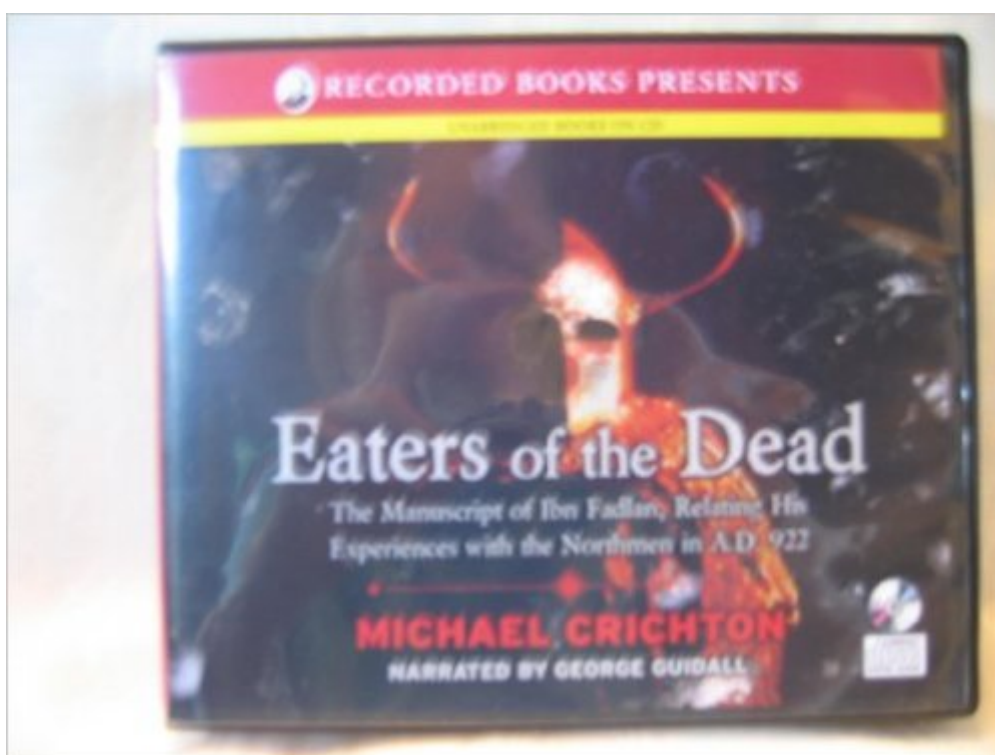


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Eaters Of The Dead: The Manuscript Of Ibn Fadlan, Relating His Experiences With The Northmen In A.D. 922



Synopsis

It is 922 A.D. The refined Arab courtier Ibn Fadlan is accompanying a party of Viking warriors back to the north. Fadlan belatedly discovers that his job is to combat the terrors in the night that come to slaughter the Vikings--but just how he will do it, Fadlan has no idea....

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Contrary to what has been said by many of the reviewers here, this book is in fact based on a real manuscript by the Arab traveller ibn Fadlan in the tenth century who made his way from the Caliphate to the shores of the Volga to treat with the Bulgar kingdom which was then ensconced there (apparently to entice the Bulgars away from their Khazar overlords who were then enemies of the Arab empire). This ambassador of the Caliph faithfully recorded much of what he saw among the barbarians, including encounters with the Oghuz Turks and the Norsemen who were then frequent travellers along the rivers of what would one day become Russia. (In fact some thinking has it that the Norse, in the guise of "Rus" -- etymology unclear -- actually gave their name, along with their ruling princes, to Russia since the first major Russian state, Kievan Rus, was ruled by princes of viking heritage, with the help of second and third generation viking adventurers serving them as mercenaries.) But Crichton's book is not just a reprint of ibn Fadlan's manuscript (which is available, in English, in various scholarly tomes). Crichton enlarged upon the tale he found and appended an apparently fictional second half which takes ibn Fadlan north, in the company of his new-found Norse comrades, to the viking lands, there to face a shadowy menace of unknown origins. In this second half, Crichton blended historical speculation with the Beowulf tale in Old English (the chief of the viking crew which inducts ibn Fadlan is called "Buliwyf") to suggest an

ending to Ibn Fadlan's adventures which surely never happened. But it's done quite nicely, hard to tell where the real tale ends and the author's fictional enterprise begins, and it keeps you reading right to the final moments.

Usually I read the book first, then see the movie. Not this time. I was not disappointed. "The 13th Warrior," movie starring Antonio Banderas stays very faithful to the book by Michael Crichton. Both are based on a true story taken from the writings of an Arab courtier Ahmad Ibn Fadlan who, back in A.D. 921, was sent by the Caliph of Bagdad to be an ambassador to the King of the Bulgars. Ibn Fadlan had the bad luck to have caught the eye of a beautiful Arab woman who was the young wife of an old and very rich merchant. The merchant complained to the Caliph and wanted Ibn Fadlan banished to some far off and hostile land. While on his way to his new post, this highly refined, educated Arab poet encounters a band of Viking warriors and gets caught up in a horrific quest traveling to Scandinavia with them to save the people of a remote kingdom from a terrifying enemy. The movie and the book give a wonderful look at the contrasts of these two utterly different cultures. Banderas delivers a stellar performance as the Arab scholar trying to maintain his dignity under some extraordinarily difficult circumstances. Ibn Fadlan finds the Vikings' crude, vulgar, violent and sometimes blatantly sexual customs and personal habits almost more than he can endure, but he does so with a quiet and sometimes comical dignity that makes him all the more likeable. He comes to respect and even like these giant Northmen, especially their brave leader Buliwyf. Once Ibn Fadlan and the Northmen begin their journey together, the action is almost nonstop. The book is done in Ibn Fadlan's voice in narrative style. It is a rather matter-of-fact diary of his travels. But don't let that deter you.

First released in 1976, 'Eaters Of The Dead' was one of my first Michael Crichton books. I have been an avid Crichton fan since that time. Later, in the 1990's, a film was made called 'The 13th Warrior', which remained true to the book and yet added some wonderful flavor and fantastic visuals to a novel I still remembered as terrific. Though based heavily on the rediscovered manuscripts and references of the real Ibn Fadlan, Crichton clearly tells us the book is considered as fiction and was/is marketed as fiction. Ibn Fadlan was sent away from Bagdad by the Caliph, on the word of a jealous husband whose wife Fadlan had tampered with, to become Ambassador to the King of the Bulgars far to the north. On his journey, he is waylaid by a band of Norsemen and selected to join them on a journey to aid King Rothgar against an unspeakable evil that appears in the cold northern mists. Traveling with Buliwyf, a man soon to become king of his own court, and a group of twelve

hearty Norsemen including the light-hearted Herger who speaks enough Latin to act as translator, Fadlan is taken further north with a band of men the fastidious Arab considers to be unclean barbarians. Fadlan becomes immersed in their savage lifestyles, killing for sport and rutting in public, even gaining some respect for their superstitious ways and bawdy, rugged beliefs. King Rothgar's lands are being attacked by the Wendol, a Neanderthal-type, cave-dwelling clan who takes the heads of their enemies and eats their flesh. It is up to the thirteen warriors to rid King Rothgar of his dangerous enemies. 'Eaters Of The Dead' is a riveting tale, with enough footnotes and factual base to make it a realistic peek at the ancient Norsemen and a quick, exciting read.

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