



EARL DERR BIGGERS

THE BLACK CAMEL



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The death of Hollywood actress Shelah Fane in her Waikiki beach house brings Charlie Chan of the Honolulu police to seek the identity of the killer. The story behind her murder is linked with the three-year-old murder of another Hollywood actor and also connected with an enigmatic psychic named Tarneverro. Through the confusion of alibis, false clues, and bizarre characters, Chan moves with the utmost calm – until the classic "gathering of suspects" climax, when his form of justice hits with shattering force. This is the fourth of Earl Derr Biggers' books in the Charlie Chan series. It is also the first book in which we meet Chan's family. Well, his wife and four of his eleven children to be specific. Where the other seven kids have gone is never mentioned.

The Black Camel Details

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From Reader Review The Black Camel for online ebook

Amber McCarter says

This was not my kind of book, at all. It was probably not terrible, and perhaps even well done, for the "who done it" mystery genre. But I am not a fan of those and, indeed, did not particularly enjoy this - so am declining to rate it.

Hannah says

Flush with success from solving two highly complicated whodunnits in California, Charlie Chan is back in Hawaii; back to his home on Punchbowl Hill; back to his newest infant son and 10 other children. Now promoted to Inspector, Charlie's latest case takes him to the rental home of Hollywood film star Shelah Fane, who is currently in Hawaii to wrap up filming on a movie that originated in Tahiti. But the lovely Shelah won't get to finish her performance due to a deep and deadly stab wound to the heart.

Who hated Shelah enough to kill her? And does the mysterious murder of fellow actor Denny Mayo 3 years previously have anything to do with Shelah's own death?

The suspect list is long and varied, and includes a personal assistant, a butler, fellow actors, a director, an ex-husband, a present lover, an artistic but drunken beach bum and a fortune teller to the stars. Alibis are made, then destroyed, and Charlie is in serious danger of losing face before the killer is exposed.

The Black Camel is another charming addition to the Charlie Chan mystery series. Biggers again delivers an intriguing whodunnit with enough ambiguous suspects and clues to make Charlie work extra hard to bring it to a successful conclusion.

I am really enjoying this series; so much so that I have personally petitioned my local library to purchase the last 2 books so that it will have the complete Chan canon. Fiscal budgets being what they are, it might be awhile before I can visit Charlie again. Until then, Aloha, my wise and witty friend!

Phrodrick says

This may be one of the best "who done it mystery" books ever. There is some padding out but in *The Black Camel*, Earl Biggers has nailed the fundamentals in a way I find subtle. In the meantime, Detective Inspector Charlie Chan has out grown any sense of inferiority and is not taking guff.

One of my most important rules for any "Who Done it", is that the detective cannot solve the crime with secret information. All important information and evidence must be disclosed to the reader and the investigator at the same time. The playing field may contain misdirection, red herrings, clutter and plot twists, but the every part of the final solution must be shared evenly with the reader.

The Black Camel of Death kneels before impetuous actress Shelah Fane on a languid, lush Hawaiian night near the beautiful beaches that grace the shores alongside romantic Waikiki. Part of the character/suspect list is an ad man for Hawaiian Tourism, so we get lots of purple prose on this topic. Meantime Ms. Fane is discovered stabbed; her pretty orchard corsage tramped and still keeping the secret that has her hesitating to

marry her rich and handsome suitor. To quote the famous line: "The game is afoot!"

Detective Inspector Charlie Chan, fresh from three cases that established him as a master crime solver on two sides of the American Pacific; is the man to pin down the culprit. Call him a Chinaman and look down at him at your own risk. He is done apologizing to haole (white men) who cannot see past his race.

Of course justice will be done. How we get there is I think what makes this the best of the four Chan books I have so far read. The case proceeds rather like an investigation. The red herrings are presented before the reader and the plot twists are kept just inside of credulity. Meantime, case is built on evidence. We, the reader and Chan will solve the case together.

This is a High Society type caper so everyone is sophisticated. They are also rather cool in their reaction to a murder and therefore a possible murderer among them. The usual characters are present, just that no one seems to be especially upset or sorry for the loss of Ms. Fane. If there is a weakness to *The Black Camel*, it is the detachment and lack of emotional depth in any of the characters. This said this is a great old fashioned beach read. Nothing steamy or unseemly just a tricky murder and the right (China) man for the job.

Sg.00 says

Charlie is back in Honolulu in this one (4th of the series) ~ another well-written mystery.

