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Heat: An Amateur's Adventures As Kitchen Slave, Line Cook, Pasta-Maker, And Apprentice To A Dante-Quoting Butcher In Tuscany



Synopsis

A highly acclaimed writer and editor, Bill Buford left his job at *The New Yorker* for a most unlikely destination: the kitchen at Babbo, the revolutionary Italian restaurant created and ruled by superstar chef Mario Batali. Finally realizing a long-held desire to learn first-hand the experience of restaurant cooking, Buford soon finds himself drowning in improperly cubed carrots and scalding pasta water on his quest to learn the tricks of the trade. His love of Italian food then propels him on journeys further afield: to Italy, to discover the secrets of pasta-making and, finally, how to properly slaughter a pig. Throughout, Buford stunningly details the complex aspects of Italian cooking and its long history, creating an engrossing and visceral narrative stuffed with insight and humor.

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Customer Reviews

Bill Buford's funny and engaging book *Heat* offers readers a rare glimpse behind the scenes in Mario Batali's kitchen. Who better to review the book for [.com](#), than Anthony Bourdain, the man who first introduced readers to the wide array of lusty and colorful characters in the restaurant business? We asked Anthony Bourdain to read *Heat* and give us his take. We loved it. So did he. Check out his review below. --Daphne Durham Guest Reviewer: Anthony Bourdain Anthony Bourdain is host of the Discovery Channel's *No Reservations*, executive chef at Les Halles in Manhattan, and author of the bestselling and groundbreaking *Kitchen Confidential*, Anthony Bourdain's *Les Halles Cookbook*, *A Cook's Tour*, *Bone in the Throat*, and many others. His latest book, *The Nasty Bits* will be released on May 16, 2006. *Heat* is a remarkable work on a number of fronts--and for a number of reasons. First, watching the author, an untrained, inexperienced and middle-aged desk jockey

slowly transform into not just a useful line cook--but an extraordinarily knowledgeable one is pure pleasure. That he chooses to do so primarily in the notoriously difficult, cramped kitchens of New York's three star Babbo provides further sado-masochistic fun. Buford not only accurately and hilariously describes the painfully acquired techniques of the professional cook (and his own humiliations), but chronicles as well the mental changes--the "kitchen awareness" and peculiar world view necessary to the kitchen dweller. By end of book, he's even talking like a line cook. Secondly, the book is a long overdue portrait of the real Mario Batali and of the real Marco Pierre White--two complicated and brilliant chefs whose coverage in the press--while appropriately fawning--has never described them in their fully debauched, delightful glory. Buford has--for the first time--managed to explain White's peculiar--almost freakish brilliance--while humanizing a man known for terrorizing cooks, customers (and Batali). As for Mario--he is finally revealed for the Falstaffian, larger than life, mercurial, frighteningly intelligent chef/entrepreneur he really is. No small accomplishment. Other cooks, chefs, butchers, artisans and restaurant lifers are described with similar insight. Thirdly, Heat reveals a dead-on understanding--rare among non-chef writers--of the pleasures of "making" food; the real human cost, the real requirements and the real adrenalin-rush-inducing pleasures of cranking out hundreds of high quality meals. One is left with a truly unique appreciation of not only what is truly good about food--but as importantly, who cooks--and why. I can't think of another book which takes such an unsparing, uncompromising and ultimately thrilling look at the quest for culinary excellence. Heat brims with fascinating observations on cooking, incredible characters, useful discourse and argument-ending arcania. I read my copy and immediately started reading it again. It's going right in between Orwell's Down and Out in Paris and London and Zola's The Belly of Paris on my bookshelf. --Anthony Bourdain --This text refers to the Audible Audio Edition edition.

Buford's voice echoes the rhythms of his own writing style. Writing about his break from working as a New Yorker editor and learning firsthand about the world of food, Buford guns his reading into hyperspeed when he is jazzed about a particularly tangy anecdote, and plays with his vocal tone and pitch when mimicking others' voices. At its base, Buford's voice is tinged with a jovial lilt, as if he is amused by his life as a "kitchen slave" and by the outsize personalities of the people he meets along the way. Less authoritative than blissfully confused, Buford speaks the way he writes, as a well-informed but never entirely knowledgeable outsider to the world of food love. Listening to his imitation of star chef Mario Batali's kinetic squeal, Buford ably conveys his abiding love for the teachers and companions of his brief, eventful life as a cook. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Audible

Audio Edition edition.

