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Pendragon (The Pendragon Cycle, Book 4)



Synopsis

At the dawn of his reign, a young king confronts his destiny "and must prove his greatness . . . or lose a realm Arthur is King "but treachery runs rampant throughout the beleaguered Isle of the Mighty. Darkest evil descends upon Britain's shores in many guises. Fragile alliances fray and tear, threatening all the noble liege has won with his wisdom and his blood. His most trusted counselor "the warrior, bard and kingmaker whom legend will name Merlin "is himself to be tested on a mystical journey back through his own extraordinary past. So in a black time of plague and pestilence, it is Arthur who must stand alone against a great and terrible adversary. For only this way can he truly win immortality "and the name to treasure above all others: PENDRAGON "Though Lawhead brilliantly creates an authentic and vivid Arthurian Britain, he never forsakes the sense of wonder that has graced the legend throughout the ages. "Publishers Weekly

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Customer Reviews

Fans of the first three volumes of Lawhead's "Pendragon Cycle" need to be forewarned about two things before they commence this fourth volume of the series. Firstly, "Pendragon" is not a continuation of the story that ended in volume 3. "Taliesin", "Merlin" and "Arthur" complete Lawhead's retelling of the Arthurian legends, and form a complete and independent story in themselves. In "Pendragon", Lawhead expands on a part of the story about king Arthur that he has already described by recounting one of the struggles that the king Arthur faced in the early days of his kingship. Secondly, "Pendragon" does not match the high standards of the three volumes that

preceded it. Readers familiar with the first three volumes will find that Lawhead recounts much of Arthur's life that they are already familiar with. In fact, the description of Arthur's king-making is nearly identical word for word to the description of this same event found in "Arthur", the only difference being that "Pendragon" recounts the event from the perspective of Merlin. But the initial drama and sense of passion and glory is gone, because we have been here before. Even though events such as Arthur's youth are described in more detail here than in "Arthur", the fact remains that we already know the basic plot, and this detracts from the amount of enjoyment you can expect. Yet with this warning in mind, "Pendragon" is still a worthwhile read. Lawhead focuses on one aspect of Arthur's reign, namely his conflict against the barbarian Vandals and against a pestilent plague. Don't be confused: this is not an enemy described in "Arthur", hence its ascription as "The Forgotten War" (Chronologically both "Pendragon" - aside from the first part - and "Grail" both fit between books 2 & 3 of "Arthur") In this great conflict, the human element strongly comes into the foreground, especially the twin roles of the bard Merlin, and the king Arthur. The first point of view heightens the readers understanding of Merlin's role in this conflict. Lawhead's treatment of Merlin is profound, and particularly outstanding in my mind is one passage where Merlin comes to realize that "in order to welcome redemption, one must first embrace the utter hopelessness of failure. For how can a man look for rescue unless he knows he is truly lost?" (p.69) - a wonderful metaphor of salvation for lost sinners. Equally outstanding is Merlin's journey to the other-world, where Lawhead uses a profound sequence of events to bring Merlin to understand his role in the great conflict over against evil. Also profound is Lawhead's treatment of Arthur. The last third of the book in my view is a climactic masterpiece, and after being entranced by the last section of the novel, Lawhead's weaknesses in the first half of the book were quickly forgiven and forgotten. Arthur's role in the struggle against the enemies of the people is central: as leader and king he must fight on behalf of his people. In an absolutely unforgettable climax, the whole weight of his people's hopes depend on him, as Arthur himself must single-handedly take on the leader of the barbarians in a battle to the death. The imagery will not be lost on you, as Arthur makes a distinctly Messianic figure, bruised for his people, a Christ-like king giving his everything for his people at the risk of his own life. Yes, "Pendragon" has weaknesses. Does this make "Pendragon" a failure? If you were not forewarned, you would likely be disappointed. Even if you are forewarned, you may still be disappointed with the first half of the book because it lacks Lawhead's typical depth and drama. But in the last half of the book Lawhead more than redeems himself with a captivating narrative that you won't be able to put down, and will in the end leave you breathless at its sparkling imagery and depth, and eagerly grabbing the next volume in the series.

I just finished reading Pendragon for the third or fourth time and enjoyed the book this reading more than any other. As I age, I enjoy different aspects of Lawhead's books with each reading and Pendragon was no different. Many ancient traditions of oaths, fealty, and faith are made present to the reader through the story and characters of Pendragon. In this way the reader comes in contact with holy ideas long forgotten in our present age. I love the characters and this story was one more adventure with those I love like Arthur, Gwenhwyvar, Cai, Bedwyr, Lleanlleawg, and Merlin. Merlin is such a tragic and triumphant character! Read this book, it is well worth the journey. One more thing, one of the other reviewers claims that Merlin recognizes Arthur as the Summer Lord several times in Pendragon, when it is Avallach in Arthur who recognizes Arthur. I read Pendragon, specifically looking for this fault, but I never found it. It is true that Merlin doesn't recognize Arthur in Part 1 of Pendragon, but this takes place chronologically before Avallach recognizes Arthur in the book Arthur. Thus, as far as I can tell, there is no discrepancy. This reviewer may be mistaken.

I have long admired Stephen Lawhead's writing. He has the uncanny ability to create worlds and characters that spring to life through his poetic images. He has definitely breathed new life into the Arthurian legends with his Pendragon Cycle. But "Pendragon", the fourth book in the series, is perhaps the weakest link. "Pendragon" is not a continuation of the story that was started through "Taliesin", "Merlin", and "Arthur". Rather what Lawhead does in this fourth installment is revisit some stories about Arthur's life that either weren't in the previous books or that weren't expounded upon. This makes the beginning of the story read like left-overs that Lawhead cut from the original work. There are even times when the story is word-for-word the same as the previous novel. That being said, "Pendragon" does begin to build about halfway through the book and the story of Arthur's struggle to save Britain from a barbarian invasion comes to life. While perhaps not the strongest link in the cycle, "Pendragon" is a continuation of Lawhead's magnificent rendering of Arthur's life. He has crafted Arthur as a king who is both strong and intelligent, fearless and faithful, seemingly invincible but also somehow mortal (even though he is the forever king). If readers can stick out the ramshackle beginning, they will not be disappointed in the end. Especially when the legend of the grail comes into question. But, as Merlin says, "that is a different story" and one this reader is looking forward to.

Everyone who has read and wondered about the legend of King Arthur and have read about or have seen the movie "Camelot" or the TV series Merlin, will have a basic knowledge of the tale of

Merlin and Arthur and want to know more, you should endeavor to read this series but be forewarned it is a task to try and read them you will need a strong commitment. Stephen Lawhead has written a monumental series.

Pendragon is a great series. There is lots of subtle story lines within the main story. Easy read as most of the books took me a week to finish. I would recommend getting the e-book as this will cost way less than paperback. Before you start the series, make sure you read the books in the proper order. This is not the same order they were published. I know its weird but I learned this after I finished the entire series. I think the order is Books 1, 2, 3, 4 (first half), 5, 4 (second half). This puts the series in chronological order. Also, if you liked Pendragon, I would recommend Hood, Scarlet, and Tuck. Its about Robin Hood but with a Welsh twist.

A fine addition to the wonderful "Pendragon Cycle". Follows Arthur, Merlin and other characters from the "Summer Kingdom"! Fans of myth and fantasy reads will want to indulge in this entire series. JRR Tolkien readers - jump in on this!

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