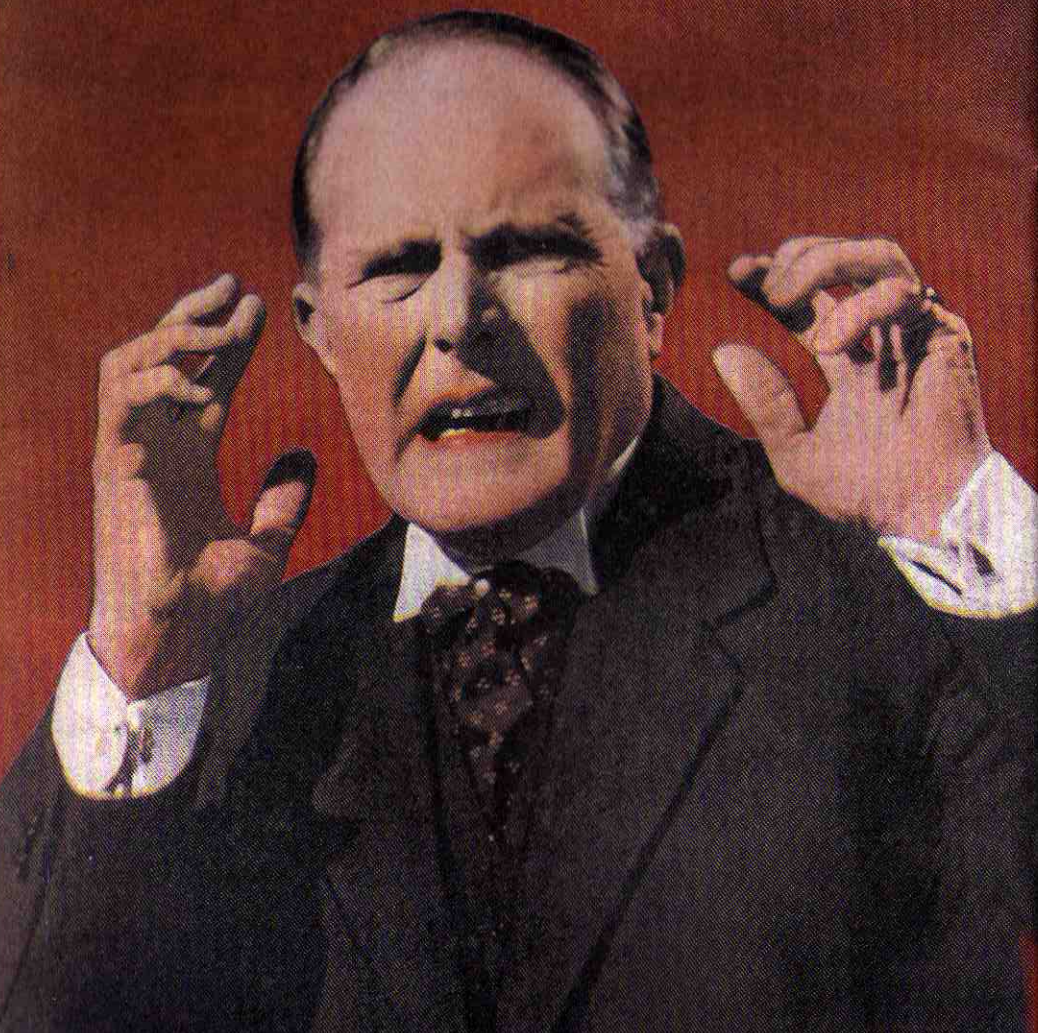


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The Ultimate Locked-Room Library

by Jonathan Scott

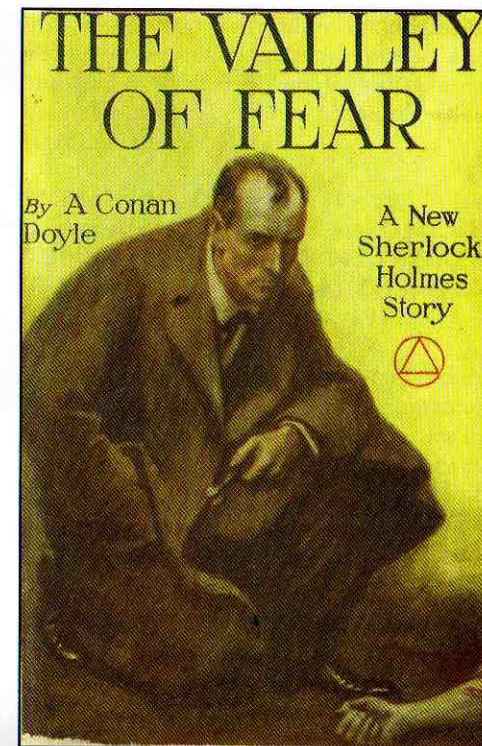


A locked-room problem is at the heart of the first stanza of modern detective fiction – Edgar Allan Poe’s ‘The Murders in the Rue Morgue’ – and there are locked-room devices in the works of Wilkie Collins, Le Fanu and others. Holmes was faced with several impossible conundrums in the likes of *The Valley of Fear* and ‘The Adventure of the Speckled Band’, before Israel Zangwill and Gaston Leroux cemented the form.

To qualify as a locked-room mystery, the crime does not have to take place in an hermetically sealed chamber. The deed must simply seem impossible – through a venue that is locked or guarded, a victim killed at close range under observation, a killer who leaves no footprints in the snow, or an impossible suspect, shielded by an unbreakable alibi. The stories often evoke the supernatural, only to be unmasked as an act of trickery, illusion or misdirection.

