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Edgar Wallace

# The Council of Justice

Read by **Bill Homewood**



CLASSIC  
CRIME

THE FOUR JUST MEN • 2

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1	Chapter 1: The Red Hundred	4:59
2	There were three delegates from Baden, Herr Schmidt...	5:31
3	Two men stumbled into the car, one dumbfounded and silent...	5:17
4	The air of the crowded hall struck the two men in the face...	5:03
5	So her fame had grown until her father died and she went to...	5:36
6	Chapter 2: The Fourth Man	4:54
7	The detective jumped at the opportunity.	5:11
8	They passed through the crowd that had gathered about the hall...	4:45
9	'Enthusiast, dreamer and intellectual, of course,' said Gonzalez...	3:45
10	In Middlesex Street, in the almost emptied hall, Falmouth stood.	4:36
11	Chapter 3: Jesson Alias Long	5:21
12	It may be observed that 'Mr Long' at the threshold of the house...	4:45
13	Nobody rose to greet the newcomers. The flashy man nodded...	5:19
14	It would not be fair to follow Jesson through the elaborate...	5:47
15	Chapter 4: The Red Bean	3:48
16	He was one of the seven that gathered in the dingy...	3:56
17	Starque stabbed the list before him with a thick forefinger.	5:09
18	He had to invent a story that would pass muster.	5:23
19	So complete and inexplicable was the chill that had come to...	6:06
20	Chapter 5: The Council Of Justice	5:56

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21	Bartholomew had regained a little of his self assurance.	5:25
22	'Here, wake up!' Somebody was shaking his arm...	4:22
23	If Bartholomew's need for cutting himself adrift...	3:05
24	Chapter 6: Princess Revolutionary	5:45
25	Bartholomew took a fresh grip of the chair.	5:23
26	He saw her, standing near the body of the man...	4:45
27	Chapter 7: The Government and Mr Jessen	4:58
28	It was subsequent to Mr Jessen's visit to the Home Office...	4:07
29	The detective remembered that this hereditary Prince...	5:04
30	Chapter 8: An Incident In The Fight	5:31
31	That night His Highness arrived promptly at eight o'clock...	3:27
32	Carlos Ferdinand Bourbon, Prince of the Escorial...	3:17
33	Chapter 9: The Four Versus The Hundred	1:19
34	'It's a humiliating confession,' said the chief commissioner...	5:19
35	Thereafter Von Dunop was not permitted to enjoy his walk...	4:09
36	Chapter 10: The Trial	4:55
37	It was in the Lodge Room of the Pride of Millwall, AOSA...	4:56
38	After this, the sum of his transgressions was pronounced...	4:36
39	The power of the Red Hundred was broken.	3:21
40	'There are two ways of writing about the police, Sir...'	3:45

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41	Chapter 11: Manfred	4:49
42	'Come in,' he said, in answer to the knock.	3:53
43	'What is it you see that displeases you?' he asked.	4:31
44	Still he made no sign, sitting there all huddled in the big...	4:38
45	Chapter 12: In Wandsworth Jail	5:31
46	Manfred refused to plead 'guilty' or 'not guilty'.	5:21
47	The governor, still frowning thoughtfully, left the cell.	3:58
48	He might have been tried at the sessions following his committal...	3:35
49	Armed with the authority of the Home Secretary came...	4:33
50	Chapter 13: The Rational Faithers	3:10
51	Poiccart made no response. 'He is also the head...'	3:41
52	His pause was so long that Poiccart interjected an...	4:10
53	The hotel was well surrounded by midnight, but so skillfully...	3:55
54	Chapter 14: At The Old Bailey...	4:56
55	So he went on to speak of the Four Just Men who had founded...	5:49
56	'You come to speak on behalf of the accused?' asked the judge.	4:19
57	'Let me put another case. Suppose you governed...'	4:04
58	The court was so still that he could hear the scratchings of...	3:10
59	'It would be madness to expect a civilized country...'	4:10
60	Chapter 15: Chelmsford	4:36

