



The Legions of Fire

David Drake

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From the Bestselling author of the "Lord of the Isles." . .

In this novel of magical menace to the survival of all humanity, David Drake introduces a new fantasy world, Carce, based on Europe during the later Roman Empire.

Far in the north, a group of magicians perform a strange dance on a volcanic island intended to open a gateway for supernatural creatures that will allow them to devastate the whole Earth and destroy all life. Not knowing the cause, two young men, Corylus and Varus, and two women, Hedia and Alphena, each separately pursue the answer to mysterious and threatening happenings that prefigure disaster in the great city of Carce, the center of civilization. Through magical voyages in other realities where fantastic creatures, and even gods, help or hinder them, each of them must succeed or not just the city but the world will end in fire.

"The Legions of Fire" is the first of a fantasy quartet set in the world of the city of Carce.

The Legions of Fire Details

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From Reader Review The Legions of Fire for online ebook

Craig says

I've come to think of David Drake as a fairly good fantasy writer and a really terrific science fiction writer, so I approached this first volume of a new series more or less wishing that the characters on the cover had on space suits rather than togas. However, I was most pleasantly surprised and enjoyed the story very much. The characters are a family and a few friends and the book reminded me more than anything of Christopher Stasheff's wonderful Warlock books... a much, much darker world than Stasheff's, of course, but a very good thing nonetheless. One point that confused me is that the story is set in Rome in the year 30 A.D., but the city is called Carce. All of the other things and people and places keep their historical names, so it was a little jarring to read "Carce" on the page while hearing "Rome" in my mind. The story was captivating, the historical detail fascinating, and the characters enjoyable and well-developed; I enjoyed it more than his previous fantasy series, the Isles books.

Jacob Aitken says

Drake made the mistake of labeling it an "altnerative history fantasy" to Rome. Except he used literal geopolitics of that time and literal classical labels, only changing "Rome" to "Carce."

Unfortunately, it also contained a lot of the degeneracy of ancient Rome, thus showing, perhaps unwittingly, that Christianity is superior and paving the way for the rise of the German over that of the Roman.

Derek says

Excellent pseudo-historical fantasy. Set in "Carce", which isn't eve a thinly disguised Rome of the Empire period, *The Legions of Fire* blends Greco-Roman and Norse mythologies in a heroic fantasy of Apocalypse-averted. I'd just finished Lord of the Isles, and was disappointed that, for all the great reviews it's received, I didn't find it up to the standards of his SF work. This book certainly meets, if not surpasses, those standards.

Liviu says

This one I started and put down many times but after the superb Into the Hinterlands I decided to give it a final spin - either read it and go to the next or drop the series; the fantasy 30AD Rome of the setting is very intriguing and David Drake is always very dependable to write good historical stuff with no anachronisms (especially of the social kind that are so often encounters in modern books about Rome who take our values and mindset there).

His using Carce instead of Rome but keeping everything else historical (Gaul, Spain, Germany, names, cities..) to emphasize the book is fantasy worked ok but it was not really necessary; the characters are likable and interesting since they all have twists on their archetype - the aristocratic but somewhat indolent scion of a high nobility (senatorial class) house, his knightly class (the lower nobility/upper middle class, but still rich) friend, his tomboy sister and his young ambitious stepmother, plus the supporting cast of assorted veterans/mentors, philosophers, aristocrats, wizards...

The magic of the book was very canned and left me cold; when the villains try to burn the world with fire and the heroes above had to save it, I kind of got bored rather than excited; I still enjoyed Legions of fire well enough for the characters and Roman setting that I will try Out of the Waters and i hope that the book will have more twists beyond the "evil of ages, stirring, bla-bla..." stuff of the first

Daniel Smith says

I wanted more explanation about the mystical events and creatures. I'm willing to reserve judgment until I've read a little further in the series. Perhaps the gaps will fill in.

Carl Alves says

The Legions of Fire is sort of an alternate history, fantasy novel that is set in ancient Rome except that magic and all sorts of monsters exist. The basic premise of the story is that there is a wizard who is an advisor to a senator in Carce, a Roman city, who is trying to bring about the ruin of the world by calling forth a group of gods from a different plane of existence. There are four people related or acquainted with the senator who together and separately are trying to stop this from happening.

This novel gets off to a terrible start. Apparently, this author never heard the advice that the number one rule as a fiction author is to hook in the reader from the very start of the story. Not only does the author not accomplish this, but nothing whatsoever of interest happens for the first hundred pages or so. Eventually, there are things happening, but by that point in the novel, I had totally lost interest and could never gain interest because the author had lost me. Another problem I had was that the four main characters all go on adventures to different planes and they all fight off various types of monsters. This made the novel both repetitive and confusing. It was hard to tell who was doing what because they were all embarking on the same type of mission with the same type of storyline.

