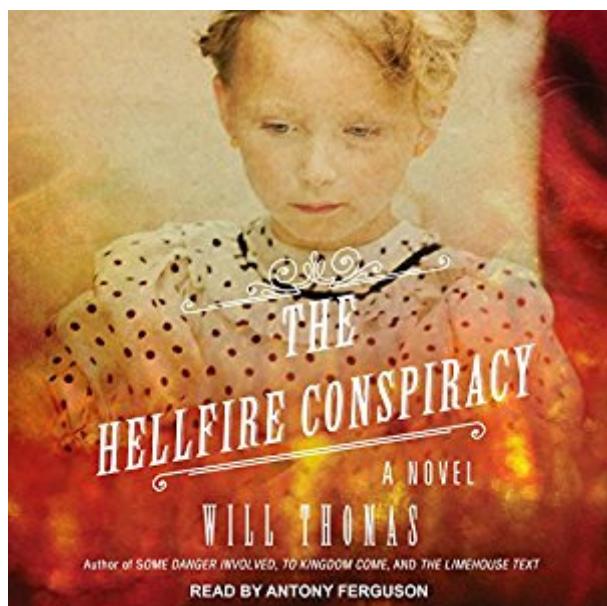


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The Hellfire Conspiracy: Barker & Llewelyn Series, Book 4



Synopsis

When Cyrus Barker and Thomas Llewelyn are hired to find a girl from the upper classes who has gone missing in the East End, they assume her kidnapping is the work of white slavers. But when they discover five girls have been murdered in Bethnal Green, taunting letters begin to arrive in Craig's Court from a killer calling himself Mr. Miacca. Barker fears that Miacca might be part of the Hellfire Club, a group of powerful, hedonistic aristocrats performing satanic rituals. He must track the fiend to his hideout, while Llewelyn confronts the man who put him in prison. Dodging muckrakers, navigating the murky Thames under cover of darkness, and infiltrating London's most powerful secret society, The Hellfire Conspiracy is another wild ride that "brings to life a London roiling with secret leagues, deadly organizations, and hidden clubs" (Ron Bernas, Detroit Free Press).

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The fourth offering by Will Thomas in his Barker - Llewellyn series has many of the elements that have endeared me to his characters and stories: vivid descriptions of Victorian London, a tightly-woven plot, and the gradual revelation of details of both character's pasts as their friendship deepens and their partnership becomes closer. Unlike the previous mysteries, however, Barker and Llewellyn have a rare miss - their client does not receive the resolution sought in hiring the pair. I like this - its messy to be sure, but it also reflects real life. This installment deals with kidnapping (and the possibility that the victim is sold as a "white slave" - a prostitute) from the east end. What brings

the case to the attention of Barker and Llewellyn is that the client isn't the typical victim of the crimes (the immigrant poor), but rather is from the solid middle class. The story, therefore, is as much a social commentary as it is a who-dunnit. This commentary (and the larger injustice it represents) is similarly related to the historical figures who make appearances in the story including Beatrice Potter (a social reformer, not the Peter Rabbit author), Amy Levy, William Stead (a muckraker) and Joseph Chamberlin, an influential MP. Because it is as much mystery as it is historical fiction and social commentary, I have to give it 5 stars. The best of the series so far - highly recommended.

First, let me say I am really enjoying this series. Every one of the books is good and they seem to concentrate on one ethnicity in Victorian London after another. This particular book had more red herrings in it than usual but I was interested through the book and the conclusion didn't seem like a violation of the rest of the book. This is a worthy part of the series.

This time we explore white slave trade, age of consent laws, and socialists. The case begins when a young middle class girl goes missing in a bad neighborhood in which her mother volunteers. Soon it is apparent she is not the first such girl. Then the killer starts sending taunting letters to Barker. I for reasons unclear to me known from first meeting the killer that that was going to be so. It didn't lessen the storytelling though.

I found this book very disappointing. The plot was okay, but structurally confusing and after the denouement of the story there was an additional 10% of unnecessary material that should have been pared down or cut out completely. I had the impression that the author doesn't know when to end his stories, nor does he know how to judge the correct amount of historical fact to include to provide adequate flavor without burdening the reader with unnecessary information. His editor should have been on top of this. Unfortunately, this is the last book I shall read in this series. (I had read four others prior to this one.)

Barker and his assistant find a case that has far reaching consequences in both society and moral grounds. It's a revealing look into the politics of both government and the power behind them.

Enquiry agent Barker has by now trained his assistant Llewellyn in the art of fighting so that he can defend himself, while the two are involved in solving a horrifying string of gruesome murders. Well

crafted as the previous volumes in the series although with fewer appealing characters and less descriptions of ethnic groups in Victorian London.

I love to read books that take place in late Victorian London. As a young man I was forever trying to figure out who Jack the Ripper was and create a long list of possible suspects, which included Mohandas Gandhi--well, he was in London at the time! Will Thomas invites me back to that period again, this time to follow the adventures of two characters, Barker and Llewelyn. The Hellfire Conspiracy is a hybrid of history and fiction as all his books tend to be. You are entertained and you learned something you probably didn't already know. Thomas writes in a way that allows the reader an unhindered ride through the plot. The books are over all too soon leaving the reader hungry for the next. If you're just beginning the series (this isn't the first book) slow down and enjoy each page.

Will Thomas has a nice series of books in the Barker and Llewellyn series. This is one of my favorite periods of history for fiction, and he does not disappoint. The characters are believable, the stories interesting, and I love to read what they are eating! Their pet has a nice place in the story, but isn't unbelievable, and all in all they are good reads. Start with book 1, and read them as their relationship as business partners begins and matures. I am sad I have to wait several months for the next installment as this series is several cuts above a lot of detective fiction series one finds.

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