Michael E. Grost

Edward D. Hoch

Recommended Works:

City of Brass
- City of Brass (1959)

The Quests of Simon Ark
- The Mummy from the Sea (1979)

Funeral in the Fog: The Strange Mysteries of Simon Ark
- Day of the Wizard (1964)
- Funeral in the Fog (1973)
- The Avenger from Outer Space (1979)
- The Sorceress of the Sea (1980)
- The House of a Hundred Birds (1982)
- Prisoner of Zerfall (1985)
- The S. S. S. (1986)
- The Way Up to Hades (1988)
- No Blood for a Vampire (1995)

The Night My Friend
- The Long Way Down (1965)
- In Some Secret Place (1965)
- They Never Come Back (1966)
- A Girl Like Cathy (1966)
- The Ring with the Velvet Ropes (1968)

The Ripper of Storyville and Other Ben Snow Tales
- The Flying Man (1961)
- The Ripper of Storyville (1962)
- The Vanished Steamboat (1984)
- The 500 Hours of Dr. Wisdom (1984)
- The Trail of the Bells (1985)
- The Only Tree in Tasco (1986)

Uncollected Ben Snow stories
- Poker Game at the Golden Nugget (1987)
- The Nude Over the Bar (1988)
- The Pirate of Death Valley (1990)
- Five Days in a Texas Town (1992)
- The Passion of Lizzie B. (1993)
- The San Agustin Miracle (2001)
- Gunfighter's Honeymoon (2002)
- The Mountain of Jade (2003)
- Once Aboard the Eagle (2005)
- Madam Sing's Gold (2008)

Harry Ponder stories
- The Magic Bullet (1968)

Leopold's Way
- The Rainy-Day Bandit (1970)
- Christmas Is for Cops (1970)
- The Jersey Devil (1971)
- Captain Leopold Plays a Hunch (1973)
- Captain Leopold and the Ghost-Killer (1974)
- No Crime for Captain Leopold (1975)

Uncollected Captain Leopold tales
- The People of the Peacock (1965)
- No Holiday for Captain Leopold (1977)

- Captain Leopold Looks for the Cause (1977)
- Captain Leopold and the Three Hostages (1978)
- Captain Leopold on the Spot (1979)
- Captain Leopold and the Vanishing Men (1979)
- The Second Captain Leopold (1983)
- Suddenly in September (1983)
- Leopold and the Broken Bride (1987)
- The Murder in Room 1010 (1987)
- Leopold and the Cemetery Bandits (1988)
- Too Many Murderers (1990)
- The Essex Park Cowboys (1994)
- The Christmas Tree Killer (1999)
- Leopold in the Vineyard (2004)
- Leopold in the Lab (2006)

The Spy and the Thief

- The Spy Who Took the Long Route (1966)

The Spy Who Read Latin and Other Stories

- The Spy Who Read Latin (1968)

The Old Spies Club and Other Intrigues of Rand

- The Spy in the Pyramid (1972)
- The Spy at the End of the Rainbow (1974)
- The Spy and the Healing Waters (1990)
- Waiting for Mrs. Ryder (1994)
- The Old Spies Club (1997)
- One Bag of Coconuts (1997)
- The War That Never Was (1999)

Uncollected Jeffery Rand stories

- The Spy Who Didn't Exist (1967)
- The Spy and the Diplomat's Daughter (1971)
- The Spy Who Didn't Remember (1972)
- The Spy Who Was Expected (1972)
- The Spy and the Intercepted Letters (1974)
- The Spy and the Talking House (1974)
- The Spy and the Mysterious Card (1975)
- The Spy at the Crime Writers Conference (1976)
- The Spy and the Snowman (1980)
- The Spy Who Stayed Up All Night (1981)
- The Spy at the Spa (1985)
- The Spy Who Knew the Future (1986)
- The Spy and the Embassy Murders (1988)
- A Game for Spies (1988)
- The Spy and the Greek Enigma (1992)
- Paris Masque (2005)

Diagnosis Impossible: The Problems of Dr. Sam Hawthorne

- The Problem of the Covered Bridge (1974)
- The Problem of the Old Gristmill (1975)
- The Problem of the Little Red Schoolhouse (1976)
- The Problem of Cell 16 (1977)
- The Problem of the Country Inn (1977)
- The Problem of the County Fair (1978)

More Things Impossible: The Second Casebook of Dr. Sam Hawthorne

- The Problem of the Revival Tent (1978)
- The Problem of the Whispering House (1979)
- The Problem of the Boston Common (1979)

- The Problem of the General Store (1979)
- The Problem of the Pilgrims Windmill (1980)
- The Problem of the Gingerbread Houseboat (1981)
- The Problem of the Pink Post Office (1981)
- The Problem of the Octagon Room (1981)
- The Problem of the Gypsy Camp (1982)
- The Problem of the Hunting Lodge (1983)
- The Problem of Santa's Lighthouse (1983)

Nothing Is Impossible: Further Problems of Dr. Sam Hawthorne

- The Problem of the Crying Room (1984)
- The Problem of the Curing Barn (1987)
- The Problem of the Snowbound Cabin (1987)
- The Problem of the Black Roadster (1988)
- The Problem of the Dying Patient (1989)
- The Problem of the Protected Farmhouse (1990)
- The Problem of the Blue Bicycle (1991)

All But Impossible: The Impossible Files of Dr. Sam Hawthorne

- The Problem of the Vanishing Salesman (1992)
- The Problem of the Leather Man (1992)
- The Problem of the Phantom Parlor (1993)
- The Problem of the Poisoned Pool (1993)
- The Problem of the Missing Roadhouse (1994)
- The Problem of the Crowded Cemetery (1995)
- The Problem of the Enormous Owl (1996)
- The Problem of the Enchanted Terrace (1997)

Challenge the Impossible: The Final Problems of Dr. Sam Hawthorne

- The Problem of the Yellow Wallpaper (2001)
- The Problem of the Candidate's Cabin (2004)
- The Problem of the Secret Passage (2005)
- The Problem of the Devil's Orchard (2006)
- The Problem of Suicide Cottage (2007)

The Thefts of Nick Velvet

- The Theft from the Onyx Pool (1967)
- The Theft of the Silver Lake Serpent (1970)
- The Theft of the Mafia Cat (1972)
- The Theft from the Empty Room (1972)
- The Theft of the Cuckoo Clock (1973)

The Velvet Touch: Nick Velvet Stories

- The Theft of the Venetian Window (1975)
- The Theft of the Sherlockian Slipper (1977)
- The Theft of Nothing at All (1977)
- The Theft of the Four of Spades (1980)
- The Theft of Cinderella's Slipper (1987)
- The Theft of the White Queen's Menu (1983)
- The Theft of the Overdue Library Book (1984)
- The Theft of the Cardboard Castle (1985)
- The Theft of the Faded Flag (1988)
- The Theft of Leopold's Badge (1991)

Uncollected Nick Velvet stories

- The Theft of the Satin Jury (1972)
- The Theft of the Child's Drawing (1977)
- The Theft of McGregor's Skunk (1986)
- The Theft of the Lucky Cigar (1991)
- The Theft of the Canceled Stamp (1994)

- The Theft of Twenty-Nine Minutes (1994)
- The Theft of the Sandwich Board (2001)
- The Theft of the Wedding Doves (2002)
- The Theft of the Blue-Ribbon Bass (2003)
- The Theft of the Empty Paint Can (2005)
- The Theft of the Blue-Ribbon Pie (2006)
- The Theft of the Ostracized Ostrich (2007)

The Iron Angel and Other Tales of the Gypsy Sleuth

- The Luck of a Gypsy (1985)
- The Gypsy Treasure (1986)
- Murder of a Gypsy King (1988)
- The Gypsy Delegate (1990)
- The Puzzle Garden (1994)
- The Gypsy's Paw (1994)
- A Wall Too High (2000)

Uncollected Michael Vlado, the Gypsy Sleuth stories

- The Return of the Gypsy (1991)
- The Hiding Place (1993)
- The Vampire Theme (2002)
- The Nameless Poison (2006)

Paul Tower, the Lollipop Cop tales

- The Kindergarten Witch (1975)

Al Darlan tales

- The Girl Next-Door (2007)

Sir Gideon Parrot tales

- Lady of the Impossible (1981)

Connie Trent tales

- The Crime in Heaven (1988)

Sebastian Blue and Laura Charme of Interpol tales

- Interpol: The Case of the Modern Medusa (1973)
- Interpol: The Case of the Flying Graveyard (1976)
- Interpol: The Case of the Straw Serpent (1980)
- The Case of the Chloroformed Clerics (1980)
- The Case of the Drowned Coroner (1984)

Charles Spacer tales

- The Film Festival Assignment (1986)

Hoch's Ladies

- Susan Holt tales
    - A Fondness for Steam (1994)
    - A Parcel of Deerstalkers (1995)
    - A Craving for Chinese (1995)
    - A Shower of Daggers (1997)
- Libby Knowles stories
    - Wait Until Morning (1985)
- Annie Sears tales
    - The Cactus Killer (2005)
    - First Blood (2007)
    - Baja (2008)

Alexander Swift tales

- The Hudson Chain (1995)
- The Sword of Colonel Ledyard (2000)
- St. John and the Dragon (2001)

Ellery Queen tales

- The Circle of Ink (1999)

Father David Noone tales

- The Hand of God (2003)

Stanton and Ives tales

- Cuba Libro (2003)
- Midsummer Night's Scheme (2004)
- A Bird in the Sand (2007)
- Handel and Gretel (2007) (completed by Jon L. Breen)

Mystery-Suspense tales

- Fiction (1980)
- The Haggard Society (2000)
- The Fading Woman (2000)

Uncollected Non-Series Mysteries

- Murder Offstage (1967)
- King's Knight Gambit Declined (1973)
- Something Green (1988)
- The Things That Are Caesar's (1996)
- Circus in the Sky (2000)
- The War in Wonderland (2003)
- Money on the Red (2004)

The above is not a complete list of Hoch's fiction. Rather, it is a list of stories by Hoch that I enjoyed reading, and recommend to others. It selects the stories in each of Hoch's book collections that are outstanding, and also lists many recommended uncollected tales that have appeared so far only in magazines or anthologies.

Edward D. Hoch

Edward D. Hoch published 950 short stories. Hoch is the leading contemporary writer of true puzzle plot mysteries.

Among his current books in print, the best introductions to his work are:

- The Nick Velvet mystery-ingenious theft tales in *The Velvet Touch: Nick Velvet Stories*.
- The impossible crime stories in *More Things Impossible: The Second Casebook of Dr. Sam Hawthorne*.

One wishes these books were available in every newsstand and bookstore, but one will usually have to order them by internet or mail from a book seller, or from their small press publisher, Crippen & Landru. (I am not associated with Crippen & Landru, and have no financial ties with them whatsoever. The link here is merely designed to help readers find Hoch's books.)

Not surprisingly for such a prolific author, Hoch's tales are uneven in quality. Some are far more imaginative than others. The lesser Hoch tales tend to have puzzle plots whose solutions are too easy to guess, although they are still solidly crafted, fair play mystery tales. Hoch's lesser works also tend to suffer from gloom, especially in his early writing of the 1960's. While it is the duty of the critic to point out such problems, it is also the duty of the critic to highlight the huge number of brilliant tales that Hoch has written. These outstanding works form the largest body of first rate mystery fiction of any contemporary author. This article will concentrate on Hoch's major works.

I've read 300 of Hoch's stories. While this is a large body of fiction - collectively they are twice as long as *The Lord of the Rings*, for instance - it is still just one third of Hoch's 900 published tales. So the article below has huge gaps as a systematic study of Hoch's works. Please take it as a work in progress, designed to shed at least a partial light on Hoch's oeuvre.

Information on Hoch

The best print essay I've seen on Hoch's work is Francis M. Nevins' introduction to the Captain Leopold collection *Leopold's Way* (1985). This contains biographical information on Hoch, and a detailed look at his many detective series. *Leopold's Way* is available in many libraries. Amazingly enough, it still seems to be in print, after all these years. It also has a bibliography of Leopold stories by Hoch. Nevins' introduction to *The Night My Friend* (1992) has an updated look at Hoch's series. And a bibliography of Hoch's non-series tales. A version of these articles appears in Nevins' critical collection *Cornucopia of Crime*.

The Crippen & Landru collections of Hoch's stories also contain bibliographies.

An interview with Hoch, conducted by Steve Lewis, is available in Lewis' on-line journal, Mystery*File. By the way, Hoch's name is pronounced to rhyme with "Coke".

A large amount of well-researched criticism of Hoch's stories is at Beneath the Stains of Time. Please keep clicking on the "Older Posts" link at the end of each batch of articles: more articles will appear.

An introduction in *EQMM* (May 1994) says that Hoch had served for many years on Rochester's library board. Hoch lived for much of his life in Rochester, New York. This is a sizable city: the Rochester metropolitan area currently has over a million people.

Series Detectives

Much of Hoch's work centers on series detectives, many of which have been featured in long-running sequences of short stories.

Many of Hoch's series detectives tend to personify different mystery subgenres. Captain Leopold tales are police procedurals; Dr. Sam Hawthorne, impossible crimes; Nick Velvet, Rogue thieves who turn detective; Jeffery Rand, the mystery tale based in espionage; Ben Snow, the historical mystery and the Western-mystery. Hoch can shift to any of these genres simply by altering his series protagonist. It is a clever arrangement.

Impossible Crimes

Hoch is among the most gifted contemporary creators of impossible crime stories. Statistics on impossible crimes by various writers:

1. In fact, Hoch has published at least 125 impossible crime stories, making him the all-time most prolific creator of impossible crime works.
2. John Dickson Carr also created over 120 impossible crime tales: 56 novels, 32 short stories, at least 35 plays or (especially) radio plays. Carr is in a statistical ties with Hoch. The two men are far more prolific in this genre than any other writers.
3. The contemporary author Paul Halter, with at least 40 novels and 20 short stories, mainly impossible crimes. Halter has created a number of novels with multiple impossible crimes, and probably these should be counted as multiple works. That would make his total even higher.
4. Paul Doherty, with 51 novels and 7 short stories, so far.
5. Arthur Porges: 51 such short stories.
6. Joseph Commings: 42 short tales.
7. Bill Pronzini: 40 novels and short stories, so far.

All of these statistics mainly derive from Robert Adey's indispensable bibliography, *Locked Room Murders and Other Impossible Crimes* (1991), and from its equally invaluable continuation, Brian Skupin's *Locked Room Murders, Supplement* (2019). Both books are published by Locked Room International.

Many libraries and used book stores contain anthologies with Hoch short story gems in them. Four locked room / impossible crime tales by Hoch in anthologies are especially recommended:

- *The Locked Room Reader* (1968) edited by Hans Stefan Santesson includes "The Long Way Down" (1965);
- *Locked Room Puzzles* (1986) edited by Martin H. Greenberg and Bill Pronzini includes "Day of the Wizard" (1964);
- *Death Locked In* (1987) edited by Douglas G. Greene and Robert C. S. Adey includes "The Magic Bullet" (1968);
- *Detective Duos* (1997), edited by Marcia Muller and Bill Pronzini, contains "Interpol: The Case of the Modern Medusa" (1973).

"The Theft of Cinderella's Slipper" (1987) (in *The Velvet Touch: Nick Velvet Stories*) resembles "The Long Way Down" (1965) in being an impossible crime story set in the world of skyscraper business offices. These are some of Hoch's purest and most delightful impossible crime tales. They are in the Chesterton-Carr tradition. Another fun story in the same mode is "Captain Leopold and the Vanishing Men" (1979).

Impossible Appearances. Another series of Hoch tales deal with objects that impossibly show up in sealed chambers. SPOILERS:

- "The Magic Bullet" (1968) contains a bullet that fires through a locked door.
- In "The Problem of the Crowded Cemetery" (1995), an extra corpse shows up in a sealed casket.
- "The Problem of the County Fair" (1978) is also in this mode.
- "The Problem of the Poisoned Pool" (1993) has a person mysteriously appear in a large region.

These sorts of situations have not been dealt with by many other writers, so they give Hoch plenty of room to develop novel impossible crime ideas.

A Plot Structure. A number of authors have used this plot structure for an impossible crime mystery:

1. First, the detective figures out *how* the impossible crime was committed.
2. Then, from this solution, it becomes clear *who* committed the crime. They are the only ones who had the opportunity to pull off the impossible crime.

Examples of this structure in Hoch include "The Stalker of Souls", "The Problem of the County Fair", "The Problem of the Old Oak Tree", "The Problem of the Hunting Lodge", "The Problem of the Country Church", "The Problem of the Protected Farmhouse", "The Problem of the Missing Roadhouse", "The Problem of the Poisoned Pool", the main impossible crime plot in "The Problem of the Curing Barn".

1978-1983: Impossible Crimes

The impossible crime stories in *More Things Impossible: The Second Casebook of Dr. Sam Hawthorne* are especially inventive. These tales were written in 1978-1983, a period in Hoch's writing that centers around impossible crimes. Some of the best tales in other Hoch series in these years also involve such miracle problems:

- "Captain Leopold and the Vanishing Men" (1979).
- The Rand story "The Spy and the Snowman" (1980), reprinted in *Tales of Espionage*.
- "The Vanished Steamboat" (1984), the story that caused Hoch to revive his cowboy detective Ben Snow. It's available in *The Ripper of Storyville and Other Ben Snow Tales*.

"Lady of the Impossible" (1981), the first story about Sir Gideon Parrot, appeared in this era. It is an impossible crime tale.

In 1983, at the end of this period, Hoch invented Nick Velvet's antagonist, master thief Sandra Paris, the White Queen. The White Queen tales usually lead Nick Velvet into solving impossible crimes, as well. The White Queen tales have been collected in *The Velvet Touch: Nick Velvet Stories*. This book, along with *More Things Impossible: The Second Casebook of Dr. Sam Hawthorne*, shows Hoch's abilities with the impossible crime at their fullest.

Hidden Schemes

MILD SPOILERS AHEAD

Comparisons of a number of Hoch tales (chosen at random) suggests the structural approaches Hoch used for constructing plots and clues. The Rand stories "The Old Spies Club" and "The War That Never Was" in *The Old Spies Club*, the Annie Sears tale "Baja" and the non-series "The War in Wonderland" all have a *hidden scheme*. This scheme is a hidden plot, only revealed at the end, that involves concealed, elaborate activities by the bad guys. This scheme is the core of the mystery puzzle plot in the four tales. Hoch drops bits of plot throughout the tale, that will eventually be revealed to be be aspects of the hidden scheme. These aspects serve as clues. Some of them point to the actions of the scheme. Others can point to the guilty person's involvement with the scheme.

In two of the tales, the existence of such a scheme is indicated fairly early. There is no apparent motive for the killing in "The War in Wonderland": so the reader can conclude that something unknown must be happening that provides a motive for the murder. And in "The War That Never Was", a borderline impossible situation demands an explanation, also indicating that there is a major back-story that will explain it.

By contrast, in "The Old Spies Club" and "Baja", the fact that there's a hidden scheme is a complete surprise at the end. Only the fact that mystery fiction often has such schemes, alerts the informed reader to look out for the possibility of such a scheme.

In all cases, the existence of the scheme delights the reader. This is what puzzle plot mystery fiction is for: to unleash logical but surprising plot solutions on the reader. The hidden scheme is thus a major artistic attribute of the story. It in fact helps make these tales into puzzle plot fiction. Anyone can write a simple tale in which there is a crime, and at the end of which we learn whodunit. Hoch goes beyond this, in developing a whole hidden plot scheme, that serves as a puzzle for the reader.

"The Avenger from Outer Space" is also structured around a hidden scheme. The main clue to the killer's identity is linked to this scheme - it is not part of the murder mystery, strictly speaking.

"The Problem of the Old Gristmill" (1975) also centers on a hidden scheme. One whose existence is a surprise to readers at the end of the story. Added to this is an impossible crime puzzle. This puzzle is linked to the scheme through motives, and shared technical means used to pull off both the scheme and the impossibility. Both the hidden scheme and the impossible crime are developed with much plot detail. Both the hidden scheme and the impossible crime, have separate clues to their solutions. The clues to the impossibility are technical: clues to how the impossibility was physically committed. By contrast, the clues to the hidden scheme point to aspects of the scheme.

"The Problem of the Yellow Wallpaper" also mixes a hidden scheme with a separate impossible crime. In this tale the hidden scheme is simple, while the impossible crime is detailed and imaginative. The hidden scheme has affinities with the one in "The Problem of the Old Gristmill". "The Problem of the Yellow Wallpaper" also resembles "The Problem of the Old Gristmill", in focussing on new residents in Northmont.

"The Problem of Santa's Lighthouse" is a bit unusual, in that the hidden scheme is revealed and solved midway through the tale, rather than at the finale.

In both "The Problem of Santa's Lighthouse" and "The Problem of the Crying Room", Dr. Sam unexpectedly insists on making a trip, to a locale that has only been mentioned in the story, rather than having been seen "on-stage". In both tales, this leads him to uncovering details of a hidden scheme.

The Simon Ark tales "The House of a Hundred Birds" and "Prisoner of Zerfall" share common structural features:

- Each has not just one, but *two* hidden schemes.
- The second scheme builds on the first scheme, in each story.
- The schemes are done by two opposing groups of characters. The groups overlap, having one or two members in common.

The second scheme in "Prisoner of Zerfall" is very simple, and benefits from this simplicity, being something readers might fairly guess. By contrast, the second scheme in "The House of a Hundred Birds" is highly complex. It's imaginative - but not something readers might easily figure out. SPOILERS. This second scheme echoes the real-life mystery of Maelzel's chess player.

