

A Chronicle of the Roman Twilight

John Ranger

iUniverse (May 17, 2018)

Softcover \$28.99 (670pp)

978-1-5320-4517-2

A Chronicle of the Roman Twilight is an entertaining and informative look at the end of the Western Roman Empire.

John Ranger's massive historical novel *A Chronicle of the Roman Twilight* depicts the last days of the Western Roman Empire through the eyes of one of the bulwarks of Roman civilization—a Roman soldier.

Marcus Cedranus is the novel's everyman protagonist. The son of a semiprosperous middle-class family in Roman Britain, Marcus is born into many advantages. He is a Roman citizen, a city dweller in Cirencester, and the son of a former German mercenary who became a Roman citizen after fighting in the army of Emperor Septimius Severus. However, Marcus spirals after a falling-out with his parents.

Marcus decides to find his fortune by leaving Britain for the European continent. He is drafted into the increasingly barbarian-heavy Roman army in Gaul. For the remainder of the story, the legionnaire Marcus partakes in the many civil wars of the late Roman Empire. He ultimately watches as Rome, which has been supplanted as the capital by the eastern city of Constantinople, is sacked by a Visigothic army led by the Arian Christian general Alaric.

This novel is a treat for history lovers. It is packed with well-wrought details about the final days of the Western Roman Empire, from the state of the battle-hardened Roman army to the flagging economy in places like Gaul, Germania, and North Africa, all of which saw endless barbarian raids and conquests between the fourth and fifth centuries. Marcus provides an excellent lens for examining the drama and pain of watching a great civilization collapse into anarchy.

Several historical figures appear in this powerful book. They include Stilicho, the half-Vandal, half-Roman general who oversaw some of the last great victories of the Roman army; Emperor Theodosius, the Nicene Christian who became the last ruler of a unified Roman Empire; and Alaric, the Visigothic king and Roman general who, despite bringing Rome to its knees, nevertheless saw himself as the loyal vassal of the Roman emperor.

This rich and hefty tome's characters are all well drawn and mostly conform to real historical personalities. At times, Marcus's arc gets lost in all of the history. While his story is part of the wider world of the fall of the Western Roman Empire, there are moments here when it is hard to distinguish whether this book wants to be a novel or a history with fictional elements.

A Chronicle of the Roman Twilight is an entertaining and informative look at the end of the Western Roman Empire and what it meant for Roman citizens, Roman soldiers, and romanized "barbarians" alike.

BENJAMIN WELTON (October 15, 2018)

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