

# Death of an Old Master

*David Dickinson*

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## **Death of an Old Master** David Dickinson

“Excellent. . . Dickinson's knowledge of the arts, history and literature is nothing if not exhaustive, and adds enormously.”—*Publishers Weekly*

“Fine prose, high society and a complex plot recommend this series.”—*Library Journal*

Original or fake, masterpiece or forgery: misadventure or murder?

England 1899, and the Salisbury Galleries in London announce the biggest exhibition of “Old Master” paintings ever seen in Europe. Excitement is intense, but before the exhibition opens, one of Britain's leading art experts, Christopher Montague, is found dead in his study. When Lord Francis Powerscourt is called in to investigate, he finds that every book, notepad, and scrap of paper has been removed from the scene of the crime. Montague had been working on something that would have rocked the art world. Did the article that claimed a number of the “Old Masters” had been painted recently by a single hand have anything to do with his death?

Powerscourt embarks on an odyssey through a treacherous world of art dealers and picture restorers in pursuit of a master forger. He travels to Sicily where the trail grows cold, but, after the thrills and dangers of that lawless island, it is in a remote corner of the English countryside where the truth is finally revealed.

## **Death of an Old Master Details**


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Author : David Dickinson

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# From Reader Review Death of an Old Master for online ebook

## William says

The first half to two thirds of the book dragged and then it picked up and I enjoyed the last hundred pages or so. I'd give the first half of the book one or two stars and I'd give the last half four stars.

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## Nancy says

By now, you can probably figure out what shelf I landed on at my new Public Library---came home with a load of light mysteries, but this book (and its companion which I also read--Death Called to the Bar)were really fun for me because I love anything smacking of British high-life. This book was particularly amusing to me because it centered on the nouveau riche Americans at the turn of the last century and their hunger for European style and culture (thus their vulnerability when presented with forged paintings). Not a Nobel prize-winner! but entertaining to me.

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## Ann says

This is a well written, very intelligent mystery. A leading art expert is found murdered in London. He was just about to publish a book on art forgery which would cause great turmoil in the art community. He was about to say that most of the art on sale or on display in London was forged. Lord Francis Powerscourt is called in to investigate. This takes him into the dark world of art forgery, the business of selling art, and the intrigue of romance. It is set in 1899 and the information about the paintings of the Old Masters is woven very skillfully into the fictional story. I enjoyed it thoroughly and look forward to reading more.

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## Sandra says

Enjoyable and interesting; I like Dickinson's writing. The plot was also interesting and although I figured out the "whodunnit" part well before it was revealed (which I hardly ever do), it remained interesting to the end. Also, I liked it enough that I realized that I need to change my rating of Janet Evanovich's book, whichever one it was (the one with the number four, I think) to two stars; the Evanovich was ok, quick read, but I doubt I'll read more of her stuff.

I'm not sure if I'll read the other Lord Francis Powerscourt volumes (I have three more), but I'll probably keep them around for that rainy day when I feel like something rather light-hearted.

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## Shannon says

First off, the title is a misnomer. No "old master" meets his demise in this story! The tale involves a murdered art critic and his close friend who are both garroted. The plot does concern the sale and forgery of

"old master" paintings, although that genre doesn't really apply to many of the painters whose work was being forged, i.e. Gainsborough and Reynolds. The details of the con-man gallery methods were quite interesting, proving that a customer is always wise to do thorough background research and not be too trusting of even the most prestigious surroundings!

I was more than a little annoyed by the author's constant use of the characters whole names in every reference! It was an extremely distracting device to have to read: William Alaric Piper, sometimes several times on the same page! (he did it with many other characters as well, ugh!) Also, I felt that the murderer, while believable, did not live up to the expectation set-up by the subject matter of the book. (maybe that's just sour grapes on my part, as I definitely did not see it coming!)

Overall, I thought the forger himself was the most engaging person in the book, while the investigator, Lord Francis Powerscourt, left something to be desired. Motivation, perhaps. He is of the dilettante school of detective, of which Lord Peter Wimsey is probably the best known and the best-drawn of the type!

While it was a fairly good read, it was overlong and drifted into areas that didn't really advance the plot much. (i.e. the Powerscorts trip to Corsica.)

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### **Emg says**

I had difficulty getting into the book. The first part was so choppy that it didn't seem to flow. It became more focused toward the end.

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### **Michael says**

Slightly more restrained outing for Lord Powerscourt this time; so no marshalling of Venice's waiters, no blow by blow cricket matches or gleeful pyromaniac fire inspectors. There's still time for some boy's own gun play, Nelson's eye, playtime with the little ones and plenty of unrestrained alcohol consumption from trusty sidekicks. Surprisingly, considering Dickinson's wide knowledge of the art world, it's the series first court room sequence that shines rather than the nefarious machinations of those dastardly greedy art dealers.

