



# Star Trap

*Simon Brett*

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Simon Brett is back with one of his best theater-inspired detective novels in Star Trap. Though the target for murder is an odious theater and television star, actor/detective Charles Paris finds that the main character is behind the strange happenings backstage, including the rehearsal pianist being shot in the hand, and an actor falling and breaking his leg. Why does the star want to sabotage his show? The answer is one much more human than it first appears.

## Star Trap Details

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Author : Simon Brett

Format : Paperback 196 pages

Genre : Mystery, Fiction, Crime, Cozy Mystery, Detective

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## From Reader Review Star Trap for online ebook

### Mihran Kalaydjian says

Simon Brett is back with one of his best theater-inspired detective novels in Star Trap. Though the target for murder is an odious theater and television star, actor/detective Charles Paris finds that the main character is behind the strange happenings backstage, including the rehearsal pianist being shot in the hand, and an actor falling and breaking his leg.

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### Sharla says

I read the first in this series, Cast, in Order of Disappearance, some time ago. I thought it was pretty good but it didn't inspire me to go right after the next in the series. Finally I got around to reading the second, So Much Blood, and thought it was better. Charles Paris, the cad with a conscience, seemed more likable in that one and I'm always a sucker for a book set in Edinburgh even if one premise the plot hinged on did not make sense to me. So I picked up this one, the third in the series and was pleasantly surprised to find it the best so far. Charles is fleshed out more and I enjoyed the humor in this one. The plot is good, more believable than the last one. I would give it four and a half stars if Goodreads did halves.

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### Verity W says

I'm really enjoying this series - and it's very easy to go straight from one book to the next.

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### Nan Silvernail says

Charles Paris is asked to join in a new "realization" of "She Stoops to Conquer." Apart from the myriad hacking and disfiguring changes to the old play strange things seem to be happening to anybody involved in the play who breathes a word against the star of the show. Can Charles get at the truth before the attacks turn deadly?

Another interesting read. The twist is a little predictable here, but not offensively.

I learned what the term "Corpsing" means. Not from the book itself but researching it online. It means to laugh involuntarily. There was an old tradition in the theater to try to make someone portraying a corpse on stage laugh. It can also encompass making another actor break character, usually making them laugh. Peter Cook usually succeeded in making Dudley Moore corpse. Tim Conway was a master of it especially with Harvey Korman as his victim. Here's a great example, the Dentist Sketch:  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xw0df0...>

A Star Trap is a trap door set into a stage which is circular and has been cut into pie wedges. It is usually employed to deliver actors or props up onto the stage very quickly via a lift.

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## Marie says

2.9 stars.

I prefer the books after this one. More murder :-D

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## Randee Baty says

How much is stardom worth? Charles Paris, my favorite chronically out of work actor, is offered a job! In a big budget commercially viable play! With a nine-month run scheduled! Of course, there's a catch. Gerald Venables, his friend and a backer of the play, thinks someone is trying to sabotage it and he wants Charles to investigate from the inside and protect his investment. Being perpetually broke, Charles takes the job.

The play is a revamped version of *She Stoops to Conquer* headlined by a beloved comedic tv star. What could go wrong? Apparently, a bit of everything. There are accidents from the first week of rehearsal on. Charles has to investigate and decide if they really are accidents or if they really are sabotage.

The main theme of this book is the price of stardom. What are people willing to do to get it and how far they will go to keep it. Is rising to the top worth killing for?

This book held my interest from start to finish. Like the first 2 Charles Paris mysteries, the Theater is as important as the characters. It interested me enough that I did a little research on *She Stoops to Conquer* which I have never read. I'd love to see it performed. But I'd really want Charles Paris in the cast!

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## J says

Somewhere around the time I turned ten years old, my father decided to make a dream of his come true and he joined a local theater company. This was in a small town in a small state and so I always assumed it was for sociability and for a love of theater that prompted this in him. Surely he had no dreams of being recognized or becoming a star so late in life (thirty-five), and surely he recognized shortly after being in a few productions that he was never going to be a headliner. When he moved across the country, it wasn't long before he insinuated himself into another company to fill the same type of roles. His dramatic specialty, from the number of shows I witnessed, consists of meaningful raises of his eyebrows and extra-careful annunciation of his lines. Bit players have such few opportunities to shine.

One of the bonuses of being related to someone in the theater, if you can call it a bonus, is the plentiful opportunities to go to theater parties. For the uninitiated, imagine a group of about twenty people, all simultaneously and in increasing levels of volume and drunkenness competitively auditioning for the role of "Life of the Party." The half-life of entertainment for this kind of thing is incredibly short and by evening's end, you will wonder why there aren't more celebrity murders. After one theater party, you really will have had your fill for the decade. I've had my share in my college life and as a post-graduate.

