



A Play of Isaac

Margaret Frazer

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THE MIDDLE AGES COME TO LIFE... TO BRING US MURDER

The year is 1434, and preparations are under way for the Corpus Christi festival in Oxford, England. Plays are a traditional part of the celebration, and Joliffe and the rest of his troupe are to perform Isaac and Abraham. Until then, their theatrical antics are in demand by a wealthy merchant who offers them an opportunity to ply their trade for room and board.

But when the body of a murdered man is found outside the barn door where the troupe is lodging, Joliffe must raise the curtain on the merchant's mysterious past and uncover the startling truth behind a murder most foul...

PRAISE FOR THE PLAYER JOLIFFE SERIES

"Everything I'd hoped to find: memorable characters, a meticulously detailed world, an intriguing crime, and a satisfying conclusion." - Roundtable Reviews

"Will entertain and confound you with its intricately plotted mystery and richly detailed writing... Ms. Frazer knows the fifteenth century and it shows..." - Romance Readers Connection

"Deftly drawn characters acting in a stage of intricate and accurate details of medieval life." - Affaire de Couer

Carefully and faithfully rendered, 15th-century England and France and all the political difficulties come easily to life... Medieval mystery fans will once again enjoy the clever player Joliffe and his adventures. - The Mystery Reader

PRAISE FOR MARGARET FRAZER

"Prepare to be enchanted as Margaret Frazer transports you back to the 15th century." - Romantic Times

"More than just a good read. The reader comes away sadder and wiser, knowing that what they've read is that stuff of real life. Brava!" - Historical Novels Review

"A smooth and absorbing saga of conspiracy and treachery in 15th-century England... A tantalizing secret turns out to have stunning political implications." - Publishers Weekly

"Finely plotted and subtly shaded. Frazer has the detailed substance that brings an era to life, while her characters' psychological makeup is as cunningly wrought as the historical background." - Publishers Weekly

"Margaret Frazer has quietly claimed her place as one of the preeminent writers of historical crime fiction, delivering the whole package - a good mystery, wonderful characters, and a fascinating period of history. Her novels are a dream to read." - Aunt Agatha's Newsletter

Herodotus Award Winner.

Twice nominated for the Edgar Award

Twice nominated for the Minnesota Book Award

A Romantic Times Top Pick.

A Play of Isaac Details

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From Reader Review A Play of Isaac for online ebook

Sumi says

A Play of Isaac is the first in the Joliffe series of mysteries.

Joliffe was introduced in Frazer's Dame Frevisse mysteries first as a member of a troupe of down--on-their-luck players and continues to pop up intermittantly in them.

In this story, taking place not long after the events that introduced them in 'The Servants Tale', the troupe is in Oxford. They have been invited to stay at the home of one of the merchants in exchange for some entertainment. To the troupe the deal is better than what they've been getting of late and they happily accept.

The ever curious Joliffe can't help but notice things and that's all to the good because not long after they arrive, they find a dead body outside the barn they're being housed in. Then a mysterious food poisoning strikes during a feast resulting in the death of Lewis, who was to be betrothed to the daughter of the house in spite of the fact that he had down's syndrome.

Joliffe solves the mystery, as he always does and almost as if by way of reward, Lord Lovell, a visitor to the merchant becomes their patron, giving them a guaranteed income in addition to his protection.

Mike McAdam says

I loved this book! I don't usually go for historical fiction but this was interesting and fun. It is about a troupe of actors in the 1400s that find a body on their doorstep (that is all you are getting - I don't do spoilers). The plot took some time to get going (like maybe 1/3 of the book before it starts) but the set up and characters and time period were all interesting so I wasn't bored waiting for the story to begin. There is a lot of set up. The characters are memorable and fun and the plot was interesting. Another thing I don't usually like is the everyday joe who turns into a detective (in this case an actor), but this was enjoyable enough that it didn't bother me. I read this book upon recommendation from a friend - I would never have chosen it. But I am glad I read it....

Lauren says

Sweet but a bit of a snooze. The actual mystery is teeny tiny.

Rosemary says

Interesting premise, but we gave up partway through as the writing style was too awkward. It may have benefited from some ruthless editing. It's very hard to find a medieval mystery as good as Cadfael.

Cheri Edwards says

I never thought that I would ever find a mediaeval / renaissance mystery novel that I could not complete reading. Got to page 126 and I couldn't take it anymore.....it saddens me that I didn't like the book. There is nothing wrong with the writing style.....I did have to get used to her style though. It just didn't move, stays in one place too long. I will try the 2nd book. I'm just so used to Edward Marstons novels on the same subject (acting troupe) The Nicholas Bracewell novels. I just about cried when I finished the last book in that series. Such a beautiful series.

