



The Fat Man: A Tale of North Pole Noir

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A satire of traditional Christmas stories and noir, *The Fat Man* makes the perfect gift for the literary-minded.

A hardboiled elf is framed for murder in a North Pole world that plays reindeer games for keeps, and where favorite holiday characters live complex lives beyond December.

Fired from his longtime job as captain of the Coal Patrol, two-foot-three inch 1,300-year-old elf Gumdrop Coal is angry. He's one of Santa's original elves, inspired by the fat man's vision to bring joy to children on that one special day each year. But somewhere along the way things went sour for Gumdrop. Maybe it was delivering one too many lumps of coal for the Naughty List. Maybe it's the conspiracy against Christmas that he's starting to sense down every chimney. Either way, North Pole disillusionment is nothing new: Some elves brood with a bottle of nog, trying to forget their own wish list. Some get better. Some get bitter. Gumdrop Coal wants revenge. Justice is the only thing he knows, and so he decides to give a serious wakeup call to parents who can't keep their vile offspring from landing on the Naughty List. But when one parent winds up dead, his eye shot out with a Red Ryder Carbine-Action Two-Hundred-Shot Range Model BB gun, Gumdrop Coal must learn who framed him and why. Along the way he'll escape the life-sucking plants of the Mistletoe Forrest, battle the infamous Tannenbomb Giant, and survive a close encounter with twelve very angry drummers and their violent friends. The horrible truth lurking behind the gingerbread doors of Kringle Town could spell the end of Christmas-and of the fat man himself. Holly Jolly!

The Fat Man: A Tale of North Pole Noir Details

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Author : Ken Harmon

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From Reader Review The Fat Man: A Tale of North Pole Noir for online ebook

Amy says

Loved this! If you're a fan of the genre and Christmas "classics," this is a great read, chock full of references.

Stacia says

Things have been busy/crazy lately, so I applied only about 3 brain cells when reading this & that seems about right. It starts out as a fairly hard-boiled noir (well, as hard-boiled as cranky elves can be), but ends up (appropriately?) Christmas-y happy/sappy/all is well in the end. For those who love little references & mentions of other books/movies/cultural references in their reading, you would definitely enjoy this book. There were so, so many, such as Zwarte Piet, Ralphie from A Christmas Story, A Christmas Carol, Charlie Brown, King Kong, Citizen Kane, Miracle on 34th Street, Top Gun, Green Acres, The Twelve Days of Christmas, etc.... I think there was something on almost every page. Oddly (in my opinion), the Christ child comes up at various times in the story too, which seemed to me to be an odd mix of the religious amid the overwhelmingly pop culture & noir tone. In a way it worked, but in a way, it seemed a little strange to have the religious/secular mix in a book that I had anticipated would be firmly set in the secular world.

Overall, I'd say that if you're looking for a light, fairly fun seasonal read, some Coal Patrol cranky elves, & hard-boiled lingo that doesn't take too much brainpower, you might enjoy The Fat Man.

Keeley says

Initially, I would have rated this one four or five stars. I adored all of the references to Christmas carols and pop culture. And I really, really loved the Christian message of "the child," how mercy and love are more important than justice and making people behave. It was a cute story, but it got a little too strange toward the end and went on just a little too long because of it. Overall, I enjoyed it- Johnny Heller is an AWESOME narrator! I would recommend this for a fun, light, irreverent Christmas read.

Deb says

This book ROCKS. Funny and smart. Elements from every imaginable Christmas story are turned on their heads and incorporated. Written in delicious noir fashion, with gritty dialog and an unflappable hero. Truly brilliant stuff. You just gotta read it. (And Peter Jackson needs to option this for a movie!)

