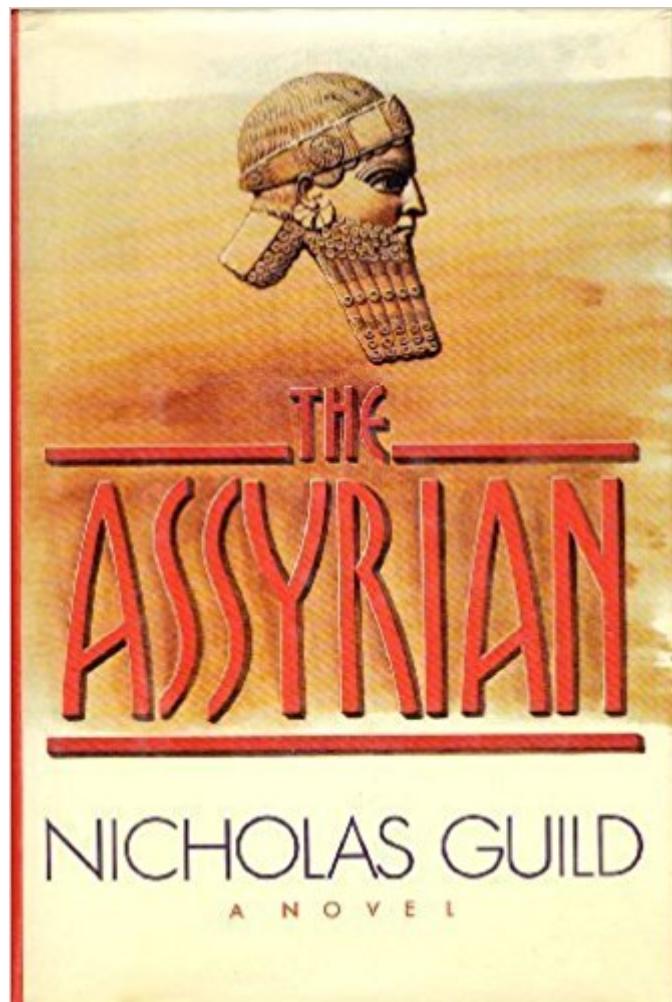


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The ASSYRIAN



Synopsis

An extraordinary historical epic of love and war in ancient Assyria during a time of dreadful omens, tortures, invasions, and a bloody civil war, from the bestselling author of Chain Reaction. --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Set in ancient Ashur (called Assyria by Greeks), this absorbing epic novel dramatically portrays two royal half-brothers whose childhood camaraderie later gives way to acrimony and violence. Tiglath and Esarhaddon, sons of aging King Sennacherib, grow up amicably and share rigorous military training. Their friendship dissolves when the king's priest proclaims the gods' decree that Esarhaddon will be the next monarch. Resentful of Sennacherib's preference for Tiglath and not eager to assume his prospective duties, Esarhaddon dreads his fate, while noble Tiglath unhappily refrains from usurping the throne out of a concern for his country's well-being. Even more disturbing to Tiglath, however, is the certainty that his lover, comely Esharhamat, must become the future sovereign's bride. Reeling with grief, Tiglath leaves Ashur to become a seasoned conqueror worthy of his compatriots' homage, yet a momentous clash between him and Esarhaddon still awaits. Guild (The Berlin Warning masterfully describes court intrigues and the feverish panorama of the battlefield, but the book's abundant merit lies in its timelessness and universality. This story of a passionately moral man torn among amorous longings, the seductiveness of power, fraternal emotion and cognizance of his nation's welfare holds many contemporary implications. Major ad/promo. Copyright 1987 Reed Business Information, Inc.

In a quick moment of bravery, indicative of the man-to-be, young Tiglath Ashur stays the hand of the priest who is about to make him a eunuch. Assyrian law in the 7th century B.C. required that all sons of a king but one be castrated in order that there be no question of the succession. Tiglath Ashur and his brother Esarhaddon are close friends from childhood. They share games, secrets, initiation into the warrior's world, and even the same woman, until the question of succession arises. Tiglath, the natural leader, is the popular hero, but treachery places Esarhaddon on the throne, thus replacing brotherly love with hatred. This sprawling epic of unbridled ambition is overlaid with battles, tortures, and debauchery. Homeric similes and metaphors and careful detail do, however, re-create a little-known historical period. A map would have been helpful. For larger fiction collections. Joan Hinkemeyer, Englewood P.L., Col. Copyright 1987 Reed Business Information, Inc.

