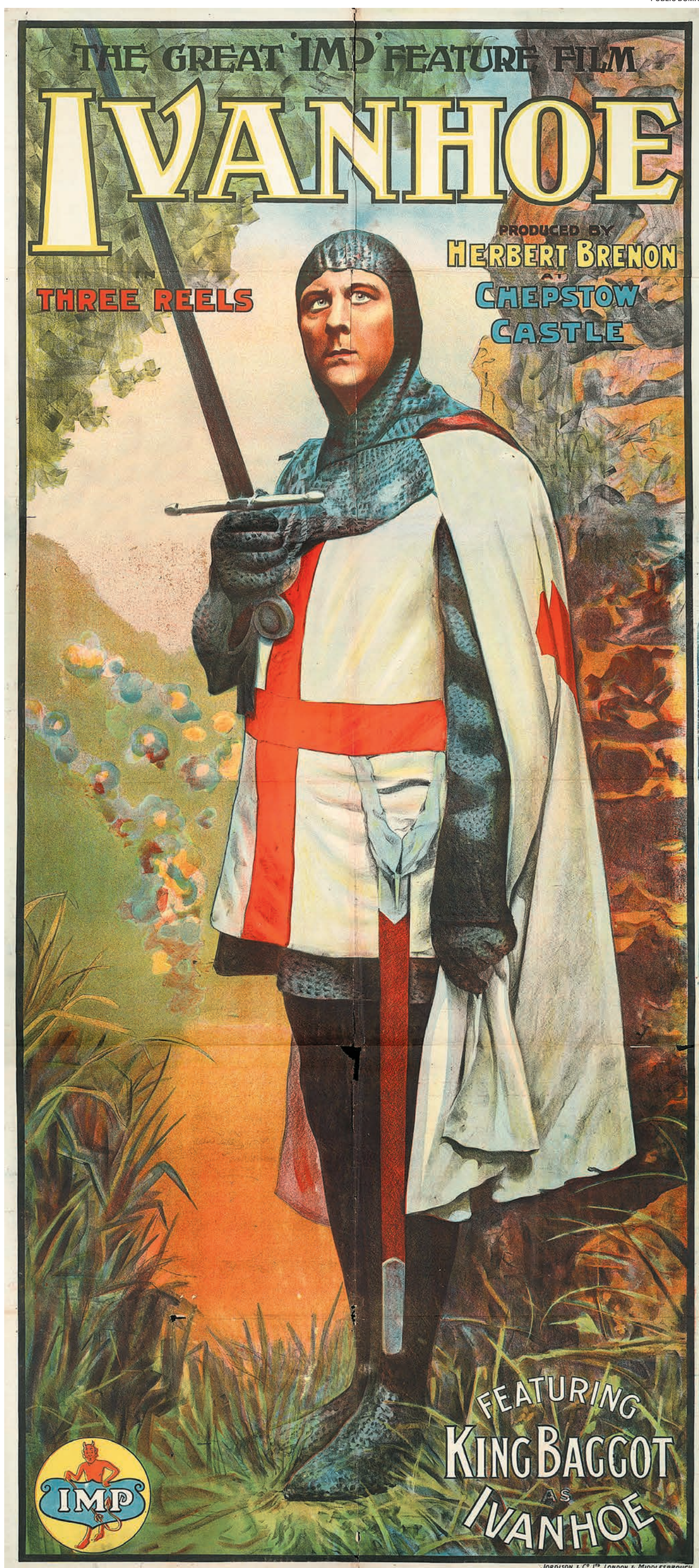


THE EPOCH TIMES

ARTS & CULTURE



PUBLIC DOMAIN

ONE OF 12 GREAT BOOKS

Lessons From a 200-Year-Old Novel: 'Ivanhoe'

JEFF MINICK

Late last year, in separate conversations with three friends, I realized how slack I had grown in the reading of books. I read more than the average person. I've written weekly book reviews for the Smoky Mountain News for over 20 years, and I daily speed through a dozen or more articles online. But compared to my friends, my time spent with a book in my hand was pitiful.

Moreover, I realized how few old books I've read in the last decade: novels, histories, and political tracts written before the middle of the last century. Many years ago, I devoured such writers as Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, the great American authors who wrote between 1920 and 1960, and French and English novelists now long dead. That habit had vanished without my even taking notice.

And so in late December, I resolved for the New Year to read 12 books, half of them old, in addition to the books required for my reviews.

As a result, this month I found myself sailing back through time almost a thousand years to the England of King Richard and Robin Hood, a time of political turmoil and battles, tournaments and ladies, and a society rich in religious faith. Remarkably, I also discovered in that distant age a mirror reflecting today, in some regards.

Sir Walter Scott was my guide, and our shared vehicle was his most famous novel, "Ivanhoe."

Language of Yesteryear

At first, "Ivanhoe" proved a challenge for me. The sentences tend to run longer than our present-day fictions, the paragraphs are fatter, the descriptions of the characters and the landscape are long and detailed, and the author intrudes throughout the story—a literary no-no nowadays.

To illustrate these barriers, I've just now opened "Ivanhoe" at random and instantly found these two sentences, which are indicative of Scott's style:

"Two things displeased Cedric in this speech. It contained the Norman word meele (to express the general conflict), and it evinced some indifference to the honour of the country; but it was spoken by Athelstane, whom he held in such profound respect, that he would not trust himself to canvass his motives or his foibles."

After making my way through the first few chapters, however, I soon became an admirer of Scott's prose, if for no better reason than it is so utterly foreign to our literature today. Moreover, "Ivanhoe," which was first published in 1819, gave me an appreciation for the literacy and tastes of our ancestors, for in both Britain and the United States, this novel and other works by Scott were wildly popular.

Continued on Page 4



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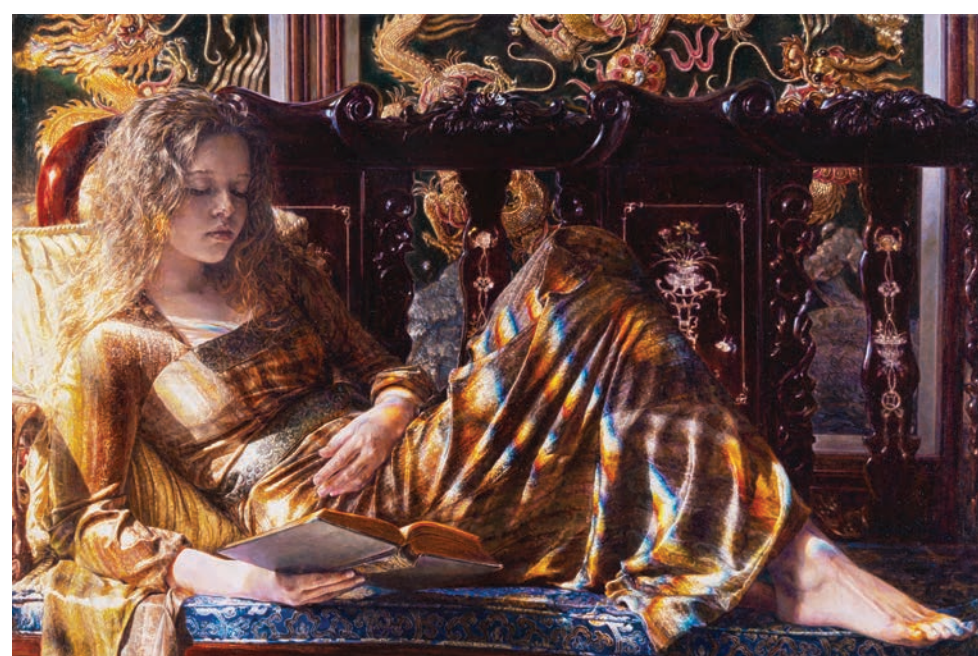
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Miniature Masterpieces Inspired by Iconography

Russian lacquerware is an artform born of tradition and beauty

J.H. WHITE

Russian lacquerware developed in rural villages and formed a legacy of artists adapting local traditions to a new artistic medium.

