



# Antidote to Venom

*Freeman Wills Crofts*

[Download now](#)

[Read Online](#) 

# Antidote to Venom

*Freeman Wills Crofts*

**Antidote to Venom** Freeman Wills Crofts

‘Mr Wills Crofts is deservedly a first favourite with all who want a real puzzle’ – Times Literary Supplement

‘He always manages to give us something that really keeps us guessing’ – Daily Mirror

George Surridge, director of the Birmingham Zoo, is a man with many worries: his marriage is collapsing; his finances are insecure; and an outbreak of disease threatens the animals in his care.

As Surridge’s debts mount and the pressure on him increases, he begins to dream of miracle solutions. But is he cunning enough to turn his dreams into reality – and could he commit the most devious murder in pursuit of his goals?

This ingenious crime novel, with its unusual ‘inverted’ structure and sympathetic portrait of a man on the edge, is one of the greatest works by

this highly respected author. The elaborate means of murder devised by Crofts’s characters is perhaps unsurpassed in English crime fiction for its ostentatious intricacy.

This new edition is the first in several decades and includes an introduction by the award-winning novelist and crime fiction expert Martin Edwards.

## Antidote to Venom Details

Date : Published July 7th 2015 by Poisoned Pen Press (first published 1938)

ISBN : 9781464203794

Author : Freeman Wills Crofts

Format : Paperback 278 pages

Genre : Mystery, Fiction, Crime, Classics, Thriller, Mystery Thriller

 [Download Antidote to Venom ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online Antidote to Venom ...pdf](#)

**Download and Read Free Online Antidote to Venom Freeman Wills Crofts**

---

## From Reader Review Antidote to Venom for online ebook

### Tony says

ANTIDOTE TO VENOM. (1938). Freeman Wills Crofts. \*\*\*1/2.

“Crofts (1879-1957) was one of the pre-eminent writers in the golden age of British crime fiction. He was the author of more than thirty detective novels and was greatly acclaimed by his peers, including Agatha Christie and Raymond Chandler.” I suspect that Croft is not widely read today, but is more important as a footnote in the history of crime fiction. He was well-known as a writer of intricate plots that well thought out. In this novel, the Superintendent of the Birmingham Zoo runs into money trouble when his gambling and philandering habits begin to eat away at his income. He looks for relief to his aging and very ill aunt to offer him a way out, since she has told him that he would be her principal heir. When the aunt passes and he is ready to receive his money, he learns that the money he was left had been absconded by his aunt's attorney. This leads to an arrangement where our zoo magnate and the attorney become partners in a new crime that will bail both of them out of their troubles. This novel also features Chief Inspector Joseph French of Scotland Yard, a continuing hero of many of Croft's novels. As might be inspected, once French is on the case it is as good as solved.

---

### Gerry says

This is without doubt one of the most intriguing crime novels I have read for a long time. Freeman Wills Crofts called it 'an inverted story' as the events are initially seen through the eyes of the culprit(s). Only late into the novel, when Chief Inspector French enters the fray, do the usual police investigations take over. And the method works wonderfully well.

The setting is unusual in that it revolves around Birmingham Zoo where one of the protagonists, George Surrige, is director. Surrige is struggling with his marriage, finding it difficult to manage his money and trying to sort out disease that has struck some of his animals at the Zoo. He is understandably under tremendous pressure so when he meets a young lady he is ever-willing to become good friends with her.

He is awaiting an inheritance from someone who is seriously ill but who continues to hang on to life. When Surrige's debts become almost crippling this is too much for him to bear but he hangs on to the hope that when this person dies he expects to inherit quickly. But when this happens and once he meets the solicitor, a Mr Capper, who is acting for the person, the whole perspective of what is to come changes. And with it Surrige's life changes somewhat dramatically.

The solicitor himself is expecting to inherit some money from an ailing client and, with the help of Surrige, he decides to speed things along. And he does but even then things do not go smoothly and Surrige is left with little money, just expectations, which he finds difficult to come to terms with.

The client eventually dies suddenly and his complicated death is considered an accident so the matter is closed. That is until, quite by chance, Chief Inspector French hears about the case and immediately has his suspicions. He persuades his boss that he should be allowed to go to Birmingham to see if he can prove the theory that he has formed from his reading of the case in the newspapers.

