



War at the Edge of the World

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The epic first installment in a new series set at the end of empire in the reign of the Emperor Constantine, *The War at the Edge of the World* follows newly promoted centurion Aurelius Castus into the tumultuous battle for the future of Rome.

Once a soldier in an elite legion from the Danube, now stuck in Britain's provincial backwater, Castus believes his glory days are over. But fate is about to intervene. When the king of the Picts, the savage people beyond Hadrian's Wall, dies in mysterious circumstances, Castus is selected to command the bodyguard of a Roman envoy sent to negotiate with the barbarians.

But the diplomatic mission ends in bloody tragedy. Castus and his men are soon fighting for their lives and the legionary discovers that nothing about his doomed mission was ever what it seemed.

War at the Edge of the World Details

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Author : Ian James Ross

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From Reader Review War at the Edge of the World for online ebook

Stephen says

really enjoyed this historical novel based in the latter years of the roman empire on the borders between the roman empire and pictland and the power struggles between different factions on both sides and how the hero goes through betrayal and court politics as your transported back to 385AD and the bustle of York and the edge of the world.

Malacima says

Toplo preporu?ujem za one koji vole istorijsku fikciju i akciju. Serijal nije 'savršen' ali je dosta dobar . Radnja je smestena u kasnu vladavinu imeratora Konstancija Hlora (zvanog bleđi-ko Hlor) i po?etak vladavine Konstantina Velikog. Glavni lik Kastus (znacenje jednostavan, nekomplikovan) rođen u (Taurunum-u) Zemunu beži od ku?e od nasilnog oca i pridružuje se rimskoj vojsci. Bore?i se u Persiji, a zatim u Panoniji , Britaniji-gde i zapocinje vladavina Konstantina- Rimu...kako on napreduje kroz razne avanture i unapredjenja kroz serijal (zasnovane na istorijskim događajima) tako i uzdizanje Konstantina Velikog i hriš?anstva. Primarni lik ovog romana je Krastus njegov privatni i vojni život. Moja zamerka je sto se Konstantinova majka Jelena/Helena vrlo malo spominje ali uzimajući u obzir da je Konstantin u neku ruku sporedni likSerijal mi definitivno privukao pažnju jer nema mnogo knjiga (barem kod nas) imperatorima sa ovih područja (pogotovo ako ih piše stranac). U knjizi se takodje cesto spominju Dioklecijan,Sirmium (Sremska Mitrovica)....Iako autor nije ulazio u neka dublja razmišljanja takodjer mislim da je podbacio u opisu i konekciji vizija koje je Konstantin imao. (vecina istoricara se slaze da ih je ponekad izmislio da bi vojsku naterao da se bori i on postao imeprator, jer ipak je on hriscanstvo prihvatio tek pred kraj života)

Sve u svemu interesantan serijal

Speesh says

What an interesting and entertaining tale this was! Oh, and I love the title too.

The latter days of the Roman Empire is interesting me more and more, I've no idea why, but this really fed that interest, and then some. Good solid characters (though Castus really will have to work on getting a personality in the next book), some interesting dilemmas placed in their way and of course, what you're really looking for in this kind of story, plenty of well-written, not to say tense, backs against the wall, how the heck are they going to get out of that, action scenes. The whole flowing as a seamless whole.

There are perhaps, one too many of the Hist. Fic. Touchstones: The phrases and words that not only gain the author acceptance into the Hist. Fic. Author's club, but also establish them as a *Real Historical Fiction Author*. Because, as all Hist. Fic. Authors know, the raised eyebrows, the battle-calm, the blood hot on his hand, the wolfish grin, the dreams of dead comrades that he can remember every gory detail of his interaction with, in the dream, and that they are berating him for something he has - or hasn't - done wrong have to be in a real Hist. Fic. book. Or it isn't one. It does seem like, according to the books I read, that

people in Ancient Times did dream a whole lot more, and more vividly, and with dire portents, than people do these days, me, for example. In *Ancient Times*, you saw the whole of the family of the person you killed, not an hour or so previously. I'd like to read a Hist Fic book set in Ancient Times, where the main character has a dream where they are 30 years previous, in a Crit at Art School and they haven't done the work. Just saying...well, what I'm saying - it doesn't happen!

However, despite ignoring all that nonsense there was still more than enough left to whet my appetite for the rest of the series.

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S.J.A. Turney says

I wasn't sure what to expect from Ian Ross' debut, to be honest. I've a soft spot for the Late Roman Empire these days, and it often worries me that writers won't do the era justice. After all, for centuries now scholars have considered everything from the early 3rd century onwards to be the Decline and Fall etc. I needn't have worried. What should you expect from War at the edge of the world? Rollocking Romans, put simply.

