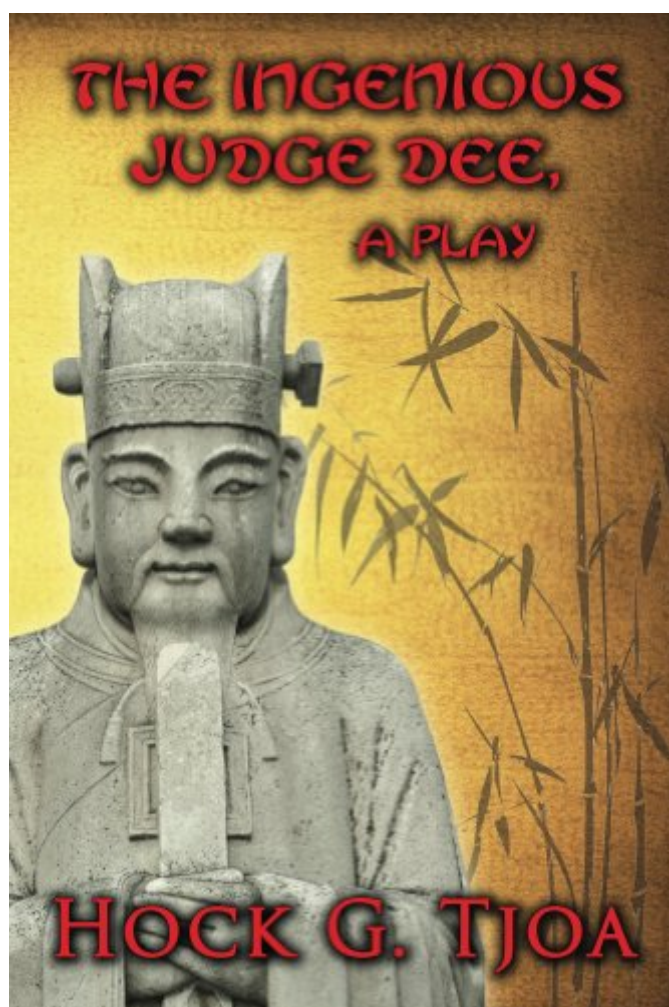


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The Ingenious Judge Dee



Synopsis

A double homicide, a "reluctant" corpse, a bride poisoned on her wedding night--all taking place in a small county, one of fifteen hundred in Tang dynasty China, and all demanding investigation and judicial response within a month! Judge Dee deals with these cases with his usual investigators and with his customary aplomb, even though he is himself under investigation by an Imperial Censor. He is unorthodox in his choice of investigators (former bandits and a female ex-cat burglar) and one of his suspects is a voluptuous woman who alleges harassment on the part of the authorities. He may also have stepped on some toes of the local gentry. What is an upright civil servant to do?

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Customer Reviews

I want to begin this review with the note that I'm not normally into plays. Despite that, I did enjoy reading it for the most part. The play takes place in China and revolves around Judge Dee, his band of investigators, and three murders. The plot line was interesting and I could imagine it on stage with colorful costumes and traditional music. I've always enjoyed plays from Asia (Kabuki, etc) and I know that if this were being performed I would thoroughly enjoy it. There is sparse description as to setting, which leaves most to the reader's imagination. There were a few elements that I found lacking. While the dialogue was well written, there didn't seem to be any difference between any of

the characters. Each character seemed to have the same vocabulary and a similar speech pattern. I ended up imagining them all as the same person, just different genders. I also found the constant "beat" used throughout the dialogue to be distracting, especially when ellipses were used at other times to signify a pause. The last element I found lacking was how easy all the information pertaining to the homicides was to ascertain. It seemed as though everyone was willing to divulge anything upon just meeting someone. I liked the story and I liked the characters; I wanted something a little less predictable. I was also confused as to why the Censor was present in the play since he seemed to have no purpose and nothing came of his presence. Overall, I did enjoy the play. It was well written despite a few typos and some of the previously stated issues. I could absolutely see this as a popular and entertaining play when acted on stage. There was good character development where Judge Dee was concerned.

The Ingenious Judge Dee is a play, adapted from the original Robert van Gulik novels, which are, according to Wikipedia, also adapted from their original Chinese counterparts from an eighteenth-century Chinese novel, all of which are allegedly adapted from a real magistrate, Di Renjie, who was born in the year 630 AD. Author Hock Tjoa has his work cut out for him! If I've used the word "adapt" a lot, it's only because I'm trying to provide a good hook for this review. Truthfully, it's because there's a good hook in the book! Judge Dee is an interesting enough character; we learn early in the play that he's fair-minded, that he employs former criminals to investigate crimes, and that he's living in a time long before forensic technology has given him access to DNA evidence, satellite surveillance, and PRISM by the NSA. It's a time when a law enforcement official is really not beholden to the people of China, but to the officials "one of whom he ends up having to snoop around, investigating the death of a young bride! The play is especially enjoyable in the first large chunk. The description and stage direction is strong, and the characters inhabit a cohesive world. As the drama goes on, however, a reader will have a difficult time keeping track of what they see; there's an "elder" and a "young" versions of many characters, along with a "Mother" and a "Widow" ones. The names can grow hard to keep track of. The actual description of a scene gets lost as dialogue seems to replace it; from a reader's perspective, this makes it difficult to know where the characters are. From a play director's vantage point, it's almost impossible to tell how to set up one's stage "but that's not necessarily bad. Ultimately, it's hard to judge a play by reading it.

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