



The Enterprise of Death

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As the witch-pyres of the Spanish Inquisition blanket Renaissance Europe in a moral haze, a young African slave finds herself the unwilling apprentice of an ancient necromancer. Unfortunately, quitting his company proves even more hazardous than remaining his pupil when she is afflicted with a terrible curse. Yet salvation may lie in a mysterious tome her tutor has hidden somewhere on the war-torn continent.

She sets out on a seemingly impossible journey to find the book, never suspecting her fate is tied to three strangers: the artist Niklaus Manuel Deutsch, the alchemist Dr. Paracelsus, and a gun-slinging Dutch mercenary. As Manuel paints her macabre story on canvas, plank, and church wall, the young apprentice becomes increasingly aware that death might be the least of her concerns.

The Enterprise of Death Details

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From Reader Review The Enterprise of Death for online ebook

Daniel2 says

Not done reading yet, but this dude needs to read Strunk and White. The overuse of adjectives is driving me crazy. Just a very immature writer, technically speaking. A little lazy and self indulgent, too. And only four chapters in!

Alright, so i finished it. The guy is a talented writer, or could be with a more discerning pen. The book was just unnecessarily crass. The main character was sort of weak, enough so that i didn't really care what happened to her.

It read too much like a deadwood episode in the second act, which seemed out of place. I think the word 'cunt' is fantastic and can be entertaining, but it poisoned every other paragraph and it wore on my tolerance. Also, it's a cop out for creative dialogue.

Overall an interesting book, though i will pass on this author in the future.

Ashish says

It started brilliantly, then lost itself in a wash of emotional outpourings and muddled, confused and somehow unlikeable new characters. Book One was almost reminiscent of the Larry Niven *Warlock* series - fantasy that essentially creates the environment and the tools for a puzzle - and then leads you to the resolution of it using only those same rules. At its heart, its an intellectual exercise - *how would we do this* - and in Books Two and Three, *The Enterprise of Death* loses that focus.

How? Here's a hint. In a book dealing with necromancy, necrophilia, slavery, torture, casual murder, cannibalism, and massacre, the most *icky* thing I found was the stew of emotional upheavals that seemed to haunt everyone, all the time, endlessly hemorrhaging out in inner monologues.

So there you go.

Don;t get me wrong - it's a decent read, especially if you can tune out the drama, but a bit unwieldy to get through.

Jason says

5 Stars

Enterprise of Death is my cup of tea. I loved it...I had so much fun reading and eating up every word. I will remember the heroine Awa for a long time, she is something else. Bullington has created a really cool, dark, dirty, and not very nice world, where 3 young people are kidnapped by a horrible necromancer. I was already a Jesse Bullington fan as I thoroughly enjoyed his first novel *The Sad Tale of the Brothers Grossbart* which I read a couple of years ago. This book would be a better launching point for those unfamiliar with his style as it is not nearly as graphic as the *Brothers*, and it is more fully realized.

Bullington has created a unique story about necromancy, raising the dead, eating the dead, and torturing the

living. He casts our heroine into an unimaginable situation and has a routing for her the whole way through. I loved all the world building around the necromancy. It is a fascinating type of magic that is done just right in this book. I loved much of the banter between young Awa and her captor the necromancer.

A conversation between the two discussing a major aspect of necromancy:

““You’re dead,” the necromancer breathed in her ear. “But you’re not. It’s how we can prolong our lives—instead of sleeping I let myself die for a little while, so that the days granted my mortal flesh are extended. Yes, days. Picture your life as a day, Awa, with dawn your birth and sunset your death, and everything in between a single, impossibly long day. The sun keeps its pace regardless of whether we are waking or sleeping, and eventually twilight comes for even the most long-lived creature. You already know several means for healing yourself, for slowing the sun, as it were, but now I’ll teach you something better—how to freeze the sun in the sky of your life, to bring it to a standstill. The only way to cheat death is to die first, to give yourself willingly, and with the methods for revival.””

