



Viper of the North

Gordon Doherty

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The Danubian frontier is weaker than ever, and a storm is gathering in the north . . .

Deep winter, 376 AD: Emperor Valens has withdrawn the field armies from Moesia and Thracia to fight in the Persian War. The impoverished limitanei legions left behind to defend the banks of the River Danubius are now all that stand between the war-hungry Goths and heart of the Eastern Roman Empire.

For Numerius Vitellius Pavo and the men of the XI Claudia, the brief from Emperor Valens is simple: to avoid war with the Goths at all costs while the Roman defences are so weak. But in the frozen lands north of the Danubius a dark legend, thought long dead, has risen again. The name is on the lips of every warrior in Gutthiuda; the one who will unite the tribes, the one whose armies will march upon the empire, the one who will bathe in Roman blood . . .

The Viper!

Viper of the North Details

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Author : Gordon Doherty

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From Reader Review Viper of the North for online ebook

Joe Singleton says

I enjoyed reading the first book in this series but the second one was even better. Very well written and descriptive

WarpDrive says

This is a solid continuation of the "Legionary" series by this talented author.

The author's historical research is very good, and the few inaccuracies are duly acknowledged by him in the "author's notes" at the end of the book.

I also like that the author decided to represent an important but not well-known battle, the one at Ad Salices (battle which is so often forgotten because it is chronologically close to the (in)famous battle of Hadrianople, which used to be considered a pivotal event in the history of the Roman Empire).

The story is riveting, most of the main characters are well developed and believable. The author has also a gift for rendering these battles as vivid, epic, memorable encounters.

The only real issue I have with this book is with the "Viper" character, character which sometimes assumes almost a supernatural, caricatural aspect - it is really a bit overdone IMO.

Overall, a very good book of historical fiction, pleasurable to read, and highly recommended to anyone interested in this fascinating period of the Roman Empire.

Jane says

This was the author's take on the Gothic *Volkswanderung* [migration of people] into the Eastern Roman Empire late 4th century AD, debacle at Marcianople and the stalemate Battle of Ad Salices [The Willows]: all set within this Roman military action/adventure novel. It was enjoyable, light, fun reading and highly recommended.

The protagonist, Pavo, and his army buddies were engaging. The identity of the chief villain deceived me, as well as the XI Claudia legion. Characterization was good; each of the ensemble had a distinctive personality. I 'loved to hate' the villain and unpleasant people and hoped they'd all get their just desserts. I could catch glimpses of the author's Strategos series. [I have read and enjoyed the latter.] I don't mind blood and gore, but I felt the drawing and quartering was beyond the Pale. Some of the earlier skirmishes and battles I skim-read, feeling there would be a large-scale set piece battle as climax; there was: Ad Salices. Too many battles render me numb to the death and destruction.

I thought there were too many coincidences and implausibilities. Many incidents relied on the old *deus ex machina* trope, e.g., at Ad Salices, the Western Roman army arrived to help in the nick of time. It was

amazing how quickly characters recovered from serious wounds! The novel could have used more proofreading; there were certain phrases the author used over and over; more use of a thesaurus might have been in order. I did not read the first novel in the series. Because the author gave enough of the backstory I felt I knew the gist of the previous action. Mr. Doherty is a very talented storyteller. I applaud him for delving into a different period of Roman history than the usual. His historical research was impeccable.

For a nonfiction treatment of this era, I enjoyed and recommend Day of the Barbarians.

Hakan says

A very excellent retelling of the events that would eventually lead to the downfall of the East Roman Empire.

One minor nitpick though, if this is the last time I read the word *plumbatae*, it will not be a second too soon :-)

Gordon Doherty says

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Rachel says

I really, really enjoyed these Legionary Series. On almost every page, the reader plunges blindly into the scene, never knowing when a Gothic war horn may sound, and all hell break loose. This is what I really loved about this book. Also, the suspense/mystery was very intriguing. I could not put this book down: I picked this book up yesterday and finished it today.

Gordon Doherty has become one of my favorite historical fiction authors. I cannot wait to read the other books that will follow up this one...the story of Pavo and his seemingly dead father and the old crone draws me. I will have to see what happens next. Yes, I will most definitely be buying the book that follows this one. For my sake, treat yourself, buy this book, and hang on for a very fast ride across the East!

Ian McCreedy says

Full of action and amazing plot twists.

Benjamin says

Very entertaining. Looking forward to book 3

Conor says

This was another enjoyable, if not particularly challenging, read from the author. Pretty much everything I said in my review of the first book holds true for this one; this is a straightforward historical adventure that could be enjoyed by pretty much anyone over the age of 10. While the plot isn't exactly complex and the villains are hilariously hammy and 2-D (including, disappointingly, Salvian, the ambassador who mentored and befriended the main character and had the potential to be a truly great villain before randomly turning into the 'mwahahahah' sort that describes every other bad-guy in this series) the main characters are funny and likeable and the action scenes come thick and fast. The setting, with the once all-powerful Roman Empire beset by enemies on all sides and teetering on the brink of collapse was still really interesting and had an obvious effect on the plot.

