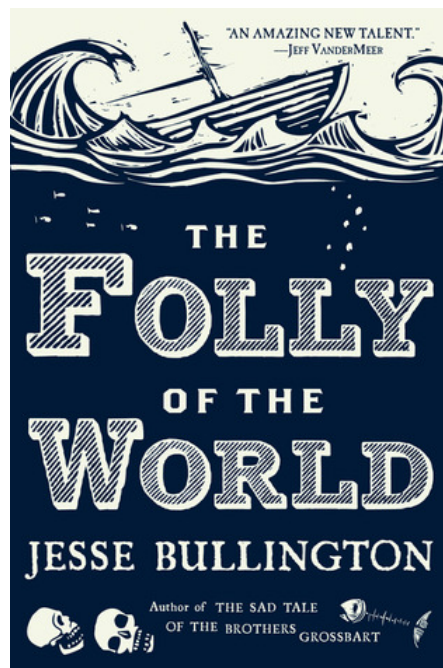




The Folly of the World

Jesse Bullington

Download now

Read Online ➞

The Folly of the World

Jesse Bullington

The Folly of the World Jesse Bullington

On a stormy night in 1421, the North Sea delivers a devastating blow to Holland: the Saint Elizabeth Flood, a deluge of biblical proportions that drowns hundreds of towns, thousands of people, and forever alters the geography of the Low Countries. Where the factions of the noble Hooks and the merchant Cods waged a literal class war but weeks before, there is now only a nigh-endless expanse of grey water, a desolate inland sea with moldering church spires jutting up like sunken tombstones. For a land already beleaguered by generations of civil war, a worse disaster could scarce be imagined.

Yet even disaster can be profitable, for the right sort of individual, and into this flooded realm sail three conspirators: a deranged thug at the edge of madness, a ruthless conman on the cusp of fortune, and a half-feral girl balanced between them.

With *The Folly of the World*, Jesse Bullington has woven an extraordinary new tale of the depraved and the desperate.

The Folly of the World Details

Date : Published December 18th 2012 by Orbit (first published October 1st 2012)

ISBN : 9780316190350

Author : Jesse Bullington

Format : Paperback 502 pages

Genre : Fantasy, Historical, Historical Fiction, Fiction, Horror

 [Download The Folly of the World ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online The Folly of the World ...pdf](#)

Download and Read Free Online The Folly of the World Jesse Bullington

From Reader Review The Folly of the World for online ebook

Adam says

I loved Jesse Bullington's first two novels for their color and life and transgressive imagination. His prose and characterization have always been good, too--the opening sequence of *Enterprise of Death* is one of the most memorable fantasy sections I've read. But the first two novels were undermined a bit for me by the sense that Bullington hadn't quite mastered the structure of the novel yet. I was excited that he'd written three of these standalone medieval novels not just for the abundance of goodies themselves, but for the promise that the third one would finally deliver on the whole package: historically detailed settings, great and unique characters, grotesque monsters, and absurd and shocking sensibilities, wrapped up in a great novel.

Folly of the World is not **quite** everything I was hoping for, but it's pretty close. There are still no monsters that match the bestiary of *Brothers Grossbart*, and I'm not sure the first section of *Enterprise* is topped by anything in *Folly*. But it doesn't have any of the structural flaws that undermine the coherency of those previous books. It builds a layered series of more or less cryptic and mystical conspiracies, complicated by unreliable memories and mental illness and deliberate lies, but it's all a slow burn building up gradually behind slice-of-life material. The main characters are full of verve and vulgarity, largely accounting for Bullington's ability to seamlessly marry a rich historical setting with the sensibility of a contemporary horror movie. They inhabit their world with such a natural, obscene physicality, that other historical fiction begins to feel like a polite, sanitized revision.