There are some really deep themes that are explored in this book. What is Good? Or Evil? Is there a God? Heaven? Hell? Is there a balance that we must stive for??? The characters are all flawed, and they know it, yet it is that which makes them likable and real.

I really enjoy Jesse Bullington’s writing style and feel that this is the perfect book for people to get to know him. His books are real page turners. They are original. They are damn fun to read. The first of his books *The Sad Tale of the Brothers Grossbart* is a much more graphic novel that some will be turned off by. His novels really are not for the faint of heart or the squeamish... To me he is an author not to be missed and *The Enterprise of Death* is one of my favorite reads of 2013....Highest recommendations!!!

Adam says

For the most part, *Enterprise of Death* holds on to everything that made *Brothers Grossbart* great and improves tremendously on character building. The monsters are visceral, pungent horrors that feel medieval in a way that manages to sidestep the familiarity of the fantasy aesthetic. None of them match the witch, or the manticore, or the plague demon of *Grossbart*, and they’re a fair bit sparser, but they’re still just great. Bullington has a knack for potent textures and imagery that feel really transgressive, and that really shows in the necromancy here, breathing a vital new tone into something that’s been trodden to death by a million derivative fantasy works.

The *Brothers Grossbart* are fun and shocking characters, but they’re also foreign and offputting and unflappably awful. They feel more like forces of nature, drivers of the plot, than emotionally vital characters. Awa, Manuel, and the gang in *Enterprise* are a massive improvement, with some of the same transgressive sensibilities (the things Bullington did to Manuel and his wife’s relationship, especially given they are real historical figures, are just wonderful) but a lot more heart and vulnerability and humor. Awa goes through some powerful, unique experiences, especially in the first third of the book.

Like *Grossbart*, *Enterprise* starts to feel a bit thin towards the end, but this time it doesn’t feel like it’s padded with extra vignettes so much as threads of plot and character are resolved in a more perfunctory way that

doesn't make good on their promise or potential. I was kind of underwhelmed by the Schwarzwald, for instance, as well as the resolution of the necromancy arc. And Awa could have had a bit more internality on the impending mortality arc. I was not entirely fond of the way magic was handled, either. It quickly evaporated the mystique of necromancy in favor of some pretty simple abilities and didn't replace it with any particularly compelling ideas or flavor.

But overall I was really impressed and just fucking excited by this book, especially at the beginning. There are some things that could be better in the execution, but for the most part Bullington's producing exactly what I want in a contemporary fantasy book. It's smart and kind on the social justice angles (though the obsession with prostitution is a bit questionable?), charts out a new medieval-horror aesthetic, and it's based on solid historical research! How can you not love a fantasy author who includes a bibliography in each of his books? That's great.

Dave says

Wow, what a ride! I did not expect to enjoy this book near as much as I did. I've read all of Jesse Bullington's books now and have to say this was probably his best in my opinion. It has everything- war, death, the undead, romance, completely believable and tangible characters that you genuinely care for and much more. Despite the few uncomfortable issues the story deals with (which is what great books do) I genuinely loved this story and am sad that it's over. I highly recommend this book if you're in the mood for an action packed adventure that makes you squirm!

Aaron Ingram says

The jacket is what originally caught my eye - an intriguing cover, an interesting title, and good quality binding all lead me to hope that this would be worth a read. But once again, I'm reminded that you can't judge a book by it's cover.

I had high hopes for this one. The jacket description promised something of a rollicking adventure. Necromancy, swords, muskets, some comedy, and more! However, what was contained therein fell quite flat. Far too long with little or no pay-off, I wouldn't recommend this one; after reading it, I see why I found it in the discount section. However, if you really want to give it a shot, you can have my copy.

S.B. Wright says

The Enterprise of Death is the second of Jesse Bullington's novels.

The first - The Sad Tale of the Brothers Grossbart was likened to a cross between Tarantino and Rabelais by the Guardian and Jenne Bergstrom from the Library Journal described it as:

'A zestfully grotesque adventure; not for the squeamish or faint of heart'.

