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Among The Mad: A Maisie Dobbs Novel (Maisie Dobbs Mysteries Series Book 6)



Synopsis

In the thrilling new novel by the New York Times bestselling author of *An Incomplete Revenge*, Maisie Dobbs must catch a madman before he commits murder on an unimaginable scale on Christmas Eve 1931. On the way to see a client, Maisie Dobbs witnesses a man commit suicide on a busy London street. The following day, the prime minister's office receives a letter threatening a massive loss of life if certain demands are not met and the writer mentions Maisie by name. After being questioned and cleared by Detective Chief Superintendent Robert MacFarlane of Scotland Yard's elite Special Branch, she is drawn into MacFarlane's personal fiefdom as a special adviser on the case. Meanwhile, Billy Beale, Maisie's trusted assistant, is once again facing tragedy as his wife, who has never recovered from the death of their young daughter, slips further into melancholia's abyss. Soon Maisie becomes involved in a race against time to find a man who proves he has the knowledge and will to inflict death and destruction on thousands of innocent people. And before this harrowing case is over, Maisie must navigate a darkness not encountered since she was a nurse in wards filled with shell-shocked men. In *Among the Mad*, Jacqueline Winspear combines a heart-stopping story with a rich evocation of a fascinating period to create her most compelling and satisfying novel yet.

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Customer Reviews

In the world that Maisie Dobbs ("Psychologist and Investigator") inhabits, peace is an elusive phenomenon, even 13 years after the Armistice put an end to the trench warfare that she witnessed as a nurse. In the aftermath of the Great War, Maisie now finds herself battling with the legacy of that conflict. In Winspear's five previous novels, she has dealt with the aftermath of mysterious wartime Zeppelin attacks, evil doings at a hospital for disfigured soldiers and myriad other crimes tied to the aftermath of the war. In this, Winspear's sixth novel in the series, Maisie is unwittingly dragged into a case that involves terrorist threats. After witnessing a man she believes to be a troubled veteran blow himself up with a hand grenade, her name is mentioned in a threatening letter that another soldier sends to Scotland Yard and top government ministers. Along with her former admirer, Inspector Stratton, Maisie must work with Special Branch police to fend off a chemical weapons threat from a disturbed individual demanding that the government treat veterans -- disabled or otherwise -- fairly and honorably. It's a difficult case for Maisie, not only because she must grapple with her own mixed emotions -- she has seen, all too clearly, the struggle that the men she once nursed in France have when they try to return civilian life -- but because she is also grappling with the personal problems of her assistant, Billy Beale, and her closest friend. Not surprisingly, perhaps, given this somber backdrop, the novel often feels very intense and even downright melancholy. That's appropriate, given the subject matter. Still, this would have been a stronger book had Winspear had a lighter touch with both plot and characters.

This is the sixth book in the series about Maisie Dobbs, a former domestic servant who "made good" as a result of sponsorship by her former employer and is now operating as a psychologically-oriented private investigator in depression-era London. I enjoyed several of the earlier books, especially for their compelling picture of a British society still reeling from the effects of WWI and now experiencing the economic tribulations of the Depression. Unfortunately, in this book the atmosphere took over to the detriment of the plot and the characters. Although the Depression is an important element of the society that Ms. Winspear effectively constructs, the psychological injury caused by the Great War seems to be the dominant theme and the major depressant on the characters. The book opens with a former soldier committing suicide on the sidewalk as Maisie witnesses in horror; it continues as the police and Maisie try to track down an insane former soldier who is threatening to commit terrorist attacks in London to bring attention to the needs of veterans;

the wife of Maisie's employee Billy becomes deranged by the death of her young daughter and has to be hospitalized; and Maisie has to deal with what seems to be the impending nervous breakdown of her best friend Priscilla. Practically EVERYONE in this book has serious mental problems; it exceeds credibility. The atmosphere of this psychologically dysfunctional society overwhelms the book to the detriment of the plot. During most of the book, Maisie and the police are racing against time to locate a potential mass murderer, but there is little sense of suspense because all the details about the society and the historical background that created it and molded the characters slow the plot to a plod.

The intrepid Maisie Dobbs, psychologist and private investigator, is walking through London on Christmas Eve, 1931, when a man she believes to be a shell-shocked veteran of World War I suddenly blows himself up, injuring Maisie and several other bystanders. Maisie herself has served in the Great War as a nurse, and she, too, suffered injuries, both physical and emotional during the war, so she has always been particularly sympathetic to the plight of these unfortunate, mentally ill veterans. Ineligible for the kinds of pensions, benefits, and services that physically injured veterans receive, they are often homeless and too damaged to get and keep a job to support themselves. They have been abandoned: no one even knows the name of the suicide victim. Another anonymous (and mentally ill) veteran observes the suicide, and shortly afterward issues a threat, telling the authorities that he will "demonstrate [his] power," if the government does not alleviate the suffering of war veterans within forty-eight hours. "If you doubt my sincerity," he says, "ask Maisie Dobbs." Interviewed by Scotland Yard, the Special Branch, and military intelligence, Maisie convinces the authorities that she has had no previous contact with the suicide, and they eventually hire her to help them identify and then find the person who has issued the threat. As the hours tick down, the brilliant but obviously insane man takes action, quickly demonstrating that he is an expert on gases and proving that he will use them. Old Year's Day, on Dec. 31, is the day he intends to demonstrate his full power on the crowds celebrating in London.

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