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The loveable full time priest and part time detective Canon Sidney Chambers continues his sleuthing adventures in late 1950's Cambridge. Accompanied by his faithful Labrador Dickens, and working in tandem with the increasingly exasperated Inspector Geordie Keating, Sidney is called on to investigate the unexpected fall of a Cambridge don from the roof of King's College Chapel; a case of arson at a glamor photographer's studio; and the poisoning of Zafar Ali, Grantchester's finest spin bowler, in the middle of a crucial game of cricket. As he pursues his quietly probing inquiries, Sidney also has to decide on the vexed question of marriage. Can he choose between the rich, glamorous socialite Amanda Kendall and Hildegard Staunton, a beguiling German widow three years his junior? To help him make up his mind Sidney takes a trip abroad, only to find himself trapped in a complex web of international espionage just as the Berlin Wall is going up.

Here are six interlocking adventures that combine mystery with morality, and criminality with charm.

Sidney Chambers and the Perils of the Night Details

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From Reader Review Sidney Chambers and the Perils of the Night for online ebook

M.R. Graham says

Much mystery, caught up in its attempt at edginess, loses itself in gratuitous sex and gore. Edginess has its place, of course, but I've grown tired of it. I wanted to take a few steps back from the edge.

Sidney Chambers has provided for me a much needed break. I found the reading at once light and weighty, a balance between vibrant, whimsical characters and their brushes with the darker side of human nature. The language is elegant and cerebral without being overbearing, and it fits the period without feeling stilted.

The episodic structure of the book – a series of short stories, tied together by a few threads into a loosely-bound whole – threw me off a little at first, but I quickly decided to allow myself one story a day, and the subdivision into manageable chunks became a convenience.

What I loved most, though, was the title character, the clerical detective, Canon Sidney Chambers. Much in the tradition of Father Brown, Sidney shows a deep and sensitive understanding of humanity, flaws included, and yet retains a wonderful optimism and innocence, reaching out to touch the sinner without letting himself be touched by the sin. In some ways, he perhaps surpasses Father Brown in realism: in the difficulties of his relationships, his flashes of human jealousy, his worries that his academia or detective work sometimes interferes with his priestly duties. Where moral ambiguity has become the norm for protagonists, Sidney is proof that it is by no means a necessary attribute of a complex, interesting character; I found his uprightness refreshing.

My only complaint would be the overabundance of cricket jargon in The Hat Trick, the fourth story in the collection.

Shopgirl says

Si vous avez découvert le personnage de Sydney Chambers via la série, oubliez les intrigues télévisées avant de vous plonger dans le Grantchester reconstitué par James Runcie !

Il est étonnant de voir à quel point les scénaristes ont réécrits la plupart des enquêtes, ne conservant que la base imaginée par l'auteur (dont je serais curieuse de connaître la réaction face à son travail manipulé de la sorte ...).

Passé ces changements, ce deuxième tome est très agréable à lire.

Nous retrouvons cet univers familier, les rendez-vous au pub de Sydney et Geordie, les singulières interventions de ce cher Leonard ou encore le mauvais caractère de Mrs Maguire . Tout y est.

Même le retour d'une femme, croisée dans le premier tome qui occupe une place importante dans la vie de Sydney. Il est passionnant de découvrir un autre dénouement amoureux et qui finalement, se révèle plus "logique".

En ayant hâte de lire la suite, je peux vous affirmer que ces deux Grantchester (livre vs série tv) peuvent coexister sans aucun problème. Cela demande juste un peu de gymnastique de l'esprit :D.

Gwen says

What happened to the charm of the first book? This book was so bland in comparison (and the first book really wasn't all that great to begin with)... As with the first book, I found the mysteries rather pointless (what's the fun in a mystery novel if you can't play along?), but this time, the English scenery and setting weren't well enough described to keep me interested. If you enjoy the minutiae of cricket or physics, you might find this enjoyable, but there was precious little here to pique my interest.

The best parts of this one are the two stories revolving around Amanda (although that plot seemed to drastically change Amanda's character) and especially Hildegard (not that I 100% believe Sidney's ability to do all the things he did in East Germany with no repercussions).