The Assyrian by Nicholas Guild (Scribner, 1987) The Assyrian, by Nicholas Guild, is one of the few historical novels that look at the Ancient Near East (ANE). The book is a massive epic that covers the life of Tiglath Ashur, the son of the Assyrian King Sennacherib, who ruled much of the ANE nearly 4000 years ago. This is a monumental epic that would make a good epic film. In some ways, it reminded me of The Egyptian by Finnish writer Mika Waltari. The book is told from the point of view of Tiglath Ashur, one of King Sennacherib's many sons. The novel starts from Tiglath's viewpoint as an old man reflecting on his life. He's born from a concubine sent to the King of Assyria as tribute by a Greek prince. Tiglath comes of age in the House of Women, where all of the king's concubines are kept. He is close with another boy, Easharaddon, son of a different woman. Because the king only wants so many of his boys in line for the throne, he has many of them castrated and raised as scholars. Tiglath almost goes under the knife until he impresses his father with his courage. A good chunk of the novel covers Tiglath's years as he becomes a cunning warrior. We follow him as he rises in the ranks of the Assyrian army. Along the way, Tiglath picks up a Greek slave known as Kephalos, a physician, that provides comedy relief for much of the book. Tiglath also falls in love with a woman intended for his half brother Easharaddon. There are conflicts with his half sister's political maneuvers. He becomes the favored son of the king, but chooses to lead armies into enemy territory rather than to stay home and play politics. This decision leads to the book's climax, where Tiglath leads several combined armies deep into Mede Kingdom territory to confront the one man he fears. The Assyrian soars when it focuses on the tactics of battle: We had reached a terrible standoff, in which both armies could only butcher one another, each man hoping to inflict the deadly blow before it fell on his own shoulders. For the most part, the battle squares of my foot soldiers still held, but the

Medes in their vast numbers and their astonishing, reckless courage, were pressing down hard upon them. The cavalry on both sides had abandoned even the pretense of a cohesive strategy, and their horses weaved in and out of the mobs of soldiers to strike at what targets they could find. Also, the minute details of Assyrian society: I received Kephalos' letters from Nineveh, in which, because they were written in a language not many in the lands between the rivers could read, he felt emboldened to speak of the dissatisfaction at home. There was division over the king's war against Babylon; many felt with Esarhaddon that the city should be respected. Their reasons were various: fear of Marduk's revenge, a sentimental attachment to Babylon as the mother of our culture and learning. Some even said that Sennacherib's wits had been turned by grief over his son's death, that he wasted blood and treasure in a blind, senseless rage. It was a dangerous sign that such things could be spoken of Ashur's king. Kephalos, who was not a fool, wrote his letters on sheets of leather which I found neatly folded at the bottom of the boxes of medicines and supplies he sent me. These I always burned. The novel bogs down a bit when it concentrates on the Prince Tiglath's love affairs and the pointless usage of Assyrian terms in italics where modern equivalents would do just fine. Look, I get it that his half brother, Esarhaddon, is crown prince and Tiglath is merely another prince. No need to smack me in the head with the Assyrian term for it over and over. The author doesn't shy away from the cruelty of the Assyrian Empire. The Assyrians were the Evil Empire of this time in history. The Assyrians only got to where they were because they were tougher than the competition. There is a famous wall carving of the Assyrian King Ashurbanipal reclining on his couch. In the background, the head of one of his challengers dangles from a tree. As someone once said about The James Gang: rough men used to rough ways. Even the narrator is not the usual enlightened leader you might expect. He doesn't hesitate to have the elders of an enemy tribe beheaded in front of the surviving clan and their daughters sold into slavery. However, for a real taste of how cruel he can be, here is the passage where he gets rid of a slave mistress who tried to poison him: We went back to the baggage train, and I found Zabibe's wagon, where she was lying on a carpet naked as dawn, painting her toenails. She smiled when she saw me, but before she could speak I took her by the wrist and pulled her down into the dust. The Metalsmiths one eye burned with delight when he beheld her, as well it might, for I would venture his village did not hold another that was her equal. "Here is a new wife for you, Metalsmith . . ." "No, Lord!" Zabibe tried to pull free from my grasp, but I held her tight. "Mercy, Dread Lord. . . Not this! No!" And he gives her future husband a whip as the wedding present. The descriptions of the public executions are gruesome. Traitorous rulers left to die in a

