



Raptor

Gary Jennings

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AN ADVENTURER UNLIKE ANY OTHER--THE RAPTOR...

HE BOLDLY EMBRACED THE PASSION AND VIOLENCE OF AN EMPIRE AS CORRUPT AS IT WAS MAGNIFICENT

An abandoned waif, the blond, gray-eyed Goth was called simply Thorn. From his unorthodox sexual awakening in a monastery and a convent to his exciting journey across Europe in search of his people, he would learn a warrior's skills and the cunning of a survivor. And amidst it all a stunning secret would mark him forever as an outsider who knew too deeply and too well all the hidden desires of men's ... and women's ... hearts. In the great cities of a dying empire, on the battlefields of Roman legions, and in the opulent palaces of potentates and kings, Thorn would witness human beings at their most brutal and their most noble. His incomparable adventures bring to electrifying life a vanished age never again matched for its doers of great deeds...and of chilling revenge.

(Set in the fifth century A.D. and framed by Theodoric the Great's conquest of Rome.)

Raptor Details

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Author : Gary Jennings

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From Reader Review Raptor for online ebook

Lou says

Not quite as good as his other books. Probably as good as Aztec so the story is outstanding in any case!

Go get it and read it!

--Wag--

Aldo Ojeda says

Gary Jennings tiene una cierta obsesión con el sexo, pero todos lo sabemos y así es como lo queremos; aun así, cuando el protagonista es un hermafrodita (totalmente funcional, que en realidad no existen en la naturaleza, pero digamos que hubo ciertas libertades artísticas), en las primeras diez páginas el autor explora ya con gusto todo el potencial sexual de su personaje.

El protagonista, Thorn, con todo esto, ha de ser uno de los personajes más interesantes escritos por Jennings. Pero Halcón falla donde muchos otras novelas históricas fallan. La primera mitad del libro es muy buena, tiene un objetivo (el camino de Teodorico para tomar la península italiana), y fluye naturalmente. Después de esto, el libro pierde su trama; el objetivo de Jennings es llevarnos de paseo por toda la Europa medieval. Y esto es interesante y se agradece toda la documentación que realizó el autor, pero no tiene ningún objetivo, simplemente vamos de un lugar a otro. El final de Halcón es, por tanto, totalmente intrascendente.

A la primera mitad del libro le doy 5 estrellas, a la segunda mitad solamente 2.

Thomas Nelson says

Engaging story about a dual gendered human, an hermaphrodite. A learning curve for me.

David DeMar says

I enjoyed this book, although not as much as Aztec. The format is much the same though. There's no unifying plot, just a man (in this case a hermaphrodite) telling his life story. While his character is fictional he does interact with real historical people and events and the author goes into much detail describing these. Sometimes the pacing gets a little bogged down with seemingly endless infodumps consisting of descriptions of kings, cultures, and places that don't really have much to do with the story. The author also doesn't hide his opinion of Christianity, as every character in the book who is a Christian is portrayed as arrogant, hypocritical, and hateful.

Anyway, if you like Gary Jennings and you liked Aztec then you will probably like this one too.

Megan says

3.5* The broad scope of the book was handled well, with different sections that mostly focused on a smaller part of the story with a map to match. Some sections were more interesting than others and some just went on and on. The cultures and anecdotes were intriguing but often left me unsatisfied. Theodoric was interesting at first, but became too perfect and too lovingly depicted. As always, the book could have benefited from an author's note.

I liked Thorn's identity and how he dealt with it, for the most part, but there were far too many times in which he was oh so condescending. I got so sick of being told what women are like (we like jewelry), or that a woman is just a womb to be filled. I could appreciate that some of this was meant to be Thorn reflecting his times, but he was also supposed to be an enlightened thinker and it just got to be too much over the length of a very long book.

Nina says

Novel set in the 6th century Gothic empire. This is customary Gary Jennings fare. Exceptionally long, and it always seems like Jennings goes out of his way to work in every little tidbit of information he picked up during his research. Also, as is typical, he wove in a lot of gore and sex. He got to play all the sexual angles in this one because the character narrating the story is a "mannamavi," equipped with the genitalia of both male and female. It's too bad he throws in so much unnecessary sex and historical trivia, because other than that, he spins a good yarn.

CRyan says

This was one of those books I couldn't put down and suffered at work the next day for it. The story and characters have stuck with me these 9 years since I have read it. One of my friends made off with my paperback copy, so I just recently decided to replace it with a first edition hardcover.

This isn't really a spoiler, but there are many graphic scenes of sex, violence, incest et al. The main character is an intersexed person (hermaphrodite, for the non-PC among us) and s/he uses what s/he's got like s/he's going to lose it tomorrow.

