



War at the Edge of the World

Ian James Ross

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A strange, violent land at the far edge of the Roman empire sets the stage for this essentially human war tale.

In *War at the Edge of the World*, the first book of a planned series entitled *Twilight of Empire*, Ian James Ross offers a gritty tale of adventure and an invigorating immersion into a time and place that is both familiar and perplexingly strange to contemporary readers.

To modern English-speaking readers, northern England and Scotland may be comfortably familiar settings. But from the standpoint of the Roman Empire, Britannia was the edge of the world: the far periphery of the empire, beyond which lay frigid wastelands filled with incomprehensible barbarians.

When Aurelius Castus, a decorated veteran of victorious campaigns against the Persian Empire, accepts a promotion to centurion, it comes at the price of transfer from the elite II Herculia legion, in which he won his reputation, to the rather less glorious VI Victrix legion, a garrison force stationed at the “edge of the world” in northern Britannia. The weather is damp and gloomy, the imperial glories of Rome are far away, and the soldiers he commands spend the majority of their time brandishing shovels instead of swords. But forces are moving that will disrupt the tedium of this northern existence. The co-emperors Diocletian and Maximian have resigned, appointing a new and unfamiliar Caesar to rule over Britain and Gaul. And north of Emperor Hadrian’s wall, which marks the edge of the empire, there are rumors that a Pictish king allied to Rome has died, creating a power vacuum sure to attract the ambitious and ruthless.

Ross excels at depicting both the personal, day-to-day lives of the soldiers who lived, worked, and fought in this relatively obscure time and place and the larger political, social, and religious currents that influence their lives. The barracks, offices, roads, villas, and brothels that Castus frequents are vivid reminders that in any time or place, human beings have basic human needs and desires.

Ross has done a wonderful job bringing this vanished world to plausible life while telling an exciting story full of characters who are essentially human and distinctly formed by their time and place.

BRADLEY A. SCOTT (Fall 2015)

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