This book, set at the time of the tetrarchy with Constantius as Augustus, is based at a time when the Roman world was on the cusp of new things. Only fifty years earlier was what they call the 'crisis' of the third century and an era of soldier emperors. Within fifty years will be the flowering of fully Christian Rome. This is the time when things change. And that was nicely reflected in the book for me.

Essentially, the story and its action and characters could have taken place in any Roman era with just a few tweaks. That is how familiar Ross' Rome is. At the level of the general soldier much is as it has always been. It's the detail and the background, oddly, that show us we are in late Rome. Details like the armour, weapons and clothing are not what you would find in Principate books. And in the overall background, there are Christians about, watched with suspicion, but they are there. There is a system of emperors rather than a straight Dynasty. But the most striking thing for me is that, appropriately for the era, Rome is no longer the centre of the world. Yes it's a great city, but it's no longer the home of emperors. Imperial courts are held at Nicomedia or Trier, or more or less wherever the emperor is. And the emperors are not Italian these days. In fact the majority descend from Balkan stock. It is nice to see this 'devolved' state of later Rome shown in books.

Then there's the writing and the style. For those of you who read Roman fiction often, the best comparison I can present you with is Anthony Riches. Ross' book reminded me in many ways of the first three of Riches' Empire series. The story flows well and hardly ever lags from its fast, adventurous pace. The plot is intelligible but not simplistic, the descriptive atmospheric but not over-the-top. The writing is very easy and engrossing. It is very easy to pick this book up for a 5 minute read and put it down after an hour wondering where the time has gone.

There is, I would say, nothing strikingly unusual about most of the characters for the regular reader of Roman fiction. Grizzled centurions, barely-disciplined ne'er-do-wells, untrustworthy civilians in high authority, barbarous barbarians etc. The exceptions for me are the teacher-turned-legionary, who I found entertaining and would like to see more of, and the female Pict, who broke the mould a little.

In short, War at the edge of the world was a welcome surprise for me. A fast paced, very engaging read, at the same time comfortably familiar and yet strangely exotic, it was one of the best debuts I've seen and I shall most definitely be reading the second volume.

Jane says

Absolutely enthralling and packed with action! Set in Roman Britain, during late reign of Emperor Constantius and subsequent acclamation of Constantine as Emperor by the troops, in the 4th century A.D., a time not treated much in fiction. Aurelius Castus, a common soldier, who, in fighting Persians, because of his valor at his unthinking rush into the breach when his centurion is killed, is decorated. After defeating barbarians in Pannonia he is promoted to that rank and sent to Roman Britain. He becomes part of a diplomatic mission to the Picts and the mission goes terribly wrong. He surrenders himself to the Picts in exchange for his men's lives; his century has come with him as honor guard. The envoy takes his own life, rather than suffer brutality. Castus waits for the right opportunity then escapes, making his way back to his fort, pursued by the Picts and their dogs. The town of Isurium and surrounding countryside is burned and the Roman inhabitants killed. The home of the envoy is near Isurium. The honorable Castus seeks it out and rescues the envoy's daughter, Marcellina, from the barbarians, taking her to Eboracum with him at her request. Upon the order of the emperor, Constantius, he leads a punitive expedition north again, to destroy native villages, then the Pictish hillfort in which he had been imprisoned.

I feel the author chose an excellent name for his unforgettable protagonist. That name expresses his personality perfectly: Castus = Chaste in the secondary senses of decent, simple, uncomplicated. The envoy's daughter, Marcellina, expresses it best: *"always appearing the strong, obedient soldier, unthinking, like a dumb animal ...but you are a good man, Centurion."* She sees something more in him than what others see: she senses something deeper: kindness and a code of honor, maybe even the self-deprecating personality and lack of self-confidence in matters non-military that I picked up on. As centurion, he has learned to mask any feelings of fear in front of his men, following advice given by another centurion--his previous superior in Persia. I am sure, as this series progresses, he will blossom. His mantras have always been "Duty" and "Following Orders", but he shows great initiative in his evading recapture and in his actions at the hillfort. If he can become more assertive outside his military role....

The novel was well written and carried me back into that era. I felt many emotions: identification with Castus and his feelings, anger at the Picts, fear for him on his flight, sadness at the massacre of his century, especially as the Picts had let them go with the promise they would not harm the men. I appreciated that no scenes with Marcellina turned sexual--that Castus respected her, her station and the class gulf between them. Outstanding were the pages on the harrowing escape from the Picts and their dogs and the climactic battle at the hillfort, including preparations. I am eager to follow him on his further adventures.

