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Posted on 22 October 2018 By Ngaio Marsh

# @Kindle á Opening Night ? eBook or E-pub free

After the disappointing *Swing, Brother, Swing* or *A wreath for Rivera*, Marsh returns to the world of theatre A world which she knew very well and it shows An encounter with a person hitherto only seen and heard on the cinema screen is often disconcerting There was a kind of voluptuousness in Martyn s fatigue Only the chair she sat on and the desk that propped her arms and head prevented her, she felt, from slipping to the floor Into this defencelessness Poole s suggestions entered like those of a mesmerist, and that perfection of duality for which actors pray and which they are so rarely granted now fully invested her She was herself and she was the girl in the play She guided the girl and was aware of her and she governed the possession of the girl by the obverse of the man in the play There is perhaps nothing that gives one so strong a sense of theatre from the inside as the sound of invisible players in action The murder does not occur till one third of the book is over, but Marsh is able to make the set up interesting enough that one does not mind the wait. As always, the murder is investigated by Chief Detective Inspector Alleyn who is an obvious aristocrat but is acceptable because he had a spare and scholarly face with a monkish look about it And again as always, Alleyn is supported by the earthier Inspector Fox Others are also stock characters with some portrayed negatively in a manner typical of that era 1951 But the mystery and the writing are good enough to hold one s interest, and then some. Love Marsh She s up there with Christie as a great mystery writer. @Kindle ó Opening Night · A London Actor Was Dying For A Star Billing From The Leading Lady S Liaison To The Harassment Of An Aging Juvenile Lead There S Never A Dull Moment, Darling, At The Vulcan Theatre But Vanity And Hysterics, Suspicion And Superstition, Brandy And Jealousy, Are Upstaged By A Death On Opening Night Was It Really Suicide Or A Macabre Encore To A Long Ago Murder In The Same Backstage Room Scotland Yard S Cast Of Suspects For The Final Curtain This is the sixteenth Inspector Alleyn book and was first published in 1951 This instalment in the series, shows Ngaio Marsh turning to a world she knew extremely well that of the theatre Martyn Tarne is nineteen, and has come from New Zealand to try her luck as an actress Unfortunately, she had her money stolen on board ship and, when we meet her, she is tramping sadly from theatre, to theatre, attempting to find work Exhausted, and hungry, she happens to be resting in the Vulcan theatre, when she hears that the leading lady, Helena Hamilton, needs a dresser Although this is not the job she wanted, she jumps at the chance and suddenly finds herself ensconced in the comfortable world of the theatre However, of course, things cannot settle so comfortably The play the cast are rehearsing, requires a character, played by Gay Gainsford, to resemble leading man, Adam Poole who turns out to be a distant cousin of Martyn Gay Gainsford is hopelessly out of her depth, but her uncle, Clark Bennington, who happens to

