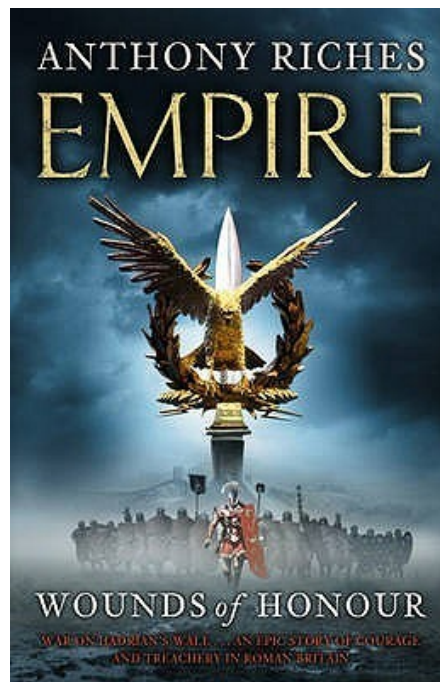




Wounds of Honour

Anthony Riches

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'A master of the genre' *The Times*

Thrilling, authentic and action-packed, this novel introduces soldier hero Marcus Valerius: a centurion stationed on Hadrian's Wall in the second century during a revolt against the Roman Empire. Marcus Valerius Aquila has scarcely landed in Britannia when he has to run for his life - condemned to dishonorable death by power-crazed emperor Commodus. The plan is to take a new name, serve in an obscure regiment on Hadrian's Wall and lie low until he can hope for justice. Then a rebel army sweeps down from the wastes north of the Wall, and Marcus has to prove he's hard enough to lead a century in the front line of a brutal, violent war.

Wounds of Honour Details

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From Reader Review Wounds of Honour for online ebook

Jacqui says

As I have mentioned previously, I like books about the Roman Empire especially the armies, so when I found this series and read the description, I was hooked: Marcus Valerius Aquila has scarcely landed in Britannia when he has to run for his life - condemned to dishonourable death by power-crazed emperor Commodus. The plan is to take a new name, serve in an obscure regiment on Hadrian's Wall and lie low until he can hope for justice. Then a rebel army sweeps down from the wastes north of the Wall, and Marcus has to prove he is hard enough to lead a century in the front line of a brutal, violent war.

This was the authors' first book, so I was prepared for the writing not to flow as well as say Simon Scarrow, who has written numerous excellent books on the legions. I also had a few doubts after reading that the author had a military degree. Having read some well-written but very technical books in the past, I was wary of receiving a history lesson when all I wanted was to enjoy a story. I need not have worried, although the author has obviously researched his subject matter and has a great deal of knowledge, this is incorporated into the writing quite naturally so an entertaining world of 2nd Century Britain and the Romans is created for the reader. I can hear you say that there are numerous other Roman books out there so what makes this one different. I know that there are many of these books, I have read quite a few of them, but the style of writing in this one makes it different. The story sounds a bit familiar, a young man suddenly finds himself alone after his family is killed and is forced to make his own way against all the odds, hiding his identity. The writer takes this simple idea and builds on it creating a situation and a character that the reader can believe and sympathise with. There are some great characters in this book that support Marcus the young centurion who suddenly gets his world turned upside down by being declared traitor. To name just a few, you have Rufius the veteran, Dubnus, who Marcus names his chosen man, Antenoch, who initially thinks that Marcus will be an easy target to beat and then becomes his man and saves his life and the First Spear who knows Marcus's secret. There is action from the word go in this book with no let up in the pace of the story, with plenty of intrigue to keep you interested. In fact, you find yourself so caught up with the plot that you do not want to stop reading. I read some reviews that criticize a lack of polish in the writing with some of the characters speeches being unclear. This is slightly true, but in no way does this take anything away from the story. Speaking as someone who is struggling to write a book, if I thought anything I was writing could get up half as good as this one, I would be over the moon. I would recommend this to anyone, not only those who likes Roman books but anyone who is looking for a good book to lose themselves in for a while.