The ornate papier-mâché treasures are decorated with detailed paintings of folk stories and fairy tales. Then they are lacquered and polished to a high sheen, giving them a charming, lifelike glow.

The Museum of Russian Icons has opened an exhibition showcasing over 100 of these colorful gems: "Miniature Masterpieces: Russian Lacquer Boxes." It's open until March 28.

The art of Russian lacquer ranks among Russia's most beautiful artistic achievements of the 20th century. It's a medium rooted in the religious art of icon painting, according to the museum's website. Before the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, many icon painters were employed creating beautiful religious works for churches and private homes.

Workshops in the countryside produced icons for centuries. By the mid-18th century, the economies of these villages were reliant on this religious artform. After the revolution, artists were no longer allowed to work as iconographers. They were forced to find a new way to make a living.

In 1924, an iconographer from Palekh, Ivan Golikov, helped establish the Artel of Old Painting. He and other artists began crafting paper-mâché decorative boxes and panels. With the same intricate hand-drawn beauty of iconography, they painted secular themes, such as fairy tales, poems, country life, troikas (a three-horse-led carriage), landscapes, battle scenes, and popular classical artworks.

These miniature cultural gems were described as lacquer boxes due to the many layers of lacquer—typically, black and red—applied to the inside and outside of the boxes. The combination of the detailed iconography painting techniques and the lacquered shine give them a special spirit. Similar workshops then opened in Mstyora and Kholuy.

The history of Russian lacquer boxes showcases artists' ingenuity, by integrating and adapting local traditions. This medium first appeared in the 18th century when Peter the Great commissioned Russian iconographers to decorate a room at his Monplaisir Palace with lacquered panels. Like many other

decorative arts born during his reign, lacquerware manufacturing was gradually taken over by private companies.

Four villages spearheaded the development of this new lacquered art form. Each village established a workshop and produced its own distinct, artistic style.

Heritage and Style of the 4 Villages

All located near Moscow, these four villages gave birth to workshops that created Russia's most beautiful lacquered boxes.

Fedoskino

Fedoskino is the oldest, lacquer-box manufacturer in Russia. It was the first to work with papier-mâché. Lacquer painting began in the 18th century when Ivan Korobov opened a factory—later called the Lukutin Factory—specializing in papier-mâché objects. Fedoskino artists painted in a realistic style, using oil paints instead of egg-based temperas. They often used gold, silver, or mother-of-pearl to add richness to their exquisite boxes.

The art of Russian lacquer ranks among Russia's most beautiful artistic achievements of the 20th century.

Palekh

Palekh was known for its religious icon painters. After the Bolshevik Revolution, master iconographers began painting papier-mâché boxes with techniques learned from painting icons. These miniature boxes soon became renowned as Palekh icons.

Artists layered bright tempera paint over lacquered black backgrounds, depicting themes of daily life, fairy tales, literary works, and folk songs.

Palekh artists continue the tradition today. Their exquisite iconography skills are elegantly applied to lacquer boxes detailed with gold- and silver-leaf ornamentation. Admirers fondly call these treasures "small miracles."

Mstyora

Mstyora grew as a settlement around the Theophany Monastery, which likely influenced the birth of icon workshops. Like other regions, artists from Mstyora tailored



All of the boxes are quite small, no more than three or four inches along a side. "Hats," 1995, from Fedoskino, Russia. Paint on papier-mâché, lacquer. A gift from the private collection of Dennis H. and Marian S. Pruslin.

their painting skills to other decorative arts, such as lacquer boxes.

This village's boxes are famed for their multicolored base coats, commitment to realism, and a minimal use of gold leaf. Artists avoided black backgrounds and preferred colorful ones, such as light blue, pink, gold, or ivory colors.

Kholuy

Kholuy's economy thrives on artisanal crafts, such as textiles, woodworking, and, famously, its lacquer boxes. Icon painting in this region began as early as the 13th century.

Following the revolution, Kholuy artists shifted focus to the new medium of lacquer boxes, as well as other crafts. Although its iconography is centuries old, the Kholuy style is the newest lacquer-box style of the four villages. It's best defined by a warm color palette of deep yellows, browns, and reds.

Religious Renaissance

Under the communist rule of the Soviet

Union, factories and workshops were tightly regulated. When communism collapsed, there was an influx of inexpensive imitations. Cheap ripoffs in tandem with a struggling economy dropped the value of these ornate lacquer boxes.

However, these four villages have preserved this rich lacquer art form. Not only have these Russian artists kept this charming medium alive, but as spirituality revived in Russia after the fall of communism, artists are now returning to iconography, the original art form that inspired these miniature masterpieces.

For more information on these miniature masterpieces, visit MuseumOfRussianIcons.org

J.H. White is an arts, culture, and men's fashion journalist living in New York.



"Indian Summer in Vladimir," 20th century, by Dmitriev Sergey Mikhailovich from Kholuy. A gift from the private collection of Dennis H. and Marian S. Pruslin.



"Late Summer," 2002, by Vasily Sinduykov. Paint on papier-mâché, lacquer, from Fedoskino, Russia. A gift from the private collection of Dennis H. and Marian S. Pruslin.



"Boy with Horn," 1995, by V. Titova. Paint on papier-mâché, lacquer, from Fedoskino, Russia. A gift from the private collection of Dennis H. and Marian S. Pruslin.



"Spring," 20th century, from Mstyora, Russia. Paint on papier-mâché, lacquer. A gift from the private collection of Dennis H. and Marian S. Pruslin.



"Woman," 20th century, from Fedoskino, Russia. Paint on papier-mâché, lacquer. A gift from the private collection of Dennis H. and Marian S. Pruslin.