Folly's Netherlands are a post-apocalyptic nightmare landscape of molding houses barely covered by filthy floodwater, of monstrous catfish and thin spits of sand and rock jutting into the cold Atlantic. It's the perfect setting, and a lot of the book's weirdness floats up from its depths, hanging dreamlike in the murky water rather than poking its head up and thrashing around too much. A lot of people found this frustrating, since the book leaves all of its central mysteries unresolved. As a *Souls* fan, I found it just right. It lurks and tickles at your imagination without spilling too much of its arcana into the harsh light of explicit description. Definitely the best fantasy I've read so far this year.

PS - In addition to the standard progressive worldview Bullington applies without apparent anachronism to all of his books, I was delighted to find that *Folly* includes a ton of medieval environmental history. From the population of sea snails Jo's family uses to create purple dye (and the marginal economic status they earn for their environmentally marginal labors), to the economics of sheep sales in the city and its taxation, to the almost too-big-to-notice fact that the entire landscape, other than a few cities, has been permanently flooded within the characters' lifetimes.

Jason says

2 Stars

I am a big fan of Jesse Bullington and I really enjoyed his previous novels. I cannot finish this book at this time. It has taken me far too long to reach the midway point. I simply cannot see any reason to go on. This book is tame and lame compared to his previous books. I do not care about any of the characters and the world is just ok. Book closesd.

Insouciantly says

I don't know how to feel about this book, and how it ended. The reader is left VERY unsatisfied, but, well, something about that unsatisfaction is satisfying. I guess its just written so very well you can't help but like the ending, even as you're hating not knowing the answers to so many questions. I mean really. SO MANY QUESTIONS.

Also, it was rather more graphically violent than I normally like in a book. But the violence is used well, I guess. It's not just there to make the reader feel uncomfortable, its not just there to make a point. It's necessary to the story, it's not superfluous, so I can get over it.

It was difficult to identify with the main characters. One is a very insane, violent, crude man, and the other is a rather coldly logical girl who is still sort of an idiot, but at least knows when she's being idiotic.

And yet to balance all that out, it was definitely one of the most original stories I've ever read. Its not like anything else. And its engrossing, it draws you in, and you definitely need to know what happens, what makes it all make sense. Except you never find out. Damn author. :-P

Anyways, for those with a strong stomach, who don't feel uncomfortable with awkwardly graphic sex and violence, this book should be read. I can't recommend it to everyone because of that (a lot of people will hate it because of that), but if you can get beyond it, its such a fascinatingly weird and unique story. And the style is integral to the story. You couldn't have this story without the way it was written, you'd get something completely different, and something a lot less original.

Justin says

review by Justin Blazier posted originally on www.fantasyliterature.com

In a flooded 15th century Holland there are very few opportunities available. Jan may have an amazing opportunity at a life full of riches, but it's hidden somewhere at the bottom of a flooded town. To reach his greedy goal in the dark moldy depths, Jan enlists the help of a wild young girl with a knack for swimming. Add Jan's slightly psychotic but ever-faithful partner Sander to the mix and you have yourself a watery adventure with a cast to remember.

In both of his previous books, *The Sad Tale of the Brothers Grossbart* and *The Enterprise of Death*, Jesse Bullington went to great lengths to defy our expectations in every way. His characters were immoral, his language was foul, his violence was graphic, and his subject matter was often nauseating.

His fans will be pleased to know that *The Folly of the World* is full of the same decadence, degeneration, and gut-wrenching twists and turns we've come to know and love. *The Folly of the World* proudly carries the Bullington torch of depravity, but it's applied in a more focused, less liberal manner — like using guided missiles instead of napalm.

The characters in *The Folly of the World* are as you would expect from Jesse Bullington — flawed, violent, and disturbed — but this time he has taken extra care to build a backstory that lets us understand why they turned out that way. Empathy can be a cruel tool for an author to wield. This was done so well that I was horrified to find myself actually feeling sorry for these despicable people. Readers who didn't like *The Sad Tale of the Brothers Grossbart* because of the characters may feel differently about this novel.