Ruth says

C2009: Marcus Valerius Aquila now has a new follower. I thoroughly enjoyed this book and although there wasn't anything tremendously unique about the plot or themes, it didn't matter – it was a great story. To me, it is the mark of a good writer to be able to achieve this and somehow it seemed that the author was not only passionate about this particular part of history but had managed to flesh out personalities from perhaps dry historical 'facts'. Certainly, the bravery required from warriors on both sides of the Wall needed a type of courage that is hard to imagine. Salt that description with humour and a few basic human behaviours – and an authentic picture comes to life. I really had a good chuckle at the part where Dubnus was 'translating' Marcus' first speech to his century ending with the caution that 'life in this century changes now' which Dubnus relayed to the troops as, "Your hairy white arses are mine from this second. Get ready to grab your ankles." Daft Marcus is really not well equipped to deal with the 'secret' and managed to reveal it accidentally to a few people. Annoying but I can imagine this to be more lifelike than to be able to moderate all information coming out of one's mouth especially when one thinks that one is in the right! And the

graffiti artist struck again. I am not quite sure why but a question mark was placed by the phrase, "a sharp wind to mercifully cool the hard-marching cohorts." I don't see anything wrong with this so its all a bit of a mystery. Definitely recommended to the normal crew. FWFTB: Britannia, dishonourable, Praetorian, army, brutal. FCN: Marcus Valerius Aquila, Dubnus the Brigantian, Rufius, Equitius, Felicia Clodia Drusilla.

Jane says

1.5/5. I kept reading to the end to see the outcome of the story. The book was not badly written on the whole, but I personally hated the vulgarisms, profanity, modernisms, and absolute coarseness. Dialogue was terrible. You only have to read the extended quote where Marcus is haranguing his men, to see what I mean. The soldiers, garrison life and 'basic training' sounded like modern GIs transplanted into an ancient Roman setting. Had Mr. Riches been in the military, borrowing from his own experiences? The setting: of Roman auxiliaries--the Tungrians--on Hadrian's Wall was original. I think the author was trying to show male bonding as a main theme.

Any gruesomeness of battle scenes did not bother me, but the love interest subplot was not plausible and clumsily done. I also did not like the use of English translations of the Latin or Celtic names of the forts. I didn't understand the logic of this usage. Others may enjoy this book, but it was just not my 'cup of tea.' I had bought the book, but gave it away to someone I felt would enjoy it.

After this novel and the second in the series [which was a bit better], I won't continue. This series is absolutely not to my taste, although as a whole I really like Roman fiction.

Terri says

Andy McNab meets the Second Century AD only with twice the cumstains and a cock jockey or two. Yes. You read right. It is what I said. Cumstains and cock jockeys. An example of two words that appeared in the book and that I feel should not have appeared in the book. If it surprised you to see them here in my review, imagine how I felt to find them in the Second Century AD. And yet they help me make my point, because it is from within those cumstains and cock jockeys that springs my compatibility issue with this book. The modernity of the dialogue. The slang, the swearing, the modern colloquialisms and the pressure of a modern military setting compressed into an historical one.

I appreciate that there are readers who enjoy this series and this book in particular. That is fine. We all have different likes and dislikes. Some of my dislikes in historical fiction happen to be the prevalence of our modern slang words, swearwords and mannerisms. I can deal with one every now and then, but when it is too often and too much it sounds modern and I don't read historical fiction to feel like I am down the Angler's Arms pub pulling kegs on a Darts Premier League finals night.

The other dislike I have with historical fiction is when the author forces our modern military culture into the book. Where you feel at any stage you will turn the page and a Roman soldier will be humping to an overwatch position, or asking for a Sit Rep or pulling out a bag of nuts and calling it an MRE. If I wanted that feel in my books I would read an Andy McNab novel, although even a McNab novel doesn't have as much British squaddie in them as Wounds of Honour does.

