



## Fortress of Spears

*Anthony Riches*

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The Romans have vanquished the rebel alliance, leaving Calgus, Lord of the Northern Tribes, the prisoner of the chieftains he once led.

But the new Roman leader will not let them rest. He forms an audacious plan to capture Dinpaladyr, the Selgovaes' fortress of spears, and return it to the hands of a trusted ally.

Marcus Aquila – burning for revenge on an enemy army that has killed one of his best friends – is part of the select group of infantry chosen to go north with the Petriana cavalry and take the fort before the rebel army can reach it. He believes his disguise as Centurion Corvus of the 2nd Tungrians is still holding.

But he is just a few days ahead of two of the emperor's agents, sent from Rome to kill him. Pitiless assassins who know his real name, and too much about his friends.

## **Fortress of Spears Details**

Date : Published June 15th 2011 by Hodder & Stoughton (first published April 28th 2011)

ISBN : 9780340920367

Author : Anthony Riches

Format : Hardcover 352 pages

Genre : Historical, Historical Fiction, Roman, Fiction

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## From Reader Review Fortress of Spears for online ebook

### Alfonso D'agostino says

La premessa assolutamente necessaria è che non ho mai eccessivamente adorato 1) le saghe 2) la narrativa storica, in particolare se ambientata prima del Medioevo. Quindi non (ripeto: NON) ho grossi termini di paragone.

E' semplicemente accaduto che mi sia lasciato sedurre da Anthony Riches e dal primo di romanzo di quella che ho poi scoperto essere una saga: mi è capitato sotto le pupille L'onore e la spada, e l'ho iniziato con quella scarsa aspettativa leggermente venata da un profumo di tanto-mi-romperà-le-palle-dopo-50-pagine.

Ovviamente è accaduto l'esatto contrario: in una settimana circa mi sono sparato non soltanto L'onore e la spada, ma anche La battaglia dell'Aquila perduta (secondo capitolo della saga) e Lunga vita all'imperatore (terzo romanzo con lo stesso protagonista). Amazon mi avvisa che non è finita qui ma c'è un limite anche al monomaniacale, quindi mi fermo qui (almeno fino alla prossima estate, per spiaggiarsi Riches mi è sembrato fenomenale).

Come sarà apparso chiaro dalla scorpacciata compulsiva di romanzi successivi, le avventure di Marco Valerio Aquila non mi sono affatto dispiaciute: scaraventato in Britannia dal padre – che annusava aria infelice per la sua famiglia patrizia dopo l'arrivo di Commodo imperatore – il giovane Aquila cresce come uomo e come ufficiale, garantendosi sul campo il rispetto dei suoi uomini prima e di tutta la linea gerarchica militare dopo. Confesso che è probabilmente la chiave del successo tra le mie mani: i romanzi di Riches propongono le legioni romane come un misto fra la Legione Straniera e un battaglione di Marines in missione alla liberazione dell'Europa. Gli scontri sono realistici, la differenza fra caduti romani e barbari sono simili a quelle fra USA e germanici nelle pellicole hollywoodiane (e ogni volta ti domandi perché ci abbiano messo qualche anno ad arrivare a Berlino...), gli aspetti psicologici sono indagati esclusivamente in funzione della trama (il commilitone traditore, il centurione assetato di potere e scalata gerarchica, e via dicendo).

Dalla biografia dell'autore e dall'elenco di studi e pubblicazioni consultate sorge il sospetto che la ricostruzione storica sia abbastanza accurata. Non ho gli strumenti per confermarlo e francamente interessa il giusto: Riches punta direttamente all'intrattenimento, il sospetto di poterlo interpretare come minimamente saggistico non ti sfiora neppure per un istante.

Tutto sommato, sorprendentemente leggibile.

<http://capitolo23.com/2017/11/06/limp...>

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### James says

This was better than the rest that in the series in some ways, but in others it was much the same and not living up to the quality that I am sure this series and author could produce. I am giving this a **Three Stars** because while there were some glaring places where this book let itself down, for all of that, it still managed to entertain me in ways that only the best can.