So with Tarantino's foray into pseudo-history (Inglourious Basterds) firmly in my mind I set out to read.

And it was a good thing to have such a sign post to prepare me - this book, like the first, requires a certain

degree of fortitude.

The Tale

The Moors have been kicked out of Granada by the Spanish and the Spanish Inquisition (who nobody expects) are beginning to stoke their fires. Against this backdrop we are introduced to Awa, a young African slave who along with her mistress and eunuch are on the receiving end of a number of unfortunate events - the worst being that they are all 'apprenticed' to an evil Necromancer.

Awa, eventually becomes the recipient of the Necromancer's knowledge, but being a Necromancer and an evil one at that, he lays a curse on her. The Necromancer he will return after ten years and claim her body as a vessel for his mind and soul unless she can find his Grimoire or figure out by some other means, a way of breaking the curse.

It's Awa's search for this book that brings her into contact with the mercenary and artist Niklaus Manuel Duetch of Bern (a historical character whose art is used as the cover image for the book) who is entrusted with transporting her to the Inquisition for roasting.

The story is chiefly one of friendship, when you get past the cannibalism resurrection and necromantic lesbian love scenes.

What I liked

Jesse Bullington as well as having a degree in History and English Literature is also a folk lore enthusiast and I can see this aspect of his personality coming out in this novel. The Enterprise of Death reminds me a little of Margo Lanagan's Tender Morsels, the later being more folkloric, but each having a dark, mature tone.

Bullington's first book has been compared to Tarantino and I think that's apt for The Enterprise of Death too. There's language (of quite modern construction) violence, and grotesque scenes of cannibalism, and copulation with resurrected corpses. Bullington, however, has done a good job of playing on reader discomfort to develop character and character motivation - the privations Awa is forced to endure, the acts she performs are perfectly reasonable within the context of the story and in making her a believable and loveable character. In other words the grotesque is not overworked.

Bullington doesn't play as fast and lose with history as Tarantino does in Inglourious Basterds, and I really appreciate the level of research and the use of history in this story. Quite a few of the characters are plucked from the pages of history Niklaus Manuel as mentioned above, Albrecht von Stein and the concluding battle to mention just a few. I think this beds the story down in a familiar surrounds and contributed to my suspension of disbelief.

What I didn't like

If there was only one let down for me it was the vanquishing of the Necromancer. I felt that things were resolved too easily, considering what Awa had already gone through. I was convinced that she was not going to make it through unscathed, that there would be a dark and nasty twist at the end. The Enterprise of Death is somewhat of a fairy tale (albeit a very adult one) however and those tend to end with happy ever afters.

Summary

If you like historical/fantasy fiction with a dark edge then I think you'll enjoy it. Despite my flippant remarks

about necromantic lesbian love scenes the treatment of Awa's sexuality is quite reasonable and while early scenes might be somewhat titillating, it's an important part of the development of the story i.e. the romantic but non-sexual love between Awa and Niklaus.

Bullington's writing drew me in and had me to the last page. I really did fear for Awa and secretly wished that she would make it through to the end. The author is to be commended for creating a illusion of impending doom but giving the reader a happy ending.

Dark, gritty and likely to put you off your lunch. A pleasure to read.

This book was provided to me by the publisher Hachette/Orbit at no cost to myself

Sally says

I'd never heard of Jesse Bullington before stumbling across *The Enterprise of Death*, so I had the pleasure of entering into it with no expectations. To be honest, I'm not sure having heard of him previously (or having read *The Sad Tale of the Brothers Grossbart*), would have made a lick of difference. This is the kind of book that beats you over the head, robs you of your expectations, and then forces you to watch as it tears those expectations to shreds, stomps upon them, and gleefully urinates upon the mess . . . all while you nod delightedly and ask to do it all again.

