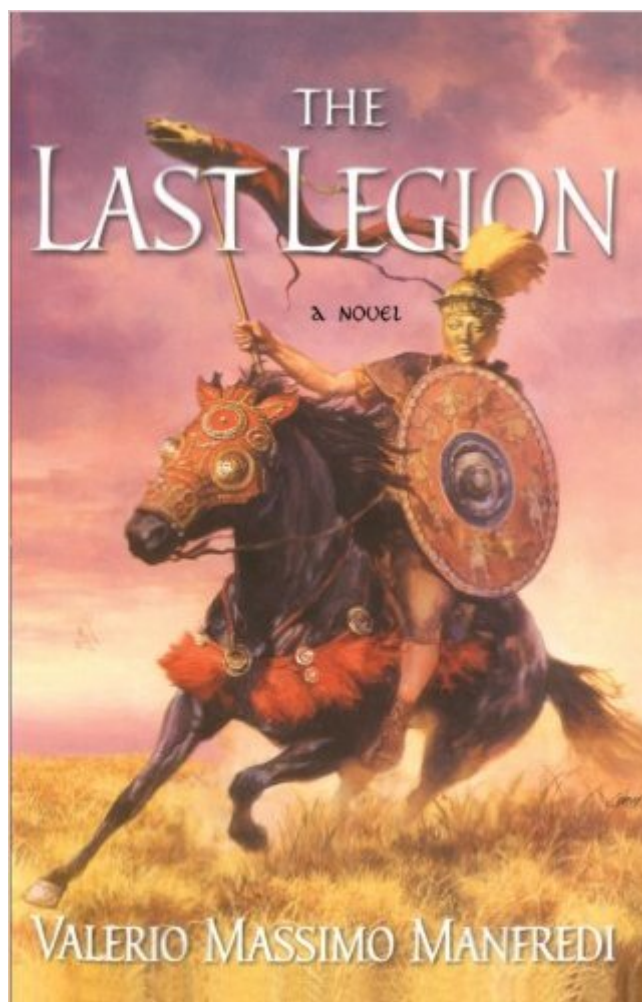


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The Last Legion: A Novel



Synopsis

The Roman world is in the throes of death, but a new myth, destined to span the centuries, is waiting to be born. The camp was quiet. Mist shrouded the plains and the Nova Invicta Legion, the legendary warriors charged with protecting the last emperor of Rome, settled in for another cold and bitter night. Then, through the fog, the barbarians appeared. In a space of a few hours, all was lost -- the Roman Empire lay in ruins. But not all the Romans are dead. From the dust of the battlefield, a band of seemingly immortal legionaries rise up. They are the Last Legion. Risking their lives, they attempt an audacious mission to free the young emperor and his enigmatic tutor from the hands of their captors. The Last Legion is a bewitching novel of bravery, love, myth, and magic. Valerio Massimo Manfredi has written an epic that will hold you spellbound until the very last page.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This review is for the English language version of Valerio Manfredi's 'The Last Legion'. I am a fan of Colleen McCollough's (Great Men of Rome) work and thought it would be interesting to try some Roman-era fiction from a different viewpoint. I, therefore, picked up the Last Legion, and read it over the course of the last few days. I liked the book, and the story was quite fun. McCollough's work is much more intricate, but Manfredi's has a lot more action and adventure to it. This is the story of Aurelius, one of the few survivors of the Nova Invicta Legion, last of the Roman legions in the year AD 476. With the orders of a dying general, he searches for the deposed emperor Romulus Augustus (Augustulus in the history books). Once found, he must keep the boy safe from recapture by the barbarian warlord Odoacer and his lieutenant Wulfilla. Along the way they are accompanied

by a Venetian woman named Livia, the emperor's tutor Ambrosinius, two Greek slaves turned gladiators, and the only other two remaining legionaires, Batatius and Vatrenus. The band of soldiers must fight brigands, barbarians, and the elements, all while Aurelius must deal with his troubled and forgotten past, which Livia knows far too much about. The characters, with the exception of the two Greeks (who are so secondary I can't remember their names without getting the book out), are fairly well developed (which makes the two Greeks somewhat disappointing), and are written as human beings with faults, desires, hopes, and feelings. It makes them believable, such as when the young boy, distraught over the death of his parents, does something stupid, or when a wound Aurelius can't pick something up with a damaged arm, no matter how hard he tries.

Manfredi knows what he is writing about. He is an Italian historian, journalist and archeologist. This is a wild and fast adventure romp and should be seen as such. It doesn't have the depth of Steven Pressfield's writing, but I don't think this was Manfredi's intention. Manfredi is best in describing the adventure, the action, the countryside he obviously knows so well but also shows good skills in developing the inevitable love affair between the two protagonists, Livia and Aurelius. The ensemble of characters is close to cliches but good. Aurelius, the strong and skilled soldier, Livia, a beautiful warriorress, Romulus, the boy-emperor, Ambrosinus, his enigmatic tutor and Batiatius, a giant Ethiopian. The Barbarian Wulfila is as expected: mean and filthy with a face almost split in two. It is the year 476 AD. The Roman empire has been overrun by various tribes and Rome itself has been invaded by Barbarians. There is however a tiny sparkle of hope that with the survival of the last Emperor, the Roman culture might prevail. The odds are against him: Romulus is just a boy with his older tutor Ambrosinus by his side. The Barbarians are powerful and adaptive. In order to be accepted by the population and to keep the society from falling into chaos, Odoacer, Barbarian leader and new ruler of Rome shows first signs of diplomacy as he allows the boy to live on in captivity. Had Odoacer sensed any of the far reaching after-effects this decision would provoke, he would probably have chopped off Romulus' head the moment he caught the boy. The Barbarian doesn't know that Ambrosinus is in fact Merlin, the mage. Nor does he know about the tiny group of skilled soldiers Ambrosinus manages to persuade to help live his vision.

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