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Stewart Binns

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1072 - England is firmly under the heel of its new Norman rulers. The few survivors of the English resistance look to Edgar the Atheling, the rightful heir to the English throne, to overthrow William the Conqueror. Years of intrigue and vicious civil war follow: brother against brother, family against family, friend against friend. In the face of chaos and death, Edgar and his allies form a secret brotherhood, pledging to fight for justice and freedom wherever they are denied. But soon they are called to fight for an even greater cause: the plight of the Holy Land. Embarking on the epic First Crusade to recapture Jerusalem, together they will participate in some of the cruellest battles the world has ever known, the savage Siege of Antioch and the brutal Fall of Jerusalem, and together they will fight to the death.

Crusade Details

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Author : Stewart Binns

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From Reader Review Crusade for online ebook

John says

English history woven into a spell binding novel has been transformed by this man into one of the best books I have read, that sits on my bedside table.

If you read this, you have to wonder why our history is not taught fully in the classroom to our children. I defy anyone to tell me that this book, that offers the reader travel, intrigue, plots and warfare along with human relationships which bonds groups of people together for life, is not worthy of the attention of everyone born in England and indeed other countries too.

A wonderful book with a terrific storyline that will enthrall the reader.

Alexandra Taylor says

I really enjoyed it, especially not having read the first one (there's something about talking books and not mentioning it's in a series). It was easy to follow though I do admit I was already rather familiar with the time and events that took place which would have helped. The characters were interesting and gave me a lot more information on the era than I already had.

Beorn says

One of the things that can put me off a book with remarkable prowess it's when the author writes it in the present tense - think not "After loading my bags with the coins onto the horse, I rode out of town and onto my quest" but "I load my bags onto the horse and ride out of town to begin my quest".

For some unknown reason, Stewart Binns decided to take everything that had worked so well about his writing in the previous book in this series, Conquest, and throw it away. He, for reasons unknown, switched from a past tense narrative to a present tense style and in the process sucked the vitality and energy straight out of his work.

I'll be honest in admitting I didn't read the whole book but frankly what I read of it is enough to convince me I made a mistake thinking it would be anywhere near its predecessor.

For Crusade's books go read Jack Hight's Saladin trilogy or any one of the other, far less annoying books set around or at least featuring the Crusades.

Adrian Chamberlin says

Epic in scope, fast-moving and page-turning - but flat and uninvolved.

This started off well: I liked the framing device of the story unfolding to the ears of William of Malmesbury and his young acolyte Roger of Caen, told in the present tense to give a sense of immediacy.

Fans of medieval fiction may be disappointed that the First Crusade doesn't form the basis and focus of the whole story; rather it focusses on a little-explored piece of English history: the years after Hereward the Wake's rebellion against William the Conqueror, and the political turmoil, plots and skullduggery that took up the lives of William's successors and the nobles, knights and common people affected by them.

As such, it is a direct sequel to the first novel CONQUEST and must be treated as such. Page 483 sums this up:

"What they have been made privy to is a remarkable story of two families, as if in a Greek tragedy; William's powerful, all-conquering Norman family and Hereward's modest, redoubtable English family locked in a bitter struggle over three generations and across a far-reaching landscape. What is more, in Hereward's grandson, recently in the service of William's son, King Henry, the saga still continues."

Binns must be credited with the ambitious task of bringing this murky period to life, particularly his use of Edward the Atheling, the rightful ruler of England, as central narrator. The book works well in exploring the dilemmas and conflicted loyalties this man suffered.

With such tangled webs and history-making events unfolding, Binns does a remarkable job in keeping the pages turning and the story moving: the years fly by, as do the countries visited and historic personages the Brotherhood interact with. And that, for me, is the problem.

It moves *too* quickly. We never pause to soak up the atmosphere of the lands, nor feel the thrill and horror of the battles fought. Instead, the conflicts are related in a dull manner that neither inspires nor horrifies.