Christy Lockstein says

The Fat Man by Ken Harmon is a tale of North Pole Noir. Gumdrop Coal has lost his position on Santa's Coal Patrol, and he's not about to take it lying down. Furious that naughty children will be rewarded with

gifts for their bad behavior, Gumdrop decides to teach the parents a lesson they'll never forget, but when someone is murdered, the evidence all points to Gumdrop, and he'll have to take it on the lam to prove his innocence, but who can he trust when all of Kringle Town seems to be in the scam? Harmon has created a new and ingenious genre for Christmas: tongue-in-cheek noir. With the hard-boiled dialogue and plot of Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett, there are plenty of good-lookin' dames and back-stabbing, two-timing jerks. Then Harmon throws in every single Christmas song, movie, story, and fable with a huge dose of humor. He is the master of the one-liner "...he deserved to be beaten every day like a rabid pinata", and I found myself reading several passages out loud to whoever was nearest me, because they were too good not to share. Harmon turns all of the traditional Christmas novellas with their schmaltz and sentimentality on their ear, because not only is the story a great crime novel, it also has unexpected heart. The story does take a hard turn in the last third (so hard it almost creaks a bit), but Harmon keeps it on track for a pleasing conclusion, although I do hold out hopes for a sequel. This would make for a terrific annual series!

Gheeta says

I was pleasantly surprised at how much I liked this story. I have to admit that I found the holiday cliches a bit tired after the first chapter, but once I got past that and just chalked it up to the writing style I was able to enjoy the story. I think this book is really meant to be heard and not read. Think Sam Spade or the Thin Man--hence the noir style of the story.

It is a pretty quick read, you could probably finish it in a weekend or so. You will see references to many of your favorite Christmastime characters from literature and popular culture. If you are a bit jaded with the commercialism of the holidays, this is a good story to remind you of the real meaning of the season--yes, even though it has elves and Santa and 'ho ho ho'. The underlying message of the story makes this book worth reading.

Paul Pessolano says

A "Ho-Ho-Ho" three times over for this book. If you are looking for a "Christmas Read" that is totally delightful and clever, you owe it to yourself to pick up this book. Although this book is categorized as mystery/thriller, it could just as easily be classified as either humor or fiction/literature.

Gumdrop Coal, one of Santa's elves, has just lost his job. He finds naughty boys and girls and puts coal in their Christmas stockings. I know this guy!!!!

Gumdrop loses his job when a parent of one of his naughty list children is found dead, and Gumdrop is implicated. The parent was shot with an "Official Red Ryder Carbide-Action Two-Hundred-Shot Range Model BB Gun with a compass in the stock". One question, "Do you remember Ralphie (your gonna shot your eye out) from a "Christmas Story"?

Gumdrop must get to the bottom of this treachery and discovers what may be a sinister plot contrived by his replacement, Charles "Candy" Cane. It seems that "Candy" Cane may have enlisted the support of such people as "The Misfit Toys", "Uncle Billy" from "It's a Wonderful Life", and of all people, "Tiny Tim".

Gumdrop finds some support from his fellow elf, "Dingleberry Fizz", and a female reporter from "The Marshmellow Gazette", Rosebud Jubilee.

A cleverly put together story that can be enjoyed by everyone. Harmon is able to interweave several loved Christmas tales into his story and does leave the reader with some thought about the holiday season and our relations with other people.

I am positive that once you have read this book you will keep it for future Christmas's, and recommend it to your friends.

Megan (ReadingRover) says

I'm all about the holiday mysteries with punny Christmas witticisms but some tend to go a bit overboard. This was a noir style frame up of an elf named Gumdrops Coal. It had so much potential but it was just too boring. Blah blah blah. There was a lot of talk about stuff happening but nothing was happening. There were a lot of Christmas wise cracks but then it became overload. I never thought I'd say I heard too many witty Christmas one liners in an audiobook but I'm saying it. After this I need to clean the boring noir soot off myself with a fun holiday rom com. Blah. At least the narrator was good. He gave life to all of the Christmas characters and stereotypes. He did a great job portraying their personalities through their voices. I would have cut this one short if it wasn't for him.

Lolly's Library says

2.5 stars

The first two-thirds of this book started out in a rip-roaring manner, easily earning it a four-, even five-star rating for its originality and storytelling. The back third, however, fell off steeply into one- and two-star territory as the story descended into schmaltz and religious proselytizing. I realize there will be some well-trodden referrals to Christianity in association with Christmas (and as much as that bugs me, have no fear, I'm not going to give a dissertation on the fact that Christmas is a usurpation and amalgamation of various pagan midwinter celebrations and festivals, done so in an attempt to bring those pagans in line with the new dominant religion of Christianity), but the heavy-handed way in which they ruled the last third of the book, thereby giving the story a rather weak ending, felt too out-of-character for the genre. The reader is moved out of a Raymond Chandler-esque North Pole and into a suffocatingly preachy Thomas Kincade winter wonderland. What could've been an original take on noir, reminiscent of Jasper Fforde's Nursery Crime series, ended up a thinly-veiled reference to the joys of having faith in God. That's not what I had been anticipating at the start of the story. However, if that sounds like something right up your Christmas tree (which is actually based on the ancient Egyptian ritual of bringing palm fronds into the house at midwinter to symbolize renewal, but that kind of info really belongs in my aforementioned dissertation, which I'm not writing...really I'm not), give this peppermint twist of a tale a try.

