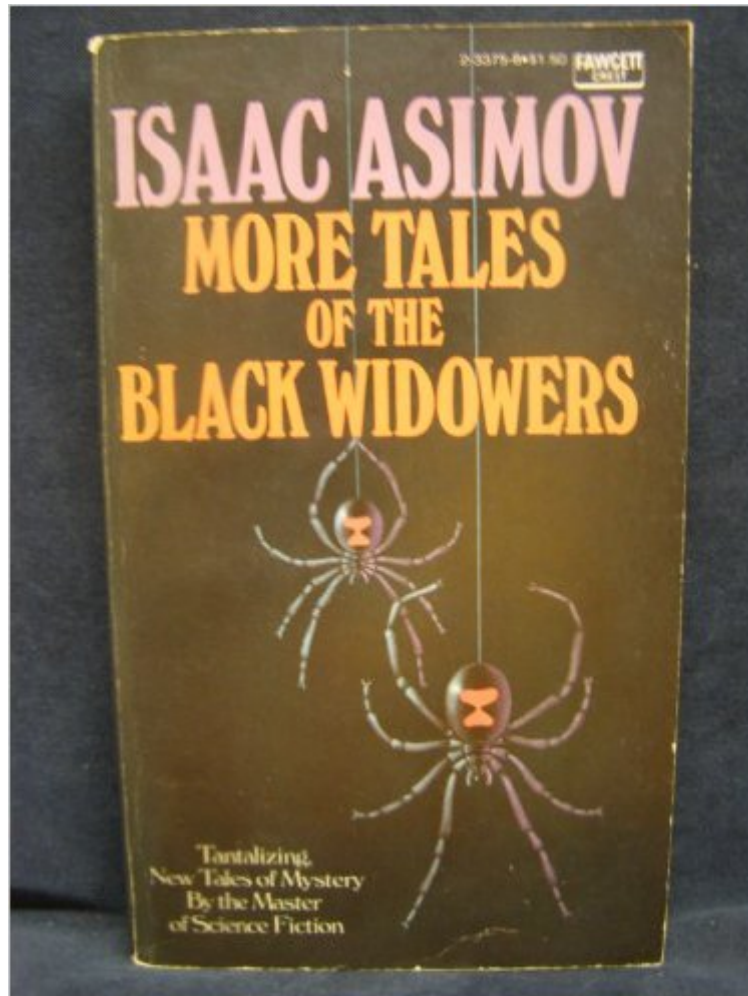


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More Tales Of The Black Widowers



Synopsis

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Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Asimov wrote Black Widower short stories for _Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine_ for years, rounding out each batch to a dozen with a few previously unpublished episodes for each new Widower collection. The Widowers are a stag club who meet once a month at the Milano restaurant: Avalon (patent attorney), Drake (research chemist), Gonzalo (painter), Halsted (teacher), Rubin (author), and Trumbull (intelligence analyst). They rotate the office of host; each month's host brings a guest for an evening of dinner, conversation, and grilling, and each eventually produces a problem of some kind for the Widowers to try to solve. (Problem-solving isn't the point of the club; Avalon, for one, grumbles about how the grilling always seems to degenerate into sleuthing, lately.) The seventh Widower - Henry, the waiter - always produces the solution after the other six have batted the problem around awhile. I can see why EQMM usually ate them up; the puzzles tend to be the kind of artificial gimmick that EQ's own early adventures were noted for - fair, if you know the right bits of trivia, and can view the problem as a constructed puzzle rather than a story about people. The crossword aroma is generally diluted with a healthy dose of Black Widower squabbling, though, as well as the wildcard element of the guests, so they're an entertaining read. "When No Man Pursueth" Guest: Mortimer Stellar (a stand-in for Asimov himself), who's annoyed with a publisher who bought an article only to sit on it without explanation. [Asimov used this story to blow off steam about a real-life incident.] "Quicker Than the Eye" - Host: Trumbull. Guest: Robert Alford Bunsen,

Trumbull's boss - because Trumbull couldn't explain previous successes without violating Widower confidentiality.

The Black Widowers meet once a month at the Milano Restaurant, taking the task of host in rotation. Each month the host brings a guest for grilling, traditionally beginning with 'How do you justify your existence?' and ending with ferreting out some mystery. After the six regular members have cleared the ground, the seventh - Henry, the waiter - always solves the problem. Most of Asimov's Black Widowers stories first saw the light of day in Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine (EQMM), except those written to round out collections. EQMM retitled half of them; Asimov has reverted all but one title change. The club is based on the real-life Trap Door Spiders, a stag club created so that the members could meet without involving one friend's disagreeable wife. Asimov, as a member, has based some of the Widowers on fellow club-members. I find the by-play between the Black Widowers entertaining in itself. Drake is the original reason for the no-women rule. Halstead, high school mathematics teacher, has an ongoing hobby of writing limericks for each chapter of the Iliad and the Odyssey. Trumbull works for an unspecified agency as a code-breaker; when he's not host, he's usually chief griller, and is the most apt to shout down the other members when they stray off-topic. Avalon is dignified, pedantic - good for the odd spot of in-character exposition. At the other extreme, Gonzalo, the youngest, is usually eager for each puzzle to appear. As a professional artist, he caricatures each guest, and enjoys trading insults with Rubin (mystery writer and deputy chief griller). Rubin also finds reason, at least once per book, to libel another writer of his acquaintance: one Isaac Asimov. :) "The Acquisitive Chuckle" - Host: Avalon.

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