The books below are some of the best, rarest and most important locked-room mysteries of all. Arranged in chronological author, there is only one entry per author – otherwise the list would be dominated by John Dickson Carr/Carter Dickson. We concentrate on novels and collections published first in English, omitting a number of important French and Japanese authors such as Noel Vindry, Thomas Narcejac, Pierre Boileau and Soji Shimada. Indeed in Roland Lacourbe’s anthology *Mystères à Huis Clos* (Mysteries In Camera) he included a list of recommended reading suggested by a panel of authors and critics. This list has been transcribed (and made available online) by renowned aficionado and locked-room translator John Pugmire, who points out: “The striking feature of this list is that about 40 per cent of the titles have never been published in English.”

Other sources that were invaluable in compiling this feature include *The Perfect Murder: A Study in Detection* (1989) by David Lehman, Edward D. Hoch’s *All But*



Impossible (1981), Robert Adey’s bibliography *Locked-Room Murders* (1991), ‘The Locked-Room Lecture’ (Chapter 17 of *The Hollow Man*) by John Dickson Carr (of which more below), and the websites www.mysteryfile.com and www.classiccrimefiction.com.

Locked-room mysteries hold a special place in the hearts of crime collectors. The challenge and intrigue of the impossible, the intricacy of the baroque set pieces, set them apart from mere thrillers. The question is not only who, but how?

The prices given in this feature reflect what a specialist dealer would charge, and assume copies in Very Good (or better) condition. The most modern books are assumed to be in Mint condition. Unless otherwise indicated, all pre-1910 values are without jackets, later titles with. All the 19th-century book values assume choice copies, complete and in their original bindings.

TALES

BY

EDGAR A. POE.

NEW YORK:
WILEY AND PUTNAM, 161 BROADWAY.

1845.

1. Edgar Allan Poe, 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue' in TALES (Wiley and Putnam: Library of American Books, 1845; first issue with T.B. Smith and H. Ludwig on copyright page; paperback buff wrappers) £40,000+ Ditto (second issue with 'Craighead's Press' on copyright page; paperback) £30,000+ Ditto (first or second issue; rebound) £5,000+ Ditto (London: Wiley & Putnam, 1845; green cloth) £20,000+ Ditto (rebound) £4,000+

A woman and her daughter are murdered in an inaccessible room, locked from the inside. The mother's throat is cut, the daughter strangled and stuffed in a chimney. This is the puzzle of Edgar Allan Poe's 'Murders in

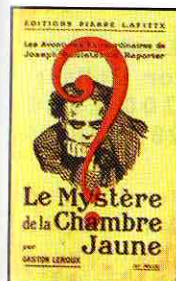
the Rue Morgue', investigated through a series of newspaper reports into the crime, which has baffled the French Sûreté. Although the solution is not as artful as works that followed, it set a template for impossible crimes and the conventions of detective fiction, paving the way for an army of sleuths to follow in the footsteps of C. Auguste Dupin.

2. Israel Zangwill, THE BIG BOW MYSTERY (Henry, 1892; paperback) £400-£600

Israel Zangwill's novella is considered the earliest proper locked-room mystery, and has been almost continuously in print since first publication. The story begins on a foggy day in the Bow district of London, where the wonderfully Dickensian widow Mrs Drabdump is convinced her lodger has come to harm. When Inspector Grodman forces the door, they discover the unfortunate man in bed, his throat cut. First issued in light buff pictorial covers, priced one shilling, this was the English humorist and Zionist campaigner's only work of mystery. He was perhaps most noted for the novel *Children of the Ghetto* and for a play that made him the toast of America – *The Melting Pot*, with its famous line: "America is God's Crucible, the great Melting-Pot where all the races of Europe are melting and reforming... Germans and Frenchmen, Irishmen and Englishmen, Jews and Russians – into the Crucible with you all! God is making the American."



3. Gaston Leroux, LE MYSTÈRE DE LA CHAMBRE JAUNE (Editions Pierre Lafitte, 1908; paperback) £100-£150 THE MYSTERY OF THE YELLOW ROOM (London Daily Mail, 1908; paperback) £60-£80 (Edgard



Arnold, 1909; paperback) £40-£60

In 1981 Edward D. Hoch invited seventeen authors and reviewers to choose their favourite impossible crime stories. The results appear in his anthology *All But Impossible*. Carr's *The Three Coffins* (see below) was number one, while Carr himself chose *The Mystery of the Yellow Room*. The 'Extraordinary Adventures of Joseph Rouletabille, Reporter' was first serialised in *L'Illustration* in late 1907, before it was published in book form in 1908. There is no murder in the story. Miss Stangerson is merely injured by an attacker, who disappears from a locked-room. Rouletabille investigates the case, and Leroux furnishes readers with clues, diagrams and floorplans, to help crack the problem.



4. Jacques Futrelle, THE THINKING MACHINE (Dodd Mead, US, 1907) £200-£300 (Chapman and Hall, 1907) £150-£200

When Max Allan Collins wrote *The Titanic Murders* (1999), the idea of

setting a murder mystery on the doomed liner was not new. His innovation was casting American detective novelist Jacques Futrelle as the protagonist of the piece, a real victim of the tragedy. Futrelle wrote 43 turn-of-the-century tales about 'the Thinking Machine' – Professor Augustus S.F.X. Van Dusen. Like Dupin, Van Dusen solved impossible crimes brought to him by a third party – reporter Hutchinson Hatch. *The Thinking Machine* was chosen by H.R.F. Keating for his chart of the 100 best crime

and mystery books, and it includes the frequently anthologised masterpiece, 'The Problem of Cell 13', where Van Dusen wagers he can escape from a prison cell using ingenuity alone.