Julia says

Laugh out loud funny (some of the time) - couldn't quite maintain the pace or humour all the way through. Enjoyable nevertheless and appropriate for the season.

My favourite quote from the book = "it did take some of the starch out of your tights"

Lindsay Stares says

What a shame. Harmon took a great premise and absolutely ruined it with shitty, shitty execution.

Premise: Gumdrop Coal is a sorry excuse for a noir hero, in a poorly constructed holiday world. Someone is framing him, or muscling him out, or trying to destroy Santa, or trying to ruin Christmas, or something. It isn't exactly coherent.

I loved this idea. Christmas elf noir? That could be great! The dark side of the holiday, maybe the dirty secrets of the elven sweatshops or some artifact is stolen and you don't know who to trust. A murder investigation, at least, right? Nothing that cool is in this book.

The story is boring. The characters are shallow, hollow, despicable things. The author doesn't come up with almost anything interesting; he's too busy stuffing the book with more horribly grating references to holiday crap.

What horrified me the most was the tone. It alternates wildly between fake-noir and sickly sweet. There's no tension. No drama. It's a thin excuse for a book that should be on fanfiction.net, not in hardcover.

There are maybe two scenes that show some originality and intriguing ideas. Of course, they're layered under so much derivative crap that it just doesn't feel worth it. Plus the main character is a cipher. He tries to be a noir hero, but the author's too scared to jettison all the cheerful Christmas junk, so he can't allow any real darkness into the story or the character. The whole reason noir heroes work is that they ride that line between staying afloat in a dark world and going too far in pursuit of their goals. When you don't allow that character actual moral ambiguity (he comes close, but only briefly), he becomes a useless whining mess.

Watching all those Christmas specials this past season helped me get more of the references. This did not help the book, since the references are either of terrible things, or do idiotic spins on okay things. If you pulled out all the references and direct quotations of other work (I HATE when authors do that! You can feel the slimy marketing mind-space it comes from. It's trying to make you feel like you're in on the joke: "Hey, I know that line! Hur, hur hur." Ugh.) you wouldn't have enough left to fill a grade-school essay.

See, the world of this book isn't interesting. It's all the Christmas movies and songs this guy could think of, all forced into awkwardly close quarters, and desperately pretending they make sense together.

I don't want to save that world.

I want to nuke it from orbit. It's the only way to be sure.

Also, for a book about Santa, Jesus was talked about a lot. Plus it was in a way that made him sound like some sort of sparkly fairy princess. "The special Child." It was faux-stealthily religious nastiness. That whole part (and the entire end) was so stupid that I have no words for it.

Stephen says

I found this completely by accident in a used bookstore and immediately knew it was right up my chimney.

This is the author's first novel and, admittedly, it has some flaws. It gets a bit busy during the third act, but even with that, the very idea of doing a pulpy murder mystery set in Santa's North Pole is brilliant. It kind of reminds me of *Who Censored Roger Rabbit?* which is a VERY different story than a certain movie with a similar name.

So you've got an elf, Gumdrop Coal, who talks like Sam Spade or Mike Hammer. He's a surly little bugger and he's wanted for murder - but it's a frame up, and the whole rest of the book is about whodunit.

Now, the crazy part in this is that almost EVERY Christmas story ever told fits in here somehow. You've got stuff from the old Rudolph TV specials, the Peanuts Cartoon, you name it. And yet, it all works out fairly well (although, as I stated, it gets a tad messy during the big finish). Satire only works when you do it right, and this book really reads like a hardboiled detective thriller, but with elves and Nutcrackers and reindeer and talking toys.