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### **Jocelyn Harvey says**

I've been raving about David Dickinson's Powerscourt series, set in England (with several divergences elsewhere in Europe) in the late Victorian era. This is one of the best of the 5 or so I've read so far - the same wonderfully detailed, fascinating characters, both major and a vast cast of secondary folk; the same intricate plot lines, often deceptive, but with a particularly intriguing premise this time - the world of art fraud in the period. There are fakes, forgeries, blatant self-interest and abundant fraudulent practices, including the creation (and sale of course, to purportedly ignorant social-climbing rich Americans) of "new old masters". Lots and lots of fun. Strongly recommended. This one is as rich as the first Powercourt (Goodnight, Sweet Prince).

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### **? Irena ? says**

I was wondering where this series would go after the excellent *Death and the Jubilee*. It didn't disappoint. It

seems that in every new book the author introduces something new and he is not lazy with it either. Every new book starts sort of slow, then it picks up and, more often than not, hits you with a twist or two for good measure. Just in case you were planning to forget about it.

*Death of an Old Master* takes place two years after the Jubilee. This time there is no threat to the empire unless you count an embarrassment in artistic circles as one. However, there are two garrotted victims, one of whom might have been a leading expert in authenticating the works of art if he'd lived. He is also Lady Lucy's cousin, so of course Lord Powerscourt is on the case.

Parallel with his investigation into the murder of two bright young men, you follow a duo of art dealers who target impoverished families taking their paintings and selling them to rich Americans. As despicable as it sounds, it wouldn't be as bad if most of those paintings weren't forgeries. The author uses this to point the hypocrisy of pretty much everyone involved. When an American says how they don't need nobles in his country, an art dealer is quick to think that *'an aristocracy of wealth might have replaced one based on birth.'*

By now I am used to and expect an occasional dose of humour in these books. The remarks are always on the spot and they always follow the theme of the book. One American didn't even want to look at the nude body on one of the paintings, but another liked it very, very much and his comments are hilarious (*'There's some vulgar religious picture my wife picked up hanging above the fireplace at present, Moses leading the children of Israel out of Egypt. Well, Moses can just lead them all someplace else now.'*; when he compares the paintings with religious motifs to the paintings he likes: *'Those holy women give me the creeps, Mr Piper, I don't mind telling you. And those damned portraits of all those noblemen all dressed up in their finery.'* [...] *They give me the creeps too.'*).

And there is always Powerscourt's best friend, Lord Fitzgerald, to lighten the mood.

Anyway, while it may not pack a punch as the last one (it is hard to compete with a conspiracy, after all), *Death of an Old Master* is a great story. What I've written is only on the surface of the story, of course. I love how the case, even when solved, leaves you thinking about the participants. Some you will feel sorry for. Others not so much.

And that ending made me cry.

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## Abbey says

**BOTTOM LINE:** A leading art critic dies, forgeries abound, much money passes hands, lovers get found and then lost and then found and then... someone else dies. Highly recommended for historical mystery readers who prefer late Victorian/Edwardian stories, as this series is one of the best at showing us a glimpse of a time long past while being very entertaining as well.

**#3 Lord Francis Powerscourt**, 1898 London, rural Norfolk, Corsica  
[historical thriller]

**Main Characters:** Lord Francis Powerscourt, Intelligence officer extra-ordinaire; his dear wife Lucy, sharply intelligent and brave, whose hundreds of relations prove to be surprisingly helpful in tracking down the whereabouts of several important people; his second-in-command, Lord Johnny Fitzgerald, who has never met a drink he didn't enjoy but somehow always manages to keep his wits and his courage high; Christopher Montague, a critic writing an explosive article, who dies for his art; Horace Buckley and his wife Rosalind, who fall a-foul of love and youth; DeCourcy and Piper, gallery owners with many secrets; the

lovers Orlando (the forger) and his dearest Imogen.

Christopher Montague was an up-and-coming VIP in the art world. Young, handsome and brilliant, he was about to publish an article that would upset a lot of folks, but now he is dead, and all his papers are missing. As Christopher was connected to his wife's web of multitudinous relatives, Lord Francis takes a look into the death and finds much money, a great deal of possible prestige at stake, vast amounts of intrigue, and skullduggery as intricate as any spymaster could wish. The more he looks into the matter the more difficult and expensive it becomes, and then another young man dies.

Christopher's lover's husband is put on trial, with the assumed motive being jealousy, but Lord Francis doesn't think it's as easy as all that. With the help of his sharp and courageous wife Lucy, his best friend the hard-drinking Lord Johnny Fitzgerald, and their innumerable connections among the elite of England at the end of the 1890s, he follows the convoluted trail to its carefully plotted end, and saves the day. And along the way we are treated to an absolute feast of personalities and nice folks from the period.

Dickinson has crafted another excellent visit with Lord Francis and his friends, set us a nifty plot to follow, and keeps the pace up just high enough. A true craftsman, he weaves in all sorts of possibilities without straying too far away from reality. His characterizations are excellent, with enough of the regular cast being mixed with new people (good guys and scoundrels alike) that we enjoy meeting. And he finishes things off extremely well, not only tying up the main plot threads but also weaving in all the little bits and pieces he has left so tantalizingly along the way.

