



The Spanish Cape Mystery

Ellery Queen

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THE SPANISH CAPE MYSTERY is a study in jealousy, revenge and mistaken identity. The setting is a brooding headland called the Spanish Cape. The cast contains the monstrous Captain Kidd, the ill-fated David Cumer and his beautiful niece Rosa, and Rosa's suitors. Into this scene drives Ellery Queen, intent on a holiday. Instead he must solve a baffling kidnap-murder!

The Spanish Cape Mystery Details

Date : Published by John Curley & Associates (first published 1935)

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Author : Ellery Queen

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William says

Solid as always- I've yet to find a *bad* Ellery Queen after having read 7 entries.

This one has your typical secluded estate with guest at which, inevitably, there has been a murder. I do prefer this set-up over Queens set in NYC given that it more definitively limits the suspect list.

In the negative column, this does have the issue with early Queens- in order to reach a sufficient level of complexity, the book requires 238 densely typeset pages. Queen simply doesn't read as breezily as Christie. I will say, though, that there's a trade-off there. At this point, I can usually predict Christie's solutions. Queen, on the other hand, I very rarely get right. On that note...

I solved this one. Sure, I was missing some of the finer details, but who, why, and much of how I got. This is probably a good first Queen to read if you want to see how involved his solutions are but actually still have a chance of solving. Stuff like Egyptian Cross, Dragon's Teeth, and French Powder are quite a bit trickier. Solving it, however, didn't prevent it from being a fun and well-constructed puzzle to solve (unlike lesser-Christie), and I didn't fully commit to the correct solution until I'd done a bit of thinking and re-reading, which brings me to...

This is one of those early Queens that has the Challenge to the Reader. I really appreciate these. True, Christie and other usually do a good job of communicating that a reader has all the clues by having the detective say "aha! I've solved it" and then asking the inspector to gather everyone up, but I appreciate how explicitly Queen lets the reader know they should think everything over and try to solve- it keys folks into the notion that reading Queen is meant to be an active challenge rather than a passive imbibing of information linearly, page by page.

In any case, good stuff. Glad to have Queen and Carr to read now that I have less than 20 Christies left! It'll be like graduating detective college and moving on to detective grad school :P

Kelley says

This is a mildly entertaining read. This is the first Ellery Queen novel that I've read, and it may not be the last. This whodunnit is clever enough, but for me, I happened upon the solution very early on. I'm no super sleuth, so some luck was part of the reason, through no fault of the author. I will say that I was disappointed we really didn't learn much about Ellery Queen, the character, much at all. He was not a well-developed character at all, and in fact we learn more about almost all the suspects than we do about him. Still, this was a light easy-enough mystery novel to ponder.

Peter Jakobs says

As always a fancy read - but this time I found the murderer earlier than Mr Queen did!

Ariadne Oliver says

The pace of this book dragged a lot. There wasn't any suspense. I figured out who the murderer was quote easily. The ending might have made more impact if I'd have cared for any of the characters. Add a dash of fat phobia to all this and it just wasn't a very fun book.

Dan says

I recently acquired 23 novels by the infamous Ellery Queen through a used bookstore on-line. (Powells) In case you never heard of this author, Ellery Queen is a pseudonym for two people, Frederic Dannay and Manfred B. Lee. All of the novels were written between the 30's through the 70's and as far as I know, are all out of print.

The novels are all murder mysteries and the great detective, Ellery Queen, not only solves each case, but the reader is invited along side the detective to solve the mystery himself. With about 20 pages left to the story, the detective will challenge the reader at that point, and declare that all the facts have been given, so who done it, and how?

"The Spanish Cape Mystery" starts off with a naked dead body sitting in a chair facing the ocean. How did the victim die? Who did it if it was murder? Why is the victim naked? All these questions and more are answered to my satisfaction as the story unfolds.

All in all this mystery has many twists and turns as Ellery Queen deduces step by step all the answers to solve this mystery. A quick read and very satisfying. 4 stars

M. says

My first foray into the world of Ellery Queen. In a word: Great!

This author (I know, I know...authors) is very entertaining, and provides a true challenge to the reader. I may be a bit biased in that I did figure this one out (the who and the how, although I messed up the motive because I didn't think it through), but the challenge to the reader heightens the enjoyment because there is a sense of fair play. The reader is given everything they need to solve the crime...if they dare!

The plot: Ellery Queen and his friend Judge Macklin are off for sun and surf. What they encounter instead is murder and mayhem at Spanish Cape, a rocky promontory filled with a motley assortment of residents and guests, one of whom is a handsome lothario who is later found dead on a patio wearing no more than an opera cape and hat! The setting is well-described and inviting, and the characters have depth and dimension. These are not cookie cutter stock players for the typical mystery novel --- there are characters tragic and noble in this book.

I have a few more Ellery Queen novels on my shelf that I picked up at an old bookstore...I am already looking forward to the next one!