Elizabeth says

THE BLACK CAMEL by Earl Derr Biggers

'Death is the black camel that kneels unbidden at every gate.' This is the quote used by Charlie Chan minutes after he is called to investigate the murder of Shelah Fane a Hollywood actress who has just arrived in the Hawaiian Islands to wrap up a movie that had been begun in Tahiti. She had hoped to have some time to recuperate once filming was done. Shelah was quite famous for her work and appearance but these were on the cusp of a downhill slope, something that actresses in the movie business always feared when the little lines on the face became more obvious.

This is a very high profile case for Inspector Chan of the Honolulu police and he proceeds warily among many possible suspects. One man a mysterious crystal gazer or fortune teller known as Tarneverro is well known among the Hollywood set and a close personal friend of Miss Fane is very eager to help in the solving of this murder and Charlie accepts this philosophically with help from another wise saying: 'the bird chooses the tree, not the tree the bird.'

Most of Charlie Chan's approach relates to basic philosophy of what will be will be. Life is predestined and so there is no use worrying about things not easily controlled such as the weather, one's weight, and other facts of life. But he has no intention of behaving like the crane, which waited for the sea to disappear and leave him dry fish to eat, starves to death. Thus he proceeds and in his quiet intuitive way knows he can find the murderer.

Charlie Chan has eleven children and in this book we are introduced to his oldest son, Henry, his oldest daughter, Rose and the next in line Evelyn. We also meet little Barry who was born while he was helping the SFPD during his recent adventures in California in *BEHIND THAT CURTAIN*.

Read1000books says

Who killed fading actress Sheila Fane on a moonlit night in the paradise of Hawaii? Was it her ex-husband? The beach-comber? Her millionaire suitor? The butler? Or one of five other suspects? And what does it have to do with the unsolved murder of Denny Mayo in Hollywood three years ago?? A satisfying mystery that I vaguely remember reading decades ago but had forgotten the ending.

This particular edition (Bantam, 1975) has a couple of mysteries of it's own. For starters, the red circle on the front cover says "5 In A Series". Actually this is the fourth Charlie Chan book (written in 1929) by his creator, Earl Derr Biggers. For reasons unknown, Bantam chose to insert a new novel (Charlie Chan Returns, penned by "Dennis Lynds" in 1974) into the series and call it #4. Secondly, there's the cover art work. It depicts a dapper-dressed man firing a pistol. Yet the crime was committed with a knife; not a single shot is fired by anybody in the entire 218 pages! Conundrums aplenty, both inside and out!

And now, a word about...

CHARLIE CHAN AND RACIAL STEREOTYPING

In our post-modern, culturally hyper-sensitive age, dear old Charlie has taken, from a few squeaky wheels, a bit of a beating of late, most notably in the 2010 diatribe "Charlie Chan: The Untold Story of the Honorable Detective and His Rendezvous with American History" by Yunte Huang (see my review). In short, Chan (and his creator) are accused of all sorts of racial underlingship. Let me just say, having now read all six of the original novels, that the critics obviously have not. Anyone who does will see that Chan is portrayed as intelligent, hard-working, and respectful of authority (which, by the way, were once considered virtues) but hardly allows himself to be treated as a doormat by "the white man". Take as one example, this come-back (on page 53 of the above edition if you are interested), when the butler inadvertently refers to the Chinese as a "heathen race": "A heathen race," Chan replied gravely, "that was busy inventing the art of printing at the moment when gentlemen in Great Britain were still beating one another over the head with spiked clubs. Pray excuse this reference to history". That doesn't sound very subservient to me. On another occasion, Chan basically tells a complaining rich man that he will come to his house and interview him whenever the detective thinks it's necessary, like it or not. Not to mention that Chan himself isn't as pure as the wind-driven snow when it comes to prejudice either. In this novel and at least one other, he seems to have a particular dislike for the Japanese. In "The Black Camel" he repeatedly insults, and waves from his presence, a police subordinate who happens to be from Japan. All that said, these books were not written to make any type of political, racial, or any other type of "statement", other than "relax, and read a good mystery". May I humbly suggest we leave off all the wrangling and do just that.

Larry Piper says

In his fourth adventure, Charlie is back in Hawaii, albeit still dealing with California types. This time, he must investigate the murder of a hugely famous Hollywood actress. She had been filming in Tahiti, or some such place, and was going to finish up the final scenes in Hawaii. She had just arrived, was setting up a household on the beach, and had gathered a bunch of friends for a dinner party. She didn't make her expected grand entrance into the party, she was found stabbed to death in a pavilion across the beach from her house.