be Helena Hamilton's husband, has helped her get the part and she struggles along, her nerves in tatters, and unable to accept the sudden appearance of Martyn who could, so easily, play the role herself. There are a good cast of characters and motives for the murder that follows, but Alleyn and Fox manage to untangle the various threads easily. The theatre has seen an earlier murder and this appears in a short story, *I Can Find My Way Out*, which is included in the short story collection, *Death On Air and Other Stories*. This mystery also sees the reappearance of Michael Lamprey, who was in, *A Surfeit of Lampreys*. I really enjoyed this straightforward mystery: no Troy, no romance, no dysfunctional family, which seem to have appeared in the previous few books. This was assured, with a good setting and characters and worked really well. I look forward to reading Ngaio Marsh and continuing the series. First Ngaio Marsh book for me. Very well written, interesting murder story. I wonder if all her stories are set up like this. The story is 180 pages odd long, and the murder didn't happen till just past the 100 page mark. So it's as much a general fiction story that happens to have a murder in it as anything else. Set in London in the 40s or 50s I'm guessing, we see little New Zealander Martyn Tarne newly in London struggling to find acting work and getting really down on her luck. Desperate for any work, she ends up at the Vulcan Theatre, which she has been avoiding. We find out later why and kind of falls into a dresser's job for glamorous actress Helena Hamilton. Helena's husband, Bennington, is a drunken has-been who most people can't stand. He got his niece into a role in the play that everyone can see isn't suited for the part. As they go through dress rehearsals this becomes apparent, whilst at the same time that Martyn would be perfect. The niece, Gay, gets hysterical about this. She is tiresome and there's all kinds of trouble, which culminate on opening night when there is a murder. The police turn up, interview everyone and solve it there and then before sending people home. So we don't get much time to wonder over the murder, how or why it was done before everything's neatly tied up. The ending seems particularly random, a proposal after three days, and just why did that need throwing in. Other than that it seems to be typical of whodunnit murder mysteries from this time that we have to end on a happy and irrelevant engagement. The theatre world seems to be a tiring mix of egos, politics, bitching and backstabbing. I couldn't be doing with it. From what little I know, Marsh knew a lot about this world. Are all her books set in this? I don't know how many I would want to read. Of course, it's a very detailed and realistic feeling theatre world she creates. Worth a look. I like detectives. Not all of them by any means, but I like them. Hercule Poirot, Miss Marple, Lord Peter Wimsey, Inspector Grant, and most recently, Inspector Alleyn. Any new to me. Alleyn mystery is a cause for rejoicing, the donning of a smoking jacket and the putting up of an occupied sign on my non-existent study door. Lord Peter is perhaps my favorite but Alleyn comes close. I'm not sure how many Alleyns I've read so far. My wild guess is about ten. They have, at this point, started to get a bit formulaic, although the characters are always a delight. *Night at the Vulcan* was interesting partly because it varied the formula a bit and also because Alleyn managed to solve the mystery in a single

night. The story starts out with a young woman named Martyn Tarne who intended to audition for a small part in a play but arrives too late. She obviously has no money and is at the end of her rope. She manages to win a job as the leading lady's dresser. They very quickly notice Martyn's strong resemblance to the leading man, Adam Poole. A complicated situation results. Of course there is a murder someone no one likes or will miss very much. Alleyn arrives on the scene accompanied by Fox and Mike Lamprey, from *A Surfeit of Lampreys*. And of course the murderer is caught, although not quite in the usual way. *Night at the Vulcan* is one of Marsh's clever mysteries. The cast of characters is not as appealing as they often are, but the two main characters remain sympathetic. All in all, it was an enjoyable book and satisfying book. Pleasantly surprised at how entertaining *Night at the Vulcan* was I was previously thoroughly underwhelmed by *Light Thickens*, my first of the Alleyn novels, but found myself quite enjoying this one. *Vulcan*'s strength partly lies in its protagonist, Martyn Tarne, who is interesting and sweet of nature, and therefore quite easy to like. It helps considerably when you can like and follow what the protagonist is saying and doing. The secondary characters, as well, are all very well fleshed out and painted vividly. Adam Poole and Jacko are particularly delightful. The set up to the murder is well done the reader becomes thoroughly absorbed in the different personalities on stage, as well as the goings on of the play. It is to Marsh's credit that we become so involved in the characters' lives that when the murder does happen, it becomes just one small part of the story that made up the whole. The theatre material was even interesting than the detecting, in a way. The light splash of romance was a pleasant surprise, as well. The way Alleyn solved the mystery and caught the murderer was rather unusual. The identity of the murderer, as well, came as a minor shock the old cliché that the crime was committed by the person you'd least suspect held true here. Quite a satisfying read.

