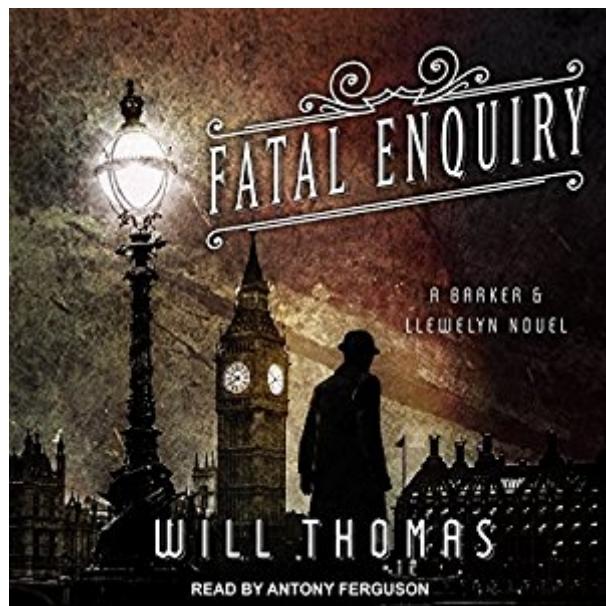


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Fatal Enquiry: Barker & Llewelyn Series, Book 6



Synopsis

Some years ago, Cyrus Barker matched wits with Sebastian Nightwine, an aristocrat and sociopath, and in exposing his evil, sent Nightwine fleeing to hide from justice somewhere in the far corners of the earth. The last thing Barker ever expected was to encounter Nightwine again - but the British government, believing they need Nightwine's help, has granted him immunity for his past crimes, and brought him back to London. Nightwine, however, has more on his mind than redemption - and as Barker and Llewellyn set out to uncover and thwart Nightwine's real scheme, they find themselves in the gravest danger of their lives.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Fans of this series can heave a big sigh of relief. After a considerable wait, the next installment of Barker and Llewellyn adventures is here. And it's really good. Reading the first of Thomas Llewellyn's narration was like reading a letter from an old friend. Thomas is an exceptional middleman for the reader--often finding out things when the reader does, but in Barker's world and experience.

Readers of the series know that Barker was the son of missionary parents in China, that his parents died there, and, mentioned in The Limehouse Text, that he had an older brother. How Barker survived his childhood and young adulthood is described in more detail (finally), as is the basis for the enmity Barker has for Sebastian Nightwine. The cast of recurring characters show up--Harm, Mac, Israel, Reverend Andy, Inspector Poole, Seamus O'Muircheartaigh, Pollock Forbes, Phillipa Ashleigh, Soho Vic--and there is a lovely young woman for Thomas to moon over. Details are added

that show the growth of the characters; little things that show that Thomas is building his own life, such as weekly meetings with friends at his club, as well as a deepening of the formal relationship between Thomas and Mac into--dare I say it--friendship. At last we get a glimpse of Barker without his spectacles and find out what Thomas' nickname on the streets is. Predictably, he is less than pleased with it. Barker and Llewellyn briefly contemplate a bit of larceny while in Westminster Abbey on the run for the murder of Lord Clayton. There is a wonderful bit at the end that will probably set up the next book (which will arrive hopefully sooner than this one.) Be advised that not all favorite characters make it out alive; one of the deaths will leave a big gap in future installments. The reader gets excellent historical accuracy as well; a real treat for the picky readers among us. So why did I give this book only four stars, if I like it so much? Well, it's basically due to Nightwine being the villain of the piece. I wasn't intrigued by him the first time we met him in the first book, and I'm a bit impatient with having to deal with him for a whole book. Normally the villains in this series have motivations or circumstances that make them interesting--a man in desperate search for the knowledge in a book to further his ambitions, revenge for being cuckolded, gang warfare, the desire to drive the British out of Ireland. Even in *The Hellfire Conspiracy*, the villain's evil is interesting to a point due to his accomplice and situation. But here, Nightwine is simply a rotter, with no redeeming qualities at all to make him interesting, and the upper class connections to escape most of the consequences of his actions. He's just not that interesting to me. I found myself hurrying through the scenes with Nightwine in order to get to the better stuff. Why I give it four stars (I would love to give it four and a half stars or four and three quarters) is the outrageously fun opportunity to reenter the London of Barker and Llewellyn, engaging further with these characters and their world. The writing is so skillful and rich, it is a pleasure to be able to visit these characters at any time.