But as usual, Bullington still takes delight in making his readers very uncomfortable — The Folly of the World is filled with sexual tension, unwelcome surprises, and short lifespans, all of it weaved with masterful wordplay and dark humor. Bullington has perfected his voice in this novel. He's taken the elements that his fans loved from his previous work and incorporated them in a manner that addresses the critiques of those who didn't appreciate his earlier work. I think this demonstrates a sense of self awareness and growth as a writer. He was scary good before, and he just keeps getting better.

The Folly of the World is Bullington's best work to date. I love his previous work, but this is something special. When I recommend his work to others, I'll suggest this book first. Thanks, Mr. Bullington, for an excellent piece of fiction. And if you're one of the readers who were grossed out by the Brothers Grossbart, try The Folly of the World.

Kirsten Simkiss says

When you find yourself actually openly screaming at the last 100 pages of a book, it's either a really really good thing or a really really bad thing. In this case, it was a little bit of both. I went into the book grimacing and wincing at the characters and the violence and by the end being completely hooked into their well being and their life choices. And oh my god, those life choices.

I am going to preface the rest of this review by warning you now that if you are squeamish, homophobic, or don't like reading about violence or murder, this book is ABSOLUTELY NOT MEANT FOR YOU. Judging by other reviews, the author's other books are similarly violent. But, if you happen to be looking for a period drama that doesn't pull any of it's punches and follows three very flawed characters, you are absolutely in luck.

If you've ever heard the phrase, "Sometimes it's like watching a train wreck. You're uncomfortable, but you just can't help yourself." This is literally that book. I don't want to give anything away if you plan to read it, because not knowing what to expect made this train wreck of a story something that was very hard to pull myself away from. It was fantastic and it was horrible and I want an HBO miniseries because for once they might actually have to tone back some of the violence, craziness, and sex instead of adding it in.

When I first started reading, I found it difficult to attach myself to characters that are so foreign to me in their attitudes. A crazy thug, a manic 17-year-old girl, and a con man toddling around in flooded Holland? Not that easy. But as things progressed, I really got attached to these odd creatures of fiction. The book was also way more violent than most of the things I read. But, because it wasn't over the top, I found it bearable. Perhaps it was just me, but the violence plateaus off after a certain point for a while.

It was also very informative. I had never heard about St. Elizabeth's Flood at all, so I had to go look it up to understand it better. I can't imagine how crazy it was in those days to wake up one morning only to find that possibly 10,000 people had drowned due to failed infrastructure. It was also informative in another way: cursing. This book came up with more unusual curse words than I could probably list. My favorite was very easily shitbird, which is just a funny thing to call someone to me.

Ultimately, I would recommend this to a friend if I were sure they wouldn't be offended by how unusual the book is. (Because it really is that unusual.) It's not a book for the faint of heart or the easily offended, but gosh is it ever worth the read.

Emma Darcy says

charming, vulgar nonsense. I loved it even as I loathed it. No questions are answered and the end of the book feels no different to the other chapter breaks. It's like the author just got up and wandered away. The pace is bipolar, fast and sloooooooooow, manic and dour. The moral of the story appears to be "even terrible people fall in love. " It doesn't make them nicer. It just means that they kiss each other between all of the horrible things they do.

I'm furious. I don't demand all the answers, but so many things were given the kind of weight where you expect them to be addressed in some manner, not just whipped out and then left hanging. Maybe the answers were there but I missed them because I was too busy shouting "WHAT?!" at every page in the final chapter.

Westly William Sample says

potential it had

Nigel says

Jesse Bullington's latest! With each new book, Bullington's craft improves, honed by a formidably visceral imagination and what is clearly a passion for medieval European history not to mention an affinity for the lowly rogues, cheats and outsiders skulking in the shadows. Folly displays an impressively tight sense of plotting and place. The spooky and damp floodlands of Holland where terrible secrets linger amongst the reed and the mud and the drowned farms.