*Opening Night* aka *Night at the Vulcan* 1951 finds Ngaio Marsh returning to the world of theatre comfortable home turf for an author who claimed the theatre as her first passion. This time Marsh focuses on the backstage antics going on as the players at the Vulcan Theater prepare for the opening of a new play by a brilliant, but difficult playwright. We see everything through the vantage point of Martyn Tarne, a young actress in waiting who has recently arrived from New Zealand with the hopes of landing a part on a London stage. After making a discouraging round of the theater casting calls, she comes to the Vulcan just a tad too late to audition for a part. She's down to the last bit of her money and has no idea what to do when she overhears Bob Grantley, the business manager, frantically calling round for a replacement dresser for Helen Hamilton the play's leading lady. Helen's dresser has been rushed to the hospital and Grantley needs a substitute quick. Martyn needs a job at this point any job will do and she offers herself as dresser. She immediately finds herself in a seething cauldron of backstage emotions and interactions. Helen Hamilton is married to the leading man, Clark Bennington. Bennington is an aging, alcoholic actor who is thoroughly disliked by just about everyone including his wife. Helen has been having an affair with Adam Poole, the Vulcan's

actor manager Bennington's niece, Gay Gainsford, has been cast in a rather important role as a blood relation to Poole's character who supposedly looks remarkably like him and is a somewhat depraved version of himself. She's been making a rather bad showing in the part, not helped by the fact that she really looks nothing like Poole and is having a case of the nerves. Dr John James Rutherford, the playwright and another thoroughly unpleasant man, is having fits over Gay's inability to play the part, making himself generally disagreeable to all and sundry, and is quoting Shakespeare at everyone. J G Darcy and Parry Percival, the remaining actors, add their nerves and emotional outbursts to the mix. Martyn's arrival doesn't help matters. Because you see, she does look like Poole, they wind up being second cousins or some such and could absolutely play the part. To Gay's dismay, Martyn is made her understudy in addition to the dresser's role and on opening night, Gay has a fit of hysterics and is unable to go on. Martyn, of course, steps in to save the day and winds up being a sensation. She barely has time to take in her good fortune and all the applause when Clark Bennington doesn't show up for his curtain call and is discovered dead in his dressing room. To the actors, it has every appearance of suicide. But when Inspector Roderick Alleyn arrives from the Yard, he is not convinced. And, of course, he and Inspector Fox will find all the clues and discover the culprit.

There were several things that I enjoyed about this one. The opening scenes with Martyn learning of her journey round the theaters and her bad luck at the auditions, her interactions with the fellow hard-luck actress outside the Vulcan and her conversations with Fred Badger, the nightwatchman. In fact, I liked Fred Badger so much that I kind of hoped that we'd see of him. But, alas, Jacko, Adam Poole's right-hand man and jack-of-all-trades, is also an interesting character again, particularly in his interactions with Martyn. Overall, I'd say that I enjoyed the characters' interactions with each other, barring a few jarring exceptions. Gay Gainsford gets on my last nerve, for instance. I really do think Marsh was in her element when writing about the theatre and the people of that world. She creates interesting and realistic characters and it's evident that she's writing from experience.

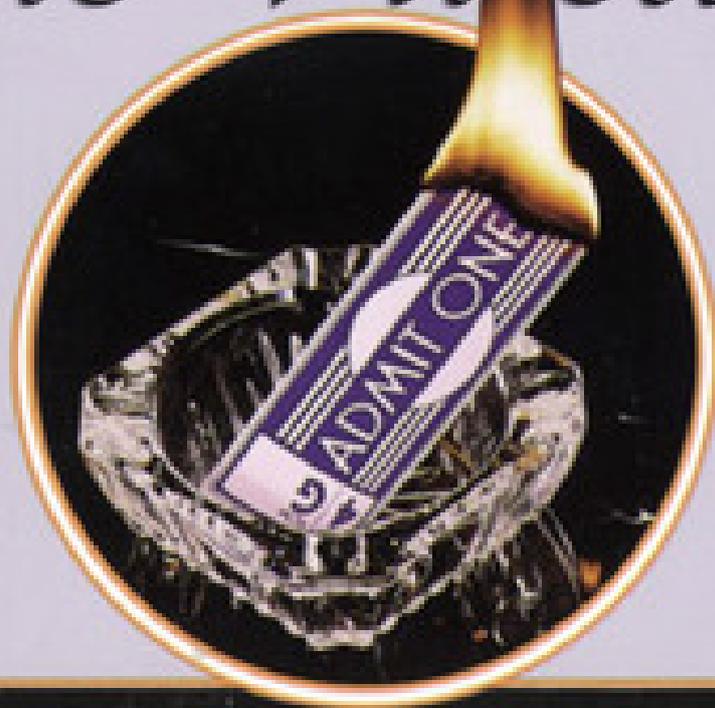
First posted on my blog [My Reader's Block](#). Please request permission before reposting. Thanks.

