



# Hannibal

*Ross Leckie*

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## **Hannibal** Ross Leckie

"A battle is like lust. The frenzy passes. Consequence remains." Such are the observations made and ill-gotten lessons learned in this fictional autobiographical narrative of breathtaking range and power. Ross Leckie not only presents a vivid re-creation of the great struggle of the Punic wars and the profoundly bloody battle for Rome, but also succeeds in bringing the almost mythical figure of Hannibal to life. Introspective, educated on the Greeks, Hannibal has never been presented quite like this. Written from Hannibal's perspective, this riveting, unique historical novel charts the rise and fall of the great Carthaginian general who came so close to bringing down Rome. A tragic chronicle of love and hate, heroism and cruelty, Hannibal is a dramatic and ultimately nourishing exploration of the inner life and epic consequences of one of humanity's greatest adventurers and most bloodthirsty leaders.

## **Hannibal Details**

Date : Published April 21st 2005 by Cannongate Books Ltd (first published 1995)

ISBN : 9781841955698

Author : Ross Leckie

Format : Paperback 256 pages

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# From Reader Review Hannibal for online ebook

## Jason M Waltz says

I'll give this 4 stars, though it was a bear to begin. There's a long period of time between my initial handful of pages and my wanting to wrap this book up this week. some of it has to do with the writing style , which I understand was done in an attempt to match the era, and another, larger, part due to the horrendous number of tongue-twisting names. again, era specific, but when I typically skip over a single unpronounceable secondary character name, it makes reading and following who does what where extremely challenging and ultimately boring when there's a dozen+ such names. so if you don't regularly read stuff like this, it's daunting. basically, I said, full steam ahead and discarded all the secondary names and followed Hannibal alone. before mid-book, I inadvertently had most of the characters down, though some have extremely similar names and roles, and by the last third I pretty much knew everyone, even if not by the name as typed on the page. it did help less were alive.

last half of the book, essentially from the death of Hannibal's father on, is rather rousing, deeply more psychological than anticipated, and filled with bloodshed and braggadocio. I read this because I despise the Rome that sacked and salted and stole the cultures and histories of Carthage and Greece and so many others, and wanted to read of Hannibal's victories again. it was an interesting novelization, poignant and brooding, filled with violence and the stuff of legend.

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## Olethros says

-Tonos crepusculares muy intensos.-

Género. Novela histórica.

Lo que nos cuenta. Aníbal Barca sabe que está cerca de la muerte y mira atrás con serenidad para recordar cómo vivió su vida, en qué acertó y qué errores cometió, tanto desde la perspectiva del hombre como desde la del general que puso a la Antigua Roma contra las cuerdas. Primer libro de la Trilogía de Cartago.

¿Quiere saber más de este libro, sin spoilers? Visite:

<http://librosdeolethros.blogspot.com...>

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## Charles says

One of the problems with historical fiction is that the reader is likely to have a fairly clear idea of what happens. This is particularly the case when the fiction deals with the illustrious dead. Novels about Napoleon and Marie Antoinette and Henry VIII may have a lot of incidental stuff to tell us, but the essential tension of fiction – will he die in exile? will she live? will he get married? – is necessarily absent.

There are ways around this, of course. The writer can take a leaf from Robert Graves' Claudius novels, choosing a relatively minor figure and dividing the life into two. Alternatively, the book can portray the

famous, about whom pretty much all is known, through the eyes of the real protagonists, as Mary Renault does in her wonderful novels about the adult Alexander and the Athens of Socrates and Plato. Other less scrupulous historical novelists have simply invented love affairs, illegitimate children, mysterious deaths, in an effort to sex the whole thing up.

Ross Leckie, in *Hannibal* (Canongate, 2008), has chosen a more difficult option. There can be few readers who don't already know that Hannibal tried to conquer Rome by leading his army, complete with elephants, across the Alps in winter, and that he failed. And, really, that's all there is to it. So it's a pleasure to be able to say that Leckie, with great skill, has taken this basic story – the Carthaginian leader's campaign against the Roman empire – and created a novel that works not only as a picture of an unutterably foreign world and time but also as a page-turner.

You can find the rest of my review [a href="http://charles.lambert.blogspot.com&q...](http://charles.lambert.blogspot.com&q...)

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### Vasil says

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### Cheryl says

Wow.

Go back to Rome in its power. Here comes a Carthaginian with the guts and power to take on Rome. How does he plan to do it? By bringing elephants down through the Alps.

The storie is told in the first person and gives you a view of a young confident Hannibal in the time where slaves are common and women are property. His father makes him swear to destroy Rome. In fact, in his dying words, he reminds Hannibal of his vow.

Hannibal commits heinous atrocities by today's standards. And heinous crimes are committed against him. It is difficult to hate Hannibal because he may just be a product of his time. It is easy to admire him for his strategies. His eye is decaying, so he plucks it out. He leaves his wife unprotected while he chases a Roman consul. She is raped and killed. His child dies on the winter crossing of the Alps. He grows through his cocky confident youth. His country will not support him even in his success. He could have been remembered more as Alexander if Carthage had the vision of Hannibal. Instead, it was destroyed. It is now a world heritage site.