I was intrigued by Runcie's description of Sidney's apparent atypical masculinity for the 1950s/1960s: "Even if he were to marry he was sure that he would make an unsatisfactory husband. He was incapable of concentrating on the typically masculine areas of everyday life. He may have been able to translate Herodotus from the Greek but he was not able to drive a car. He could listen to the darkest fears of his parishioners and comfort them in their hours of anxiety, but he was not sure that he could change a fuse. He was hopeless with money, finding that he always had more pressing things to do than go to the bank or pay his bills." (46)

Where Runcie really lost me on faith-based matters: "Sidney ordered coffee. 'I sometimes think that faith is rather like explaining the punchline of a joke. If you have to take it all apart then the joke doesn't work any more.'" (134)

The cover art is gorgeous, though--not that that makes up for the far less-than-stellar work within.

Ivonne Rovira says

In the second novel of a series, Sidney Chambers, Anglican priest and canon of Corpus Christi College (one of Cambridge University's actual ancient colleges), once again dabbles in detection. As with the debut novel of the series, the new novel consists of a series of short stories — some related, some not — with each case contained within a chapter. However, whereas in the debut novel of James Runcie's series, *Sidney Chambers and the Shadow of Death*, the slow pace and distractions created a charming, warm effect, here Runcie slows down the pace and introduces so much tangents that the reader's mind begins to wander.

Sidney Chambers and the Perils of the Night opens in 1955; in the first of several cases, Canon Chambers weighs whether the death of a college don was a foolish accident or deliberate murder, a case of espionage or something altogether different. In the second and fourth cases, which take place a few years later, there are no doubts at all: someone deliberately burned down a flirtatious photographer's studio and someone poisoned the cricket spin bowler. In the third case, Canon Chambers quickly tumbles to the fact that the junior bursar's death in his bath wasn't a heart attack but murder. (Sadly, this third short story ranks as the weakest of the bunch.) In the fifth case, which takes place in 1961, Sidney's longtime friend, Amanda Kendall, rashly enters into an engagement with a conceited Oxford University physicist, Antony Cartwright. Will this engagement prove to be as disastrous as Amanda's last? The sixth and final case involves Sidney's

trip to Berlin, where he's gone to see old friends in the early 1960s. The serious illness of the friends' mother sends Sidney into East Germany, where he's surprised to find someone he thought he knew — and that encounter spells trouble for Canon Chambers. This final story turns out to be the most suspenseful of the lot and a reminder of Runcie at his finest.

Despite the slow pace, readers will enjoy the resolution of a dilemma Canon Chambers has been mulling since the last novel: Should he marry wealthy art expert Amanda Kendall? Amanda and Sidney, the son of a North London doctor, grew up together, but now that Sidney Chambers is a mere priest, he no longer belongs in her same socio-economic set. Marriage to Sidney — especially in the 1950s, when men were loath to tap their wives' incomes — would mean a considerable loss of position and comfort for Amanda. Amanda seems ambivalent herself, and Sidney doesn't dare to ask her to sacrifice so. Or should he marry piano teacher Hildegard Staunton, a German-born widow who Chambers met while investigating her husband's murder? The sympathetic Hildegard shares Sidney's love of jazz and intuits what Sidney's thinking most of the time, but she, likewise, possesses her own obstacles: She now lives in Berlin and, in the 1950s, Germans were still regarded with suspicion. Also, Hildegard carries considerable baggage from her time in England and her unhappy marriage.

With Sidney's romantic triangle resolving itself in this volume, I had been wondering if I would even bother when *Sidney Chambers and the Problem of Evil* is released in May 2014. But that final chapter on Sidney's foray into East Germany reminded me of why I should.

