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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.

Book Information

Paperback: 336 pages

Publisher: Vintage; Reprint edition (June 26, 2007)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1400034477

ISBN-13: 978-1400034475

Product Dimensions: 5.2 x 0.7 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.4 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.3 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (299 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #33,284 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #23 in [Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Regional U.S. > Mid Atlantic](#) #72 in [Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Professionals & Academics > Culinary](#) #234 in [Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Arts & Literature > Authors](#)

Customer Reviews

I don't go to restaurants. I don't watch FOOD Channel. I don't even order take-out. I'm just a pizza and burger guy with an occasional side trip to Taco Bell for my veggies. So why was I reading this book? My lunch partner was reading this weirdly yellow hardback and slowly choking on his burrito as he chuckled through Page 230 where the author had become a walking grease fire. Now, I can understand the humor behind being lit up like a Christmas tree in my kitchen (I'd done that after turning on the burners without removing my Hungryman TV dinner carton on top of it.) But a whole book of such mishaps? Ah, my friend urged this book on me and predicted I'd be converted! He would be able to persuade me to go to an eatery that didn't have paper boats of onion rings or plastic packets of mayo. I would want to eat ramps (huh?) and autumn squash! I would want to eat fennel pollen!! And he was right! I was plastered to this book for the next week and a half. Buford

started his quest to understand what goes on behind the professional kitchen, in Mario Batali's restaurant, Babbo. He offers himself as an unpaid servant. He promptly cuts himself while deboning ducks and hunting for their "oysters." And his whole world is never the same again. After months of culinary bondage, he flies to Italy to roll pasta with Betta (why you make pasta like an old woman, eh?) and butcher tall cows with warbling Dario and carve thighs with the Maestro (of the Monster Hands) in Tuscany. I suffered with him as Molto Mario roots in trash cans, retrieving celery leaves and lamb kidneys that shouldn't have been tossed in the garbage. I puzzled over the importance of broccoli floret heads to customers.

Bill Buford decided in his early forties to ditch his job as a successful New Yorker editor to enter the world of food. What started with a simple assignment to write a magazine story on Mario Batali, the renowned Food Network chef, ended up taking him to Italy and becoming a cook. "Heat" details this journey, including the back stories of numerous chefs and foodies with whom Buford ending up working, such as Batali. The book is entertaining for the most part; hearing about the difficulties of being a line cook in a three-star New York restaurant is certainly interesting. Buford started at the bottom by prepping, including spending hours dicing carrots only to have them thrown out because they were done incorrectly. The book certainly conveys the message that great food requires precision and working in these kinds of restaurants is brutal. Of course, we've seen this same idea before in numerous other "insider" books. What sets "Heat" slightly apart is the path that Buford takes. When he first starts cooking, he's the "kitchen b*tch" in Batali's Babbo Italian restaurant, and you really don't think he'll make it for more than a few months. However, he becomes enthralled with food, in particular homemade authentic Italian food. He becomes convinced that he has to follow Batali's lead and spend time as an intern in Italy, first learning pasta and then working for a famous Tuscan butcher. Buford meets some interesting characters along the way and tells some fun stories. However, I could never shake the feeling that Buford was just playing a role. Indeed, he tries to downplay the fact that he entered this world as a writer - we don't get the full explanation of why he started in Batali's kitchen (i.e., to write a story) until page 141.

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