But in the night of a show at a pub full of people he loses everything when he dies.He collapses on stage and dies.Nobody knows what happened with him.

But Kempston Hardwick was in the public when Charlie died.He and his new friend are going to the crime scene and Hardwick discovers that Charlie was poisoned .But who killed him?And why?These are the questions.

Kempston and his mate are investigating Charlie Sparks' mysterious death.And they will find out that Charlie wasn't exactly who he seemed to be.

Do you want to find Charlie's secrets and assasin?Well,read the book!

A mysterious crime and a smart investigator.I recommend this book if you're looking for a short ,sweet reading!

Lesley says

fun short story but very stereotypical and maybe not so orginal but like I said--just a fun read!

Mike McCormick says

Very entertaining.

Katherine Dunn-Mines says

An entertaining short read, set in the modern day but with a feel of a classic crime duo, slightly tongue in cheek. Not for those who like a gritty, realistic crime thriller but especially given that it is quite brief, a welcome little morsel between longer reads.

LISA MARKHAM says

I have mixed feelings about this story. I liked it, but for some reason it kept bothering me that Kempston Hardwick wasn't who people thought he was (maybe I'm too honest lol) and the fact that he had only just met Ellis Flint but he continued to hang out with him while investigating, even though he didn't appear useful. I didn't see the point in that unless to make it appear more authentic when talking to suspects.

Saying that, I did enjoy the story unravelling and wanted to read more and see who did it and why. I have read other Adam Croft books and enjoyed them and see that this is part of a series. Therefore I'm going to read the next one and see how I feel second time around. I do like a series where you see the characters develop as well as enjoying a new story so will be interesting what I feel about the next one in the series.

Cathy says

Derivative at best. Boring at worst. Shades of Holmes, Watson and Poirot.

Roddy Williams says

I started this during my hour's commute to work and finished it on the way back. Yes. It's that short. Once famous TV star Charlie Sparks' career has sunk to the point where he is doing spots in local pubs. Kempston Hardwick is in The Freemasons Arms on the night of a scheduled performance and there makes the acquaintance of Ellis Flint, who pays the landlord for a private meeting for them both with Charlie. During the performance Charlie collapses and dies. Kempston suspects murder and shanghai's Ellis into helping him in a private investigation.

It's all a bit odd, as the book is not really sure whether it's a comical adventure or not. One also suspects that the dated style of the narrative suggests it was written a long time ago and just put out for free for the sake of it. Fair enough if that's the case, but one would like some sense of date establishment. One presumes from the nature of his comedy that Charlie was famous in the seventies. Most major stars of the seventies of this nature were in their thirties or forties or older which would make Charlie a little too old today for regular

stage appearances and frolicking with strippers. You never know though. Also there's only one appearance of a mobile phone, which I suspect may have been added as an update.

Characterisation isn't too bad apart from the case of Hardwick himself, of whom we learn nothing. In other scenarios this may well work but here it just doesn't.

The plot is fine and it's well written which makes it more of a shame that this wasn't treated as a decent first draft and rewritten to at least twice its size, to allow some character development and to establish where we are in time.
