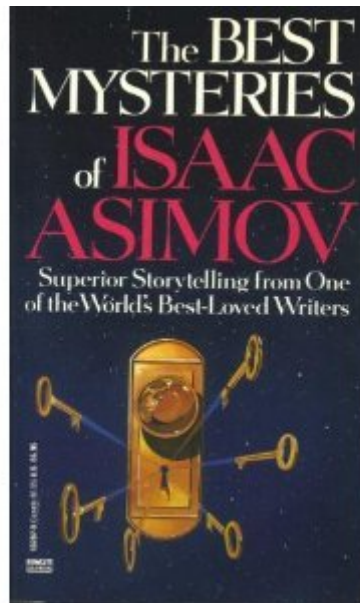


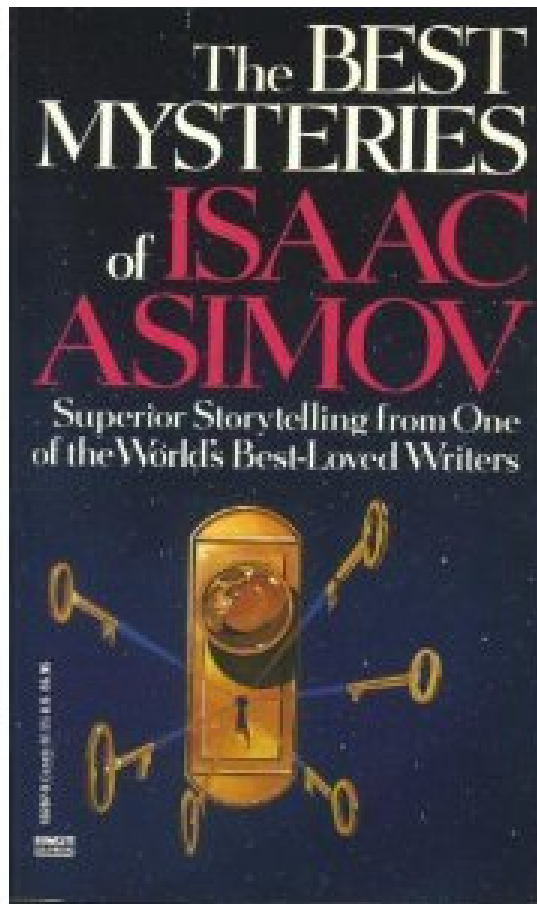
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## BY ISAAC ASIMOV



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5 of 5 people found the following review helpful.

How'd this guy write so much so well?

By A Customer

"Almost every mystery story I write belongs to the 'armchair detective' variety. Our hero listens to a puzzling story of some kind that seems to have no solution and, taking into account only what he is told, comes up with the answer in so cogent a fashion that every other character in the story (and the reader, too) is at once convinced of its legitimacy.... My stories are, in short, not exercises in violence, not thrillers, not psychological suspense stories. They are, generally speaking, puzzles, and rather intellectual ones."

Now that I've quoted the author, let me add that most but not all of these puzzles were too tough for me. Then, when the solution was revealed, I was invariably like, "Aw, I'm a stupe!" I'd say he set out to emulate the whodunits he loved and wound up topping them instead. I've never seen any better, or even equal, and I highly recommend this collection to anyone who loves puzzles of any description. As an added bonus, the masterful prose of Mr. Asimov. Get this book.

3 of 4 people found the following review helpful.

31 short stories, mostly Black Widower and Union Club

By Michele L. Worley

The short stories herein fall into 3 categories: Black Widower mysteries (15), Union Club mysteries (9), and miscellaneous (7). The Black Widower mysteries are a cross-section of the first 4 Black Widower short story collections, while the Union Club mysteries can be found in THE UNION CLUB MYSTERIES.

Many of Asimov's mysteries resemble crossword puzzles, in that they have only one "correct" solution - and have about as much believable characterization, with the exception of some recurring characters when considered over time.

I'll begin with the miscellaneous stories, although they appear last in the book. While some feature recurring characters who have been collected elsewhere, others are one-shot efforts written around a single gimmick for a magazine, and haven't been collected much.