The Plot: Three Stars

This was somewhat... forced? It is almost as if the author has run out of things to do in Britain - a fact backed

up as at the end Riches clearly leads the next plot into the events occurring in Germany at the time. What do I mean by forced? Well, it makes a lot out of the 'horseplay', and not the humour horseplay, but actual cavalry. How he manages to make it... "acceptable", that a tent party of foot 'mules' become cavalry is beyond me. It just stinks of trying to force something out of nothing.

I am also displeased by the way that Marcus is getting less and less face time. I understand that this is because the events of the time are not convenient for a centurion of have the adventures I am sure that we all want him to have, but there are ways around this: You could move them to an area where history is thin and then have lee-way, you could promote him into a position where action is likely or you could even send him out on a secret 'espionage' mission. Like kill Calgus in the north with only a select few to back you up. It just reeks of lack of creativity when it comes to this.

But, I don't want to sound too negative. The plot is still fun! It excels at being fun. Everything is fast and non-stop, pulling you along at breakneck speeds. How you can't enjoy this book is beyond me - once you look past many of it's glaring errors it is entertainment personified.

The Characters: Three Stars

Once again, Marucs seems to be a bit of a martin sue. I have to say though that he is becoming more and mroe of a real character as the books progress - in this one he even has to deal with some truly emotional garbage! (view spoiler)

As usual, it is the rest of the cast that set this book alight for me. They are one of the best support cast in the whole genre. A real pleasure to read about and a definite plus to the books. I won't talk about them - I've done that plenty in the previous reviews.

The Writing: Three stars

This book still lacks that realism that can make hisotrical fiction great. While I am sure that all of this is acurate and is certainly not bad writing, it just lacks that grittiness that is the hallmark of really great historical fiction writers. If he get's that then he can say good by to relative mediocracy. Because apart from that his writing has certainly improved, and really moves from part to part with exceedingly easy transition. One of those books that you neve really notice the writing, because it just is. You don't notice it because it does it's job - exactly what you want from it.

So should you read this series? Yes. While there are certainly better historical fiction novels out there, Riches is on his way, steadily, to reaching that level. And if they aren't there yet, then they certainly excell for entertainment. I will be coming back to this series as he produces them, they have me hooked.

Have Fun Reading.

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## **Marina says**

3rd in the "Empire" series, FoS continues the story of Marcus Tribulus Corvus, as he is now known. The attack on the enemy camp, the final assault meant to drive the tribes back north, has cost the life of Marcus' friend and protector, another score to settle with Calgus, who is also responsible for killing his birth-father. Tribune Scaurus, the coolest commander a man can wish for and one of the best characters in the series, is tasked by the governor to take a detachment accompanied by Petriana's donkey wallopers and Votadini prince Martos north, to free the Fortress of a Thousand Spears, a Votadini city.

Meanwhile, the real stars of this book, Praetorian Centurion Rapax and corn-officer (read Imperial spy) Excingus, arrive in Britannia, Hades-bent on finding and executing the Roman officer who murdered the (traitorous) son of the Praetorian Prefect, second most powerful man in Rome. They leave the Tungrian camp on a trail after Marcus, taking with them something he cherishes, and Dubnus, hardly recovered from the spear wound suffered in AoF, commandeers half a century of battle-dodging legionaries to go after them and recover what they took.

After featuring the infantry and the archers in the previous books, this one focuses on cavalry, as Marcus joins the scouting Petriana wing on their progress north.

I love this series and can never get enough of the military humour and battles and little anecdotes about the military life, with all its aspects. There are good soldiers, bad soldiers, crafty soldiers, and the same for officers.

My favourite characters this time were the two Roman centurions Rapax and Excingus, whose banter and bad cop - worse cop routine is great fun to read. Tribune Scaurus has been a favourite since AoF as is his bodyguard Arminius and since the book features the Petriana, the steady and competent Tribune Licinius takes the centre stage as well.

