

# [***Book Review: 'Glorious Exploits' turns classical history into an endearing comedy about tragedy***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BMS-FG61-DYMD-602M-00000-00&context=1516831)

The Associated Press

March 25, 2024 Monday 2:42 PM GMT

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**Section:** ENTERTAINMENT NEWS

**Length:** 545 words

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**Body**

Best friends Lampo and Gelon are potters by trade, but their souls are filled with poetry. It’s 412 B.C. and the city of Syracuse doesn’t know what hit it when these two hatch up the best worst idea: They’ll put on a play using the Athenian prisoners of war who are starving to death down in the rock quarry.

If the googly eyes on the cover didn’t make it apparent, Ferdia Lennon’s knockout debut novel “Glorious Exploits” is hilarious. In fact, it’s loaded with dark humor literally from page one. Never before has history been such a riot, and so indelibly endearing.

The book is crass, quick-witted, and dialogue-heavy, making it a quick read to boot. Born in Dublin, Lennon infuses the story with a delightfully Irish lilt, complete with very Irish cursing, that gives the whole thing a kind of bizarre yet familiar approachability. The author’s also applied his deep interest and knowledge in classical history to give us exactly the context needed to set the stage for the epic tale he’ll tell.

And, while I’m sure history buffs will get some extra layers of entertainment, rest assured that even for someone like me who is woefully bad at history and has never taken much interest in Greek or Roman stories, it’s still a hoot.

“Glorious Exploits” is a story largely built as if on happenstance. The directors-in-the-making stumble on children playing in the street with valuable armor they found, that Lampo and Gelon can then sell to fund their project. Later, they happen to come across an old man singing for money in the streets whose story strikes Gelon deeply, but that Lampo only sees as a story, driving a wedge between the two.

But their friendship — and the story itself — is stronger than this. Watching them morph and grow with the project’s progression is deeply gratifying. And relieving. If at first Lampo seems almost unbearably awful sometimes, fret not, because it gets better.

As Gelon says, “It’s poetry we’re doing. It wouldn’t mean a thing if it were easy.”

The main characters are sympathetic and their goals admirable — certainly feeding the Athenians is humanitarian, even if gruffly so — but before long I found myself also rooting for their success in every venture that branches off from the play, from Gelon’s search for happiness to Lampo’s courting of Lyra, the new girl down at their favorite watering hole.

All told, the project is so much more than putting on a couple of Euripides tragedies; it's lifegiving, and it challenges the barriers thrown up between “us” and “them.”

I never thought I could be so enraptured reading a book describe a play performance — especially a tragedy I didn’t know. Yet, somehow, when we finally get to the big day, Lennon has infused the pages with nervous anticipation that's closer to reading a thriller than a historical comedy.

“Glorious Exploits” is a celebration of stories and storytelling lavishing in the emotional power of the arts, and one that’s especially apt in dealing with the fallout of the Peloponnesian War at a time when, in our present reality, [*fighting has left cities in rubble*](https://apnews.com/article/palestinians-gaza-israel-bombing-destruction-hamas-reconstruction-f299a28410b70ee05dd764df97d8d3a0) and [*millions of people facing starvation*](https://apnews.com/article/sudan-war-hunger-wfp-adfd7107d49732e1aee7cf8d5a9b0065). Lennon offers a window through which to see past the fog of messy ***politics*** and view these tragedies with empathy.

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**Load-Date:** March 25, 2024

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