You would enjoy this story of a very human leader.

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## **Emily says**

Blood, gore and lust... who wouldn't want to read it for Global???????)

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## **Motorcycle says**

It was kind of monotone. It was full of big action, but all delivered in a dull tone. And the character didn't conform to my historical impression of him.

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## **Catherine says**

I had mixed feelings about this book, as one can see from the grading. I asked for it because my knowledge of the Punic Wars is limited and I've always preferred getting information through reading good stories - even if I later have to revise some of it because the author has stretched the known facts as far as the unknown. As far as I'm aware, this is not a criticism that can be levelled at this book, so that's in its favour. Similarly, the picture painted of Hannibal's childhood and relationship with his wife offered an explanation for his hatred of Rome that made sense of his determination to bring his army to the gates. The narrative is driven along at the same pace, so it is sometimes difficult to put down.

However, I did find the violence and cruelty hard to stomach: I'm sure it happened and I can see why it was described so graphically, but such things are not for me when I'm trying to escape. I was also rather unsatisfied with the character of Hannibal - there were some sparks of feelings other than the desire for revenge there, but could they really have been so buried? I would have expected much more internal dialogue from a tale written in the first person and don't buy that he would not let himself recognise his 'weaker' sides.

In summary: I always thought I was a narrative over character person, and this book is certainly that, but maybe my tastes have changed, or maybe it's the gore, but this isn't one I'll re-read. Sorry.

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## **Nikki says**

I loved learning about the Punic Wars in my Classics classes, so I hoped for a lot from this book. Hannibal's an interesting figure, and the lessons never really made me understand him. Not, for example, in the way I understood what drove Alexander the Great. I hoped this book would help, but it ended up being, despite the first person narration, too superficial. I never really felt for Hannibal, through it, and it felt like a history lesson: a lot of dry figures, lists of what he learnt, and passionless descriptions of atrocities.

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## **Terence says**

I was leaning toward a 2-star review before getting to the second half of the book, which began (however tentatively) to explore Hannibal as a human being but it was too late and too facile to raise the book beyond a

2.8, at most.

I'm going to assume that anyone reading this review knows at least the basic outlines of Hannibal's career: Carthage was Rome's great bete noire during the Republic's rise to "great power" status in the Mediterranean. Hannibal, the son of Carthage's chief general Hamilcar Barca, supposedly swore an oath to his father to destroy Rome and, spurred by this overbearing desire for revenge, launched the Second Punic War and very nearly succeeded. Despite inflicting two of the greatest defeats in Roman history on her legions, Hannibal was unable to take the city or, indeed, to sway many of Rome's allies in Italy, and spent over a decade fruitlessly ravaging the Italian peninsula until recalled to Africa to meet a Roman counter-invasion and defeat at Zama. True to its nature and usual foreign policy, the Roman Senate was unable to rest without a completely cowed enemy and eventually hounded Hannibal into exile and death. The Romans tracked him to the kingdom of Bithynia, whose king betrayed Hannibal. Always one step ahead of the Romans, however, Hannibal managed to commit suicide before they could take him (in Leckie's version, Hannibal slits his own throat; the story I'm more familiar with is that he takes poison - in either version he gets the last word).

All of our sources for the Punic Wars and pre-Roman Carthage are Roman. The Republic was extremely thorough in wiping out any memory of its hated enemy after the final war in 146 BC (the Carthage of the Empire, Augustine and Boniface was a Roman colony). Thus, a modern author has a relatively open playing field in which to speculate on just what sort of man Hannibal may have been.

Ross Leckie's Hannibal conforms fairly closely to the idea of a man driven to obsession to destroy Rome for all the injustices it has heaped on Carthage; he sacrifices friendships, wife and son on its altar. It's only after his wife's brutal rape and murder at the hands of Roman legionnaires that he realizes how empty his life is and spends several years in a "funk," unable to finally settle affairs with Rome yet equally unable to retrieve anything worthwhile from the situation. Eventually, he returns to his obsession but too late to fulfill it. After fleeing Carthage, Hannibal spends the last decades of his life advising the Eastern kingdoms that are falling under Rome's hegemony in their resistance (particularly Antiochus).

Leckie does a good job capturing the flavor of the era, especially its brutality. It may be off-putting to modern sensibilities but the extremes of violence and the morality of the period ring true. And, to be honest, are we all that much better? What are we to make of the rape and murder of the 14-year-old Iraqi girl and slaughter of her family by US troops only a few years ago? How is this different from the Romans' rape and murder of Hannibal's wife, Similce, and Hannibal's response in butchering the pregnant Roman captives?

Another point in favor of Leckie's abilities as an author is his thorough grasp of the sources and of ancient warfare. It's also one of the weak points of the novel, which at times reads as little more than filler to get us from one decisive battle to another. Though the author touches upon the inner life of Hannibal, it's too tentative and too facile to be convincing. We're told of Hannibal's obsession, of his overwhelming love for wife and son (though not so overwhelming that he balks at taking them over the Alps in winter), of his sudden realization of revenge's futility, etc.