5. Melville Davisson Post, 'The Doomsdorf Mystery' in UNCLE ABNER, MASTER OF MYSTERIES (D. Appleton, US, 1918) £100-£125 (£400-£600) (Tom Stacy, 1972) £4-£6 (£15-£20)

American author Melville Davisson Post's recurring character, Bible-bashing amateur sleuth Uncle Abner, solved mysteries set in a reclusive Virginia community during the early years of the nineteenth century. The highpoint of this collection was 'The Doomsdorf Mystery', when he and his brother Randolph travel to confront Doomsdorf, a notorious moonshiner, only to find him murdered.

"The answer is evident," said Randolph: "The one who killed Doomsdorf hid in the room until he was asleep; then he shot him and went out."

"The explanation is excellent but for one thing," replied Abner: "How did the assassin bolt the door behind him on the inside of this room after he had gone out?" Randolph flung out his arms with a hopeless gesture. "Who knows?" he cried. "Maybe Doomsdorf killed himself."

Abner laughed. "And after firing a handful of shot into his heart he got up and put the gun back carefully into the forks against the wall!"

6. Eden Philpotts, THE GREY ROOM (Hurst & Blackett [1921]) £20-£30 (£200-£300)

The highly prolific Devonian writer wrote many dozens of mysteries in a 70-year career, beginning with *My Adventure in the Flying Scotsman* (1888). The Grey Room was his most successful detective novel and the best of his locked room mysteries. Visitors to a country house suffer a bizarre series of deaths in the titular macabre room. The



detective Manetti discovers that poison, secreted in the mattress of the large antique bed is released by the body heat of the person sleeping in the bed. This is one of the most unusual stories in the locked-bedroom genre, that began with 'A Terribly Strange Bed' by Wilkie Collins in 1852.

7. G.K. Chesterton, THE INCREDULITY OF FATHER BROWN (Cassell, 1926) £75-£100 (£750-£1,000)

Several stories by the 'prince of paradox' include impossible puzzles. In the case of 'The Oracle of the Dog', first published in *Nash's Magazine* in December 1923, Father Brown is a guest of a retired colonel when his host is found dead, stabbed in a watched summerhouse with a narrow blade, but no murder weapon remains. A dog's howling seemed to foretell the crime, while barking at the Colonel's lawyer seems to indicate the murderer. The actual method forms one of Father Brown's most intricate challenges. Other impossible crimes in this collection include 'The Dagger with Wings', 'The Miracle of Moon Crescent' and 'The Arrow of Heaven'.

8. Horatio Winslow & Leslie Quirk, INTO THIN AIR (Victor Gollancz, 1928) £30-£40 (£200-£300) (Doubleday, US, 1928) £20-£30 (£150-200)

Horatio Winslow was a writer of magazine stories, particularly for the *Saturday Evening Post*, who collaborated with Leslie Quirk to write *Into Thin Air*, a triple-pronged impossible mystery of small-town America, tackled by two professional criminologists. The story takes on a supernatural atmosphere, involving both mediums and séances, a method frequently employed by Carr, Chesterton and Talbot's *Rim of the Pit*.



9. Alan Thomas, THE DEATH OF LAURENCE VINING (Ernest Benn, 1928 [1929]) £30-£40 (£200-£300)

Alan Thomas was born in London in 1896, educated at Cambridge, later becoming a barrister and literary editor. In his best known work, Inspector Widgeon is sent to investigate the strange death of Laurence Vining, a criminologist who after responding to an anonymous letter inviting him to a meeting in Hyde Park, is found dead in an elevator at the tube station. Workers see him go in, the lift does not stop, and he is found with a dagger in his back when the doors reopen. Multiple solutions and narrative trickery pervade this ingenious tale. War-poet and critic Edward Shanks, wrote in *The London Mercury*: "Mr. Thomas does not, perhaps, play quite fair with the reader. But the competition is growing exceedingly severe and the contrivance of his murder is exceedingly good."

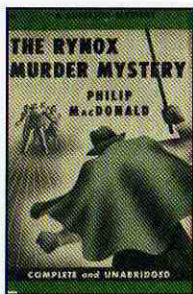
10. Philip MacDonald, RYNOX (Collins Crime Club, 1930) £150-£200 (£1,000-£1,500)

MacDonald was a popular British mystery and thriller author, who later moved to



Above: Freeman Crofts. Below: Dorothy L. Sayers

America, writing many successful scripts for radio, film and television. (One of his credits was the novelisation of the film *Forbidden Planet*, writing as 'W.J. Stuart'.) He penned many highly collectable mysteries including *The Noose* (the first Collins Crime Club



title), *The List of Adrian Messenger*, *The Nursemaid Who Disappeared* (a favourite of American critic Alexander Woollcott), plus impossible crimes such as below-par Colonel Gethryn title *The Choice* (also known as *The Polferry Riddle*) and this non-series novel, dealing with murderous troubles at the eponymous firm.

11. Freeman Wills Crofts, SUDDEN DEATH (Collins Crime Club, 1932) £60-£80 (£800-£1,200)

The Dublin-born author wrote pioneering forerunners to the modern Police Procedural, many starring the dour Inspector French. His investigations were normally hampered by the kind of unbreakable alibis that made Columbo's life so difficult. Raymond Chandler praised Crofts' plotting, calling him "the soundest builder of them all". In *Sudden Death* he has two locked murder scenes to investigate in the same house, seen through the eyes of the Inspector and the story's second narrator – housekeeper Anne Day.

12. Virgil Markham, THE DEVIL DRIVES (Collins Crime Club, 1932) £60-£80 (£800-£1,200)

The innovative puzzle at the heart of *The Devil Drives* doesn't actually appear until well into the novel. The story has a hard-boiled flavour, beginning with a jailbreak, seen from the point of view of the warden, before the hero disguises himself, and infiltrates the New York underworld. Virgil was the son of Edwin Markham, American

poet, most famous for 'The Man with the Hoe' (1898).