Full review to come...

Alun says

Right now, I'm thinking this may well be the best #RomanHistFic I have ever read.

Chris says

This is probably the best Roman fiction I've read. Actually, I think it's the only Roman fiction I've read, but don't let that cloud my glowing opening statement.

This book tells the story of the Viper, a Gothic warrior who is killed long before Chapter 1 even starts. As a shade, he doesn't get much air-time for obvious reasons, which focuses on Pavo and the XI Claudia. However, nobody in this book is as they seem, and it is full of crossing, double-crossing, back-stabbing and shady pasts.

Although a work of fiction, like *Sharpe* it has a basis in real historic events with the usual caveats for artistic licence. Anybody who likes back-stabbing, Romans, battles and Bernard Cornwell should pick this up.

NB: I received this book via a Goodreads giveaway.

John Condliffe says

A good read full of action and drama. The plot was a bit transparent and some of the escapes and narrow misses implausible but this is an action adventure. The historical narrative is very impressive and Gordon has woven his story into it very nicely. Some of the dialogue is not quite natural but the this author is improving as he goes along. A must for those who love history and especially Roman History.

Margareth8537 says

Action packed. A depressing period of Roman history, as we are used to them mainly coming out on top, and this is a fairly inglorious period. The same team as in the first book, this time fighting the Goths, and acting as a backbone of veterans to new recruits. Historical details fascinating and a very enjoyable read.

Paul Bennett says

The decision to read Legionary 2 at this particular time was made despite the fact that I am currently in the process of reading many different series including Mr. Doherty's Strategos, Angus Donald's Outlaw, Giles Kristian's Raven, Robert Fabbri's Vespasian, Ben Kane's Hannibal and SJA Turney's Marius Mules & Ottoman Cycle. So as you can see there was a lot of excellent material to choose from. Having decided to go with either Legionary 2 or Strategos 2 next, I sent a tweet to Gordon Doherty asking him as to which I should choose. He re-tweeted asking if I preferred to be in the baking sun or a wintry blizzard. Well given the 95 degree temperatures and 100% humidity we have endured the last week, the wintry blizzard won out.

The Goths are uniting under a mysterious shade from the past, The Viper, who has only the destruction of The Roman Empire on his mind. This part of The Empire is not well manned by The Legions and would seem to be ripe targets for the Gothic Invasion. That is the main storyline and one that is riveting in its telling and imaginative in its scope. However, as good as that story is, it is the detailed characterizations making up this story that really sells the goods. The main characters are each imbued with the secrets that make them tick, make them do the things they do, make them live and breathe despite their doubts and nightmares. Pavo and his search for truth, Avitus for atonement, Gallus for peace, these and many other torments and desires are hidden deep in each one's mind and draw the reader in to experience the turmoil.

Throughout the telling of this tale there are many likable rogues most especially in the XI Claudia, the core if you will of that depleted Border Legion would fit in well with Vespasian's 2nd Legion with Macro and Cato or with Fronto's 10th Legion with Caesar in Marius Mules. Of course any tale worth telling has to have the not so likable and this tale has plenty to go around and not all of them are Gothic but even a couple of them find redemption of some sort.

Along with the chaos and mayhem of battle, the author also gives us some very nice twists and turns along

the way not the least of which is the identity of The Viper. That revelation is certainly a stunner and really adds to the drama. It is a well written and researched episode and I look forward to the next one in the series.

I rate this at 4.5

John Salter says

I read the prequel to Legionary, the first in the series, a couple years ago after it was recommended to me by Simon Turney (author) and decided to give it a go as he highly recommended it. The late Roman period usually isn't my cup of tea but it is a history novel and it contains Roman soldiers so that was good enough for me.

The Legionary in question in book one and Viper of the North is a young man called Vitellius Pavo who through misfortune was born into slavery but eventually joined the legions where to all intents and purposes he grows and develops into a man. In book two the Gothic hordes are gathering on the border and threatening to invade badly depleted forts and garrisons of the empire.

In Viper of the North as a reader you get a real sense of the cold, snow and general awful sense of winter combined with ancient battles and war as the Viper appears and attempts to destroy the very people who tried to destroy him or should I say the very thought of him? I don't want to spoil it so won't say too much and give it away.

The story contains strong characters that you will be able to relate with and there are those that you would enjoy being in the company of, Pavo for example who is honest, hard working yet humble and a warrior. Then there are others such as Senator Tarquinius who cares nothing for anyone else and is only out to get what he can for himself.

There is also an incompetent, arrogant and quite despicable Roman officer, who you are just willing throughout to have the most awful and hideous death in the form of Lupicinius who tries his best to destroy the Claudia XI Legion whilst Tribune Gullus is elsewhere fighting for the cause as well as a whole host of other excellent characters.

In summary, if you like good historic novels, with engaging personalities, a cracking storyline and an atmosphere that actually makes you shiver due to the cold that you are reading about, get yourself a copy of Viper of the North. It's packed full of historically accurate detail, lot's of action and is a thoroughly enjoyable read.
