



## The First Murder

*The Medieval Murderers , Karen Maitland , Bernard Knight , Philip Gooden , Ian Morson , Susanna Gregory*

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Carmarthen, 1199 - A sudden snowstorm in late December means that two parties of travellers are forced to abandon their journeys and take refuge in the bustling market town of Carmarthen. Unfortunately, the two groups - one representing the Archbishop of Canterbury and one comprising canons from St David's Cathedral - are bitter opponents in a dispute that has been raging for several months.

When an enigmatic stranger appears, and requests permission to stage a play, which he claims will alleviate tensions and engender an atmosphere of seasonal harmony, the castle's constable, Sir Symon Cole, refuses on the grounds that encouraging large gatherings of angry people is likely to end in trouble, but his wife Gwenllian urges him to reconsider. At first, it appears she is right, and differences of opinions and resentments do seem to have been forgotten in the sudden anticipation of what promises to be some unique entertainment. Unfortunately, one of the Archbishop's envoys - the one chosen to play the role of Cain - dies inexplicably on the eve of the performance, and there is another 'accident' at the castle, which claims the life of a mason.

Throughout the ages, the play is performed in many guises, but each time bad luck seems to follow after all those involved in its production.

## The First Murder Details

Date : Published July 5th 2012 by Simon Schuster UK

ISBN : 9781849837361

Author : The Medieval Murderers , Karen Maitland , Bernard Knight , Philip Gooden , Ian Morson , Susanna Gregory

Format : Hardcover 384 pages

Genre : Historical, Historical Fiction, Mystery, Historical Mystery, Crime

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## From Reader Review The First Murder for online ebook

### **Bettie? says**

Bettie's Books

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### **Kirsten says**

These are fun reads...I love the themes that flow through these multi-author mysteries.

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### **Linda Curtis says**

A good entertaining quick read by some very good authors.

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### **Alanpalmer says**

Not exactly a murder Mystery although a few of the stories within the collection have a who done it theme running. It is the story of a story. How a 12th Century Manuscript appears KJinxed, even Cursed at its first performance and as the story covers 800 years ( in 4 main and 2 minor stories) one can see the reactions of future generations (although all are in our past) to a historical manuscript at the creation of which we were present.

As to the stories they attempt to be historically accurate with footnotes explaining the real world situation at the time and dosed with a sometimes black humour. They are good and entertaining stories but nothing like the adventure of a Sherlock Holmes, or the mental agility of a Miss Marple.

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### **Alison C says**

The First Murder is another in the series of mosaic novels by The Medieval Murderers, a group of British historical mystery writers that this time around includes Ian Morson, Bernard Knight, Philip Gooden, Karen Maitland and Susanna Gregory. A prior pens a religious play, really a series of Biblical stories for his brother monks to act out for lay people, thus edifying their souls and entertaining them at the same time. Included among the stories he chooses to tell is that of Cain and Abel, the brothers who become the perpetrator and victim, respectively, of the first murder in the Bible. Little does the prior know that the story is cursed, and that the ancient murder depicted in the play is not the only murder that occurs when the play is performed.... As was done for the previous seven novels in this series, each author contributes a novella based on this beginning, carrying the story of the play's performance through time and generally using series characters by

the various authors. We have the play traveling to Wales in 1199, to Cambridge in 1361, to London in the early 1600s, again in London in 1821 and finally to Surrey in 1944. Each story is well-told and contains a lot of historical detail, which I assume is more or less accurate, and each story finds a different riff on the basic idea. It's not necessary to have read any of the earlier novels in this series, nor to have read any of the individual author's series novels featuring some of the characters that appear here; an enjoyable, if sometimes grisly, way to while away a few hours. Recommended.

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### **Linda Amos says**

Another good outing for this series, although it wasn't as gripping as the previous 3 I've read. Hopefully the next one will be better.

Oseney Priory, Oxford in 1154. Prior Wigod writes a play which is a series of sketches from the Bible and includes the Cain and Abel story. When the bell isn't rung for matins the Prior goes to find out why and finds Brother Paul, the bell ringer, has been murdered. We follow the play and the incidents connected to it through the centuries to WW2

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### **Ovidia Yu says**

I really enjoyed this book though I picked it up out of curiosity. Each 'act' is written by a different (established in his / her own right) history mystery writer and complete in itself though there are links (explaining what really happened or happened as a result of) to previous acts. I am looking to get the other books in the series.

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### **Naticia says**

A set of themed short stories, all featuring the same cursed play. I thought the first was the best of the set, by far.

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### **Sorcias MacNasty says**

The audio of this is terrible. Every time you move to a new track, there's an absurdly long pause, so conversations are continually interrupted and it feels horribly slow-moving.

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### **MarilynM says**

3.5 stars

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## **Mary says**

Time was up at library, and I had already re-newed it, and I was losing interest due to the "short story" format of the book. Or maybe I was just missing a good Reacher book?

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## **Lisbeth says**

The pen name of "The Medieval Murderers" hides five historical mystery writers, all members of the Crime Writers Association (Bernard Knight, Ian Morson, Philip Gooden, Susanna Gregory and Karen Maitland). It seems this is not the first book they write. I find information on another seven books they have written together. This book is not exactly what I expected (more of real time medieval murders), but turned out to be quite interesting and enjoyable. The more you get into it, the more difficult it is to put down.