13. Dorothy L. Sayers, HAVE HIS CARCASE (Victor Gollancz, 1932) £40-£60 (£1,500+)

The majority thus far have involved literal locked rooms, but during the 1930s authors began to explore other impossibilities, one frequent poser being a body surrounded by fresh snow without footprints. In the case of *Have His Carcase* (the seventh Lord Peter Wimsey story, and the second with crime novelist Harriet Vane), the victim is found on a rock in the middle of a footprint-free stretch of sand. The crime is so recent that the victim's blood has not yet clotted, yet fishermen less than 100 yards away saw nobody approach the rock for hours.

14. James Ronald, SIX WERE TO DIE (Hodder & Stoughton, 1932) £30-£40 (200-£300)

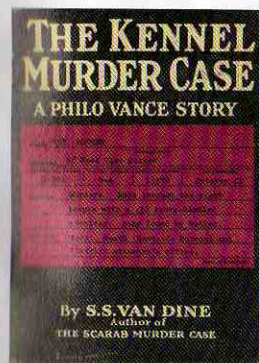
James Ronald was a relatively prolific English crime and thriller writer, whose works appeared under his own name, and pseudonyms Michael Crombie and Kirk Wales. His series character was Julian Mendoza, reporter for the *London Morning World*. His other memorable locked-room problem *They Can't Hang Me!* (1938), begins with asylum inmate Lucius Marplay promising to escape and murder four victims. He keeps his promise.

15. T.H. White, DARKNESS AT PEMBERLEY (Victor Gollancz, 1932) £200-£300 (£1,000+)

Terence Hanbury White's reputation rests on Arthurian Saga *The Once and Future King*, written long after he tried his hand at crime fiction with this ingenious puzzle



piece. The case of a college professor murdered in his room is tackled by Police Inspector Buller. The story gradually transforms from cozy mystery to thrilling chiller, when the killer follows the detective to the estate of Pemberley, and attempts to kill the appropriately named host – Darcy.



16. S.S. Van Dine, THE KENNEL MURDER CASE (Scribner, US, 1933) £150-£200 (600-£800) (Cassell, 1933) £100-£150 (£400-£600)

S.S. Van Dine was the pseudonym of art critic and author Willard Huntington Wright, whose Philo Vance stories were hugely popular in the 1920s and 30s. In *The Kennel Murder Case* the dapper detective is set three problems. Archer Coe is found in a locked-room with a pistol, in what looks like a case of suicide, until examination uncovers a fractured skull and dagger wound to his back. Then his brother is found dead the next morning in a downstairs closet. Finally a dog is discovered wounded behind a curtain. The story was filmed with William Powell as the lead – essentially a trial run for his memorable performances as Nick Charles in the 'Thin Man' series.

17. R.E. Swartwout, THE BOAT RACE MURDER (Grayson, 1933) £60-£80 (£400-£600+)

Robert Egerton Swartwout is probably the most obscure author in this list. He was a New Yorker who moved to England to attend the University of Cambridge, where he coxed the university rowing team to victory over Oxford in 1930. After university he remained in England writing for *Punch*, contributing crosswords for *The Spectator*,

producing books of verse (*Rhymes of the River*) and non-fiction (*The Monastic Craftsman*). He also penned a short Holmesian pastiche called 'The Omnibus Murder'. This was his only full-length work of detective fiction, where the victim is found drowned in a sealed bathroom. The story itself is full of references to other more famous detectives, and a Philip MacDonald novel is even used as evidence. The solution has been used many times since, and so may appear old hat to modern readers.

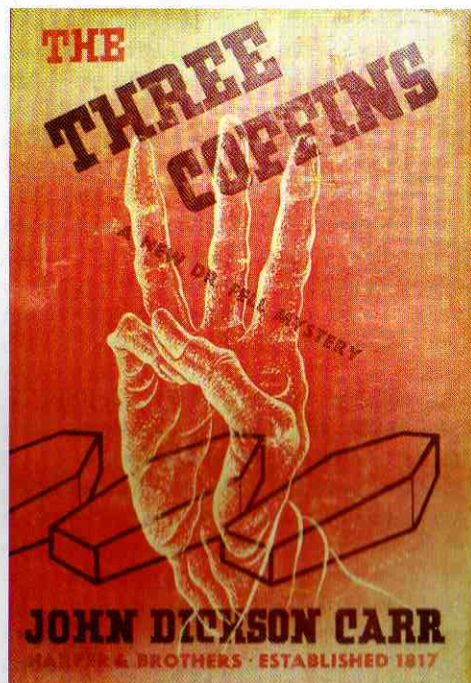
18. Ellery Queen, THE CHINESE ORANGE MYSTERY (Stokes, US, 1934) £60-£80 (£400-£600+) (Gollancz, 1934) £30-£40 (£200-£300)

"I maintain that at this point in your reading of *The Chinese Orange Mystery* you have all the facts in your possession essential to a clear solution of the mystery."

So begins the penultimate chapter of Queen's influential novel, eighth on Edward D. Hoch's list of top ten impossible problems, but in reality you would be hard pushed to guess the outcome. A wealthy publisher and collector of Chinese stamps, who runs his business from a hotel room, is visited by an anonymous man. He winds up dead in a guarded reception room, his clothing reversed and further encumbered by two African spears.