The historical detail is astounding. Historical characters are woven seamlessly into the storyline. Jennings travelled the Balkans researching this book and it shows. What many consider his masterpiece, Aztec, found him living among their descendants intermittently for 12(!) years.

Read it. You won't regret it.

Annie M says

What a story. It takes place in like the first century or something which automatically makes it more interesting to me, being historical and all. The descriptions of the various lands, how people dress, and how much variety there is in the different tribes and groups of people that the main character interacts with is so vivid and described so perfectly. Jennings has great style without having the style itself stand out or keep you

from picturing yourself right there with the character. Thorn's character obviously develops throughout the whole book, but one thing he never lost was his clever-ness. He may have had a lot to learn but he seemed to always be able to function just fine - if not better than those around him - when in foreign lands and while dealing with foreign customs. One thing I did notice is that he never seemed to have any self-doubt whatsoever. I have never read a 1st-person point of view novel where the character didn't have those internal questions of whether he/she was worthy for whatever it was that came their way (even just a few here and there). He took every problem head-on and with authority, rarely questioning his confidence.

If felt like I was reading three books rolled into one, and by the time I got to the end I felt like the beginning was like *really* far away. That's not a good thing or a bad thing, I was just noticing it. Overall, it was excellent!

Yohana says

I loved the fact that the book is very narrative. Throughout the passages you learn about different cultures and customs adopted by different civilizations such as goths, ostrogoth, ect. It talks about the adventures of the character Thorn, who is brought up and raised as a boy in a monistry to later learn he was a girl and sent to a convent to really find out she/he didn't really fully fit in one world but in both.

Vicki Boyd says

This epic follows the life of an unusual individual from his childhood through his entire life. It explores the dichotomy of spirit which exists in each of us. It has sexually explicit passages, so this tome is not for young readers or for those who might be offended by a frank exploration of sexuality.

Actually the life of the main character is set within the larger story of the dark ages. It examines society as it shifts from a pagan system of belief to the strictures of the Christian Faith. The slow collapse of the Roman Empire is examined. I found myself recognising the similarities between the rot that toppled Rome and our society today. The historical story is fascinating.

Gary Jennings is a master story teller. He weaves the threads of this story into a fabric that pull you relentlessly into the story. I literally could not put this book down. After I read the last Chapter, I reluctantly put it aside. This is a book that I will want to read again. If you enjoy Historical Fiction you will enjoy this story.

Elfscribe says

A fascinating premise utterly ruined by its execution. The story is about a hermaphrodite, a person with characteristics of both sexes who becomes the right-hand "man" of King Theodoric of the Goths, conqueror of the Roman empire. The main character Thorn mostly acts like a man, but if he puts on a dress, he becomes a woman and the story is about his/her peregrinations through the empire of the Goths as witness to history of the era. It is a really interesting idea that had a lot of potential to illustrate the roles of both men and women in a nuanced way and further had potential because it was set in a time period not much explored in fiction. The opening when young Thorn experiences sexual awakening both as a boy and as a girl drew me

right in. However, the story was in no way nuanced and I found myself irritated and unconvinced by the main character. For one thing, s/he seems utterly homophobic and is either completely a man when s/he is having sex with a woman or a woman when s/he is with a man. In both instances when someone attempts to approach Thorn thinking s/he is a member of their own sex, once when a monk rapes him thinking he's a boy and the other when a woman attempts to seduce her/him thinking s/he's a woman, s/he contrives to have them horribly killed. This strikes me as much more the author's hang-up than an accurate depiction of a truly hermaphroditic being. Why would s/he reject making love to men when acting as a man, when in his/her role as a woman, s/he's taken hundreds of male lovers? Also, I simply didn't buy the notion that among his/her literally hundreds of lovers, that no one figured out his/her condition. I'm sorry it doesn't work that he simply hid his phallus with a linen band when he was a woman. Despite Thorn's cleverness, as the story progressed, I found myself disliking him/her more and more, which is a rather difficult feat on the part of an author when the narration is in the first person. And no, I don't believe it was purposeful on the author's part. Clearly we are supposed to admire Thorn for his/her cleverness and sagacity.

In general, the women characters are despicable in the story with the exception of a princess dying of cancer. The whole section of the story where Thorn meets another hermaphrodite like himself who looks just like him, sort of an evil twin, was simply bizarre and the scene where they end up among the disgusting Amazons seemed merely to reinforce the author's hostility towards women.

There were long, pompous sections where Thorn travels throughout the empire that merely seemed designed to impress us with the author's admittedly immense amount of historical research.

Overall, I found the book without redeeming merit and only finished it because I couldn't believe it could continue to be so bad.