Increased rating on rereading in September 2016.

Highly recommended.

Ben Kane says

This is an impressive debut. Set in a little-known era of the Roman Empire - the early 4th century AD - it

throws us headfirst into a chaotic world in which emperors rise and fall, fortunes change and a man does not know who to trust. This is a thumping good read, well-crafted, atmospheric and thoroughly enjoyable. A real page-turner. Where's the next volume, please?

Keith Currie says

Where emperors are made

Aurelius Castus, Roman centurion, is that sort of stolid, tough, illiterate, Pannonian peasant soldier upon which the Roman Empire came to depend in the Fourth Century, its twilight years. A man to whom the army is life, who obeys his orders without question, he is sent on escort duty deep into the Pict lands far north of Hadrian's Wall. The mission is mysterious, however his is not to reason why, but to protect the delegate sent to negotiate with the Pict leaders. The mission is a failure, Castus' men killed and Castus taken prisoner. During the course of this imaginative novel, Castus becomes increasingly and unwillingly involved in politics at the highest level, and ultimately develops as a participant and protagonist.

This is a good addition to the genre of Roman military novels. The author is knowledgeable, his plot convincing, his characters sympathetic. The violence which is typical of this sort of novel is ever-present, but well integrated into the narrative. I felt that this worked well, both as a standalone novel, and as the first in a very interesting series.

Kate says

An excellent Roman military adventure set in late Roman Britain - in York and north of the Wall. Very hard to put down.

Robin Carter says

Review

Ian Ross and Twilight of Empire: War at the edge of the World has all the hallmarks of the next great Roman series. The author has chosen a period that few have written in, a time when Rome and its empire is very different to the one we see portrayed in films and the HBO TV series, gone is the segmented armour, the Scutum etc, in its place, Mail or scale armour oval shields and these guys wore tunics and breeches, a clear sign of the blending of other nations into the empire. It was a time when the Empire was so large its power and leadership was shared, its politics even murkier. The book follows the exploits of Centurion Aurelius Castus, his journey north into the lands of the Picts, the inevitable betrayals, escape and eventual revenge.

The book is delivered in an interesting style, I would suspect that the author is very well read in the genre, or by some quirk of writing styles he has endeavored to produce the depth of detail and narrative of Ben Kane, the action and pace of SJA Turney and a main character that has the depth and personality of Simon

Scarrows Macro (that's not an Insult, i think Macro is very multi faceted). Castus is a non nonsense hard fighting centurion, a man who looks out for his men, he is also a man with a tactical brain, very much like Macro. Add in Nigrinus the notary (who takes the place of Narcissus) and you can see the comparison... but don't be swayed by it, this is only a facet of the characters and plot, Ian Ross brings plenty of originality.

The Journey of Centurion Aurelius Castus is a refreshing change for the Roman fiction genre, across a very much changed Romano Britain landscape, the power of the empire has dimmed at its edges, but thinking its failed is a mistake the Picts will rue. In the same way that the conquest of Britain was for politician ends rather than expansion, this political backwater of the empire is once again at the forefront of a changing an empire, Instead of Claudius solidifying his hold on power, we are to witness the rise of Constantine, a name to shape an empire. In many ways this book feels like a taste of what's to come from a clearly talented author.

I hope to follow more of the journeys and battles of Centurion Aurelius Castus, and also the rise of Constantine.

Highly recommend this one

(Parm)

Peter Kavanagh says

I have to admit that I came to this book with low expectations so I was more than a little impressed as I ploughed through this book in a single sitting. Well worth reading and I can't wait for the next instalment.

Ozymandias says

A very good look at the reign of Constantius Chlorius in Britain in the early fourth century. It manages to combine action/adventure heroics with a very accurate depiction of the realities of Roman life. About the only problem I have with it is that the main action is done by a little past the halfway point, leaving the last part of the book feeling like an overextended epilogue. But still a very good read.

Jack Beaman says

With War at the Edge of the World, I decided to take a break from my usual, continuous fantasy binge to read a bit of historical fiction. I tend to really enjoy Roman-based books, and found this to be a refreshing change, set as it was in the later stages of the empire rather than during the height of Republican power. With an endorsement from Conn Iggulden on the cover, I had high expectations, and I was not disappointed. The plot progressed at a good speed and even if some of the twists were expected, it was good to see them borne out. I found myself liking the main character, Castus, without apparent effort, and enjoyed the complex of subplots swirling just below all the visceral action. The combat was well done, with good armour consistencies (a rarity in fantasy as well as historical fiction), and I found it highly educational with regards to later Roman equipment – for example, I did not realise the legionaries used darts as well as javelins.