19. John Dickson Carr, THE THREE COFFINS (Harper, US, 1935; with unbroken seal on last section) £200-£300 (£800-£1,000+) Ditto, with seal broken £75-£100 (£800-£1,000+) Aka THE HOLLOW MAN (Hamish Hamilton, 1935) £150-£200 (£800-£1,000)

John Dickson Carr delighted in making life difficult for himself. In *The Three Coffins*, first issued in the UK as *The Hollow Man*, Dr Gideon Fell investigates two murders. Professor Grimaud's killer disappears without leaving a trace, with the only door to locked from the inside, with witnesses



gathered in the hall outside, and the ground below the window and the roof above covered in unbroken snow. To make matters worse, a second victim is shot at close range with the same revolver, only minutes later, again leaving no tracks in the snow. This mystery, despite strong competition from other Carr and pseudonymous works, came top of Edward D. Hoch's survey of favourite impossible crime novels. The story is especially famous for the 'locked-room lecture', where Dr Fell explains the different methods of the perfect murder.

20. C. Daly King, OBELISTS FLY HIGH (Collins Crime Club, 1935) £100-£150 (£800-£1,000+)

King's masterpiece, issued the same year as Agatha Christie's *Death in the Clouds*, involves the murder of a physician during a transcontinental flight. King always enjoyed setting his problems in confined spaces – from basements to penthouses – and describes these grim venues in exhaustive



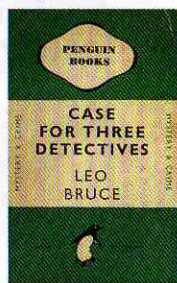
detail. This is the most admired of his six mysteries, and although not as complex as the best of Van Dine, Carr or Queen, the solution is nevertheless surprising. There is no denying the author's gift, but some of his characters are frankly infuriating. King's wonderful collection, *The Curious Mr Tarrant*, in which seven of the eight stories are 'impossible crime' mysteries, was also published in 1935 by Collins Crime Club, and fetches a similar high price.

21. Anthony Abbot, ABOUT THE MURDER OF A STARTLED LADY (Farrar & Rinehart, US, 1935) £40-£60 (£400-£600) aka THE MURDER OF A STARTLED LADY (Collins Crime Club, 1936) £40-£60 (£800-£1,000)

Another largely forgotten American author, Anthony Abbot (the pen name of journalist Fulton Oursler) is known for series character Thatcher Colt, a shadowy copy of Van Dine's Philo Vance. *The Startled Lady* is a macabre affair, part police procedural, part classic mystery, with a hint of the supernatural. He converted to Catholicism in 1943 and wrote *The Greatest Story Ever Told*.

22. Leo Bruce, CASE FOR THREE DETECTIVES (Geoffrey Bles, 1936)

This light-hearted pastiche sees English author Leo Bruce (Rupert Croft-Cooke) poke fun at the traditional structure of detective fiction, reversing



Agatha Christie

the relationship of amateur sleuth and professional policeman, when three amateurs (based on Lord Peter Wimsey, Hercule Poirot and Father Brown) are bamboozled by a locked-room case, solved by the straight talking Sergeant Beef. The Sergeant went on to appear in eight novels.

23. Helen Reilly, DEAD MAN CONTROL (Doubleday Crime Club, US, 1936) £20-£30 (£150-£200) (Heinemann, 1937) £15-£20 (£100-£150)

American Helen Reilly wrote forerunners of the Police Procedural, mostly featuring New

York police Inspector Christopher McKee, similar to Van Dine and Anthony Abbot's Thatcher Colt, with a dash of R. Austin Freeman. The fifth McKee mystery was included in a list of recommended locked-room reading, suggested by a panel of authors for Roland Lacourbe's anthology *Mystères à Huis Clos*.

24. Dennis Wheatley, (with J.G. Links): THE MALINSAY MASSACRE (Hutchinson, [1938] wrappers, with unbroken seal) £100-£150 Ditto (with broken seal) £30-£40

In the 1930s, taking a leaf out of the 'sealed' mysteries of John Dickson Carr, Dennis Wheatley conceived a series of whodunits, presented as case files, with testimonies, letters, pieces of evidence such as hairs or pills. The reader had to go through the evidence to solve the mystery before unsealing the last pages of the file, which gave the answer. Four of these 'Crime Dossiers' were published: *Murder Off Miami*, *Who Killed Robert Prentice?*, *The Malinsay Massacre* and *Herewith The Clues*.

25. John Rhode, INVISIBLE WEAPONS (Collins Crime Club, 1938) £75-£125 (£1,000-£1,250+)

Cecil Street wrote a huge number of mysteries under the pen names John Rhode, Miles Burton and a handful as Cecil Waye. Many of his stories concentrated on the puzzle of the crime, rather than characterisation, and *Invisible Weapons* is arguably his purest locked-room mystery. An aging Dr Lancelot Priestley investigates two deaths, one in a sealed suburban cloakroom, the second in a wine cellar.

26. Clayton Rawson, DEATH FROM A TOP HAT (G.P. Putnam, US, 1938) £75-£100 (£600-£800) (Collins Crime Club, 1938) £75-£100 (£1,000-£1,500)

There is a natural link between magicians and locked-room mysteries. Both seek to

misdirect their audience, to create illusion and false assumptions. And long before Jonathan Creek there was the Great Merlini, a professional magician and magic shop owner who appeared in a short run of novels by influential American author Clayton Rawson, one of four founding members of the Mystery Writers of America. Merlini's first adventure was this Haycraft-Queen Cornerstone (and legendary rarity, especially in its dustjacket).

27. Agatha Christie, MURDER FOR CHRISTMAS (Dodd Mead, US, 1938) £60-£80 (£600-£800) aka HERCULE POIROT'S CHRISTMAS (Collins Crime Club, 1939 [December 1938]) £100-£150 (£1,500-£2,000+)

This seasonal offering from the Queen of Crime is one of her unsung masterpieces. It takes place during the Lee family reunion, which is shattered by a deafening crash of furniture, followed by a high-pitched scream. When the door is forced open, the furniture is found upended, the safe rifled, and the tyrannical Simeon Lee lying dead with his throat cut. Another challenge for those little grey cells.

