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Peter Elbling

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When Ugo DiFonte and his teenaged daughter Miranda are snatched from their farm and spirited away to Duke Federico Basillione DiVincelli's estate, Ugo thinks life can't get any worse...until he is forced to replace the recently de-tongued royal food taster. Now Ugo must stay alive-a difficult prospect considering the prince's myriad of enemies and their poisons-to protect Miranda from her suitors and desires, and somehow hold the unruly court together.

A bestseller in ten countries, in this novel of gastronomical delight and brilliant wit Peter Elbling remarkably captures the sights, sounds, and tastes of sixteenth-century Italy with the story of a peasant rising to extraordinary and death-defying acts of grace.

The Food Taster Details

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Author : Peter Elbling

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From Reader Review The Food Taster for online ebook

Kris Wright says

Ugh...we all hated it!

Janet says

Disliked it so much, I couldn't even finish reading it.

Ian says

Interestingly enough, i came across this book at a Dollar Tree and something about it made me want to purchase it.

Ana T. says

When Ugo DiFonte and his teenaged daughter Miranda are snatched from their farm and spirited away to Duke Federico Basillione DiVincelli's estate, Ugo thinks life can't get any worse... until he is forced to replace the recently de-tongued royal food taster. Now Ugo must stay alive - a difficult prospect considering the prince's myriad of enemies and their poisons - to protect Miranda from her suitors and desires, and somehow hold the unruly court together.

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I've recently read somewhere that Peter Elbling is a screenwriter. While reading the book I didn't know that but I noticed immediately how he has a beautifully descriptive way of write that makes it very easy for the reader to "see" the action taking place. In fact, now that I know that, I can't help thinking how easy it would be to adapt the story for the movies and how well it would work.

Unfortunately, as a fiction book I thought it had too many plot twists, too much action if you will, and after a while I found my attention wondering in other directions.

The book is written as a memoir by the fictional Ugo, food taster to the mighty Duke Federico, and its set in Italy in the 16th century. Ugo has had a hard life before being caught by Federico's guards. He was abused by his father and brother, saw his mother hang herself, got married only to see his wife dying in childbirth and leaving him with a baby. His daughter Miranda soon becomes the center of his life and when he becomes Duke Federico's food taster she goes with him to the castle.

Duke's Federico court is full of intrigues; he is an autocratic ruler, loud and violent. He hates his wife and his mother in law, keeps mistresses and plans orgies of food and entertainment which often ends with someone dead or humiliated. There is a real fear of poison and of being killed by the Duke in a fit of rage, Ugo soon tries to find allies to prevent both situations but he can never find peace. He falls in love with Agnese, a washer woman from the Palace but she is killed, his daughter grows and attracts the attention of Federico's main cook which displeases Ugo, a spurt of plague leads him to send Miranda away for her own safety, eventually she returns but she is not the same and soon falls under the spell of Ugo's brother who reappears practicing some sort of witchcraft...

I can see the appeal of reading something different and bringing some freshness to the genre but I felt that there were too many things going on, like everything was rushed, and since Ugo is not particularly likeable it was a struggle to keep reading his life's story. The author also resorts to crude language very often for effect but after a while it feels like an obvious device and it's annoying rather than effective.

Grade: 3/5

Donna LaValley says

The strong point was the plot, and at least the characters were dynamic (learned and changed from experiences) but none of the characters were particularly likable. There was plenty of ugly gore and violence, sex and foul language. I've read a lot of books that take place in the middle ages, all researched to varying degrees, and think this author chose to include the most scatological and murderous scenes he could to sell the book. Of interest were the physical descriptions of the palaces, towns, and countryside, the menus and even recipes in the book. I'd rather have given it 2.5 stars.

Miss Framboesa says

O que dizer deste livro? Divertiu-me, prendeu-me e transportou-me para um ambiente e épocas diferentes. Toda a história é narrada pelo próprio Ugo, o provador do Duque Federico (ou seja, a personagem que na corte prova a comida para o caso desta estar envenenada e se estiver...hummm...) e, na minha opinião, não há como não sentir uma certa ternura ou empatia por este personagem, não só pelo modo como expressa as suas fragilidades, mas também pelo seu grau de humanidade. Um livro cheio de passagens engraçadas, especialmente devidas à bizarrice das situações, algumas de uma crueza tal que me fez quase desviar os olhos e proferir vários "blhecccccccc". Um livro diferente que me vai ficar na memória.

Maria says

I thought I might have already reviewed this book, but maybe I didn't. I didn't like it. In fact, I didn't even finish it. I keep meaning to put a category for my choosing that says, "Didn't Care to Finish". There were several not nice words in this book, within the first 60 pages. The story seemed to intriguing, so I was very sad that I was so turned off. Lots of sex, LOTS of sexual references. Not cool.

Heatherterrybell says

This book was crude and petty nasty in the first five pages. I threw it away. Don't Waste your time

Kirsten says

If you are serious about accuracy in historical fiction, then forget this book. If you are more into the FICTION end, this is a light, funny, entertaining book with some real food for thought thrown in.

The life of a peasant and his daughter are turned topsy-turvy when the Duke decides to make the peasant his new food taster. I think this is accurate, that people were afraid of being poisoned and used food tasters for all their meals. It is great fun to follow the evolution of a peasant to a food taster at court who rises in prominence and stature, and who is always haunted by his father and brother's rejection of him. At the same time, his daughter grows up in the castle and becomes quite the beauty. I would say this book is well-written, though many of the characters are shallow and/or one-dimensional, and as I mentioned before, the history isn't exactly plausible at times. I doubt that such a easy back and forth existed between the dukes of the time and their servants, or that someone could rise from a peasant girl to the wife of a duke so easily. However, it is the implausibility of these events that makes it so entertaining.