Jan, the con-man, recruits Jolanda, the swimmer, to recover an item from an underwater mansion. Sander, the burly thug perpetually on the brink of a violent psychotic breakdown, is muscle, if he can keep the schizophrenic paranoia at bay. This is a heist novel, of sorts, and as often occurs in heist novels, surviving the heist, no matter how badly it goes wrong, is a cakewalk when compared to surviving what comes afterwards. And, of course, the biggest danger usually comes from your fellow heisters. That's about as much as I'll say for the plot, as I wouldn't want to give too much away.

Interestingly, Bullington dials back considerably on the supernatural horrors, always front and centre in his previous two books. Such horrors and monstrosities as do appear are ambiguous, and though they provide a growing sense of unease and unreality, they are kept peripheral to the story itself, leaving the reader with much to ponder.

As usual, the characters are skillfully drawn, sympathetic even in their ugly depravity. Sander in particular is a creature of such violence, madness and appalling contradictions, you keep rooting for a redemption you know is impossible. Jan's smooth cruelty and Jolanda's growth from impoverished daughter of a dye-maker to an intelligent, albeit still ferocious young woman are equally strong and engaging.

Excellent.

Bob Milne says

If you've ever read Jesse Bullington, then you know he's quickly become known for his darkly humorous, delightfully obscene, disgustingly fantastic tales of humans failings and obsessions. His characters are no more attractive than the vulgar language with which he tells their tales, and nothing is ever safe - or, worse, sacred. While *The Folly of the World* tries a bit too hard to top its predecessors in terms of characters or narrative, it's still a fascinating tale that offers up Bullington's most traditional (and, for some readers, satisfying) plot to date.

As far as set-pieces go, it is hard to top an entire medieval town submerged beneath the waters of a great flood. It's creepy and surreal, with chimneys and peaked rooftops just poking up from the waters, dead bodies floating alongside giant catfish, and a cemetery mound rising above it all. Drop a young girl into the midst of it all, sent to swim her way through one dark, flooded house in search of a hidden ring, and you've got a definite sense of adventure. Leave a pair of scoundrels in the boat up top, one a coldly calculating bastard, and the other a violently unhinged madman, both of whom take carnal pleasure in one another - often with their ward watching - and you've got a definite taste for the darkly surreal.

Of course, that only carries you through a third of the tale. It's what happens once Jo retrieves the ring that really matters, a story of plots, counter plots, secrets, and betrayals. Time and time again, Bullington teases you into reevaluating everything you thought you knew, and tempts you into second-guessing everything you felt about the characters, their motives, and their personalities. I've never before come across an author who could so deftly sway my feelings towards a character, not just from like to dislike, but across the entire spectrum of disgust, admiration, and then back again.

For me, it was Sander, the madman with a taste for violent erotic asphyxiation, who kept me reading. Despite being a low-life scoundrel with a temper as sharp as his wit, Sander is also a man with a conscience (as deeply buried beneath the muck and mire as it may be), who is at least honest about his vices and his fetishes. Reminding most of the characters who drew me into *The Sad Tale of the Brothers Grossbart* and *The Enterprise of Death*, he serves to provide a much-needed contrast to the often hidden ugliness of the characters around him. While it's the Jan-Jo and Jan-Sander relationships that launch the tale, it's the Sander-Jo relationship that carries it through to the conclusion.

Strangely, I found that Bullington's attempts to provoke the reader were actually more transparent here, and not in *The Enterprise of Death*, as many readers have suggested. Perhaps that, coupled with my gradual dislike for Jan, is the reason I found the whole to be slightly less satisfying than his other work. Regardless, a new book from Bullington is always a refreshing addition to the shelves, and fans of his grim, cynical, darkly humorous work will find this to be a thoroughly engaging read.

Originally reviewed at Beauty in Ruins

Kaora says

I'm stuck between two and three stars for this one. It was entertaining in parts I will give it that and the writer is quite talented.

My biggest issue was with how slowly the book moved. The start was well done, but then it seemed there was 300 pages of just nothing. By the end I had started to get a bit antsy, and while it ended with a bang I was left feeling underwhelmed.

Bryarly says

Occasionally going from mysterious to plain confusing, but on the whole a fun and interesting read.