28. H.H. Holmes, NINE TIMES NINE (Duell, Sloan & Pearce, US, 1940) £30-£40 (£200-£300)

Renowned SF editor Anthony Boucher's *Nine Times Nine* has an ingenious plot and a unique sleuth in Sister Ursula. The story begins when Wolfe Harrigan, a devout Catholic who debunks religious cults, is discovered murdered in a locked room moments after Ashavar, a cult leader (and natural suspect), is seen with him. The story is notable for an extended summery of Carr's lecture in *The Three Coffins*, and for a totally new solution. Sadly Sister Ursula only went on to appear in one other novel and a smattering of short stories. (H.H. Holmes and Anthony Boucher were the pen-names of William Anthony Parker White.) In the

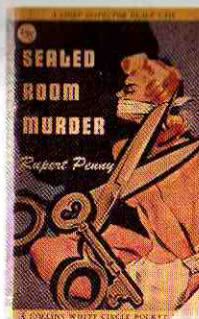
forementioned poll of 17 writers and reviewers, *Nine Times Nine* was voted ninth best locked-room mystery of all time. The book in second place was the following by Hake Talbot...

29. Hake Talbot, RIM OF THE PIT (Simon & Schuster, US, 1944) £30-£40 (£100-£150) (Tom Stacy, 1972) £4-£6 (£15-£20)

Hake Talbot was the pen name of American conjuror Henning Nelms, whose macabre puzzle *Rim of the Pit* is frequently compared to the weird fiction of Algernon Blackwood and H.P. Lovecraft. While the story is certainly bizarre, involving magic, ghosts and Indian spirits, Nelms was most obviously influenced by Carr. In the story a group gather at a remote snowbound lodge in New England, where intrigue is quickly established by a séance and murder that only a dead man could have committed. What sets it apart from the crowd is the multiple mysteries that assault our hero adventurer Rogan Kincaid, including a locked-room and mysterious footprints in the snow.

30. Rupert Penny, SEALED-ROOM MURDER (Collins Crime Club, 1941) £60-£80 (£600-£800)

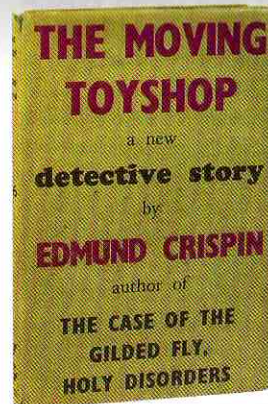
Rupert Penny (pseudonym of Ernest Basil Charles Thornett) is arguably the most cult author on this list, whose first editions have been steadily rising in value over the last ten years. On the blurb for *Sweet Poison*, the Crime Club marketer claimed a Penny novel will "brush up your brains, give your wits an airing, stimulate your grey matter and leave you mentally invigorated". While this may be a slight exaggeration, Penny's 'Policeman' series is highly regarded. This was last, one of the most satisfying



impossible crimes ever written by a British author. It's a classic of the era, set a large family mansion, where matriarch Harriet Steele is targeted by a series of mischievous attacks (including ink poured into her underwear drawer), causing her to hire a private detective, after which she is promptly stabbed. The solution was a totally new variation at the time.

31. Christianna Brand, THE CROOKED WREATH (Dodd Mead, US, 1946) £20-£30 (£75-£100) aka SUDDENLY AT HIS RESIDENCE (Bodley Head, 1947) £20-£30 (£75-£100)

British author Mary Christianna Lewis's reputation rests on the *Nurse Matilda* children's stories and six crime novels solved by the shabby, chain-smoking Inspector Cockrill. The second, *Green For Danger*, was a favourite of H.R.F. Keating's, while locked-room masterpiece *Suddenly At His Residence* was written the same year she was invited to join the Detection Club. Issued first in the US as *The Crooked Wreath*, the story is set in a country house, where Sir Richard Marsh is surrounded by family and friends, until one of them murders him.



32. Edmund Crispin, THE MOVING TOYSHOP (Victor Gollancz, 1946) £20-£30 (£100-£150)

Anthony Boucher once described Edmund Crispin (pseudonym of composer and *Sunday Times* crime critic Robert Bruce Montgomery) as a "blend of John Dickson

Carr, Michael Innes, M.R. James and the Marx Brothers". Although he only wrote a handful of mystery stories under his pen-name, they are fondly remembered for their wit, charm, ingenuity and charismatic sleuth – Oxford don Gervase Fen. This tale begins at night when a poet stumbles on the dead body of an old lady in an Oxford toyshop. The following morning the toyshop has vanished and in its place is a grocery store. The book is a unique mixture of detection and farce, where Fen has to track down five characters named after the nonsense poems of Edward Lear.

33. R.T. Campbell, BODIES IN A BOOKSHOP (Jahn Westhouse, 1946) £15-£20 (£40-£60)

Scottish poet and novelist Ruthven Campbell Todd, who helped launch the career of Julian Maclaren Ross, penned several murder mysteries as R.T. Campbell, solved by witty botanist Professor Stubbs. In this tale his assistant is browsing secondhand bookstores off Tottenham Court Road, when he stumbles across a locked-room filled with gas and two dead bodies.

34. Herbert Brean, WILDERS WALK AWAY (William Morrow, US, 1948) £15-£20 (£40-£60) (Heinemann, 1949) £10-£15 (£30-£40)

Herbert Brean was an American journalist, crime fiction writer and vice president of the Mystery Writers of America. His recurring series characters William Deacon and freelance journalist Reynold Frame appeared in several mysteries, while *A Case of Identity* was the basis for Alfred Hitchcock's *The Wrong Man*. In this classy locked-room mystery, Frame travels to Wilders Lane, Vermont, a village with a history of inexplicable disappearances. . .