Bottom line: it's not perfect, but it works. It may get a little sappy at times, but that's Christmas stories for you! And the conclusion might be convoluted, but pulp mysteries tend to do that. So really, you have an almost seamless blend of two genres, a feat few beginning writers could pull off. Heck, there as seasoned pros who might not have handled it so well.

Danny Newell says

Really enjoyed this! Wish I'd discovered it a month ago during the holiday season instead of in January, 11 months too early, but it's short and fun and I suspect I'll revisit it every December for years to come. It has that "instant classic" feel to it.

Sure, the plot slowed down for me a bit in the final third, but the concept is fantastic and you'll have a smile on your face more often than not. It's almost like a Christmas-themed version of the insanely popular *READY PLAYER ONE* in that it incorporates so many of your favorite Christmas tales into one universe, and you get to watch all these timeless characters interact with each other.

It also reminded me of John Swartzwelder's Frank Burly series (comedic noir about a bumbling detective). Swartzwelder wrote 59 episodes of *THE SIMPSONS* during its 90s Golden Age (which is my favorite show of all time), so Swartzwelder's a grandmaster writer and a titan of comedy, all of which is on display in his Frank Burly series, but here's the thing--

Ken Harmon's prose in *THE FAT MAN* is even funnier.

I read *THE FAT MAN* in two sittings (which is rare for me) and genuinely chuckled aloud (which is even rarer for me) every few pages.

Harmon put so much thought and care into this that you gotta applaud him. His love of Christmas is apparent and more importantly, completely contagious. And it's all mixed flawlessly into a noir tone to hilarious effect. It's been a few days since I finished reading it and I still catch myself laughing at some of the imagery and ideas here.

I'd put this right up there with Calvin & Hobbes' "Tracer Bullet" comic strips as one of the most creative and best-written comedic noirs I've read. Can't wait to check it out again next December.

Jeff Grosser says

A funny, lighthearted holiday read.

Brian says

It had been, oh, nearly 14 years since I had read the classic crime novels by Hammet and Thompson. Soon after diving into Ken Harmon's *The Fat Man*, I remembered how much fun reading those novels had been. Many of the characteristics of those novels were all present here; the snappy similes and clever word-play, a protagonist with attitude, and of course a foxy dame.

Gumdrop Coal, the novel's narrator, is a likeable (little) fellow despite the pleasure he finds in punishing naughty children with lumps of coal. Gumdrop's motive is noble – to teach kids to be nice – but his take-no-prisoners approach is a little hard core. Perhaps that is why I liked him so; like lots of people (and maybe even myself), his heart is in the right place, but his stubborn inability to see beyond his own idea of right and wrong leads to trouble. I think we've all been there at some point in our lives, right?

Despite the fun factor inherent in a crime noir novel about elves, *The Fat Man* flirts a little too occasionally with caricature. Maybe it even crosses the line sometimes. Too, Harmon figures quite a bit of poplar culture into the plot, which threw me off initially. Somehow in my mind I equate all Santa and elf stories with a bygone era. When "Elfbay" is mentioned as a venue for commerce, however, it's as if a Toyota Prius has just driven through the set of "A Miracle on 34th Street".

I was a tad surprised as well by the religious overtones of the novel. Yes, I know Christmas is technically a religious holiday, but there's no denying the secularization of the holiday in popular culture and media. Pair that reality with a novel whose literary models were anything but religious, and the unexpected meditation on "The Child" and how He made the world a better place for us all makes the novel feel a bit dogmatic at times. Maybe Ken Harmon is a deeply devout Christian, and that's great. But is he trying to push something on us here besides a fun, quirky crime noir novel?

Still, *The Fat Man* has its moments. When Santa expresses his disappointment with Gumdrop over the way he has behaved, it comes off so genuine and heartfelt that I felt personally responsible. The Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come is hilarious, made even more so by his oh-so-Englishness. And of course there's Rosebud Jubilee, the sexy newspaper lady/investigative reporter all over the story of what's going down in Kringle Town. Not surprisingly, Gumdrop has the hots for her. The novel is at its absolute best when these two characters are on the same page at the same time. I wish they could have shared the stage a little more often.

I'd give 2.5 stars if I could, but I can't. The novel was fun at times, but truthfully, I was more excited about the novel before I started it than I was after I had finished it. Feeling generous in the holiday season, however, so I'll reluctantly go with three stars for Ken Harmon's *The Fat Man*.
