



Swords and Scimitars

Linda Lee Chaikin

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Framed for a murder he didn't commit, Tancred Redwan is a knight torn between his father's Norman blood and the Moorish blood of his mother. Forced to flee for his life, Tancred travels the golden hills of Palermo to the seven jeweled hills of the Byzantine capitol. Caught up in the turbulent events surrounding the Peasant Crusade, he is again forced to make a difficult choice as Christian Europe arms for the First Crusade to rescue the Holy Lands from infidels.

Swords and Scimitars Details

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Author : Linda Lee Chaikin

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Tamara says

So I read this and the second book a long time ago, and I remember liking them a lot. (I read them twice.) I never knew there was a third book, so now I'll have to see if I can find all three of them!

Suzannah says

THE BACK COVER PROMISED THE KIND OF SWEEPING HISTORICAL ROMANCE SHE LOVED, BUT THE CONTENTS DELIVERED LESS THAN EXCELLENCE.

Ahem. Got to love those cheesy Bethany House cover blurbs.

So, I decided to read this for two reasons. One is that I once somewhere acquired a wish to try out some Linda Chaikin. The other is that I am studying the Crusades and hey sure why not let's read a fun historical novel set during that period.

Overall I would not recommend this book. The history is flattened like a pancake, the plot and characterisation are far from believable, and words are misused all over the place (how does one have an "artistic face"?).

The history is all minced up. For example:

- Lots of things are called by anachronistic modern names. The Eastern Romans are called Byzantines. Hired killers are called Assassins, which is weird because this was the point in history at which western Europeans discovered the historical Assassin sect. Armed pilgrims are called crusaders.
- Did you know that all medieval peasants were superstitious idiots who went to the Holy Land not to liberate it from the Saracens but because they had been promised gold and land? That all Byzantines were cowardly, devious, and effete schemers and liars? That all medieval Jews were saintly and learned? Me either. Not to say there's no truth in any of these things, but I don't believe Anna Comnena either when she says that all Kelts were so greedy they would sell their own mothers for a song. I certainly won't believe Linda Chaikin's equally sweeping generalisations. As for going on Crusade to get rich, that idea has been thoroughly discredited by more recent historians.
- Related, true, Alexius Comnenus was an acquired taste and a supremely agile diplomat, but you do not trash talk him like this. The man was supremely competent, a brilliant general, the veteran of a squillion battles (beginning at age 14). He was also not without great personal piety - if you believe his admittedly biased daughter.
- "I serve no master", says the hero, a knight from a medieval feudalistic society in which everyone was linked by overlapping rights and responsibilities.

So why did I stick with this rather painful book? I wanted to know what Chaikin would say about the Crusades. This was very useful and interesting. As a supercessionist myself, I was surprised by her focus on

the Jews and her insistence that true Biblical faith demanded that the Holy Land belong neither to Muslims nor Christians but to the Jews. Don't get me wrong, they've got it now and I wish them all joy of it, but I was amazed that Chaikin would insist that the reason the Crusades were a farce was because the land belonged to the Jews anyway.

In so saying Chaikin completely misses the actual historical belief among the crusaders that the Holy Land belonged not to them nor to Muslims nor to Jews but to CHRIST. That is a belief I can share in so far as that goes, but the medievals put their own twist on things: they believed that he died siezed of the land. That it was his patrimony and that they as faithful liege warriors of Christ had the responsibility to defend it against his enemies. Of course it was their responsibility and not the Jews', for the Jews had rejected Christ and the Christians, not the Jews, were his followers.

So yes, there was an actual legitimate theological underpinning to the aim of the Crusaders, which Chaikin either ignores or is ignorant of.

Nevertheless, while historically ill-informed, I thought this book contained some really great and thought-provoking commentary on the First Crusade. Was it really God's will for those warriors to go on Crusade? Was it not arrogant and deluded of them to claim God's will for their blood-soaked campaign?

Or, given that the Crusades actually succeeded, however precariously, for 200 years, were they so far out in claiming the will of God?

That's the question that's really going to do my head in.

Claudette says

Did not finish.

Johnny Bennett says

Sword and Scimitars is a book that has been read multiple times and held in the collection for years. The historical setting seems well enough researched that it drove interest to study the People's Crusade. The storytelling is compelling and the characters just believable enough. Though Tancred Redwan is a bit too much white knight superhero. A little action. A little romance. And an okay amount of political intrigue. When you throw in the dichotomy of good Muslims and bad Christians in a christian book, one that also hints at the unfair and unfavorable treatment of Jews, one gets a good example of how religion applied to politics and likewise politics applied to religion, leads to neither one being appropriately applied to the people.

Melody says

Really enjoying the story so far... Entertaining well developed characters, great pace, predictable in some parts, but also some interesting twists and turns. My only complaint (and this is probably really my fault) is

that I didn't realize it was the first of a series, so I got to the end in the middle of the story and won't have access to the next book for quite a while. Kind of a bummer...