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### **Ian says**

More murder and mayhem in northern Britain, as well there should be. Riff-raff disturbing the empire! The big showdown between the Romans and Picts. Lots of graphic violence, hand to hand, for me, a tad repetitive, but the novel is entertaining.

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### **keith lady moore says**

#### **Roman wonderland**

A real page turner, you can feel the tension as the story races to its conclusion, a truly wonderful read about the Roman wars in this country

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### **Ian says**

This is the third outing for Anthony Riches series about a Roman Centurion/Fugitive from Justice based around Hadrian's Wall. Like the previous books this is an excellent romp, with some interesting scenarios and storylines. The book is well worth reading and I'm already looking forward to #4 in the series.

So, why only 4 stars? The fact that I had the book for 3 weeks before picking it up speaks volumes - a Giles Kristian or Sam Barone book would have been started immediately. I would rate these books slightly below those of Cornwell, Scarrow, Kristian or Barone, but not too far behind. The main problem with the book is that the main character is almost a super-hero and is simply not believable. Added to that the dialogue, although improved from the previous books, still does not ring true as being of the correct era. Finally the status of Marcus as a fugitive has been played out to the full - I cannot recall the details of how this came to be, and don't particularly care anymore. I hope that the author will concentrate more on the relationship between Marcus and his colleagues moving forwards.

Having said all the above, this is a very good book and I will definitely pre-order the follow-up.

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## Speesh says

The third of Anthony Riches' Empire series, 'Fortress of Spears' was quite clearly written as the ending to a trilogy. Maybe it was submitted, they read it, got back to him and said "we'll have some more of that, thanks." "D'oh!"

If you've come across the first two in the series, you'll be on (very) familiar ground here. However, whilst again being set on and around the Roman Wall in the north of Britannia province, this one does actually start off back in Rome, with the murder of a Senator by a Corn Officer and a member of the Praetorian Guard. They will then proceed to kill his whole family. As you did back then. The Senator has gossiped and given away the first two books' hero, the fugitive Marcus' new identity and location. Their pursuit of 'truth and justice', then runs through the book, leading from Rome, to a bloody climax of revenge and retribution in the far north of Britain. Luckily, while Marcus has enemies in high places, he also has the necessary number of friends in low places and when the supposedly friendly foes - unbeknown to him - snatch his bride to be, they aren't slow to do what(ever) has to be done. That is a sub-plot, however, as the main thrust of the action, front and centre, involves the continuing campaign against the northern Britons, on both sides of the wall. And it can get messy. In fact, you're going to need a strong stomach for parts of this. Riches, presumably (one would hope, for his sanity's sake) has based it all on assiduous research, because several characters go through 'the mill' in many sections of the story.

The action again takes place in a relatively small area, the harsh, largely barren, wild and dangerous - if you spoke Latin and had a long nose - landscape, north of Hadrian's Wall. If you go there today, you'll get the idea of how it might have been. Beautiful now, but probably not back then, if you were Roman. It is only ever referred to as 'the wall' or 'frontier' in these books. As this area was, again if you were a Roman soldier, effectively unknown territory, you can perhaps imagine the fear and trepidation the soldiers and auxiliary troops must have felt when venturing - told to venture - out there. "You are now leaving the Roman Empire, just don't count on coming back," as the sign probably didn't say. The Antonine Wall, further north than Hadrian's Wall, was built in the years after 142, before being abandoned in the 160s. As these books take place in the 180s, I'm guessing the soldiers are at least travelling to places they have heard of, if not visited, recently. Having the action take place in a relatively small area, works well. It almost puts the action in a vice, squeezed, as it were, into a pressure cooker-like intensity. Simple, effective. This story again has threats both from in front of the Wall, in the form of them there Celts and their never ceasing campaign to rid their country of the invaders, but also behind it, in the form of the afore-mentioned Praetorian Guards. So our hero Marcus Aquila, finds that the danger this time out, isn't always covered in tattoos, stripped naked, painted blue and screaming in a language that sounds like a cat coughing up a fur ball. It is also dressed in smart black armour, is sent from Rome on the Emperor's business and is sneaking around behind him.