Correction

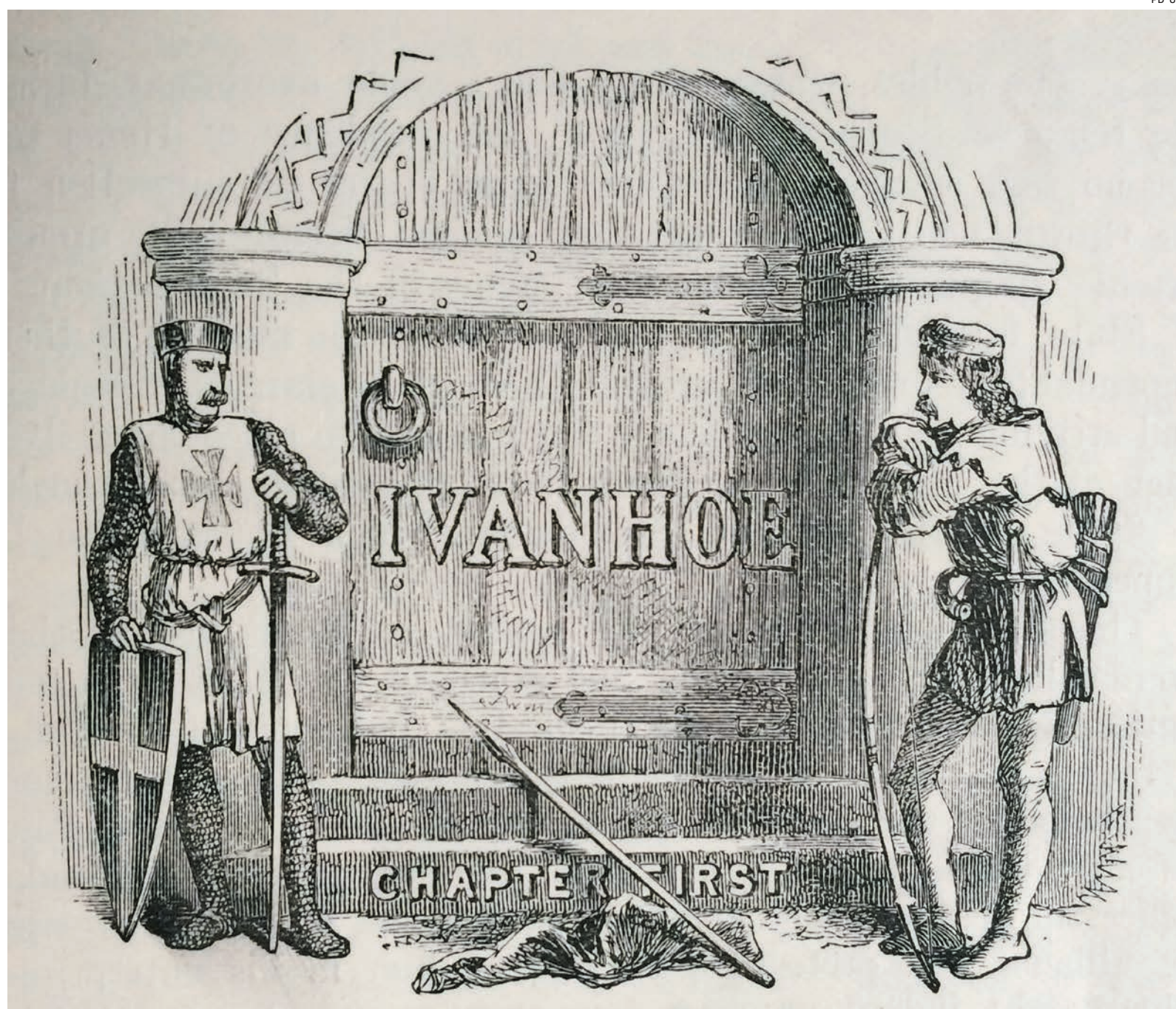
In the Jan. 26 article by Jeff Minick, "Never Say Die: Lessons From Michael Walsh's 'Last Stands,'" a photo captured a moment when the Poles of Warsaw fought the Nazis, and the correct date of the "Pasta" building fire in the photo is August 1944. The Epoch Times regrets the errors.

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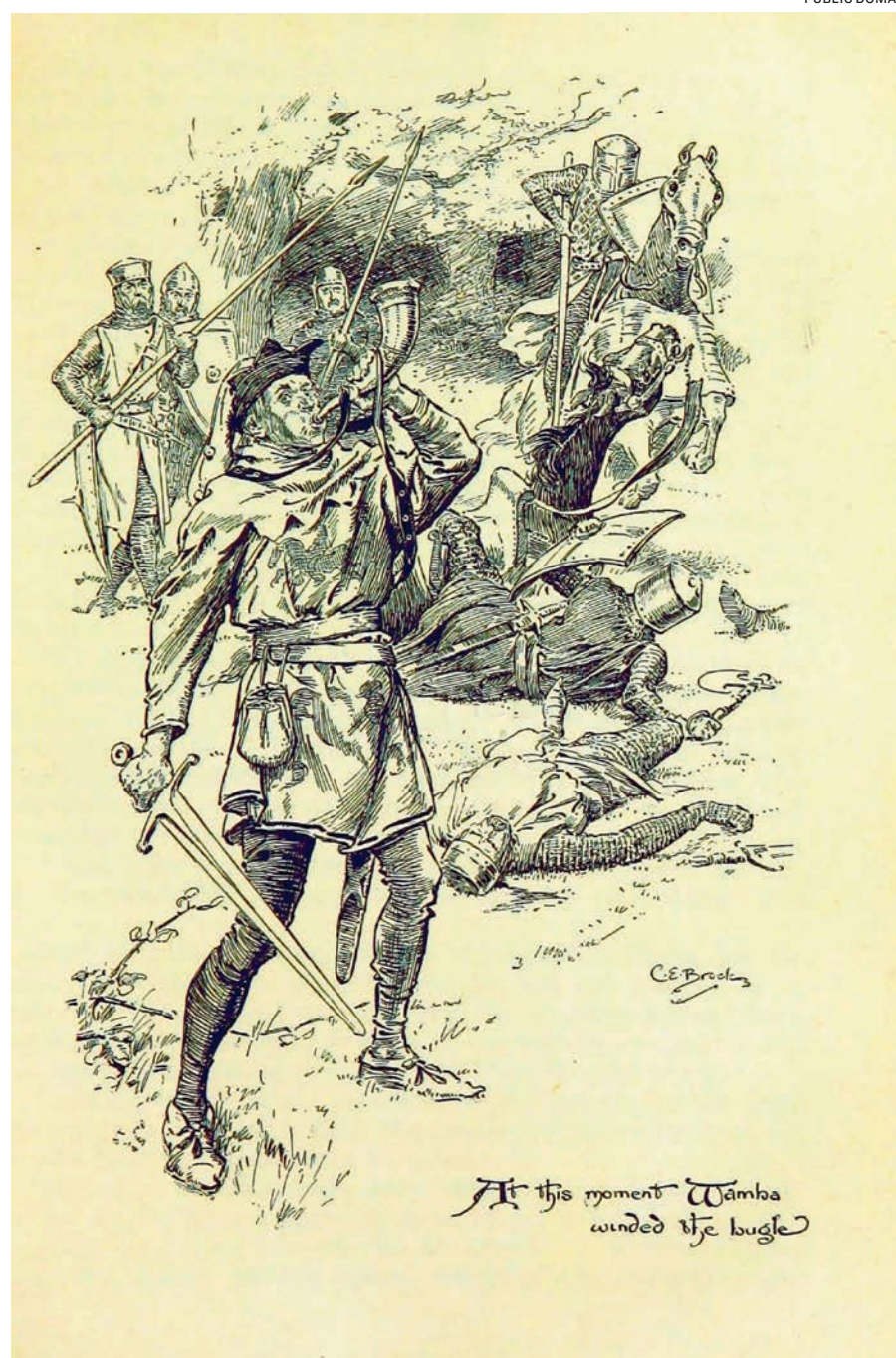
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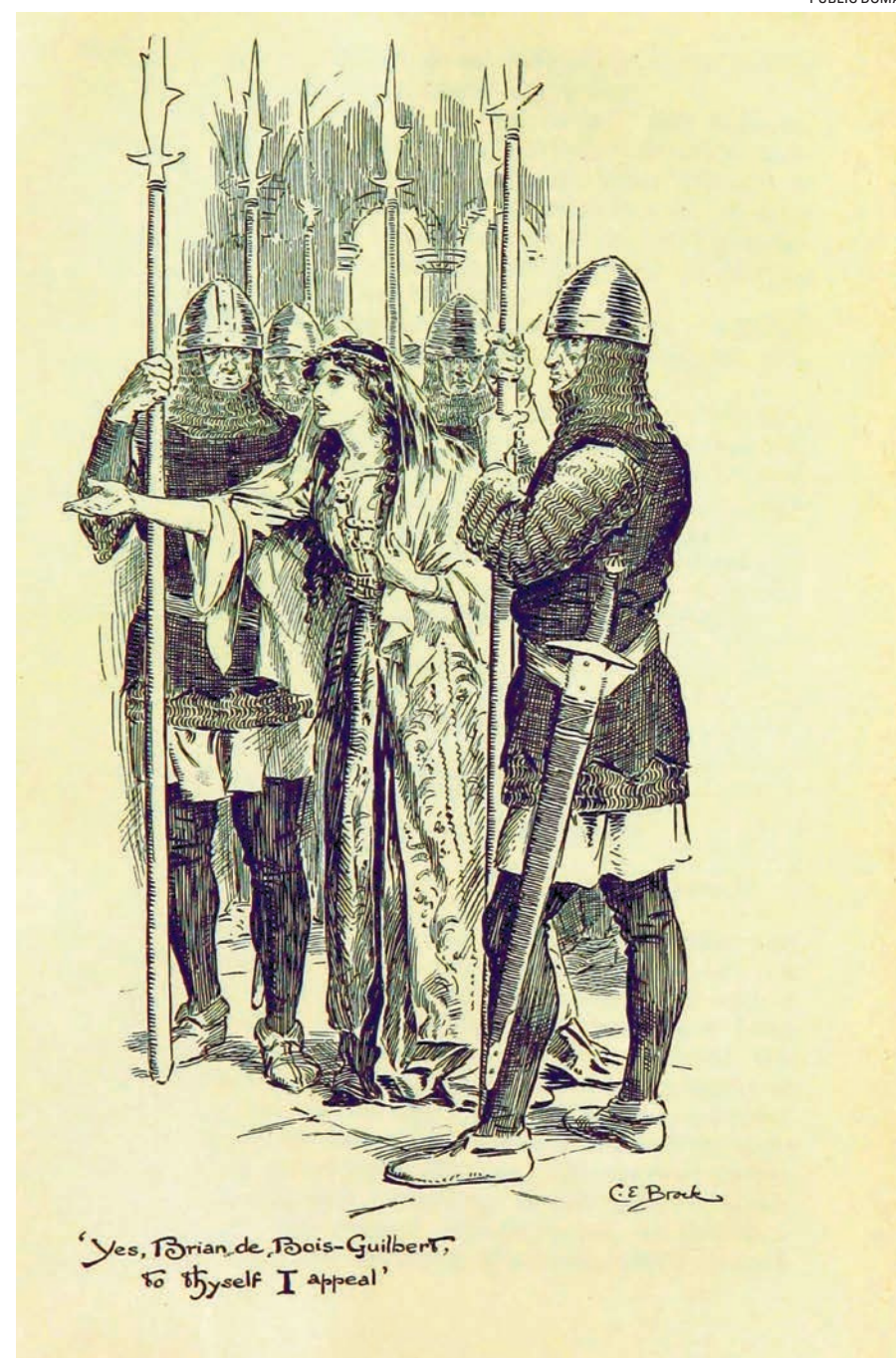
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Chapter One frontispiece illustration from the 1871 edition of Walter Scott's "Ivanhoe," from the "Waverley Novels."



