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AUTHOR OF *The Black Rood* AND *Byzantium*

**STEPHEN R.
LAWHEAD**
THE CELTIC CRUSADES
**THE IRON
LANCE**



The Iron Lance

Stephen R. Lawhead

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Booklist

Scotland, 1095. While his father and brothers follow Pope Urban II's call to win Jerusalem from the infidels, Murdo Ranulfson stays behind to guard his family's interests. But when his home is confiscated by greedy usurpers, Murdo is forced to follow the Crusades himself. Hoping to find his father and redeem his family's land, Murdo sets off on a journey that leads him to the Mediterranean—the heart of civilization now threatened by barbarian hordes—and on to the fabled city of Constantinople and beyond, to the Holy Land. Amidst brutality and ambition, Murdo discovers what he seeks—and obtains a relic that will guide him and his descendants for centuries.

Rich in heroism, treachery, and adventure, *The Iron Lance* begins an epic trilogy of Scottish noble family fighting for its existence and its faith during the age of the Crusades—and of a secret society whose ceremonies will shape history for a millennium.

The Iron Lance Details

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From Reader Review The Iron Lance for online ebook

The Nerd Book Review says

I have to admit I read his book around 2000 and remember very little other than that I really enjoyed all 3 books in the trilogy and it was about several generations of k Igor's fighting in the crusades. There was also a bit of a supernatural element in it. I was reading a book recently that reminded me a bit of a series I read back in high school and after a bit of research I remembered this was the series I was thinking of haha.

Marcia Chocinsky says

Interesting read on the Crusades and those who participated from the Northern Isles. I found this book interesting and absorbing most of the time. However, there were parts which dragged on like all the emporer playing mind games with the various Lords. Oh well, I found those parts boring but the rest was more than okay. Murdo, Emlyn and company were entertaining. Now on to Book Two!

Fiona Hocking says

I've had some pretty big wins choosing orange. found a great hairdresser because of the colour of his chairs, for example. When trying to work out why I picked up this book in the 1st place, all i can come up with is that it's cover is orange. this isn't the kind of book i usually read; but then who chooses to read slow, ponderous dirge. stay away, stay well away. having said that, did learn some history from a time I have no interest in.

Heather says

Rating B+

Review As I've found with all of Stephen Lawhead's books (my initiation into the world of Celtic mythology and the Fantasy sub-genre), this book was just a little slow on the ramp-up of the book, but, paradoxically, by the end, I couldn't read it fast enough.

The story of Murdo's travels cover a long-forgotten Scotland (with names of places that were entirely unfamiliar to me because this was a Scotland shortly after the turn of the 11th century) all the way across the Mediterranean to the sun-scorched lands of ancient Byzantium and Jerusalem and back. The settings in this book, whether on farms, on boats, in walled citadels, or amongst a military encampment were so evocative that you feel as if you're right there traveling with Murdo and his pals.

Additionally, related to the setting, the description of the battles was really interesting (and hard) to read. Most often Murdo doesn't fight (because of his tender age), but comes through the area after the siege and sees the carnage and the evil that has been played out on the land and its inhabitants, which was a new way to portray war. I actually found it more interesting to read than Lawhead's descriptions of front-line action of fighting that are in some of his other novels. Also, this allowed for some nice philosophising about war and

related topics that was interesting to read.

Beyond just describing a place or a feeling well, Lawhead describes people well. From the terror seen on a Turkish woman's face when her baby is being killed by crusading knights, to Murdo's elation at first love, to his crushing grief following his father's death, to the wisdom of Emperor Alexis, every character is meaningful and richly-drawn. The monks who go with Murdo, who are from an off-beat sect of Catholicism (not approved by the church), inspire him to greatness and are an interesting comparison to other monks and clergymen seen in the book (not that all monks and clergymen are money-hungry thieves). I also greatly enjoyed reading about the sea captain, Jon Wing, who gets Murdo safely from Scotland to the Middle East and back. He was so different from both the monks and the noblemen that it made for an interesting character study in contrasts.