Des says

Raptor will always be a fond favorite of mine. It was the first “taboo” book I’d ever read, and incidentally, one of the first characters—aside from Lyra Belacqua in Pullman’s His Dark Materials trilogy—whom I identified with. I credit Gary Jennings for opening my eyes to a world beyond one-dimensional heroes and heroines. In that same vein, Jennings had this incredible ability to take a simple thread and weave it into a complex, colorful tapestry—applying both to his well-rounded characters and highly engaging plot line. I fell in love with Thorn (Veleda) from page one and was a willing literary slave throughout their incredible coming-of-age journey.

The book is told through Thorn’s eyes as he matures into a “fully-functioning”, sensually-aware young hermaphrodite (intersexual) through a series of bizarre, often questionably consensual, sexual (mis)situations. At least that’s what Jennings threw us into within the first 50 pages, respectively. While I cared very little for the stomach-churning rape scene(s), I had to admire the way Jennings allowed Thorn to grow from the situation(s!!) and turn the character’s mindless abuse into a weapon of revenge. In some of the scenes, it was like watching the classic revenge film, “I Spit on Your Grave”—a bloody, gratuitous excuse for torture porn, yes.... But one you found yourself routing for the victim-cum-avenging angel, nonetheless.

Aside from Thorn/Veleda’s sexual awakening, the book was the quintessential quest-for-missing-object tale—in this case, the missing “object” being Thorn’s identity. Here you have your young hero/ine, (Thorn/Veleda) conflicted by their past and torn between two identities. You have the catalyst that thrusts them onto their story path (getting kicked out of the convent), and toward their first major obstacle (learning

how to fight). You're introduced to a way around that first obstacle by way of the first major character (Wyrd); and through proper training, the main character conquers their first obstacle and finds a small sense of what their missing "object" is. (Thorn starts to realize that he can live life quite passable as both Thorn AND Veleda.)

We continue to follow Thorn/Veleda on their journey to finding their inner warrior while travelling the lush landscape that was Jennings' historical visitation of 5th/6th century Rome. In this sense, Jennings showed his true talent: recreating sprawling landmarks of ancient history. As with his other epic, Aztec, his attention to detail was both painstaking and overabundant; oftentimes forgoing character progression in favor of exploring the architecture and the land. While his attention to detail gave the story texture, there were times where it was a bit heavy-handed. Overall, though, he managed to reach a nice balance between setting and plot, so I won't complain too much about it.

In summation, this 900 page beast of a book was nothing if not memorable. It's been years since the first time I read it yet I still find myself thinking about Thorn/Veleda from time to time. There aren't many books that can boast the same thing. And I think that's a wonderful attribute to have.

Ned says

Read this with a map to chart the course of the Danube and also learned of the cities and passes in the Alps, Innsbruck, Salzburg, Tirol and so on. From the high mountains and open spaces in Alsace, the crumbling ruins of once mighty Rome, the deep forests around Lake Geneva, the rush of the water at the Iron Gate, or the cheers in a colosseum in Sofia, this author takes you there. c. 480-510 AD

Myth says

Greatly enjoy Jenning's writing and Thorn's character. Throughout the book I felt Thorn maintained his base personality in being adventurous, inventive, curious and mischievous. And occasionally clumsy.

For the most part I greatly enjoyed this book. Towards the end there were times I was a little bored. I had to give it five stars because I felt there was so much in this book. It is a long book, but it's not just adventures and mischievousness, there's insight about the times and about Thorn's condition.

Thorn is (what we'd call now) an intersex individual, raised male and in a time period when being male is definitely beneficial. He does, however, adopt a bigender identity. He has a female and male self, considering them distinct people. Thorn was an authentic character with a lot of different emotions and insight. There were times, maybe due to his particular nature, that he seemed beyond his time.

I think the fact that Thorn is not a reliable narrator is distinct and pointed out at the beginning of the book and all the way through. He's very complicated and conflicted, trying to balance his selves (which is frequently a reflection on what it is to be human and him simply divvying it up, believing he's the only one who experiences the kind of emotions he does.) He also indulges in both sides of himself and to some extent uniquely so, in other times it's just human experiences. There are times when his two selves overlap or are apparent at the same time, but he doesn't recognize it.

It's interesting that he must dissect experiences and sort them. I think it's done to make it clear how much we, as people - male and female - dissect our emotions, responses and experiences to match with being male or female. Also, being bigender, his core personality remains even as his gender changes. In so many ways he's showing how gender is a complete construct and there is something more valuable under the constructs he follows simply because there's no other reality.

I could read this book again and get more from it. I could write several kinds of literary critiques and reviews on it. There's race, ethics, gender, nationalities, war, religion... Thorn gives his insight on everything as well as he can given how he's grown up and the culture he's surrounded by.