Derek says

Its advantage is not having the sort of closed-room, synthetic setup as *The Chinese Orange Mystery* or *The Finishing Stroke*, while still having a weird aspect to the crime, and the explanation of this aspect is the key to the solution.

The final answer had some loose threads that I'm not sure make perfect sense, but am willing to let it slide. And unfortunately there are a few moments where the reader is forced to say, "I'm sure *that* was mentioned for a reason."

One detail that I thought was interesting but was only touched on tangentially: what happens after a serial blackmailer has completely tapped out his victims, yet continues to demand money?

Fran Young says

It's been quite a while since I read a mystery set in the 1930's. Charming but of course predictable. The usual striking but isolated setting -- in this case a manor house set on a cliff above the sea. The stock set of wealthy characters, all hiding secrets, all somehow involved in the eventual murder. Then in comes the police, upstaged by the detective (Ellery Queen), who hijacks the investigation and of course solves the crime. In this particular book, he's accompanied by an old friend, "the judge". As it unfolds, there are many frail and fainting women, tough and chivalrous men, and sneaking around at all hours, hiding on balconies and behind bushes to spy on each other. And to make it stylistically perfect, the denouement comes in a final climax scene with all involved where Queen lays out the who done it and how done it, before he rides off into the sunset in his Duesenberg automobile. Enjoyable and interesting, even if a little dated.

Susan says

Ellery Queen is just looking for a few weeks along the coast, but he and his companion, the elderly Judge Macklin, find a kidnapped girl in their hired cottage. When they take her home, they learn that one of her wealthy father's guests has been murdered under peculiar circumstances. Ellery applies his logician's mind to the problem, but those pesky human emotions keep getting in his way. I remember reading this many years ago, and how shocking the ending seemed. Perhaps I remembered too much of it to feel the same frisson now.

Martin Gibbs says

Another great Ellery Queen novel. I enjoy the challenge to the reader, because unlike other mystery writers, the EQ team provides everything for you to solve the case. Although I can't ever seem to do it (probably because I just enjoy the ending and "listening" to Ellery explain everything in his reasoned, clinical manner). At least in this one, I had it down to two folks, one of whom was the murderer... oh well.

I wonder how audiences received this in 1935; EQ put some things on the table that I wasn't sure were so

openly discussed back then. But then again I could be wrong.

However, it was a little long. I think the authors were trying to fit their standard length and it just went overboard. True, it was a clever way to bury a few clues within details, but it could have been a novella, or a longer story included in a collection.

All in all, a nice one. I enjoyed it, as I do all of the EQ novels in the 1930s. As I mentioned in my review of *On the Eighth Day*, I do not like that many of the later novels were farmed out to others... I preferred the originals, in their yellowed, musty tomes.

Chazzi says

One of Ellery Queen's earlier books, it has a bit more detail to it and provides a solid read. There are red herrings to pull you off track, yet the clues are all there. This adventure finds Ellery on vacation and in the company of Judge Macklin heading for the coast for a bit. This is one story that doesn't include Inspector Queen.

The cast of characters is colourful and there is logic galore in the analysis of the clues.

Stephen Osborne says

The last of Queen's "nationality" titles and the end of his (their?) first period. *Spanish Cape* signals the shift from the impossible crime to more psychological puzzles, perhaps because Queen realized he'd wrung all the changes out of the impossible crime genre. The case is interesting, although a little easy to figure out (I got it, missing just a couple of minor details) and involves a blackmailer found naked on the terrace wearing only a fedora and a cape. No Inspector Queen here, but Judge Macklin fills in and does his best to keep up with Ellery.

Dave says

An early Ellery, still a little stodgy (twirling his *pince-nez*) but loosening up, not yet gone Hollywood. The dialogue and supporting characters are very slangy and mannered, as in 30's movies or songs (yes, one individual refers to "The Argentine"). But there's a tricky puzzle, affecting scene of suicide, and enough action to keep me engrossed on this rereading, twenty-five years after the first time. The long explanation chapter--formerly my favorite part--is my least favorite now.

Barry says

I grew up reading the Hardy Boys books, so I'm more than a little partial to classic mysteries from the good old days. If a book like this were written today it likely would be relegated to the frumpy section of bookstores, if it even got published, but because this was written decades ago its quaintness is perfectly acceptable.

This book isn't mind-blowing in its greatness, and it ebbs and flows as it progresses, but in the end it is a real page-turner. Other than a few mild swears this book is highly recommendable to anyone who enjoys a well-told yarn from the classic-mystery bin.

Luffy says

Ellery Queen books are quite inconsistent. They're a mixed bag. The more difficult is it to solve the crime on your own, the worse the book is. This I've gleaned from experience in reading the blighters. As for this particular book, there was too much melodrama and not enough drama. Concretely, too much eavesdropping was going on to facilitate the solution of the case. Ellery Queen had to find out a lot of the mystery by a too well informed butler. There was a single murder, and by the time the mystery hemmed and hawed, I was losing interest.