The most interesting part for me to read was of the noblemen--I greatly enjoyed their POV--because Lawhead painted the many-numbered lords in various hues, from the down-right silly, to the sage. I haven't read a lot of books that involved a monarchy system, but they're almost always portrayed in literature and film as irrational and brutish, but not all of them in Lawhead's world were like this. It was a different take on a common construct that was worth the read.

There were two things that I didn't like about this book, that resulted in the lowered grade. First, the pacing at the end was problematic. The climax and resolution are the last 10% of the book and, by this point, the book is moving fast and the plot is interesting, you're fully engaged, but Lawhead got a little too purple for my taste. I found myself skimming to get to the dialogue and description of action, I didn't need all the internal monologue at this point; I'd been waiting 400 pages and wanted the goods. It was mostly in the scenes as Murdo is returning to Scotland and trying to find the family he left behind, and I understand that Murdo was equally frustrated at having to wait, and it might have just been a writing device so the reader connects with Murdo's feelings, but the writing came across as unnecessarily over-wrought. I've said it before, and I'll say it again, if your reader is skimming, it means you haven't edited as well as you should have.

The other thing that bothered me, only slightly so, was that the bit of story about how Murdo's actions will affect the future of the world were thrown in at the beginning of each section of the book, but we don't know how they relate. The only evidence in the prose is that the stuff going on in 1899 Scotland is told via someone who is part of the same sect as Murdo's monk friends. Further, the epilogue did not reveal anything more than someone ranting about the Day of Judgment approaching soon. This is likely true, but it doesn't help us understand the connection to the two time periods in the book. I'm sure more will come out in future books, connecting 1100 Scotland to 1900 Scotland, but I feel this should have been edited differently.

Neil says

I enjoyed this book quite a bit. I have read it several times now; I probably read it once every other year or so [not quite once a year]. I think it has a good flow to it, overall. It was very descriptive in parts; it also helped me see the Crusades in a new light. So that was good.

The basic gist of the plot is this: a young man [Murdo] is unable to go on one of the first Crusades with his father and older brothers. Not realizing how large the world truly is, he anticipates his father and brothers returning within the year while he takes care of their homestead with his mother. Their lands are 'illegally' seized and they are forced to flee for their lives to a friend's hall. The young man decides he will find his father and brothers and return them home to right the horrific wrong done to him; he has a fly-by-night

wedding with his beloved and leaves the next day. Along the way he encounters some monks who are trying to reach their benefactor-king to act as his advisers. Murdo's travels and directions coincide with the priests' journey, and along the way he learns bits and pieces about the Cele De, a mysterious order that claims to protect and share 'the True Light.' Upon reaching the Holy Land, Murdo makes it to Jerusalem in time to watch the city be sacked by the Crusaders. He eventually finds his father and brothers before returning home with a treasure beyond compare. He has many experiences, some of which are mystical in nature and some of which are spiritual in nature; through them, he decides to create a safe haven for the Cele De because of the example they have set before him. He returns 'home' to his wife and his mother, his king having granted him new land holdings after discovering how Murdo's family lost their original land holdings and hall.

The story alternates between 'the modern times' [say, late 1800s/early 1900s] and Murdo's story. The story in the 'modern times' involves a descendant of Murdo's joining a mysterious group that seeks to protect and disseminate 'the Truth' in dark and perilous times; it is secretive because other forces [dark forces] in the World would seek to destroy them. I do not know how necessary these four [five?] forays into the 'future descendant' helped the book or story as a whole; it could have been done without. But as I tend to read this book on a regular basis and not the last two books in the series, perhaps I have forgotten how the author ties it all together at the end of the third book.

I think Lawhead also does a nice job describing Imperial life in Byzantium and the Eastern Empire [for lack of a better word]. So many people do not realize the Eastern Half of the former Roman Empire lasted much longer than the Western Half and stood as a bastion in the path of the Moors and Barbarians that prevented these groups from spreading into Europe. It was interesting to read about the different Crusader lords as well as Emperor Alexius - not one of them seemed to be a stereotypical character without any type of depth to them. Instead, each character was unique and different; sure, there were some similarities [which would make sense due to a similar upbringing] but each Crusader lord was uniquely different, which I felt added to the story.