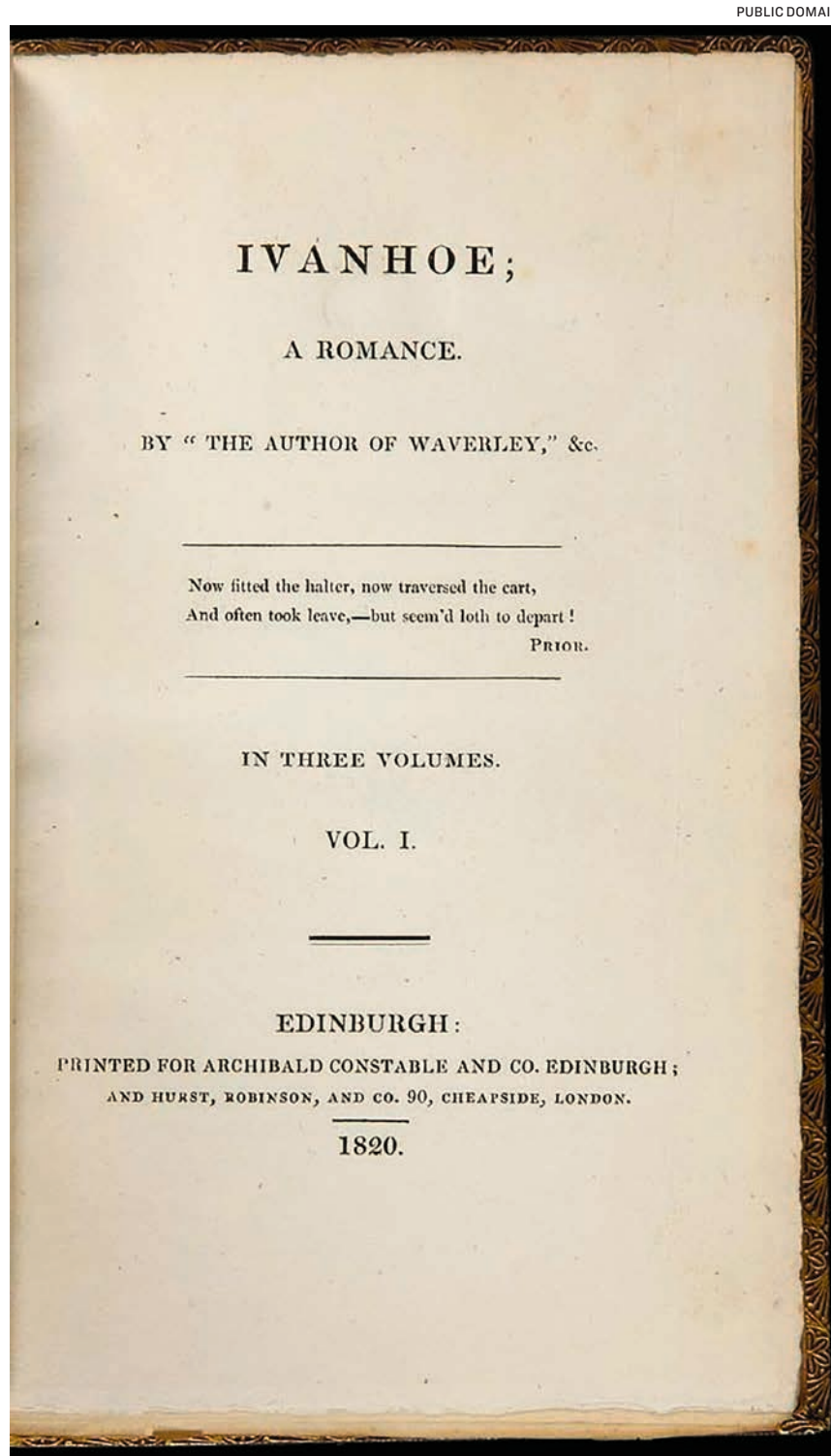
Wamba the Fool blows a bugle, in an 1897 illustration by C.E. Brock for "Ivanhoe" by Walter Scott. The British Library.