"No Blood for a Vampire" has a hidden scheme. It is a bit unusual in that:

- The scheme is not illegal or criminal, as the story points out.

- It does not provide a motive for the murder. Instead, it provides opportunity for the murders.

The scheme and the murders in "No Blood for a Vampire" are so closely linked, that they seem to form one overall pattern of plot. This plot is imaginative and unexpected.

Visual Puns

SPOILERS. In "The House of a Hundred Birds", a witness sees an event. But thinks it is something other than what it really is. What the witness thinks they are seeing, and what they are actually seeing, look exactly alike, even though they are in fact very different. The two serve as what one might dub a "visual pun": an event that looks just like a different event.

"The Problem of the Yellow Wallpaper" also has an event that is seen but misinterpreted by the detectives and the reader. This event looks simple, but has hidden complexities.

"The Problem of the Boston Common" contains a visual pun in its solution. SPOILER. This enables Dr. Sam to identify the killer, and show how he could have committed the crime.

"The Problem of the Black Cloister" has two visual puns, one for each killing in the story. SPOILERS:

- One has to do with the interpretation of the wormholes in the door.
- A second visual pun: how the spectacle of the officer firing was interpreted by the audience - and how it appeared differently to the victim.

"The Problem of the Hunting Lodge" has a clever solution at the end for its impossible crime. SPOILERS. This solution depends on one kind of evidence, looking like another kind of evidence. This allows the one type of evidence to conceal the other.

"Christmas Is for Cops" (1970) has a visual pun as the main idea in its solution.

"The Sorceress of the Sea" has a seemingly supernatural event. Like quite a few supernatural events in fiction, it has "light show" aspects: in this case, bubble and light. Such shows are a big feature in William Hope Hodgson. The solution offers a drastically different, non-supernatural interpretation of the light show. The supernatural and non-supernatural events look alike, and form a kind of visual pun.

The main impossibility in "Captain Leopold and the Vanishing Men" has a solution based on a visual pun.

The strange illusionistic painting of the villa in the Ben Snow tale "The Phantom Stallion" (1985), is perhaps related to the visual puns.

"Leopold Undercover" (2007) contains an *aural* pun. Sleuth Captain Leopold hears a sequence of sounds. But a villain dupes him into thinking the sounds are different from what they actually are. The villain provides an alternative meaning and structure for the sounds-sequence. The sounds do not involve words, however: this is not a "verbal pun". This aural pun, and its explanation at the end of the story, are the best features of the tale.

SPOILERS. In "No Holiday for Captain Leopold", "Leopold and the Cemetery Bandits", one kind of criminal action is cleverly disguised by crooks to look like another kind of action. This disguise in not primarily visual or aural. Still it is a kind of "action pun".

Clues

Hoch's fiction is rich in clues. Most of his puzzle plot tales offer multiple clues to the mystery and the killer's identity.

A clue in "Baja" is especially ingenious. It is an *ambiguous statement* (the whispered statement of the woman). It can be read one way, in the surface plot of the story - and another, in terms of the hidden scheme. This is the most complex clue related to the schemes in any of the tales. The other clues are are straightforward indicators, pointing to one plot element or another of the hidden scheme.

Hoch also has clues, especially to the identity of the killer, that are logically separate from the scheme itself. These often involve a *discrepancy* between the killer's statements, and facts that have been set forth in the rest of the story. In two of the tales, this discrepancy involves *time*. Everything from minutes to years, can be found to be "off" in the killer's statements. In another tale, "Madam Sing's Gold", the discrepancy involves *geography*. A discrepancy clue in "The Old Spies Club" involves neither time nor space, so Hoch is far from limited to these two approaches.

Hoch has other kinds of clues as well. There is an element with *hidden meaning* in "Baja" (the tattoo).

Hoch has clues that relate to the *aftermath of the crime* in "The War in Wonderland".

"Baja" has a *suspect saying something that only the killer would know*. (An example, not from Hoch. A cop will say to a suspect: "Where were you when the killing took place?". Suspect: "I was at a bar when the victim was shot." Cop: "How did you know the victim was shot? I never said so. You must be the murderer.") This kind of clue is completely fair. But I think it is one of the least interesting kinds of clue in mystery fiction. It does not hurt "Baja": there are two other far more interesting clues in the tale. Why do I value such clues less? For one thing, they have no logical connection to the rest of the story - they are not connected to a hidden scheme, for example. Secondly, they can be created almost at will, showing little real imagination in most cases. They are fair, and part of detective fiction's repertoire of techniques - but not very inventive.

Hoch likes clues based on characters' names. Examples: "Christmas Is for Cops", "The Avenger from Outer Space", "The Problem of the Secret Patient", "The Theft of the Ostracized Ostrich".

Search for a Hidden Object

The above discussion of hidden schemes and clues does not cover every plot aspect of these tales. For one thing, "The Old Spies Club" has a completely separate subplot, about a *search for a hidden object*. This kind of mystery plot was a favorite with Ellery Queen and Stuart Palmer. It makes a good addition to "The Old Spies Club", one logically separate from the hidden scheme plot in the story.

"The Problem of the Pink Post Office", "Once Aboard the Eagle" have searches for a missing object. "The Problem of the Gingerbread Houseboat" has a search for people who have disappeared.

Unlikely Suspect

Hoch also ingenuity to make the killer be an *unlikely suspect*. This approach is notable in "The Old Spies Club". MAJOR SPOILER: Here the hidden scheme is interesting as a mystery puzzle in itself. But it also seems to remove the real criminal from suspicion. Hoch develops a profile for the killer, and makes it look like it has to be one of three spies. But the hidden scheme shows that the actual villain could also have been involved in espionage, and thus is a potential criminal - something we never suspected during the story.

Another Ellery Queen like feature of Hoch's tales: his ability to make the criminal be someone the reader has never suspected. Hoch has repeatedly surprised me with ingenious choices of murderer, someone in the tale that did not fall under suspicion. Yet these choices are always fair, someone present in the tale, and with clues pointing towards the criminal's identity. This is especially hard to do in the space of a short story. One can bury a murderer far more easily in a 200 page novel than in a 20 page short story.

Hoch has also come up with some surprising motives. They too are often far removed from the conspicuous motives discussed in the body of the story; yet also fairly present and clued.

SPOILERS. A main merit of "The Spy Who Had a List" is its unexpected choice of villain.

Color

Color Used in Mystery Plots. The colors in "The Theft of the Empty Paint Can", "Captain Leopold and the Vanishing Men", "The Spy at the End of the Rainbow" and "Turkish Delight" play a role in the tales' mystery plots. The colors are not there simply as a literary technique.

Highlighting. Some Hoch tales use color to highlight key elements in the mystery plot. This makes these elements more vivid and attracts the reader's attention to them. However, the colors themselves play no role in the tales' mystery plots.

Examples: "The Problem of the Pink Post Office", "The Problem of the Curing Barn", "The Problem of the Blue Bicycle", "The Problem of the Enormous Owl", "The Problem of the Enchanted Terrace", "The Problem of the Interrupted Séacne".

Please see my Color in Ellery Queen, which documents Queen's extensive use of this highlighting-key-objects technique.

Much is made in the early Dr. Sam tales of his bright yellow car. The yellow color plays no role in the mystery plots. But it does help characterize Dr. Sam.

"The Spy at the Crime Writers Conference" has color-coded name tags used at the Conference. But neither the name tags nor the colors play any role in the plot. This is likely just a pure example of Hoch's love of color, without any plot significance.

Fashion

Some 1990's Hoch stories comment on men's fashion:

- In "A Shower of Daggers" (1997) Susan Holt expresses disdain for the polished appearance of some non-suspect men: co-worker Mike Brentnor and lawyer Irving Farber. The 1990's were a high point in dressy looks for men; Holt is a skeptic about this. While Holt doesn't like this, the story goes no further: it does NOT link such polished looks to corruption or fraud. Please see my analysis of Men's Fashion Magazines of the era.
- The year before Hoch included a punk teenager in a black leather motorcycle jacket, in "The Graveyard Ghoul" (1996). This too is designed as an image statement by the teenager. He turns out to be a red herring with little to do with the mystery plot - rather like the polished non-suspects in "A Shower of Daggers". Detective Simon Ark and the narrator disapprove of the teen's appearance, recalling sleuth Susan Holt's disapproval.
- By contrast, Dr. Sam mainly approves of the title character in "The Problem of the Leather Man" (1992). His leather clothes are compared to Western buckskins.
- Suspects Michael Simmons and Kevin Clark in "The Essex Park Cowboys" (1994) are not described in terms of their clothes. But they do have fancy offices, which gives them a polished image. Kevin Clark has a leather chair. Police Captain Fletcher also has his office redecorated in this tale. It includes one of those special chairs for visitors.

In "The Film Festival Assignment" (1986) young Hollywood honcho Kevin Cross is in "an expensive suit".

New Explanations of Old Tales

Hoch wrote stories that attempt to explain 19th Century riddle tales, puzzling works which were originally designed to set up situations so baffling that they could have no possible solution:

- "The Problem of the Phantom Parlor" (1993) explains Madeline Yale Wynne's "The Little Room" (1895).
- A non-impossible crime tale, "The Spy and the Mysterious Card" (1975), cleverly explains Cleveland Moffett's "The Mysterious Card" (1896).

Hoch developed an impossible crime version of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892), in "The Problem of the Yellow Wallpaper" (2001). Like "The Problem of the Phantom Parlor" this is set in a creepy old mansion. Both tales show Hoch's interest in the Golden Age mystery tradition of unusual architecture.

Related tales by Hoch, that build on traditional stories and concepts, often with new explanations and solutions:

- "The Problem of the Leather Man" (1992) is Hoch's version of the tale of the woman at the Paris Exposition. Other versions have been written by Anna Katherine Green and John Dickson Carr.
- "The Theft of the Silver Lake Serpent" (1970) explains, not a riddle story, but something similar: the folk tales about sea serpents in lakes, such as the Loch Ness monster. Such folk tales are as fantastic as the riddle tales, and equally hard to find a rational explanation for. This Nick Velvet tale differs from most other Nick Velvet tales in that the actual theft plays little role in the story. Instead, the focus throughout is on the mystery of lake serpents.

- "The Problem of the Gingerbread Houseboat" (1981) comes up with a new solution to the real-life *Mary Celeste* mystery.
- "The Problem of the Boston Common" (1979) is inspired by the real-life Jack the Ripper murders, as the tale itself points out. It is not close to the Ripper killings, however.
- "The Ripper of Storyville" (1962) also offers a fictional variant of the Ripper murders, together with a new mystery solution.
- "The Problem of Cell 16" (1977) offers a new solution to "The Problem of Cell 13" (1905) by Jacques Futrelle, as the tale points out.
- "The Problem of the Pink Post Office" (1981) offers a new solution to the mystery in Edgar Allan Poe's "The Purloined Letter", as the tale points out.
- "The Problem of the Vanishing Salesman" (1992) offers a new solution to the vanishing of Mr. James Phillimore, referred to by Doyle in "The Problem of Thor Bridge" (1922).
- "The Things That Are Caesar's" (1996) is an inverted mystery, that reworks the well known historical account of Julius Caesar's assassination into a new and different crime plot.
- "The Cactus Killer" (2005), an Annie Sears tale, contains a parody of the mystery in Robert Bloch's *Psycho* (1959), with a completely new solution by Hoch. *Psycho* is not a folk tale, but it has become so archetypal that it can serve a similar purpose. Hoch's story clearly presupposes that the reader is familiar with the plot.

Paired Houses

"The Crime in Heaven" is mainly set in two houses next door to each other. Paired locales occasionally appear in other Hoch tales. See the paired cottages in "The Problem of the Gingerbread Houseboat", the paired houses in "Captain Leopold Plays a Hunch", "Searching for Sammy Sand", the two offices in "The Girl Next-Door".

The houses are actually identical in "The Problem of the Gingerbread Houseboat", "Searching for Sammy Sand".

These recall paired identical houses in Mary Roberts Rinehart stories.

Dr. Sam Hawthorne

Hoch has written a long series of impossible crime tales, starring his series sleuth New England physician Dr. Sam Hawthorne. It is easy to recognize a Sam Hawthorne tale by its title: most begin with "The Problem of".

Popularity. During much of Hoch's pre-2000 career, his Captain Leopold and Nick Velvet tales seem to have been his best known works. But today, the Dr. Sam stories seem to be the popular favorites among Hoch's series. Some possible reasons:

1. Crippen & Landru have published all 72 Dr. Sam tales, in five large volumes. So they are easily found by today's readers.
2. Impossible crimes are one of Hoch's strengths as a mystery plotter.
3. Comments by reviewers show they like the historical fiction elements of the Dr. Sam stories. The tales are set from 1922 to 1944.
4. Amateur sleuth Dr. Sam is often involved with cases, through his personal or professional life. So we learn a great deal about Dr. Sam's activities and character. Today's readers like richly drawn characters.

In his Introduction to *More Things Impossible: The Second Casebook of Dr. Sam Hawthorne*, Hoch discusses reasons #2 and #3 above. On #3: Hoch says the stories show "the life and times" of Dr. Sam. And "tell the reader something of the world in which he lived."

The editor's introduction to "The Problem of the Candidate's Cabin" (EQMM, July 2004) says that though the Dr. Sam series "was even conceived by the author as a series that might prove appropriate for TV, it has never proved as popular with producers as some of the other Hoch series, especially that featuring offbeat thief Nick Velvet". (Suggestion: actor Matt Bomer of the TV series *White Collar* could convey the brain-power of Dr. Sam.)

Van Dine School: Sleuths. S.S. Van Dine and many of his followers, such as Ellery Queen, featured mysteries solved by genius amateur detectives who worked in close collaboration with friendly police. This is the same paradigm Hoch used in his Dr. Sam stories. Dr. Sam is a brilliant genius and amateur sleuth, and works closely with Sheriff Lens.

The Dr. Sam tales begin in the 1920's. This is the decade when S.S. Van Dine and Ellery Queen started publishing mystery novels.

Hoch created other amateur sleuths: Simon Ark, Susan Holt, Father David Noone. But none has the steady long-term relationship with a series cop like Sheriff Lens.

Covered Bridge. The first Dr. Sam tale "The Problem of the Covered Bridge" (1974) establishes the three most important series characters: young Dr. Sam, his nurse April, and lawman Sheriff Lens. It also establishes that Dr. Sam has just moved into the small New England town of Northmont. However, unlike later tales, Northmont is not much of a presence yet. Instead, the tale concentrates on three farm families who live none-too-close along a country road. There is an atmosphere of "tragedy in an isolated rural area among traditional farm families", that perhaps recalls Susan Glaspell's "A Jury of Her Peers" (1916). This sort of extreme rural isolation will not be the dominant mode in later Dr. Sam tales, which will more look at small town life.

"The Problem of the Covered Bridge" contains references to Doyle, and Doyle's tale "The Problem of Thor Bridge" (1922). Hoch was a mystery historian as well as a fiction writer. His tales sometimes refer to classic mystery authors, always knowledgeably.

"The Problem of the Covered Bridge" includes the phrase "a small libation". It will become a comedy catch phrase in the series. It's a quote from an old comic poem, often attributed to Oscar Wilde.

A few of Hoch's "impossible disappearance" tales, have solutions that require the victim to collaborate in his own disappearance. This approach seems a bit less ingenious, than tales that do not require such collaboration, as part of their solution. SPOILERS. These include "The Problem of the Covered Bridge", "The Problem of the Blue Bicycle", "The Way Up to Hades", "Master of Miracles". These four stories have related impossible crime premises, too. However, their solutions are all quite different. "The Way Up to Hades" and "Master of Miracles" share imagery of "fire as part of stage

magic". "The Problem of the Covered Bridge" and "The Problem of the Blue Bicycle" have personal tragedy engulf the characters.

The same victim-collaboration is present in some impossible crime tales: "The Gravesend Trumpet".

Old Gristmill. "The Problem of the Old Gristmill" (1975) is the second Dr. Sam tale. It inaugurates what will become common in the series: interesting people from out of town who move to Northmont, and get involved in mysteries.

The visitor in "Old Gristmill" is explicitly linked to New England traditions: he's compared to Thoreau. And traditional New England institutions are featured, such as the title gristmill. This continues the focus on rural areas, found in "The Problem of the Covered Bridge". And adds a focus on New England traditions.

However, these twin emphases on rural life and New England will be less common in many later Dr. Sam stories.

A character is a writer named Henry Cordwainer. This is perhaps a reference or tribute to the major science fiction writer Cordwainer Smith. And the tale's repeated admiring references to Thoreau are an example of Hoch's liberal politics. They also help establish New England cultural traditions.

"The Problem of the Old Gristmill" has an excellent mystery plot. It's discussed in this article's section on Hidden Schemes.

Landscapes. Hoch likes to set his Dr. Sam impossible crime tales against outdoor landscapes. These often include a small building inside of which the crime takes place, hidden from human eyes. Around the building is a complex landscape, with strategically poised watchers, footprints in the snow, and various unusual outer buildings where people can potentially hide. Examples include "The Problem of the Hunting Lodge" (1983), and a later story in a similar vein, "The Problem of the Snowbound Cabin" (1987). Both stories develop original ideas for impossible crimes in such settings, ideas which have a family resemblance. "The Problem of the Protected Farmhouse" (1990) has a rather similar setting. "The Problem of the Crowded Cemetery" (1995) has a unique, if small, landscape, closely linked to the tale's impossibility. Some Dr. Sam tales take place against even bigger outdoor landscapes that stretch across the countryside, such as "The Problem of the Covered Bridge" (1974), "The Problem of the Boston Common" (1979), "The Problem of the Gingerbread Houseboat" (1981), "The Problem of the Gypsy Camp" (1982), "The Problem of the Blue Bicycle" (1991), "The Problem of the Leather Man" (1992), "The Problem of the Missing Roadhouse" (1994), "The Problem of the Enormous Owl" (1996), and "The Problem of the Devil's Orchard" (2006). See also the cityscape in "The Problem of the Black Roadster" (1988).

Hoch less often goes to the sort of indoor locked room situation of say, John Dickson Carr's *The Three Coffins* (1935). This might reflect a sociological change since the 1930's: Hoch does not usually set his tales in vast houses with unique and complex architecture, the setting of so many Golden Age stories.

Also, the outdoor setting allow a disparate group of the general public to be present, instead of the single large households of the 1930's mystery. The Rand story "The Spy and the Snowman" (1980) is another fine impossible crime tale with an outdoor setting in a snow covered estate. "The Theft of the Satin Jury" (1972), a non-impossible crime mystery, is also set against a delightfully complex outdoor landscape, as is the unusual railroad that is the locale for the Ben Snow tale, "The Sugar Train" (2006). "Captain Leopold Plays a Hunch" (1973), "The Theft of the Empty Paint Can" (2005) are also non-impossible crimes with a large outdoor landscape. See also the block-long cityscape of "Captain Leopold Looks for the Cause" (1977).

When Hoch does set a mystery inside a building, it tends to be something highly creative and unusual, as in "The Spy in the Pyramid" (1972) or "The Problem of the Pilgrims Windmill" (1980).

A much earlier mystery writer with an interest in landscapes is Arthur Morrison. It is unclear if he had any direct influence on Hoch, however. Morrison's landscapes are often man-made, something found fairly often in Hoch too.

Little Red Schoolhouse. "The Problem of the Little Red Schoolhouse" (1976) has an abundance of mystery plot. There is both an impossible crime, and a second, related mystery subplot.

Cell 16. "The Problem of Cell 16" (1977) is a clever impossible crime. As the tale itself makes clear, the story is a variation on the classic "The Problem of Cell 13" (1905) by Jacques Futrelle. The two tales

propound similar mystery situations. But Hoch's solution is original, and quite different from the solution in Futrelle.

The tale also refers to G. K. Chesterton.

SPOILERS. "The Problem of Cell 16" has a clever subplot about that Hoch favorite, a hidden criminal scheme. This is linked to another mystery puzzle in the tale, different from the impossible crime.

"The Problem of Cell 16" is unusual for Hoch, in that it is not a who-done-it. That is, the identity of the villain is not a mystery. We learn right away that the Eel is a clever conman, and the central cause of the mystery. The tale is so full of mystery, between the impossible crime and the second mystery puzzle, that a lack of a mystery about "who did it" is hardly noticed. There is also no murder.

Country Inn. "The Problem of the Country Inn" (1977) offers an abundance of impossible crime plotting. This is the tale's strongest feature.

"The Problem of the Country Inn" shares a pair of suspects with the previous Dr. Sam story "The Problem of Cell 16". This is unusual for Hoch. Both tales also have similar kinds of impossibilities. SPOILERS. Both are impossible disappearances from a building.

SPOILERS. The tale has a simple, but unexpected, hidden scheme. It echoes the one in "The Problem of Cell 16", in involving one of the same people, and turning out to have no connection with the tales' main mysteries.

The Country Inn is a historic landmark. We briefly learn about its history. Such looks back at the area's history are unusual in the Dr. Sam tales. The stories focus instead on innovations and modernity. For example, the previous tale "The Problem of Cell 16" centers on the town's brand new jail.

Revival Tent. Tales like "The Problem of the Revival Tent" (1978), "The Problem of the General Store" show Hoch can execute traditional locked room puzzles with imagination.

"The Problem of the Revival Tent" condemns faith healing. It also casts a jaundiced eye at the revival meeting context that promotes the faith healing. The later Simon Ark "Master of Miracles" (1999) has a negative look at the similar meetings of a cult group. "The Spy and the Healing Waters" (1990) has hero Rand being skeptical of faith-healing claims.

Whispering House. "The Problem of the Whispering House" (1979) shows enthusiastic storytelling in its treatment of that mystery standby, the spooky mansion. The tale has lots of plot inventiveness.