The Sack of Jerusalem was horrendous and really opened my eyes to the horrors of the Crusades. I had no idea that essentially EVERYBODY was killed in Jerusalem [due in part to Crusader ignorance and due in part to the Crusaders not taking the time to figure out who 'the Enemy' truly was]. It was a very disturbing set of chapters in the book [which is what I am sure Lawhead was intending]. Perhaps it is the result of growing up in a private school, but unlike other reviewers I have read, I grew up believing the Crusades were a noble endeavor to free the Holy Land from Islamic oppressors and to protect pilgrims who wished to visit sites and towns seen as holy by Christians. It was not until I attended college that I learned how much the Crusades are despised by other people and are now seen as a blot [among many, unfortunately] on Christianity. I still remember the shock and horror of how I felt after reading about the Sack of Jerusalem the first time; it still grieves me each time I read about it.

My tangential opinion: (view spoiler) But enough of my soap box.

I have to admit, the first time I tried reading this book I quit before I started reading Murdo's story. The whole 'modern preface' thing about a future descendant joining some kind of secret, quasi-mystical society was a bit much for me and EXTREMELY BOOOORING!!!! Once I started reading about Murdo's adventures, I enjoyed the book. So what I would do whenever I re-read the book was that I would skip over the 'modern stuff' to get to 'the good stuff.' Lately, though, I read the whole book. I'm sure if I read the three books consecutively I'd have a better appreciation about the whole 'future descendant's storyline' thing going on, but maybe I wouldn't.

I liked how Murdo stayed true to himself and his core beliefs. I also liked how he transformed over the

course of the book, how the monks from the Cele De transformed his life by the living testimonies of their own lives. I felt this was one of the better parts of the book, and very believable [even despite some of the mystical encounters / visions that took place].

I loved how the three monks interacted with each other, especially when they were trying to be deceptive without lying or breaking any of the Commandments. They made a great team! Hilarious beyond belief! Some of their arguments/discussions were also rather funny to read. We mock the logic of those who lived 1000 years or so ago, but our 'modern-day logic' can be rather stupid/illogical, so perhaps we should not mock them too much. Their logic was based upon what they know; our 'modern logic' oftentimes seems bent on ignoring what we know in a pathetic attempt to seem PC or more acceptable. Granted, their logic wasn't as funny as Arthur's discussion with Sir Bedevere [about what floats on water in conjunction with how much a woman weighs, and how if she weighs as much as a duck, she can float, which means she's made of wood, which means she's a witch, and can [logically] be burned].

I think the book also does a great job showing how and why the deep animosity Muslims feel toward Christians started, on the one hand, and why they were [are] worried about Western forays into the Middle East being the harbingers of new 'Christian Crusades' against them. At the same time, I rarely read about Christian terrorists hijacking airplanes or killing innocent people [strangers] just to make some kind of bizarre political point. Anyway. Lawhead does a great job describing the animus, fear, and worry that the conquering rulers felt in regard to the surrounding countryside once the Crusader armies returned home. Not only did the Crusaders have to worry about attacks from the Muslims, they also had to worry about retaliation from the Christians, Copts, Jews, and Arabs [as well as other members of the diverse population in the region] after the indiscriminate killings inflicted by the Crusaders.

I definitely liked this book [and the full series] better than the Pendragon cycle or Dragon King series. The Empryon Saga still has a warm spot in my heart as the first set of Christian fiction [sci-fi] books I ever read. But I think this book [and this series of books] shows how Stephen Lawhead has grown as an author and improved upon his storytelling abilities.

Lance says

Big thank you to Adam, for recommending a book with my name in the title!