35. Akimitsu Takagi, THE TATTOO MURDER CASE (Japan, 1948 NA) (Soho Press, US, 1998) £6-£8 (£15-£20).



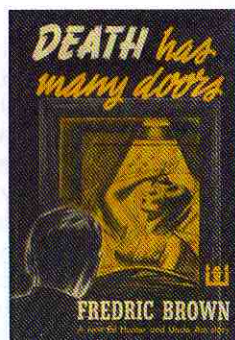
This was the first detective story by leading Japanese crime author Akimitsu Takagi (Takagi Seiichi), first published in 1948. The protagonist is Kyosuke Kamizu, an assistant professor at Tokyo University, who investigates the brutal murder of Kinue Nomura, whose dismembered head and limbs are found in a sealed bathroom. Her torso, decorated by a very beautiful tattoo, is missing. His follow-up novel, *Noh mask Murder Case*, won Japan's Mystery Writer Club Award.

36. Helen McCloy, THROUGH A GLASS DARKLY (Random House, US, [1950]) £15-£20 (£50-£75) (Victor Gollancz, 1951) £10-£15 (£40-£60)

American writer Helen McCloy's eighth Dr Basil Willing novel, *Through a Glass Darkly*, is a macabre supernatural puzzle. McCloy often used duplicates and doppelgangers in her intricate plots, which were normally tailed off by an explanation of the crime from her psychologist investigator Dr Willing. *Mr Splitfoot* (1968) also had a supernatural flavour, and was another favourite of H.R.F. Keating

37. Fredric Brown, DEATH HAS MANY DOORS (E.P. Dutton, US, 1951) £15-£20 (£150-£200) (T.V. Boardman, 1952) £15-£20 (£60-£80)

Pulp SF author Frederic Brown was



the master of the short story and unexpected twist, who wrote mystery stories "to pay the bills". This was the fifth in the 'Ed and Am' series (Ed Hunter and Uncle Ambrose), launched with the Edgar Award-winning *The Fabulous Clipjoint*. This novel begins when Sally Doerr walks into the Hunter & Hunter detective agency, in fear of being murdered by Martians. They don't take her too seriously, and she winds up dead. Then Sally's sister complains of a premonition of her own death, which also comes true.

38. Peter Antony, THE WOMAN IN THE WARDROBE (illustrated by Nicolas Bentley) (Evans, 1951)

At the start of Anthony Shaffer's play *Sleuth*, we meet a crime author (played by Laurence Olivier in the film) reading the dramatic solution of a locked-room problem where a body is found in the middle of a tennis court, with no tracks left behind him in the red dust. Long before *Sleuth*, twin brothers Peter and Anthony Shaffer, writing as 'Peter Antony' (the original spelling on the jacket) produced three light-hearted mystery novels – *The Woman in the Wardrobe*, *How Doth the Little Crocodile?* and *Withered Murder*. This gentle mystery reveals the brothers' well developed reverence for the structure and characters of detective stories.

39. Derek Smith, WHISTLE UP THE DEVIL (John Gifford, 1953) £10-£15 (£30-£40)

Another chilling tale of an ancient curse, a haunted chamber where murder was committed three centuries ago, and a killing in a guarded room, Smith's only mystery is an homage to the Golden Age. Throughout there are references to mystery stories, including one scene where amateur detective Algy Lawrence, discusses the locked-room lectures of Gideon Fell and the Great Merlini.

40. Ngaio Marsh, DEATH OF A FOOL (Little Brown, US, 1956)

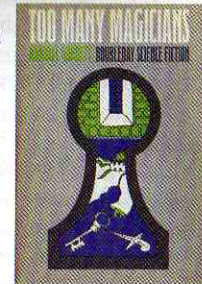
£6-£8 (£30-£40) aka OFF WITH HIS HEAD (Collins Crime Club, 1957) £6-£8 (£30-£40)

"Superintendent Roderick Alleyn found himself faced with a case of great complexity – and also with a flat impossibility." So reads the original dustjacket blurb for New Zealand crime writer Ngaio Marsh's nineteenth crime story, *Off With His Head*, published in the US as *Death of a Fool*. Mrs. Bunz arrives at Mardian to study a strange annual folk ceremony – the Dance of The Five Sons – that takes place on 'Sword Wednesday' of the winter solstice. This time, however, one of the dancers is decapitated.



41. Randall Garrett, TOO MANY MAGICIANS (Doubleday, US, 1967) £15-£20 (£40-£60) (Macdonald, 1968) £10-£15 (£30-£40)

Pioneering SF and fantasy author Garrett is best known for this award-winning Lord Darcy book, set in an alternate 1966 where the Anglo-French empire is still led by the Plantagenet dynasty, and where magic has developed into a scientific discipline. Darcy, Chief Investigator for the Duke of Normandy, assisted by a forensic sorcerer, tackles a locked-room problem at a wizards' convention.



42. Maj Sjöwall & Per Wahlöö, DER SLUTNA RUMMET (Stockholm, 1972) N/A LOCKED-ROOM: The Story of a Crime (Pantheon, US, 1973) £4-£6 (£15-£20) (Victor Gollancz, 1974) £4-£6 (£15-£20)

The enormous popularity of Henning Mankell in the last decade has given Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö's procedurals a retrospective boost. The Swedish husband and wife team's grimly realistic Martin Beck series are tough and chilling, although some readers are put off by their socialist commentaries. *Roseanna* and *The Laughing Policeman* are their finest works, but *Locked-Room* is a troubling, modern arrangement of an old fashioned problem. Beck, still recovering from the events of *The Abominable Man*, is sent to investigate when a retired man's decomposed body is discovered in his sealed apartment.