Although I've been a fan of Will Thomas' from the first time I picked up the initial Barker and Llewellyn novel in 2006 (shortly after I met Thomas and his family, entirely by coincidence, in a London pub; in the interests of disclosure I'll say I haven't been in contact with him since), I hadn't realized quite how much I'd missed the pair until the second or third chapter of *"Fatal Enquiry."* After that, I pretty much read straight through to the end with minimal interruptions. Readers who've been drumming their fingers waiting for this latest addition to the series will find a lot that's rewarding here, and a lot that pays off the wait. But as many other reviewers have suggested, there is something different about this Barker and Llewellyn title that makes it, in some key ways, a big departure for the series. As I've noted in most or maybe all of my reviews of earlier Barker and Llewellyn books, Will Thomas' standard approach is to put us in a setting that's probably relatively

recognizable to most mystery readers -- late-nineteenth century London -- but then carries us into much less familiar segments of that era's society -- Irish revolutionaries, Chinese immigrants, London's Jewish community, and so on. (Of course, being Scottish and Welsh respectively, Barker and Llewelyn are also outsiders to a fair degree.) "Fatal Enquiry" has very little of that occasionally unsettling blend of familiar and unfamiliar. That's because in this book, Barker and Llewelyn are not master and student trying to catch their criminal prey, but are themselves the prey, marked for destruction by Barker's oldest and most dangerous foe, Col. Sebastian Nightwine. I really liked the way the premise of the story was introduced in chapter one, with Barker's police friend Poole coming to tell him a VIP had requested Scotland Yard's protection from a potential attacker ... the attacker being Barker himself, with Nightwine the VIP. After that, Barker and Llewelyn's world collapses around them ... quickly, disorientingly, and by this series' standards, quite violently. Characterization sometimes felt a bit too ... "too." Barker and even Llewelyn a bit too superhuman, Nightwine a bit too Moriarty, with his fingers on every lever of power. The one "character" who came out beautifully well-defined and evocative was, as always, London itself. I think we learn more about Barker in this book than in the rest of the series put together. Readers following the series will want to read this one for that reason alone, I think, but even with my reservations noted above this is a good entry in an excellent series. I've found Will Thomas' work to be the Lake Wobegon of mystery series: all the books are above average. By that standard, even a title that some may find disappointing is still worth reading. It's definitely enough to make me start drumming my fingers waiting for the next one.

I've read all the Barker & Llewelyn novels by Will Thomas. This is the only one I didn't care for very much. Throughout this novel, Thomas Llewelyn became the main character while Cyrus Barker remained in hiding from his nemesis, Sebastian Nightwine. While Llewelyn is a good character, he is only good when he's partnering with Barker. As a stand-alone main character, he just didn't interest me. Since the action mostly centered around Llewelyn, I found it not as interesting and sometimes very redundant. Too many fights and not enough depth to the plot. I'm still a big fan of Barker & Llewelyn and purchased the next novel, *Anatomy of Evil*.

This book is a bit different from the others, as there is no main mystery to solve. Rather, a character from their past returns and plans to not only wipe Barker and everyone associated with him off the map, but to burn his good reputation to the ground. And he has the money, connections and devious mind to do it. Although focused more on the battle of wits between the two rivals rather

than a mystery, I found I wasn't disappointed. The book moves right along, with twists and turns. We find out more about Barker's youth, find out a bit more about what's behind those dark glasses, and see Llewelyn take another step into the man he's to become under Barker's tutelage. Barker must decide how far to go to save those around him, and Llewelyn must make some decisions on his own, without Barker's instructions. A different focus than the others, but I liked how it tied up some things from their past, and introduced new characters and held their old ones up to the light. For, when push comes to shove, how many of their old friends will stand by them, and how many will bet against them coming out of this alive?

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