The book delivers in all the ways the first two have. There isn't a lot of development in terms of character and/or story complexity, it's all very similar to one and two. Presumably with 'if it ain't broke, don't fix it' type feeling from Mr. Riches and publisher. And why not? You get exactly what you came for in 'Fortress of Spears' and if you came for what the book delivers, you're going to go away happy and I'll admit that I'm liking these books very much indeed. However, I do feel duty bound to say that it can't be fulsome praise the whole way. Especially as we're now into book three. The main characters could do with a bit more development, the minor, bit-part players have been the more interesting. I'm thinking here Dubnus and the Prefect Scaurus in particular. Amongst the Roman soldiers, there are basically just several versions of the same character. Bluff, honest, blunt, battle-weary, suspicious of barbarians and officers alike, with no time

for polite niceties and a liking for regularly roughing up Quartermasters.

The woman character is/was clearly currently an afterthought. I can't imagine she was brought in to appeal to female readers, as this series is fundamentally about life in 'the Army.' Plus, the story does point out that soldiers weren't allowed to marry while in the army, doesn't it? Anyway, there's what you would expect army types to be concerned with and how they would express it. It's not subtle. It's blunt and above all, like it or not Ancient and Medieval History knitting circle - it's obviously authentic. There is though, an unhealthy male genitalia fixation here. I'm not sure how much the historical records and writings of Roman period historians/things written in Latin on statues would back him up on this front, but I guess AR would say it's based on solid historical evidence - and is anyway how soldiers have always talked. Which would, presumably, cover the swearing as well, (which I've mentioned before). It seems that in the 'Empire' books (so far), your ability to do your job, or your ability to take on a certain, usually dangerous, task, is dependent on the size of your genitalia. The more hazardous the task, the larger said genitalia need to be to accomplish said task successfully. Or must have been, once said task is completed, to have enabled said hazardous task's completion. Of course, never having been a soldier or part of any all-male combative fraternity, I can neither confirm or deny that this is or isn't true. From my rugby-playing days I can attest that continued, detailed discussion of your or your mates' 'crown jewels,' their size, or lack thereof, would have seen you instantly and permanently branded a 'woofter.' Or worse. It presumably did/does go on, but it can be a little wearisome with repetition. Once, twice, yes, we get the idea. Prolonged, repeated use, adds nothing, just creates a wearying effect when (many) other means of expressing the same, could surely be used to similar, if not better, effect. Soldiers are nothing if not creative in their abuse, as my father's tales of his uncle, a Regimental Sergeant Major during WWII, will confirm, so more linguistic creativity from AR's characters wouldn't go amiss.

Another problem could (I'm guessing here as I have absolutely no professional experience to base my opinions on), possibly be the fault of Riches' editor, or whoever it is that gives the (nearly) final version a through read-through. I'm guessing that's how these things are done. Mainly, as it's how I would do them. It is the irritating repeating, within a sentence or two, or the same sentence sometimes, of the same word. Example? P154 "...and you're going to provide us with the means of making sure he comes to justice quietly. Your Marcus Valerius Aquila has been evading justice with his barbarian friends up here for long enough..." Too subtle? Try this on P157 "Putting his hands to his mouth, he bellowed a greeting to the Romans. 'Greetings, Romans.'" Giving the benefit of the doubt, the second there could be done for a laugh, but, first is typical of many others. If the second isn't a joke, is a mistake like the others; why hasn't the Editor said something? Easy enough to change. I could come with at least a dozen alternatives (so could the Dictionary app on my computer), as I could with the other half dozen I found in only 30 randomly selected pages (I listened to this one on Audible, but I have a hardback version, so that's why I selected some pages at random, and how I can quote page numbers, despite having listened to the book on Audible...in case you're wondering). There's no denying it is irritating and any reviewer that doesn't mention it isn't doing his - or, I can think of at least one, 'her', job. Just like the editor isn't. It has happened all the way through the series so far. Can we say that the first three books were submitted in a blaze of euphoria at finding a brave new Roman story writer and not looked at too closely? Possibly. So, from here on, things would be looked at a little more closely? We'll see...

