



THE CLASSIC MURDER MYSTERY

Ellery Queen, *The Spanish Cape Mystery* (1935)

A Short History of the Classic British Murder Mystery

- 1868: Wilkie Collins, *The Moonstone* (Sgt. Cuff of Scotland Yard)
- 1887: Arthur Conan Doyle, *A Study in Scarlet* (Sherlock Holmes)
- 1911: G. K. Chesterton, *The Innocence of Father Brown* (short-story collection)
- 1920: Agatha Christie, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* (Hercule Poirot)
- 1926: Dorothy L. Sayers, *Whose Body?* (Lord Peter Wimsey)
- 1933: John Dickson Carr, *Hag's Nook* (locked-room mystery)

A Short History of the Classic American Murder Mystery

- 1908: Mary Roberts Rinehart, *The Circular Staircase* (“had I but known . . .”)
- 1925: Earl Derr Biggers, *The House Without a Key* (Charlie Chan)
- 1926: S. S. Van Dine, *The Benson Murder Case* (Philo Vance)
- 1929: Ellery Queen, *The Roman Hat Mystery* (Ellery Queen and Richard Queen)
- 1933: Rex Stout, *Fer-de-Lance* (Nero Wolfe)
- 1933: Erle Stanley Gardner, *The Case of the Velvet Claws* (Perry Mason)

Reasons for Popularity

- Increasing number of women writers
- Increasing number of women readers
- The genre's containment of violence
- The isolated scenes of crimes
- "Snobbery with violence"
- No reference to current issues or politics

1930s: Golden Age of the Murder Mystery

- 1841-1920: 1,300 detective novels published
- 1929-1941: more than 8,000
- Crimes presented as shocking in well-ordered societies
- Eccentric detectives
- Escapist pleasures for readers
- Murder as a game, a puzzle

Generic
consistencies in
the classic
Murder Mystery

- The Great Detective à la Sherlock Holmes
- The isolated setting
- The criminal: nonprofessional; has personal reasons for crime
- The victim: not nice or innocent
- The crime: always murder; premeditated and always rational
- The method: complicated, scenario using unusual weapons
- The mystery: impossible *and* solvable
- The Police Paradox
- The presentation of the solution



The Detective Club's Decalogue of Rules

1. The criminal must be someone mentioned in the early part of the story, but not someone whose thoughts the reader has followed.
2. No supernatural or preternatural agencies.
3. Not more than one secret room or passage is allowed.
4. No undiscovered poisons or instruments that require lengthy scientific explanations
5. No Chinamen must figure in the story.
6. No accidents or intuitions may help the detective.
7. The detective may not be the criminal.
8. Any clues must be instantly produced for the reader.
9. The "Watson" must not hide any thoughts; he must be slightly less intelligent than the average reader.
10. No twin brothers or doppelgangers allowed, unless we have been prepared for them.

CHALLENGE TO THE READER

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"In the mountains of truth," quoth Nietzsche, "you never climb in vain."

No one outside the realm of fairy tales ever scaled a mountain by standing at its foot and wishing himself over its crest. This is a hard world, and in it achievement requires effort. It has always been my feeling that to garner the fullest enjoyment from detective fiction the reader must to some degree endeavor to retrace the detective's steps. The more painstakingly the trail back is scrutinized, the closer the reader comes to the ultimate truth, and the deeper his enjoyment is apt to be.

For years now I have been challenging my readers to solve my cases by the exercise of close observation, the application of logic to the winnowed facts, and a final correlation of the individual conclusions. I have been encouraged to persist in this practice by the warm testimonials of many correspondents. To those of you who have never tried it, I earnestly recommend that you do. You may run afoul of a snag somewhere along the line, or you may indeed after much thinking get nowhere at all; but it has been the experience of thousands that, successful or not, the effort is amply repaid by the heightened pleasure.

Technically there are no snags. The facts are all here at this point in the story of John Marco's death. Can you put them together and logically place your finger on the one and only possible murderer?

ELLERY QUEEN.

