

Cradle of Saints: The Chronicles of Iona

Paula de Fougerolles

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Cradle of Saints is an epic historical novel in which politics and religion lead to clashes and power struggles in the British Isles.

Set in medieval Britain, Paula de Fougerolles's thrilling historical novel *Cradle of Saints* is full of passion, violence, warring Scottish lords, and the Black Death. Columba of Iona and Aedan mac Gabran, a warlord, lead this fascinating story about power and ambition in the Scottish Highlands. It is further centered by the dramatic formation of the maritime kingdom of Dalriada.

Aedan's star is on the rise; nonetheless, when the story starts, he is in trouble. His grip on his kingdom is crumbling; his wife consort, Ama, and his son are being held hostage by a foreign king who thirsts for power; and he's at risk of losing his life to his scheming vassals. He musters his loyal vassals, their respective warriors, and a handful of ships for a rescue mission, knowing that his efforts could mean war. He faces small-scale battles in which every death is fraught; intrigue ensues.

Meanwhile, Aedan's wife and son struggle to find their way to freedom. They escape captivity only to enter a lawless, frightening landscape. And Columba, tasked with tracking them down, travels dangerous roads too. Columba's efforts, though, are amplified by his mysticism: he has the power to see into the beyond. The advent of the Plague is an additional impediment: it sweeps the land and decimates those it touches.

The sixth-century setting is made vibrant thanks to rich descriptions of conflicts between feuding lords and their vassals. While some of the book's court drama is captured in familiar terms, the landscape and culture in which it exists are rendered in more unique ways. Deep, textured conversations are used to further develop the conflicts. And while the cast is extensive, and the terrain that they travel is broad, an introductory summary of the key people and their connections to one another helps when it comes to following the tale and defining its dramas—as the book's included maps help when it comes to understanding the scale of the conflicts. In the final pages, the story gives way to history, with revelations of the truth behind the novel—just as interesting as the fictionalized story itself is.

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JEREMIAH ROOD (November 10, 2022)

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