James Aura says

This book had potential but I bailed on it around page 100. Jesse Bullington is a talented writer, but the book simply grossed me out- and I don't gross out easily. The book was not my cup of tea.

Ross says

After reading The Sad Tale of the Brothers Grossbart about a year ago I had kept my eye on Jesse Bullington. (I would also like to quickly note that Mr. Bullington might just have the best facial hair in the genre. Move over Patrick Rothfuss!!!) His newest book The Folly of the World caught my eye for two reasons. The first being the beautiful cover art... I've heard that many authors don't have a say when it comes to their cover art, and if that's the case then Mr. Bullington is a very lucky author because the covers of his books are all wonderful. The second thing that really drew me in with this book was the whole concept. "A deranged thug at the edge of madness, a ruthless con man on the cusp of fortune, and a half-feral girl balanced between them". Combining these characters with the setting of a flooded medieval world and you have a recipe for a delicious read.

I should come out and say that while I enjoyed the book, it wasn't perfect and to be honest I would have a hard time recommending it to many traditional fantasy fans. For starters Bullington isn't writing stories that really sit well next to the likes of Terry Brooks, or George R. R. Martin. Instead he has created his very own niche in the fantasy genre. It's hard to describe because you have elements of whimsical prose that give the story an almost fairy tale feel, but at the same time you have elements of extreme sex and violence. This creates a unique reading experience that I haven't come across before so it's hard to give a good comparison. One thing that I've come to appreciate with Bullington is his ability to make his medieval world feel very authentic. Bullington dedicates a lot of research into his work and you can really feel it over the course of his story.

The book suffers from a bloated "middle section" which is unfortunate because the opening and conclusion are both very well done. Some readers also might be turned off by the fact that two of the main characters are homosexuals, and they do have multiple sex scenes. There is also some pretty foul language (this is coming from a sailor mind you) but the violence wasn't as harsh as it was in The Brothers Grossbart. So take that with a grain of salt, this isn't a book for the faint of heart or for someone who is easily offended.

The three characters were all stellar and as I mentioned above Bullington has a way with words that really give the story a feeling of whimsy. Several internal monologues also had me laughing out loud, and these elements of humor shed some light on the dark watery world that Bullington has created. Overall if you enjoyed the crazy adventures of The Brothers Grossbart than you will enjoy the hot mess that is Sander, Jan, and Jo. It is clear that Jesse Bullington is becoming a cult favorite among many people and I can't wait to see what he has next in store for us!

*Also worth noting... No Belgians were harmed in the making of this novel.

David Dinaburg says

Less than a quarter of the way through The Folly of the World, the question of how the remaining three-hundred-odd pages would be filled was very real; though the setting was fifteenth-century Holland, it is character-based fiction, more at home in the fantasy genre than alternate history. The plot, up to that point, involved a quest to find a representative (née magical) MacGuffin that would change the lives of the three crusaders *forever*—the draw was that the characters themselves were callous, manipulative, cruel, and—in at least one instance—demented.

The choice of narrative lens boldly leans into the insanity, with a subjective third person that leaves distinguishing between reality and delirium up to the reader:

What if all the servants were in on it, Lansloet and even Lijsbet? She knew Lijsbet was at her aunt's, again, and now Lansloet was supposedly out visiting an ill relation he had never mentioned, but what if all the servants were lying about their destinations?

It is difficult not to get swept up in the paranoia.

In keeping with genre fantasy are the requisite scenes of a sexual nature—The Folly of the World adroitly positions them as character development and applies their substance to reinforce the plot, rather than as the adolescent titillation of the prototypical hero's journey where a heteronormative questing team's budding romance plays out with tepid ennui. The explicit detail is dialed up, but beyond the smut sits a standard plot of three adventures searching for a bauble; the rub is that all three are miscreants and the tale is told in increasingly unreliable voices. The plot is vehicle for character development—standard genre constructions apply.