Oh dear, I guess I have spoken too soon. So disregard my bad critique for this book because this is a very fine read, Beginning may have been a little slow but wound up being a very 'good read'.

Vicki Carlson says

I really liked the characters and the background of this story. There's a level of detail about players in the 15th century that I found entertaining and informative. But the mystery is too small of a part of the story. I'll enjoy following the characters through the rest of the series, but I hope that mystery will be a larger part of the rest of the books.

Meredith Galman says

Lackluster historical about an acting troupe in 1430s England. I gave it a try because I remember once liking Frazer's Dame Frevisse mysteries before I realized they were all the same, but neither time nor change of protagonist has improved her.

Ruth says

c2004: FWFTB: 1434, Oxford, merchant, players, Eden-child. The cover of the book that I have is completely different to the one on GR and I can only think that it was because the UK edition seems to have been published some time after the US edition. Very evocative and nice characters although I didn't 'love' any of them. The plot slowly winded to its conclusion but written in such a way that I couldn't describe it as a slow burn. Recommended to the normal crew. *"He kept his outward smile but inwardly hurt with the thought of losing all of this because of something not part of it at all."*

Anna Mussmann says

Summary: An overly-educated, traveling medieval player (actor) realizes that murder has been done.

As a sketch of medieval life in a college town, the book is enjoyable. The style is polite and peaceful-- so peaceful that nearly the entire volume is devoted to developing the characters and setting. Fortunately, the characters and setting are interesting enough to engage the reader until the end. Unfortunately the book is over-written: the author does not seem to believe that "showing is better than telling," and provides rather pedantic explanations of what the characters are thinking, seeing, and doing. The book was also bit

predictable-- the murder victim, although in the best of health for the majority of the book, seemed clearly doomed to me as soon as he stepped into his first scene. Rather short shrift is given to the mystery and very few clues are provided to either the sleuth or the reader. In addition, the protagonist's response to the conclusion seems underdeveloped. All in all, this is a reasonably pleasant book but far from stellar.

Eliza says

Poor. Slight and insubstantial. Very amateurish writing and with no sense of time and place. I'm sure she had done her research, but she had no feel at all for medieval England. Very much an American view of English history - very clean and cosy and everyone thinking and acting with modern view-points. Contrast with Ariana Franklin's Mistress of the Art of Death books, which do have a real sense of period. Wouldn't read any more

Terri says

A band of traveling players make an arrangement to play for a local landowner in exchange for board until their upcoming Celebration they are playing. When a man is murdered and dumped outside the barn they are staying in, Joliffe investigates.

I love the historical detail of Margaret Frazer's works and this is no different. I like Joliffe and the players and enjoyed the dynamics.

This was the first in a new series and the mystery part was pretty weak but will give it another shot.

Susan says

Since they have no patron, a band of traveling players in 15th century England is vulnerable to accusation when a murdered man turns up outside their door. They are in Oxford to dramatize the story of Isaac and Abraham for the Corpus Christi festival, lodging with a wealthy family because their ward, who has Down's syndrome, is entranced by the players' performance. One of the actors, Joliffe, who has a flair for adapting plays for their tiny troupe, also has knack for investigating murders. A well-researched background of heresy and medieval property law in addition to a well-crafted plot makes it an interesting read.

Linda says

Maybe 4 minus. Enjoyed book. Historical fiction a favorite. Like the medieval period. Having the main character be a traveling player interesting.

John Lee says

I am not sure who/what pointed me towards this one but I am glad it/they did.

At almost 3 weeks, the book took me much longer to read than I would normally expected, especially with 2 long haul flights included which provided an extra 16 hours potential reading time.

Somehow the early story, although very readable didnt 'grab' me and maybe because of this read-a-bit-here-read-a-bit-there attitude to the book I tended to lose track of who was who, not only in the household but even in the players themselves.

I thought that as a whole the main scene took too long to set before the action started. Also,because this is the first of the series, it took a while to establish if Joliff, the central character, was a goodie or not.

After finishing the book, with all sorted for the best,(and we all love a happy ending- dont we?) I think that I would have scored this a 4*. However, realistically I have decided on a 3*

Please do not let that put you off reading it.It will not stop me going on with the series and I have the next already downloaded.

elizabeth mackessy-lloyd says

Love this author and really love this character! Can't wait to read subsequent installments.