Yes, this is a wonderfully messed-up book, set in a wonderfully messy world, that comes across as a mixture of Terry Gilliam's most surreal, Tim Burton's most unusual, and Clive Barker's most sexual . It's a book of nightmares and fantasies that are as much the Brothers Grimm as they are the Marquis de Sade. This is a darkly cynical tale of human history, told not by the historians (and not even by the victors), but by the sad souls forced to live out its cruelties and delights, armed only with an unflinching eye and a very dark sense of humour.

As readers, this is a story that demands of us an empty stomach and an open mind, as it repeatedly gives rise to open eyes and open mouths – as often in delight as in disgust. The world of *The Enterprise of Death* is one populated almost entirely by the scum of society - soldiers, slaves, eunuchs, prostitutes, and criminals without an ounce of morality between them. Even those characters who don't revel in evil and brutality are often casually cruel, and at least amoral, if not immoral.

Of course, when the choices available are between the supernatural horrors of zombies and vampires, and the all-too-human horrors of necrophilia, bestiality, and cannibalism, it's really hard to fault the characters for not being paragons of virtue. They are, however, disturbingly endearing characters (particularly Awa and Monique) with whom we are more than happy to tag along on this journey through the horrors of the Inquisition, even if we'd prefer not to shake hands at the end of said journey.

The only thing that initially bothered me about the book was the writing style. The story regularly leaps between past and present, a narrative device that is further confused by frequent jumps in viewpoint from one character to another. As far as the language goes, it's a story that's written in a 15th century style (with some quirky turns of phrase), but full of very 21st century dialogue (that, at one time or another, is guaranteed to make every reader blush at least once). Yet, despite the contradictions and confusions, it all works . . . once the story comes together in your head, it holds fast for the duration.

Quite possibly the strangest book I've read in a very long time, it's also one I find myself thinking about

reading once again (something I rarely do). I'd love to get my hands on a physical copy, to smell the ink, to feel the paper, to suffer the weight of it in my hands, and to get lost in the experience of reading. Perhaps too dark and morose for a beach read, I suspect it would be an entirely fitting read for a hot, stuffy, candlelit room during a violent summer thunderstorm. While not for everybody, if the subject matter and storytelling style present any appeal, then it's worth investing the time in a read.

Sean says

Jesse Bullington's follow-up to his massively enjoyable first novel *The Sad Tale of the Brothers Grossbart* has ambitions to a greater complexity and richer characterisation. To some extent he succeeds, but I reluctantly have to admit that it didn't entirely work for me. The book is a convoluted tale of lesbian necromancers, whores, soldiers and artists, set against a Europe in turmoil. The Inquisition is in full swing, but Luther has posted his paper and the enlightenment is stirring. Bullington serves up a tasty collection of quirky individuals, all at odds with the conventions of their time in one way or another. His trademark vigorous salty language and fantastical beasties are all here, but there is another level that explores the struggle of misfits toward self-actualisation and the mutual support that develops between those for whom the mainstream is a threat rather than a nurturing womb. One of the charming aspects of the book is the use of actual historical figures in the form of the maverick doctor Paracelsus, and even more pertinently, the Swiss artist (and writer, and politician, and soldier) Niklaus Manuel Deutsch, whose artworks are woven into the set pieces of the story. The less effective parts of the book come early on. There is an extended segment describing the forced magical education of the black slave Awa by an evil necromancer wherein I found myself having to constantly double back and re-read to follow the narrative. There seems to have been some difficulty balancing out the introduction of the suite of characters, so that I was sometimes at a loss to sense where my focus should lie, and there is an amount of temporal back-and-forthing that is somewhat confusing. As the book progresses though, these start to fall more into place, and by the latter half I was rolling along quite nicely with their misadventures and foibles. Jesse introduces some pretty nice monsters, including a rather original take on the age-old vampire myth, but also makes you care ultimately for the cast of odd-bods and their particular struggles. While I remain critical of some aspects of this novel, in the end I would have to say I went away with a warm regard for the characters and their stories. Plus I also went and looked up the work of Niklaus Manuel Deutsch of Bern, who, though in some ways a rather ordinary man, was at the same time remarkable, in the way of his age.