The book had a lot of monsters and a lot of sex, even if it was at completely inappropriate times. Here is the world on the brink of destruction, but the main characters manage to have sex frequently. Talk about gratuitous. This was a novel that is not worth reading, and you won't have a hard time finding better options.

Carl Alves - author of Two For Eternity

Jack says

OK - I need to do a full disclosure before I comment on this book. I am a very literal guy. I don't go in for allegories, hidden meanings, or 'the author was saying this to represent that'.

In college I read Conrad's 'Heart of Darkness'. My take: a somewhat boring tale of a trip down the Congo River. The professor's take: the author is exploring man's inner blah blah blah. How in the hell did she figure that out?

Now, for the "Legions of Fire" - I have read a number of David Drake's books before and liked them all. I picked this up for \$1.00 and I lucked out because this was Vol 1 of a series. Normally I see discounted books but they're Vol 2 or 3 or 4.

The story takes place in the city of Carce which is actually ancient Rome. Everything about the characters and the location is ancient Rome. There's lots of Greek/Roman mythology thrown in as well.

I've found an alternate history novel - great I like those. But then the magic starts.

I have read my share of fantasy/swords and sorcery books - some I loved and some were, well 'not bad'. A few stunk.

Everything seemed to be going along ok until the magic started and then everything got really weird. At one point one of the characters sees a goose striding along being ridden by a chipmunk who is all dressed up in fine clothes. Say what? It was as if Drake was describing an LSD trip.

That's when I knew I picked up the wrong book - for me.

The character development was very good; the action/fighting scenes well written; the dialogue was good. But I struggled through the last 1/2 to 2/3 of the book when everyone was wandering around in this Alice in Wonderland world.

I won't be picking up the other books in this series.

Jessica Strider says

Pros: great characters, excellent world-building, interesting plot

Cons: a few distracting word choices

The magician Nemastes takes advantage of the superstitious senator Saxa and casts a spell in the man's house. That spell interrupts the poetry reading of Saxa's son Gaius Varus, and turns the young man into an unwitting pawn of Nemastes's enemies. Also pulled into the spell's influence are Varus's sister, Alphena, who practices swordplay, even though it's not a womanly art; his new, young stepmother, Hedia; and his best friend Publius Corylus, who grew up on the border of the barbarian frontiers of Germania.

The four players are pulled into other worlds, worlds in which creatures of myth are real, and where a group of evil men are planning the destruction of the world.

The author begins the book with a forward explaining that while the book is based on the history of ancient Rome (called Carce in the book to help keep the distinction), it is not historical fiction. He also points out that all of the gods and mythological creatures he references are things people in the past believed in.

It was really cool reading a book that referenced a lot of old mythology as if it were real. There were some expected creatures and a lot of unexpected ones as well. And while the main setting is Carce, Egyptian, Norse, and other belief systems make appearances.

The four principle characters are well fleshed out, as are a few side characters. I really enjoyed the developing relationship between Alphena and her close in age stepmother - the mix of anger Alphena feels towards the woman as well as her grudging respect. Hedia meanwhile is a surprising woman: on her second marriage with few illusions about the world. She enjoys sex and knows how to use her looks to advantage. She's also quite intelligent with regards to the danger posed by Nemastes and honestly wants what's best for

her new stepchildren. I felt kind of sorry for Varus, who wants to do great things but just doesn't have the necessary abilities. I was impressed by his actions in the climax. Corylus has a grab bag of skills that come in handy during the trials he faces. He doesn't grow as much as a character as the others, but he's a fascinating character to read about.

The plot takes a while to get going, but the characters are so interesting I didn't mind. And when it does pick up, things go quickly.

A few word choices irritated me, specifically the use of 'knight' for a position in the Carcian army instead of the Roman title and 'hell' referencing to the Christian version of the afterlife (which didn't exist as we think of it at the time) rather than the terms/meanings people back then would have used for the afterlife). But those are pretty minor complaints and didn't detract from my enjoyment of the book

This is the first of a four book series but though there's a teaser for book 2 in the epilogue, all of the plot points are resolved and it can be read as a standalone novel.

If you like mythology and Roman fiction, give this a go.

Phyllis Griffiths says

The Legions of Fire tells a tale set in another universe- a few over from our own- split off from the ancient western civilizations of our own continuum in that Rome never rose past a village but another town- Carce- rose in it's place. In this universe magic is as real as science, and much of the history of Carce matches that of our Rome. A fine place to set a tale such as this one.