The characters are flat and two-dimensional, and the dialogue is appalling. We don't get an insight into the medieval mind; instead, their actions and viewpoints of the world are tailored to fit into 21st century expectations. Look at this exchange between Estrith and Sweyn when they get to the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem:

"Estrith was moved to tears. 'Why would men fight over such a place?'
Sweyn was moved to anger. 'Let's try to make sure they don't.'"

A heartfelt plea, and understandable with the horrors of the First Crusade that soon follow; but this is not a medieval mindset.

The book has its merits; as said earlier, it brings a little-known period of English history to a 21st century readership. You'll learn a lot, as I did, but for me the book fails because it didn't bring the period to life.

And for me, that is what I look for in a historical novel.

Wulfrun Andy says

This is a wonderful story! the only reason i have given it 4, is personally, I found too much "background" detailing in it, large phases of it tell you of the historic points, but thats just a personal view. The characters

are wonderful, and its not often.. I wont say too much and spoil anything, but its not often that a book can bring a lump to my throat when someone dies in a book..

Timothy says

I've been reading this book for several years, every time I go on holiday. The length of time it has taken to get to the end should give you a clue as to how much of a page turner it is.

Actually the book isn't bad, taking you back in time to an age of chivalry and immersing you in post 1066 history of England. The main characters are interesting and story well told, although you can't help but think that the author is trying to give you a history lesson.

If you want a history book that teaches you about the fight for power in Britain and France post 1066 with a smattering of adventure and crusade then this is for you.

Alison says

I enjoyed this book but felt that it was over-written - the style was a bit too "academic" (in a bad way) in that the author seemed to have swallowed the dictionary and so sacrificed some of the speed and impact of the narrative. This particularly applied to the battle scenes and could be forgiven only because the narrator is supposed to be an old man (Prince Edgar) who is "good with words" and a diplomat, as written down by a cleric: a device reminiscent of Alfred Duggan. As a consequence it meant that, though "action-packed", the story never felt very "active".

William Goodrich says

Great read

Loved it. Really appreciated how it tied to the holy land and the timing. Thought it did a great job contextualizing the period.

Avery Christy says

Much like the previous book, I knew this was going to be a work of fiction set in a historical scenario, and to not take this as historical gospel truth. I greatly enjoyed this book, which again Forest Gumps the characters through the great historical situations and with people of the time. And again, it got me wanting to go do actual research on the events and people used in the novel to learn something factual. I enjoyed the characters and the story, but did get a little bit tired of the pushed philosophy of 'why can't we all get along'. I don't think people thought like that during this time period, it felt far too contemporary of a thinking and I did not appreciate that. Still, I was able to look past that and enjoy the action and good storytelling. I'd recommend this to anyone.

Robin Carter says

Book one by Stewart Binns seems to have been a bit like marmite, you either loved it or hated it. I thought it was great and made an effort to get in touch and tell him so, and he was kind and polite enough to respond. Since that book one i have been looking forward to what he would produce next, and there has not be a massive amount of advance notice, but when it came i was concerned it might be a bit of the band wagon, the crusades are popular right now.

Its not, what he has produced here is a very good well told credible tale of what might have been following on from Conquest: a book that for the first time ever made me stop and wonder why are the British reserved, why are they also adventurous, where does our mix of national make up come from, what forged this great nation.

Crusade goes one better and shows you the first founding layers of the type of people being created by the amalgamation of all these races and ideals and personalities.

Also for the first time since i started reading David Gemmell back in 1986 i think i now know who Druss the legend is modeled on, and i don't know why it didn't come to me reading book 1. Gemmell had a penchant for making some of his characters a mirror for characters from history EG: Ulric = Genghis. I think Hereward = Druss. I'm not sure if that made me love it more, but i suddenly saw in Hereward the same ideals, the same blunt honesty, the same brotherhood, the same implacable killer if he had to be, but ultimately a man who just wanted the world to be better.

Stewart's writing is not a new Gemmell, but to have his writing make me think of him, that's impressive enough for me.