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61	He woke with the chief warder's hand on his arm...	4:48
62	The detached house facing the prison was fortunately...	5:22
63	Until 6 o'clock these men rested – as men must rest...	4:21
64	Another silence, and then Leon resumed...	4:53
65	Chapter 16: The Execution	5:26
66	Three days before the date fixed for the execution...	4:49
67	He was accurate in his surmise. At the eleventh hour...	5:05
68	Manfred felt himself caught in a net, deft hands...	5:15

**Total time: 5:16:26**

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## Edgar Wallace

(1875–1932)

# The Council of Justice

Most thrillers offer the reader an escape into a world where the pursuer of justice, often a detective, is a good person; his quarry a bad one. The stories may be more or less complicated (e.g. John Grisham's novels), the subjects may be parochial (e.g. Agatha Christie's novels) or they may involve international intrigue (e.g. Andy McNab's novels) but on the whole the villain ultimately suffers the consequences of his actions, and justice triumphs.

In his *Four Just Men* series, Edgar Wallace comes up with something different: the 'villains' are not necessarily bad people, and the pursuers of justice – the Four Just Men, as they call themselves – are acting outside the law. They argue that their actions are for the public good, and dispassionately eke the ultimate revenge – death – on their victims. In their turn, the Four Just Men are pursued by the

police, but somehow remain our heroes, even garnering the reluctant praise of politicians:

*'It is a poetical idea,' said the phlegmatic Premier, 'and the standpoint of the Four is quite a logical one. Think of the enormous power for good or evil often vested in one man: a capitalist controlling the markets of the world, a speculator cornering cotton or wheat whilst mills stand idle and people starve, tyrants and despots with the destinies of nations between their thumb and finger – and then think of the four men, known to none; vague, shadowy figures stalking tragically through the world, condemning and executing the capitalist, the corner maker, the tyrant – evil forces all,*

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*and all beyond reach of the law. We have said of these people, such of us as are touched with mysticism, that God would judge them. Here are men arrogating to themselves the divine right of superior judgment. If we catch them they will end their lives unpicturesquely, in a matter-of-fact, commonplace manner in a little shed in Pentonville Gaol, and the world will never realise how great are the artists who perish.'*

One does not have to look far in adventure films and literature to find glamorous heroes with questionable methods (for example Barry Eisler's hit-man thrillers with titles like *Blood from Blood* and *One Last Kill*, Alexandre Dumas's *The Count of Monte Cristo*, Johnston McCulley's *Zorro*, innumerable war films of heroic and bloody retribution, and, of course, cowboy classics such as *The Magnificent Seven*). These appeal to the vigilante in all of us. Who has not dreamed of super revenge on a school bully, an unpleasant teacher, a traffic warden, a treacherous colleague? Perhaps, in twenty-first-

century literature, the equivalent of *The Four Just Men* might be the action stories of our Special Forces heroes on so-called 'deniable operations', where we are led to believe that governments prefer to wash their hands of the illegal action – an abduction, an assassination – rather than admit to having ordered it. In such books we love the cautious, wicked methodology of killing – the plotting and creeping, even the dreadful moment itself. What is extraordinary is that we are following these events from the point of view of the assassin, who is honourable only because he is on government duty. It is great fun, and possibly the best sort of holiday reading, to be vicariously criminal. We enjoy suspending the ordinary morality which we apply to our everyday lives in our schools, colleges and workplaces, and replacing it with this 'naughty' morality, where the end justifies the means.

George Manfred, Leon Gonzalez and Raymond Poiccart are wealthy Europeans who move easily in high society but, capable of convincing disguise and brilliant acting, are as likely to be found on the street corners of London as at

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the dinner tables of Paris and Rome. Like Dumas's Three Musketeers, they recruit a fourth person, and, by means of ingenious plotting and perfect timing, always a step ahead of the police, never fail in their task. They leave false trails and provocative notes, often teasingly pulling off extraordinarily complicated, even ritualistic, murders under the very noses of the police. It is probably the swagger and assurance with which the Four enact their crimes, rather than the justice of the punishment, which attract our awe.



