



The Mask of Red Death

Harold Schechter

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Suspense, intrigue, atmosphere, and vivid historical detail combine into a thrilling ride through nineteenth-century New York City in *The Mask of Red Death*. Harold Schechter delivers both a wonderfully accurate portrait of a city in turmoil and an irresistibly appealing depiction of his amateur sleuth Edgar Allan Poe, mirroring the master's writing style with wit and acumen.

It is the sweltering summer of 1845, and the thriving metropolis has fallen victim to a creature of the most inhuman depravity. Found days apart, two girls have been brutally murdered, their throats slashed, viciously scalped, and—most shocking of all—missing their livers. Edgar Allan Poe, despite what the tenor of his own tales of terror might suggest about his constitution, is just as shaken and revolted by these horrendous crimes as the panic-stricken public. Suspicion of the scalper's identity immediately swirls around the most famous “redskin” in New York, Chief Wolf Bear, one of the human attractions at P.T. Barnum's American Museum. Certain that Chief Wolf Bear is innocent, Poe has deduced that the city is concealing a cannibal somewhere in its teeming masses, one with an ever-growing appetite for human prey.

Before he can investigate his theory further, Poe stumbles onto the scene of a third gruesome murder. Poe recently met William Wyatt when he agreed to look at a document for Wyatt to determine the authenticity of the purportedly famous handwriting on it. Now Poe finds Wyatt in a pool of blood, his scalp removed. How, Poe muses, are Wyatt and his document connected to the two slain girls?

As frenzied emotions over the murders reach a fevered pitch, Kit Carson makes an appearance. The famous scout has been tracking the “Liver Eater” since the man killed his wife months ago. Together, Carson and Poe make an odd sleuthing team, but their combined wits are formidable. The trail they uncover reveals a dark secret more powerful than anything they could have imagined— one that may reach the upper echelons of politics and privilege.

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