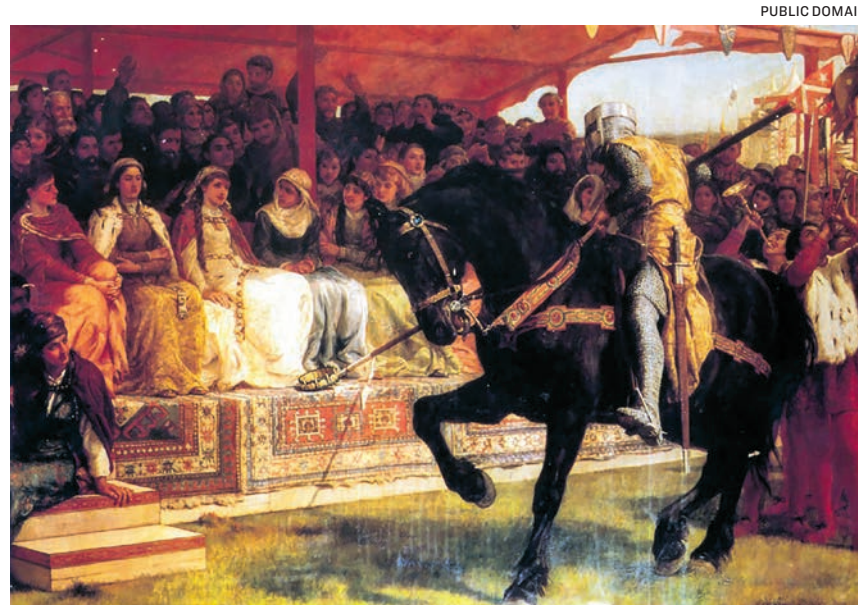
Rebecca appeals to Brian de Bois-Guilbert, in an 1897 illustration by C.E. Brock for "Ivanhoe."



Ivanhoe begs his father's forgiveness, in an 1897 illustration by C.E. Brock for "Ivanhoe."



Title page of Walter Scott's "Ivanhoe," first edition, 1820.



"The Queen of the Tournament: Ivanhoe" by Frank William Warwick Topham.

ONE OF 12 GREAT BOOKS

Lessons From a 200-Year-Old Novel: 'Ivanhoe'

Continued from Page 1

And as I plunged more deeply into the story, I found many of Scott's themes pertinent to today's culture and politics.

Stolen Power and Ambition

Believing that his older brother Richard remains in a prison far from England, John and some of the nobles set out to steal the crown from him. Though opposed by men like the Saxon chieftain Cedric, the noble Ivanhoe, and the forest outlaws headed by Locksley (alias Robin Hood), John commands far greater numbers of knights and soldiers. He also has the support of certain counselors pursuing their own ambitions.

Nearly all the people of power depicted here are ambitious, which is not in itself an unworthy trait. Disguised as the Black Knight, for example, Richard eventually reveals himself to Locksley, Ivanhoe, and his supporters, and he displays the chivalric qualities of that age: largesse, mercy, and courage. He seeks his throne not through the underhanded machinations of his brother, but through honesty, forthrightness, and a desire to gain what rightfully belongs to him.

Others are devious plotters always seeking to put foot on another rung up the ladder. Here's just one example: Albert Malvoisin, the Preceptor of the Templar Order at Templestowe, "knew how to throw over his vices and his ambition the veil of hypocrisy, and to assume in his exterior the fanaticism which he internally despised."

These excursions in leadership studies gave me pause to consider our federal government: the elected leaders, the heads of various agencies, and the bureaucrats. How many of them, I wondered, actively work for the good of our country, taking the right path even when it portends dire consequences? How many others in our Capitol put ambition and the cushy job ahead of the flag and patriotism?

A Virtue Shared

Knights and commoners, priests and monks, women, even the knaves in this story all hold to a code of honor. For some, honor is for outward show only. For others like Ivanhoe, like Brian de Bois-Guilbert who is willing to throw away his status as a Templar to take as his consort Rebecca but will never abandon what he regards as his honor, and even like Wamba the Fool who risks his life helping his master, Cedric, escape imprisonment and then rescues King Richard from assassins, all hold themselves to some standard demanding integrity and rightful behavior.

Rebecca, the beautiful Jewish woman who near the end of the novel stands accused of sorcery, resists the advances of Bois-Guilbert. And though angered by her refusal to take him as a lover, he nevertheless comes to admire her for her courage. Rather than surrender her honor, she prefers death before dishonor. Scott's vivid portrait of Rebecca—her faith, her goodness, her knowledge of right and wrong—alone made "Ivanhoe" worth the read.

Until recently, most Americans had some rough sense of honor, a code that demands the individual's honesty, decency, and respect for others. This sense of personal integrity led to such duels as those fought by Aaron Burr and Alexander Hamilton, and later by Andrew Jackson (who duelled more than 100 times), and became the core of the Code of the Old West.

Comparing Scott's characters to the men and women in our Congress and in our federal agencies made me wonder whether honor, however diminished, still exists among these people. Is there in them a deep-seated code of righteousness like that of Rebecca? Or do they put on a show of honor, like putting on a dinner jacket or a cocktail dress?

The Haughty Normans

Although "Ivanhoe" was set decades after William I's Norman invasion of England in 1066, the strife between Norman and Saxon continued. The Normans considered the Saxons uncouth and quarrelsome, while the Saxons despised their Norman overlords for the destruction of their culture and for the arrogance with which they ruled the land.

Without that invasion, without the conquest of England and the gradual merging of these cultures, everything from our English language to our laws would undoubtedly be quite different today. We can be grateful for that merger. Nevertheless, Scott offers a fine account of elites changing and sometimes crushing a culture they regard as inferior.

Given this theme, I couldn't help but compare the oppressive and haughty Normans to our D.C. elites. Few of them, Republican or Democrat, elected officials or bureaucrats, seem to care about the

people I know: the neighbor who heads off to work every morning at 5:30 and puts in a 12-hour day, the guys who run our local auto repair shop, and the manager at the Soul Mountain Café who no matter her long hours always greets me with a kind word and smiling eyes above the requisite mask.

Our leaders want respect, but they give little in return. Have the Locksleys and Ivanhoes among us, I wondered, grown more aware of this contempt often shown by a government for its citizens?

Arrogance Today

When Bois-Guilbert discovers that the Grand Master of the Order intends to charge Rebecca with witchcraft, he retorts: "Will future ages believe that such stupid bigotry ever existed?"

By our standards, the characters of "Ivanhoe" are a superstitious lot, fearful of witches, ghosts, and demons, and relying on the intervention of saints to protect them. Some of us may smile at their credulity and their illusions.

But what, I wondered after reading Bois-Guilbert's angry words, will the future make of us? How will those not yet born regard a culture and a government that allowed people to select their gender and sex, that permitted biological males to compete in female sports, that mangled the use of pronouns? What will they say of a government trillions of dollars in debt that continued to spend money rather than look for ways to pay down that debt? What will they say of a nation that locked down its businesses, churches, and schools, despite increasing evidence that such measures have long-term painful effects?

Looking Ahead

Who knew that a hoary old chestnut like "Ivanhoe" could raise such questions and invite such comparisons?

Next up on the list is Fyodor Dostoevsky's "Devils," which I was once determined to read but then failed to do so. Here's a part of the blurb on the back of the copy I own: "The satirical portraits of the revolutionaries, with their naivety, ludicrous single-mindedness and readiness for murder and destruction, might seem exaggerated—until we consider their all-too-recognizable descendants in the real world ever since." Sounds about right for our times.

Jeff Minick has four children and a growing platoon of grandchildren. For 20 years, he taught history, literature, and Latin to seminars of homeschooling students in Asheville, N.C. He is the author of two novels, "Amanda Bell" and "Dust On Their Wings," and two works of non-fiction, "Learning As I Go" and "Movies Make The Man." Today, he lives and writes in Front Royal, Va. See JeffMinick.com to follow his blog.



"Rebecca and the Wounded Ivanhoe," 1823, by Eugène Delacroix. Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Knights and commoners, priests and monks, women, even the knaves in this story all hold to a code of honor.



JÜRGEN LANGE/SKD

FINE ARTS

Revealing Love in a 'New' Vermeer Painting

Restoring the 'Girl Reading a Letter at an Open Window,' by Johannes Vermeer

LORRAINE FERRIER

Standing by an open window, a young lady is engrossed in reading a letter. On a table in the foreground, a bowl of fruit seems to have been toppled, spilling some of its contents onto a colorful and richly woven "rug." Perhaps, the lady toppled the bowl in her haste to read the letter she grips so tightly.