In *The Council of Justice*, written in 1908, the Four pit themselves against The Red Hundred, an organisation dedicated to international anarchy, led by the mysterious and beautiful assassin, the Woman of Gratz:

*The emotion that was within her she conveyed through her wonderful voice. Indeed, the power of the speech lay rather in its delivery than in its substance, for only now and then did she depart from the*

*unwritten text of Anarchism: the right of the oppressed to overthrow the oppressor; the divinity of violence; the sacredness of sacrifice and martyrdom in the cause of enlightenment.*

As in the first of the series, *The Four Just Men*, the Four are pursued by the indomitable Detective Superintendent Falmouth of Scotland Yard:

*He was at the same disadvantage he had always been – the Four Just Men were to him names only, symbols of a swift remorseless force that struck surely and to the minute – and nothing more.*



Edgar Wallace was born on 1 April 1875. His parents were unmarried actors. Nine days later he was adopted by a fish porter. At 11 years old he started his career selling newspapers on Ludgate Circus, London. After military service he became a journalist, working in South Africa and then London. He was a prolific and popular

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writer (despite Leon Trotsky's assessment of his work: 'It is hard to imagine anything more mediocre, contemptible and crude'). At one time Wallace's publisher claimed that a quarter of all books read in England were written by Wallace. He lost a fortune on gambling and lavish entertainment. One particular decision was his ruin: a competition in the *Daily Mail*, which serialised *The Four Just Men*, in which readers had to solve the mystery. Too many were successful, and Wallace had to underwrite the prize money. He died penniless in 1932, while working on the screenplay of the Hollywood film *King Kong*. Today a memorial plaque in Ludgate Circus reads: 'He knew wealth and poverty, yet had walked with Kings and kept his bearings. Of his talents he gave lavishly to authorship – but to Fleet Street he gave his heart.'

### **Notes by Bill Homewood**



**Bill Homewood's** West End credits include leads in *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *Grand Hotel*, *Phantom of the Opera*, *The Boys From Syracuse*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Twelfth Night* and *The Hollow Crown* (Royal Shakespeare Company). His innumerable television series include *The Professionals*, *Berkeley Square*, *A Wing and a Prayer*, *The Renford Rejects*, *London's Burning*, *Casualty*, *Coronation Street*, *Crocodile Shoes*, *The Bill* and *Spy Trap*. Bill also directs theatre in the USA, the UK, and France, where he runs a ranch with his wife Estelle Kohler. His recordings for Naxos AudioBooks include *Les Misérables*, *King Solomon's Mines*, *The Count of Monte Cristo* and *She*.

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Edited and mastered by Malcolm Blackmoor

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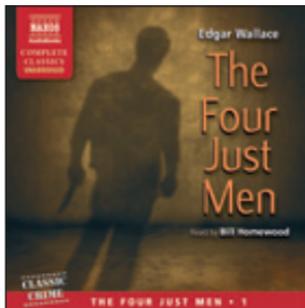
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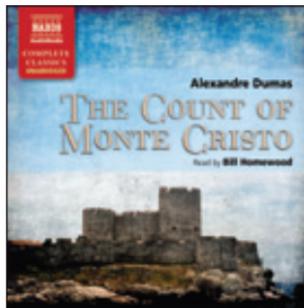
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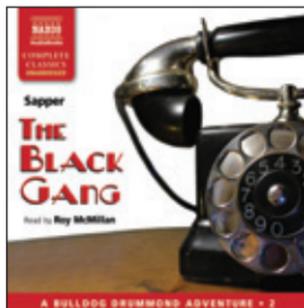
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(Wallace) ISBN: 9781843794554  
Read by Bill Homewood



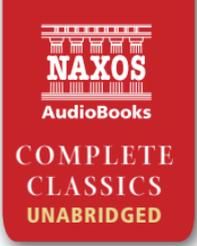
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**Edgar Wallace**

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The Four Just Men, in this second of Wallace's ingenious series of thrillers, pit themselves against The Red Hundred, an organisation dedicated to international anarchy, led by the charismatic, mysterious and beautiful assassin, the Woman of Gratz. As always, the avengers' methods are meticulously planned and ruthlessly executed.



**Bill Homewood** is well known for his appearances in numerous television shows and leading roles in the West End and for the Royal Shakespeare Company. His other recordings for Naxos AudioBooks include *Les Misérables*, *King Solomon's Mines*, *The Count of Monte Cristo* and *She*.

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CD ISBN:  
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