As far as the reality of what was happening during these times I don't think Jennings tries to sugar coat it, if anything he makes it more hideous. The world was a stark contrast to our modern one, yet a familiar world begins to take shape out of it, and I liked that. In a few important ways it related to our modern time and way of thinking.

Sometimes the diction was overwhelming, but it was usually promptly explained in one way or another. I like seeing history in this way and I think Jennings might have started me on historical fiction.

Ardesia says

Romanzone storico in linea con gli altri di Jennings che mi è capitato di leggere: cambia l'ambientazione storica, ma c'è sempre un protagonista avventuroso e scaltro che attraverso le proprie vicissitudini riesce a raccontarci un po' del suo mondo. In questo senso ho trovato il Predatore molto simile all'Azteco, ma dato che sia il tempo che il luogo sono totalmente diversi alla fine qualche ripetizione narrativa si perdonava facilmente, specialmente se ci si sofferma un attimo a considerare tutto il lavoro di ricerca e documentazione storica che sta alla base di un libro come questo. Credo di non essermi mai appassionata alla storia di quel periodo come nei giorni in cui ho letto le vicende di Thorn.

shannon says

this is one of those novels i forgot that i read until just recently. it's breathtakingly unique and astoundingly different -- it tells the story of an intersexed Visigoth -- and while you may be going, "...Did I just read that correctly?" I assure you that you did and that it is a wonderful and complex story. Like most of Jennings' novels, not recommended for the faint of heart.

Michelle says

Nothing is as it seems. This book show that their is always the woman in the man and the man in the woman.

Jane says

Read these Runes !!!

On the whole I enjoyed this novel: the [fictitious] memoirs of the hermaphrodite Thorn. I hated in the first Part: "In the Ring of Balsam" the drawn-out, graphic first sexual experiences of the intersex hero/heroine, Thorn, in both a monastery and a convent, In fact, anything of a graphic nature from then on I skipped over. I almost quit reading completely because of Part I, but am really glad I persevered after the first 70-80 pages. Thorn had been left at the monastery as a foundling. Since the only clue to his identity was the Runic letter Thorn on his swaddling; that became his name. I enjoyed the basic story of the rest of the novel, set at the time of Theodoric the Great and the Goths, right at and after the collapse of the Western Roman Empire, Thrown out from both monastery and convent, Thorn sets out from Burgundy to meet the Ostrogoths and comes upon a woodsman/fur trapper and trader, a previous officer in the Roman army, Wyrd, who guides him from Burgundy into central Europe. Wyrd was a fascinating character, a father figure and mentor to Thorn. For awhile Thorn has a pet eagle and Thorn says somewhere in the novel they are both amoral. All through the novel he compares himself to a raptor. The deaths of both the eagle and of Wyrd were moving. Later, on his journey eastward, Thorn meets Theodoric. Sometimes, depending on what is taking place in the story, Thorn 'becomes' a female, Veleda.

There was a lot of discussion on religions [mainly the three Christian sects in existence at that time], the place of women in society [Veleda experiences women's status herself], politics, etc. Thorn/Veleda journeys to Constantinople as Theodoric's emissary, and further journeying will take him to the Black Sea. I liked the descriptions of Constantinople and her customs, the emperor's palace, and Thorn's quarters. After capture by usurper [another Theodoric: "The Wall-Eyed"], Thorn escapes and after his return to King Theodoric he is given the mission to find out the early history of the Goths, which he completes successfully, travelling to the Amber Coast and Skandza. Then Theodoric founds the Kingdom of the Goths; Thorn travels widely on his behalf; and the novel enumerates some of Theodoric's accomplishments: why history has called him "The Great." I felt the novel was researched well, but I question how much real history was incorporated, except the bare bones. I don't know much about hermaphrodites and wonder how well they can even function sexually. If many of the graphic aspects could have been excised their absence wouldn't have hurt the story or insights. I liked the semi-*Fraktur* typography and that page numbers were in the right and left margins.

Amy says

Trash-tacular yet compelling. Still, Gary Jennings novels are always despite my better judgment. How can a guy be so punctilious about his historical research and yet not learn that a hermaphrodite is not "fully functional"?

David Koblos says

Having read Aztec by the same author, I came with very high expectations to this book, which it didn't quite meet. I thought that early medieval history, particularly of the Goths and Theodoric the Great offered just enough known sources to supply ample information to illustrate 6th century life, while leaving sufficient blank spots to be filled with various lore and legends, to make an exciting reading. Unfortunately Jennings failed in both of these points. Both the informational content, and the captivation of the reading is somewhere between decent and mediocre.