Thus begins a more thorough investigation that eventually leads to a different verdict and also to the downfall, in quite different ways, of the two men who planned and executed the crime. French is justified in

his thinking and he is quite happy that Scotland Yard have come out tops.

'Antidote to Venom' is a superb crime novel with excellent and cunningly planned plot twists and as a consequence the tension builds throughout the tale to a terrific climax.

---

## Chris says

The most interesting feature of *Antidote to Venom* is its structure: as an inverted detective novel, it starts out following the criminals and not the detective, dealing with the prelude to murder from the eyes of the guilty. In this case, the guilty is one George Surrige, director of the Birmingham Zoo and desperate for money. His marriage is dry and loveless, all due to his perpetual lack of funds. He's scraped by for years waiting for an inheritance from a wealthy aunt. And when he falls for another woman and takes her up as his mistress, he finds the need for wealth even more pressing---with the inheritance, he can start life anew, dreaming of life in a small cottage with his mistress.

His aunt's death brings much-needed relief, until George finds that his inheritance is not forthcoming after all---the solicitor Capper has spent it all, and has nothing to offer a distraught George but a cunning plan. For Capper is waiting on an inheritance of his own, from a wealthy but ailing uncle who works at the zoo. With venomous snakes. If George can provide him the poison and dead body of one such snake, Capper will make all of their problems go away---don't ask about the details, it'll be better if George doesn't know for the inquest. And out of desperation, George takes him up on the offer.

It takes a good 75% of the novel before Crofts' series detective, Inspector French, even appears, and while that seems antithetical it works surprisingly well---it worked for Colombo, didn't it? French begins to pick and prod at the setup, certain that there's foul play at hand; I quite enjoy that element of the novel, watching the detective make and discard theories as they piece the case together. Some faulty theories lead to more successful ones, and soon French thinks he's on the right track, doggedly pursuing this case as his reputation---and Scotland Yard's---is on the line.

This structure offers a good look at George's existential woes, but as ambitious as the novel is, I'm not sure Crofts' writing is able to make the psychological elements work. George is sympathetic, but also came across less as a put-upon everyman and more as a desperate loser gambling everything on a bad bet. It is fascinating to see him put under the microscope, and I think that's where *Antidote to Venom* sells the inverted trick---the reader gets a solid feel for George and a good idea of why he turned to crime. And there's still a strong mystery element, as we discover the trick alongside the brilliant Inspector French---an ingenious method that took some serious thought and skill to pull off, and stands as one of the best of its kind that I've read. They don't make them like this any more---for one, the plot would easily be solved by checking the zoo's surveillance cameras. For another, George's behavior in the finale perhaps works best if the reader is of a religious persuasion---Crofts intended the novel to be a "positive" crime novel, and ends on a much different note than the usual fare.

*Antidote to Venom* is a novel of historical importance, as its combination of the inverse-mystery and the "direct" detective novel makes it unique in the Golden Age. The mystery is as ingenious as its solution, though the existential angst and the crushing burden of George's poverty aren't entirely successful, nor is Crofts' portrayal of this criminal's redemption. It remains a fascinating and enjoyable curio, though I think it will appeal most to Golden Age readers drawn to it by its inverted structure. In that department, Crofts was a capable writer who came up with several innovative ideas, and I think it lives up to its reputation.

---

## Michelle says

None of his characters are ever likable

---

## John says

Although FWC is one of my very favourite authors, I felt that this inverted mystery was a bit too long. In Martin Edwards' forward he explains that Crofts was trying to show how an otherwise decent person can be drawn into temptation and allowing his (Crofts) faith to show through. While I take this on board I still feel that the build up detailing how George SurrIDGE gradually turns from a decent man into a murderer was so long it began to get boring. When French eventually turns up on page 189 of 288 it gets better again and the reader is treated to all the usual painstaking and methodical detection much loved by his fans.

Would have been five stars if it had had a bit shorter build up but still very highly recommended.

