



Give Me Back My Legions!

Harry Turtledove

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"Bestselling author Turtledove turns his attention to an epic battle that pits three Roman legions against Teutonic barbarians in a thrilling novel of Ancient Rome "Publius Quinctilius Varus, a Roman politician, is summoned by the Emperor, Augustus Caesar. Given three legions and sent to the Roman frontier east of the Rhine, his mission is to subdue the barbarous German tribes where others have failed, and bring their land fully under Rome's control.

Arminius, a prince of the Cherusci, is playing a deadly game. He serves in the Roman army, gaining Roman citizenship and officer's rank, and learning the arts of war and policy as practiced by the Romans. What he learns is essential for the survival of Germany, for he must unite his people against Rome before they become enslaved by the Empire and lose their way of life forever.

An epic battle is brewing, and these two men stand on opposite sides of what will forever be known as The Battle of the Teutoberg Forest--a ferocious, bloody clash that will change the course of history.

Give Me Back My Legions! Details

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Colin says

I am not a big fan of the alternative history that Turtledove is famous for, but this is historical fiction that is quite gripping and informative at the same time.

Nicole Geub says

just meh. the idea was there but the execution was weak. the historical note at the end was more useful than the rest.

Angus Whittaker says

This book was the worst Harry Turtledove I have read so far - which really isn't saying that much. I don't know how this book got to be published. My three-year old brother could have written a better novel. Turtledove's writing is so flawed. He repeats himself ENDLESSLY, and spends 30 pages at a time drilling one single, easy, simple concept into the readers' heads. He wastes a bunch of time and page space by writing about what could have happened - every time a character makes some choice, Turtledove helpfully informs the reader in great detail about what could have happened had the character not made that choice. These may seem like minor, nit-picking points, but Turtledove makes the same mistakes so many times that it seems like the book is just one big flaw - which it is.

Turtledove managed to fill up 310 pages with what could have easily been written in about 100. I'm not saying that this should have been a novella or short story instead, but Turtledove could have written about more than he did. He basically wrote about two things: the Germans plotting revenge, and the Romans complaining about being in Germany. (The book is set at the time of the Battle of Teutoburg Forest in 9 AD, in which the Germans drove the Romans out of their lands). Oh yeah, and Turtledove also sticks a battle in at the end, almost as an afterthought. Instead of taking so much time to write about so little, Turtledove could have concentrated on other things, such as the main character's wife, for instance. All she gets is a passing mention. Or he could have spent longer on the actual battle, which is the reason I picked this book up in the first place. Terrible novel.

Donald says

very good

Donald says

Very good historical fiction. The events leading up to the Battle of the Teutoburg Forest were only mildly interesting, but the plan hatched by German born Roman citizen Arminius is cunning in its simplicity...

befriend the newly appointed Roman Governor of Germany, Publius Quinctilius Varus, who is more of a politician than a military might, and over the course of years, during which you are building a German army on one hand and playing the good Roman soldier on the other, convince him to alter his route back to the easier winters across the Rhine to a more accessible, less swampy route of your choosing wherein lies your hidden army, just waiting to strike and take out three legions of the Roman army in the Teutoburg Forest. The battle is well described but over too quickly. Nice read for my introduction to Turtledove.

Hardy says

As a former Latin teacher fascinated by the history of its time, I happened upon this on a library shelf and rolled the dice. The historical significance of the Battle of the Teutoburg Forest in 9 A.D. is well-known; less so are the details of what happened there. Harry Turtledove has gamely taken on the challenge of telling the story and emerged with modest success. The tale moves steadily along, but the balance seems off; much more (and often repetitive) attention is given to the buildup than to the battle itself. The visceral horror of battle and its aftermath, vividly described by the author, deserved more time on stage given the pivotal nature of these events. Another tricky aspect of historical fiction, particularly that set in foreign lands long ago, is dialogue; Turtledove's, while clunky in places, mostly blends in.

Overall, the novel is an entertaining read, and there is an afterword directing a reader so inclined to further background. I look forward to reading more of Turtledove's work for comparison.

Jaret says

The content was interesting and Turtledove's battle descriptions were excellent. His descriptions stayed true to the time period, so parts were graphic. But, he definitely kept you on the seat of your pants during the battle scene. The rest of the story, though, was long and drawn out. Turtledove also had a habit of repeating himself again and again and again and again.... If the repeated parts were edited out, and he had stuck to a brief storyline, I would have loved this book.

Anton T. says

Extremely repetitive. Should've been at least twice shorter. No character arcs, a very limited number of ideas. Basically, it's a short story that's artificially bloated to look like a novel. The writing itself is fine, though. Still, it's a one star rubbish, because the whole repetitiveness thing is a crime against the reader's time. Sad!

Christopher says

In AD 9, the German Arminius who had served as an auxiliary in the Roman army persuaded P. Quinctilius Varus, Roman governor of newly conquered Germany, to take his army to winter quarters in a way that allowed hostile German forces to wipe out the Roman garrison of three legions at the Teutoburg Forest, effectively ending the Roman attempt to turn Germany into a Roman province. This novel is an okay effort to investigate how this took place. It reminds me a lot of the work of Bernard Cornwall. The book mainly revolves around the plot and the characters are underdeveloped. Both they and the story signify nothing

much beyond the plot. There is no "backstory," the characters learn nothing, and the writing doesn't really give much texture to the story. You have characters interact, and the narrative does nothing much beyond giving the setting for the dialogue.