The story covers the period from 1154 to 1944 and the theme is the same. Can a play possibly be cursed? It definitely seems like it. Every time The Play of Adam is enacted, somebody dies. The drama is divided into a Prologue and Epilogue with Four acts in between. The programme reads as follows:

Prologue - In which Ian Morson tells of Prior Wigod of Oseney Priory writing The Play of Adam, and how the world's first murder - of Abel by his brother Cain - is enacted with equally murderous results (1154)

Act One - In which Susanna Gregory relates how The Play of Adam travels from Oxford to Carmarthen in the year 1199, and the castle's constable and his wife encounter murder among rival clerics (1199).

Act Two - In which Karen Maitland tells how the townspeople of Ely fear that The Play of Adam has unleashed a demon upon the town, after a gruesome discovery is made in the cathedral (1361)

Act Three - In which Philip Good tells the story of a playwright who wishes to obtain revenge on William Shakespeare and comes to an unfortunate end, while player Nick Revill faces the secret agents of the Privy Council (somewhere between 1603-1616).

Act Four - In which Ian Morson writes about Doll Pocket satisfying her yearning to become an actress, while Joe Malinferno struggles with the mystery of Egyptian hieroglyphics. Unfortunately, the rehearsals for the newly discovered Play of Adam result in a murder. But has it to do with thespian jealousies, or something much more arcane? (1821)

Epilogue - In which Bernard Knight recounts how The Play of Adam is revived by an academic department during the Second World War, which provides an unexpected finale (1944).

This is a cleverly written book. As you can understand from the above The Play of Adam is in the centre of the story, travelling merciless through time. Whenever it is played, somebody dies. Already in 1199, Prior Alan knew that the play was cursed and he took his steps to never let it be played again.

"Brother Stephen, choose two of our younger brethren. Tell them they must be ready to leave Ely at dawn. They must take this scroll straight to the Benedictine House at Westminster, and give it into the hand of the abbot. He's an old friend of mine. He will understand my warning. ....

'If God wills it, this Play of Adam might for once save two young lives instead of taking them.'

He handed the scroll to Stephen, who looked down at the words his superior had written.  
In that this scroll contains Holy Writ, you shall not suffer it to be destroyed. Yet neither shall you break the seal upon it, lest fools and knaves make of it swords to slay the innocent and infect man's reason with the worm of madness.  
Alan of Walsingham, Prior of Ely."

Well, obviously the play found its way out from the hidden archives. As it travels through history you get historical notes after each act. Upon these notes the authors have woven their stories. It is quite fascinating and I really enjoyed this book. On top of it, it has a great ending. A different kind of mystery, and really enjoyable. If you like history and historical fiction it is a great read.

Review from my book blog [thecontentreader.blogspot.com](http://thecontentreader.blogspot.com)

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### **Stephanie says**

'The First Murder' is an historical mystery by the Medieval Murderers, these being a group of published authors who specialise in historical mysteries, mainly set during the medieval period. The authors have fluctuated slightly over the series (this is the eighth, I believe), but on this occasion include Susanna Gregory, Bernard Knight, Karen Maitland, Ian Morson and Philip Gooden.

The idea behind all of the series is a kind of literary relay race with each book featuring some sort of artefact, in this case a medieval play called the Play of Adam. Each chapter is a separate story by one of the authors featuring this artefact and then passing it on to the next author so that you get a series of episodes in the object's history.

In the prologue, Ian Morson explains how the Prior of Osney Abbey comes to write the Play during the 12th century and how the story of Cain and Abel exposes dangerous tensions within the priory's community, resulting in brutal murder and the idea that the play is cursed. From that point on the play reappears in medieval Carmarthen and Ely in stories by Susanna Gregory and Karen Maitland, but travelling to London where Philip Gooden's Jacobean playwright Nick Revill is dragged into Shakespearean drama. Ian Morson picks up the story in Georgian London and we finally concluded with Bernard Knight and the Second World War.

Like a lot of anthologies, this has strengths and weaknesses. None of the stories are bad, but some are stronger than others. I thought Susanna Gregory's and Philip Gooden's stories were the best of the bunch, but I didn't hate any of the rest. I think these books are also a very good way to test the waters with new authors.

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### **Vikas Datta says**

The narrative achieves a subtle air of menace in its march down the centuries, but a couple of installments don't leave you with a full sense of closure or definite tying up of loose ends though evoking the ethos and the atmosphere of the period quite well - the last however offers a good twist, rounding out everything..

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## **D.H. Hanni says**

First time reading a book by The Medieval Murderers, a collection of historical fiction authors who each write a stand alone story, each having one common thing that loosely ties them together. This one revolves around a fictional medieval play, The Play of Adam, written in the mid 12th century. It's cursed from the start with a murder being committed whenever it's performed.

The beginning stories and the last story were the strongest, most well-written out of the 5 stories in the book. It is a little bit difficult to make the transition from different time periods and a new cast of characters in each section and after a while the common thread of a murder being committed gets a little old.

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