As an action-packed novel about Hannibal, this book succeeds but it lacks the power and insight of Renault's series of novels about Alexander or the faux autobiography par excellence, Yourcenar's *Hadrian* but it's a good diversion if you're interested in the period and the genre.

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**GUD Magazine says**

This is a nasty book. If you're expecting to read about Hannibal the famous general, Hannibal who crossed the Alps and gave the Romans the thrashing they deserved, forget it. This is Hannibal the man, one who doesn't care how many die in his pursuit of the revenge-wish he inherited from his father. He takes his wife and newborn baby through the alpine ice and snow, and then butchers some Roman women because the baby dies (the death is the Romans' fault--parse that one if you can).

Of course, there's also his good side--after his wife is brutally raped and killed by the Romans, he forbids his troops to rape. If you're thinking he's a mess of contradictions, then yes, he is--and it's not helped by the first person narrative giving the illusion of an insight into his motivations and character that isn't really there. Sometimes, Hannibal, who's writing this narrative as an old man in the expectation of imminent capture, feels the need to justify his actions. Othertimes, even such insufficient justification is lacking. The book would probably have worked better in third person, or with a different narrator, as it isn't able to get under Hannibal's skin and explain how his mind works.

At certain points in this book, I had to stop reading because what was portrayed was so viciously and needlessly cruel. In fiction it would be bad enough; in a novel based on true events, it's unbearable.

The book's well written, evokes the violence convincingly, is crammed with period detail, and has elephants. Excellent for those with strong stomachs. Not so good for sensitive souls.

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## **Hilary G says**

Ex Bookworm group review:

I am sorry, but I gave up reading this book on page 29, just after the fourth sickeningly violent episode. At one stomach-churning episode every 7.25 pages, and 241 pages to the book, I calculated that there might be 29 more such episodes and I was not up for that. I read for pleasure, not to induce a permanent state of nausea.

I also read for my own education, and had this been history, I might, just might, have persevered. But Leckie made it clear this was a novel, and novels are a form of entertainment. I am not entertained by violence. I don't know what historical sources there might be for the novel, and I know these were violent, barbaric times, but I found the relish with which Leckie elaborated the incidents in graphic detail to be most unsavoury. At the very least, he could have given more background to why the Carthaginians and the Romans hated each other, but he couldn't be bothered with that detail. They just did, now on to the ripping off of penises, putting out eyes, disembowelling guts etc. The depth of detail was not necessary to the telling of the story, so looked like gratuitous violence to me.

I would have been very interested to learn more about Hannibal because I (and, I suspect, many others) know nothing except he crossed the Alps with elephants. I think much could have been made of the pathos of hatred being passed from generation to generation and the young having no choice but to follow the same path as their fathers and forefathers without ever having the freedom to take their own path, but (in the first 29 pages at least) such potentially interesting themes are suffocated by Leckie's apparent taste for barbarity.

While I am panning a book I have not read (unfair, I know), I will add that I wrote off Leckie as a competent writer on page 1, when he told us that "Through that last night he turned over such many things." Such many? If it's English, Jim, it's not as we know it.

This is the second time in our history that I have failed to finish a book. But as you can see, I can review books whether I have read them or not!

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### **Bryn Hammond says**

Abandoned p.38

We know there is hyper-violent HF out there; to go by the first 38 pages, this is one of the worst examples. Nothing else has happened but grisly deaths by torture. The guy doesn't only gouge out the eyes, he *bites* through the eye-strings. (I've tried to visualise this ever since. I hope he's done his anatomical homework).

I direct your attention to a wonderful novel on Hannibal, *Pride of Carthage*. Nobody bites eye-strings.

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### **Arcadius says**

This succeeds very well in humanising Hannibal, even forcing readers to sympathise with him, without making him (or the Carthaginians in general) at all likeable.

It's a little overwritten in places (as if Cecil B De Mille had occasionally jogged his elbow), and Leckie is maybe overfond of graphic scenes of disgusting cruelty. And although I'm reluctant to criticise any historical novel for being too short, I could have done with quite a lot more about Hannibal's time in Italy - one wonders, for example, what a vast banquet Colleen McCullough could have made of all this.

Still, 'Hannibal' is way above average historical genre and has left me keen to read more of Leckie.

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### **Beorn says**

A quite cold, clinical and often aloof interpretation of the story behind the most well known enemy of the Roman Empire, one of history's greatest military tacticians & warlords, Hannibal Barca.

Very little to launch yourself headlong into an engrossing epic or such like. In fact, at numerous times, it's quite frustrating and takes dedication to even keep reading.

While there's plenty of detail and information on things like the positioning of troops, war tactics etc, even though this sells itself as the story behind the great man himself, there is very little to make you immerse yourself in the story, empathise with any of the characters or make you feel a part of the tale.

This all adds together to give a very sterile read and, along with rather pretentious yet discordant phrasing, makes this a hard book to fall headlong into or get the same kind of appeal from as other, more immersive historical fiction.

Considering the previous fiction book I'd read was the far superior *Hannibal: Enemy Of Rome* by Ben Kane, I come out of this book wondering why I even bothered reading Leckie's version at all.



