

Mortal Mischief by Frank Tallis.
Century 2005.

This is the first of a series of wonderfully atmospheric and hugely readable novels set in early 20th century Vienna. The main protagonists are a young Jewish psychotherapist, Dr Max Liebermann, and his friend and colleague Detective Inspector Oskar Reinhardt.

The two bring together their respective talents to solve a particularly puzzling murder involving a beautiful medium discovered shot to death in a locked room. The two leading characters share the novel with an array of well-drawn individuals, some germane to the plot, and presumably future novels, like Max's family, and his fiancée Clara, and Reinhardt's adored wife Else and others who are human red herrings.

The story is played out against the background of Hapsburg Vienna with its heavily stratified society, and predictable pretensions, and there is more than a whiff of contemporary civic politics which was to play such a role in later decades.

As a far from habitual reader of detective stories I was hooked from the first page and intrigued until the very end. I can't wait for the next instalment of what promises to be a terrific series.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh