



Depraved: The Definitive True Story of H.H. Holmes, Whose Grotesque Crimes Shattered Turn-of-the-Century Chicago

By Harold Schechter



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The heinous bloodlust of Dr. H.H. Holmes is notorious -- but only Harold Schechter's *Depraved* tells the complete story of the killer whose evil acts of torture and murder flourished within miles of the Chicago World's Fair. "Destined to be a true crime classic" (Flint Journal, MI), this authoritative account chronicles the methods and madness of a monster who slipped easily into a bright, affluent Midwestern suburb, where no one suspected the dapper, charming Holmes -- who alternately posed as doctor, druggist, and inventor to snare his prey -- was the architect of a labyrinthine "Castle of Horrors." Holmes admitted to twenty-seven murders by the time his madhouse of trapdoors, asphyxiation devices, body chutes, and acid vats was exposed. The seminal profile of a homegrown madman in the era of Jack the Ripper, *Depraved* is also a mesmerizing tale of true detection long before the age of technological wizardry.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Herman Mudgett, who called himself Dr. H. H. Holmes, seemed the epitome of the late 19th century "Golden Age": he was a well-dressed, charismatic, self-made entrepreneur (think Andrew Carnegie). Unfortunately for his many victims, he was also a liar, bigamist, debtor, con man, and murderer. The setting for several of his murders was the bizarre urban "castle" he built in Chicago--a ramshackle construction with mazelike corridors, soundproof rooms, sealed vaults, oversized furnaces, and chutes leading down to the cellar. Holmes's undoing was an insurance scam in which he planned to use a corpse supplied by a doctor to fake his partner's death, but ended up killing the partner, his wife, and his five children. *The Boston Book Review* wrote, "[Harold] Schechter's account of this charming, repulsive monster is both an astonishing piece of popular history as well as a near clinical analysis of as sinister a killer as this country has ever produced." Also recommended: Schechter's books about Albert Fish (*Deranged*) and Ed Gein (*Deviant*).

From Publishers Weekly

Herman Mudgett, born in New Hampshire in 1860, purportedly achieved worldwide notoriety as the serial killer Dr. H. H. Holmes. He certainly made an impression in Chicago, where he built a "castle" filled with soundproof rooms, stairways that went nowhere and chutes leading to huge vats in the basement. How many women died there is unknown. Ironically, a case of insurance fraud that was no fraud at all resulted in Holmes's arrest, conviction and hanging. He had talked his aide, Ben Pitezel, into getting an insurance policy on his own life, assuring Pitezel that they could render a cadaver unidentifiable, pass it off as Pitezel and collect \$10,000. Then he killed Pitezel and, subsequently, three of his five children. Schechter (*Deviant*) has done a masterful job of reconstructing Holmes's killing spree and detailing the detective work that led to his apprehension. Illustrations not seen by PW .

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From Library Journal

At the time of his 1895 conviction for one of the possible 27 murders he committed, Herman Mudgett, alias H.H. Holmes, was fully as notorious as his now more infamous contemporaries, Jack the Ripper and Lizzie Borden. Revelations about his Chicago "Horror Castle" shocked a nation unused to wholesale murder. Holmes was a psychopathic con man who differed from today's serial killer in that he seemingly acted out of greed rather than sexual sadism. Schechter (*Deranged*, Pocket Bks., 1990) has written the second full-length account of Holmes (following David Franke's *The Torture Doctor* (LJ 11/1/75)). It is a solid and engrossing tale, although Holmes's crimes will remain forever murky (an inveterate liar, he confessed to murdering people who turned up very much alive). For true crime readers who are unfamiliar with the case.

Gregor A. Preston, Univ. of California Lib., Davis

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Clemencia Torres:

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