It was really interesting to read a post-grimdark fantasy series in 2016. I could feel the ideas evolving towards a bleaker world-view through the depictions of graphic violence against civilians and the flagrant self-interest of the highest ranking noblemen, although Bohemond and Dalassenus still came over as extremely charismatic figures. It was interesting to contrast this with the major plot resolution which upheld kingly honour and placed the testimony of a young vassal and his mother above that of an influential bishop. A charming "missing-link" novel, combining element of 1980's post-Tolkein honour narratives with the burgeoning demand for more gritty or grey fantasy characters. Very much a relic of its time.

Another element that I really found refreshing was the presence of a disabled love interest for the main character. Ragna was introduced as intelligent first and beautiful second, with both postural and facial deformities arising from an accident when she was a baby. I found this really authenticated the love between Ragna and Murdo, and softened my opinion of the sometime overly-headstrong and conservative Murdo. Unfortunately, later in the book Ragna's disability fails to be mentioned and it poses no difficulties for her

when she is placed in hostile circumstances, which kind of undermined the originality of the concept for me personally. Still, a great step forwards, I cannot think of a single other book which portrays an attractive disabled female lead.

Yet, why the two star rating? Let me explain my Taranto-esque ruthlessness.

Firstly, there were serious pacing issues with the book. I charge the editors more with this than the author himself, as I feel that some small alterations would have resolved much of the issue. In its current state however, there was a jarring mix of needless hurry, for example travelling overnight or during the hottest part of the day when it would have been more sensible to travel a few hours later, juxtaposed with year-long sea voyages and months of overwintering in which the characters quietly bide their frustration. Would the nature of medieval journeying not teach Murdo a little patience? Still, he is only 18, and I would have accepted his frustration better if it had been incorporated into a more linear build up of suspense throughout the low-action sections of the narrative. Second, I have to deduct a star for some dodgy metaphors. In some places the writing was a little unimaginative. For example, there's a paragraph where sunburn is likened to fire and flame and singing and burning, just a little unimaginative. Similarly, things shine like the sun, blood turns things either black or red with a relentless monotony of prose, and all the noblemen are described in a very similar trite manner.

Okay. Rant over. I really enjoyed the book, the narrative was compelling and the prose absorbing. I have no doubts about picking up the second in the series.

Annette says

I've been on a Lawhead kick lately; the "Celtic Crusades" series is another of his I've long put off reading for one reason or another. I was pleasantly surprised at how much I liked it. While told in third person, Lawhead avoids for the most part the "telling rather than showing" of his characters' emotions and motivations that is the bane of so many writers (and even himself in other books.) The history is fascinating, the plot compelling, and the pacing excellent - especially considering how easy it would have been to get bogged down in the minutia of the long, hard travel between the British Isles and the Holy Land.

The plot itself revolves around the First Crusade and is set between ~1096 and 1099. Our main character is from Orkney in the British Isles. While he desperately wants to follow his father and older brothers on the Crusade (although not out of any personal piety), he, only 16 years old, is instead forced to stay behind and hold down the family farm. Through a series of events he ends up chasing after them anyway some months later, and on the way meets up with a trio of monks from a curious sect who claim to guard the "Sanctus Clarus," or "Holy Light." They, and a series of visions he does not seek and only reluctantly acknowledges, end up radically changing the path of his life - unsurprisingly, the title object looms large in his destiny.

What I liked about the book:

The history. Like so many Americans of my generation, all I really knew about the crusades was what they taught in school - namely, "Catholics bad! Crusades Evil!" Lawhead did a good job of not only illuminating some of the complex motivations, but also in avoiding becoming simply one more voice mindlessly echoing the above sentiment. Certainly, the crusaders were as a group fairly ignorant, arrogant, and brutish and behaved in a manner no one could call Christian no matter how great their imagination. But, their enemies were no innocents either. Individual crusaders ran the gamut of pious to pitiless, and some (our hero included) came to quickly abhor the inhuman, hellish violence with which Jerusalem was conquered. Some of the nobles (most notably one who bears my great-grandfather's name of Magnus) were in the own way honorable men willing to right wrongs even for those who could not obviously be of much use to them. Similarly, the church itself was not presented as all bad, although most of the higher-ups were certainly impugned. Our "Cele De" monks were genuinely good people, if still children of their age in many of their

opinions, assumptions, and (if you will) superstitions.