For all my dislikes, I concede that people read books for different reasons. I am not a fan of this style of historical fiction, but so many others are and apart from criticisms about modernity and giving an ancient

culture the loud scarlet wash of our modern culture, there is still plenty the book has to offer readers. The writing is not awful, except for the dense use of modern words and mannerisms, I thought it was pretty good. The plot is not too deep and presents as fun to most no doubt, even I was enjoying the story for the first 80 pages or so and was able to overcome my aversions.

The book is far from being pulp fiction rubbish. There is plenty of skill and research within it. The author has put a lot of effort into this book and for that reason I would never condemn it to anyone. If anyone were to ask me, I would explain that it is a just a case of being incompatible. Then I would recommend the book to them because in my experience the majority are going to like it. I have seen this first hand as I read the book with others and I know others who rave about the series all the time.

I will always be honest if I think a book is awful and have given it two stars because of it. However, in the case of Wounds of Honour I am not giving it two stars for that reason. I am giving it two stars because it is not my kind of book. Simple as that.

Stuart says

"Even when running to escape the past, you will end up fighting it in the future"

Anthony Riches "Empire - Wounds of Honour" slots in well within Roman fiction. It is certainly reminiscent of Simon Scarrow's Eagles series.

Many authors who tackle the Roman's focus upon Britain and the subsequent conquest of what will become the northern reaches of the Roman Empire. Anthony Riches begins his tale some 139 years after the original conquest of Britain's (which was 43 AD under Emperor Claudius - Math isn't my strong point!). Hadrian's Wall was constructed around 128 AD. Why? To stop the northern tribes from harassing Roman settlements - it acted as a buffer zone. Was it effective, yes and no. The Picts descended past the wall several times. Anyway, this isn't a history lesson.

So we find ourselves reading the story of a young Centurion Marcus Valerius Aquila attached to the Praetorian Guard, fleeing for his life from Rome in Britain, where he is promised protection by a Roman Legatus. Things, as you can imagine, don't work out as planned. Especially given that Emperor Commodus now reigns - and what a megalomaniac he was! The Emperor has his family murdered for conspiracies against Rome - more like paranoia of an insecure man.

The story itself really falls into a two-fold telling. Valerius is running for his life after his family is accused of treason, he finds himself as a Centurion for the First Tungrians, commanding the Ninth Cohort. He gets some help on the way from a veteran of the Sixth Legion (Rufius) and a bullish Briton named Dubnes - who is a Chosen man, similar to the rank of Optio. The First are auxiliaries, this type of soldier are generally maligned in history - but imagine that nearly 2/3rds of the Roman army consisted of such troops variants at one time. Then the tale continues with his struggle to 'hide' his persona from Imperial agents and the conflict with Calgus and the northern tribes (or as Mr Riches states "blue-nose-fuckers").

I couldn't find a flaw with the dialogue, it's sharp and witty in part. There is always a lot said about modern swearing in historical fiction, especially ancient history. I personally don't have an issue with it, as it can be argued swearing was part of everyday life in ancient times. There are examples of cursing and derogatory remarks from such historical works as Hipponax (a lovely ancient Greek poet) to Sallust's and Tacitus

writings where they openly insult Roman officers, families and emperors. There are so many examples, the evidence is plain to see. Life isn't so vetted in the real world.

As for characters, Valerius is believable if a little to akin to Cato from Simon Scarrow's Eagles fame. This goes for the same of Quintius Rufius, the battled hardened veteran who reminded me of Marco. There really isn't much of a difference in regards to how they find themselves at the beginning of the story. Some of the supporting cast are a joy to read, including, Dubnes for his ability to always being there. Tribune Perennis for being a conniving git and Scarface for being, what I would call, a typical Roman soldier (through Romanized). Calgus, who is the leader of the northern tribes is a disappointment. I really didn't feel his role of the villain (if you will) was ever fleshed out in the story. He just seemed to find himself in the role! I didn't really get the feeling of hatred which was a staple of those who detested what was a type of Romanization - that's not a term I use often.

"Wounds of Honour" is a good read. You can tell Anthony Riches has a degree in Military History. The engagements were well written and showed evidence of both tactical and military knowledge. It's good that the language doesn't weigh too heavily on accuracy in regards to Latin - I have enough of that with my own academic work. I generally read to ease that burden of my mind, it's good to have that ability to escape, but at the same time enjoy the eras of history I study about. Kudos to Mr Riches, I'll be reading further into the series.

