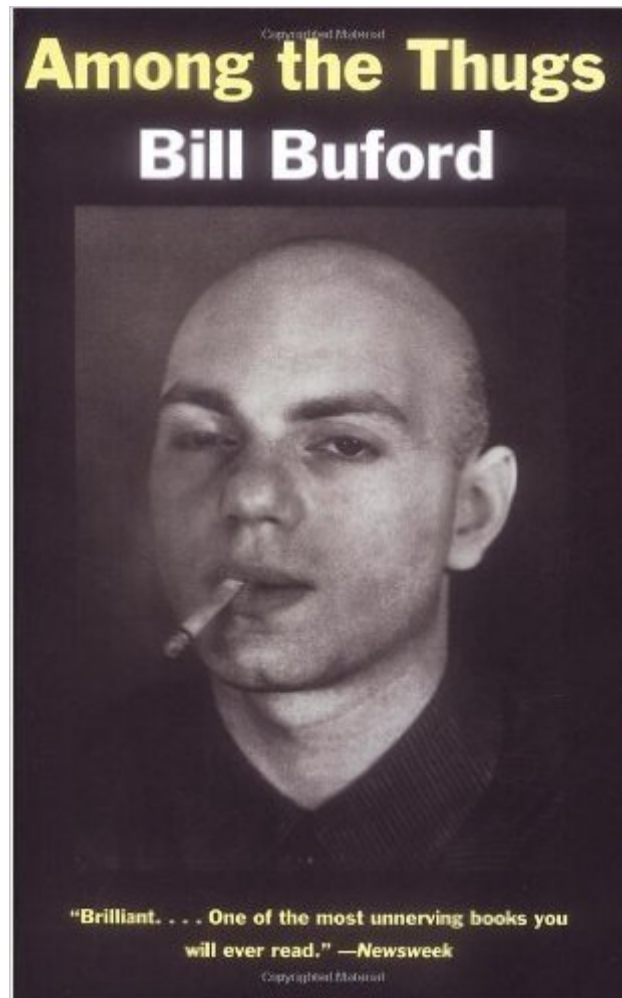


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Among The Thugs



Synopsis

They have names like Barmy Bernie, Daft Donald, and Steamin' Sammy. They like lager (in huge quantities), the Queen, football clubs (especially Manchester United), and themselves. Their dislike encompasses the rest of the known universe, and England's soccer thugs express it in ways that range from mere vandalism to riots that terrorize entire cities. Now Bill Buford, editor of the prestigious journal Granta, enters this alternate society and records both its savageries and its sinister allure with the social imagination of a George Orwell and the raw personal engagement of a Hunter Thompson.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Bill Buford, a naive American adrift in England, tackles a very dicey subject: Mob violence by English football fans. He starts out innocently enough, trying to find the allure, cause, nature, basis, and form of England's notorious football hooligans, but soon has difficulty separating himself from his subject matter. As he relates his journey into the world of the yobs, we get a vivid picture of the people and the events, but no real glimpse into what is behind the football mob violence -- even after Buford spends most of the second half of the book trying to work it out. The only real insight were provided is that the mob becomes greater than the sum of its parts, and that there is a line where a person within the mob ceases to be an individual, and becomes a component of a greater organism. However, questions such as why sporting crowds in the US, Canada, or other countries never reach the level of violence or mob mentality as seen in England are never addressed, nor are questions of why this sort of violent behavior seems to be limited to a very large degree to football

(soccer) crowds. Of course, that subject is beyond the scope of any one book. Still, the snapshot into the seedy world of NF members, jingoistic supporters, drunks and felons provided by Buford is entertaining, in a voyeuristic sort of way. Besides, unless you are intimately familiar with crowds at English, or any European, football matches, Buford's book is best if taken as a sort of superficial sociological travelogue, offering a glimpse into a strange land, complete with foreign customs, traditions, uniforms and etiquette. Reading 'Thugs' won't provide too much enlightenment on sports violence or the psychology of mobs, but it will entertain. And with the coming Euro2000 tournament, reading this may prove timely, as well.

When my friend recommended this book, I was skeptical. I didn't believe an American journalist could successfully infiltrate a gang of European football hooligans. I was introduced to the notoriety of hooligans when I attended a match in Turkey. There I witnessed 200 soldiers armed with assault rifles and riot gear, lined up behind the goalie. This severity made me believe what I'd heard about fans ending up trampled, stabbed, beaten, and killed in the aftermath of a match. Starting with a few lukewarm leads, Bill Buford, a true journalist, is relentless. He transports the reader to England, Germany, and Italy as he tries to understand what fuels hooligans. You experience the helplessness of being caught in a body-crushing crowd, being ambushed by the brutal mobs after the match, and riding the fan-crammed trains. His characterizations are so vivid, you can almost smell the charged atmosphere in the streets and in the stadiums. This book is about violence. The descriptions are fierce and don't let up. The history behind the European football fury is discussed. Even if you aren't a fan of football (better known to Americans as soccer), this book is an excellent read on the sociology of mob mentality. You become aware of what propels crowd violence and its devastating effects on the victim, whose only blunder might be unfortunate proximity and timing.

I couldn't stop reading this. We went to a friend's house and I sat and read this book in the corner (easily one of the most impolite things I have ever done, but there was no way in hell I was stopping reading). I lived in London in the late eighties, working between Highbury & Islington tube station and Arsenal's ground and can remember the shops and pubs closing early on Wednesdays if there was a game. I can also remember the warnings not to work late, etc. I never understood why until I read this book. These people were (are?) the cruelest, nastiest people alive, and Bill Buford deserves endless credit for the quality of this book. One last thought, we often hear that it was the average person that served as the guards in concentration camps, etc., well after reading this book I think it is the thugs who are described here, not the average Joe - so I feel better about the rest of

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