The tale avoids the *Old Dark House* plot, where strangers gather at random in the house, taking shelter from a storm. SPOILERS. Instead, everyone in the tale except Dr. Sam, has some sort of logical connection to the mansion, and to each other. Watching the connections grow and develop, is part of the interesting plot of the story. A "web of growing connections" recalls *The D.A. Draws a Circle* (1939) by Erle Stanley Gardner.

The house has links to U.S. history. This too adds to the plot richness of the tale. It also offers some good social commentary and perspective.

The story shows the interest in architecture prevalent in traditional mystery fiction.

"The Problem of the Whispering House" uses secret passages, something normally considered a cheat in impossible crime stories. However, Hoch tries to justify such passages, by:

- Showing a secret panel early on, to Dr. Sam and the reader. This alerts readers to the use of secret passages right away.
- Setting the story in a spooky mansion, a locale often associated with secret passages.

The tale has something rare in the Dr. Sam series: a mention of the State Police. In many mysteries by other authors, the State Police get called in, after any crime in the countryside. The troopers are professional, experienced, intelligent, and have access to modern labs and technology. Please see my list of the State Police in classic mystery fiction. One suspects that Hoch doesn't use the State Police, so that Dr. Sam and Sheriff Lens can solve all the crimes in Northmont.

Boston Common. The solution of "The Problem of the Boston Common" (1979) comes in a series of stages. Each stage involves creative ideas. SPOILERS. One of the best parts is the mathematical analysis Dr. Sam gives in his speech. (A later Simon Ark tale "The S. S. S." also uses math in its solution. And there is simple, but revealing, math in the solution of the Ben Snow tale "The Passion of Lizzie B.") In addition to the mathematics, Dr. Sam concludes his analysis-during-the-speech with two unexpected, imaginative conclusions. These conclusions are in part based on the math ideas.

Dr. Sam's analysis in "The Problem of the Boston Common" synthesizes a wide variety of story elements, into a unifying plot pattern. Such a synthesis is always intellectually exciting in mystery fiction.

BIG SPOILERS. The solution has some broad, general resemblances to mystery ideas in *The Investigation* (1959) by Stanislaw Lem. Both involve the mathematics of distances. The details of the two works are quite different, however.

Gingerbread Houseboat. "The Problem of the Gingerbread Houseboat" (1981) is one of the handful of of Dr. Sam tales that are NOT impossible crimes.

Instead, "The Problem of the Gingerbread Houseboat" offers another standard type of mystery puzzle: the situation which is hard to explain, and which just does not make sense. In such stories, no logical explanation looks possible, for most of the tale. But a logical explanation for the mystery is eventually offered, at the tale's finale. Such tales show ingenuity, in coming up with *any* logical solution for their mysteries.

Hoch's solution in "The Problem of the Gingerbread Houseboat" is indeed logical.

"The Problem of the Gingerbread Houseboat" recreates the situation of a famous real life mystery in this category: that of the ship *Mary Celeste*.

"The Problem of the Gingerbread Houseboat" also includes that favorite, the exhaustive search. Such searches typically look for small hidden objects, such as a jewel or a document. SPOILERS. This story differs in looking for large objects: four bodies, alive or dead. The tale offers a clever clue, that enables Dr. Sam, and potentially the reader as well, to figure out where the missing people are.

The paired identical cottages, recall paired identical houses in Mary Roberts Rinehart stories like *The Album* (1933) and "The Burned Chair" (1953). The cottages are an example of traditional mystery fiction's interest in architecture. For that matter, the houseboat is mainly described in terms of its rooms: also architectural. The lake is an example of the related interest in landscape, in classic mystery fiction.

Pink Post Office. "The Problem of the Pink Post Office" (1981) is an impossible theft tale, of a classic type going back to Anna Katherine Green, and often practiced by Ellery Queen and Stuart Palmer. In these an object vanishes within a well-watched and searched room. The vanishing is mysterious, and looks impossible. Hoch shows virtuosity, in coming up with multiple solutions, in this delightful tale. I thought I knew the answer to this tale; it merely turned out to be solution #3, and not anywhere as ingenious as the tale's actual answer!

The simple architectural layout of the Post Office, recalls that of "The Problem of the General Store". The two tales have different puzzles and solutions, though.

"The Problem of the Pink Post Office" has a festive, maybe even comic quality. Like "The Problem of the Crying Room", it takes place on the gala opening day for some new Northmont institution. As the tale points out, there is no murder. The motives for the theft are pure greed, less dark than many motives for murder.

Octagon Room. "The Problem of the Octagon Room" (1981), the sequel to "The Problem of the Pink Post Office", also falls into a standard kind of impossible crime, the "locked room created by a physical device or approach". Hoch mentions S.S. Van Dine right in the story, who was a practitioner of this sort of tale; it is also a kind of problem much tackled by Edgar Wallace. Hoch's approach is indeed original, and represents an innovative contribution to this ancient sub-genre of locked room tale. The Captain Leopold "The Murder in Room 1010" (1987) also comes up with another physical approach to a locked room - a fairly rare occurrence in Hoch's numerous impossible crime tales. Like Carr, G. K. Chesterton and Jacques Futrelle, Hoch tends to prefer a more imaginative and inventive look at a wide variety of impossible crime situations.

Tin Goose. "The Problem of the Tin Goose" (1982) starts out pleasantly, with a look at the activities and careers of some barnstorming pilots. There is a lot about various planes.

However, the locked room puzzle is a cliche of the genre, widely used for decades by earlier authors. This robs the story of mystery interest.

Hunting Lodge. "The Problem of the Hunting Lodge" (1983) has six false solutions to its impossible crime, before the true solution at the end. Most of these false solutions are well-worn approaches in the impossible crime genre. By contrast, the true solution is both highly ingenious and original. It forms an outstanding finale for the story.

The first three false solutions are proposed by Sheriff Lens. Then Dr. Sam proposes the fourth, Lens the fifth, and Dr. Sam suggests the sixth false solution.

Dr. Sam keeps disproving the false solutions as they come up, finding evidence that they are not correct. The attitude of Dr. Sam (and Hoch) is that the principles behind these false solutions are sound in general, and might work in other cases. But that Dr. Sam has come up with specific evidence, showing they cannot be applied to this tale's murder.

In John Dickson Carr's *The Three Coffins* (1935), the Locked Room Lecture outlines a vast number of possible solutions to impossible crime mysteries. We get something a bit similar in "The Problem of the Hunting Lodge". Its six false solutions provide a dissertation, on standard solutions to such impossible crimes. It also shows innovative ways unique to this story, in which the various solutions can fail.

Dr. Sam's father makes contact with big-time hunter Ryder Sexton, through a gun magazine. In that era before the Internet was widespread, magazines often served as points of contact among groups of shared interest. In real life, Hoch and other mystery writers and fans made friendships through mystery magazines.

Hunting for sport, is seen negatively in this story. It is shown as part of a suite of negative character traits and behaviors. These, to a degree, are examples of what is now called "toxic masculinity". Hunting was strongly associated in that era, with 20th Century America's most prestigious author, Ernest Hemingway. While Hemingway is not mentioned, the tale paints a grim picture not just of hunting, but of the whole "hunting ethos" or "hunting culture" around it. It seems obsessive and creepy, in the tale's portrayal. "Once Aboard the Eagle" is another anti-hunting Hoch tale.

Santa's Lighthouse. "The Problem of Santa's Lighthouse" (1983) has an opening story situation that recalls "The Two-Headed Dog" (1934) by Ellery Queen. Both:

- Open with the detective hero driving by himself along the Massachusetts coast, on a vacation.
- The hero is attracted by a sign for a tourist attraction.
- The attraction is a historic New England institution: a lighthouse in Hoch, an inn in Queen.
- The attraction is owned by a middle-aged man, but the hero first meets the man's adult daughter, who works there.

The mystery plots of the two tales are completely different.

Northmont is inland, far from the ocean. So if Hoch wanted to write a lighthouse tale, he had to set it while Dr. Sam was away from home. Other mysteries with lighthouses:

- *The Bell in the Fog* (1936) by Dorothy Stockbridge Tillett (John Stephen Strange).
- "A Light on Murder" (1950), a short story by Gladys Mitchell.

Crying Room. "The Problem of the Crying Room" (1984) has Northmont getting its first "movie palace" theater, in 1932. Hoch's interest is mainly *architectural*, focusing on the theater's "crying room" for babies. Architecture often played a key role in traditional mystery fiction. Unusual architecture like the crying room was especially prized.

The extravagant, detailed story telling in this tale, is especially good.

The plot involves two linked crimes, separated by a time interval, and which seem joined together in a way that looks impossible. In this, the plot resembles Hoch's classic "The Long Way Down". The resemblance is not perfect, and perhaps not even close. Still, the plot draws upon a similar aspect of Hoch's plot-creating skill.

The films showing at the theater, *Winner Take All* (Roy Del Ruth, 1932) and *The Miracle Man* (Norman Z. McLeod, 1932), are authentic. But they are obscure works that have rarely if ever attracted the interest of film historians. The story mentions their famous stars, James Cagney and Chester Morris, and one suspects Hoch picked them as 1932 releases with "name" actors. Please also see my picks for the Best Films of 1932.

The story at first calls the theater Northmont's first talking-picture *palace*: which is believable. But later the Mayor calls it Northmont's first movie *theater* - which is unbelievable. Movies had been wildly popular in the U.S. for decades before 1932. Surely Northmont would have had some sort of theater. Earlier, "The Problem of the Old Oak Tree", set in 1927, had said that there was no theater in Northmont, and that to see silent films one had to drive to cities like Hartford and Springfield. This just doesn't sound believable.

Curing Barn. "The Problem of the Curing Barn" (1987) has two parts to its solution. Both are ingenious. Both are fairly clued:

1. The first part explains the impossible crime. Its solution points to the identity of the killer.
2. The second part involves left handed vs right handed people. This was a favorite topic in Ellery Queen. This part shows how the killer was *enabled* to commit the crime.

SPOILERS. Aspects of the impossible crime solution, return in "The Problem of the Country Church" (1991). They are simpler and much more plausible in "The Problem of the Curing Barn".

"The Problem of the Curing Barn" suffers from its unpleasant characters. They make the story less enjoyable than it might be. The uncomfortable personal relations in this story, anticipate those in the Simon Ark tale "The Graveyard Ghoul" (1996).

Two Birthmarks. "The Problem of the Two Birthmarks" (1989) has a pleasantly complex story. But suffers from problems with its solution. The second impossible crime (about the operating room) is completely legitimate, and nicely done. But the first impossible crime (about the patient's room) has problems.SPOILERS. Its solution depends on a lying witness. Having an impossibility depend on a lying witness is usually considered a cheat.

Two non-impossible subplots also have problems with their solutions. It turns out that both are just arbitrary red herrings created by the criminal. Their bizarre happenings have no logical explanation. They are just lies. I was expecting a logical explanation., and found this disappointing. SPOILERS. These subplots involve the ventriloquist, and the mysterious nature of the patient's illness.

Dying Patient. "The Problem of the Dying Patient" (1989) has a simple but sound solution.

Protected Farmhouse. "The Problem of the Protected Farmhouse" (1990) has two solutions, a false and a true one:

1. The first false solution is simple but ingenious. It also seems to be original. This solution has two components. Both derive from elements that are fairly shared with readers.
2. The second solution is complex, and involves carefully thought through, storytelling detail. It is solidly done. But it centers on an old idea in impossible crimes. John Dickson Carr used versions of it in the 1930's.

The super-elaborate protections at the farmhouse have a comic dimension. They take the standard ideas of a locked room, and exaggerate them for effect. "You want a locked area - we'll get you a locked area!" might be their motto.

The tough Feds, complete with fedoras, also have a comic edge. However, one wonders if they are more in touch with the political reality of this serious situation, than Dr. Sam or the other townspeople are. This might be one case where Dr. Sam is not as knowledgeable as he might be.

Vanishing Salesman. A story that deals nicely with an impossible disappearance is "The Problem of the Vanishing Salesman" (1992). Like other of Hoch's disappearance tales, this has a welcome vein of humor. Hoch sees something fundamentally comic about such disappearances. They are like magic shows, or entertaining stunts. It is the plot itself that Hoch sees in a comic light.

Like "The Problem of the Covered Bridge", "Vanishing Salesman" deals with farm families who live close to each other. However, "Vanishing Salesman" lacks the tragic tone of "The Problem of the Covered Bridge".

We get a detailed description of the layout of the house. This tale shows the interest in architecture, in traditional mysteries. Reflecting Hoch's interest in the outdoors and landscape, he pays attention to the outside areas of the house, as well as the inside.

The impossible crime is given two solutions. The first false solution is eventually disproved by reasoning from clues hidden in the story.

This story is an attempt by Hoch to build a story around an incident Doyle mentioned in his Sherlock Holmes tales, but which Doyle never turned into a story. This is the vanishing of Mr. James Phillimore, referred to by Doyle in "The Problem of Thor Bridge" (1922). Both John Dickson Carr and Ellery Queen have written their own attempts to explain Doyle's intriguing situation: Carr's *The Curse of the Bronze Lamp* (1945) and "The Adventure of the Highgate Miracle" in *The Exploits of Sherlock Holmes* (1954), and Ellery Queen's radio play "The Adventure of Mr. Short and Mr. Long" (broadcast January 1943, published 1944) in *The Adventure of the Murdered Moths*, and the *Q.B.I.* tale "Double Your Money" (1951). A re-reading of Doyle's tale suggests that Doyle did not necessarily intend Phillimore's vanishing to be an impossible crime, a form of mystery that Doyle rarely attempted. But

Queen, Carr and Hoch all treated it as an impossible crime in their writings, ever since Ellery Queen took this approach in his 1943 radio play.

Leather Man. "The Problem of the Leather Man" (1992) is one of the longest Dr. Sam stories. It needs the space, to set forth the numerous incidents of the tale.

The Leather Man might be a sort of psychological double for Dr. Sam. In "The Problem of the Enchanted Terrace", Dr. Sam will meet an actual physical double of himself. Both men are ultimately sympathetic, and friendly to Dr. Sam.

Dr. Sam consults Northmont's city historian, who has an office at the public library. This recalls the Captain Leopold "The Crime in Heaven" (1988), where policewoman Connie Trent does the same. The presence of a official city historian is more plausible in a big city like that of the Leopold tales, than in a small town like Northmont. But the encounter is informative and entertaining in both works.

In some ways "The Problem of the Leather Man" consists of two tales, one after the other:

- The first half concentrates on the Leather Man, unravelling his mysterious history, location and motives. This makes for an unusual mystery plot.
- The second half looks at a puzzling mystery situation, in which the Leather Man is one of the characters. This too is an off-trail mystery.

The two parts of the tale are not as distinct as the above suggests: plot elements from each half affect the other half of the tale.

Poisoned Pool. "The Problem of the Poisoned Pool" (1993) has an inventive pair of impossible crimes. The two impossibilities center on the same character, and are closely linked.

The first impossibility, is part of a detective story tradition. The story accurately compares it to the mystery in an earlier impossible crime novel *The Dragon Murder Case* (1933) by S.S. Van Dine. However the premise of "The Problem of the Poisoned Pool" is different, although related. And Hoch's solution is original.

"The Problem of the Poisoned Pool" portrays the workings of a Northmont newspaper. It is one of those Hoch tales which portray a work environment, and have the workers as witnesses and suspects. Other Dr. Sam tales show us Northmont papers: "The Problem of the Tin Goose", "The Problem of the Enormous Owl". But "The Problem of the Poisoned Pool" goes deeper in its portrait.

Missing Roadhouse. "The Problem of the Missing Roadhouse" (1994) has much in common with "The Problem of the Leather Man":

- Characters go up and down remote roads, and we see in detail their experiences.
- What the characters and the reader see on the roads, is later often contradicted by witnesses or evidence, who claim what they saw didn't exist. What they thought they saw seems impossible.
- Motives are inventive in both tales. Differences: "Leather Man" has a series of different motives; the motives in "Missing Roadhouse" are all based on a shared situation.
- Both tales are long for Dr. Sam stories.

Crowded Cemetery. "The Problem of the Crowded Cemetery" (1995) has ideas inspired by Ellery Queen:

- As the tale points out, the impossibility is inspired by a situation from Queen's novel *The Greek Coffin Mystery* (1932). The story also points out a key innovation Hoch made in the situation, making it different from Queen's story. This innovation leads to a highly creative impossible crime mystery, one entirely invented by Hoch.
- The main clue to the killer's identity echoes a signature plot gambit Queen used throughout his career, about men's clothes. The tale uses a different specific kind of clothes, than was ever used in any Queen tale.

"The Problem of the Crowded Cemetery" looks at some of the possibilities of women's careers and opportunities. The tale is contemporary with Hoch's Susan Holt tales, about a skilled working woman turned amateur sleuth.

Enormous Owl. "The Problem of the Enormous Owl" (1996) has that standard Hoch subplot construction, the "hidden scheme". But this scheme is set up differently. Often the existence of such a scheme is kept a secret from the reader, and revealed only as part of a surprise solution at the tale's end. But here the reader learns halfway through the tale, that some scheme is going on, from the witness testimony of neighbor Pete Antwerp. This then creates a puzzle plot: what is the nature of the

mysterious scheme? This puzzle plot is solved a page later. The solution is surprising, but admirably it is fairly clued.

The murder in the impossible crime, is also a *how-done-it*. In a how-done-it, the physical mechanism of how the crime was committed, is mysterious and unknown. The detective and the reader have to figure out *how* the crime was done, as a physical act.

The majority of impossible crimes are not how-done-its. For example, "The Problem of the Candidate's Cabin" is not a how-done-it. It is clear that the victim has been shot. There is nothing mysterious about this! The murder method is clear. By contrast, in "The Problem of the Enormous Owl" how the murder was actually committed, is a major puzzle.

Second Problem. "The Second Problem of the Covered Bridge" (1998) is a sequel to the first Dr. Sam tale "The Problem of the Covered Bridge". The sequel has new, different characters, but takes place at the same covered bridge. The impossible crime in the sequel is better than other story aspects, which suffer from being morbid and downbeat. Merits of the impossible crime:

- It's a new impossible mystery premise, different from the one in the first tale. (The tale itself points this out.)
- The solution to the impossibility is unexpected. There is a good clue to this solution.

Haunted Hospital. "The Problem of the Haunted Hospital" (2001) suffers from slim plotting:

- The impossible crime is easy to solve.
- The motive for the crime and the situation at its cause, are cliches of the genre.

One the plus side, the mystery plot is logical, and with a plausible solution. SPOILERS. There is a sound, clever reason for the hood.

There is some pleasant storytelling. SPOILERS. And a key development in Dr. Sam's life.

A later tale "The Problem of the Secret Patient" will have a similar hospital setting.

Interrupted Séance. "The Problem of the Interrupted Séance" (2003) is unfortunately simpler in its mystery plot, than many other Dr. Sam tales:

- There are only two suspects.
- The impossible crime is restricted to puzzling over the impossibly missing weapon.

The mystery plot does benefit, over a "hidden criminal scheme". SPOILERS. This involves the victim and her business activities.

Both Dr. Sam and author Hoch show commendable skepticism about mediums. Mediums are shown as fakes, and as crooks who exploit people.

Candidate's Cabin. "The Problem of the Candidate's Cabin" (2004) pleases by the profusion of mystery subplots it contains:

- An impossible crime.
- A hidden motive for the murder.
- A hidden scheme.

The hidden scheme brings together a number of unexplained aspects of the plot, giving them explanations as part of the scheme. Such a joining together of unexplained events into a logical pattern, is always a most pleasing aspect of mystery tales.

SPOILERS. The solution of the impossible crime, bears some resemblance to that of "One More Clue" (1958) by Craig Rice. However, there are differences between the two solutions too.

"The Problem of the Candidate's Cabin" has an extensive Background, showing politics in Northmont. We also learn more about the Sheriff's department that Sheriff Lens runs, than in most other tales.

Vera Lens conducts an unofficial telephone poll, as part of the political campaign. Polling was already big in the US in the 1940's. Susan Ohmer's book *George Gallup in Hollywood* (2006) shows polling in the 1940's film industry.

Black Cloister. "The Problem of the Black Cloister" (2004) is one of the few Dr. Sam tales that is not an impossible crime.

Another unusual feature of "The Problem of the Black Cloister": it refers back to a crime that happened before Dr. Sam arrived in Northmont. Its shows crime investigations as being poor and medically incompetent, before the era of Dr. Sam. But there are otherwise no big historical revelations about Northmont, or about the series characters.

"The Problem of the Black Cloister", like "The Problem of the Unfound Door" (1998), deals with a religious order that sets up a self-contained compound on the fringes of Northmont.

The bond rally is treated as an example of performing arts, with "fictional" activities dramatized on-stage. Performing arts are a perennial interest of Van Dine school writers.

The career of the tough guy Hollywood actor in the tale, does not correspond with Hollywood realities:

- The actor seems to become a star rapidly, whereas most real Hollywood tough guys had long apprenticeships.
- The actor's career seems influenced by his appearance, whereas most real Hollywood tough guys were famous for their ability to project their personalities strongly from the screen.

Secret Passage. "The Problem of the Secret Passage" (2005) does indeed have a secret passage. But it is revealed and fully explained near the start of the tale. This makes it completely fair, to include in a detective story. What would be unfair, would be to reveal a secret passage as a surprise at a tale's end, using it to explain a locked room mystery.

The solution of the locked room mystery in "The Problem of the Secret Passage" is simple but sound. It surprised me.

The tale refers to (apparently real-life) photos that appeared in a Rochester newspaper in the 1940's. This suggests that Hoch's research for the Dr. Sam historical tales might have included reading old newspapers.

