

Dark Matter: The Private Life of Sir Isaac Newton

By Philip Kerr

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I swore not to tell this story while Newton was still alive.

1696, young Christopher Ellis is sent to the Tower of London, but not as a prisoner. Though Ellis is notoriously hotheaded and was caught fighting an illegal duel, he arrives at the Tower as assistant to the renowned scientist Sir Isaac Newton. Newton is Warden of the Royal Mint, which resides within the Tower walls, and he has accepted an appointment from the King of England and Parliament to investigate and prosecute counterfeiters whose false coins threaten to bring down the shaky, war-weakened economy. Ellis may lack Newton's scholarly mind, but he is quick with a pistol and proves himself to be an invaluable sidekick and devoted apprentice to Newton as they zealously pursue these criminals.

While Newton and Ellis investigate a counterfeiting ring, they come upon a mysterious coded message on the body of a man killed in the Lion Tower, as well as alchemical symbols that indicate this was more than just a random murder. Despite Newton's formidable intellect, he is unable to decipher the cryptic message or any of the others he and Ellis find as the body count increases within the Tower complex. As they are drawn into a wild pursuit of the counterfeiters that takes them from the madhouse of Bedlam to the squalid confines of Newgate prison and back to the Tower itself, Newton and Ellis discover that the counterfeiting is only a small part of a larger, more dangerous plot, one that reaches to the highest echelons of power and nobility and threatens much more than the collapse of the economy.

Dark Matter is the latest masterwork of suspense from Philip Kerr, the internationally bestselling and brilliantly innovative thriller writer who has dazzled readers with his imaginative, fast-paced novels. Like *An Instance of the Fingerpost*, *The Name of the Rose*, and Kerr's own Berlin Noir trilogy, **Dark Matter** is historical mystery at its finest, an extraordinary, suspense-filled journey through the shadowy streets and back alleys of London with the brilliant Newton and his faithful protégé. The haunted Tower with its bloody history is the perfect backdrop for this richly satisfying tale, one that introduces an engrossing mystery into the volatile mix of politics, science, and religion that characterized

life in seventeenth-century London.

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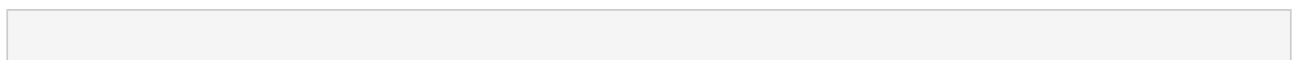
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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Holmes and Watson provide the template for this very satisfying historical thriller from Kerr (*The Grid*, etc.), with Sir Isaac Newton acting as great detective and one Christopher Ellis serving as narrator. It's 1696, and a series of murders are plaguing the Tower of London, where the middle-aged Newton has recently assumed (as in real life) the position of warden of the royal mint, with the younger Ellis (again as in real life) serving as his assistant. Like Holmes, the cold and cerebral Newton relies on rationalism the scientific method to solve the crimes, while Ellis, quick with sword, pistol and temper, brings the emotional counterweight provided by Conan Doyle's Watson. The murders are accompanied by esoteric clues, most notably encrypted messages and alchemical references, that spur Newton to their resolution as forcefully as does his intense sense of duty, for the killings seem to involve not only a plot to disrupt a recoinage necessary to continue England's war with France, but also a conspiracy to commit religious genocide against a backdrop of incessant tensions between Catholics and Protestants. The mystery elements of the novel provide a sturdy spine for the book's main flesh: its robust recreation of life at the end of the 17th century. Ellis's fluid narration sets the tone, illuminating a London beset by pestilence, poverty, whores and ruffians, noblemen grave or foppish, opium dens, brothels and grisly executions, and a bright array of historical figures including, in the role of blackguard, Daniel Defoe. There's an erotic/romantic subplot involving Ellis and Newton's niece, but the main focus is on the two leads. Both are well drawn, though Newton, ostensibly the novel's center, is less compelling than Ellis's full-blooded youth. That disparity, and an overly complex plot, are the drawbacks of what is, withal, a most gripping and well-appointed entertainment.

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From Library Journal

There have been many mysteries featuring famous historical figures as protagonists, among them Elliot Roosevelt's crime-solving First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, Stephanie Barron's investigative Jane Austen, and Karen Harper's sleuthing Queen Elizabeth I. Now comes Sir Isaac Newton and his assistant, Christopher Ellis (also an actual person). It is 1696 in London, and Ellis has been hired to help Newton in his job as Warden of the Royal Mint. Ordered by the king to find and prosecute counterfeiters whose false coins threaten the war-shaken British economy, the two men get more than they bargained for when they uncover a much more dangerous conspiracy. Plot devices such as secret coded documents, the pseudoscience of alchemy, and a string of strange murders make for an exciting read. Using as backdrop the Tower of London, the Royal Mint, Bedlam madhouse, and Newgate Prison, the ever-versatile Kerr, author of sophisticated science-based thrillers like *The Second Angel* and *Esau*, weaves a rich tapestry of interesting characters and period details. Highly recommended. Fred Gervat, Concordia Coll. Lib., Bronxville, NY

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From [Booklist](#)

Starred Review It's tempting to dismiss Kerr's latest historical mystery as nothing more than a Sherlock Holmes adventure in Newtonian drag. One of the seventeenth century's greatest minds, Isaac Newton, is appointed warden of the Royal Mint during England's Great Recoinage. Aided by educated yet slow-witted sidekick and narrator Christopher Ellis, Newton employs the scientific method and logical deduction to thwart a high-reaching conspiracy to murder thousands of Catholics, pass counterfeit guineas, and reignite the war with France. "You seem to know everything without the need to be told of it first," failed lawyer Ellis exclaims midway through the tale. Replies Newton, "It's no trick. Merely observation. . . . That is enough." Holmesian similarities aside, *Dark Matter* turns out to be an illuminating, often crackling exploration into the mysteries of science, mathematics, religion, and human nature-- played out in the dark

shadows of the Tower of London and on the city's even meaner streets. Kerr's mastery of period detail makes the story all the more delicious, as does the fact that Newton really did hold a post at the Royal Mint, where, with the help of a clerk named Christopher Ellis, the author of *Optics* and *Principia Mathematica* tracked down counterfeiters with the ruthless dedication of Eliot Ness. This isn't as multilayered as Iain Pears' *Instance of the Fingerpost* (1998), but it is considerably more accessible and covers much of the same thematic ground. *Frank Sennett*

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Gail Kernan:

Have you spare time to get a day? What do you do when you have more or little spare time? Yes, you can choose the suitable activity regarding spend your time. Any person spent their spare time to take a move, shopping, or went to the particular Mall. How about open or even read a book eligible Dark Matter: The Private Life of Sir Isaac Newton? Maybe it is being best activity for you. You realize beside you can spend your time with your favorite's book, you can smarter than before. Do you agree with the opinion or you have other opinion?

William Ullrich:

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Clifford Jones:

Precisely why? Because this Dark Matter: The Private Life of Sir Isaac Newton is an unordinary book that the inside of the publication waiting for you to snap this but latter it will jolt you with the secret that inside. Reading this book adjacent to it was fantastic author who all write the book in such amazing way makes the content within easier to understand, entertaining approach but still convey the meaning fully. So , it is good for you for not hesitating having this nowadays or you going to regret it. This unique book will give you a lot of positive aspects than the other book get such as help improving your proficiency and your critical thinking approach. So , still want to hesitate having that book? If I have been you I will go to the guide store hurriedly.

Monique Hightower:

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