



Locked-Room Mysteries & Impossible Crimes: DEFINITIONS

from Gigi Pandian

LOCKED-ROOM MYSTERY. A crime has been committed in a room or other sealed location where it appears impossible for the misdeed to have been committed. A locked room is only part of the equation; the key is that the situation appears impossible.

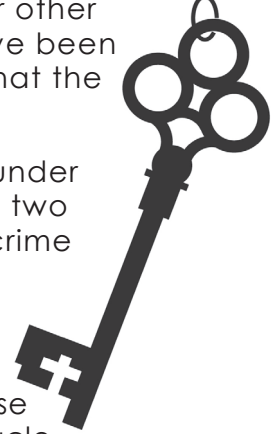
IMPOSSIBLE CRIME. The impossible crime sub-genre is the umbrella under which locked room mysteries fall. Purists disagree as to whether the two terms describe the same sub-genre, but in practice an impossible crime mystery serves as a synonym for a locked-room mystery.

MIRACLE PROBLEM. The term for impossible crime stories preferred by mystery historian Douglas G. Greene. The idea of a miracle problem captures the spirit of why impossible crimes are so tantalizing—because it appears the crime could only have been committed through a miracle.

CLOSED CIRCLE. The mystery involves a limited number of suspects, such as strangers brought together onto a secluded island. ***This plot device is sometimes mistakenly referred to as a locked-room mystery.*** A story can be both, but a closed circle doesn't mean it's necessary an impossible crime or locked-room mystery.

GOLDEN AGE OF DETECTIVE FICTION. Loosely defined as the period between the two world wars, the 1920s and '30s, but time isn't the only necessary element. The unifying element was puzzle plots, where fairly presented clues were prominent and violence was not. Many Golden Age authors continued writing the same style of story for several more decades, but after the Second World War the *whydunnit* became more popular than the *whodunit*.

SHIN HONKAKU. The Japanese "new orthodox" style of mystery translates as the "logic mystery" genre, with locked room mysteries featured prominently. While locked-room mysteries fell out of fashion in the English-speaking world for several decades, they've been going strong in Japan since the 1980s.



A small snapshot of several excellent locked-room mysteries that are a good introduction to this style of satisfying puzzle

Cristianna Brand, *DEATH OF JEZEBEL*

John Dickson Carr's Dr. Gideon Fell novels
(*THE THREE COFFINS* includes Carr's famous "locked room lecture")

Agatha Christie, *AND THEN THERE WERE NONE*

Paul Halter, *THE FOURTH DOOR*

Edward D. Hoch's short story collections

Helen McCloy, *THROUGH A GLASS, DARKLY*

Edgar Allan Poe, short story "Murders in the Rue Morgue"

Ellery Queen, short story "The Lamp of God"

Clayton Rawson, *DEATH FROM A TOP HAT*

Soji Shimada, *THE TOKYO ZODIAC MURDERS*

Seishi Yokomizo's *Kindaichi* novels

TV show *Jonathan Creek*

Have fun exploring further! —Gigi Pandian, February 2022