What I didn't like: The story's "wrapper" concerns a secret brotherhood who are the modern descendants of the Cele De monks; the Dark-Ages monks themselves would probably have agreed with the label of "secret society." One of them has almost magical powers (although they're only briefly revealed in this volume). Despite the fact these characters clearly had a better grasp on Christianity than the rank in file, the whole thing smelled of Gnosticism. And then, of course, there is the Iron Lance itself. The veneration of icons is something that I've always found disquieting and superstitious and is one of the main reasons I am not myself Catholic. I have a little trouble turning this reaction off and simply accepting the story as it is. All in all: good, entertaining, and educational. Just don't swallow it whole.

Mimi says

I wasn't quite expecting the Knights Templar side story, but it was an interesting story of the Crusades. However, it is so, so, so very Protestant and therefore, the author doesn't always quite have his arms around Catholic piety (I'm pretty sure Lent was observed by this time in the West), the sacraments, and the heroes have an interesting ability to be schismatic.

I have the second of this series around and will probably read it.

Elaine says

I came to Lawhead via his much vaunted "Merlin" series. This, is quite a different series, and one in which he excels. More historical than fantasy, I am amazed that Lawhead doesn't have a wider following, as he recounts a riveting tale, populated by fascinating characters. The Celtic series spans some 1,500 pages-and if ps2+3 come up to par with this first excellent installment, then I have much to look forward to, and will be reading the next 2 in quick succession-p2 starting shortly!

Two tales are recounted-the losing of the Celtic lands in Orkney, for the protagonist's family-and the epic tale of the first Crusade to liberate Jerusalem. Although the first tale is short, it adds much to the narrative, and gives us huge empathy for the families involved. Murdo, the youngest son, sets out for the Holy Land to get help from his father and elder brothers, undertaking a tortuous route which takes him a year to complete. En route he befriends three monks of the Cele De-they are vehemently opposed to the traditional church, and their innate goodness contrasts vividly with the Church of the time, and inspires Murdo to help and support them. I suspect this will become more relevant in the subsequent novels, as the "True Path" is established.

Simply, the first part is one of these historical narratives of epic proportions. I was riveted by the entire concept, learned much, and found plot and characters page turning. I adore and thrive on this type of writing, and plan to track down the rest of Lawhead's back catalogue. 5/5 stars does not really reflect how much I enjoyed it-and how much I learned.

Jane says

Very enjoyable; to me one of the more engrossing books on the Crusades. Lawhead was, if not at the top of his form, very close to it. I feel that honor is reserved for his Byzantium.

Murdo, a young Orkneyman, sees his father and brothers go off on Crusade. To his disappointment, he is left home to take care of land and mother. When venal churchmen, by a trick, steal the family estate and it is now the property of a Norseman, Murdo takes ship for the Holy Land to bring his father back home. He meets three monks of the Cele De, an order with Celtic practices, frowned upon by the official Roman Catholic Church. All Crusaders have to pass through Constantinople on their way to Jerusalem and Emperor Alexios is only too happy to help them pass through his empire. Murdo participates in a quest to recover from the Turks the Holy Lance, the spear that pierced Christ's side at the Crucifixion.

I liked Lawhead's unpretentious style. It was a tad overwrought towards the end, though. The story had three main subplots: that of a Scotsman in Victorian times in a secret society [descended from the Cele De] framing the main action; Murdo's story; that of the Crusade and Crusader States; and that of the wise, shrewd Emperor Alexios, his Drungarios and his Captain of the Excubitori. I got a feel for the Crusades. Descriptions were vivid. Battle scenes and duels were well presented. The characters were likeable. Murdo matures in his thinking in the course of the novel. The three delightful monks give a moral framework to the story and are a stark contrast to the greedy clergy. The novel was very readable.

