



The Book of Emmaus

Kevin St. Jarre

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In Kevin St. Jarre's novel *The Book of Emmaus*, three groups of people in different historical eras attempt to find a powerful book that's said to contain truths that will upend Catholicism.

In a fourteenth-century monastery, two monks are given a bound manuscript with strict instructions to deny that it exists—and to kill anyone who reads it. The manuscript vanishes from history until the Nazis attempt to find it in the closing days of World War II. Once again, the manuscript is lost. In the present, a professor and her graduate student discover a journal detailing the manuscript's translation; they try to trace its path through history.

The mystery of the manuscript's contents is built through artful transitions between the three time periods—1349, 1944, and 2022. Each time period focuses on a key set of characters; touching moments overshadow the mystery temporarily. In the 1349 timeline, an ambitious monk survives the Black Plague, losing friends to illness and attacks. In 1944, as a new generation of monks guards the legend, there's a tender love story between a monk and a German nurse. In the present: the professor and graduate student pursue the truth with dogged determination in the face of threats and violence.

The story moves with speed through the three time periods, racing toward its revelations of the manuscript's contents. The document is lost and found several times; each time, the loss is reflective of the era's approach to truth. The mystery becomes less about the contents of the book, and more about how truth interacts with historical, social, and religious dogma.

The Book of Emmaus is a compelling novel in which a buried religious text has profound implications in a variety of historical contexts.

JOHN M. MURRAY (July / August 2022)

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