Dame Ngaio Marsh has pulled it off big time in this one. This mystery, which moves at breakneck pace, takes place over a period of four days, during the rehearsals and opening night of the play. Thus to Revisit. The author draws her knowledge of the stage enormously, and we are presented with the spectacle of the stirring human drama, taking place backstage in the dressing rooms. Martyn Tarne is a young girl, not quite out of teenage, on the lookout to make it on the London stage. She hopes to use her uncanny physical resemblance to Adam Poole, the leading man and the producer of the play in question, as there is a part which has exactly the same requirements. Unfortunately, however, she misses out on the casting but manages to land a job as the dresser to the leading lady, Helena Hamilton. Once in, Martyn finds she has entered into a seething cauldron of human emotions. Poole is having an affair with Helena, who is married to Clark Bennington, an actor in the twilight of his career. Bennington is an alcoholic, partly due to

the reason that he is being cuckolded and he makes a life hell for all others involved with the play. The team has another unbearable character in the person of Dr John Rutherford, author of the play. He is harsh with everybody, especially with Gay Gainsford, Bennington's niece, who is the actress playing the part. Martyn was hoping to get J.G. Darcey, a character actor who is sweet on Gay, Parry Percival, another actor, and Jacques Dore Jacko, general dogsbody to Poole, completes the cast of characters in this dressing room drama. The setting is also not pleasant. Years before, an actor had been murdered at the Vulcan Theatre where the play is slated to open. It had been shutdown since then. Recently Poole has purchased it, pooh poohing the superstitious whispers. However, in the show business, superstition rarely goes away so easily. The trouble starts when Martyn is given the job of understudy to Gay. It is not long before Dr John notices the resemblance to Poole and wants her to be given the role. However, Bennington would have none of it, and she is secretly relieved. But Gay goes to pieces and throws hysterics just before the start, and Martyn is forced to make her first stage appearance in inauspicious circumstances. The play is a hit however, just before the curtain call, Bennington commits suicide by inhaling gas exactly like the previous murder. The only problem is, Chief Inspector Alleyn of Scotland Yard knows it's murder. This novel about a play is actually structured like a classic play: the setting is confined, the time frame compressed, and the characters limited. The action rises from the beginning up to the point of the murder, which is the first climax. Then there is the resolution, ending with the second climax of the unmasking of the murderer. It is a very fast read. Also, Dame Ngaio has succeeded in that particular sleight of hand where the readers are misdirected at the crucial moment from the actual clues. It is not as breathtaking as Agatha Christie does. IMO, at least but pretty impressive all the same. And when you review it after the cat is out of the bag, it all holds up well.

*Ngaiio*  
**MARSH**

*Night at  
the Vulcan*



*"It's time to start comparing Christie to Marsh instead  
of the other way around." —New York magazine*

This is my first read of a mystery written by Ngaio Marsh The New Zealand author has a distinctive writing style, which I grew to like She postpones the murder and its subsequent investigation until late in her narrative Again, it works successfully The setting for this mystery is a theater and its colorful players, some of whom don't like each other Lots of details about the occupation are included All in all, I enjoyed my reading experience and would tackle another title by her.

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