Highly recommended for those who enjoy historical novels on the Crusades.

Richard Derus says

Rating: 2* of five

The Publisher Says: In the year 1095, Pope Urban II declared war on the infidel. Kings, princes, and lords throughout Europe have joined the Crusade. To Murdo Ranulfson has fallen the duty of guarding his family's interests while his father and brothers fight to win Jerusalem. But when corrupt clergy prove enemies rather than protectors, Murdo must leave his native Scotland in search of his father.

In the company of monks and warriors, he journeys far beyond the rolling fields of home, beyond the fabled Constantinople and the brooding walls of Antioch, to the Holy Land and the sword points of the Saracens. There, where blood, suffering, and human evil at its most horrifying are shot through with rays of the miraculous, he obtains the relic that will guide his life and the lives of his descendants for centuries. And there he grows from a callow youth to a man, trading cynicism for faith and selfishness for the heart of a leader.

Steeped in heroism, treachery, and the clamor of battle, *The Iron Lance* begins a remarkable, masterfully woven epic trilogy of a Scottish noble family fighting for its existence and its faith during the age of the Great Crusades -- and of a secret society that will shape history for a thousand years.

My Review: There was a time when I tried, and tried hard, to be a christian. Something alluring about feeling sure you're protected by a bid daddy who loves you. But the problem for me is, I have this logical outlook on life and I need stuff to make sense, to follow the rules of storytelling. This religion don't do none o' that, and plus it's riddled with exclusionary language, "moral" justifications for rotten stuff like slavery and incest, and so on and so forth.

Horrible.

This novel is a holdover possession from that period of my life. It's competently written, it's about a period of history I find enthralling, and I hated every single eyeblink I spent on it. There's persuasion and then there's bludgeoning. This is the latter. Had I paid the slightest attention, I would have noticed that the book was published by Zondervan...a christian publishing house. A foolish error on my part.

This review is my reminder to myself: Openness to change is good, but don't get carried away. Borrow from the library. That way the crap that offends you can go back with no damage to your pocketbook.

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Doris Mahala says

Celtic religious war and the attempts of the religious sect from Rome.

The secret society within the religious society.

Recommend if you are interested in the history of the Celtic people in the fictional setting.

Sergio says

Questo primo romanzo della saga delle Crociate Cetiche, ambientato al tempo della I crociata e della riconquista dei cristiani guidati da Goffredo di Buglione di Gerusalemme fino allora dominio dei Selgiuchidi mussulmani, è avvincente e avventuroso al punto giusto e mi spinge a prendere al più presto in mano il seguito delle avventure di Murdo, il giovane signore delle Orcadi che ha partecipato alla crociata ed ora è tornato in patria pronto a costruirsi un regno come vassallo del re Magnus di Norvegia.

Rob Markley says

The story of Murdo and the back story of the modern secret society worked pretty well - but the politics of Crusader and Byzantium were uninteresting, simplistic and faulty moralism. Lawhead can write pretty well with an engaging story and the idea of the Lance isn't a bad one, but if it is going to be set within real history then the reality must be convincing and its just not. I also have to wonder about the tangent a supposedly Christian fantasy writing is taking all this... dangerously veering towards some kind of Gnostic cult I fear.

Olethros says

-Ceñido a las fuentes pero con toquecitos fantásticos.-

Género. Novela histórica.

Lo que nos cuenta. En Escocia, a comienzos de 1899, un anónimo narrador acaba de alcanzar un grado muy alto de iniciación en el Consejo de los Hermanos, sociedad secreta a la que pertenece. A finales del siglo XI,

Murdo es un joven de cuna noble del Condado de las Orcadas que, junto a su madre, queda al frente de las tierras y posesiones de la familia cuando su padre y hermanos. En Levunium, el emperador bizantino Alejo I Comneno cabalga al frente de su ejército, asegura la frontera norte y pone su mirada en las tierras perdidas del sur y el este. Primer volumen de la trilogía Las Cruzadas Celtas.

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