By sheer coincidence, the two books I listened to at the end of the week, both rather short, happened to involve murder and the stage. (Get caught at too many theater parties and you will find yourself linking these concepts indelibly.) Both could be considered cozy mysteries featuring somewhat bloodless crimes and amateur detectives, though the older, an adaptation of Agatha Christie's play *Spider's Web*, comes from the

mystery master, who oftentimes features crimes that are rather grisly. The second, Simon Brett's *Star Trap*, has a seedy atmosphere and the kind of behavior that would shock my grandmother and perhaps many a cozy mystery reader (heavy drinking by the protagonist, casually loveless and almost hostile sex, existential crises brought on by age and failure, and poverty unflinchingly portrayed).

And that last element, the rather grimy lowlife atmosphere, has a mundane reality that grimmer, more noir mysteries lack. While hardboiled detectives never lack for their bottle in the desk drawer, their poverty, if part of the story, is simply a minor element. Charles Paris, the low to middling actor/detective in *Star Trap*, has the kind of shortage of funds that cause him to reflect on simple things, like the difference between drinking when you're poor and when you're working steady. His dreary flat has no romantic glamour. His romances likewise are lacking in dramatic flair.

The crimes of the book are also of a more simple nature. While more gritty detective stories feature daggers in the back and fatal struggles with a dropped pistol, *Star Trap*, which tells how Charles Paris tries to discover who, by knocking cast and crew about, is sabotaging the show he is in, features minor violence. Muggings that might not be muggings, a bit of paraffin wax slipped into someone's gin to give them a touch of food poisoning, someone who may or may not have tripped down a flight of stairs.

I've always felt resistance to series of novels in which normal, regular, everyday people spend their days and nights stumbling over bodies. It's the kind of thing that would take a psychic toll, yet Jessica in *Murder, She Wrote* never seems to lose her joie de vivre and sprightliness. While I understand the rubbernecking titillation fans of this series are expressing (just the hint of a thrill, a tidy, bloodless body), their very hygienicity is perhaps more appalling. These folks want murder, but just for entertainment purposes, the bad guy clutching his stomach and toppling from rooftop, pure and safe for prime time.

*Star Trap* doesn't pander to this vile sentimentality, and in fact, the actual crime element of the story is an incredibly small portion. While the crimes are clean enough for television, there is a seedy furtiveness that dramatic mysteries always overleap. What most of the book focuses on is the backstage dramas between the prima donna lead and every single other member of the show, the almost superstitious remedies for sore throats and coughs, and the little vanities actors are prone to. Brett elegantly skewers this bit of self-dramatization with the delightful phrase "...generally putting on expressions of private suffering which they had learnt when rehearsing Chekhov."

The other element that is much to be admired in Brett's novel is just how underplayed the climaxes and moments of drama are, how authentic they feel. When in anger Charles decides to buck his orders to protect the star of the show over everyone else, rather than the timpani moment of some books, this scene is done with silent teeth gritting vengeance, the way you would do in isolation. When a cast member is hit by a car, his injuries are minor, a Mini-clipping him and breaking his kneecap. The revelations that come to Charles are shown not as sudden and elusive epiphanies, but the result of working hard (when the mood strikes him), and come after he makes many attempts to avoid his unpleasant conclusions. That he is so frequently wrong makes him even more sympathetic to readers.

What ends up being the most striking about this is that the book demonstrates a keen psychological insight into the characters. Where most mysteries provide us with long-suffering existentialist automatons for heroes, one dimensional dramatic props, Charles Paris strides the literary stage with all his good and embarrassing bits fully on display, fully synthesized and realized. His flaws are not romantic, nor are they romanticized as heroic weaknesses. That's rather appealing to find a writer willing to portray his hero so unflatteringly.

## Jenny says

This was my favorite Charles Paris book of the first 3 that I've read! Compared to the other two, it wasn't so much about the place (Cast, in Order of Disappearance/So Much Blood) or a specific time in history (So Much Blood) but more about a single production and the egomaniac (Christopher Milton) who is running the show.

Charles is sent to London by Gerald Venables to investigate a new production called Lumpkin!, which is basically a vehicle for Milton, who is a famous TV star. Venables thinks that something fishy is happening since two "accidents" happened exactly a week apart to members of the show (an actor accidentally fell down a flight of stairs and the pianist was shot at on the way to work).

Once he's at the show, Charles at first thinks nothing is really afoot other than the "director" is just a puppet and Christopher Milton is running the show. He thinks it's Gerald's imagination and that he's lucky to have a fulltime paid gig, but then an actress's drink gets Mickey Finn'd and (view spoiler) This is all amidst the constant changing of the script and musical score to further accentuate Milton's talent (which Charles has to admit he has).

(view spoiler)

Frances makes a brief appearance at the end and Charles isn't as much a cad as he has been before - in fact I think he misses Frances and sees the futility of all his one-night stands. Also Juliet is pregnant!

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## Paul says

3.5 stars

A little light reading to start the year.