Beorn says

Make no mistake this is no melodramatic Roman saga, this is stonecold hard meat.

This book is the epitome of blood, sweat and no tears when it comes to Roman period historical fiction. At the same time it doesn't resort to the angle often adopted by authors trying to set themselves apart from the usual 'epic' style Roman novels, namely gratuitously large amounts of gore and bloodletting to hide the threadbare plot. While this novel undeniably has its share of bloodletting, it feels a lot more calculated and integral to the plot rather than be superfluous. It's possibly this that adds to the whole feeling of just how realistically grisly this novel feels.

The plot is also developed so well and insidiously that right when you think you can predict, say, when one of the main protagonists Tribune Perennis is going to meet a sticky end, you realise you've been sold a red herring, only to later find it almost sneaking up on you. It is also done so cleverly that even though you know, because there's at least another few sequels, that the lead character survives, it doesn't diminish the potency of the various threats against his life.

If I were to wax lyrical with an overdose of hyperbole, I could say that this book fairly well encompasses the Roman, and later, view of Britain. Cold, slightly bleak, full of barbarian hostility, Roman iron and cynical men of steel.

If you like your historical fiction gritty, realistic and downright no pomposity, this is a brilliant book/series for you to throw yourself headlong into.

Flemming says

while I appreciate a good story about Romans in Britain, this is ruined by the mary-sue that is the main

character. Not only is he, at age 19, THE best swordsman with DUAL swords, he can also step into line with legionaries, and he doesn't need a shield, that's how badass he is. Nevermind the fact that this is how the Roman Legions bested the tribes of Gaul and Britain but no, he is so damn awesome, he can do without, and STILL be a part of the unit. He is also impossible modest, and the only time he ever gets hit on the head, it's just so that he can wake up and sleep with the beautiful doctor that runs the hospital, is married to a BAD MAN, and that EVERYONE wants, but of course, James Bond gets her..sorry, Marcus gets her.

Basically, the story got away from the author, and he ended up indulging in a bit of male power fantasy instead of writing a book about the Roman occupation of Britain.

Nice cover, though.

Chris F says

I enjoyed this book with the story keeping me interested throughout. For most of the book I was thinking 4 stars, but felt the dialogue during the last quarter was a bit weak and let down the well-written action scenes a little. Also the ending was just too neat and tidy. This is the author's first book though and he seems to have gained a wide audience with the books that have followed this one in the series, so well worth continuing with the series as a solid start could get even better.

Rosa Chacón García says

Novela entretenida de romanos que se lee en una tarde.

Por si le sirve alguien tiene un estilo muy parecido a las novelas de Simon Scarrow.

Conor says

Wounds of Honour was a light, enjoyable read with plenty of exhilarating action scenes. Unfortunately it was also pretty predictable and unremarkable, especially in terms of plot. This was a pretty typical piece of Roman historical fiction focusing on the adventures of a centurion serving in the legions, it did this reasonably well and was a solid example of the genre.

The action scenes in this were frequent, bloody and exciting. Unlike other books I've read recently (Steven Erikson's Malazan Books especially) this one takes a somewhat parochial view of war. Rather than focusing on the human tragedy, war is mostly presented as an exhilarating adventure. While this would be jarring in another book (see the Malazan books above) here this shallow portrayal fits with the generally straightforward plot and emphasises this book's focus on action and adventure rather than more weighty themes. Lack of philosophical and sociological depth aside the action scenes in this book were still intense and compelling.

The plot of this book was extremely well-worn with a number of familiar tropes. One of the most familiar occurred when the main character, directly after joining the army was assigned to a unit filled with misfits. Uh-oh. *Sitcom laugh-track plays in the background*. Despite his inexperience as a commander, the lower quality of his troops to start with and the fact that he has less time to train them than the other officers he somehow manages to turn them into a crack unit (and while the other officers are still presented as highly

competent, rather than the morons logic would dictate in this situation). That being said while many plot-points were predictable and formulaic it was always well handled and the story kept moving forward at a good pace, greatly helped by the frequent action scenes.