Devil's Orchard. "The Problem of the Devil's Orchard" (2006) contains a "hidden scheme", as well as an impossibility. Both share the same motive and same culprit.

The impossibility is clever, and fun to think about.

SPOILERS. The story points out at the end, that it is unusual in not involving violence or crime. I like this positive, lack of violence approach. It is indeed humane. The tale (thankfully) has plenty of *mystery* - it is simply non-criminal and avoids violence.

Fertility is a theme throughout "The Problem of the Devil's Orchard". The Orchard is at harvest season, and overflowing with apples about to be picked. SPOILERS. The heroine has become pregnant. The fertility theme is perhaps related to the tale's lack of violence.

Shepherd's Ring. "The Problem of the Shepherd's Ring" (2006) is a lesser Dr. Sam tale. Plot problems:

- The impossibility is eager to figure out.
- There is no hidden criminal scheme to add plot complexity.
- The psychological manipulation in the solution, is not plausible.

On the positive side:

- The movements of the walking stick are inventive.
- SPOILERS. The clues about books are decently done.

Suicide Cottage. "The Problem of Suicide Cottage" (2007) has two linked impossibilities. They turn out to share a common solution. A shared solution seems likely from the start, so it is not a spoiler to mention it.

It is a good approach, if an author can use a solution idea to generate two or more impossibilities. This adds to the plotting richness of a story.

There is no "hidden scheme".

SPOILERS. This tale tells something new about Dr. Sam's personal life.

Secret Patient. "The Problem of the Secret Patient" (2008) has war elements and an F.B.I agent. It involves a back-story of international intrigue. But it is not really a spy tale in most senses of the term. Instead it is mainly a murder mystery.

The solution to the murder in "The Problem of the Secret Patient" employs a combination of two standard ideas in impossible crime fiction. While these ideas are not original, their combination is. This combined approach makes a mystery that is hard to solve.

There is no "hidden criminal scheme" in "The Problem of the Secret Patient". But the mystery subplot about the identity of the patient has a bit of a broad formal similarity to a "hidden scheme" mystery. The sleuth and reader have to figure out what is hidden in the patient's back-story, to solve the mystery of his identity.

SPOILERS. "The Problem of the Secret Patient" includes a real-life historical person as an on-stage character. This is rare for the Dr. Sam and Ben Snow historical mysteries. Dr. Sam and his friends often discuss news accounts that mention real-life people - but the people don't usually show up "on-stage".

SPOILERS. I am uncomfortable with the rather favorable treatment of this historical figure. It should be far more negative. This is a reason why I am not recommending this tale.

This is the last of the Dr. Sam tales to be published. But it is not a finale to the series. Instead, it is "just another tale", in what Hoch clearly planned as an on-going series.

Social Class. Both "The Problem of the Covered Bridge" and "The Problem of the Hunting Lodge" make clear that Dr. Sam comes from an upper middle class background. His parents aren't glamorous, but they are prosperous. Likely his parents paid for his medical education, although I don't recall this being spelled out anywhere. Dr. Sam has to do some belt-tightening in the Depression, when his patients have trouble paying his bills. But it is clear that Dr. Sam has never experienced genuine want. Or most of the class or financial barriers that dominate so many lives.

Northmont: Size. The second Dr. Sam tale "The Problem of the Old Gristmill" calls Northmont a "little town". And throughout the series Northmont has a small town feel. "The Problem of the Crying Room" implies Northmont has 860 residents. However, Northmont has so many institutions, businesses and colorful residents in the 72 tales, that Northmont seems more like a sizable city. All these institutions would be impressive in a city of several hundred thousand people, let alone a small town like Northmont.

Northmont has so many upscale people, that a local weekly newspaper has a full-time Society reporter, in "The Problem of the Poisoned Pool". And this paper is one of two weekly newspapers in Northmont. This too sounds like a sizable city, rather than a small town. The story itself mentions that it is odd for a "small town" like Northmont to have a Society column in its paper.

A major event in the series is Northmont getting its own hospital, in "The Problem of the Pilgrims Windmill". The hospital has 80 beds, although these are not all in use, but installed in anticipation of future growth in Northmont. This indicates the size of Northmont, suggesting it has many more than a thousand people.

Northmont: World-Building. Northmont's hospital is repeatedly referred to, in later stories, after its opening in "The Problem of the Pilgrims Windmill". Dr. Lincoln Jones and Dr. Bob Yale, who work there in "Pilgrims Windmill", return in "The Problem of the Grange Hall". Dr. Lincoln Jones also appears in "The Problem of the Phantom Parlor", at the start of "The Problem of the Haunted Hospital", "The Problem of the Secret Passage", "The Problem of the Shepherd's Ring", "The Problem of Suicide Cottage", "The Problem of the Secret Patient". These are examples of *world-building*: the introduction of elements that will be repeatedly used in later tales or episodes. More examples:

- The introduction of veterinarian Annabel Lee Christie and her clinic, Annabel's Ark.
- Occasional references to the Sheriff's wife Vera.
- April's husband Andre Mulhone appears or is mentioned a number of times.
- Northmont has a town square. Many businesses are located there. A park in the town square is the site for town celebrations.
- Dr. Sam's first office is on Main Street, a short walk from the town square. When he eventually buys a house in "The Problem of the Blue Bicycle" it is a short way off Main Street. One can speculate that Dr. Sam likes to be in town and at the center of things.
- The Grange Hall occurs in "The Problem of the Grange Hall", "The Problem of the Missing Roadhouse", "The Problem of the Enormous Owl", "The Problem of the Candidate's Cabin". It gives Northmont a place for indoor public events of all kinds. (The Captain Leopold tale "Christmas Is for Cops" takes place at Eagles Hall, a hall-for rent run by a fraternal group. Grange Hall serves a similar purpose in Northmont.)
- The General Store appears in "The Problem of the General Store" and more briefly in "The Problem of the Devil's Orchard". We learn it has become more modern in its approach, in the later tale.
- Northmont's Public Library appears in "The Problem of the Leather Man", and in that tale's immediate successor "The Problem of the Phantom Parlor". We meet different employees and learn different facts about the library, in the two tales.

- Max's Steakhouse, Dr. Sam's and Annabel's favorite restaurant, and its owner Max Fortesque appear in several of the later tales.
- Two suspects in "The Problem of Cell 16", return as suspects again in the next tale in the series, "The Problem of the Country Inn". This is a rare situation in the Dr. Sam tales.
- The North Road is the setting of eerie events in the first Dr. Sam tale "The Problem of the Covered Bridge". North Road leads to later eerie events in "The Problem of the Whispering House". What seems to be a different North Road appears in "The Problem of the Missing Roadhouse".
- Turk Hill is a poor district in town in "The Problem of the Little Red Schoolhouse". Later, "The Problem of the Leather Man" and "The Problem of the Missing Roadhouse" include Turk Hill Road.
- Northmont is in Eastern Connecticut, and there are countless references to Boston, the nearest giant city.
- The town nearest Northmont, is Shinn Corners. It is named after the town in Ellery Queen's *The Glass Village* (1954). Shinn Corners is a frequent presence in the series.
- Northmont is connected by train and roads to other places. But it does not seem to be a transportation hub.
- Chester Lake near Northmont appears in "The Problem of the Gingerbread Houseboat" and "The Problem of Suicide Cottage", and is mentioned again in "The Problem of the Fatal Fireworks". Chester Lake is a genteel, even upscale resort area. But it is also really creepy, in the events that take place there. Silver Lake in "The Problem of the Blue Bicycle", another genteel vacation area, also has sinister events.
- In the United States, a sheriff by definition is a law enforcement official who works for a *county*. "The Problem of the Gingerbread Houseboat" recognizes this. It points out that the events still lie in the county that is Sheriff Lens' jurisdiction, even though they are some distance from Northmont. "The Problem of the Leather Man" also refers to this county and Sheriff Lens. "The Problem of Cell 16" says that Northmont is not the county seat, but doesn't discuss Lens' jurisdiction. ("Captain Leopold Plays a Hunch" also contrasts city-employed cop Captain Leopold with a Sheriff who has jurisdiction outside the city.)
- Bootleggers play a role in several of the earlier stories. But each tale has a different gang of bootleggers.

However, I think such world-building is relatively rare in the Dr. Sam series. Most of the characters, businesses and institutions in the tales are one-shots, appearing in just one story.

It is unclear if there is a standard definition of "world-building". The previous discussion treated only elements that are *repeated* as examples of world-building. But it is possible that *every* person and institution in Northmont should actually be seen as world-building, whether it is repeated or not. In that case, world-building in the Dr. Sam tales is on a massive scale, indeed.

David Bordwell's essay Rex Stout: Logomachizing has much to say about world-building.

Northmont: A Representative Place. Several Dr. Sam tales start with a real-life event, then show how the trend exemplified in the event is playing out in Northmont. For example, "The Problem of the General Store" starts with a mention of Amelia Earhart's flying the Atlantic in 1928. The story then goes on with Northmont residents discussing women's possibilities, and the arrival of a feminist in Northmont.

Such tales imply that Northmont is representative of trends in the United States as a whole.

Modernity. The Dr. Sam tales focus strongly on the era in which they are set, 1922-1944. One consequence, is that the tales are NOT dominated by Colonial or other early New England traditions. People in the stories are rarely described in terms of their 1600's Puritan ancestors. And society in the tales is 20th Century American, not some relic of Colonial times.

The stories often depict new things coming to Northmont or the United States as a whole, including innovations in technology or society. The tales often embody what academics call "modernity": a focus on modern, innovative life in the 20th Century.

An example: "The Problem of the Boston Common" is set in 1928. It emphasizes how much the city of Boston has changed over the last ten years. The fancy hotel where the characters stay was built in that period. The tale also mentions such modern institutions as a medical research laboratory, and that

innovation of the 1920's, the movie palace. Intermixed with all these modern elements, is a detailed description of the Boston Common, one of the most historic features of Boston. The tale is very interested in the Common, but does not even mention its historic aspect.

In the aviation tale "The Problem of the Tin Goose" Dr. Sam wonders if the dashing flyers "were the forerunners of a whole new world". He also wonders if he Dr. Sam is missing out on such things. This celebrates the promise of modernity.

In "The Problem of the Crying Room" the opening of the movie palace is called "a step into the future for us" in Northmont. Please also see my list-with-links Movies and Modernity: British Crime Fiction.

Dr. Sam is regularly shown reading medical journals. Journals were a primary way doctors in that era kept up with new developments in medicine.

Anti-Nazi. The Dr. Sam stories are always pro-American, pro-democracy and anti-Nazi.

The Dr. Sam tales are set from 1922 to 1944. The Nazis came to power in Germany in 1933. From this point on, Hoch presents the sinister rise of the Nazis as something present in the tales' historical background. Several stories have Nazi villains behind the tale's crimes. This is often a surprise solution - so I will not spoil them here by listing these tales.

Ideologies to Avoid. Some popular-in-real-life ideological beliefs just don't seem present in the Dr. Sam tales:

- A long tradition portrays New England as the root of America, the essence of America, or just plain "more American" than other regions of the U.S. This idea doesn't seem present in the Dr. Sam series.
- The Dr. Sam series is strongly pro-democracy, pro-USA, and anti-Nazi. But it does not promote the popular idea that New England is "more democratic", or "more representative of democracy", than other parts of the USA. Instead it seems to accept that democracy is typical of the USA as a whole.
- Many modern-day Republicans portray small town life as "the real America", superior to the rest of America. Hoch doesn't subscribe to this either.

None of these ideas help one understand the Dr. Sam stories.

A possible example of city vice / country virtue in Hoch: "The Problem of the Revival Tent" has its "city slicker" conman refer condescendingly to his Northmont victims as "ignorant people". Still, this is one conman, not a whole city of villains. This tale is balanced by many other stories, showing homegrown corruption in Northmont.

Why?. Why did Hoch set the Dr. Sam tales in New England? Why are they set in a small town? I don't know. Hoch's introductions to his Dr. Sam collections do not discuss these issues at all. By contrast, Hoch seems eager, there and elsewhere, to discuss his interest in both impossible crimes and historical fiction - two other major components of the Dr. Sam series.

Perhaps even more importantly, the stories themselves do not explain why Dr. Sam has moved to New England or a small town. There are tales that examine Dr. Sam's life, such as "The Problem of the Covered Bridge", "The Problem of the Boston Common", "The Problem of the Hunting Lodge". These tales implicitly raise questions about Dr. Sam living in a New England small town - but do not explain Dr. Sam being there.

One thing is clear: Dr. Sam's situation does not reflect Hoch's own personal life. Hoch lived most of his life in Rochester, New York. Rochester was Hoch's home town. Rochester is a fairly large city, rich in scientific and cultural resources. By contrast, Northmont is NOT Dr. Sam's home town - he comes from a Midwestern city a great distance from Northmont (see the opening and end of "The Problem of the Hunting Lodge"). And Northmont is a small town, not a big city like Rochester.

Not Sophisticates. One possibility, that is pure speculation on my part. Many mysteries by other authors, deal with New York sophisticates. For example, *Murder Has Its Points* (1961) by Frances and Richard Lockridge conveys its Manhattan characters' sophistication on every page. Such sophistication is largely not found in the Dr. Sam tales. Having the tales set in a small town, allows Hoch to avoid such milieus. The same is true of the mid-size city where Captain Leopold works.

Don't get me wrong. "The Problem of the Poisoned Pool" is convincingly set at an upper middle class party given by a well-to-do Northmont newspaper publisher. Hoch has no problem portraying this

successful businessman and his circle. Still, these people are not the New York sophisticates found in the Lockridges and so many other traditional mystery novels.

I've argued that Northmont is shown as "typical of America" and "representative of America". This lack of big city sophistication, might help make Northmont in fact seem typical of most of the country.

Predecessors. "King's Knight Gambit Declined" (1973) is a short non-series tale, published under Hoch's pseudonym R.L. Stevens. It takes place in a small town. Features that anticipate Northmont include the town square, and the hero's home near it. Unlike the Dr. Sam series, it takes place in modern times. And it does not have a mystery puzzle to solve. The tale is absorbing reading.

Time Sequence. Each Dr. Sam tale is firmly set in some historic time period. The 72 tales tales were published in strict chronological order, with each tale being set a little later than the previous one.

I don't know of many models in other authors for this time structure in the Dr. Sam tales. Such strict time sequences are most popular in science fiction. The 8 long tales that make up most of Isaac Asimov's *Foundation Trilogy* (1940's) were published in chronological order. So mainly were the 1940's short stories in *City* by Clifford D. Simak.

Simon Ark

Hoch's first series detective is Simon Ark, a man who claims to be a 2,000 year old Coptic priest, a man on a quest for mystical truth. Hoch has been writing Simon Ark tales from the 1950's throughout his career.

Publishing. The narrator and "Watson" in many of the Simon Ark tales works for a New York City publishing firm. He thus has the same profession as Jerry North, the series sleuth in the Mr. and Mrs. North books by the Lockridges. However, Hoch's narrator seems less glamorous and more like a working stiff than Jerry North. In both authors, the publishing connection can get the characters involved in a mystery. The specific books we hear about from the narrator's firm, tend to be nonfiction.

In both the Lockridges and Hoch, this look at publishing is part of the Van Dine school's interest in media.

Museums. Museums are settings for such Simon Ark tales as "The Society of the Scar", "The Gravesend Trumpet". See also the museums in "The Problem of the Enchanted Terrace", "Leopold in the Vineyard" and "Robe to Mandalay". Museums were locales in S.S. Van Dine and some of his followers.

Scientific Detection. A number of Simon Ark tales have modern technological aspects, settings or solutions. These include "The Sorceress of the Sea", "The Way Up to Hades", "Master of Miracles", "The Avenger from Outer Space", "No Blood for a Vampire", "The Stalker of Souls". This technology brings these tales within the realm of the Scientific Detective story.

Such technology makes an apparent contrast with Simon Ark, a man with no known technical training, and who seems to be obsessed with the supernatural. But Simon Ark has no trouble in coming up with the technology-based solutions to the mysteries.

The technology is some of the tales is quite advanced, on the cutting edge of "high tech". Its oddness becomes related to the other odd aspects of these "off trail" stories. The high tech can seem eerie or disturbing.

Name: Unknown. As best I can tell, we never learn the name of Ark's publisher friend, the "Watson" who narrates the series. There are precedents for such characters in other works, not by Hoch. Please see my list of Characters with Unknown Names.

City of Brass. A Simon Ark tale that is not an impossible crime is the novella "City of Brass" (1959). This gently melancholy tale involves both religious symbolism, and Hoch's thoughts on the nature of human existence. The story is filled with a poetic mood. It is not one of Hoch's cleverest puzzle plot stories, but it is highly readable and effective in mood throughout. The title of "City of Brass" perhaps recalls an episode of *The Thousand and One Nights*, which similarly deals with man's mortality and transience. Hoch returned to the subject matter of this tale in his non-series story, "Two Days in Organville" (1973). Like "City of Brass", this takes place in an upstate New York town dominated by a single industry, in this case organ building. Both stories are full of Roman Catholic religious symbolism. In fact, "Two Days in Organville" is probably the only hard-boiled detective story ever written whose plot centers around the work of St. Thomas Aquinas. Hoch himself lives in an upstate New York city, so this is his home turf. Such cities also recall the New England town of Wrightsville, in Ellery Queen. The jaundiced look at the life of one of the characters that opens "City of Brass" seems especially Queen-like.

Hoch's stories tend to take place in communities. These are people who know each other, and who share at least some common purposes. They can include the smaller cities of upstate New York and New England, such as those we find in "City of Brass", the Leopold or Dr. Sam Hawthorne tales. They can be the Gypsy village of Gravita, Romania, in which Michael Vlado lives. Or they involve the spy communities within which Rand operates. This community focus differs from many Golden Age mysteries, which tend to be set either in a big city, or in a single household. Hoch often looks at the leaders of such communities. They often have difficult problems on hand, which need resolution. The problems get interwoven into the mystery plots. The problems can involve controversial, unpleasant or illegal activities by members of the community, which the leaders need somehow to police. Often times the options open to the leaders seem limited, and it is very unclear how to deal with the sticky situation.

Leadership has few glamorous qualities in Hoch. Instead, it consists of cleaning up unpleasant messes, with which it is often very problematic to deal. The detective often helps some with this situation, by at least solving the mystery, and making the situation in the story clearer. The leaders themselves are often far from good people; instead they can opportunistically exploit a situation to obtain power or money.

Day of the Wizard. Some of the Simon Ark stories are impossible crime tales. "Day of the Wizard" (1964) is one of Hoch's most Carr like stories, with its magician character and its multiple impossibilities. Its spy background in North East Africa anticipates Hoch's later gem, "Waiting for Mrs. Ryder" (1994) (in *The Old Spies Club*).

The central situation in "Wizard" is delightfully full of what is a tradition in puzzle plot stories, The Complication. In Complication stories, the central mystery idea is elaborated, to make extra mysteries in the plot. The central mystery gimmick, which is of course concealed from the reader, enables other parts of the plot to be twisted mysteriously as well. These twists create further false impressions in the reader, and add further mysteries to the plot. Intuitionist writers, in particular, are always on the look out for a good Complication in their plot. Hoch does this very well here.

Funeral in the Fog. "Funeral in the Fog" (1973) contains an unusual impossible murder. The story shows Hoch's fondness for setting impossible crimes in landscapes. There is one landscape in Java, told about as a backstory. And two more in contemporary times. The landscape in the backstory is closely linked to the impossibility.

A subplot about an impersonation is colorful. It gets its own elaborate clue. SPOILERS. This clue helps identify the person who is the impostor.

Simon Ark keeps coming up with new revised versions, of what really happened in the backstory. This gives an unusual structure to the tale.

The Avenger from Outer Space. "The Avenger from Outer Space" (1979) shares a broadly similar kind of subject matter, with "The Singing Diamonds" (1949) by Helen McCloy. Both:

- Have strange events that involve flying vehicles in outer space.
- Deal with a whole series of perplexing events.
- Have a world-wide scope of events.
- Get national security forces to try and investigate them.

The specific events and their solutions are very different in the two tales, however.

The Weapon Out of the Past. "The Weapon Out of the Past" (1980) has impossibilities that have a similar pattern to those in Hoch's non-series classic "The Long Way Down". The two tales' solutions are quite different however.

SPOILERS. Each tale has a linked pair of two impossibilities. There is a similar pattern to the link in each tale. And a curious gap in time between each tale's first impossibility and second impossibility.

The Sorceress of the Sea. "The Sorceress of the Sea" (1980) is not an impossible crime. But it is an "explain the apparent supernatural event" story, a structure often employed by impossible crime tales.

SPOILERS. The solution to this seeming-supernatural event involves that Hoch staple, a "hidden criminal scheme".

The murder mystery is a separate puzzle from the seeming-supernatural event. Ark finds the solution to the mystery through reasoning. His solution involves not so much a clue, as a whole chain of reasoning based on details from the story. This reasoning is ambitious, and therefore interesting.

Prisoner of Zerfall. "Prisoner of Zerfall" (1985) exemplifies an approach to mystery construction, frequently used by Rex Stout. That is to have the mystery center around some institution or business. And have the suspects be the people who run the institution, along with key employees. "Prisoner of Zerfall" centers on an institution: a prison. And the four prison directors and the prison doctor are central characters. Similarly "The Problem of the Crowded Cemetery" has the cemetery board of directors and superintendent as suspects.