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### **Kate Millin says**

'Original or fake, masterpiece or forgery - misadventure or murder?' England 1899, and the Old Masters have come to London in a major exhibition of Venetian paintings. New World money and prices are coming to London too, as American nouveau riches millionaires bid to carry off many of the masterpieces across the Atlantic. The excitement is intense.

Then a leading art critic, Christopher Montague, is found dead in his study. Lord Francis Powerscourt soon discovers that in the weeks before his death Montague had been investigating a theory that could have destroyed the exhibition and rocked the London art world to its foundations. According to Montague, most of the Venetian paintings were fakes and some of the alleged Old Masters were in fact, brilliant - and recent - forgeries.

Powerscourt embarks on an odyssey through the treacherous world of art dealers and picture restorers in pursuit of a master forger and a murderer. His quest takes him and Lady Lucy to sunbaked Corsica, with its traditions of violence and blood feuds, and then back to a remote Jacobean mansion in England when Powerscourt's investigation turns into a life or death race against time...'

This is my first Powerscourt book, which I found very difficult to put down. The plot moved and twisted in many ways before an excellent denouement. I even guessed who did it, but it could have been a number of people. Would love to see the fakes - they sounded brilliant.

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### **Susan says**

The murder of an art critic distantly related to his wife, Lady Lucy, pitches Lord Francis Powerscourt into the shady world of art dealers in turn-of-the-century England. Christopher Montague was about to expose dealers who sell forged Old Masters to naive, wealthy Americans. The police, however, focus on Montague's affair with a married woman. Powerscourt is almost positive that the husband who is on trial for the murder is innocent, but there's no evidence against his own suspect and the defense counsel must pull off a courtroom scene worthy of Perry Mason, but rather more entertaining.

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## **LJ says**

DEATH OF AN OLD MASTER (Hist. Mys-Lord Francis Powerscourt-England/Corsica-1899) – VG+  
Dickinson, David – 3rd in series  
Constable, 2004, UK Hardcover – ISBN: 1841196045

First Sentence: The old man walked slowly across the fields.

When art critic Christopher Montague is found garroted, enquiry agent Lord Francis Powerscourt, is asked to investigate. Powerscourt finds that the critic had been having an affair with a married woman. The husband, Mr. Buckley, is the obvious suspect and is arrested.

Powerscourt is not convinced Montague was working on a book to expose the gallery of de Courcy and Piper of selling fake old masters. If he's right, it will discredit the gallery and all the other appraisers who have claimed the work to be genuine. The gallery has a lot at stake selling expensive painting to wealthy American industrial millionaires. With plenty of motives and possible suspects, Powerscourt must find the truth before Buckley is convicted.

With each book, I become a bigger fan. Dickinson does everything right.

There are great characters, each of whom is fully developed. Powerscourt isn't stuffy, but a family man in love with his wife and children. He is well-placed in society, but also ex-military and highly-regarded by those in power. But all the characters are wonderful; Charles Augustus Pugh, the barrister defending Buckley; Orlando Blaine, the artist; Johnny Fitzgerald, Powerscourt friend; Lady Lucy, Powerscourt's wife, and her battalion of relatives, and all the others. They are all fully developed and alive. I was amused at the American millionaire industrialists being portrayed at uncultured rubes, which they may well have been.

The sense of time and place is wonderful. When the characters travel, you travel with them. When they are freezing in the snow, you reach for a blanket. The courtroom scenes were fascinating as was the look inside the world of art and galleries. The suspense was excellent all the way to the end.

I very much enjoy that each book can stand on it's own but there is a segue at the end that makes me want to read immediately for the next book but doesn't make me feel I'm being tricked into it.

This was a wonderful book in a series I shall definitely continue.

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## **Nancy Ellis says**

I enjoy these Victorian mysteries and the chance to lose myself in time. These books are more substantial than many I have tried and include much interesting information about life in those times. This book deals with the art forgery scandals of the day as the newly rich American businessmen come to London to buy "Old Masters" without troubling themselves overmuch to verify the origin of the painting. It made for a fun read!

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## **Chantelle (aka the Blogmonstar) says**

Art forgers, jilted lovers, somewhat gullible American multi-millionaires and priceless masterpieces weave the journey for Lord Powerscourt in *Death of an Old Master*, the third tale from David Dickinson about his series about an ex-Army Intelligence Officer, Lord Francis Powerscourt.

Lady Lucy, Lord Francis' wife of 7 years, asks him to investigate the death of one of her many relatives, Christopher Montague. Montague is an up-and-coming art critic and author who was writing an article about some of the beautiful Masterpieces currently on show at Piper and de Courcy's art gallery being well-painted forgeries. He was found dead in the study of his flat, garotted with piano wire. His mistress' husband is missing and so are many of his books and every last scrap of paper in his desk and the room.

So the mystery begins. Was it something to do with the Italian Masterpieces and the art dealers who made hundreds of thousands by commanding steep prices from American businessmen? Was it the mistress' missing husband? Was it one of the authenticators whom Montague would put out of business with the success of both his article and next book? Dickinson leads us around London and parts of rural England (well, rural in the late 1800s), as Lord Francis tries to find the true murderer before it is too late.

A more detailed review: <http://blog.butterflytempest.net/>

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