



Play to the End

Robert Goddard

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Once Toby Flood played a Bond-like hero in a Hollywood film. Now he's serving a sentence in a crippled traveling production of a newly unearthed Joe Orton play—a play that might have saved Toby's career if only someone enjoyed watching it. Painfully, the show's swan song is coming in Brighton, where Toby's wife happens to be living happily with another man in anticipation of a divorce decree. Then, almost as if he were scripted, a stranger enters the scene....

A stalker is frightening Toby's wife, Jenny, who believes the man is probably one of her estranged husband's fans. When Jenny asks Toby to confront the man, Toby leaps at the chance. Soon, he's moonlighting from the stage lights and heroically pursuing... something. The truth is, the more Toby finds out about Jenny's stalker, the more questions he has about a twisting tale of unexplained deaths, interlocking lives, and the violent, greedy adventures of none other than Jenny's wealthy fiancé—a man who might make the perfect villain, if only the hero lives long enough to prove it....

Play to the End Details

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From Reader Review Play to the End for online ebook

Iowa City Public Library says

Middle-aged actor Tobe Flood is stuck in a theatrical tour that's sputtering to an end. The last week of it's lackluster run is in Brighton, where his soon to be ex-wife is living with her new fiancé. Tobe's hoping to somehow convince her to come to her senses and take him back. By the end of the week, though, he finds himself in the middle of a decades-old mystery that threatens to end his career, if not his life.

This is the third Robert Goddard novel I've read, and the one I liked the best. What his novels all have in common is an intelligent plot that's full of twists and turns and well-drawn characters. In the midst of my enthusiasm for my new-found author, I was looking through the December 12, 2008 issue of Entertainment Weekly and saw Stephen King's picks for the best books of 2008. The novels of Robert Goddard were at the top of his list. Apparently, King just discovered the author this year, too. As he said in the article: "You discover a guy who's doing work on such a high level, and the disturbing question occurs: Who else have I missed that's this good?" --Ardis

From ICPL Staff Picks Blog

Bryan Higgs says

Number 16 in my anal, Robert Goddard novel reading quest.

This one's a good one. Unlike the previous two, it doesn't go far-afield at the end, to explain what has been happening -- either geographically, or plot-wise.

A common characteristic of a Robert Goddard novel is that you don't know what's happening, but the layers of the plot onion are slowly peeled away, and then you think that you know what happened (or a little of it), but then -- sudden clever twist (for which Goddard is famous) -- and no you don't. This one certainly fits that mold, and is cast (pun intended!) in a different situation -- the protagonist is a stage actor.

Recommended -- but then, I haven't read one of his yet that I wouldn't recommend.

Hannah says

And I thought Steven Moffat was the king of convoluted and unnecessary plot twists.

Jayne Charles says

There are certain books that have to devote page after page to the bad guy explaining his actions in forensic detail, often in some kind of bizarre suspension of hostilities before the police roll up, so the protagonist gets to ask all kinds of "but why didn't you....." and "how did you....." questions to tie up all the plot holes the

reader thinks he's spotted. This is one of them. That kind of thing always convinces me there's a gaping logic loop somewhere in the plot if only you take the time to investigate it under laboratory conditions.

In the novel, actor Toby Flood goes on the trail of a strange guy who appears to be stalking his estranged wife. It subsequently appears that he is the one being pursued, rather than her, and by some very unsavoury characters. Much of the action relies on Toby's interest in getting back together with his wife, and given that she didn't come across as a particularly nice character, I found that element of it hard to swallow. It was competently written, and for the most part it kept the action coming. On the other hand, I found the title ironic, as it gave up its secrets earlier than I was expecting, leaving the end of the book a chore to complete.

Sandie says

This is my first Robert Goddard novel, but it certainly will not be my last. This story is wonderfully plotted, fluid and intelligent. Duplicity and intrigue are the order of the day and will keep you reading. Unlike most mystery/suspense novels, Mr. Goddard's manipulations and story telling expertise do not "telegraph" the ending when your half way through the book. Others have described the plotline, I will not do so. Just know that if your in the mood for some engrossing storytelling, this is the ticket.

LG says

If this book were a matinee performance at the local theater, I'd probably pay the ticket price for it to while away an agreeable couple of hours, but I wouldn't be surprised if it didn't get to the West End of whatever I meant by "local." Our hero Toby Flood is affable enough, but I just couldn't buy his protestations that he still loved Jenny, his leading lady. More likely, he was willing to give up his own onstage engagements and play detective because he had got bored of the production he was in and didn't actually feel like playing it to the end. Then he causes a terrible accident and thereafter feels obliged to personally get to the bottom of things and correct all wrongs as they arise.

The action builds up in solid Goddard fashion until local weirdo Derek Oswin goes MIA, and then the plot thickens absurdly and the third act resolves things as best it can. Along the way are amusing enough characters, including – for a completely random reason I still can't fully explain to myself – Hergé's Captain Haddock and Red Rackham. It's as if Goddard picked unseen ingredients from a mixed bag (Colbonite plastics, obsessive-compulsive disorder, Tintin comics, Brighton country mansion, old photos, family secrets ... and, of course, murder) and said, "Right, let's see what I can make out of these." The result *just* about holds together until the final bow.