The story..well read the blurb I'm giving none of the plot away. But the characters slowly come alive on the page, and it brought to life a period of history again i knew little to nothing about. That make it a winner for me

Im going to be very interested to see what book 3 brings.

Buy this book

(Parm)

Description from back of book

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The few survivors of the English resistance look to Edgar the Atheling, the rightful heir to the English throne, to overthrow William the Conqueror. Years of intrigue and vicious civil war follow: brother against brother, family against family, friend against friend.

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Lesley Lodge says

Like the first book, Conquest, (Crusade is its sequel) Crusade takes a little while to get into. But this is because it tells a whole story with a great deal of historical accuracy. And it is a thrilling tale. Crusade really brings to life the detail of life in twelfth century England, Europe and the crusader countries, from the food through to the weapons. This book is a classic, reminiscent in style and breadth of the great Tolstoy novels, with elements of storytelling akin to the Icelandic sagas. A really great read.

Laurence says

Even though I do enjoy historical fiction I found this novel a bit of a toil as it seemed slightly disjointed. The large lapses of years between events didn't really help the story progression or allow the reader to engage adequately with the characters. The novel was an average read that was enjoyable in parts but a bit lacking overall

Dean says

I enjoyed this book as well and will continue to read the remaining books in the series. These books are a good read for the beach or a day at the lake. Fast, easy reads with lots of action.

Sonny says

Started out a little slow but ended up relatively entertaining.

Speesh says

1072. England is firmly under the heel of its new Norman rulers. The few survivors of the English resistance look to Edgar the Atheling, the rightful heir to the English throne, to overthrow William the Conqueror. Years of intrigue and vicious civil war follow, which will see brother against brother, family against family, friend against friend.

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Stewart Binns' second book in his Making of England tetralogy (go look it up), brings us to the aftermath of the 1066 conquest. Hereward, who was the source for the story in book one, is gone from England and here, we see the story through the eyes of Edgar, who should, by rights, if it wasn't for William invading and all, be King of England. He isn't. He's a recluse in the northern parts of England, in touch with the land and the ancestors of the ancient peoples. So the story is told by him and of course, is based around his travels and

recollections. Hereward still casts a long shadow over the book. Here, he is as much a talisman, as the amulet they carry. If only he would come back, or come to their aid, it'll be alright. Hereward is getting a re-working through James Wilde's books, but he still needs to emerge from the title of England's forgotten hero (for example my spell-check constantly wants to alter Hereward to Hereford, the ignominy!). Stewart Binns has done his part excellently in Conquest and here in Crusade.

How much is truth and how much is fiction, it's hard to tell. Though, that is a good thing. Of course, the stand-out highlights, the aftermath of the invasion, the Norman possessions in Italy and Sicily, the First Crusade are well-documented historical fact. A lot of the other stuff, the friends and companions he makes and travels and fights with, not so sure. As with the first book, to have the aim of basically weaving a tale around and through the major (European and Middle Eastern) events of the period, does mean the main character has got get around a fair bit, meeting the leading personalities and being present at a vast assortment of the major battles, etc. If you've read the first, you'll know the type of thing going on here. However, rather than seeming strained, Stewart Binns' style and plotting really doesn't feel too strained. Actually, it reminded me of Tim Severin's Viking series in that way. A thorough knowledge of the main points, interestingly and well formulated into a story. As with Tim Severin's work(s) I also found that Binns' style is a nice type of melancholy, as befits a main character telling his story, looking back, missing the friends he's telling about and maybe rueing the chances he didn't take, the opportunities he didn't make the most of and the way fate passed him by. There are therefore, some nicely poignant sections. Particularly referring to Senlac Hill (look it up). About it now being just 20 years after and all Englishmen are thinking about it constantly. Not something I'd thought about before as we usually see the next period of history, through the Normans' eyes.

It's an un-cluttered style, simple and direct, no aires and graces. I've not read reviews of this (or the other books), but I'd imagine that many self-styled 'discerning' Historical Fiction writers and reviewers would pooh-pooh the books for this very reason. You and I; we can sit back and enjoy the ride. And enjoy it I did, very much.

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