



Who Left God Playing with Mud?!

Adam

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Set against the lush backdrop of the Ancient Near East, Who Left God Playing with Mud?! is a novel about the heinous acts committed in the name of religion.

Written under the pseudonym Adam, the epic historical novel *Who Left God Playing with Mud?!* includes a mix of familiar characters from texts like the Hebrew Bible and the Epic of Gilgamesh; they fight for power, status, and revenge.

Set in a time of chariots, clay tablets, polytheism, and fresh-budding monotheism, this lust-filled, bloody story delivers dramatic commentary on fanaticism, faith, and the faults of humans and the gods. A sacrilegious jester, Gaga, recites a Genesis-inspired poem about creation for narcissistic King Sargon, ruler of Mesopotamia and Phoenicia. Sargon is an immature sadist with a penchant for cutting off heads. Meanwhile, King Sargon's daughter, Princess Enheduanna, venerates the goddess Ishtar.

While the story loosely follows historical texts documenting religious practices, its primary focus is sex and violence. For example, at numerous points, characters take part in the practice of deflowering young priestesses in order to satisfy Ishtar; such scenes become repetitive and gratuitous. Other rape scenes are present as well. These raunchy and disturbing elements precede or follow executions and plots for murders, all used to demonstrate the extreme acts that are committed in the name of religion. Indeed, primary characters take part in the sexual religious ceremonies, further pushing themes of god versus man and man versus man. And when one character uses sex rituals as a way to isolate and murder nobles, the pace of the story reaches a frenzy of blood and ill intent.

The book is also thick with descriptions of ancient markets in Babylon, schools for writing poetry on clay tablets, the Euphrates River, and other Middle Eastern settings. These form a lush backdrop for the corrupt characters. Still, scenes in which depraved people prey upon young women dominate, and much of the suspense is driven by plots for revenge on the parts of the women's loved ones.

Throughout the book, the last words of the dying take the form of prayers to various deities. In these vulnerable moments, subtle irony arises. Characters look for signs of divine will in all they encounter—in what others say or don't say; in a pile of animal innards. Their variety of religious beliefs come to seem arbitrary, and the gods do not often seem to answer.

However, the book's clear messaging comes at the expense of maintaining narrative tension; its points are belabored. Whether it's focused on a man avenging his exploited daughter or a father punishing his son, all that happens is forced under the umbrella of critiquing ancient culture's strict adherence to superstition. Herein, religion is an explanation for behavior, good or bad; nuance is absent.

Who Left God Playing with Mud?! is a forceful novel set in biblical times; its storylines are dominated by skepticism toward ancient religions.

CLARISSA ADKINS (October 5, 2024)

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