public cage, families of princes who went against Sennacherib slaughtered as part of public ceremonies; these are not passages to read on a full stomach. There are times the book seems to wander into John Norman's Gor territory. And all of it based on historical evidence. At the same time, Tiglath finds a husband for one of his slave women and makes sure she has a large dowry. He even tells his troops not to kill the women and children because "we are not barbarians." In essence, he's a complex character, which is always the sign of a good book. I recommend this novel if you want a historical novel about a part of history that doesn't get enough attention. There is plenty of action, even if the main character spends too much time brooding about the one woman he will never be able to marry. I know there is a sequel and I plan to read it as well.

I saw all the high rating reviews and was really excited to read this book. The book went well until the hero's invention of anti-cavalry pikes. This episode was extremely galling since: 1. Long spear (pike) based formation didn't really exist until the late Greek / Macedonian period. 2. The book mentioned that the pikes were made entirely of iron ("...spears ...of a great length, eight maybe ten cubits long." "...bronze drawn to more than four cubits will bend... I could attempt it in iron..."). Note that a Near Eastern cubit is about 18 inches. So 8 cubits would be 144 inches or 12 feet. A spear 12 feet long made of solid iron? That would be impossibly heavy to carry. Pikes might have iron or bronze spearhead but their shafts are made of wood. To the author: if you are going to write a historical novel, kindly do your research properly before you add in the types of details above.

It's a rollicking bloodbath of a book that vividly portrays the life of an Assyrian prince with all the intrigue, conniving, and slaughter that entails. Personally I found the explicit sex to be gratuitous. It's enough to know Tiglath was a horndog and a stud, but the descriptions of coupling with pubescent slave girls and a half sister go into the pornographic. As plot elements the sexual escapades help delineate the character and his difficult relations with the women in his life, but it goes beyond the necessary sex of a book like The Crimson Petal and the White into meet titillation. Of course the book reads like a mega action blockbuster movie. The brutality and bloodshed of each battle is lovingly detailed. It definitely feels like a "guy" book. So it gets four stars rather than five. I'll read the sequel because vivid portrayals of the Assyrian age are uncommon and I love my ancient world historical fiction, and I'll read each blood soaked battle, but I'll skim past the pseudo-pornography. Tiglath's sexual prowess is clear. His character still has room for development.

I loved this book. It really took me back to ancient Mesopotamia and the Assyrian empire and made me feel what it was like to live there. The Author must have an astounding knowledge of the period and have researched extensively as well. I also loved the story which is very compelling and exciting about the life of Tiglath Ashur and his family, friends and strange lands he travels. The story has lots of sex, love, action and drama all woven neatly into the historical context of the time. After reading this I suddenly realized the origins of lots of language and traditions and their implications to both western and middle-eastern culture and philosophy. I highly recommend reading this as it is exciting and very well written.

An excellent read, very well written, it accomplishes the feat of immersing the reader in Assirya 600 years BC.

The Assyrian is historical fiction, combining an interesting life story with historical events from the Assyrian empire as it passed its peak. The story is told through the eyes of a half-brother of Esarhaddon who became king upon the assassination of his father. In the story, the half-brother is portrayed as far more suited to be king, and immensely more popular than the eventual heir. He is a great military leader, an insightful and skilled diplomat, and rendered helpless by the woman in his life. It would be a good character study if entirely fictional. The interweaving of historical battles and characters made it all the more interesting. I thought it ended a bit too abruptly after Esarhaddon's ascension to the throne. It would have been interesting to hear his fictional half-brother's comments on his rule!

This and the second book are really well written historical fiction. If you're a fan of Gary Jennings or Conn Iggudon you should like these books.

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