The story is basically about Arminius and Varus, and each has a side kick (a slave assistant in the case of Varus, while Arminius has his father). There are a few other characters on the Roman side. These are just insubstantial soldiers, who are hard to tell apart because they have no story of their own (either in the immediate setting or as "backstory"). They basically serve as foils to Varus's actions, and when they finally participate in the climactic debacle, their final stories have little impact. There are a few Germans running around apart from Arminius and his father, but they don't count for much.

Overall, the book does a pretty good job of explaining how Varus could have done something that in retrospect seems monumentally stupid, and it's interesting enough in that regard. But there really isn't much more to it beyond that, and even the final battle is portrayed in a rather unengaging way. The action isn't all that vivid, and the readers don't have enough investment in the characters to care that much about their fates.

The book doesn't have enough substantial detail to give rise to an overall evaluation of its historical accuracy, but there are a few signs of a less than full understanding of the period on the author's part. He seems to think that it was possible for a senator like Varus to become governor of Egypt, though it's a pretty rudimentary element in the system set up by Augustus that Egypt was anomalously governed by an equestrian-rank prefect (senators were actually forbidden from setting foot there without imperial permission, and Tiberius's nephew and adopted heir Germanicus got into some trouble for visiting the place without permission despite being a sort of plenipotentiary in the east). Also, Varus's slave assistant is constantly referred to by the title *pedisequus*, but that's actually a very lowly function (the term literally means "foot follower" and signified a flunky who would accompany the master on foot). And in the name of the gods, Roman personal nomenclature, while different from our own, isn't all that complicated, and it drives me nuts when the writers of historical fiction screw them up, as here.

So, overall an okay investigation of the motivations and behavior of the two main protagonists, but not all that engaging. For example, the final scene when Augustus gets word of the debacle has no real emotional heft, and is defective historically speaking in that while the Pannonian revolt of AD 6-9 is occasionally alluded to, no mention is made of the fact that the disaster at the Teutoburg Forest was so final derived from the fact that during the Pannonian Revolt Augustus had found it very difficult to come up with reinforcements, and after that effort, it was pretty much impossible to make good the loss of about 10% of the overall Roman military force as a result of Varus's bungling.

Marijan says

Malo je repetitivno, ali zanimljivo. Povijest bitke kod Teutoburške šume ispričana kroz odnos glavnih likova- Arminija i Varusa- uz plejadu sporednih likova. Malo me smetalo što Harry ne može odoljeti igrama riječi tipičnim za engleski jezik koje stavlja u usta likovima koji definitivno nisu govorili engleski. Sve u svemu, vrijedno čitanja.

Rich says

Interesting historical fiction, however I found it to be very repetitive - to the point of being annoying at times. Still and all, worth the read I guess.

William says

An important aspect of European history. This the story about Rome's failure to dominate the Germanic kelts east of the Rhine River. Had they conquered the Germans Western Europe would be as it is. The Franks would probably not conquered Gaul and thereby the Romans would have remained in Britannia, and of course no Holy Roman Empire.

I think that it has been a good balance having both Germanic and Latin cultures.

The History Channel did a program on this showing visually how the battle took place.

Kip says

ok - easy read.

Colleen says

It would be appropriate if I ran around my house screaming "Turtledove! Give me back my time!" and banging my head against the wall.

It's been awhile since I have read this author, and I never liked him before, but he's prolific so figured I might have just encountered something not his best in the past. Give Me Back My Legions isn't helping his case. (Would like to also note that I did not read this book by choice--was another foisted upon me by my father.)

One of the LAZIEST and most repetitive books I have ever read. Is this all it takes to get a book published nowadays? I kept reading in disbelief because I couldn't believe the author was truly this bad. Example:

Random Chapter: Varus talks to his Greek secretary about how much he hates Germany--the rain, the uncouth men--though the women aren't that bad. The gay secretary sighs.

Random next Chapter: Arminius talks to his father about how much he hates the Romans--their preference for garlic, how they water their wine, and they're corrupting the women!

Chapter following this one: Varus is writing a letter to Augustus, stops to ask his secretary if it's still raining. It is. Long dialogue about how much nicer Antioch was in comparison.

Chapter Etc. Arminius rides along on a mangy pony in a swampy forest, thinking of how much he hates the Romans and how Germany just needs to be free. If only they had better organizational skills! Instead, he'll have to use the rain to his advantage.

So, take the above four sample chapter plots I have above, and just repeat them endlessly for like 300 pages, until of course, the show down in the forest, which for all the build up was incredibly stupid. I'm not kidding about this either--it is really the same four above chapters endlessly repeated. I bet if I got a set of colored highlighters, and marked phrases and PARAGRAPHS that are used more than once in this book, the whole thing would be a rainbow of colors.

There's more things wrong with this book than just inanity, cardboard characters, suspense so forced it becomes parody, and repetition galore. One star is a star too much. Ugh.

Jane says

Straightforward retelling of Battle of Teutoburg Forest, A.D. 9. Very easy reading, level of writing--a YA novel. He gave backstory -- why Varus was chosen as governor, Roman legionary life, Arminius' plans for ambush -- then the actual battle, (description of which was very exciting!) but it seemed the story could have been a novella, rather than padded out as a full-blown novel. The author has an interesting afterword in which he explains who were actual historical figures and why he fictionalized motivations as he did.