The S. S. S.. While the Simon Ark tales tend to explore Roman Catholic themes, other religions are also featured in the tales. Religious groups not associated with any specific world religion also sometimes pop up in the Ark stories. "The S. S. S." (1986) deals with a small modern day organization. It recalls a bit in subject matter Hoch's non-series tale about a small religious fringe group, "Too Long at the Fair" (1964) in *The Night My Friend*. Both groups meet in unexpected places. "The S. S. S." explicitly mentions M. P. Shiel's story "The S. S." in *Prince Zaleski* as the ancestor of such tales.

"The S. S. S." has an exemplary solution to whodunit, in which the guilty party is identified through reasoning about clues in the story, and the events of the crime. SPOILERS. The main set of clues deals with *knowledge*: who knew about a key fact.

Master of Miracles. "Master of Miracles" (1999) has an original, unexpected "impossible crime" premise. This is the best feature of the tale. Unfortunately the solution of the impossible crime is easy to figure out. SPOILERS. "The Problem of the Covered Bridge", "The Problem of the Blue Bicycle", "The Way Up to Hades", "Master of Miracles" have related impossible crime premises. Their solutions are all different.

Also good: the "bird screen", something I'd never heard of. This gives an architectural dimension to the plot. The setting of the impossible crime, also has architectural aspects.

Both the impossible crime setting, and the bird screen, have technological aspects. This makes the tale a Scientific Detective story.

However, this tale is gloomy and has horror elements, which make it remote from my tastes.

Rand mystery-spy tales

The stories about Jeffery Rand, the British spy make up more of a story sequence than do many of Hoch's works. They have continuing characters who reappear in tale after tale. They also involve on-going political situations and life changes for their casts. This gives them interest beyond their mystery plots: the reader is interested in seeing how the characters will evolve over time.

Many of the best Rand stories were collected in *The Old Spies Club*. *The Old Spies Club* contains related works, dealing with Rand's courtship and marriage to his wife Leila. Another common thread throughout the tales: Leila is Egyptian, and many of the tales have a Northeast African setting.

Hoch does not have a consistent tone to his tales. Some of his stories take place in the most bland and banal of everyday settings; others are wild surrealistic extravaganzas, sometimes set in exotic climes. I much prefer Hoch when he is in full surrealistic motion. A tale like "The Spy in the Pyramid" is more of an adventure than a mystery, but its wild storytelling makes it a fascinating work. In general, Hoch's tales about spy Jeffery Rand tend to have more imaginative settings and surrealistic tone than his Leopold or Sam Hawthorne works.

The Spy Who Took the Long Route. The Rand tales are unusual among spy fiction in that they typically contain a puzzle plot mystery for Rand to solve. This makes them personal for Hoch, who loves to create whodunits, but atypical for the spy genre as a whole. Hoch developed this approach early on in the series. The fourth Rand tale, "The Spy Who Took the Long Route" (1966), is already a full puzzle plot mystery. This puzzle plot is set against, and based on, an elaborate espionage background, set in another country to which Rand travels on assignment: also a frequent feature of this series. These espionage situations allow Hoch to create a wealth of unusual story material from which he can create mystery plots. One of Hoch's strengths as a writer is his ability to come up with countless different stories, plots and background situations. His fertility in plotting and story construction recalls that of Erle Stanley Gardner.

"The Spy Who Took the Long Route" (1966) seems to make a pair with "The Spy and the Intercepted Letters" (1974). Both stories have ingenious puzzle plots; both plots have a sort of family resemblance, dealing with intercepted communications. Each story shows original ideas, as well.

The Spy Who Didn't Remember. Rand is head of Concealed Communications, the department of British Intelligence that deals with codes and ciphers. "The Spy Who Didn't Remember" (1972) contains a simple but pleasant code as part of its mystery. This secret code aspect is integrated into one of Hoch's well-constructed puzzle plot stories.

The Spy Who Was Expected. "The Spy Who Was Expected" (1972) of the same year also deals with an intercepted message in a creative way. Hoch works this into a pleasant traditional puzzle plot of the "three suspects" kind.

The Spy Who Didn't Exist. "The Spy Who Didn't Exist" (1967) is a sort of "spy procedural", detailing several aspects of Rand's work life. Like some early Rand tales, it involves an actual cipher as part of its mystery puzzle plot.

The story shows Hoch's interest in Samuel Pepys, the 17th Century diarist. This will return in "The Spy Who Stayed Up All Night" (1981).

The mystery puzzle of "The Spy Who Didn't Exist" sparkles. Its solution is revealed in two stages:

- First we get general info about the kind of people behind the mystery, and their motive.
- Then at the end, Rand's solution shows us specifics about these folks.

The Spy and the Christmas Cipher. Years later, Hoch wrote another tale with a mysterious cipher, "The Spy and the Christmas Cipher" (1990). Hoch makes the mystery two levels deep: first the good guys (and the reader) have to break the cipher and read the message; then secondly, they have to *interpret* the message properly.

Rand and the reader know who the villain is right away. The tale is a mystery: what is the villain up to? But the tale is not a who-done-it: we all know who done it.

Rand has to steal an object from the villains in "The Spy and the Christmas Cipher". This object doesn't have any known value. This sort of task is close to that associated with a different Hoch hero, thief Nick Velvet, who specializes in stealing worthless objects. The object that Rand steals is not as obviously worthless as those Nick Velvet takes, however. Which is perhaps why Hoch used this plot in a Rand story instead of a Nick Velvet tale. Hoch does not underscore or make explicit the parallel between Rand's task and Nick Velvet.

The tale includes a homage to real-life Canadian writer Robertson Davies and his ghost stories. Many such tales can be found in Davies' short story collection *High Spirits*.

The Spy at the Spa. Hoch's spy stories often open with some non-Rand scene, showing a crime from the point of view of the victim. These sections often explain some things about the crime, while leaving other facts mysterious. These facts and mysteries are woven into the puzzle plot of the tale, forming part of the mystery of the story. Often times the reader knows far more than Rand himself. This is an unusual technique. It is completely fair play, and consistent with high standards of craftsmanship. But it is atypical of the mystery field as a whole, where the reader typically knows precisely what the detective knows, and no more. Something similar was often done on The Avengers TV series, where the opening would give us partial facts about some bizarre crimes. The audience would then be challenged to figure out what was going on. A good example of this technique is found in Hoch's "The Spy at the Spa" (1985). It allows him to construct a fair puzzle, that is yet very different in form from those of most traditional mysteries.

The Spy at the Crime Writers Conference. "The Spy at the Crime Writers Conference" (1976) has a real life background, depicting the 1975 conference in London. Hoch's portrait of this event is amusing, and filled with mini-appearances by real life mystery writers.

Its puzzle plot is more routine. It does contain seeds of story ideas that Hoch will develop much more fully in his later gem, "The Old Spies Club" (1997), which has one of Hoch's hardest to guess puzzle plots.

Still "The Spy at the Crime Writers Conference" has an abundance of plot, all solidly constructed:

- It has a whole espionage plot, which is separate from the Conference background.
- There are two solid clues to the identity of the killer.
- A subplot mystery - why did the victim wait so many years to reveal facts - gets a plausible, if simple, answer.
- Some possible plot twists are discussed, then rejected for sound logical reasons.
- The finale has Rand trying to escape from a trap, a kind of plot event that has a long history in fiction.

The Spy Who Knew the Future. "The Spy Who Knew the Future" (1986) has a well researched background of North Yemen. Its portrait of another culture, mixed with Cold War intrigue, reminds one of the Michael Vlado Gypsy tales that Hoch was beginning to write around this time.

The puzzle plot of the tale, with its emphasis on time, recalls a little "Captain Leopold and the Ghost-Killer" (1974).

The Old Spies Club and Other Intrigues of Rand

The Spy at the End of the Rainbow. Hoch's work often takes a structure found in Ellery Queen, and develops it into a new specific mystery plot. "The Spy at the End of the Rainbow" (1974) recalls the architecture of *The Chinese Orange Mystery* (1934): "extravaganza of detail smothering crime hides hidden logical pattern". This is one of Hoch's best stories.

The tale has a "hidden scheme". It's a clever idea, and adds some good plot to the story. This scheme is rather atypical for Hoch:

- Unlike many such schemes, this scheme is not *criminal*.
- Also atypical: the scheme turns out to have only a little to do with the solution to the main murder mystery.

The scheme can be seen as a variation on, and big improvement on, an earlier idea in "The Spy in the Labyrinth".

The tale has what is in most ways a dying message. Strictly speaking, it is not a standard dying message, something the victim gasped out or wrote while he was dying. Instead, it is a cryptic note the victim made for himself, before the killing. Like a regular dying message, this note has to be interpreted by the sleuth. Hoch does a good job with the note and its interpretation.

Earlier "The Spy and the Nile Mermaid" (1971) had a similar "hard to interpret note that is not a standard dying message because it was made before the killing". "The Spy and Nile Mermaid" contains dialogue between Rand and his boss, that draws this distinction explicitly. The note is explicitly said to be not a dying message. Still, it has to be interpreted by sleuth Rand, just like a standard dying message.

The Spy and the Healing Waters. "The Spy and the Healing Waters" (1990) has an exceptionally well-done mystery plot. SPOILERS. It is based on techniques used by Ellery Queen:

- Trying to find a common pattern in a series of crimes.
- An ingeniously concealed object.
- The identity of the killer.

SPOILERS. We realize early on that the murder weapon must be concealed. This is explicitly discussed in the tale. But the other two Ellery Queen approaches, are not mentioned until Rand's solution. Their presence in the tale is a surprise.

The tale has a well-done "hidden scheme". The scheme is revealed partway through the tale, rather than in the solution at the end. It is also simply revealed by a suspect, rather than being discovered by detective work. At the end, Rand's solution is based upon the information about the hidden scheme revealed earlier.

"The Spy and the Healing Waters" has some pleasant world-building. It shows us the details of the retirement of Rand's long-time boss Hastings. We also see Hastings' replacement in his job - an unsurprising choice.

Rand's wife Leila does a good piece of detective work.

Waiting for Mrs. Ryder. "Waiting for Mrs. Ryder" (1994) shows Hoch's skill with that Ellery Queen favorite, the dying message. For once, a writer comes up with a sound, logical reason for a cryptic dying message to be left. "The Spy and the Greek Enigma" (1992) also involves riffs on the dying message, as does (in a hidden way), one of the Nick Velvet tales of the period. The excellent "The Trail of the Bells" (1985) also has a dying message.

SPOILERS. The murder in "Waiting for Mrs. Ryder" is linked to a clever "hidden criminal scheme". Hoch shows inventiveness, coming up with many clues to this scheme. The clues deal with the scheme itself, and are solidly linked to its plot.

"Waiting for Mrs. Ryder" is set in an island off East Africa. The portrait of the region anticipates the portrait of the Madagascar setting of the Simon Ark tale "No Blood for a Vampire" (1995).

The War That Never Was. "The War That Never Was" (1999) has a fascinating and surreal premise. Its fantastic character and surreal quality approaches avant-garde science fiction writer J. G. Ballard.

The tale's very strange premise, and its exotic locale, also suggest Hoch's stories of sleuth Simon Ark.

"The War That Never Was" benefits from good storytelling. Its strangeness helps generate suspense.

The bizarre back-story is repeatedly contrasted with the genial London streets where the characters meet. These streets are all famous London tourist destinations. They are wholesome and joyous, which the sinister back-story is decidedly not.

BIG SPOILERS. At the tale's end, the mystery's solution brings out the undercurrent of racism in the villain's scheme. The tale's condemnation of racism is all the stronger, for emerging from the shadows at the tale's end. The racism becomes part of the horror of the finale. Perhaps it also suggests that in real-life, racism is not always on the surface of things. Instead, it is embedded in a concealed way in the underlying structure of some system. There it forms one type of "systematic racism".

Nick Velvet

Hoch wrote a long series about Nick Velvet, a professional thief who only steals objects of no value, at substantial fees for his clients.

No World-Building. Unlike some other Hoch series, there is little world-building in the Nick Velvet stories. There are mainly just three series characters: Nick, Gloria, and in some later stories the rival thief known as the White Queen.

A key premise of most of the tales is that Nick operates alone, without any help from anybody else. Such an approach rules out world-building: other series characters would tend to turn into helpers of Nick.

Even when Nick collaborates with the White Queen, the tales feature the pair of them, alone against the world.

Nick being a lone operator also has moral and political implications. Nick's thefts are NOT part of some moral or political program. They are just thefts. Nick is not like the heroes of TV series like *It Takes a Thief* or *White Collar*, who steal to help some government agency. Nor is he a Robin Hood who steals from the rich to help the poor.

The Velvet Touch: Nick Velvet Stories

Even though the tales in *The Velvet Touch: Nick Velvet Stories* (collected 2000) were written over a twenty-five year period, they are remarkably similar in tone, and content. The book seems more like a Story Sequence than a mere collection of stories. There are three types of recurrent subject matter in the book:

- Impossible crimes, especially impossible thefts.
- Strange, often humorous criminal schemes, usually done by comic crooks that Nick meets.
- Nick's efforts to steal out-of-the-ordinary objects, usually to aid the crooks in these schemes.

The schemes tend to be bizarre, but not at all menacing or sinister. Several, once their details are revealed, tend to involve wish fulfillment fantasies for readers, such as being able to obtain money from Swiss bank accounts. Both the schemes, and Nick's clever methods of stealing objects, involve considerable plotting ingenuity. Together with the impossible crimes, this means that the stories are overflowing with plot ideas.

The tone of *The Velvet Touch: Nick Velvet Stories* is comic throughout. There is a tone of sophisticated wit. All of the plot events attempt to be elegant and stylish, with gracefully executed criminal schemes, and thefts. Such elegance is part of the Rogue tradition. Hoch's Velvet stories outside of this collection are by no means uniformly humorous in tone. The tales here, both those involving the White Queen or not, are unusually comic for Hoch. The aspect of elegant thefts and capers here is also much more pronounced than in many Velvet stories, which can often seem more like pure mystery tales.

Some of the tales in *The Velvet Touch: Nick Velvet Stories* are actual puzzle plot mystery tales. These include the two best stories, "The Theft of Cinderella's Slipper" (1987) and "The Theft of Leopold's Badge" (1991). Both of these stories are gems of mystery fiction.

Other tales are essentially stories of criminal schemes. These are fun, and well done, but probably less ambitious than the true mysteries. Such stories include "The Theft of Nothing at All" (1977) and "The Theft of the Four of Spades" (1980). Other stories in the Velvet series, "The Theft of the Mafia Cat" (1972), "The Theft of the Lucky Cigar" (1991), also mainly emphasizes the theft elements of the tales.

Faded Flag. The impossible crimes in "The Theft of the Faded Flag" (1988) are of a kind frequently employed by Hoch. The hero of the tale is in a public place. He removes his eyes from something for just a minute. When he looks again, some major crime has occurred. It is hard to explain how anything could have happened so quickly, and without anyone around noticing. Such a crime is not "impossible", in the strictest sense of the term, but is still astonishing and very difficult to explain.

The Thefts of Nick Velvet

The Thefts of Nick Velvet is a collection of Nick Velvet stories.

Onyx Pool. The most important of the very early Velvet tales is the second story in the series, "The Theft from the Onyx Pool" (1967). This well done tale sets the full paradigm for the series. It includes the standard features of the Nick Velvet tales to come:

- Nick Velvet being commissioned to steal a bizarre and apparently worthless object.
- His clever, light-hearted method of stealing the same, even though it is hard for the reader to figure out how he is possibly going to do it.
- A mystery subplot about why the client wants Nick to steal such an apparently valueless object in the first place.

All of these elements are well done here. It should be considered as the true start of the series, the one in which Nick becomes "himself".

Empty Room. "The Theft From the Empty Room" (1972) deals imaginatively in the theft of apparently nothing. It reminds one of one of Isaac Asimov's best essays, "Nothing", in which the good doctor looks at the concept of a total vacuum, space with absolutely nothing in it. This is one of Asimov's most Borges like essays, perhaps because in the approach to nothing, it begins to approximate the infinitely small. Hoch's story has a paradoxical feel to it as well, and is also very Borges like. Another Hoch tale that deals with an empty room is the Simon Ark story "The Vicar of Hell" (1956). Such stories are related to Hoch's impossible crime tales, in which something either appears or disappears in an apparently sealed chamber. All of these stories show imagination centering around "a room and its contents".

General's Trash. "The Theft of the General's Trash" (1974) shows good storytelling in the sections dealing with Nick's thefts. Nick also makes a good pair of deductions, about the circumstances behind the client's theft request.

But the tale develops problems that eventually ruin the story:

- Unfortunately, the tale never resolves its mysteries. Important plot threads are left unanswered at the end. Most seriously, we never learn "who done it". Or the details of the crime. This approach is rare in Hoch, who usually explains all mysteries by a tale's end.
- The tale is condescending to Nick's girlfriend Gloria.

Two of the characters are thinly disguised versions of real people then in the news. I have mixed feelings about this. Hoch in general would not use such torn-from-the-headlines characters, instead making up characters from scratch. I think that is better.

Having sleuths search through someone's garbage for information, has become a cliche of mystery fiction and television. I don't know how original it was in 1974.

The Spy and the Thief

The Spy and the Thief is a collection partly of Nick Velvet stories. partly of Rand spy tales.

Brazen Letters. "The Theft of the Brazen Letters" (1968) is an inoffensive but minor Nick Velvet story. There is a clever touch in Nick's method of stealing the letters. And the honest but menacing tough local cop is well-drawn, with some clever actions. Paradoxically, while the cop is honest and Nick is a thief, Nick's methods are more ethical and less manipulative than the cop's.

On the negative side, the object of the theft is not imaginative. And the explanation of why Nick's customers want it stolen is complex but labored.

Later Nick Velvet tales

Canceled Stamp. "The Theft of the Canceled Stamp" (1994) gets Nick involved in an especially complex whodunit. Like some other Hoch works of the same era, the Ben Snow tale "The Passion of Lizzie B." (1993), the Dr. Sam "The Problem of the Missing Roadhouse" (1994), the Susan Holt "A Craving for Chinese" (1995), it eventually involves a surprising back-story: a "hidden scheme".

"The Theft of the Canceled Stamp" also shows Hoch's ability to have his characters inter-relate with each other in an intricate network of relationships.

Twenty-Nine Minutes. "The Theft of Twenty-Nine Minutes" (1994) is a light-hearted, inventive extravaganza about an ingenious theft of time. It has thematic ties to the earlier Ben Snow story "The 500 Hours of Dr. Wisdom" (1984).

"The Theft of Twenty-Nine Minutes" also offers some playful variants on the basic paradigms of the Velvet tales.

High Tech. "The Theft of the Wedding Doves" (2002) and "The Theft of the Empty Paint Can" (2005) show Hoch's interest in modern technology. Hoch is at the forefront of writers who employ the latest in communications and computer technology in their tales. It helps give a fresh background to the stories. Hoch also integrates such devices deeply into the puzzle plots of the tales.

The technology in "The Theft of the Empty Paint Can" has become widespread in real life, since Hoch wrote about it.

Blue-Ribbon Pie. "The Theft of the Blue-Ribbon Pie" (2006) brings Nick Velvet to a small town and its County Fair. The small town is laid out like Northmont in the Dr. Sam series, with a park at its center. There are elements of humorous self-parody, with Nick Velvet out-of-place in a town that echoes another Hoch detective.

SPOILERS. Also humorously, Nick Velvet has trouble committing his theft in this apparently simple place. He is really out of his turf. By contrast, Dr. Sam had no trouble in solving "The Problem of the County Fair" (1978).

Nick does do a good job solving the tale's mystery.

The tale has a good riddle interpreting a journal entry, very close to a dying message.

Artist Milo Marx is another example of Hoch's interest in contemporary avant-garde arts. He too makes a colossal contrast to the tale's small town and its mores.

Ostracized Ostrich. "The Theft of the Ostracized Ostrich" (2007) shows Hoch's interest in modernity. Its ostrich farm setting reflects real-life trends and enthusiasms. SPOILERS. Its solution also has modern aspects.

"The Theft of the Ostracized Ostrich" is mainly set in a large outdoor landscape. This is a favorite kind of locale in Hoch tales.

"The Theft of the Ostracized Ostrich" does not have a murder. So there is no murder mystery. Also, there is no impossible crime. Instead, the tale concentrates on two interlocking mysteries:

- Why do the crooks want Nick and Sandra to steal the ostrich?
- Why are the ostriches behaving unusually?

These give plenty of mystery. SPOILERS. The tale also introduces whodunit aspects near the end. This is unexpected. It adds more mystery to the plot.

"The Theft of the Ostracized Ostrich" has a cheerful, often comic tone. The lack of a murder helps this.

Like "The Theft of the Ostracized Ostrich", several Dr. Sam tales are set on farms.

Early Theft Tales

Before Hoch created Nick Velvet, he wrote stories about clever thefts.

"A Girl Like Cathy" (1966) in *The Night My Friend* has an entertaining caper much like those to come in the Nick Velvet tales. It also includes the twists in the progress of the caper that will often appear in the Velvet stories. This story lacks the whodunit mystery aspects of the later Velvet series.

Captain Leopold

Hoch's most prolific series deals with Captain Leopold, a policeman in a mid-size city that rather resembles Hoch's native Rochester, New York. However, the Leopold stories do not contain the sort of "local color describing a real city" that is often found in the police procedurals of other writers. Hoch tends to reserve such looks at real life locales for his other series, such as the Rand and Gypsy stories.

Of the over 100 Leopold tales, 19 were collected in *Leopold's Way* (1985). The series represents roughly 10% of Hoch's entire output.

Leopold's Biography. "No Holiday for Captain Leopold" and "Too Many Murderers" include brief summaries of Leopold's life and career. There are no big revelations. But they do provide more information than most Leopold tales. "No Holiday for Captain Leopold" says Leopold had his early childhood in the Midwest city of Chicago, then eventually went to high school in the (unnamed) Connecticut city where the Leopold tales are set. This anticipates Dr. Sam Hawthorne, who grew up in a city in the Midwest, then moved east to Northmont, Connecticut as an adult.