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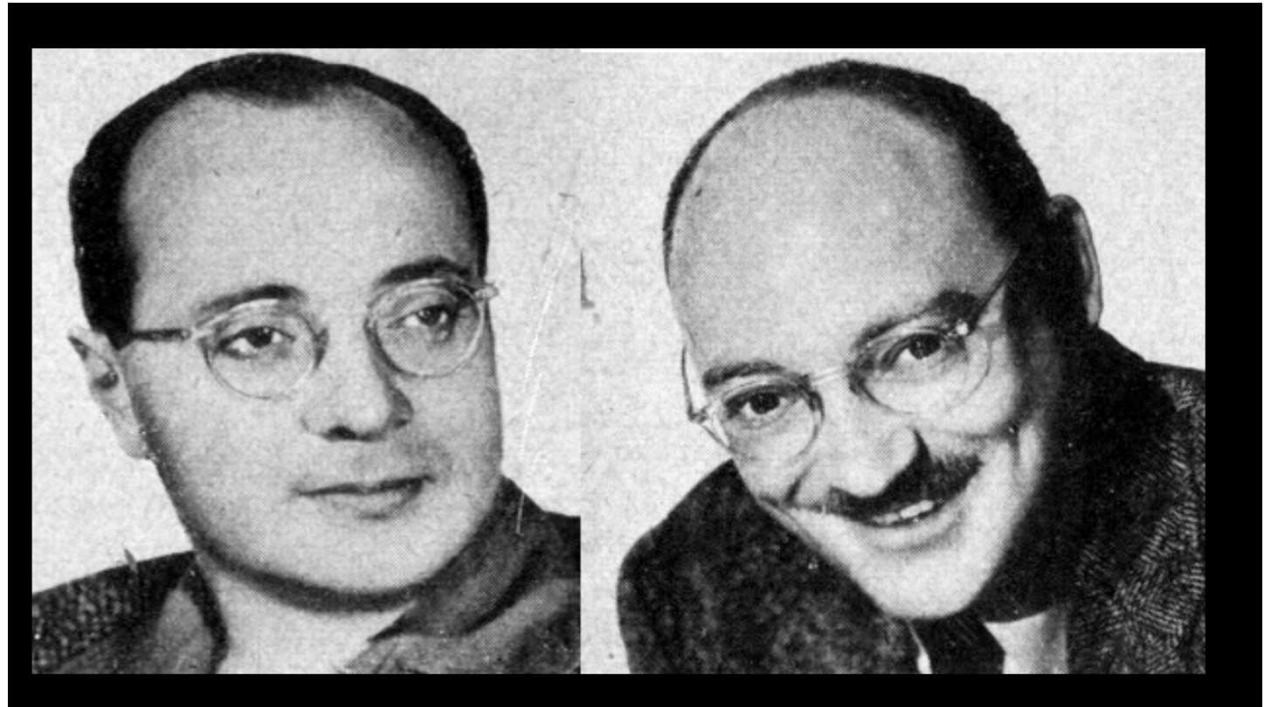
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Ellery Queen

- Manfred B. Lee and Frederick Dannay



The Spanish Cape Mystery

(1935; 74 mins)

Director: Lewis D. Collins
Screenplay: Albert DeMond,
based on the novel by **Ellery Queen**

Key characters (and the actors who play them)

Ellery Queen (*Donald Cook*) *
Inspector Richard Queen, Ellery's father (*Guy Usher*)
Judge Macklin (*Berton Churchill*)
Stella Godfrey (*Helen Twelvetrees*) *
Walter Godfrey, Stella's father (*Frank Sheridan*)
Mrs. Godfrey, Stella's mother (*Betty Blythe*)
David Kummer, Stella's uncle (*Huntley Gordon*)
Teller, the butler (*Frank Leigh*)
Pitts, the maid (*Katherine Morrow*)
Sheriff Moley (*Harry Stubbs*)
Houseguests of the Godfreys:
 Laura Constable (*Ruth Gilette*)
 Mrs. Munn (*Barbara Bedford*)
 John Marco (*George Baxter*)
 Leslie Court (*Arnold Gray*)
 George Munn (*Arthur Aylesworth*)

A top-down photograph of a red bowl filled with white popcorn, sitting on a wooden surface. A black remote control is positioned to the right of the bowl. Several popcorn kernels are scattered around the bowl and remote. The text "LET'S WATCH THE MOVIE" is overlaid in white, sans-serif font on a semi-transparent dark rectangle in the center of the image.

LET'S WATCH
THE MOVIE

The Spanish Cape Mystery as generic text

Ellery's methods and reputation: opening case with his father

Spanish Cape as a setting for crime

Death as a plot point

Offscreen murders

No engagement with the victims: first look at them

Continual reminders of their awfulness

The Police Paradox: Sheriff Morley's view of Ellery

Ellery's deadline (cf. the Challenge to the Reader)

Evidence: means, **motive**, opportunity (cf. *Scarface*)

The final lecture