The final thing? Eyebrows. Eyebrows to convey any kind of emotion, in any kind of situation, from the office, to the battlefield. Eyebrows raised by, especially, Scaurus. P151: "Scaurus shrugged, raising an eyebrow." (That's not easy to do, try it). P161: "Scaurus raised an eyebrow..." The tame barbarian gets in on the fun on P170: "Arminius raised an eyebrow..." Or both eyebrows on P175: "Paulus paused again, his eyebrows raised in an incredulous stare." P181: "The Roman raised an eyebrow." P187: "He shook his head, raising an eyebrow at his auxiliary colleague..." That's 6 times, in 36 pages, 340 pages in the book at that average, that's a shade over 56 eyebrows, or pairs thereof, raised in the course of one not all that long book. Something else to convey incredulity, surprise, doubt, suspicion, anything else, next time out perhaps? Were I the editor. But were I the editor, they wouldn't have made the print copy. Not more than a couple and well

spaced, anyway. I'd have told him "good, but loose the eyebrows, it's lazy."

As I said at the start, this is the third in the 'Empire' series. It has felt like he'd maybe written a huge long story and chopped it up into three parts. This clearly is the final part. There is a distinct tie-ing up of loose strings. There's a 'Star Trek' ending of sorts. You know, in the tv series, where the main story was done, fade out, fade up again to ship's deck, all participants (still with us) present, sit about discussing what they've learnt, finish with crew laughing... Fade to black. You know the sort of thing. While this doesn't finish with a laugh, it does finish. But then..."hey! I've been commissioned to do more!" So, sprinkle a few quick loose ends to take us into the next book(s). To be fair, as the next book does see the action move away from Britain, there should be a feeling of something coming to an end with this one I'll grant, but not as door-slammingly final as this.

Otherwise, just dandy. It gets four as a carry over from the first two. I'll be expecting a marked improvement though, in number four.

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### **John Salter says**

In the third book of the series, I think Anthony Riches has surpassed the previous books with the story and the first two were fantastic. The action comes thick, fast and quickly, as soon as you open the book and that's fast and there's little let up throughout in an intriguing story that gets better with each page. The bone crunching, blood letting and all out fury of ancient warfare is brought to life so vividly that you almost have to check yourself to make sure you haven't been splashed with blood or wounded whilst reading.

It isn't all smash and gore however, as Mr Riches combines those elements with a story that splits into different arcs where he introduces new characters, kills some off and has laugh out loud humour in certain things the characters say to each other or 'at each other'. Ultimately the story brings all tribal elements and Romans together for the final battle and a few issues that need to be dealt with at The Fortress of Spears.

Central to all this is Marcus Aquila, aka Centurion Corvus who has been taken refuge with the Tungrians after the murder of his father in Rome. As the Hyenas of the Praetorian Guard close in on Aquila and his allies on their mission to destroy him and those who have given him shelter, the book takes you way beyond Hadrian's Wall and deep into enemy territory where the hostile environment wears the soldiers down and those with Calgus are on home soil and work to eliminate those who are not indigenous to the region and some who are.

I won't spoil the story for those who want to read it with specific details but suffice to say, if you like a fascinating story that's authentic, action packed, full of humour, a torrid journey in a horrible environment and descriptive scenes that may make you wince, Fortress of Spears is a book for you as it was for me. Anthony Riches has without doubt ramped up every element in this book, buy it, you will not be disappointed.

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### **Robin Carter says**

This latest and long awaited...(a whole year Anthony...come on speed it up).. book in the fantastic Empire series of books about our hero Marcus Aquila.