Then, Folly shifts and the world changes completely. A particular scene—set from the view of a one-off character—was positioned as an obvious transition into the back half and functioned as an fantastic display of subtly in misdirection. Full advantage of the metes and bounds of the written word is applied to a scene that would not be nearly so effective in any other medium. Perhaps because it wasn't overworked, perhaps because it wasn't overlong, but it gulled me completely. It outlines how it's going to be, from this point forward—no more restrictions, no tedium of predictability. The previous two-hundred pages can finally be seen for what they were: the setup, a long con to lull a reader into the gentle haze of bog-standard fiction before the floor falls away.

At this point the concern over the remaining pages flips completely, becoming curiosity over not how they might be filled but how the story, now laden with possibility, could be made to fit into the rapidly dwindling pagecount. It is impressive that so much plot and so much time were spent as juxtaposition to the story waiting to emerge—The Folly of the World allows itself room to ramp up, trusting the reader with a comparatively slow opening, denying the *au courant* constant drip of instant gratification. Without the relatively menial, paint-by-numbers opening, the twisting, writhing tangle of the back half wouldn't command the kick nor allow for the unpredictability without seeming groundless or absurd.

Up until unexpected shift, the setting of fifteenth century Holland could well have been Middle Earth, Westeros, or the Four Lands for all the good it did the plot—*graaf* and *Cod* and *Hook* might have been *archmage* or *Lannister* or *Belgarath*, though perhaps that speaks more to my ignorance of Dutch history than anything else. Once the unpredictable became comprehensible and the insanity of the characters became

tentatively plausible—or unquestionably undeniable, depending on the passage—having one foot set firmly in the real world, no matter how embellished, adds verisimilitude and grounds expectations in a way that a created world simply cannot:

Jo didn't fire back a retort this time, though she looked upset—might've been an etiquette thing, her not being able to sass back a froggy knight without three maids to hold a pink veil between them, something like that. Sander was once lucky that nobody could really think less of him for the odd lapse in manners, and twice lucky for not giving a shit even if they did.

"It might have been an etiquette thing" but no one knows; the characters and the reader share in the ignorance, building their own reality and prodding it until it crumbles. The Folly of the World is bold fiction taken a step further, a paean to the bizarre, a pasquinade of social structure.

"So, anyway, we didn't want to pay some cheat-price to get our sheep into the city. So what do you think we did? We dressed them sheep up like men, with my da's coat and my drawers and this old straw hat we shared, and we'd lift 'em up and walk on either side of 'em, like this."

"So in we'd walk past the militia, the city watch, who back then didn't charge just to come in for local folk but did for our sheep, right. We'd wait until dusk so the gate would still be open, but it'd be dark enough that the sheepy in his pants and coat and hat might look like an old man or drunk or such we was helping along, and in we'd walk right past the stupid fucking watchmen supposed to be eyeing old Himbrecht to make sure he and his son didn't sneak no mutton in without paying the toll."

"Now, one of these militiamen was an old piss-catcher who—from Tilburg, I mean, a dirty sod from Tilburg, and every time we walked past them watchers with a sheep 'tween us, he'd give us a hard eye from up in his tower, but he never come down. So we been doing this for years, walking the sheep inside, and finally I see him stand up and squint down at us, and I think for sure we're nabbed this time, but then he sits back down and I hear him say to his partner up there, *You Dordrecht...you Dordrecht...you—*" Sander fell into a sniggering fit.

"What?" said Jolanda. "What did he say?"

"He said, *You Dordrecht boys look just like sheep when you get old,*" said Sander, and cackled. Jolanda blinked at him.

It is great fun to read, as well.

Kirsten says

Bought this on a whim for a dollar or so. It's a sort of historical fiction adventure story that I wouldn't normally have picked for myself. As a result it's rather different from anything else I've read. Although I won't search out his other books, I really did enjoy reading something outside my alley(s), and I found this a little spooky and somehow charming at the oddest moments, and overall well written. I think my lasting impression is going to be amusement that it managed to charm me.