43. Peter Dickinson, THE POISON ORACLE (Hodder & Stoughton, 1974) £4-£6 (£15-£20)

Part thriller, part inventive teaser, Dickinson's ultimately weird novel is set in the small but oil-rich country of Sultanate of Q'Kut. A murder takes place and the only witness is a chimpanzee. However, the chimp has begun to form sentences using plastic symbols – inspired by Duane Rumbaugh's contemporaneous experiments with the chimpanzee Lana.

44. Bill Pronzini, HOODWINK (St Martin's Press, US, 1981) £6-£8 (£20-£30) (Robert Hale, 1981) £6-£8 (£20-£30)

Bill Pronzini is a prolific author and renowned editor and anthologist of short fiction. His best known series involves the likable Nameless Detective, a former San Francisco police officer who collects pulp fiction. The



seventh Nameless novel takes place at the first annual Western Pulp Convention in San Francisco, where a number of pulp authors have received blackmail notes. The convention is unexpectedly disrupted when one of the guests is found dead. As Nameless investigates the first, a second body turns up.



45. John Sladek, BLACK AURA (Jonathan Cape, 1974) £5-£8 (£30-£40)

John Sladek was an American science fiction author, based in England for much of his career, where he became part of 1960s

New Wave. His short story 'By an Unknown Hand', the first to feature detective Thackeray Phin, won first prize in *The Times* Detective Story Competition in 1972. This quirky full length follow-up was a complex locked-room mystery set in the home of a London medium.

46. Douglas Adams, THE LONG DARK TEA-TIME OF THE SOUL (Heinemann, 1988) £3-£5 (£15-£20)

Named after a phrase used to describe the boredom of Wowbagger, the Infinitely Prolonged in third Hitchhiker novel *Life, the Universe and Everything*, this was the second and last completed Dirk Gently story. The first involved impossible elements, but this novel begins with macabre set piece. He arrives late for a meeting to find his client's severed head spinning round on a turntable inside a locked-room. The police come to the conclusion that it's an elaborate suicide, conceived specifically



to annoy them. The solution is pure fantasy.

47. Paul Harding, THE NIGHTINGALE GALLERY (Headline, 1991) £3-£5 (£20-£30)

This was the first instalment in Paul Harding's 'Sorrowful Mysteries of Brother Athelstan', featuring the monk who is clerk to Cranston, a coroner in 14th-century London. Harding (P.C. Doherty) often sets Athelstan and his curmudgeonly boss impossible crimes, and here they investigate the murder of a rich merchant that took place in a sealed chamber. Athelstan proves that the suspect servant, thought to have committed suicide after carrying out the crime, was also murdered. But more deaths occur before Athelstan and Cranston discover the killer's identity.

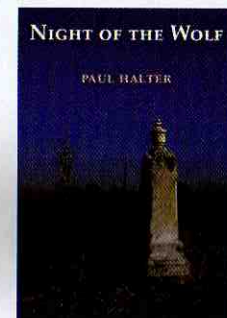
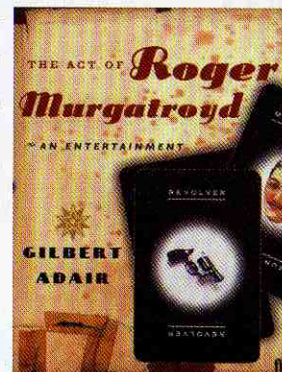
48. Edward D. Hoch, DIAGNOSIS: IMPOSSIBLE (300 signed numbered cloth copies) (Crippen & Landru, US, 1996) £30-£40

American author Edward D. Hoch produced a vast body of short fiction from 1955 until his death last year. This is a relatively recent compendium of his impossible problems, featuring his detective Dr. Sam Hawthorne, who first appeared in print in the 1970s. Though Hoch had several recurring characters – police detective Captain Leopold, cipher expert Jeffrey Rand, professional thief Nick Velvet – it was retired practitioner Dr Hawthorne who specialised in locked-room problems.

49. Gilbert Adair, THE ACT OF ROGER MURGATROYD (Faber & Faber, 2006) in print: £12.99

Several modern crime authors recreate the cozy escapism of the Golden Age. This amusing homage to Agatha Christie (the title alludes to *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* and Amy Murgatroyd from *A Murder is Announced*) is both charming parody and impossible mystery. The action takes place on Boxing Day in a

remote country Manor on Dartmoor. Early in the morning, gossip columnist Raymond Gentry is found murdered in the attic. Snowed in and unable to call the police, the party call on their neighbour, a retired Chief-Inspector, who spars with rival sleuth and crime author Evadne Mount to solve the problem. Mount has since appeared in *A Mysterious Affair of Style* and *And Then There Was No One*.



50. Paul Halter, THE NIGHT OF THE WOLF (translated by Robert Adey and John Pugmire) (Wildside Press, US, 2006) in print: £17

France enjoys a love affair with locked-room mysteries that continues through the work of Paul Halter, regularly described as the closest living rival to John Dickson Carr. Despite the fact his classic Golden Age settings and principle characters (criminologist Dr. Alan Twist, Inspector Archibald Hurst, Inspector Wedekind and Owen Burns) are English, this title is one of relatively few books by Halter to have been translated into English. The collection was first published in France in 2000 (as *La Nuit du Loup. Fine*), and includes ten tales of impossible crimes with a foreword by Robert Adey. Mysteries include an hermetically sealed crypt, a killer who leaves no trace on the snow, and a victim killed at the top of a guarded tower.