Nigel says

Jesse Bullington's follow-up to *The Sad Tale Of The Brothers Grossbart* is just as energetic, muscular, horrific, violent, inventive, fast-paced and icky as his debut. What wrong-footed me slightly was the sympathetic lead characters when I had mentally braced myself for more in the way of entertainingly sociopathic monsters wreaking havoc on the innocent and the guilty and the spectacularly evil alike. Instead we get Awa, an ex-slave forced into an apprenticeship by a necromancer, as nasty a piece of work as any Bullington has yet invented, and Niklaus Manuel Deutsch, an artist turned mercenary who, against his better judgement and self-interest, rescues said trainee necromancer from the attentions of some of his fellow soldiers. The unlikely pair become friends and, with the aid of another mercenary, a female gunner, set out to thwart the ultimate and extremely horrific schemes of the necromancer. Touring the battlefields, graveyards and whorehouses of a war-torn Renaissance Europe, pursued by a rogue witch-hunter, the ambulatory corpse of Awa's former mistress, a doctor of questionable ethics hungry for hidden knowledge and a particularly horrific corpse-hungry monster. With corpses galore, in various degrees of decomposition, the grue and gore and ghastly fluids are plentiful,

and with war raging all around and the inquisition in full flight there's violence and injustice and poverty and inhumanity to spare, but the warm heart of the book is the friendship between Deutsch and Awa and the things they do to help each other find some measure of redemption and salvation in a savage world. A strong, satisfying second novel that manages to revisit many elements of the Brothers Grossbart and yet remain utterly different. Recommended.

Jonathx says

I loved this book to death!

I really enjoyed how uncomfortable this book made me feel and how I got to read about some truly different and difficult ideas. It was a truly mind expanding book, insofar as it put a whole slew of ideas in my head that I'd never encountered anywhere else before.

It's a very intellectually confronting book- hooray! Despite the generally grisly subject matter it's also a surprisingly tender book. I really came to love the main character, Awa, and I absolutely enjoyed reading about every horror, privation and sadness that she went through. I actually wanted her to suffer much more than she did because her suffering was so instructive and so exquisite.

This book isn't for the squeamish, for prudes, for people with faint hearts or tender stomachs, but if you're after truly immersive escapist fiction that will expose you to truly different situations and ideas, this book is for you.

Anna says

So not only is our heroine a competent black woman, she's a competent gay black woman. She's also not the only gay or bisexual character in the book, and "alternate" sexuality is never portrayed as something weird or bad. Monique and Awa are probably the strongest characters in the entire book, and what's better is they don't wind up in a romance with each other. That's right, there are two lesbians in the book, but they're allowed to decide they're not romantically suited to one another and move on. Had the premise not intrigued me in the first place, I'm pretty sure that would have been enough to convince me to pick up the book. (On the other hand, I'm not entirely sure this book passes the Frank Miller test.)

If I had to describe this book in one word, it would be uneven. There were some really strong parts that almost make me want to overlook the weaker parts, but this sadly isn't a case where one can make up for another. I love that while Awa is a gay black woman who deals with racism and the assumption that

everyone is straight, neither of those parts of her dictate her character. They're allowed to be facets of her rather than standing in as an excuse for character traits, and I'm positively gleeful about that.

So what were the less than giddy bits? Well, let me pull out a passage for further discussion:

Two individuals of the opposite sex will, if forced to go on a journey together, fall in love. Often begrudgingly, and with a great deal of reluctance by at least one of the parties, to be sure, but love will fall as surely as night after day. In the unlikely event that one of the two is homosexual, asexual, already in a loving relationship, or otherwise disinclined from romancing their traveling companion, love will fall all the harder, like cannon fire upon a charging cavalry: indeed, the less likely the two are to fall in love naturally, the more certain it is that the sojourn will bring them together.