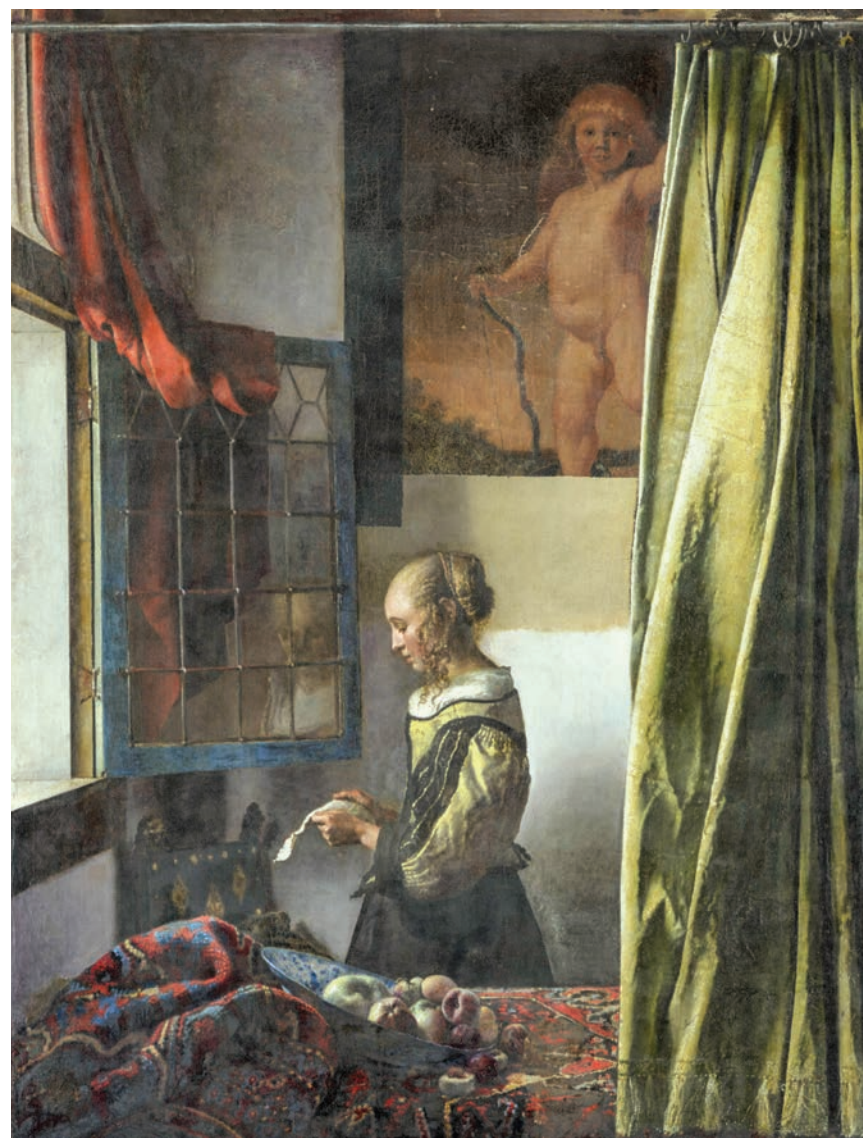
Or, as likely, Dutch painter Johannes Vermeer, who created the picture "Girl Reading a Letter at an Open Window," painted the rug and fruit bowl to draw us into the painting. He also guides us into the painting with the green velvet curtain to the right of the picture frame. The green, in turn, complements the lady's green dress.

Besides the pops of red and green, the overall painting is muted. The vast background gives us an overall sense of the lady's solitude, and further emphasizes her paying close attention to the letter's contents.

For over 350 years, the multitude of visitors who have seen the painting at the Old Masters Picture Gallery in Dresden, Germany, may have drawn similar conclusions when they viewed it. But the scene is not the same as when the painting first left Vermeer's studio around 1659. Indeed, knowledge of the painting's artist and content eluded experts for many years.

A Gift

The painting has been part of the Old Masters Picture Gallery since 1742. In that year, the elector of Saxony and king of Poland, Augustus III, bought 30 paintings from Prince



WOLFGANG KREISCHKE/SKD

"Girl Reading a Letter at an Open Window," circa 1659, by Johannes Vermeer, on Jan. 16, 2020, partway through the painting's restoration.

Carignan in Paris, and the painting "Girl Reading a Letter at an Open Window" was added as a complimentary gift to the king.

At the time, Vermeer was little known outside of Holland, and the painting was attributed to Rembrandt. Since then, the painting has been attributed to the Rembrandt School, then to one of Rembrandt's pupils, and even to Pieter de Hooch, who worked in Delft as Vermeer did. Even though, over the years, art scholars believed the painting to be by Vermeer, that attribution wasn't well received, and so it wasn't officially declared a Vermeer until the 1860s.

This painting was the first in Vermeer's series of interior paintings, featuring a few figures engaged in everyday domestic activities.

Unveiling Cupid

In 1979, an X-ray of the painting revealed that Vermeer had originally rendered a framed picture of Cupid in the right corner of the composition. Cupid holds a bow in his right hand and raises his left. This cupid motif can be seen in three of Vermeer's other interior paintings, one example of which is "A Young Woman Standing at a Virginal," at The National Gallery in London. According to the National Gallery website, Cupid is in the style of a 1608 book illustration representing faithful love.

For many years, it was believed that Vermeer himself painted over Cupid in "Girl Reading a Letter at an Open Window," so no attempt was made to remove the overpaint to reveal it.

But in 2017, when the painting was sent for its current restoration, an analysis of the paint layers revealed that the paint used for Cupid and the paint that covered it were applied decades apart. Therefore, Vermeer couldn't have painted over Cupid. That's when the restorers realized that they could remove the overpaint and restore Vermeer's original composition. It's now thought that Cupid was later hidden due to changing tastes and fashions.

For restorers today, removing overpaint requires patience. To ensure Vermeer's paint layer isn't damaged, they gently chip pieces of the overpaint away using a microscope and scalpel.

The Old Masters Picture Gallery released a photograph showing the restoration progress, taken on Jan. 16, 2020. In the painting, a confident Cupid can be seen looking directly at the viewer, as proud as PUNCH, perhaps because after at least 270 years, he's finally going to be seen again. And not only that: When the painting is finally restored, viewers will see the young lady reading her letter not only in the light of the open window, but also in the light of love.

Starting June 4, the newly restored "Girl Reading a Letter at an Open Window" will be the star of the exhibition "Johannes Vermeer: On Reflection" at the Zwinger in Dresden. To find out more about Johannes Vermeer's "Girl Reading a Letter at an Open Window," visit [Gemaelde.com](https://www.gemaelde.com).

BOOK REVIEW

A Theater-Lover's Dream

JUDD HOLLANDER

Open Dan Dietz's "The Complete Book of 1920s Broadway Musicals" and you can learn which show featured the Charleston, the dance that has come to define the 1920s; you can read about "Pansy," the three-performance flop that included blues legend Bessie Smith in the cast. There's the musical "Tickle Me," which prompted an investigation by federal authorities when chorus members apparently passed out little bottles of alcohol to the audience.