The characters in this book are well-drawn and serve their role in facilitating the plot well but are ultimately formulaic and lack depth. The main character is a young man (who is also somehow a blademaster) who goes on the run after his family is attacked by an evil tyrant. Then it turns out he's also an orphan. And later on he gets a special sword. For reals. Other characters include a gruff veteran, the heroes feisty love interest, a badass cavalry commander and a despicable traitor. Despite being very formulaic these characters were still enjoyable to read about. Standout characters for me were the hero's aristocratic commanding officer who possessed an intriguing mixture of honour and ambition and the exiled prince serving as the his second in command, whose complex and often seemingly contrasting personal code was never really explored and who had a really interesting backstory that was only touched upon here and which I hope will come to the fore in later books.

Overall I enjoyed this book without ever being particularly challenged or enthralled. Although I've been somewhat deterred by the massive, money-spinning expansion of this series (I heard that it might stretch to 25 books) I might check out the following books in the future if I'm in search of light reading.

Dawn says

Romans and Britain. I seem to be reading quite a few books with this theme lately. This one is pretty close to my favorite of the lot.

While I did have to suspend belief a couple times and roll my eyes every time Marcus told someone else his 'secret', I thoroughly enjoyed the characters, the writing and the story.

The battles were epic, whether they were small or large. The all important (at least to me) supporting cast was stellar and story kept me turning pages so fast I finished this book in 3 days.

Ben Kane says

I have a confession to make. I bought this book when it came out, 3 years ago. To my shame, I didn't read it until last summer. What a mistake that was! Anyway, I took it on holiday with me. I read half of it in the airport and on the plane. By bedtime, it was two-thirds. I finished it the next morning over coffee. To me, that's the sign of a damn fine read.

I should also point out that the topic of the book - a real life rebellion in and around Hadrian's Wall in AD 181, was the topic of my first, unpublished novel. I am happy to say that I'm glad my book never saw the light of day, because this one is far better!

There's no need for me to go into the plot, as other reviewers have covered that very well. Suffice it to say that in Marcus, Dubnus, Morban et al, Riches has created a set of living, breathing characters who bring the pages of this fast-paced, action-packed book to life. The reality of life in 2nd century AD Roman Britain, the camaraderie of soldiers, the filth and gore of war, the chilling feelings engendered at betrayal by one's own, the grief of losing one's family to a terrible injustice - they're all here. Anthony Riches is to be commended

on producing such a great read!

Chris Thomas says

A really solid read. A tad predictable, but enjoyable none the less. Builds nicely to the final battle scene, which lasts nearly 60 pages! It has everything a good plot needs, without getting too complicated. After reading this, feel more educated in the ways of the roman armies, their lifestyle, fighting techniques and defensive tactics. Is there a better way to be educated than to read a good story?

James says

To begin with I think I need to explain where I am coming from when writing this review. This book is not of the highest quality, but it entertains amazingly well. It falls into so many of the pitfalls of not just historical fiction, but fiction as a whole, but still manages to leave you loving it. All the way through I was picking out error after error - not just historically, but writing style and the fact that some things just didn't 'work' - but at the same time I could not stop, I just had to read and did so with this big eff-off grin on my face. I loved it. But hated it.

It was everything you want from a book - entertaining, relentless, addictive - but at the same time I was cursing Riches for the simple mistakes he was making. So when I give this four stars, I am giving it **Four Stars** for it's entertainment value, which is ultimately what a fictional book should be judged on. But if I was to give this a rating for technique (plot, believability) then I would probably give it two. So there, now you know where I am coming from - maybe - and hopefully have an idea of what this book is like already.

So. The plot. Well, it was... fun, fascinating, relentless but at the same time it lacked that believability behind it. Maybe that's a bit harsh, I suppose the storyline was solid - to an extent - and that it was just the way that it was written, realised that made it seem to false. Actually, yeah, that's about right. This was a good, solid plot that was let down by its telling.

