

Warriors of God: Richard the Lionheart and Saladin in the Third Crusade

By James Reston Jr.

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Acclaimed author James Reston, Jr.'s **Warriors of God** is the rich and engaging account of the Third Crusade (1187-1192), a conflict that would shape world history for centuries and which can still be felt in the Middle East and throughout the world today. James Reston, Jr. offers a gripping narrative of the epic battle that left Jerusalem in Muslim hands until the twentieth century, bringing an objective perspective to the gallantry, greed, and religious fervor that fueled the bloody clash between Christians and Muslims.

As he recounts this rousing story, Reston brings to life the two legendary figures who led their armies against each other. He offers compelling portraits of Saladin, the wise and highly cultured leader who created a united empire, and Richard the Lionheart, the romantic personification of chivalry who emerges here in his full complexity and contradictions. From its riveting scenes of blood-soaked battles to its pageant of fascinating, larger-than-life characters, **Warriors of God** is essential history, history that helps us understand today's world.

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- Sales Rank: #410539 in Books
- Brand: Reston, James
- Published on: 2002-05-14
- Released on: 2002-05-14
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.01" h x .84" w x 5.20" l, .90 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 448 pages

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review
Throughout the medieval era, the Holy Land was a fiercely contested battlefield, fought over by huge Muslim and Christian armies, by zealots and assassins. The Third Crusade, spanning five years at the end of the 12th century, was, writes James Reston Jr. in this absorbing account, "Holy War at its most virulent," overseen by two great leaders, the Kurdish sultan Salah ad-Din, or Saladin, and the English king Richard, forevermore known as Lionheart.

Writing with a keen sense of historical detail and drama, Reston traces the complex path by which Saladin and Richard came to face each other on the field of battle. The Crusades, he observes, began "as a measure to redirect the energies of warring European barons from their bloody, local disputes into a 'noble' quest to reclaim the Holy Land from the 'infidel'." Of the five Crusades over 200 years, only the first was successful, to the extent that the Christian armies were able to conquer their objective of Jerusalem. The Third Crusade, as Reston ably shows, was complicated by fierce rivalries among the Christian leaders, by a chain of military disasters that led to the destruction of an invading German army and its emperor, and by the dedication of an opposing Islamic army that shared both a goal and a language.

Saladin, Reston writes, was a brilliant leader and a merciful victor, but capable of costly errors; Richard was extraordinarily skilled at combat, but his lack of resolve cost him many battles, and, ultimately, Jerusalem. Richard returned to Europe, Saladin to Damascus. Neither leader has long to live, and the peace they made would soon be broken. James Reston's splendid book does them both honor while examining a conflict that has never really ended. --*Gregory McNamee*

From Publishers Weekly
Chronicling the often inglorious exploits during the third crusade (1187-1192) of King Richard I of England and Saladin, the sultan of Egypt, Syria, Arabia and Mesopotamia, Reston's panoramic narrative begins with the first crusade, launched by Pope Urban II in the last years of the 11th century. In the story's unfolding, we are privy to a world peopled by a bevy of characters, compelling and repulsive: starving, horse-and-grass-eating Christian soldiers, who, in sturdier moments, cut down the enemy with something akin to religious relish; mighty Muslim swimmers, traversing ocean waters and trailing leather pouches heavy with money and messages; the seafaring ghost of St. Thomas of Canterbury, urging onward fearful and flagging crusaders; Christian and Muslim men who betray gleefully savage contempt for women of all confessions. Some passages lend this account the flavor of historical fiction, complete with the requisite romance: a purported sexual liaison between Richard the Lionheart and King Philip Augustus of France. This is, nonetheless, a worthwhile introduction for those eager to be swept along by an often lively narrative thick with disturbing and provocative details. The interweaving of Islamic perspectives with those of Christians is especially valuable. This frankly accessible work may capture the imagination of those who have thus far resisted the pull of crusade history, presenting, as it does, both the extraordinary and less well known participants for whom this peculiar drama was the stuff of everyday life.

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From Library Journal
Prolific author and journalist, Reston (The Last Apocalypse, Galilio: A Life) offers the reader a captivating

story in a lucid and often humorous style. In the process, he highlights the perennial religious volatility of the Holy Land. From 1189 to 1192 it was the Christians and Muslims who slaughtered each other in the name of their respective gods. The Third Crusade led to a mighty collision between two legendary warriors. Leading the Christians was the tempestuous and pious killer Richard the Lionheart. Guiding the Muslims was the sagacious and devout Sultan Saladin. Reston uses these two powerful personalities to weave a spellbinding medieval tale of ruthless devastation and chivalrous compassion. His sympathies are with the sultan, as he takes a dim view of Richard's "emotion quotient" he was definitely a king governed by sentiment. For a better appreciation of Richard's skills as a 12th-century ruler, see John Gillingham's Richard I (Yale Univ., 1999). Warriors of God is a fine example of narrative history and belongs in both academic and public libraries. Jim Doyle, Sara Hightower Regional Lib., Rome, GA
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Users Review

From reader reviews:

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