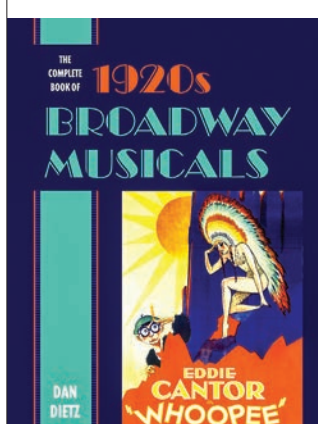
Dietz's book is exactly as described. This 670-page oversize tome contains just about everything you'd want to know about the 287 book musicals (as opposed to revues) that opened on The Great White Way between Jan. 1, 1920, and Dec. 31, 1929. Often, more than one show opened on the same day. In fact, shows arrived so thick and fast that in January of 1925, when only one musical opened on Broadway in the space of seven days, the momentary dearth was enough to

warrant comment in the press. Each show covered includes detailed information on the cast and creative team, the number of performances presented, the Broadway theater(s) where the production appeared, a complete song list, and any promotional tag lines used (for example, "the best musical comedy in years").

There's also information on musical numbers dropped during the tryout process, any songs that were added during the run, and any recordings of songs from the production, along with details on subsequent stage revivals and film iterations. Also discussed are technical innovations that made their way to Broadway during this period. For example, "Good Boy" used treadmills to move the scenery about. This innovation got almost as much press as the show itself.

Names familiar to audiences today include George and Ira Gershwin, Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart, Oscar Hammerstein II and Jerome Kern. These composers had both successes and failures during

Anyone remember the 1920s musical "Treasure Girl"? Find out who composed it in Dan Dietz's "The Complete Book of 1920s Broadway Musicals."



"The Complete Book of 1920s Broadway Musicals" by Dan Dietz, Rowman & Littlefield, 2019, 670 pages, hardcover.

this decade. (Anyone remember "Treasure Girl?") Some of the famous songs that first appeared during the 1920s included "I've Got a Crush on You," "I'm Just Wild About Harry," "Makin' Whoopee," "Let's Do It, Let's Fall in Love," and "You're the Cream in My Coffee."

Just as important as the realms of factual information is Dietz's ability to describe the types of musicals then in vogue. Among them was the "Cinderella" story: A young woman, usually, from humble beginnings falls for a young man from high society, or perhaps royal descent.

Another popular plot was that of adopting false identities: A wealthy prince, princess, or child might pass as a member of the working class.

Dietz also notes that the 1920s was a time when the Broadway musical began to grow up and offer more serious elements. For example, "Deep Harlem" looked at the African-American experience from 19th-century Africa to America's Deep South to the nightclubs of Harlem. The high mark of the decade was the landmark musical "Show Boat," with its unflinching look at prejudice.

Those interested in caustic comments from theater critics of the era can find many examples: "The plot ties itself in so many knots it frequently dies of strangulation,"

and a "5 & 10-cent" musical "that seems to have been assembled by an auctioneer, tied together with a shoestring, and marked down for a quick sale."

Unsurprisingly, the book contains seemingly endless, fascinating trivia. It mentions the stage appearances of future film stars Jeanette MacDonald, Irene Dunne, Sydney Greenstreet, Bob Hope, Ginger Rogers, and Archie Leach (much better known under the moniker Cary Grant).

Dietz buttresses his work with 13 separate appendixes, all of which break down and add to the information found in the book. There's also a very extensive bibliography and index. It helps tremendously that Dietz is an old hand at this process. He'd previously written volumes chronicling Broadway musicals from the 1930s, '40s, '50s, '60s, '70s, '80s, '90s, and 2000s.

The greatest appeal of "The Complete Book of 1920s Broadway Musicals" is that readers can simply open the pages wherever they choose and be amazed at what they find—be it a show still fondly remembered or one long since forgotten.

Judd Hollander is a reviewer for stagebuzz.com and a member of the Drama Desk and Outer Critics Circle.



'Eddie the Eagle'

Director
Dexter Fletcher

Starring
Taron Egerton, Hugh Jackman, Christopher Walken, Jo Hartley, Tim McInnerny, Edwin Endre, Jo Hartley, Keith Allen

Rated
PG-13

Running Time
1 hour, 46 minutes

Release Date
Feb. 26, 2016

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

POPCORN AND INSPIRATION

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MARK JACKSON

Olympic ski jumping. That insane, skis-in-a-"V" flying business. Unless you hail from Scandinavia, you see one jump, you've seen 'em all. Granted, it's far more interesting than the even odder, ice-scrubbing-with-brooms business of Olympic curling. But we can probably all agree that it's far less interesting than America versus Russia Olympic ice hockey, right?

Tell that to Michael Edwards of Great Britain. Where there is no ski jumping whatsoever. He set the British national ski-jumping record in Calgary '88. Michael had a dream more glorious than the collective naysayers in all the length and breadth of Merry England! "Eddie the Eagle" is his story, and like "Cool Runnings" (about the Jamaican bobsled team), it's a hilarious concept and a wonderful story for all ages.

Must. Be. An. Olympian.

Michael dreamed of Olympic glory since he was a wee lad, starting with the venerable sport of Holding the Breath in the Bath tub. After setting a new breath-holding record, Michael'd pack his tiny suitcase and go marching down to the bus station. "Where are you going at 10 o'clock at night?" his exasperated pop (a professional plasterer) wants to know? To the Olympics, naturally.

Breath holding was followed by pole vaulting (with a two-by-four pole), then more track & field (disasters all), and then skiing. Young Michael hadn't quite found the right sport yet, you see.

This is all very much like the character of Mr. Toad and his never-ending hobbies in the children's book "The Wind in the Willows," with Michael sadly discontinuing one sport, only to immediately fall head over heels for another. Until, like Toad getting completely gobsnacked by the concept of motorcar driving ("Poop-Poop!") went the early 19th-century automobile horn that beguiled him), Michael gets gobsnacked by ski flying.

The Wrong Stuff

Problem was, Michael wasn't too coordinated. He wore thick glasses and had weak knees that necessitated metal braces. The British Olympic Committee, thoroughly annoyed and underwhelmed from years of Michael's overachieving and undertalented enthusiasm, is not having him on any team. No way, no how.

But the resourceful, persistent young man discovers a loophole! Just like there were no other Jamaican bobsledders besides that one hapless team, there was also no other British ski jumper. So all Michael's gotta do is nail one jump and he's in. He'd be set to become the only British ski jumper in the 1988 Calgary Winter Olympics.

The Mentor

"Eddie" is a Hero's Journey if there ever was one, and when he meets his mentor—it's Wolverine. Hugh Jackman plays Bronson Peary, formerly the sharpest jump student in renowned Warren Sharp's (Christopher Walken) U.S. Olympic team.

(Above) Michael Edwards (Taron Egerton) demonstrating how he got his nickname in "Eddie the Eagle." (Right) Bronson (Hugh Jackman, L) and Eddie (Taron Egerton) hope for the best, while expecting the worst, in advance of Eddie's next practice jump. (Far right) The real Michael Edwards, aka Eddie the Eagle, poses on the set of "Eddie the Eagle."



Yes, it's the thoroughly clichéd story of the down-but-not-quite-out former superstar with an ever-present bourbon flask, who got kicked off the team for rebellious rule flaunting and bodily disregard by way of booze. It's the same role Jackman had in "Real Steel." And Wolverine is not an alcoholic, but not for lack of trying. It's a character Jackman portrays well.

There are "Rocky"-like, clichéd training montages where you'll roll your eyes. Especially when these culminate in a scene where Jackman demonstrates the essence of jumping by doing a Wolverine version of Meg Ryan's restaurant scene in "When Harry Met Sally." It's a bit cringe-worthy, but all this training (and this movie) functions as Olympic Ski Jumping Appreciation 101, and you'll never watch that event on TV the same way again.

The Ramps!

You'll also never watch it that way again because of the monster ramps. Ever take a good look at those things? We never get the proper perspective on a little TV screen.