The author, Bill Buford, is my kinda guy. He was a sometime cook around the house, got into the writing game at the New Yorker, and then went whole hog into learning about the restaurant business from behind the kitchen's swinging doors. Buford didn't take the soft road to his education. He went to work for some of the power-houses of the culinary industry. "We buy some type of raw food, do something to it, and then sell it for a profit" is the *raison d'être* of the professional chef. Buford had two goals; to see what the food prep work is all about and improve his skills preparing good food. So, in concert with Mario Batali and others of that ilk, he put on the whites, the crocs and the bandanna and dove in. Restaurants are places that many people think consists of a folded napkin with silverware and a glass of water on a white tablecloth. Buford's schooling starts with the beating out of his psyche any semblance of manhood - and bringing out the little boy looking for an after school job washing dishes. I have had some experiences dealing with some of the prima donnas of the restaurant industry. After finishing *Heat* I gained a new respect for those that toil behind the swinging doors of the dining room. Buford discloses that fads, fetishes and failures are common in the restaurant industry. His training is harsh because there is no sentimentality in the food service business; when one part of the team falls short, the rest can tumble into chaos at the busiest part of the night. In the end, Buford is a somewhat polished gem. I loved the detail he included in *Heat* about the move he made to grillman and the proximity in which he worked to a hot oven. This is probably the best book ever written about the horizon of knowledge it takes to be a top chef in the finest restaurants around the world. Here's how much I liked *Heat*. When I am out on a book scouting mission, if I find a used copy for a reasonable price, I buy it for friends that love to cook - and have restaurant cooking as an avocation.

I'll offer right up front that Bill Buford offers in this book what I have been missing from Anthony Bourdain's books--both offer a wonderful no-holds-barred approach to the restaurant culture and the madness that lies behind the swinging kitchen door as well as a sheer love for food, but while Bourdain has much more of the insider appeal and the edge of experience from which to tell his tales, Buford is, hands-down, a darn better writer. This book is an intense view of the world of Italian food. It is researched and experienced. Buford made a reputation with *Among the Thugs* of going deep into his subject matter, culminating (in *Thugs*) in being beaten by cops as though he were one (after he had worked hard to be one of them). Rather than take a removed, journalistic perspective, researching from afar, Buford dives right in and learns everything from the inside. In this book,

Buford comes under the wing of rockstar-chef Mario Batali, and though he may fancy himself a foodie who could have become a renowned chef himself had he put in the time, the work of the kitchen turns out to be a whole different world. From almost day one, Buford learns that there is a proper way to dice carrots (which he didn't do), uncovering the first of many lessons I would learn through this book that would let me realize that I, too, am but an amateur in the world of cooking. Buford learns that one of the first secrets to being an ace chef is being able to cook the same dish the same way each and every time, so that those who come in and enjoy it one night can come in on any other night and still have the dish that they loved so well. From there, the lessons don't get any easier. Moving up from prep to line cook creates its own hazards (literally), but within it all Buford maintains his cool (in his own way) and becomes a student of food. This eventually leads him to take some trips to Italy, where he tries his hand as an apprentice to making pasta and, ultimately, as a butcher. The book leaflet is a little misleading here, for Buford learns more about the proper way to butcher a pig carcass rather than slaughter the pig itself--this is where Buford divides from Bourdain, who wanted to be involved in the actual killing of a pig in his quest to become closer to the food he loves so much. It's hard not to make correlations between Bill Buford and Anthony Bourdain, maybe because both have such a deep respect for food and the craft of making it. Bourdain, of course, speaks from the inside, and that might be his ultimate downfall. His TV appearances are golden, but when translated to the page, books like *Kitchen Confidential* and *A Cook's Tour* have the essence of foodiness that I like, but the pages eventually get rather unreadable. Buford has a very engaging style and is good at developing moments of humor and manicness and pure horror, and the gruff relationships between the cooks seem to go right up the same alley as Buford's previous work with English soccer hooligans. His research into cooking history (for example, when egg was first used in making Italian pasta) is wonderful, though I wasn't so intrigued in his chapters that delved into the histories of some of his colleagues, including Batali. In the later chapters, Buford's writing became almost a little too thick, like (excuse, please) munching constantly on duck in a thick, rich sauce, but then getting a little overwhelmed and wanting a bit more of a respite before being bombarded with another round of deep, deep flavor. In all, this book becomes the story of a foodie's journey into discovering the essence of being a chef and even attaining that, in a way. Though I was a little let down by the ending that suggested a sequel in the guise of conveying a deeper sense of yearning in Buford's curiosity about food, the narrative is quite secure throughout. The ultimate foodie book will be written by someone with the passion and experience of Bourdain, but with the skills and desire for further knowledge of Buford. Right now, this would seem to be the best case scenario we can find, but I

hold out hope that there might be another out there who can mix absolutely everything together.

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