The characters then? Well, I think my main problem is with Marcus. He was the most contradictory character that I can think of - on one hand he was a young Roman reeling from a family disaster, but on the other hand he seemed to be an old man who was confident and secure in what he was doing. When I first picked up this book I skimmed to the middle and read a passage and my first impression was that he was a late twenties veteran, but then I started reading it for real and found out he was meant to be a 18/19 year old 'ceremonially trained' centurion with no battle experience who is running for his life after losing everyone in his family. Simply put, there were two completely separate characters going on within 'Marcus'. I usually frown upon this - and I am, admittedly - but at the same time Marcus was really likeable, and a perfect receptacle for the reader. Yes, he was basically a barely better written character than a Martin-Sue, but he worked, and in the end he was a good, enjoyable character. So no, he won't be on my list of favourite literary characters, but he is good enough. Just.

As some other reviewer said, it is the support cast that really shine in this light. They are all correct, tangible, real people - they have their flaws, they have their positives and Riches stuck to them. If he had done that with Marcus then I guarantee you that we would have had one of the best characters in the genre on our hands. But he didn't, he did it for the support cast. Easily one of the best support cast in the genre - make of that what you will.

And the writing... well, writing style was good(ish). It didn't get in the way, it told the tale, I can't think of any negatives in that regard. But, in general, his style made the whole thing come across as slightly fake and... almost like it had been written for puberty driven boys who wanted an adventure. However, he did it well enough that I could overlook this - even though a more gritty and 'real' Britain and tale would have been nice.

So should you read this? On entertainment value alone. Yes. Yes you should. If you are new to the genre then all I have to say is, if you read this book then don't use it to judge the genre as a whole - there are better [and worse] historical fiction books out there.

Have Fun Reading.

S.J.A. Turney says

I've waited until I finished the third book in this series before posting a review of any of them, and for a particular reason. Most of the historical series I've read consist of a new separate story with each book, often defined by a narrator's pause or some such device. Most series are different stories with different themes that build a series.

While clearly part of a series, Tony's first three Empire books are different. To me they follow on so closely and seamlessly that the series so far could easily be seen as one huge story spread over three books with appropriate pauses between releases. The stories are readable independently, for sure, but the best will be got from them by reading them one after the other. Quite simply, you can't read one book of this series without wanting to go on with the story. In order to get the best from the story, you need to read them all, and for the best possible results, I would suggest back-to-back.

A second thing that I would say that concerns each of Tony's works is what I consider his greatest strength as an author: The gritty military reality of his tale-telling. I have spent some time in my life, in a civilian situation but alongside men of military units, and there is something so authentic about Tony's characterisation that it felt truly familiar and real. You will find it hard to disbelieve anything about Tony's depiction of the legions, auxiliary troopers, the cavalry, their structure, style, attitude and actions. While no one can confirm exactly how soldiers then spoke and acted, it's hard to believe they were any different from the modern military and Tony has made these ancient soldiers understandable and relevant to the modern reader.

I feel that it is better for me to review the series as a whole, which I have given an appropriate 5 stars of 5, and then add a short section on the individual novel. I find it almost impossible to put down Tony's books and eagerly await the Leopard Sword to see what new direction the series might take.

Book One

Wounds of honour is a wonderful beginning, introducing a number of characters that you will love and that will go through the series with you.

From the protagonist, a fugitive from Imperial justice who will continue to take your breath away in exciting and violent ways as each new talent of his becomes apparent, to the grim centurions who have served long on the frontier, to the oily son of a Roman aristocrat seeking the hero's downfall, the story takes place against a background of violent war and tribal pride, beleaguered forts and inter-unit rivalries, and centres around a 'training of misfits' theme that is both exciting and humorous at times. The book has a solid and exciting

concussion while clearly not finishing the whole story. Wounds of Honour introduces the reader to life on Hadrian's Wall in an era of troubles, to the auxiliary units that serve there and, in particular, to the First Tungrian cohort, who will become central to the series.