There are four siblings of ramp: the baby 15-meter, the already extremely scary 40-meter, the assured, extended hospital stay should you mess up even slightly on the 70-meter, and the one for which they start measuring anyone who's not a stone-cold pro for a pine box before he starts the ascent to the top of the 90-meter.

Part of what makes this film work is that director Fletcher puts the perspective on these shock-and-awe-inspiring ramps. He clues us, the uninitiated, into just how Achtung! Verboten! Lebensgefahr! dangerous this sport is, and the depths of commitment it takes to be a player in this deadly game. Basically, if you don't start learning the sport at age 6—you're gonna die.

(Below left) "Vintage" photo of Bronson Peary (Hugh Jackman, L) with his former ski-jumping coach Warren Sharp (Christopher Walken). (Below right) Young Michael (Tom Costello) setting early Olympic records in the bathtub. (Bottom) Michael (Taron Egerton, L) and his coach Bronson Peary (Hugh Jackman) work on flying technique in "Eddie the Eagle."



Is He Insane?

Which brings us back to Michael. What the heck? Take a wild guess what Michael's preparation status is for the Olympic big-boy ramp? And this is a true story.

The film's best moment comes at the top of the world, riding the elevator up to the vertigo-inducing 90-meter death fall: Michael undergoes one of the best ugly duckling transformations ever.

Michael endured years of ridicule and the trashing of his dreams at the hands of less courageous people. Riding the elevator together, superstar Matti Nykanen (Edvin Endre) from Finland, the greatest ski jumper of all time, acknowledges Michael as an equal in spirit, saying that lesser men don't jump as they do—for the pure spirit of the thing. He challenges Michael and himself, encouraging them both, that they must both bring it now or never live it down.

Michael becomes a swan before our very eyes. It's truly a beautiful moment. Equally beautiful is the post-jump elder blessing bestowed by the great coach Warren Sharp upon his prodigal son, Bronson Peary, the Eagle trainer.

This movie functions as Olympic Ski Jumping Appreciation 101, and you'll never watch that event on TV the same way again.

A Tremendous Lesson

Yes, it's corny. Yes, Taron Egerton is a tad over-the-top in his characterization. Although ... maybe not, when you take a look at the real Eddie.

Yes, it's got slightly cheesy, '80s synth-pop in the score, and it's 100 percent predictable. But you know what? The adult take, that predictability is a bad thing—is overrated. This is ultimately a kids' movie, and kids thrive on predictability. Kids never tire of the stories that tell them how best to comport themselves in life.

One could speculate that this movie might give kids the wrong idea about valor and courage, seeing this stuff—this, this, this—flinging oneself, willy-nilly, off precipices. The multiple, body-wrecking, bodyslams of it all! Is it courageous? Or is it maybe morose?

Nope. Michael's not a moron. Michael clearly had a vision and a mission. He set the British national ski-jumping record. Only him. In whole wide universe. And his tale was to be told to inspire us all. And underneath such a tremendous thing as that, there's a deep faith that all will be well.

Michael went to meet his Maker on every try. And his Maker took care of him. As did his dear mum. One of the best screen mums ever. Very wonderful for children. I don't care who you are, everyone cries watching "Eddie the Eagle."

REWIND, REVIEW, AND RE-RATE

The Film Delivers Right Up to the Final Checkered Flag

IAN KANE

I've never been a huge fan of racing films. I'm not a gearhead and don't watch racing as a sport. The goofy, unrealistic car-action stunts and the shallow storylines of perhaps the longest-running racing series—"The Fast & Furious" franchise—hardly did anything to change that. However, after seeing the trailer for 2019's "Ford v Ferrari," I decided to give it a shot. And boy, am I glad I did.

The film is directed by James Mangold, who comes mainly from a background of making episodic TV series. As such, the movie has sort of an episodic structure to it and is a little long, as it tries to pack in as much about the two main characters' lives as possible: Friends Carroll Shelby (Matt Damon) and Ken Miles (Christian Bale) chase after their dreams of racing fame and fortune.

Most of the drama takes place off of the racetracks.

It opens in the year 1966. The Ford Motor Company, headed by Henry Ford II, who is the eldest grandson of Henry Ford (Tracy Letts), is struggling to save his family's business. He redirects the company's energy and money into building race cars. He figures that if Ford can construct cars good enough to win some world-class racing tournaments, his company will not only gain prestige but also be able to charge more for Fords. The only problem is that Italian carmaker Ferrari has long dominated the racing scene, including one of the most famous races, the 24-hour Le Mans.

Ford Motor Company's sales and marketing guru Lee Iacocca (Jon Bernthal) is tasked to hire someone who can build such a car. Iacocca decides to hire Shelby, a former racecar driving pro who has been sidelined due to health issues. Shelby, in turn,



(Top) Ken Miles (Christian Bale) and Carroll Shelby (Matt Damon) chase after their dreams of racing fame and fortune. (Above) The racing scenes feel grounded and are extremely well-shot.

hires his pal Miles—a master mechanic and driver who has an ingenious knack for designing cars to reach their optimal performances.

The only hitch is that passionate Miles is notoriously hard to work with and often rubs people the wrong way. This becomes all-too-evident when Miles meets top Ford executive Leo Beebe (Josh Lucas), and the two men immediately bump heads.

After the film's first act, it settles into a touch-and-go cadence that largely features the drama between the various Ford execs, Shelby, and Miles, as well as tidbits of Miles's family life sprinkled in—including his loving wife, Mollie (Caitriona Balfe),

and son, Peter (Noah Jupe).

Shelby's enduring friendship with Miles takes front and center as he attempts to keep his volatile friend out of trouble. It doesn't help that Beebe is constantly scheming to have Miles removed from their newly formed Ford racing team.

Miles's skill and talent as a racecar driver soon become undeniable as he rockets, mercurially, to first place in race after race. These racing scenes feel grounded and are extremely well-shot—none of the usual CGI-laden Hollywood nonsense here—just beautiful shots of both the racecars and their jaw-clenching drivers as they try to outmaneuver one another over various racetracks.

After Miles wins several races, including the 24 Hours of Daytona, a highly competitive race, and the 12 Hours of Sebring a few months later, he earns his team's place at Le Mans.

As the tension ratchets up heading into the Le Mans, we wonder if Shelby and Miles will be able to actualize their dreams of winning this most prestigious of races. Or will the Ferrari team take first place as usual?

Interestingly, even though the racing scenes are intense and well-directed, most of the drama takes place off of the racetracks. At its heart, the film is a tale about the steadfast, everlasting friendship between two men—Shelby and Miles—and the various tribulations they have to overcome in order to realize their championship dreams.

The acting here is spectacular, with Damon's more steady character, Carroll Shelby, meshing well with Bale's cantankerous and unpredictable mechanic, car tester, and racecar driver, Ken Miles. The two have an easy chemistry that makes their scenes a pleasure to watch, despite the film's overly long runtime. The supporting cast also does a great job of pulling viewers into the world that these intense, real-life characters inhabited in 1966.

More of a buddy drama than a racing film, "Ford v Ferrari" delivers some great, high-octane entertainment.

Ian Kane is a filmmaker and author based out of Los Angeles. To learn more, visit DreamFlightEnt.com or contact him at [Twitter.com/TheReallanKane](https://twitter.com/TheReallanKane).

'Ford v Ferrari'

Director
James Mangold

Starring
Matt Damon, Christian Bale, Jon Bernthal

Running Time
2 hours, 32 minutes

Rated
PG-13

Release Date
June 14

★★★★★

Virtue of the Brush in a Time of Chaos

"When things are chaotic to the extreme, order must be restored."
- "The four books" by Zhu Xi



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