I keep hoping this series will get really good. I suspect it gets better. This was written in 1975 and I suspect I'll like it better when the "contemporary" feel is less dated (if that makes sense).

Still I like the protagonist, it's fun to follow the world of 1970's theatre and the puzzle element works as ever.

One thing that sticks out is how Charles Paris - who is just a jobbing actor - asks all sorts of questions to all sorts of people and they mostly just shrug and answer them without wondering why he's playing detective. In a couple of sequences he does at least pretend to be a journalist. Maybe it's a trope of the 'cozy mystery' genre. I haven't read enough to know.

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## John Lee says

It seems so long ago now that I first became a fan of Simon Brett.

I have had many happy hours reading the Mrs Pargetter series and the Charles Parish set and more recently the Fethering Mysteries. I was a little surprised to find this one that I seemed to have missed - or is it just the memory playing tricks again.

This is very easy reading, written with a good knowledge of the theatre and a kindly feeling towards the main character that makes one wonder if there is a bit of autobiography here!

Reading it now reminds me how long ago these were written. Reference is made to a visit to a friend who must have been well off because he had a 'colour' television and then there is the 2ps in the coin slots of telephone boxes ( at least it wasn't 4 x 1ds and I wonder how long we will have telephone boxes themselves?), none of which seemed out of place when I first read the series.

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## **Norma says**

( Format : Audiobook )

"I beg yours."

Simon Brett's delightful thespian comedy detective mystery is set in England of 1975, before home computers and mobile phones, where to make a call meant using the public telephone boxes. Charles Paris is an aging, often out of work actor with an unspectacular career and a useless agent. His personal life is also a mess. So the idea of some solid acting work sounds very good. When a lawyer friend offers him a role in a forthcoming show starring a very popular T.V. star, with several weeks touring culminating in London's West End and a nine month contract, how can Charles refuse? But his friend also wants Charles to do some undercover sleuthing: two accidents to cast members, exactly one week apart, have already caused delays and he fears sabotage. Charles is there to ensure his investment is safe. But Charles believes that the accidents are just that, accidents, nothing sinister, until, that is, there are more. Pity, because for the very first time, Charles had thought he just might be in a bit...

Simon Brett reads his own book with clear English voice, understanding, gentle wit and great character voices. Visual and amusing, the Charles Paris books are great fun and still very enjoyable some forty years later (a number of them have also been made into BBC productions, starring a full cast and Bill Nighy as Paris). A very enjoyable light read. Recommended.

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## **Ian Brydon says**

Star Trap is set in 1975 and represents one of the earlier episodes in the investigative career of Charles Paris, down-at-heel journeyman actor.

Charles is recruited to appear in Lumpkin!, a musical loosely based upon Oliver Goldsmith's classic play She Stoops to Conquer. This production has been devised primarily as a vehicle for Christopher Milton, the enormously popular star of one of the leading television comedy series of the time. Charles, however, has not won his role through the customary path of attending an audition and being deemed the most suitable actor for the part. He had instead been contacted by his urbane solicitor friend, Gerald Venables, one of the 'angels' investing in the show, who has been concerned about some odd incidents which he thinks might be part of a greater plot to sabotage the musical. Knowing of Charles's success in solving a couple of previous theatrical mysteries, Venables thinks that he might prove to be a helpful asset to the company management as their man on the inside.

As ever, Simon Brett demonstrates his detailed knowledge of the theatrical world, conjuring an authentic context for the escalating series of incidents that continue to bedevil the show. Personalities and egos clash, and Christopher Milton appropriates more and more of the body of the show to his part, leaving the rest of

the cast bereft of any funny or worthwhile lines. He is, however, as Charles continually has to concede (often through gritted teeth following yet another example of the star's dreadful tantrums), exceptionally talented, and though he may be hogging ever larger portions of the work to himself, his decisions do seem to make theatrical sense.

As usual with this beguiling series, the plot is well-constructed (and the relevant clues to the eventual denouement are all there), but delivered with a light touch, and Charles remains a very engaging lead character (I think he is too self-effacing to be called a hero).

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### **Sam Wilkinson says**

Another Charles Paris mystery.

Charles is persuaded to take a role in a touring production, to investigate possible sabotage. At first he is unconvinced about the need to investigate, but during the course of the tour, more and more of the cast are incapacitated, so Charles turns sleuth once more.

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### **Aidan says**

Star Trap, the third of the Charles Paris series, is one of the best. In it the actor/sleuth is hired to join the cast of the production of a new high-profile musical which has seen several accidents occur in rehearsals.

Brett's plot moves on at a fair pace and has several interesting twists and turns. Unlike the previous installment in the series, *So Much Blood*, each of the twists in this story feel logical and well thought-out. Accordingly the answers, when they do arrive, satisfy and felt in keeping with everything that had preceded them.

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### **Lawanda says**

Audiobook performed by Geoffrey Howard

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