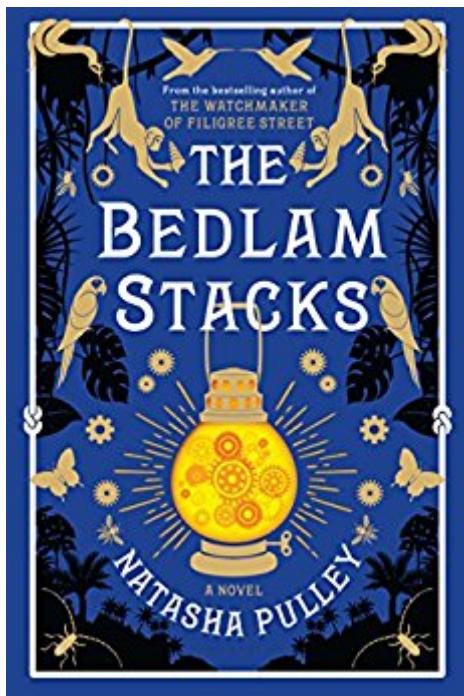


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The Bedlam Stacks



Synopsis

The eagerly anticipated new novel from the author of THE WATCHMAKER OF FILIGREE STREET--a treacherous quest in the magical landscape of nineteenth-century Peru. In 1859, ex-East India Company smuggler Merrick Tremayne is trapped at home in Cornwall after sustaining an injury that almost cost him his leg. On the sprawling, crumbling grounds of the old house, something is wrong; a statue moves, his grandfather's pines explode, and his brother accuses him of madness. When the India Office recruits Merrick for an expedition to fetch quinine--essential for the treatment of malaria--from deep within Peru, he knows it's a terrible idea. Nearly every able-bodied expeditionary who's made the attempt has died, and he can barely walk. But Merrick is desperate to escape everything at home, so he sets off, against his better judgment, for a tiny mission colony on the edge of the where a salt line on the ground separates town from forest. Anyone who crosses is killed by something that watches from the trees, but somewhere beyond the salt are the quinine woods, and the way around is blocked. Surrounded by local stories of lost time, cursed woods, and living rock, Merrick must separate truth from fairytale and find out what befell the last expeditions; why the villagers are forbidden to go into the forest; and what is happening to Raphael, the young priest who seems to have known Merrick's grandfather, who visited Peru many decades before. The Bedlam Stacks is the story of a profound friendship that grows in a place that seems just this side of magical.

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Customer Reviews

I fell in love with Natasha Pulley's first book, *The Watchmaker of Filigree Street*, and was so excited when I saw she had this second book out. And I loved this one just as much as the first! The book made me think of the sort of adventure stories written by John Buchan, or H. Rider Haggard's stories about Allan Quatermain (for younger readers of this review who may not recognize those names...think Indiana Jones)...stories of adventure and exploration but written with an earlier-than-21st-century sensibility. A lot of the reviews here mention that the book is slow...I would say more that it is a deliberate build-up. There are hints of strange very early on, before the main characters' adventures even start, and those hints build and build. The supernatural here is almost explainable...could almost be something that would occur in our own world. But it's the characters that I love especially, wounded (mentally and physically) Merrick and Raphael of course, Clement, even the people of the stacks - Inti, Aquila. And the marvelous reappearance of a character from *Watchmaker*. They are so real and their relationships so well drawn. And the world they inhabit is beautifully described. I'd love to see the stacks, with their obsidian inclusions...I'd love to write messages in the glowing pollen...I'll just have to wait for Ms. Pulley's next book, I guess.

Natasha Pulley's *The Bedlam Stacks* puts the reader in 1859 England. Merrick, the protagonist, is stuck in England with a leg injury until the India Office recruits him for a quest to obtain quinine, a medicine needed to treat a recent outbreak of Malaria, across the Peruvian border. Although reluctant at first, he goes forth with his mission. Along with his guide, Raphael, Merrick finds himself in the holy city of Bedlam with surroundings and things he has yet to experience, including the markayuq, or holy statues capable of movement. As the story progresses, Pulley reveals that this is not a singular magical journey for medicine, but one of friendship, and the ties that bind Merrick and Raphael together. It took me a few chapters to fully engage in the story line, as well as a lot of note taking due to the terminology, but it paid off in the end.

I never knew what would be on the next page and I couldn't stop reading. You can read her two novels independently, but she pulls in a character to tie them together. I cannot wait for the next installment.

Enjoyed

I greatly admired Natasha Pulley's first novel *The Watchmaker of Filigree Street* and my review here reflected that admiration. After two years of eagerly awaiting her second novel, I approached the new one hoping that it would at least equal her first effort but I never expected a novel whose intelligence, imagination and beauty make me consider it a masterpiece. In a first person narrative of journalistic simplicity whose contemporary sounding English voice belies its Victorian era setting, just one of the strange electric shocks that disorient the reader, we are told a most fantastic tale in the most matter-of-fact manner. In fact, *The Bedlam Stacks* is something of a mysterious prequel to *The Watchmaker of Filigree Street*. Natasha Pulley seems to be creating her own literary universe in which time, and everything human that's trapped within it like a fly in amber, stops being linear and is molded and shaped by people with unusual abilities and gifts. The peculiar unmooring of reality that permeates the novel begins rather early in the book with a strange series of little, almost insignificant events, mysteries whose solutions unfold slowly but that lead to even greater mysteries. To call *The Bedlam Stacks* a novel of magical realism, steam-punk era fantasy, alternative science fiction or even anthropological mythology, is limiting at best. It's all of these things and more. It revels in the mysteries of the Incas, it frets over the European exploitation of third-world countries, touches on the inexplicable nature of religion and faith and offers a long, hard look at the difficulties of friendship. But most of all, *The Bedlam Stacks* is a novel fascinated by the inexplicable nature of time and the almost painfully confused human response to its ineffable strangeness. The events in the novel cover several centuries but these events are not remote in time from each other. They are connected in a way that is so fantastic, yet told in such a reasonable fashion, with details carefully ordered throughout the novel to insure the reader's belief, that reality itself becomes malleable and the dream-stuff of living becomes plausible fact. In order not to betray the novel's many surprises I'm reluctant to detail the plot, which in any case defies easy explication. Although the novel is easy to read, it has a haunting beauty that makes it hard to forget. If a novel of imaginative brilliance and creative intelligence meets your criteria for a worthwhile work of fiction, *The Bedlam Stacks* may excite you as much as it did me.

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