Anthony for me has a way of looking at the Roman world that very few other historical authors manage, its a real soldiers view point using language that feels authentic / real and when you combine that with the setting

along Hadrian's wall and beyond, a location that Anthony walked recently for charity the book just drips with authenticity and originality, when he talks about a soldiers blisters they could be his own he is describing, they are that real, and the whole book has that sense of realism.

As usual the plot of the story races along, the plot is split between the rebel alliance story, The Roman Troops chasing them down and the agents from Rome hell bent on capturing Marcus all of which adds a tense dramatic edge to the plot over and above the previous two.

I think its the introduction of some truly nasty bad guys in the form of Rapax and Tiberius Varius Excingus who really add some spice to the story and that extra tense gritty edge.

Anthony Riches has truly cemented his place amongst the elite of the historical fiction authors writing today, and I wait with bated breath for the next book.....does it really need to be another year? (Parm)

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### **D.w. says**

I am continuing with the series, for the one fault, that our protagonist is a super-hero, with comic book like powers continues to be predominant, the background history and the plot adds colour to a part of history I have not investigated fully and give the nod to Riches for it appears that he has done so. At least enough to craft a good man's adventure story against that backdrop.

Once again the cohort is called on to do duty, and they march forth gathering to them additional misfits that swell our hero's retinue. He soon will have more friends to guard his back than the emperor and the Pretorian Prefect who wishes him dead. Once again that subplot appears, and I fear it will appear continuously. Even when it makes little sense at all. Here, the enemies are so far removed, and already hunting this one man has been so costly, one would think that it has run its course. That the logic of it diminishes adds to the strikes against the story. Drama=Conflict, but there is already more than enough conflict fighting the war and the internal politics of the cohort that one does not need this external plot to drive the story. Riches is too attached to this mystery which it appears he wants to make his hero with an added depth to his character. Plenty of time to explore that when the character returns to Rome. However the Hungarian Auxiliary Cohort is becoming a little too invincible as well. Beginning to eclipse the legionnaires that they SUPPORT.

Other tales of Roman Soldiers show, and my knowledge of the period adds, that an auxiliary cohort is not trained to the same level of a legion, where the soldiers have been in training since they were children. There should be plenty of trouble for a unit of auxiliaries to get into, but now we seem to be creating illogical and unhistorical situations for our hero to go win and drags along a unit that would not be given the task over that of a cohort of legionnaires.

All that aside, and suspending my disbelief in this, I can find the tale interesting, though better survived if the three main problems, the Heroes Comic Book like superiority, his evil enemies in Rome who want him dead, and his leadership in a group of auxiliaries instead of legionnaires, had been dealt with.

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### **LMW says**

The adventure continues..... It continues to be action packed, moves right along, and does not get boring. It does, however, still present the problem of being unrealistic, in that all these people will go to great lengths, risking death and dishonor, to protect one young man. Also, it seems unbelievable all these people, of different backgrounds, cultures, and regions, would seem to flock around him. It is still a decent read, as I

mentioned, it does not get boring.

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## **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 Three**

Fortress of spears builds the first three Empire books to a suitably powerful conclusion and ties off a number of important story threads while keeping enough open to allow for great sequel potential. Essentially, it completes the first arc of a story that clearly goes on. This book is much the Return of the Jedi of this trio; a most entertaining and engaging book.

Where the first novel concentrated on life in an auxiliary unit and the second on the Hamian archers of the middle east, this third one has the cavalry at its heart, giving another fresh dimension for the reader. The third book shows the most character growth and complexity, indicating that the series is just going to keep getting better. The best thing about it though, beyond the always-excellent characterisation of the military, was the introduction of two new villains who were loathsome and impressive to an astounding extent.

Well done to Anthony Riches. I now have the newly-released Leopard Sword and cannot wait to see what next awaits Aquila in his new role.

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## **Tom Pycroft says**

immense immense immense

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**Wilfred Goodwin says**

Just love these types of historical fictions and Anthony Riches does it right.

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**Heath Knight says**

as previously three books, east read entertaining

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