Cliff says

A typical Goddard novel, with the past influencing the present. Set in Brighton which I know, so that was a bonus. Written in the form of a transcription of an audio diary. The main character, Toby Flood comes across as likeable, but not much of a 'luvvie'. The best character is Sydney Porteous, a 'hail fellow, well met' kind of guy. I could imagine him so clearly. However, I am not happy (as a retired solicitor) with the author's take on the laws of intestacy. I do not think a child would inherit on intestacy from the husband of his mother, that

child being an illegitimate child of mother. Also, the industrial injuries claim would not have been paid by that estate, but by the company's insurers. Two glaring errors in the plot. As he had been brought up by father, he may well have had a claim, but only through the courts. Downgraded to 2*. I don't like improbabilities magnified by total errors

Amanda Wells says

I have mixed feelings about this book - because in truth I did enjoy it.
I found it easy to read, and I did want to know how it would resolve.

But there was just enough farce there, just enough requirement to suspend disbelief that it felt a bit like an episode of a British murder serial.

I think that's why my first impressions were that this was a black comedy that forgot to be darkly humorous. The characters had it in them - but it just never took that turn, and in the end it felt disappointing.

If you want a quick and relatively uncomplicated read - much as when you want to watch an episode of Midsomer Murders - go for it. If you're after something real and or clever, maybe seek elsewhere.

Barry Bridges says

Goddard on top form. Characters, plot and execution all first class. Didn't put it down!

Sandra Tee says

A good read

Keeps you guessing until the end. Many twists and turns. A very good plot. Story is good all the way through

Erich Sysak says

Very simple plot, but well-written. Moves fast. Lively first person voice and an enjoyable main character. Silly ending, but OK. Many of these thrillers don't end well."

martin says

I think someone else has said that he/she was wondering why the main characters don't just call the police instead of trying to play Miss Marples. Valid question - the idea that Toby wants to win back his wife so much that he wants to "do what a man's gotta do" is a bit thin. He's a fading actor not an action hero.

Anyway the plot is clever (relying a little too much on Flood reacting predictably to follow clues set by someone who has never met him before though) and there's little chance you'll guess the ending - except that the ending in the sense of the "why did he do it and what did he do" comes well before the end of the book.

One thing, Brighton does come alive in this book - got the feeling it was a labour of love for Goddard describing the "city".

Kim says

Setting: Brighton, UK; 2002. When actor Toby Flood arrives in Brighton for the last week of the touring production of the Joe Orton play in which he plays a leading role, he is approached by his estranged wife for help regarding a man who she believes is stalking her. Confronting the man, Toby is drawn into a maelstrom of events involving his wife's new fiancé and his family, who ran (and closed down) a medium-sized plastics factory based in Brighton. Amid allegations of dodgy dealings and industrial injuries, Toby finds himself totally out of his depth whilst trying to get to the truth...

A real rollercoaster of a ride, thoroughly gripping and absorbing as have previous Robert Goddard novels I have read - 8.5/10.

Cybercrone says

Another story where the plot is completely driven by brain-dead decisions by the protagonist.

Michael Ward says

Solid Mystery novel. A bit Enid Blyton for adults.

Karen says

Much of the plot was frustrating and tedious. I understand there wouldn't be much of a book if the characters called the police instead of doing their own investigation but I really wished they'd had better reasons for not doing so. Near the end, I got so angry with the stupid stuff the main character did I could barely stand it but hung in hoping it would somehow be explained so it all made sense. It was not. Quite a bummer, this one.

Ella says

Het eerste boek wat ik van Goddard lees. Viel heel erg tegen. Misschien was de vertaling slecht. Het zou een thriller moeten zijn maar ik vond het allemaal nog al knullig. Je wilt het toch uitlezen maar eigenlijk was het zonde van mijn tijd.

Julie Round says

Not the most interesting Robert Goddard book I have read. Perfect for fans of Peter James.

Tweedledum says

Robert Goddard certainly knows how to get a tiger by the tail! In typical Goddard style "play to the end " starts innocuously enough with a story that seems likely to be exceedingly boring and a lead character who is far from attractive. Yet we are slowly but surely drawn into the web of confusion and deceit. Why is Derek Oswin making a minor nuisance of himself around Toby Flood's ex wife's business? What is so important about his oh so boring history of a Brighton plastic firm that has been closed down a good many years ago. And so the page turning begins ending with a cliff hanger scene at Beachy Head itself!

A very satisfying read.

Jeremy says

Another excellent Goddard tale. I liked the way he made a parallel tale between our hero Toby Flood and the life of Joe Orton and, being set in Brighton offered some lovely scene descriptions.... I am getting the feeling that a standard element of a Goddard novel is the break down of a couples relationship - divorce features a lot and in this novel we have "estrangement". its often the lingering feelings the male has for the wife that gets him in trouble. I can't believe that a mildly intelligent being (like Toby?) would let themselves be drawn into a tangled web like this and constantly keep missing the show if they were not just a little bit unhinged? This tale is full of great plot twists and turns and keeps a feeling of helplessness running all the way through. I did like the way Goddard led us to a climax at the cliff face only to reveal the key to the tale at the last minute but then to slap us in the face with the final twist. Great story and well plotted out. Bring on the next Goddard.