"The Key", the 4th Wendell Urth story, turns on Jennings, a former student of Urth's who as the story opens faces lonely death on the Moon as the price of protecting an alien artifact; Urth afterwards seems the best chance of working out Jennings' only clue to the hiding-place. [The story suffers from dying-clue syndrome: an obscure clue left by a dying man that stumps people with \*far\* more time to consider it.]

Professor Neddring hands "A Problem of Numbers" to Hal, his graduate student and would-be son-in-law, to hear how Hal's mind works before Neddring will give his blessing. [Come on - an advisor who's known a student long enough for the romantic entanglement to occur ought to know Hal well enough at \*this\* late date, but passing judgement based on analyzing a \*cryptogram\*???) The puzzle resembles that used in "Unique Is Where You Find It" in PUZZLES OF THE BLACK WIDOWERS.

Clara and Hester, killing time together on a hot day, agree that it's "The Little Things" they can't stand. In Clara's case, her upstairs neighbour isn't answering her door, and the sound of a dripping faucet is driving Clara to distraction. But Mrs. Maclauren didn't mention any trip to Hester, who normally looks after her plants if she's away...

In "Halloween", an idealist stole some plutonium to prove a point about weak security, then died in a freak accident, leaving only a single dying word to reveal its location.

Two of Asimov's mysteries featuring Larry - a detective's teenage son, a la Encyclopedia Brown - appear. In "The Thirteenth Day of Christmas", there's been a bomb threat against the Soviet delegation to the UN for Christmas Day - but Christmas came and went without incident. In "The Key Word", Larry's father has a New York Times crossword puzzle as a clue on an important case.

"Nothing Might Happen" is the only non-puzzle story in this book, having been written for the non-puzzle-based ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE. Sam Gelderman endures life as his quirky author uncle's secretary by keeping his future inheritance in mind. True, his uncle might well outlive him, but Sam could \*never\* hope to pull off a perfect murder.

The Black Widowers stories compensate somewhat for the character development issue. Being based on real-life members of Asimov's own friends in the Trap Door Spiders, the club members' characters over the course of many stories have developed some personality. However, their guests - and the people their guests' problems involve - \*do\* often suffer from weak/implausible characterization.

"The Obvious Factor", "The Pointing Finger", "Out of Sight", and "Yankee Doodle Went to Town" are 4 of the 12 stories comprising TALES OF THE BLACK WIDOWERS - but not the first four, or those most significant to the club members themselves.

"Quicker Than the Eye", "The Three Numbers", and "The One and Only East" appear in MORE TALES OF THE BLACK WIDOWERS.

"The Cross of Lorraine", "The Next Day", "What Time Is It?", and "Middle Name" appear in CASEBOOK OF THE BLACK WIDOWERS.

"Sixty Million Trillion Combinations", "The Good Samaritan", "Can You Prove It?" and "The Redhead" appear in BANQUETS OF THE BLACK WIDOWERS. "The Good Samaritan" lets Asimov have a little fun with the Widowers by introducing a female guest to the sacred precincts, while "The Redhead" is based on a dream Asimov had.

Asimov's Union Club stories, like the Black Widower stories, involve several club members who bat around a problem before the resident genius solves the problem. The 9 (out of 30-odd) UC stories selected for this collection were: "He Wasn't There", "Hide and Seek", "Dollars and Cents", "The Sign", "Getting the Combination", "The Library Book", "Never Out of Sight", "The Magic Umbrella", and "The Speck". Again like the BW stories, the UC stories are based around 1-gimmick puzzles; however, I find them less appealing. The UC members don't have the friendly (though argumentative) relationship of the BWs, and Griswold is the antithesis of his gentle BW counterpart, Henry: abrasively arrogant where Henry is self-effacing. Also, there's a sameness to the UC stories: Griswold is *\*always\** the puzzle-setter, reminiscing about long ago issues, so they're not really worked out by reasoning in real-time; the other UC members try and fail to reason out the puzzle, then nag Griswold into revealing the answer.

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