Somehow, preposterous though it may sound, Awa and Manuel did not fall in love on their journey together, in spite of the wife at home who adored Manuel, in spite of Awa's lack of sexual interest in men, in spite of their mismatched personalities, and in spite of their growing and mutual fondness for one another. The best they could muster was a lessening of fear on Manuel's part and the honest --if painfully disinterested-- observation on Awa's part that Manuel was not so bad-looking, and that was only observed as the result of some self-deprecating jibe the artist had made about his own downward-angling nose. Pathetic.

The genre-savvy of this passage entertains me to no end. I'm pretty sure I giggled out loud when I came to it. The sudden jump to omnipotent narration, though, doesn't particularly fit in with the general tone of the book, which tends to third person limited.

That's actually one of my issues with the book. It's all over the place. The only thread drawing everything together is Awa herself, as the story meanders from one setting to another. It tries very hard to make our protagonist a well-rounded character, and therefore wants to show everything in great detail. We get long chapters featuring Awa as a young slave, then the story changes completely to show her under the tutelage of the necromancer, and another shift to her on the road, running from religious folks intent on killing her as a witch. Whether she's searching for a way to break her curse with a pair of ghosts in tow or living in a brothel (as a doctor of sorts, not a whore), it's presented in great detail and while the lengthy passages are interesting on their own, they don't so much feel like they fit in together so well. It felt like reading a series of stories rather than one long narration, and as a result this book took me forever to get through. A few of them could have been trimmed or cut completely and very little would have changed plot-wise. That's right, there are long sections in which nothing happens to move the plot forward.

It's also not the smoothest prose I've ever read. In the two paragraphs above, there are at least two nitpicky things I could get petty over, but since this is a review and not a critique group, suffice it to say the prose manages to get the point across but never approaches anything like beauty.

Matt says

I blew through this book in 2-3 days. It was an amazing historical fantasy novel. The narrative voice and dialog are almost perfect and fit every character like a glove. The main protagonist's character arc is long and full of change, yet something that somehow seems "core" to her remains. I cared about what happened to her and the other two I would consider to be protagonists. They each had a unique voice and outlook that the author did a great job of "showing" rather than "telling" me. What violence and sex is in there does not feel

shoehorned in or out of place.

Laurie says

This is historical fantasy like I've never read before. When a ship wreck leaves teenagers Awa, a Moorish slave, Omorose, her harem girl master, and Halim, a eunuch, stranded on what is probably the Rock of Gibraltar, they are found, imprisoned, and trained by a necromancer. His attendants- including his mistress- are animated corpses ranging from the recently dead to skeletons and they prevent any escape. In the end, only Awa is left alive as the necromancer's protégé. He leaves her for ten years to await a horrible fate, which she hopes to avert by finding the necromancer's book- which could be anywhere.

Set around 1500, Awa has three strikes against her as she searches Europe for the book: she's Moorish, she's a lesbian, and she's a necromancer. The Spanish Inquisitors don't like any of those things, and neither does the general population of the time. But thankfully not everyone has these prejudices, and she finds a few friends who help her along the way as she searches graveyards, fights a demon, is hunted by Omorose and an Inquisitor, and gets caught up in battles.

I really enjoyed the story, but I suspect not all will. There is lots of vividly described gore, lots of sex (including with the dead), and most of the characters can't utter a sentence without swear words in it, most often the F bomb and frequently the verboten C bomb. But watching the characters grow- especially Awa- through the story is engaging and it's a fine comrades-in-arms chanson de geste. A few of the characters are plucked from history, such as Paracelsus, and Awa's friend the artist and mercenary Niklaus Manuel Deutsch, and that, along with reference to the rulers and battles of the time, allow the reader to have a sense of the time and place. I stayed up late reading this one.

Emily says

Well then. I was worried that the book might be too dark for me. It might have given me a couple nightmares? But I stuck with it and thoroughly enjoyed its best moments. Though I must give credit to the death positive movement and my budding interest in medieval images for some of that enjoyment. Ain't no dance like a danse macabre! The resolution was on the "meh" side, but the plot and characters mostly worked for me. It helps to do some background reading on the historical figures, for the obvious reasons but also because you realize that *somebody* had to write historical fiction about this stuff. It's nuts! In the best way.