Overall, I'd recommend this book as a good, solid read – I've already bought the next in the series, but I'm reading a few more fantasy books before I get round to it.

'War at the Edge of the World,' by Ian Ross is the first in the Twilight of Empire series.

Clemens Schoonderwoert says

This great book is the 1st historical instalment from this author and it is a book which I hugely and thoroughly enjoyed.

First of all I like to mention that although this book has been set some 120-130 years later, the book has some similarities with the first couple of books by Anthony Riches, and I mean by that that the main character and his fellow Romans are acting around and fighting the Picts north of Hadrian's Wall.

This series really begins in the year AD 305 during the reign of Emperor Constantine, and our main character is Centurion Aurelius Castus who once served in the elite Legions of the Danube, and who finds himself now in the cold grey wastes of Northern Britain.

The story itself starts to develop from the moment when the King of the Picts dies in mysterious circumstances and Castus is selected to lead the Roman Envoy, who is sent to negotiate with the barbarians beyond Hadrian's Wall.

During this enterprise Castus will have to face treachery and betrayal, and endure quite some fighting actions which will always result in a lot of bloodshed, besides all that he has to face some real tests of his honour.

At the same time trying to avert disaster and trying to keep his promise to a woman he has sworn to help, he'll discover that nothing about this enterprise is ever what it seems.

This is a tremendous and gripping Roman novel and so in my view "A Very Impressive Debut"!

Roy says

Something about this one just didn't work for me. Probably reflected in the amount of time it took for me to complete it. I love historical fiction, especially Ancient Rome. This was a time period I hadn't seen explored before in this style of novel. I loved the politics, I enjoyed the action and the history element, however the characters were a let down. The protagonist was clichéd and just a brute who didn't have much that I enjoyed about him. I understand that at around that time most men would have been brutal and all warriors but it didn't go beyond much of that. Due to this and obviously spending majority of the story with Castus, I wasn't eager to get back to finishing. Solid ending and obviously many other battles to tell, just not sure Castus has much more growth for me.

Bookdragon Sean says

What would you do if your Centurion died in the middle of combat? Your Century is left leaderless, and the men's morale hangs in the balance, do you flee or fight. Aurelius Castus, who was just a common legionary, stepped over his Centurion's body and struck down the horseman that trampled him. Thus, in the brief prologue of the book the protagonist's heroism is defined.

It's no wonder then that after the campaign Castus was made a Centurion for his valour. He inspired his men and prevented them from crumbling. Indeed, he is the perfect person for the job: he fits the role of Centurion

perfectly. Castus loves the Roman army above all else, and he loves being a Centurion. But, what he doesn't love is the posting that came with the role. He has been sent to dreary Britain and given an assignment that he doesn't fully understand.

A complex mission

His mission appears to be simple and straightforward. He, with his century, is assigned as a guard escort for a diplomat who is to attend a Pictish peace conference. However, several members of the conference are poisoned and die. The Picts, quite naturally, blame the Romans who have just arrived at their settlement. The Picts attack the Romans with brutal savagery, and in the midst Castus realises that his mission may be not as clear cut as he supposed. Someone has deemed that he and his men are to die; they are to be sacrificed like pawns to stir the Picts into an uprising, so the Romans have an excuse to put them down.

The result is a big mess Castus doesn't know how to solve. So he keeps his head down and continues to obey his orders to ensure his survival. He doesn't voice his objections; he just accepts what has happened. His whole century is attacked, and he barely escaped with his life. Yet, he continues to be the obedient Roman officer. He should be angry with what has happened. He may not be able to voice this anger, but he should be venting it in private or internally. It just felt like he took what happened on the chin, shrugged his shoulders and then walked away. He should have been bitter and frustrated; he should have left what he once thought was an honourable army.

He's a weak protagonist

I think Castus is a very atypical protagonist. There is nothing beyond the heroic mask of a Centurion. You could argue that this is true for all Centurions, and that it is a characteristic of the rank. This may be true, but it's also true that it leaves us with a predictable protagonist. He prefers brute force to the complexities of tactics and battle plans; he simply charges in like a bull. Don't get me wrong, he isn't badly written, it's just that his actions and responses can be anticipated too much. I just can't see how he could grow as a character unless he abandoned the army which, of course, would never happen.

Overall, the intrigue of the plot helped to make this an interesting novel. The protagonist is too flat for my taste: he is simply a brave soldier, but with very little beyond that. I do intend to read the next instalment in the series, and I do hope that Castus can bring a little more personality to his next mission.

A fair 3 stars.