---

## Judy says

This is an unconventional Golden Age crime story, which starts with a long build-up to murder. Then, once the killing has happened, it's slightly like Columbo, as we follow a policeman (Crofts' series detective Inspector French) in his efforts to bring the culprit to justice. Even though by this point we know whodunit, we don't know exactly how, and there is still a fiendishly complicated riddle to unravel.

The book has an intriguing setting, in and around a zoo, and author Crofts did a lot of research to make sure the atmosphere is utterly convincing. His writing style is also very readable.

I'll admit I preferred the section which follows French's investigations and am now keen to read some of Crofts' more traditional mysteries. French is an instantly appealing detective and I'd like to see a lot more of him.

At times I found the earlier chapters where we largely see through the eyes of a character who may or may not become a murderer rather oppressive and depressing. The book also has some religious content in its later stages which doesn't really work all that well. There's an interesting introduction by Martin Edwards which looks at how these various elements work together.

---

## Abbey says

I think Freeman Wills Crofts was better at writing the traditional whodunnit than these would-be psychological crime stories. I've come to this straight after 12.30 From Croydon and liked it even less. It doesn't help that the author put a note at the start explaining that he had made "an effort to tell a story of crime positively", an endeavour at which he completely failed. The motive for the murder is that the protagonist dislikes being poor and wants to support his mistress. Not exactly calculated to make the reader feel sympathetic towards him! In addition, he's entirely selfish - it's clear that he is interested only in himself and cares little for anyone else. You can see the author trying to make it look as though he finds himself

forced into a corner where the only option is to connive in a murder, but it just isn't convincing. Also there's a really weird religious enlightenment bit at the end which doesn't fit in with the rest of the story, doesn't fit with the protagonist's character, adds nothing to the plot... it's just a bit odd!

I'm hoping Freeman Wills Crofts didn't try too many more of these experiments with the detective novel and stuck with what he was good at!

---

### **Michaela says**

Gave up after 100 pages of a thoroughly unpleasant "protagonist" rationalizing immoral actions, while the people around him did same. Blech.

---

### **James says**

Another crime author from the dim and distant past that I wasn't aware of - but according to the blurb it sounds like someone we probably should have - I guess reading this book fixes that. The author provide us with a pretty unconventional murder mystery though - we know who the murderers are up front, for example, as he is our narrator for the first half of the book. Previously I've only seen this where the murderer is an unreliable narrator, but here he his quite honest about his actions (if not entirely honest without himself about his relationship with his wife). Instead of whodunit, this is a quest for howdidit and willtheygetawaywithit?

The pace of the book is broken half way through with the arrival of Inspector French of the Yard, and the tone changes from the murderer's trying to get away with it and figure out what happened to the more methodical - and traditional - murder mystery. We know who did it, but French is trying to figure it out - and consequently let us know how the murder was committed. Initially I found this switch annoying, with the previous narrator hardly appearing in the second half at all, but as the book came to its denouement the two halves come together in a more satisfying way.

---

### **Damaskcat says**

This is an intriguing study of a crime and what led up to it. The reader knows from the start who was involved in the murder and why it was carried out but it is still interesting to read about how circumstances seem to conspire to lead otherwise law abiding people into crime. What is equally fascinating is the way Inspector French - coming to the case late and at first reluctantly - reasons that there was something strange about the death.

George Sturridge has what for him is the perfect job. He is the director of a provincial zoo, which is something he has wanted to do since he first saw a zoo as a child. Unfortunately, his wife Clarissa, is not terribly happy to be living anywhere but London and George doesn't earn quite as much as she would like him to earn so his home life isn't as tranquil as it could be. George takes refuge, as many before him have done in gambling and the arms of another woman.

I found this a well written crime story which has stood the test of time. The murder is ingenious and almost fool-proof and it proves that most of us have no idea how our actions and demeanour will be viewed by other people. If you like older crime stories then this one is well worth reading and I shall definitely be reading

more by this author.

---

## Ben Taylor says

I'm working my way through the British Library Crime Classics, and *Antidote to Venom* was a fun change of pace. I hadn't experienced the "inverted" mystery before. As the foreword hints, we experience much of the novel from a guilty party's perspective. The first 150 pages actually reminded me of the hit TV series *Breaking Bad*: a generally good man keeps making small bad decisions, each of which get him in further trouble.