World-building. As described below in detail, some of the Leopold stories involve "world-building". They show aspects of Leopold's life, or of the city in which he lives. This world-building recalls the Dr. Sam Hawthorne tales.

Tales in *Leopold's Way*

Death in the Harbor. "Death in the Harbor" (1962) is an early Leopold tale, and the first to appear in *EQMM*. Already, this tale shows the full paradigm of the later Leopold stories to come.

This is one of several Hoch tales which deal with a series of killings, somewhat in the tradition of Agatha Christie's *The ABC Murders* (1936). The villain is fairly easy to spot, but there are some good plot developments along the way.

Aside from this story, the tales from 1970 on in *Leopold's Way* show much higher quality than the pre-1970 works, which tend to be gloomy and depressing.

The Rainy-Day Bandit. "The Rainy-Day Bandit" (1970) contains two linked mysteries, both given ingenious solutions by Hoch. The tale is in the tradition of the "modular" police procedural, in which the police work on two or more crimes at once. In other authors these tales are usually stretched out over a whole novel. It shows Hoch's fecundity with puzzle plot ideas, that he can incorporate two in a single brief short story.

Christmas Is for Cops. Part of the appeal of the police procedure genre as a whole is in its attempt to paint an in-depth look at how the police function as an institution. "Christmas Is for Cops" (1970) is in this tradition: it has one of the most detailed looks inside the police in the Leopold series. It features a large cast of police officers, both returning regular characters and newcomers, and looks at many aspects of police life.

It also reflects Hoch's fascination with technological devices and gimmicks. Several of the later Rand spy tales have hooks based on high tech developments in computers. One odd thing: technology in Hoch often is very new, reflecting Hoch's interest in the "modern". By contrast, the technology in "Christmas Is for Cops" is fairly old.

SPOILERS. The two best clues are similar. Both are based on a common situation: the fact that the murder locale is under constant observation by dozens of cops. These "clues" actually go a bit beyond the simple indicators often described as "clues". Instead, they are examples of full detectival reasoning.

"Christmas Is for Cops" shows us Lt. Fletcher's family. So do "Captain Leopold Plays a Hunch", "Leopold's Class".

The Jersey Devil. "The Jersey Devil" (1971) deals cleverly with a theft. All aspects of this story relate to its background of stamps and post offices. One suspects from the Corflu subplot that Hoch has been reading Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966). The story also refers to G. K. Chesterton, as does "Christmas Is for Cops". Literary references aside, this is one of Hoch's most satisfying puzzle plot tales. Hoch will return to this subject in one of his Nick Velvet stories, "The Theft of the Canceled Stamp" (1994).

Captain Leopold Plays a Hunch. "Captain Leopold Plays a Hunch" (1973) has links to the inverted tale, especially the pulp magazine version of inverteds, in which a clever murderer is tripped up by some mistake in his calculations.

The mistake, revealed at the end, is ingenious. It is also admirably non-trivial: it involves a substantial plot development, not some simple gimmick. This plot development is both logical and surprising: also a good combination in mystery fiction.

The story has links to the Michael Vlado tale, "A Wall Too High" (2000), which also has his hero looking for alternatives to the obvious explanation for a shooting.

We get a background on Lt. Fletcher's family in this tale. And we learn something about Sgt. Connie Trent. These aspects can be considered "world-building", developing the world in which Leopold lives. So can the way we meet a deputy sheriff whose jurisdiction lies just beyond the city limits, where Leopold's jurisdiction ends.

Elements of class conflict emerge, with one of the two streets being richer and the other poorer.

Captain Leopold and the Ghost-Killer. Before Hoch created impossible crime specialist Dr. Sam Hawthorne in late 1974, he wrote a number of Leopold tales that feature impossible crimes. "Captain Leopold and the Ghost-Killer" (1974) is especially elaborate and imaginative. Its look at an impossible crime centering around time puts it into the mainstream of the Zangwill-Chesterton-Carr tradition of "impossible crimes based on rearrangements in space and time", and it is a landmark in such time-centered mysteries. The Dr. Sam "The Problem of the Whispering House" (1979) does things with time, that are in the same mode as Hoch's earlier tale.

No Crime for Captain Leopold. Other writers in *EQMM*, such as Harry Kemelman, James Yaffe and Isaac Asimov, specialized in armchair detective tales. Hoch usually avoided this form. "No Crime for Captain Leopold" (1975) shows that Hoch could execute such a tale with skill. As in Kemelman's "The Nine Mile Walk" (1947), Leopold uses a chain of pure deduction to discover the facts behind a puzzling little incident.

The Most Dangerous Man Alive. "The Most Dangerous Man Alive" (1980) deals with a sinister hitman. The character is like a more evil variation on Nick Velvet, only where Velvet plots ingenious thefts, the hitman commits murder. Leopold is shocked that anyone could be such a criminal, just as he is later shocked and appalled by Nick Velvet himself, when the two men encounter each other in "The Theft of Leopold's Badge" (1991). Leopold will also be appalled with the comic rogue Benedict Corflu he meets in "The Jersey Devil" (1971). One suspects that unlike Leopold, that Hoch is amused at these rogues' antics, at least at those of such non-violent crooks as Velvet and Corflu. There is a pleasing element of high comedy in the collision between Leopold and these various villains.

Captain Leopold and Dr. Lawn Gaylord

Captain Leopold Looks for the Cause. For a while, Leopold was dating pathologist Dr. Lawn Gaylord. They met in "Captain Leopold Looks for the Cause" (1977), a creative work that may or may not be a medical mystery - Hoch keeps the reader pleasantly guessing. This story is inventively plotted. Leopold is still the main detective in these stories with Gaylord. But they tend to have a medical or scientific feel.

Leopold tries to find a common factor among the victims, that might explain their shared medical condition. Formally, this is similar to serial killer tales that look for common factors that explain why the victims are targets of the killer. However, while the tone of "Captain Leopold Looks for the Cause" is dark, it is still lighter than most serial killer stories. The tale lacks the malice of most serial killer sagas.

Hoch conscientiously conceals six clues in the story, that indicate the mysterious common factor among the victims. The tale treats this as a fair-play clued mystery puzzle.

"Captain Leopold Looks for the Cause" has highly sympathetic portraits of government public health officials. Along with Hoch's longtime admiration for Leopold and his team, this suggests a pro-government position. The admiring portrait of Dr. Lawn Gaylord is also pro-expert, with the tale stressing her deep knowledge.

The addition of Dr. Lawn Gaylord and her lab to the Leopold series, can be seen as an example of "world-building". So can this tale's portrait of the slum district of Leopold's city.

The issue of *EQMM* (November 1977) where this tale appeared has a cover illustration showing a male cop in a sharp gray suit, and a woman. These might (or might not) be Leopold and Dr. Gaylord. The woman has the "brown bangs" of Dr. Gaylord in Hoch's story.

Captain Leopold on the Spot. "Captain Leopold on the Spot" (1979) is another police procedural involving Dr. Gaylord. It shows absorbing storytelling with a complex plot. It has some solid clues as well, relating to scientific murder investigation. This is not Hoch's typical turf, but he does it well.

Other Captain Leopold Tales

No Holiday for Captain Leopold. "No Holiday for Captain Leopold" (1977) reuses and improves ideas from a tale in another Hoch series, "Interpol: The Case of the Devil's Triangle".

This is a well-plotted tale, with several unforeseen developments. SPOILERS. The plot includes that Hoch favorite, the "hidden criminal scheme".

Sergeant Connie Trent gets to shine, showing persistence in her detective work. Lt. Fletcher shows skepticism about a theory of Leopold's - and Fletcher turns out to be correct.

The small publishing firm in the story, recalls the narrator's publishing firm in the Simon Ark tales. Both firms are based in New York City. The firm in "No Holiday for Captain Leopold" is much smaller, run by just two partners: something that plays a role in the plot. The mid-size firm in the Simon Ark tales would not have worked as a setting for this mystery plot.

This story takes place over the Fourth of July weekend: a major holiday in the U.S. It was duly published in magazine form, just before the holiday. Linking mysteries to a holiday, has a long tradition in detective fiction.

Captain Leopold and the Three Hostages. "Captain Leopold and the Three Hostages" (1978) startles by getting Leopold involved in a popular kind of TV police melodrama of its era. Naturally, Hoch turns this into a fair-play mystery puzzle.

Just as many of the Nick Velvet tales turn on the mysterious motives Velvet's customers have for the thefts, so does this story focus on the mystery of the killer's motive for the crime. Hoch explores not just one motive, but three different ones.

Captain Leopold and the Vanishing Men. "Captain Leopold and the Vanishing Men" (1979) is an impossible crime tale. The impossibilities in the tale, offer both surrealism and a undertone of humor.

SPOILERS. Hoch makes the crimes be part of a series. He takes full advantage of the complex plot developments made possible by a series of crimes. The series aspect also adds to the surrealism of the story.

SPOILERS. We learn about the layout of the police offices. This gives the mystery an *architectural* dimension, something popular in traditional mysteries. What we learn also has a *world-building* aspect, adding a small amount to our knowledge of Leopold's world.

Both "The Murder in Room 1010" (1987) and "Leopold and the Broken Bride" (1987) are also impossible crime tales.

The Second Captain Leopold. Hoch's ingenuity in exploring multiple plot implications of the situation is a most pleasant technique used elsewhere in the series. Note the very rich plot development of "The Second Captain Leopold" (1983). The formal unfolding of that tale is especially beautiful, considered as a formal pattern of plot.

The Murder in Room 1010. "The Murder in Room 1010" (1987) is a locked-room murder mystery - and a good one. At first "The Murder in Room 1010" seems conventional. It has a murder in respectable, ordinary downtown hotel: a common locale in mystery fiction. Captain Leopold solves the mystery, using standard investigative police procedure. No one reading the tale would find anything odd or off-trail about these basic premises.

But a deeper look at the actual mystery plot reveals unusual or atypical features. SPOILERS:

- The locked room aspects are enabled by that Hoch favorite, a *hidden criminal scheme*. Without this scheme, the locked room would not have happened.
- In some mysteries a locked room is deliberately created by the killer. In others the locked room arises accidentally. But the locked room in "The Murder in Room 1010" falls between these extremes. The villain has a deliberate criminal scheme, which the villain uses to commit a crime. This scheme has deliberate locked room features. These features in turn are amplified by chance, into a more complex locked room, at the time of the killing. This whole approach is unusual in mystery fiction.
- BIG SPOILERS. In general, I tend to find locked room mysteries in which the "killer physically manipulates the door" to be unimaginative and second rate. But the door manipulation in "The Murder in Room 1010" is genuinely imaginative. It's good!

- BIG SPOILERS. Many locked room mysteries have the guilty party being the man who breaks down the door. This man has the opportunity to do crooked things, that help create the locked-room illusion. But in "The Murder in Room 1010", the man Sam Mason who breaks down the door turns out to be completely innocent. He is telling the truth, and behaving totally honestly, and in a conventional manner too. This runs against locked room tradition. It makes the plot of the tale more ingenious: Hoch creates a locked room, without any help, so to speak, from the Obvious Suspect. This is harder to do.

Policewoman Connie Trent contributes a good idea midway through the tale. She solves the mystery of why the victim had behaved as he did.

Leopold and the Cemetery Bandits. "Leopold and the Cemetery Bandits" (1988) is another tale like "Christmas Is for Cops" that looks inside the world of the police. It is richly plotted,and has some good logical surprises in it.

A good plot surprise occurs half-way through the tale. I've seen similar twists in two TV mystery shows about bank robberies where customers are taken hostage. Both were broadcast long after Hoch's tale was published. Neither credits Hoch.

Too Many Murderers. "Too Many Murderers" (1990) is Hoch's version of a standard kind of mystery puzzle - one in which a long-absent person reappears, and everyone wonders if they are actually the same person who left many years ago. There are some famous real-life cases like this, such as the "Tichborne Claimant" and "Martin Guerre". Hoch uses the premise as just the start of a complex case. It has an ingenious solution.

The title "Too Many Murderers" echoes a series of works by Rex Stout, such as *Too Many Cooks* (1938), *Too Many Clients* (1960), "Too Many Detectives" (1956).

The Essex Park Cowboys. "The Essex Park Cowboys" (1994) maintains interest, as Leopold gradually obtains information about the secretive elite club of the title. This can be considered as a mystery subplot: "How is the club organized and run, and what does it do?" We don't get a simple answer to this - instead we learn a whole series of details throughout the story.

"The Essex Park Cowboys" has a main clue to the killer's identity, that is both original and well-concealed.

Minor problems: The subplot about the threatening note, is solved by Leopold using a clue not shared with the reader. This is a rare lapse in Hoch. Also, the note is traced back to a culprit who seems implausible, and who previously seemed sympathetic. However, this note subplot is tiny, and these issues do not affect the story much.

"The Essex Park Cowboys" gradually develops a portrait of power in the economic and civic institutions of the city. Linked to this, it also offers a liberal critique of male chauvinism. One suspects that many readers would find this interesting, if the tale were reprinted and more widely available. The tale's sound construction as a mystery would also appeal.

In "The Problem of the Phantom Parlor" (1993) we briefly learn about a tycoon's desires to host dinners for "the power barons of New England" at his fancy new mansion. "The Essex Park Cowboys" looks in much greater depths at such meetings.

The portrait of the Cowboys and the city's power structure, can be seen as "world-building".

The country club where the Cowboys have their club rooms, has interesting architectural features. This reminds one of the Golden Age interest in architecture.

Leopold in the Vineyard. "Leopold in the Vineyard" (2004) has both a main murder mystery, and an unrelated mystery subplot, both well done.

The subplot is not solved by Leopold, or any other sleuth: its solution is just revealed near the end of the story. There are clues to its solution, however.

By contrast, the main mystery is solved by Leopold through careful deduction from clues. The deduction has an Ellery Queen feel.

"Leopold in the Vineyard" has a good Background, showing the operation of a modern, if small, vineyard. The tale keeps stressing innovative things that current vineyards do with technology: an example of Hoch's interest in "modernity". The tale's subplot mystery is also based in modern life.

The vineyard here and the small publishing firm in "No Holiday for Captain Leopold", are examples of the fairly small, upscale businesses that often provide a background in Rex Stout mysteries.

"Leopold in the Vineyard" gives a close-up view of Molly's brother and his vineyard business. This perhaps has elements of world-building, extending what we know about Leopold's family.

Leopold in the Lab. "Leopold in the Lab" (2006) is a pleasant tale.

THE LAB. It has a detailed Background showing the police's new forensics lab. Surveillance cameras also appear. All this makes "Leopold in the Lab" a Scientific Detective story.

The new police lab can also be considered "world-building": extending the settings of the Leopold saga.

The lab in "Leopold in the Lab" recalls the city historians and their offices in "The Crime in Heaven" and "The Problem of the Leather Man". Both are:

- Sources of valuable information.
- Staffed by experts, who are genuinely knowledgeable.
- In public buildings. The lab is in police headquarters; the city historians' offices are in Public Libraries.

An oddity: the lab is paid for by the county. But I had the impression from "Captain Leopold Plays a Hunch" that Leopold and his team were city employees. However I easily could have missed information on this subject, among the numerous Leopold tales.

THE MYSTERY PLOT. "Leopold in the Lab" has a decent "hidden criminal scheme". Some verbal clues to the nature of the scheme, have to be interpreted by Leopold, so that he can figure out what the scheme is. This is formally similar to mysteries where the sleuths have to interpret a dying message.

On the main murder mystery plot: One set of clues implicitly establish a "profile" of the killer: a set of characteristics the killer must have. Leopold then shows that only one character has all the right characteristics. Such "profiles" were used by a number of mystery writers; they are especially associated with Ellery Queen.

Ellery Queen usually spells out a full profile, listing its characteristics. By contrast, Hoch does not explicitly create a profile. Instead, the characteristics in "Leopold in the Lab" emerge one at a time, while Leopold is eliminating suspects one-by-one. Still, what Hoch does is ultimately a profile methodology. What Hoch and Queen do, looks different on the surface. But Hoch and Queen's approaches have the same "deep structure" or "logical structure".

Connie Trent

Hoch wrote some stories solved by Captain Leopold's police colleague, Sergeant Connie Trent, a series character in the Leopold stories.

"Captain Leopold Plays a Hunch" (1973) tells us a little about Connie Trent, although it is mainly a Leopold tale. It explicitly says she is "brainy": something very much present in her later appearances, too. She seems to be new in the Leopold series in this era.

The Crime in Heaven. "The Crime in Heaven" (1988) is pleasant for its strange initial mystery set-up, and the nice unraveling of same.

The initial premise is so odd, in fact, that neither the detectives nor the reader know what to make of it. The premise is given a full logical explanation by the tale's end. But up to that time, it is baffling to understand on any level, what has happened at the tale's start. This is an unusual approach to a mystery, both in Hoch's work, and mystery fiction as a whole. This approach shows originality.

In addition to the mystery of the premise, "The Crime in Heaven" does a good job with the mystery of who committed the crime.

Michael Vlado, the Gypsy Sleuth

Hoch wrote a series starring detective Michael Vlado, king of a small tribe of Romanian Gypsies. Many of these have been collected as *The Iron Angel and Other Tales of the Gypsy Sleuth*. The political background of these tales can be interesting: they are set behind the Iron Curtain, and follow the progress of this region towards political freedom, since the series began in 1984. A few of the stories also involve Middle Eastern politics. It is good to see stories taking place in Transylvania that have nothing to do with vampires. After all, Transylvania is a real region with a rich history: it was the first country in Europe to have religious freedom in modern times, for instance. "The Gypsy and the Pilgrims" (1989) ends with a full scale plea by Hoch for people to respect each other's differences. Hoch's stories often conclude with messages promoting peace. His Rand stories set in the Middle East have denounced the pointlessness of that feud, which benefits no one. And the early thriller "I'd Know You Anywhere" (1963) and the Leopold tale "People of the Peacock" (1965) express harsh condemnation of US militarism. Hoch's point of view has been consistently liberal over the years. He has never expressed any sympathy for Communism, nor for any right wing political movements. Several of his best Sam Hawthorne tales also involve liberal political figures or issues: "The Problem of the Revival Tent" (1978), "The Problem of the General Store" (1979) and "The Problem of the Pilgrims Windmill" (1980).

The first Vlado tale, "The Luck of a Gypsy" (1985) gets the series off with a bang, with one of Hoch's ingenious puzzle plots. It sets the basic pattern for most of the later Gypsy tales, being a pure detective story, with a puzzle plot, clues, and fair play detection leading to Michael Vlado's solution. There will be a low key, seemingly modest, but rigorous insistence on real detection throughout the entire rest of the series.

Among the early Vlado tales, "The Luck of a Gypsy" (1985) and "Murder of a Gypsy King" (1988) contain the most detailed look at the Gypsy village in which Michael Vlado lives. "Murder of a Gypsy King" seems to echo settings and characters used in the earlier story. It shows what Vlado's Romanian village might look like, to an outside visitor from the United States. These are the best two early Vlado tales.

"Murder of a Gypsy King" centers on the reconstruction of a crime, based on trails of evidence left behind at the crime scene. This is an ancient and honorable tradition in detective fiction, dating back to the 1860's and the pioneering detective novels of Émile Gaboriau. Hoch does this very well, and mixes it with his own puzzle plot traditions.

"The Hiding Place" (1993) is a later tale, that returns to the village setting of these earlier stories. It has a continually escalating sense of mystery, with events growing more and more baffling throughout the tale. Hoch develops the ideas of this tale further with "Leopold Undercover" (2007), a work with a startling solution. This Captain Leopold story is in some ways much more like a Vlado tale, with Leopold traveling around, and encountering mystery in an exotic entertainment setting: features one associates with Vlado.

While the two best early tales look at Vlado's Gypsy village, two of the best later stories get him involved in the changing world of post-Communist politics: "The Gypsy Delegate" (1990) and "A Wall Too High" (2000). The latter story is notable for its protest against the prejudice shown to Gypsies. Its mystery plot revolves around a mysterious shooting. Hoch also explored such a shooting mystery in "Captain Leopold Plays a Hunch" (1973). Most of the Vlado stories instead focus on stabbings. It seems notable that "The Luck of a Gypsy", "Murder of a Gypsy King", "The Gypsy Delegate" and "A Wall Too High" have both the most realistic and detailed sociological backgrounds in the series, and many of the best crafted puzzle plots as well.

The other best story in *The Iron Angel and Other Tales of the Gypsy Sleuth* is "The Puzzle Garden" (1994). It is full of religious themes and symbolism, in a way similar to that of Hoch's Simon Ark tales. Its antiquarianism and search for a hidden treasure based on intellectual clues recalls the world of R. Austin Freeman. So does the unfolding puzzle plot. Two more tales, "The Crypt of the Gypsy Saint" (1990), and

"The Butcher of Seville" (1995), also involve the sleuth in European religious practices. The first is minor, but the latter has a well-concealed puzzle plot.

"The Gypsy Treasure" (1986) is an earlier work in which cryptic clues spur a treasure hunt. The tale shows good craftsmanship in the twists and turns of its puzzle plot, with Hoch exploring many different plot developments and alternative solutions to the mystery.

The Gypsy's Paw. "The Gypsy's Paw" (1994) has a clever impossible crime plot, in the tradition of G. K. Chesterton. However, this story is too grim in its surrounding storytelling to be truly entertaining: the Vlado tales tend to suffer from melancholia.

