



The Monkey House

John Fullerton

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Branston Flett is a famous American journalist who comes to wartime Sarajevo with the intent of covering the ethnic conflict. But what he discovers is the netherworld of a city gone mad. A police informant is found drowned in a bathtub of a building that rarely has water. The building is in a Serb enclave detested by the Croats. A Croatian detective with a Serbian wife is suspicious. Meanwhile gunfire, mortar, and artillery ring through the city. People are starving; others are dying. War story, crime thriller, tale of urban decay, *The Monkey House* is a powerful book.

The Monkey House Details

Date : Published 1996 by Pan

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Author : John Fullerton

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Raghda Elwakil says

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P.D.R. Lindsay says

A tightly written plot, a good story, but so bleak and depressing.

For those who like thrillers with characters you can care about this is a good one. Set in the almost aftermath of the Bosnian/Serbian war it's an eye opener. The UN gets a hammering and our MC is a real hero. But this is not the book for a cheering read, it is a darned good read though.

Raimondo says

Sarajevo during the civil war.

End in coral tragedy.

Interesting the atmosphere and the description of the city inferno at that time.

The investigative main story about a homicide of a serbian odontoiatist by a war lord is not good at all.

The family description of the main novel character (Rosso): son of a famous and infamous war criminal, member of the local police, is so uselessly clear-cut: wife serbian, him croatian, the adopted daughter a muslim.

A rapid and almost forgetting reading.

Nicole says

The book is a harsh read. I enjoyed the story and the harsh nature of it was, I believe, true to the environment the book was set in. I probably wouldn't recommend it to anyone that I know though!

Lynn Sherman says

The book can be described in one word ..CONFUSING. I read it until the end because I am trying to understand more about Sarajevo. Finished it as confused as I started. The crime plot was somewhat interesting and great descriptions of the life during the siege.

Vanessa says

This book frustrated the hell out of me. At least part of this is due to weird literary fetishes on my part; namely, as the layout of Sarajevo is a major part of the action, a map of the city giving the approximate Serbian front during the time period the action takes place would have been very helpful. Which leads me to my second bit of nitpicking: the action takes place over four days during the winter-probably December-but explicit dates are never mentioned. I hate when a novel structured around a historical event (in this case the siege of Sarajevo during the Bosnian War) doesn't provide dates. Since the main character mentions that Zagreb (the capital of Croatia) is peaceful I am guessing this puts the story at late 1995 but I don't really know. Finally on a more general note, some of the characters' actions were....distractingly difficult to understand. At one point, the main character's goddaughter Tanja has a pivotal scene at a cemetery during a funeral service. She doesn't know anyone at the service. Why is she even there given how extremely dangerous it is just to be outside on any given day, nevermind that the weather is below zero?

Now that I'm done nitpicking I will say that the elements that worked in this story really worked well. This is the first novel by British journalist John Fullerton who has covered various conflicts, including Bosnia. The story is about a police inspector named Rosso who is of Croatian descent and, for reasons that become clear later, suffers near overwhelming guilt about his family background. He lives in Sarajevo with his alcoholic Serbian wife and a young Muslim woman they took in when her family were killed. He returns from a visit in Croatia to find one of his informants, a young Serbian dentist and heroin addict, has been murdered in a particularly gruesome way. She lived in an apartment building where many of the remaining Serbians in town live called the Monkey House by locals. Rosso's determination to find the killer of a Serbian baffles many of his colleagues who are slowly starving, sleepless and in constant fear of sniper fire from the Serbian army. His obsession with the case becomes seemingly suicidal when it puts him at loggerheads with the local crime lord and folk hero, Luka.

There are many great touches in the book which give the reader a fleeting glimpse of civilian life during war. As befits a starving people, everyone is obsessed with food. One character rescues a victim of sniper fire then becomes angry at her for getting shot. A surgeon weeps because he cannot save lives and limbs as he could only a few years before when he had a working hospital. Rosso at various points dodges mortar rounds and sniper fire, while the author describes the varying sounds they make in strangely poetic prose.

Unless you are familiar with the basics of the Balkan conflicts during the mid-90's, expect to do a prodigious amount of Googling to understand parts of the story. But even if you are somewhat familiar with it, you'll also know you could read ten books and still not understand why all of this tragedy and waste happened.

Bill Krieger says

The Monkey House is bleak, harsh. The setting is Sarajevo during Bosnian war in the 90's. The descriptions of wartime existence in the city are pretty riveting, and they are the strongest parts of the book. There's shooting and mortars and kidnapping. But just as bad or worse is the lack of so many practical things you take for granted every day: food, warmth, shelter, water, toilets, a dang shower, etc. These "reality" parts reminded me of "The Road" where Cormac so wonderfully describes how hard living without all this stuff really is. He's no Cormac, but Fullerton's writing style is top notch as well.

QOTD

Wasn't he hungry, she asked, flustered. It must have been ages since he last ate and what time did he leave for the airport in the morning - she used words and questions like the clouds of metal strips dispersed by aircraft to deceive ground radar, bombarding him with them, showering him with fragments of sentiment.
- The Monkey House, Rosso's alcoholic wife

Another fave is how Fullerton intertwines the large and small scale effects of the war. Much of the book describes the war, but he also focuses in on the messed-up personal life of our hero, Rosso. Rosso's wife has lost it and crawled in a bottle. His god-daughter is sleeping with the worst mobster in town. His job is disintegrating. He stinks and he's peeing off the balcony of his condo. (Cha!) Now that's a bad day. Rosso's struggle is a microcosm of Sarajevo's struggle.

I don't know diddly about the Bosnian war, so it wasn't easy to follow all the actors. The plot is a bit uneven, and it felt like an author's first effort. I read the jacket, and this is Fullerton's first novel. I guess he is a war correspondent, so the grunge and violence in his description of the war come from experience.

QOTD2

The policeman saw then that the Serb's brain had fallen out because the rear of the skull had been sheared clean off, and it lay almost intact on the ground, skin and hair still attached. Rosso thought of a coconut, cracked open on a stone. Either the Serb hadn't worn his helmet when he was hit or it had provided no protection worth having. A kitten was feeding on the grey and pink matter, pawing at it and licking it, its tiny tongue lapping at sticky mucus. The animal looked up as the three men drew nearer. It skittered away, almost playfully.

- The Monkey House

An excellent read! Thank you, Comrade.

Mazen Alloujami says

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Garth says

This was my second reading of this book. Fortunately, I seem to have forgotten the plot, so managed to enjoy it afresh. While I do need to get my head around the history of the whole awful Serb/Croat/Bosnian thing, the storyline captured me through these historical gaps all the way to the very good twist in the end.

Alex says

A murder mystery set in the charnel house of Sarajevo at the height of the Bosnian war. Police Superintendent Rosso, an ethnic Croat, investigates the murder of a Serb dentist. The author was a war correspondent in Bosnia and brings the conflict in all it's horror to life. A good read but you will require a

fairly strong stomach.

Kristof Verbeke says

A good book, not so much a thriller or about a murder. Much more about the Bosnian war era and Sarejevo.

Abrarowaidah says

Boring
