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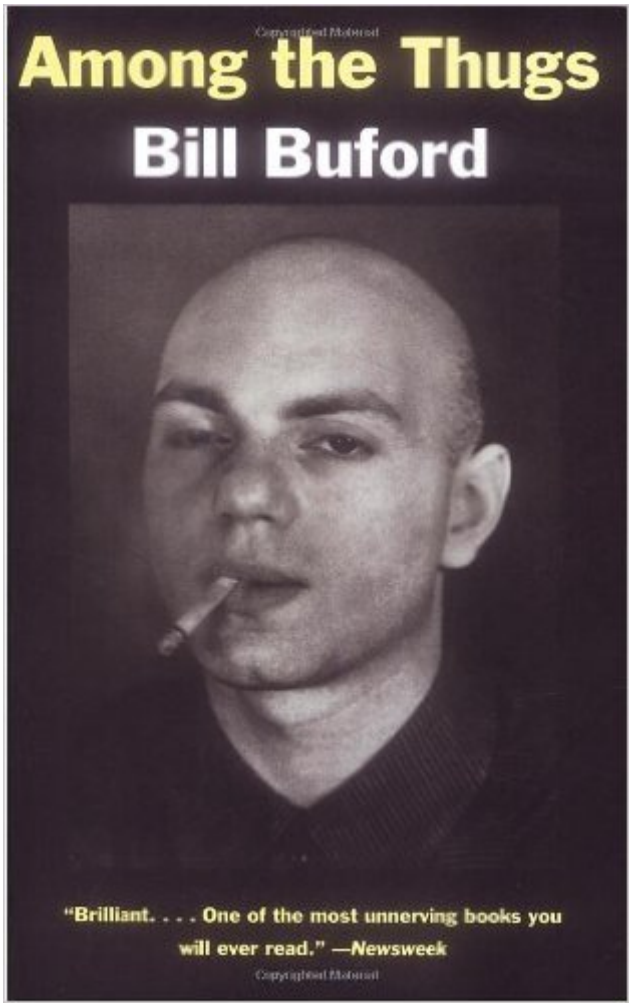
Among The Thugs



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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

Paperback: 320 pages

Publisher: Vintage; Reprint edition (June 1, 1993)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0679745351

ISBN-13: 978-0679745358

Product Dimensions: 5.2 x 0.7 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 8.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

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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 compnent 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 enlightentment 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 friends 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

humanity.

I really enjoyed this book and tore through it in three days. It really does capture how the working class of Britain has degenerated even as its standard of living has reached levels of comfort that would seem unimaginable a few decades back. There is something about the game of football that tends to drive working class males crazy in almost every country, from Argentina to China. The author does however lose steam in the middle of the book when he attempts to psychoanlayzie crowd behavior. Overall very good read

I, like Mr. Buford, lived as a priveleged American in London during the heydey of bootboys and hooligans in the early and mid 70's. I was a teenager and a wannabe-hooligan, too young (early teens) to be a real hooligan. I travelled extensively on the "football specials" to away games, among them a 1973 FA Cup semifinal at Hillsborough (scene of the 1996 disaster that ended standing on the terraces forever), and the danger of violence was expected and palpable. I recall a lovely spring day in Southampton where hooligans in motorcycle helmets roamed the streets smashing milk bottles on heads in a completely random fashion. Unlike some readers, I found his descriptions dead-on accurate. The discussion of crowd theory and when things change right before they "go off" was fascinating, as well as absolutely true. The part of the book I found odd was the change of opinion from wanting to study his topic to throwing up his hands and deciding there was nothing to study. What's the conclusion, or are there none? I am happy to report that those days are, for the most part, over. Having recently returned from England, the ticket pricing, and all-seater stadiums, have eliminated the hooligan mobs at football matches. the reason the hooligans rampage in continental Europe is because that's all that is left (there are still terraces in much of Europe). Domestically, many of the football venues described by Mr. Buford have been torn down or rebuilt as all-seater stadia.

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