Odds on a Gypsy. Michael Vlado raises horses for a living; this series, like the Western tales of Ben Snow, allow Hoch's love of horses to shine through. "Odds on a Gypsy" (1985) is mainly notable for its well researched background of horse racing at the Hippodrome in Moscow. Such a "tourist attraction in a Communist country" will also show up in the Stanton and Ives tale "Cuba Libro" (2003). It combines the possibilities of an exotic entertainment setting, with the sinister politics of a Communist thriller.

The Clockwork Rat. "The Clockwork Rat" (1996) returns Vlado to Moscow. While "Odds on a Gypsy" gives a relatively realistic look at an apparently real institution, "The Clockwork Rat" develops a flamboyantly bizarre nightclub setting. It is a story for the connoisseurs of the surreal and way-out. It shows good storytelling and atmosphere. There is also humor to be derived from that favorite locale of 1930's hard-boiled fiction, the night club run by mobsters, transformed grotesquely by its setting among the Russian Mafia.

The Vampire Theme. "The Vampire Theme" (2002) also looks at bizarre show biz in a former Communist land. This story has some inventive mystery plot ideas.

The Nameless Poison. "The Nameless Poison" (2006), like "Odds on a Gypsy", has a well developed realistic background of horse racing, this time in Paris. It combines this with a Scientific Detective story, dealing with the poison of the title. "The Butcher of Seville" had also been a scientific mystery, and this is an approach that runs through some of the later Michael Vlado stories.

The Starkworth Atrocity. "The Starkworth Atrocity" (1998) is most notable for the strange events that happen in its early stages.

The story oddly echoes the approaches used by the contemporary science fiction and avant-garde author, J. G. Ballard. I have no idea if Hoch has ever even read Ballard, or whether the similarities are coincidences:

- As in Ballard, the tale contains a horrifying, disaster-like crime, one that surrealistically mirrors modern day political traumas.
- The tale echoes Ballard's concern with the media, with TV journalists among the characters in the tale.
- It is set in Ballard's Britain.
- The title recalls Ballard's collection, *The Atrocity Exhibition*.

The Ben Snow Mystery-Western Stories

Ben Snow. Ben Snow is another one of Hoch's series detectives. His stories take place in the old US West, from 1882 to 1908, and form a series of mystery puzzle plot tales with a Western background. The first fourteen Ben Snow stories were collected in *The Ripper of Storyville and Other Ben Snow Tales* in 1997.

Historical mysteries were still quite rare when Hoch began his Ben Snow series in 1961, aside from the works of Lillian de la Torre and John Dickson Carr.

Ben Snow wanders around the Old West, going to a different locale in each tale. This recalls such popular 1950's Western TV series such as *Maverick*, *Have Gun - Will Travel*, and especially, *Cheyenne*. It also recalls such globe-trotting Hoch sleuths as Simon Ark and Rand.

Ben Snow, like Simon Ark, is a figure with mystery in his past. Both men might have something to do with eternal life. Ben Snow is frequently accused of being Billy the Kid, who allegedly died some years previously. And Simon Ark might be a 2,000 year old priest. Both sleuths are ambiguous: we never learn if these stories are true. Most of Hoch's later detectives are much less mysterious figures.

I like Ben Snow very much as a character. But the first seven of the stories in *The Ripper of Storyville and Other Ben Snow Tales*, written in the early 1960's, are generally weak. The last seven tales, written after Hoch resumed the series in 1984, are much better, and so are many of the subsequent tales in the series, which Hoch has continued to the present day.

Ben Snow sometimes works as a bodyguard. Other times he is employed as a private detective, as in "The Passion of Lizzie B." Sometimes he solves mysteries on his own, essentially as an unpaid amateur sleuth, as in "The Phantom Stallion". However, calling Ben Snow an "amateur" in such cases is likely going too far. Lots of professional detectives, like police or private eyes, occasionally solve a case while off duty and unpaid. This does not usually turn them into amateur detectives. They are still professionals. The term "amateur" is best reserved for sleuths like Dr. Sam, who are unpaid as detectives throughout their entire career.

The Flying Man. The best of the early stories is "The Flying Man" (1961). Hoch often builds both focus and suspense to his stories, by making the mystery center around some anticipated event. In "The Flying Man", this event is the much publicized medicine show. The characters spend most of the first half of the story discussing this up coming demonstration. When it finally shows up, it contains the murder mystery. This sort of construction helps give shape to a tale. It also helps lay down "ground rules": because the event is so much discussed and anticipated, the reader knows what *should* happen at it, and can compare it with what *does* happen at it. This is typical of the strategies of the mystery story. The reader is always in a state of *criticism* of the events of the tale: analyzing what has happened, comparing to ideals, looking for flaws in the logic of events, and so on. Much of this criticism occurs when the reader is trying to solve the mystery in the second half of the tale; this "anticipated event" technique allows critical examination of plot events by the reader to occur in the first half of the tale, as well.

The event approach also enables surrealism: the event often goes murderously wrong with maximum surrealistic effect.

The Ripper of Storyville. "The Ripper of Storyville" (1962) is set in the Storyville red light district of New Orleans. The setting is lurid - but the mystery plot is clever.

SPOILERS. Like "Terror Town" (1956) by Ellery Queen, "The Ripper of Storyville" has an unusual structure to its mystery puzzle. Both tales start out as seemingly arbitrary serial killings, then offer rational solutions that explain the tale's mysteries. This approach turns both into classical detective tales, with logical solutions.

SPOILERS. "The Ripper of Storyville" includes that Hoch favorite, a "hidden criminal scheme". As in most such Hoch tales, the existence of such a scheme is only revealed in the tale's solution, at the end. The hidden scheme plays a major role, in the logical explanation of the tale's mysteries.

EQ Traditions. Some of the best Ben Snow stories follow in the tradition of Ellery Queen:

- "The Vanished Steamboat" (1984) is in the tradition of Doyle's "The Lost Special" (1898) and Ellery Queen's "Snowball in July" (1952), as Hoch points out in his introduction to *The Ripper of Storyville and Other Ben Snow Tales*. Hoch comes up with a new solution here to the impossible crime riddle of these tales, different from both previous authors' solutions. This solution has a special beauty.
- A subplot in "The 500 Hours of Dr. Wisdom" (1984) echoes elements in Queen's *The American Gun Mystery* (1933).
- "The Trail of the Bells" (1985) has a deductive finale recalling Queen's masterpiece *The Tragedy of Z* (1933). Elements of Hoch's gem "The Theft of Leopold's Badge" (1991) also have a similar construction. Ever since I read *Z* as a kid, I've wanted to see other authors learn from it, and attempt similarly ambitious solutions. Here finally is an author creative enough to try. I want to point out that the influence of Queen on Hoch here is a *structural* influence. Hoch's mystery ideas here are entirely original.
- "The Only Tree in Tasco" (1986) has a simpler but well-done deductive finale, also in the Queen tradition.

Queen is Hoch's favorite mystery writer. It is impressive the way that Hoch can follow in Queen's great tradition. Few mystery writers have the skill to develop such plots.

Brothers on the Beach. Some of the Ben Snow tales, such as "Brothers on the Beach" (1984), succeed as works of historical fiction, even if they are perfunctory as mysteries.

The Trail of the Bells. "The Trail of the Bells" (1985) has numerous virtues. It has:

- A vivid setting.
- A surprising choice of killer.
- A good dying message puzzle.

These are all in addition to its remarkable solution in the Ellery Queen tradition.

"The Trail of the Bells" is set at a Mission in New Mexico in the U.S. Southwest in 1887. It was published in the same year as Hoch's contemporary mystery "The Sweating Statue" (1985), which takes place at a modern parish church.

The Phantom Stallion. "The Phantom Stallion" (1985) starts out well, with a description of an early air-conditioner on a west Texas ranch. This shows Hoch's interest in technological advances, and the idea of Modernity. As a steam-powered machine in older times, it anticipates the Steampunk movement.

The alleged "villa under construction" is also an interesting image. SPOILERS. I was hoping this would play a part in the mystery plot - but it does not.

Unfortunately, the tale goes downhill after this. It offers two solutions to its locked room mystery, both standard cliches of the genre. Its characters are grim and downbeat.

The Sacramento Waxworks. "The Sacramento Waxworks" (1986) has a solution that is sound, but which feels labored. It is a lesser tale.

Ben Snow's reaction to Sacramento, the biggest city he's ever seen, is a nice sequence.

The Nude Over the Bar. "The Nude Over the Bar" (1988) has an original, startling mystery premise. The premise is surreal, and a bit eerie. And the tale eventually comes up with a logical, surprising explanation of why the premise is happening. The premise and its explanation are the best features of the story.

The heroine is also good. Her unusual social position, in opposition to society that insists on defining her, anticipates the even more interesting protagonist of "The Passion of Lizzie B."

"The Phantom Stallion" included a painting. There is much more about paintings in "The Nude Over the Bar", including a visit to an artist's studio, and a look at his working methods. Art was a perennial interest of the Van Dine school. This tale emphasizes the *making* of art, as much as the finished product.

Unfortunately, some of the tale's other aspects seem mechanical and routine. Most of the other characters are uninteresting. Few of the horse racing elements have freshness or originality.

This is one of those Ben Snow tales, where he arrives at a locale that is building up to some festive event that will serve as the tale's climax: in this case, a horse race.

Five Days in a Texas Town. The title "Five Days in a Texas Town" (1992) echoes that of a Western film, *Terror in a Texas Town* (Joseph H. Lewis, 1958). Hoch also wrote a non-series tale "Three Weeks in a Spanish Town" (AHMM, December 1978).

The Passion of Lizzie B.. The hardware store setting of "The Passion of Lizzie B." (1993) recalls the Sam Hawthorne tale "The Problem of the General Store" (1979). Both small businesses sell numerous weapons, among other items. Both tales also feature strong-willed, progressive women who move into towns, and who form a challenge to the men there. The White Queen also forms a challenge to Nick Velvet, in the tales collected in *The Velvet Touch: Nick Velvet Stories*.

"The Passion of Lizzie B." has a well-done mystery plot. In fact, this is a model of a brilliantly plotted detective story. It should be studied in schools. SPOILERS. The solution is both logical and fairly clued on the one hand - but seems to come out of left field, on the other hand. This is an excellent pattern and structure. And one almost guaranteed to make a good mystery. It is not the only suitable pattern for quality mysteries - lots of other approaches are also sound. But if the author can pull this pattern off, it will lay the foundation for a well-done detective tale.

A good mystery solution should be both logical and surprising. That of "The Passion of Lizzie B." qualifies in abundance.

The title "The Passion of Lizzie B." is ambiguous. It could refer to romantic passion, or Lizzie B.'s passionate pursuit of goals. SPOILERS. But it also could have a religious meaning, of Lizzie B.'s tragic suffering, like Jesus' Passion.

The San Agustin Miracle. "The San Agustin Miracle" (2001) involves impossible crime. SPOILERS. Actually, there are two linked impossible crimes. The premises of both are pleasantly surreal. Both premises are original. Unlike "The Long Way Down" and related tales, the two impossibilities do NOT form a unified pattern. In fact, they seem startlingly separate and disconnected.

"The San Agustin Miracle" contains a rare bit of verse in a Hoch tale. It is clearly custom created for the tale: it retells the events of the story. Presumably Hoch wrote it himself. The verse is pleasing and shows some skill, although it is not virtuosic.

The woman who creates the verse in the tale's storyline, is an anachronism. She resembles more a 1950's Beat reciting poetry in a coffee house, than anybody in the Old West. Oddly, this anachronism is pleasing. It adds to the color of the tale. Like the impossible crime premises, she is a surprising development in the story.

SPOILERS. A surprising fact the sleuth learns half-way through the tale, recalls a similar revelation in the Simon Ark "The Avenger from Outer Space". In both stories, this discovery turns out to be a red herring, playing no role in the solution of the mystery. A related revelation is in the solution of "The Problem of the Black Cloister". It is relevant to the mystery, in this tale.

Gunfighter's Honeymoon. While many of Hoch's tales have roots in Ellery Queen, "Gunfighter's Honeymoon" (2002) offers variations on a classic novel by Agatha Christie. This tale is particularly gracefully done. It has a musical quality, as the numerous plot details seem to flow out harmoniously like a piece of music. The story takes place near Hoch's home town of Rochester, New York, and is rich in historical recreation of that city. It also offers nice developments in Ben Snow's personal life, that will please long term fans of the character.

Once Aboard the Eagle. "Once Aboard the Eagle" (2005) has that sure-fire setting, a train ride. Hoch includes skillful versions of some traditional virtues of train mysteries:

- The people aboard have a nice mix of backgrounds.
- Hoch deftly works in social commentary.
- Hoch shows a few interesting differences between contemporary train travel, and trains of Ben Snow's era.

"Once Aboard the Eagle" has a borderline "impossible crime" mystery. No murder weapon can be found on the train, and everyone wonders how the crime could be done. Hoch comes up with an ingenious solution, one that is fairly clued as well.

The conductor stresses that the train is more up-to-date than other trains out West. In a modest way, this shows Hoch's interest in *modernity*.

In the complex internal chronology of the Ben Snow tales, "Once Aboard the Eagle" is the direct successor to "The Sacramento Waxworks" (1986). Both tales have:

- Ben taking train rides to or from Sacramento, separated from his horse Oats.
- Different California state senators as characters. (Sacramento is California's capitol.)
- Ben making friends with a young woman.

Mystery-Westerns. While official mystery writers rarely used Old West settings, Western stories frequently had crime and even sometimes mystery plots.

The veteran mystery pulp writer Merle Constiner combined mystery fiction with the Western in *Short-Trigger Man* (1964) and *The Four from Gila Bend* (1968).

The Man from Blackhawk (1959-1960) was a TV series about an insurance investigator in the Old West.

The Lone Ranger was a masked crime fighter who brought law and order to the West on radio and TV. A somewhat similar Western comic book character was the Vigilante. He was masked, wore a fancy cowboy costume, and fought crooks. Like other comic book crime fighters, such as Batman, he had a secret identity, in this case a singing cowboy known as Greg Sanders, the Prairie Troubadour. Some of his stories were actual mystery plots, such as "The Forgotten Men of Ghost Town" (Action Comics #181, June 1953). This story has a mystery puzzle plot, complete with clues and a surprise solution. Its ghost town setting is not uncommon in mystery-Westerns, such as Allan Vaughan Elston's XXX and Hoch's "Ghost Town" (1961).

Alexander Swift

Alexander Swift. Alexander Swift is a trouble-shooter for George Washington, in a series of historical detective stories. The Swift, Ben Snow and Dr. Sam stories are Hoch's main series of historical mystery fiction. Swift works as a counterspy during the American Revolution, like Hoch's modern day counterspy Rand.

A film with broadly similar subject matter is *The Scarlet Coat* (John Sturges, 1955). It also deals with espionage during the Revolutionary War. Both works include secret messages. *The Scarlet Coat* is set in 1780, while the Alexander Swift series begins in 1778.

The Hudson Chain. The first story, "The Hudson Chain" (1995), is an elaborately researched historical drama, with a small but surprising mystery plot embedded within it.

BIG SPOILERS. Part of the mystery's solution, recalls the solution of "The Problem of the Little Red Schoolhouse". However, the overall solutions in the two tales are quite different.

The tale has much more about technology than do many Hoch stories. It also has a manufacturing background. By contrast, manufacturing is rare in the Dr. Sam tales. Dr. Sam's town Northmont is not a manufacturing center, unlike Ellery Queen's city of Wrightsville.

It is set in Hoch's home turf of upstate New York. The story stresses how connected New England is to the rest of the United States: both are vital to the new nation. It doesn't use the term "New England": it calls the region "east of the Hudson River", and the rest of the country "west of the Hudson River".

Alexander Swift is 28 in this first story. Dr. Sam was also in his twenties, at the start of his series.

The tale also introduces Swift's girlfriend Molly. SPOILERS. The heroine unexpectedly has gifts as a sketch artist. This is another example in Hoch's work, of the Van Dine school's interest in the arts.

A character is named Colonel Clay. This might be a homage to the crime book *An African Millionaire: Episodes in the Life of the Illustrious Colonel Clay* (1896-1897) by Grant Allen.

The Sword of Colonel Ledyard. "The Sword of Colonel Ledyard" (2000) combines vivid historical writing with an impressive locked room mystery plot. The puzzle has a bit of an affinity to the Vlado tale, "The Gypsy's Paw" (1994).

St. John and the Dragon. "St. John and the Dragon" (2001) is another tale with rich historical research, including technology.

The murder mystery is simple but satisfying; the mystery aspects not related to the murder are far more inventive.

Constant Hearses. "Constant Hearses" (2002) succeeds as a well-researched historical tale.

But aspects of the mystery plot are implausible, especially the way that various crooks are willing to let large sums of money out of their sight.

The title is a quote from a poem by Philip Freneau, "Pestilence".

The Orchard of Caged Birds. "The Orchard of Caged Birds" (2003) flashes back to the setting of the first Swift case, "The Hudson Chain", the upper Hudson during Revolutionary War times. The two stories' puzzle plots have family resemblances, too.

Swift Among the Pirates. "Swift Among the Pirates" (2007) brings the Alexander Swift series to its conclusion. The tale's coda, which resolves the main plot thread of the series, is haunting and powerful. The ending is unconventional, and drastically different from much contemporary fiction. A lot of today's second-rate entertainment glorifies vengeance and violence, suggesting they solve problems. Hoch's finale is the exact opposite.

The introduction to "Swift Among the Pirates" in *EQMM* quotes Hoch: '"I envisioned this as the thirteenth and last Alexander Swift tale," Ed Hoch told *EQMM*, "but I've never really ended a series yet, so it's possible that Swift might return sometime."'

Susan Holt

Susan Holt. Susan Holt works in promotions for a department store; she travels around the world making business deals and, incidentally, solving mysteries. She starred in a short-lived series in the mid-1990's, all of which have titles in the pattern "A quantity preposition noun". She's awfully bland as a personality, which is perhaps why the series didn't stick.

Susan Holt debuted with "A Traffic in Webs" (1993), which set up her character. The most recent tale in the main series (1993 - 1998) of Holt tales seems to be "A Busload of Bats" (1998). Hoch unexpectedly revived Susan Holt eight years later in "A Convergence of Clerics" (2006).

Among Hoch's sleuths, Charles Spacer is a sales manager for an electronics firm, and Susan Holt does promotions for a major department store. Both are figures deeply involved in modern-day capitalism. Both are "successes" in their jobs. Stanton and Ives are in business too, but they are just starting out, and much less successful than Spacer and Holt. They also work for themselves, while Spacer and Holt work for large firms. By contrast to all of these, Hoch's priest-sleuth Father David Noone leads a hard-working and deglamorized life, with few worldly rewards.

A Fondness for Steam. "A Fondness for Steam" (1994) has good storytelling, and a nicely realized Iceland background, but its solution is easy to figure out. It relates to Hoch's Gypsy tales, in its portrait of modern Europe.

A Parcel of Deerstalkers. "A Parcel of Deerstalkers" (1995) has one of Hoch's complex, well constructed puzzle plots.

It also has a bizarre and inventive Sherlock Holmes background, somewhat reminiscent of the Nick Velvet "The Theft of the Sherlockian Slipper" (1977).

The way the heroine arrives in a small town during an elaborate festival, recalls several Ben Snow tales. Such festivals seem to be Hoch's personal approach to the Van Dine school tradition, of setting mysteries among show business activities.

A Shower of Daggers. "A Shower of Daggers" (1997) has a startling and unexpected impossible crime, which is hard to solve. SPOILERS. The solution is a new variation on an old idea in impossible crime fiction.

The tale is full of a sense of creepy menace, involving Susan Holt with a normal-looking bunch of people that turn out to have dark sides. Or is the tale suggesting that Middle America has a dark side? The non-detective characters are all white, middle class, and living in an unnamed mid-sized city in upstate New York: what is often thought of as "typical Middle America". And they all turn out to be corrupt, to one degree or another. SPOILERS. Hoch has a cause for this corruption: drug use and the drug trade. But while the corruption starts with drugs, it doesn't end there.

A Busload of Bats. "A Busload of Bats" (1998) has a good background of American Baseball. The baseball theme also leads to a nice plot surprise.

But the mystery plot suffers from its choice of murderer and motive, which breaks the artistic unity of the story, adding coincidence to the plot.

Libby Knowles

Libby Knowles. Libby Knowles is a former cop who now works as a bodyguard. Her name is a neat evocation of woman's lib. She appeared in a handful of tales in the mid-1980's. Her bodyguard work recalls Ben Snow, who also was revived as a series character around the same time.

Wait Until Morning. Written at the height of the music video era, "Wait Until Morning" (1985) is a surprisingly credible rock music mystery. The Simon Ark "The Way Up to Hades" (1988) and Al Darlan "The Girl Next-Door" (2007) also have a rock music milieu. The Nick Velvet tale "The Theft of the Wedding Doves" (2002) will show satiric sparkle with a detailed look at a big star's wedding. Hoch has no trouble with keeping abreast with media developments.

The story shows Hoch's skill with puzzle plotting.

Annie Sears

Annie Sears is a young woman sleuth, who is at the start of a new series in "The Cactus Killer" (2005). This gem constructs a wildly inventive plot in a small space. The story shows Hoch's interest in science and modern technology. It also takes place at that frequent Hoch setting, a festival.

Her second tale "First Blood" (2007) is an intricately plotted work whose complex unfolding eventually develops impossible crime features.

"Baja" (2008) is simpler in plot than the first two tales, but it has unusual and imaginative clues to the killer's identity.

Stanton and Ives

Stanton and Ives. In 2002 Hoch started a new series about Walt Stanton and Juliet Ives, a young couple who travel the world and have light-hearted adventures while solving mysteries. Their titles involve puns. The couple show a welcome sense of humor. The humor and the sleuthing both recall the light-hearted films of Alfred Hitchcock. The stories have a joie de vivre and pleasant escapist tone, that is especially welcome as a contrast to much of today's grim crime fiction.