Mike Sumner says

The second volume of the Grantchester Mysteries held me spellbound. An evocation of childhood for me, the wonderful pastoral atmosphere that surrounds the gentle Canon Sidney Chambers and the dour Inspector Geordie Keating, has much to remind me of my childhood growing up in a country parish. Runcie's ability to capture the atmosphere of the 50s and 60s with reference to actual events adds to the enjoyment. His description over several pages of a village cricket match held me in suspense, an erudite ball to ball commentary that would have graced the BBC Light programme of my youth. For those who think that the Grantchester series is merely a number of short stories, think on. They are all linked, which adds to the pleasure if you have read 'Sidney Chambers and the Shadow of Death'. If you haven't then start with that highly recommended volume. There is a dollop of Midsomer Murders here, shades of Morse that would delight Colin Dexter, particularly in "Appointment in Berlin", and the beguiling romance between Sidney and Hildegard. As Country Life said: "Totally English, beautifully written, perfectly in period and wryly funny". I loved this book.

Bam says

Book two in the Grantchester mystery series featuring Vicar Sidney Chambers moves along in time from 1955 to 1961, into the Cold War era and the building of the Berlin Wall. Again it is written in six short stories, perfect for televising. Sidney performs as both clergyman and part-time detective, saying "I hope one does not compromise the other."

- 1) The Perils of the Night deals with the climbing death of a don at Cambridge and gives a look at the Cold War tactics going on behind the scenes of the university.

2) Love and Arson--a summerhouse used as a studio by a professional photographer burns under suspicious circumstances. What kind of photos was he taking?

3) Unholy Week--a mathematics professor dies in his bath from what appears to be a heartache but Sidney's friend, Hildegarde, becomes suspicious after talking to his colleagues and asks Sidney to look into the matter.

4) The Hat Trick--after helping to win a cricket match for Grantchester, an Indian man dies from poisoning. Prejudice taken to the extreme!

5) The Uncertainty Principle--Amanda wants to marry an astrophysicist but Sidney has doubts about the man and cannot give his blessing until he investigates. This story is quite touching.

6) Appointment in Berlin--Sidney visits Hildegarde in Berlin at just the wrong moment in history and they both barely make it out alive. Very exciting!

Jennifer says

Not really a review, just a few random thoughts:

I didn't enjoy this one as much as I did as the first in the series, it seemed a lot slower to me, and I found it far too easy to put it down and not pick it back up for several days (or weeks).

Far fewer of the stories translated over to the tv series this time, I'm not saying that's good or bad, I have no strong opinion on that at the moment.

At this point, I much prefer the tv show over the books, though the books do get a point in their favor for the way they handle Sidney's love life. I much prefer the character he ends up with in the books over the way it appears to be heading in the tv show.

Brian Clegg says

I love detective fiction, but I'm very parochial about it - I'm only interested if it's English. Even Scottish is too alien. At the moment most of the big names in the field are silent, so it was interesting to discover on Waterstones' BOGOHP table this book by James Runcie.

I think it's fair to say I give it a mixed reception. I love that it's set in Cambridge and Grantchester, and unlike Colin Dexter's Morse books with its fake Oxford colleges, Runcie has chosen to use actual settings. It is much more satisfying to have real locations that you know and love. The period setting is reasonably well done - it is placed in the late 50s and early 60s, and there's none of the all too common tendency to give period characters modern views. These are very much people of their time. In fact the main character is

almost too reserved for his own good.

On the downside, I find the situation a little far-fetched. The main character is the vicar of Grantchester who seems to spend most of his time helping the local police as an amateur sleuth. It's all a bit slow and leisurely. And there's an interminable section describing a cricket match that is deadly dull if you aren't interested in sport*. Oh, and there's a section where the crime involves a physicist and the physics as described is anachronistic, combining an enthusiasm for the basics of quantum theory that would be more appropriate for the 1930s with a mention of dark matter as if it were commonly discussed back then. Admittedly Zwicky mentioned the possibility of dark matter in the 1930s, but no one would refer to it as if were a commonplace in the 1950s and 60s. Oh, and I can't stand the Harry Potter-style naming convention of the books.

Even so, I enjoyed the gentle, slow pace. As one of the puff comments remarks it is 'perfect company in bed' - not challenging and decidedly cosy and nostalgic. I even quite enjoyed the rather unlikely timing of the main character's visit to East Germany that happened to coincide with the Berlin wall going up. This isn't going to be a book that appeals to someone who wants fast paced, modern dynamism, but if you enjoy a little period gentility with around four different crimes packed into the same volume, it's worth a try. There are three books available in the series.