Because of its unique structure, the book does a better job than most mystery novels at giving you a soft spot for the villain. And even better, the book doesn't give away the mechanics of the crime either, so you still have a puzzle to solve, even if you know all the key players in advance.

That said, I thought the pacing was a bit uneven, which is why I knocked off a star. The build up is just a little too slow, perhaps 50 pages too long. And then much later, the final phase of the police investigation passes by much too quickly. Where Crofts had previously taken his time to really draw things out in believable fashion, he winds up speeding through the detectives' deductions almost too conveniently. It's a shame, because the book becomes the most fun at precisely the moment it proceeds too quickly.

It almost feels as if an editor told Crofts to cut some of his manuscript, and he wound up cutting the wrong part: I'd love to see some of the first-half fat injected into the lean final pages.

---

## Sonnet Fitzgerald says

Another editor turned me on to this little gem, and Wow! It's always such a pleasure when a forgotten classic turns out to be so well-crafted and accessible today.

*Antidote to Venom* was written in the late 1920s, the heyday of literary mystery. In fact, Freeman Crofts was a contemporary of the young Agatha Christie (and at the time his books outsold hers!) *Antidote to Venom* is a unique murder mystery in that it is **inverted**: We see the buildup and crime as they occur through the eyes of the murderer, not the detective. It is a fascinating psychological study as well as anything else, combined with all the heightened characters, suspense and thrills of a classic mystery.

Our main character, George, is the director of a prominent zoo, trapped in a loveless marriage and hounded by bills. He worsens his own situation through gambling and the addition of a mistress. When he is put in a position he cannot turn away from and falls into the role of murderer, we can almost sympathize with him. We have spent a large portion of the book identifying with this very human character and it's hard not to hope that all will end well for him and he will get away with it.

Approximately the final third of the book shifts POV, and we follow Detective French of Scotland Yard as he tries to break the case. The contrast is intense, and as a reader it's tough to know who we're rooting for in the end.

Throughout there is no end of tension, and if there are a few scenes that lag slightly the overall effect is still one of a thriller.

A preview I read warned me of Crofts' tendency towards evangelism, and that the end of the book would make a case for the moral upper hand of God and religion. I braced myself for this the entire read, but found the part referred to was, in the end, neither too overwhelmingly religious nor very long, about two pages. It works fine and does not distract from the story.

4.5/5, really. A unique and fascinating read!

---

### **Lou Robinson says**

I totally love this series of British Crime Classics....and this one was a cracker. Set in the city of Birmingham (I assume it's supposed to be Brum), it's a tale of how love and money are usually at the root of a good old fashioned poisoning. And although we are clear from the outset who the killer is....will they get away with it? Not revealed until the final chapter. Excellent writing style too, I shall read more from Mr Crofts.

---

### **tom bomp says**

Pretty good book. Nothing super exciting but it messes with the traditional format in a neat way while still having a satisfying and interesting actual mystery.

It's set up sort of like a "reverse whodunnit" but even stronger - it takes a long time for you to find out who's going to get murdered with multiple false hints as to who the victim will be and things only really get going like... halfwayish through? It works well, things get set up nicely and the build-up is well done. His character writing is hardly Nobel Literature level but the characters make sense and you get a good idea of their distinct personality and motives - they're more than flat stereotypes. The mystery itself is built around a single conceit but it's pretty ingenious and I liked it

MASSIVE ending spoiler

(view spoiler)

---

### **John Frankham says**

This Inspector French whodunnit has to be persevered-with, and will reward those who do so.

A slow, meticulous unfolding of the way in which an upright citizen is drawn into considering actions he would not believe he might carry out. Then a slow, meticulous unfolding of the way in which Inspector French's procedural skills try to solve the case.

An unusual and morality-affirming conclusion/denouement makes a satisfactory end.

"George Surridge, director of the Birmingham Zoo, is a man with many worries: his marriage is collapsing; his finances are insecure. As Surridge's debts mount and the pressure on him increases, he begins to dream of miracle solutions.

This ingenious crime novel, with its unusual 'inverted' structure and sympathetic portrait of a man on the edge, is one of the greatest works by this highly respected author."