The food for thought is more in the way life and death are looked at. As a food taster, your job is to die to save your master's life. You could die at any moment. Indeed, sometimes to survive is far worse. The story looks at the plague and how it takes away loved ones indiscriminantly. Women die in child birth, and people can be killed on a whim. Robbers waylay travelers, and courtiers fear that if they say something wrong, the duke or whomever will kill them or have them killed. In other words, death is always just a taste or blade stroke or plague away.

If you want a light read but with a serious flare and do not mind the shallowness of some characters and the "light way" death is treated, this could be the book for you. Don't take the book too seriously though.

Nelleke says

Een aantal jaar geleden heb ik dit boek voor het eerst gelezen, toen vond ik het geweldig. Onlangs zag ik dit boek in de kast staan en kon ik me niks meer ervan herinneren, behalve de herinnering dat het erg goed was. Soms is het beter om in die waan te blijven. Het is nog steeds een lekker wegleesboek, maar de manier van vertellen, de grofheid, sprak mij minder aan. En de hoofdpersoon Ugo, is eigenlijk maar een vervelend mannetje. Gaf ik de vorige keer 5 sterren, nu kon ik echt niet verder dan 3. Grappig dat je inzicht zo kan veranderen.

Jeffrey says

I picked this book of a shelf in Fair Haven NY where it was available at a local book drop. The shelves were lined with summer reading and other fare, and you were asked to leave some money if you took a book. I found this one, and some others, and left a \$20.

This is a Mad Magazine style romp through the late middle ages. It did get a bit muddles towards the end, as though the author ran out of ideas and energy, but it was a fun read - if you enjoy random violence, farting, lots of rich food, gout, palace intrigue and general mayhem.

Tea Jovanovi? says

Ovu knjigu objavila sam iz poštovanja prema preminulom prevodiocu, divnoj Vesni Petrovi?, za koju me vezuju samo lepe uspomene i divna kaferisanja... da makar njeni prevodi i dalje žive...

Michalyn says

A short book that seemed very long. Despite the simple linear plot, the storytelling became confused at the end. Even though Ugo, the main character faces death at every meal as a food taster, I felt that the book dragged in a lot of places because the author wasn't successfully able to maintain that tension. There were some very funny scenes littered throughout but for the most part *The Food Taster* just didn't seem to live up to its potential either in terms of plot or wit. I appreciated the glimpse into renaissance life and the recipes at the end are great. Otherwise, there is not much remarkable here to write home about.

Bernarda says

I finally read the book. Ugo Difonte, the food taster, tells his history in first person. He had a long journey before he became famous for being, as he described himself, the best food taster in Italy. As a food taster he developed a highly accurate sense of taste, and was capable of describing every ingredient of a dish. While he was proud of being the food taster of an important Italian duke, he also knew that his life could be terminated at any moment when he had bitten into a piece of poisoned food. Ugo had to be aware of people who surrounded him, not only to preserve his own life but also that of his daughter.

It's a good story, well worth reading, although it's a bit predictable and has some historical mistakes. Of course it's fiction, but a well-based story is more believable. Don't expect too much from it or you might be disappointed.

Erica says

A bit more graphic and violent than I expected given the title (when there is plague, suicide, and bestiality in the first four pages you know you are in for a ride), but probably in line with the times. Our friend Ugo and his teen daughter are taken from their farm and Ugo is ordereed to be the food taster for a Duke that everyone hates. Ugo spends his time risking being poisoned and trying to protect those around him. Despite the bordering vulgarity at times, the healthy dose of irony and surprising sweetness kept me going and I actually enjoyed it. There is a nice treat at the end of the novel when the author includes some authentic Italian recipes from the time of the novel.

Sherelyn Ernst says

I had higher hopes for this book than it met, but it was fun if you want something a little humorous with some interesting facts about food tasters (for poison, not quality control) in Italy during Medieval times. It reads much like a cartoon plays, so horrible things can happen to characters without much affecting the reader. Because of this one never feels close to any of the characters--they just aren't real--but the story is engaging and entertaining. I had hoped for the equivalent of The Princess Bride, but this just doesn't cut it when compared to that. Then again, I can't think of anything that does.

Kendra says

Horrible. Didn't finish

Rolando Bernaus says

Una gran historia, escenas muy crudas pero el protagonista es único y te hace sentir en sus zapatos. Un libro que casi es obligatorio.

Bea says

Narrativa histórica emocionante. La parte didáctica-histórica de la novela para mí es lo mejor. No porque el argumento sea malo, que no lo es (aunque tampoco es brillante) sino porque gracias al contexto espacio-tiempo de este tipo de libros es donde realmente aprendo historia, que, por si no se ha notado ya, me gusta bastante. Una cosa buena que tiene esta obra es que el protagonista no es para nada el típico personaje humilde perfecto de la mayoría de las novelas, sino todo lo contrario, y este realismo se agradece. Para mí lo peor ha sido el personaje de la hija de Ugo, era insufrible. Ahora mismo no recuerdo un libro en el que haya odiado tanto a un personaje. La actitud del duque Federico también es genial para mostrar la cruda, egoísta e inhumana realidad del poder en la Italia renacentista.

No faltan los romances palaciegos, las risas, el amor y demás temas cortesanos. Un dato curioso es que al final del libro hay algunas recetas de comida renacentista.

Mira15 says

Este é um romance histórico bastante rico nas descrições, ambientes e comida.

Houve uns momentos que me cativaram mais que outros, mas, no geral, foi um livro que me deliciou e me fez dar umas boas gargalhadas.

(Opinião completa)