There are lots of possible culprits, including the man who wanted to marry the actress, her psychic advisor (whom she had just called to Hawaii to help her decide to accept the marriage proposal), some of her film buddies, a local tycoon married to a former Hollywood actress friend, the very proper British butler, and so forth. The psychic advisor, in particular, appears to be trying to help Chan all the while also trying to derail Chan's investigation. One can never figure out if he's a good guy, despite being a charlatan, or a not-so-good

guy, in keeping with his being a charlatan (all self-styled psychics are charlatans by definition). Whatever, Charlie figures it all out in the end.

Interestingly, given that the book came out in 1929, this woman's being a hugely successful Hollywood star meant that she was a star of silent films, maybe like Clara Bow or Theda Bara, the first sounded feature-length film having only just come out in late 1928.

I don't know if I'm just getting used to Charlie, or if things really have changed by the fourth book. It seems to me, however, that Charlie's bizarre grammatical constructions are toned down in this book from those in the earlier books. I think, perhaps, Charlie is taxed with a greater share of the dialog this time around, and that writing all that tortured syntax just got too tough for Biggers. Whatever, it's still a good enough book. Well worth the download from our friends at Roy Glashan's Library.

Wyntroire says

Reread. A fav.

Beth says

Typical Charlie Chan. An entertaining and interesting murder mystery puzzle to solve in a well-described tropical setting, with subtle hints about the prejudice Chinese faced in historical USA.

Paul Cornelius says

Promoted from Sergeant to Inspector, Charles is now in charge. And that is true on a number of levels. First and foremost, Charlie stands completely alone in solving this case. Gone are the help of past novels, the society men, the reporters, the district attorneys. In fact, the people supposed to help in this novel do anything but. Biggers has brought Charlie Chan into full maturity in *The Black Camel*. His character, too, has changed. He is more grizzled and tough. This is a detective who actually shoves people around when he feels it necessary. Looking back on the Charlie of the first novel, he is almost obsequious in comparison. This Charlie Chan is even closer to the hard-boiled detective than in the last book, *Behind That Curtain*.

The same goes for the setting. Chan is once again in Honolulu, after trips to Southern California in book two and San Francisco in book three, but this is not the same Honolulu of the opening novel. Not only is the story spread out, from bungalows on the beach to grand hotels and police offices, but it also ventures into the city's slums. The passage that describes the trip into this place, in fact, is told in hard-boiled prose, while Charlie seems tougher and the locales resembles something from a film noir movie.

This is a superior piece of detective fiction. And one more thing: the mystery itself is the best yet. In each successive book, in fact, the complexity and surprise accompanying the solving of the crime becomes more intense. The solution to the case shocked me. I had it figured out--all wrongly. Well done, Earl Derr Biggers. Now, for book number five.

*A note on the 1931 film version. Of the first five Charlie Chan films, only *The Black Camel* remains. The others have been lost. A pity, because the film is largely faithful to the book but for a slight twist at the end

involving Jessop and Smith. The film was made the same year as Universal's classic, *Dracula*. That is worth pointing out because both Bela Lugosi (*Dracula*) and Dwight Frye (*Renfield*) also appear in *The Black Camel*. Frye appears as Jessop and Lugosi as Tarneverro, with Lugosi's part much more active and talkative than in *Dracula*. Also notable is the mobility of the camera early in the film and, later, the downright Expressionistic scenes of horror mystery with Tarneverro's crystal ball and as Chan begins to uncover the murder. Similar, too, is the presence of Chan's understudy, a Japanese detective in training made out to be a comic fool. Yes, there is a racial hierarchy in both the novel and film, with the Chinese above the Japanese, something made all the more clear in the novel when Chan travels into the Honolulu slums.

Kathy says

"Truth is rare fruit in garden of murder." This quotation applies particularly well to this book. There are enough red herrings here to have a fish fry. Charlie is especially engaging in this book; plus we get to meet some of his very Americanized children. A delightfully misleading and mysterious story.

Mark Short says

This book kept my interest from start to finish. The characters were fully developed and there were enough potential murderers to keep the reader guessing. Well paced and a satisfying conclusion

Eileen says

Charlie Chan mystery. This one set in Honolulu, Charlie's home town, so we get to meet his family and see how he interacts with them at home. Fun.

Lizzytish says

Chan is back in Hawaii and is called to solve the murder of a fading Hollywood star. A murder in the past may or may not have something to do with it. Interesting characters with a lot of bantering back and forth.

Fredrick Danysh says

In Honolulu an Hollywood actress is murdered on a film's beach location placing Charlie Chan on one of most difficult cases.