* Less forgivable still, in another story, Runcie describes a backgammon game in which the same player doubles and then redoubles. Well, really.

Kathleen says

Slightly less enjoyable than the first in the series (maybe it was the short story format or the fact that I know nothing about the game of cricket) but will definitely come back once Number 3 is released. I personally think however that he married the wrong woman. So we shall certainly see what develops in the future.

Kathryn says

Enjoyable and easy read of a village near Cambridge that seems to have a high volume of crime! I found the first story in this collection a bit difficult to keep track of, but enjoyed all the rest. I especially enjoy Sidney's wrestling with his doubts and his faith, and I love the progression of the characters throughout.

I will now look forward to reading the third in the series.

Thekelburrows says

There are mysteries! In England! And a labrador retriever! And a not too overtly religious priest who is handsome and also warm! [airhorn sound effect]

Jayaprakash Satyamurthy says

I'm amazed at how many things Runcie is able to write about, and write well: theology, murder, music, cricket and even love (I fell for both Hildegard and Amanda, by the way). A real class act in the ostensibly cozy mystery genre.

Lisa says

More shenanigans involving village priest and amateur sleuth Sidney Chambers. Very enjoyable although a little more cricket and sermon detail than I would have liked!

Carolyn says

This second volume of the Sidney Chambers Grantchester Mysteries is presented as a linked series of six short stories outlining six episodes in Sidney's life from 1955 to 1961. Sidney, leads what looks like the cosy life of an Anglican priest in a parish just outside of Cambridge. He is Canon of Corpus Christi College and as well as tending to his parishioners, teaches theology to undergraduates, enjoys walks with his dog Dickens and pints in the pub with his detective friend Geordie Keating, with whom he enjoys the occasional bit of amateur detective work.

In this volume the crimes that Sidney and Geordie must investigate are many and varied. First there is the death of a research fellow from Sidney's college who fell while leading a night climbing expedition up the turrets of Kings College Chapel, but was it an accident? Next there is a case of arson involving a photographer who likes to photograph underage young girls for saucy magazines. Then there is the electrocution of a Professor of Music and the death of a promising cricket player. In the fifth tale, Sidney's long term best friend bites the bullet and becomes engaged to a Physicist but instead of being delighted Sidney is suspicious of the man's motives. The sixth and final tale is a cracker, with Sidney venturing into East Germany and suspected of being a spy.

All excellent stories showing us the life of a small town Vicar in 1950's England. There is a good mixture of life at the vicarage and the University with Sidney's detective work. Sidney is a great reader of human nature which benefits him in both his rolls as an Anglican priest and amateur sleuth.

James Runcie writes with a gentleness and warmth for his characters. For most of the book he has Sidney pondering the benefits of marriage and who he should marry - best friend Amanda, who he loves but is not suited to be a Vicar's wife or Hildegarde, a widow living in Germany who would give up much to move to England. All this is resolved by the end of the book and I look forward to reading the next in the series.

With thanks to Netgalley and Bloomsbury Publishing for a digital copy of the book to read and review

Damaskcat says

Six stories featuring Canon Sidney Chambers, Vicar of Grantchester move his life from the 1950s to the 1960s. Will he marry Amanda or will he marry Hildegarde with whom he is conducting a long distance

relationship at the start of the book? Sidney finds himself drawn time and time again into investigating crimes which are really none of his business.

‘The Perils of the Night’ is an atmospheric story about the night climbers in Cambridge – who climb the various college buildings under cover of darkness. Sidney finds himself acting as a go-between for his detective friend – Geordie Keating. My particular favourites in this well written collection are ‘Unholy Week’ with its interesting digressions into codes in music and ‘Appointment in Berlin’ where Sidney finds himself mixed up in the events leading to the building of the Berlin Wall.

I read the first collection of stories about Sidney Chambers with enjoyment but I think this second collection is even better. Sidney is a likeable character and the background of university and church life is well done. Academic rivalry feels authentic and Sidney’s doubts about his own relationships are excellent. If you enjoy reading stories set in what is to some extent a gentler era then try the Grantchester Mysteries.