This is a tale of four people- two young women and two young men. People going about their lives- a young woman who is wife to a much older man of status and wealth and who is stepmother to his two teenage children- herself not much older than them. With them is the best friend of the son, who comes from a much different background- the son of a soldier who and a nymph who grew up in the boarder lands of the Danube. When the husband brings home a wizard the lives of all of them are thrown into turmoil and great danger- along with Carce and the entire world itself.

The story telling is spellbinding. At times there are four story lines happening at the same time- and they converge and diverge several times before the tale is done. Even when the crisis is averted the prologue lets the readers know that there are more adventures to come.

This was my first reading of Legions of Fire, but not my first visit into the adventures of this family. I get most of my books from the public library and it's not always easy to read a series in the proper order this way. I had read a later book in the series and that left me wanting to read more. I am glad that I did. I will enjoy this book the second and third read as much as I did the first- and I do plan on re-reading this book at least twice more.

David says

I like the ideas Mr. Drake puts forth, but the whole thing progresses slowly, it feels like a road trip through some lush and vibrant tourist area...at 10mph. Nice for a bit then you just wonder if you can speed things up to get to the next attraction. Also a fan that doesn't use England and Arthurian legend as the basics for a fantasy world.

I might give another of David's fantasy yarns a try. Like I said I like what he was going for, but the pacing (Among other things) kinda ate at my will to continue.

Mike says

I, like some of the other folks with written reviews, picked this book up as a "bargain bin" type read. And after forcing myself through a rather plodding first 40 or so pages, the story began to flow and I found myself enjoying a very different take on the genre. I've read alternate history, and I've read more than my fair share of Fantasy works, and the aside from the pacing (clearly a lot of character arc's that needed explaining) early in the book, I was rather pleased. I will be following up in the Elements series here, and may even give his sci-fi works a try.

Head Mmoid says

I have read and liked many of David Drake's science fiction novels. This was the first of his fantasy novels I read, and it will, however, likely be the last.

The first thing that bothered me in the book was the city name. Carce **IS** Rome. Calling it by another name was just annoying.

The second thing which bothered me was the excruciatingly slow start to the book. I was almost a third of the way through before it became clear that there really was going to be a plot; and that there was a point to the slow, bit-by-bit revelations which were occurring in each chapter. At least forty percent of the first one hundred pages should have been edited out.

The main problem with the book were the characters. We see the characters either in long, drawn out exposition, or being led around by spirits in barely explained alternate worlds. They are told what to do; they do it; then they pop back to their real world or else move on to another spirit situation. None of the characters have more than a minor bit of free will. None take any serious active part in the story, except as the tools of others. The central "bad guy" is the only person who appears to ever have a plan, and he is always in the background. The result is that you never come to empathize with any character; you never really care about any character, and the most common feeling is; "finish this scene so we can get on to something else which may matter."

As is too often the case, the book rushes to an ending in the last chapter. Suddenly, all the separate and often seemingly little connected plot lines zip together thanks, again, to the actions of spirit guides instead of the characters.

This is cannot be recommended to anyone other than a die-hard David Drake fan.

Colin says

This was a New Year's gift from Chris Swanson. I thoroughly enjoyed it, though perhaps for the wrong reasons - the writing isn't great, nor is the plot particularly lucid. But it is set in an alternate-history world in which Rome is replaced with a city called Carce, and is set during the Principate. The alternate-history world

is on a collision course with more magical worlds, seemingly based on Norse mythology. Drake does a good job of understanding Rome, even an alternate-Rome, and of weaving genuine elements of Roman and Germanic myth into his narrative. I'll probably read the rest of the series, now.

Samuel says

In brief: Drake creates a fantastic world of feel-it-in-your-bones magic, a great, great sphinx duel, and some quite interesting characters atop a richly layered, well-researched, might as well be speaking Latin it's so authentic ancient "not Rome". First in a series; fantastic cover artwork of Trajan's column (plus... bonus surprises).

Joe Slavinsky says

This is my first foray into David Drake, who is one of the more prolific science fiction/fantasy writers on Earth, apparently. Not sure why I've never read him, as I've seen his stuff. I've just never had the inclination. I was in the library, the other day, between books, and spotted this on the "New" shelf. It looked interesting, and I needed something to read, so I picked it up. I'm happy that I did. It was a little slow developing, but once he'd introduced the main characters, it really started to take off. This book is the first, of four, that deal with the fictional city of Carce(CAR-see), based on ancient Rome, although all other place names(in "the waking world"!), are the same as they are here on Earth. I'm assuming, since the first dealt with fire, that the others will be based on the other 3 "elements", hopefully with the same main characters. BTW, I'm not sure whether I'll read more of Drake's oeuvre, until I've seen the rest of this series.