The globe-trotting characters recall all the traveling done by Rand, Susan Holt and Simon Ark.

Stanton and Ives are usually hired as couriers, which get them involved with mysteries surrounding their clients. Stanton and Ives are not really amateur detectives in the strict sense. They are hired professionals. However, they are so new at their job that they can seem more like an amateur couple taking on cases. Many of the situations in the tales involve danger and fairly hard-boiled characters, which form a contrast to the sleuths.

Some of the tales are examples of the Van Dine School's interest in the arts:

- The Hemingway works in "Cuba Libro".
- The Burning Man festival in "Midsummer Night's Scheme".
- The Italian film industry in "Hand Delivery".
- The temples and their sculpture, and Kipling's poem, in "Robe to Mandalay".
- The photographs in "Romeo and Joliet".
- The calligraphy, the proposal to display it, and reference to Grahame Greene, in "Turkish Delight".
- The TV cooking show and studio where it is filmed, and the music manuscript, in "Handel and Gretel".

Twelve Stanton and Ives tales appeared in *EQMM*.

Cuba Libro. "Cuba Libro" (2003) has a well-done puzzle plot. As a formal detective tale, this has a family resemblance to the Rand tale, "The Old Spies Club" (1997).

Midsummer Night's Scheme. "Midsummer Night's Scheme" (2004) shows Hoch's fondness for surrealist backgrounds, with its complex setting of the Burning Man festival in the Nevada desert. Like "The Flying Man" and "The Haggard Society", it is a tale centering around an anticipated performance. It appeared the same year as the non-series mystery "Money on the Red" (2004), which also looks inventively at the most surreal parts of show biz performance.

The word "surrealistic" is used right in the story to describe Burning Man events. The tale wants us to perceive its events as surreal.

The identity of the killer is deduced rigorously, but from just a single clue. Earlier Ives uses strict reasoning from evidence, to disprove a theory of the crime proposed by Stanton.

SPOILERS. If the surrealism of the tale recalls Ellery Queen, so does the choice of killer. So does the deductive solution and other detective reasoning.

The Burning Man festival can be considered a temporary town. The tale says it has 25,000 attendees, which makes it bigger than Northmont in the Dr. Sam stories. The story also goes to a Western ghost town - which recalls the Ben Snow tale "Ghost Town".

Hand Delivery. "Hand Delivery" (2004) is an impossible crime tale.

SPOILERS. One part of the explanation of the impossibility, depends on an old gambit in mystery fiction. I'm a wee bit skeptical that this gambit actually has a widespread basis in real life. But it has served as a basis for a lot of good fiction.

Like "The Sweating Statue", the events are seen by some of the characters as a possible miracle. However, the tone is lighter than in "The Sweating Statue". And the events are less centered on religion and miracles in "Hand Delivery", than in "The Sweating Statue".

"Hand Delivery" has a background in the Italian film industry. That industry has long been seen as a good setting for fictional books and films of all kinds, both by Italians and non-Italians.

"Hand Delivery" shows Hoch's interest in new technology. Hoch is interested in what academics call *modernity*.

SPOILERS. At the end, the tale celebrates the fact that no one got killed in it. This is (rightly) celebrated as a happy ending. Hoch will soon have a similar celebration at the end of the Dr. Sam tale "The Problem of the Devil's Orchard" (2006). One difference: not only does no one get killed in "The Problem of the Devil's Orchard", but no actual crime is committed. "Devil's Orchard" points this out.

Robe to Mandalay. "Robe to Mandalay" (2005) is an impossible crime tale. Its solution is plausible and logical. But it is also a cheat, by the standards of the impossible crime mystery. This weakens what is otherwise a sound story.

"Robe to Mandalay" has no murder. It does have a guilty party behind the crime which does occur. As usual, Hoch has "fair play" clues to the identity of this culprit.

"Robe to Mandalay" contains social criticism, of the dictatorship in Myanmar.

"Robe to Mandalay" has that Hoch favorite, a large landscape (around the hill). This is used for good storytelling. But it does not play an actual role in the mystery plot, unlike many of the landscape tales in the Dr. Sam series.

The rides in the small airplane, also recalls Dr. Sam tales involving aviation.

Romeo and Joliet. "Romeo and Joliet" (2006) opens, like many Stanton & Ives tales, with the pair being hired to transport an unusual object. In this case, the object is seemingly valueless, like the objects Nick Velvet is hired to steal. Just as in the Velvet tales, this poses a mystery: why does anyone want this object?

SPOILERS. The solution to this mystery, is linked to an ingenious "hidden criminal scheme".

SPOILERS. Another decent aspect of the tale is the choice of murderer.

On the negative side, storytelling in the tale is often flat. Also, clues to the nature of the hidden scheme, seem mainly absent. One doesn't see, therefore, how Ives worked it out.

Tourist note: Historically most people associated Joliet with a famous prison there, as does this story. Actually, Joliet is a charming city. It has undergone a population explosion in recent years.

Turkish Delight. "Turkish Delight" (2007) is inoffensive. But unfortunately it seems mainly perfunctory. On the positive side, the ways various people want to display the manuscript are interesting.

SPOILERS. Ives makes a deduction from a color-based clue, an interesting touch.

Handel and Gretel. "Handel and Gretel" (2007) was left unfinished at Hoch's passing. It was completed by Jon L. Breen. The EQMM editor praised Breen for coming up with a clever solution to the mystery, and one that tied together the story elements. I wholeheartedly agree. The story ends with a series of surprise plot twists. Each one is firmly tied to the story. The series of surprises is like a chain of fireworks going off. The series of plot twists each solve some aspect of the mystery.

"Handel and Gretel" is rare in Hoch's work, in having a classical music background. But strictly speaking, it is a tale about rare classical music manuscripts. No musicians appear "on stage" in the tale.There is some nice background information on composer Handel, though.

Some satire of traditional English cooking sounds more like Breen-the-parodist than Hoch.

Father David Noone

Father David Noone. Father David Noone is a Roman Catholic parish priest, who has solved a handful of cases since his debut in 1964. Hoch has attempted a realistic, respectful look at the daily life of a parish priest in these stories. Noone's last name suggests he is spreading the sunshine of truth through his sleuthing. It is typical of Hoch to give his detectives such descriptive last names.

In his 2004 Mystery*File interview, Hoch told Steve Lewis there were 7 Father Noone stories at that time.

Father Noone is one of Hoch's few purely amateur sleuths, along with Dr. Sam Hawthorne and Susan Holt. Unlike Hawthorne, who has a consulting role with the police in the Van Dine school tradition, Father Noone works largely on his own.

Father Noone seems to be stationed in fairly large cities. The tales have a realistic feel. They are far from cozy. Instead, they try to offer a subdued look at the real life and challenges of the contemporary Church. Several explore Catholic institutions:

- A parish church in "The Sweating Statue".
- A Catholic university in "The Hand of God".
- Being a jail chaplain in "Searching for Sammy Sand".

The Sweating Statue. I don't share the general enthusiasm for "The Sweating Statue" (1985). The mystery of the statue itself, is solidly done. But the story around it is grim. The tale has negative depictions of both believers (Mrs. Wilkins, Celia) and nonbelievers (the boyfriend, the media). They all come across as bad people. And what has the media actually done wrong, to merit the criticism they get? The extreme passivity of Father Noone throughout the story is also disturbing. All the gloom in "The Sweating Statue" is perhaps deliberate, an attempt to achieve a noir approach.

The mix of religion and an impossible crime recalls the Simon Ark tales.

The name Xavier for the investigating priest, suggests St. Francis Xavier, a founder of the Jesuits. This invokes the Jesuits, and their scholarly, intellectual tradition. Monsignor Xavier is very much depicted as brainy and intelligent.

It is Xavier who does the main detective work in "The Sweating Statue", not Father Noone. Father Noone is often present throughout the tale. But mainly he simply accompanies Xavier. This change of detective in the middle of a series, is atypical for Hoch. It perhaps recalls the tales in the Captain Leopold series, in which Sergeant Connie Trent takes on the main detective role.

Father Noone has been transferred to a parish full of poor Hispanics. This recalls Jack Webb's series of mystery novels about the team of Jewish policeman Sammy Golden and Catholic Father Joseph Shanley, starting with *The Big Sin* (1952).

"The Kindergarten Witch" about an alleged paranormal event in a hall run by a Catholic parish, anticipates "The Sweating Statue" about an alleged miracle in a Catholic parish church. However, the alleged paranormal event in "The Kindergarten Witch" is NOT linked to the Catholic religion or teaching, while the purported miracle in "The Sweating Statue" is very much a possible Catholic miraculous event.

The Hand of God. "The Hand of God" (2003) has an interestingly constructed puzzle plot. Some plot ideas recall the Leopold story, "The Christmas Tree Killer" (1999). SPOILERS. The solution to "The Hand of God" recalls in broad terms a series of tales by John Dickson Carr.

"The Hand of God" has world-building elements:

- Father Noone has been transferred to a new city.
- Monsignor Xavier from "The Sweating Statue" is now promoted to Bishop Xavier, and is Father Noone's superior. He too has been transferred to the new city. Xavier will return in "Searching for Sammy Sand". However Father Noone is once again the main sleuth in these tales.
- We learn a little bit about Father Noone's high school years.
- The city's one Catholic university, St. Joan of Arc, is explored in depth.

The university reminds one a bit of the university in *The Man in the Moonlight* (1940) by Helen McCloy. Both are modest sized universities in cities. Although these schools are genteel, the mood of both places is somber, even sinister.

"The Hand of God" refers to a once-famous real-life crime play, *Detective Story* (1949) by Sidney Kingsley.

Father Noone says he is "no match for theologians", and later says theology is "a difficult subject".

Searching for Sammy Sand. "Searching for Sammy Sand" (2004) has Father Noone taking on an assignment as a jail chaplain. The gritty urban locales of the tale are vividly done. Father Noone is also believable in his interactions with the denizens of these lower depths.

However, the solution of the murder mystery is not inventive.

The subplot mystery that allows Father Noone to find Sammy Sand, has a solid clue. It is better than the tale's main murder mystery.

The paired, mirror-image houses, give the tale an *architectural* dimension.

The editor's introduction in *EQMM* (August 2004) says that Father Noone was originally modeled on detective Father Brown by G. K. Chesterton. Chesterton and Father Brown are mentioned in "Searching for Sammy Sand".

Al Darlan

Al Darlan. Al Darlan is a private detective, about whom Hoch has been writing on and off since 1957. The Darlan stories have mainly appeared in out-of-the-way periodicals, and I've only read a few of them. Darlan is a distinctly unglamorous and hard luck character, whose cases tend to get him in trouble. Darlan lives in a mid-size city, much like Captain Leopold, and his cases take place in a similar medium-boiled milieu as Leopold's. While police officer Leopold is a respected member of the community, the honest but two-bit Darlan is just managing to stay in business.

In his 2004 Mystery*File interview, Hoch told Steve Lewis there were 16 Al Darlan stories at that time.

The Pulp Artist's Wife. "The Pulp Artist's Wife" (2006) starts off decently, with Al Darlan and his younger partner Mike Trapper involved in a conference that showcases vintage cover artists for pulp magazines and paperbacks. The subject matter is an example of the Van Dine school's interest in the arts. It is nice to see references to artist Salter and private eye writer Wade Miller. Other Al Darlan tales also involve the arts: "A Wandering-Daughter Job".

However, the crime tale that ensues is both uninteresting and grim.

The Girl Next-Door. "The Girl Next-Door" (2007) shows the good idea of involving Darlan in show biz scandal, with some nice satiric surprises along the way.

The most creative features of "The Girl Next-Door" are motives. There are clever answers to two questions:

- What scheme was the victim up to?
- What hidden show biz scandal is going on?

By contrast, the murder mystery is perfunctory. Motive aside, it is routine and uninventive.

The opening of "The Girl Next-Door" tells the unusual source of income, that is keeping Al Darlan's private eye agency afloat. This too is inventive. The income source is mainly linked to Darlan's partner Mike Trapper.

Al Darlan and Mike Trapper are unusual in Hoch, as an older and younger person who work together. Their differing ages are a springboard to the plot in "The Pulp Artist's Wife" and "The Girl Next-Door". The two have different perspectives. and different opportunities. (Simon Ark and his narrator are also of different ages, But this is given a fantastic, non-realistic treatment, unlike the realistic Darlan-Trapper tales.)

In his 2004 Mystery*File interview, Hoch told Steve Lewis: "The Stanton & Ives series was born out of my need for characters who were younger and more modern than my retired cops and spies." This shows *contrasts in age, and their implications* were much on Hoch's mind during this era. Note also Hoch's concern for the "modern", a long-time interest of his.

A Wandering-Daughter Job. "A Wandering-Daughter Job" (2008) takes its title from the classic private-eye short story "Fly Paper" (1929) by Dashiell Hammett.

Unfortunately, the mystery plot is simple and uninventive.

The tale's best feature: the performance art. This echoes earlier Hoch tales:

- The arts festival is explicitly inspired by the real-life Burning Man festival. This recalls "Midsummer Night's Scheme" (2004), which is set at the Burning Man.
- The wedding imagery recalls the celebrity wedding in "The Theft of the Wedding Doves" (2002).

We learn that Darlan's city is around a six hour drive from New York City.

Ulysses S. Bird

During the 1970's Hoch wrote a short-lived series about con man Ulysses S. Bird, who mainly preyed upon other crooks. Unlike the Nick Velvet stories, which usually involve a whodunit plot, the Bird tales lack any mystery, being rather mild tales of scams.

Bird debuted in "Meet Ulysses S. Bird: The Million-Dollar Jewel Robbery" (1973), a routine work that doesn't tell us much about Bird. The tale has upscale Manhattan settings. But it focuses on a big-time swindler who's Bird's target and other crooks, rather than Manhattan sophisticates.

The third tale in the series, "The Credit Card Caper" (1974), makes pleasant reading.

Paul Tower, the Lollipop Cop

Paul Tower. Hoch published three stories about Paul Tower, a policeman whose assignment was to speak to young children in schools about police work. Paul Tower would hand out candy to the kids, and was known as the Lollipop Cop.

The Lollipop Cop. "The Lollipop Cop" (1974) is Paul Tower's debut.

The Kindergarten Witch. "The Kindergarten Witch" (1975) takes place not in school, but at a bingo game. It has two mysteries: an impossible crime, and a murder. Both come to clever, unexpected solutions.

Captain Leopold tends to be decisive, confident and aggressive in his investigations. Paul Tower seems more hesitant.

Despite the word "witch" in the title, the tale does not have any witches or other supernatural aspects. Instead, the story is about something possibly paranormal.

The impossibility involves a seemingly paranormal event. The detective eventually comes up with a completely non-paranormal explanation of the event.

However, the story does not flatly deny the existence of the paranormal. Instead, the sleuth shows that even if paranormal powers were real, they could not be used to explain the events of the tale. Looked at strictly as a piece of reasoning, the detective's reasoning about this is sound.

As a complete nonbeliever in the paranormal, I find this approach disturbing. I prefer impossible crime tales to reject the paranormal out of hand.

As best I can tell, Hoch never used this dubious approach to the paranormal in any other tale. That's a Good Thing.

Charles Spacer

Charles Spacer. The Charles Spacer tales mix espionage and mystery.

Hoch wrote five tales in the 1980's with the word "Assignment" in their titles. A guess: most or all of these are Charles Spacer stories. Another guess: these are perhaps all the Charles Spacer short stories that exist. These tales begin with "Assignment: Enigma" (1980), which Francis M. Nevins calls the first Charles Spacer story. The rest are "Assignment: Labyrinth" (1980), "The Hatchtree Assignment" (1984), "The Sleeper Assignment" (1986), "The Film Festival Assignment" (1986).

Charles Spacer is a sales executive at an electronics firm. At least some of his tales involve him with high technology: "The Hatchtree Assignment", "The Film Festival Assignment". Hoch has always been interested in advanced tech.

Charles Spacer is a successful man in an advanced, fascinating industry. He has a certain glamour, although this is not oversold by the tales. As a brainy man with a good job he recalls Dr. Sam and Susan Holt.

The Hatchtree Assignment. "The Hatchtree Assignment" (1984) is a minor tale. It does not have a full-fledged mystery. Instead, there is a sort of surprise twist or revelation at the tale's end. This twist takes the place of an explicit mystery in other Hoch tales.

One can treat the tale as a mystery: "What are the bad guys up to? What are their plans?" And the surprise twist at the end forms the solution to that mystery.

Unfortunately, I found the surprise twist solution to be less creative than the many outstanding mystery plots in Hoch's numerous good mystery tales. I'm glad that Hoch mainly stuck to traditional mystery paradigms in his other work.

Another problem: I didn't enjoy the storytelling in the tale, finding it flat.

The Film Festival Assignment. "The Film Festival Assignment" (1986) is a delightful work. It has a sparkling setting and background: an Italian film festival.

"The Film Festival Assignment" has a sound mystery puzzle plot.

There is a criminal scheme in this tale. But it is not a completely *hidden* scheme, unlike many Hoch works. Instead, the detective and the reader learn fairly early in the tale, that the scheme is going on. However, this still leaves many parts of the scheme mysterious, and the sleuth and reader have to figure these out, as a major component of the tale's mystery.

"The Film Festival Assignment" is another Hoch tale, in which an anticipated performance forms the climax of the story.

Sir Gideon Parrot

Sir Gideon Parrot. The Sir Gideon Parrot tales, are affectionate evocations and spoofs of Golden Age mystery stories.

Lady of the Impossible. "Lady of the Impossible" (1981) is the first Parrot story.

The narrator of "Lady of the Impossible" recalls the series narrator in the Simon Ark tales:

- Both are unnamed in the stories.
- Both are successful Manhattan businessmen.
- Both are summoned into the cases, by the imperious series detective.
- The flamboyant Parrot startles the narrator's secretary at the tale's start, with his appearance and manner. Simon Ark can be startling too.

The narrator is explicitly called a Watson in the story. Watsons - friends of the detective who narrate his cases - used to be common in mystery fiction. They are present in Hoch's Simon Ark and Sir Gideon Parrot tales, but not many other Hoch series. Some Golden Age detective tales had Watsons; many did not. Still, if one is trying to invoke Golden Age tropes, having a Watson in a pastiche of Golden Age fiction like "Lady of the Impossible" is virtually mandatory.

Many Golden Age mystery plots were enormously complex. Hoch includes plenty of plot complexity in "Lady of the Impossible". This complexity is helped by the presence of that Hoch favorite, the "hidden scheme".

Ellery Queen Pastiches

The Circle of Ink. "The Circle of Ink" (1999) is a pastiche of Hoch's favorite mystery writer, Ellery Queen. It is especially strong at recreating the plotting style of the Queen books, notably the works of the late 1940's and early 1950's. Most writers who do pastiches are oriented towards literary mannerisms and verbal style, but a plot-creative writer like Hoch is picking up on puzzle plots, instead.

The Ben Snow tale, "The Victorian Hangman" (1988), also has elements reflecting the same late EQ novels.

The Wrightsville Carnival. "The Wrightsville Carnival" (2005) is another EQ pastiche. Its most Queen-like feature is its treatment of Wrightsville, the fictitious city that is the setting for so many Queen tales. Hoch employs the same paradigm that opens many EQ Wrightsville tales: "Ellery arrives in Wrightsville after an absence, and learns what Wrightsville institutions and businesses have changed or survived." Hoch is careful with the geography of Wrightsville. One suspects Hoch is working off the Wrightsville map in Queen's novel *Double, Double* (1950). This map shows the locations of most of Wrightsville's institutions and businesses. Hoch also revisits settings from at least three EQ works, all mentioned in footnotes.

Beyond this Wrightsville treatment, however, "The Wrightsville Carnival" does not have much of an Ellery Queen feel. Instead, it incorporates elements that reflect Hoch traditions, rather than EQ ones:

- Women running businesses.
- The carnival is a "festival in a park near a town's center": a common event in the Dr. Sam stories.
- Ellery is shown liking the company of an "attractive" woman, recalling Dr. Sam and Captain Leopold.
- SPOILERS. The mystery's solution involves contemporary technology. This is an example of Hoch's interest in *modernity*.

As is typical of Hoch, "The Wrightsville Carnival" is a soundly constructed whodunit. But the mystery is not inspired, at least by Hoch's standards. And the tale is bland in its story telling and characters.

Non-Series Tales

"The Haggard Society" (2000) is a non-series tale, that mixes suspense with a puzzle plot mystery. This tale has some of the most magical storytelling and atmosphere in Hoch's work. "The Fading Woman" (2000) is another mixture of mystery and suspense, one with some good plot ideas. Both stories center on an intelligent woman, trapped in a mysterious and menacing situation. The emphasis is on mysterious: in both cases, the sinister events she encounters are complex, baffling, and hard for either her or the reader to explain. Of course, Hoch proceeds to a full explanation in both stories, in the puzzle plot tradition. This structure allows Hoch a complete fusion between mystery and suspense.

Generally, most authors' non-mystery "suspense" crime fiction is not as well plotted as true mystery tales. Hoch's "The Ring with the Velvet Ropes" (1968) is an exception, which is imaginatively and ingeniously plotted throughout.

"King's Knight Gambit Declined" (1973) emphasizes the importance of U.S. mail in that era. Most of the characters' business is conducted by mail. In real life, Hoch conducted his professional career as a writer, and many of his friendships, through the mail. So did many other writers.

"King's Knight Gambit Declined" opens with the protagonist being hired by a client. This recalls the Nick Velvet stories.