



## Seven Pillars of Wisdom: A Triumph

*T.E. Lawrence*

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**Seven Pillars of Wisdom: A Triumph** T.E. Lawrence  
WITH A NEW INTRODUCTION BY ROBERT FISK

*Seven Pillars of Wisdom* is an unusual and rich work. It encompasses an account of the Arab Revolt against the Turks during the First World War alongside general Middle Eastern and military history, politics, adventure and drama. It is also a memoir of the soldier known as 'Lawrence of Arabia'. Lawrence is a fascinating and controversial figure and his talent as a vivid and imaginative writer shines through on every page of this, his masterpiece. *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* provides a unique portrait of this extraordinary man and an insight into the birth of the Arab nation

## Seven Pillars of Wisdom: A Triumph Details

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## From Reader Review Seven Pillars of Wisdom: A Triumph for online ebook

### Gayle says

I couldn't possibly "review" this book with anything that has not already been said in the past eighty or ninety years so I'll just mention what makes it awesome for me.

Although I usually find detailed descriptions of settings and how characters appear on the outside boring and tend to skip over them a lot-think James Michener-T. E. Lawrence's descriptions of the places he went and characters that he met on his treks through the Middle East leave me wanting more. He states that he was a reluctant participant in the events of the Arab Revolt, but his enthusiasm in these descriptions tells another story.

It was pretty to look at the neat, brown men in the sunlit sandy valley, with the turquoise pool of salt water in the midst to set off the crimson banners which two standard bearers carried in the sun. --T. E. Lawrence

Lawrence experienced much inner turmoil regarding the difference between the British/French and the Arabs of the true mission of the revolt, and the true character of the participants.

Vickery...was satisfied, but I could not share his satisfaction. To me an unnecessary action, or shot, or casualty, was not only waste but sin. I was unable to take the professional view that all successful actions were gains. Our rebels were not materials, like soldiers, but friends of ours, trusting our leadership. We were not in command nationally, but by invitation; and our men were volunteers, individuals, local men, relatives, so that a death was a personal sorrow to many in the army. Even from the purely military point of view the assault seemed to me a blunder. --T. E. Lawrence

T. E. Lawrence was himself a multifaceted and complicated man and nothing presents that fact more than his own writings.

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### Brian Bethke says

This is an amazing account of Lawrence's experiences in Arabia during WWI, and one of my favorite books of all time. His vivid and tireless description of the Arabs, the war and the desert combined with an intimate view into his moral struggles provides an unparalleled kathartic read. His exhausting description can seem to get monotonous at times but whether intentional or not this style "works" for writing about the desert. It is not a "quick" read, but dreamy and wondering, and laden with fascinating portraits of those who shaped the modern face of the Middle East. Simply put, the man was as brilliant as he was tragic.

Interestingly enough Prince Feisal whom accompanies Lawrence in leading the Arab campaign against the Turks becomes the King of what would later become Iraq... This was how it all started, and a glimpse into what it was supposed to be about.

## Louisa says

Since battles and warfare are not really my thing, I am amazed how much I enjoyed reading Seven Pillars of Wisdom. In this beautifully written memoir, Lawrence presents us with an honest account of his role in the Arab revolt, his hopes on making Damascus the capital of the Arabs, but also his doubts about the whole endeavor. I love how he blended in with the Arabs, learning their language and their customs, riding the camels in the Arab way, becoming one of them. That they loved him and accepted him as one of their own becomes clear in the final chapters leading up to the taking of Damascus, when the Arabs saw him negotiating with the English to get supplies and ammunition to prepare for the capture of the city:

*Never could I forget the radiant face of Nuri Said, after a joint conference, encountering a group of Arab officers with the cheerful words, 'Never mind, you fellows; he talks to the English just as he does to us!'*

The history is fascinating, and so are his descriptions of desert life, the sand storms and mirages, the annoying insects, the camels, and the oases. I found it beautifully written, well worth reading.

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## Frederic says

I have little to no interest in military tactics and strategy and only a limited generalist's view of The Great War...no interest,at all,in the topography,Flora@Fauna,Beduin(SIC)Customs of the early 20th Century...and only a superficial curiosity about "Lawrence of Arabia" of whom I was aware only as the subject of the film which I had found to be pretty but empty and totally incoherent politically and psychologically...obviously a minority opinion...but this book made all these subjects totally compelling for me with it's sophisticated(though never too complex for the layman)military and political insights,it's multi-faceted portrait of a Land and Society(alien to the Mores of The West),and the vulnerable,brilliant,wounded,incredibly brave self-portrait in which Lawrence reveals himself to readers(though trying to maintain a Stiff-Upper-Lip Distance)as a real Hero...just having read Korda's biography, coloured,I'm sure,my bias toward Lawrence but I find ample testimony in this book to confirm the idea that he really was quite remarkable,as both a figure on the periphery of the World Stage and as a Man...

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## Nicole says

That was hard to read (one star for that!). Lawrence describes every hill, tree and shrub, gives the name of every man he has met and depicts his clothes, the meal they shared and the jokes that were told. On top of that military theory, philosophy, ethics, and theology. Heavy stuff. What you also get: a better understanding for today's near and middle east conflicts, insight into the Arab soul, and a glimpse into the soul of a very complicated man. Five stars for this.

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## Alanpalmer says

We all know about the film even if we have not seen it, or at least seen the end of it. But this is the story

written by the man himself. It tells the story of one of the forgotten parts of the First World War. Less famous than the Somme, Gallipoli and Jutland this is the story of an assault on the underbelly of the Ottoman Empire, how a British Army Officer united a rag tag group of nomadic Arabs and formed a fighting unit. It is fairly low on action scenes but does describe effective use of explosives and sabotage. It is much more focussed on the mindset of T.E Lawrence and his understanding of Arab culture and customs. He was a rebel, a maverick but he could organise and get results. This book is even more relevant today than when I read it over a decade ago and describes desert warfare in the early days of airpower and before the large scale use of armour when men fought men as they did in Flanders, and when leaders rode or marched with their troops and did not sit behind computers.

although the historical accuracy has been questioned it remains primarily an adventure story and even if it is only based on facts rather than being a true account it remains a fantastic story with much to teach about the Arab culture.

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## **karl says**

This classic autobiography of over 700 pages was written 90 years ago by Lawrence covering his 1916-18 WW-I campaign to help organize and use disparate Arab tribes as a supplementary weapon to the British against the Turks, who were aligned with the Germans. I enjoyed and hated the book. The enjoyment was, to put it simply, "I was exposed to and learned so much about so many things." In fact, 1/2 way through the book I downloaded and watched the 1962 movie of Lawrence of Arabia (which for a movie is more or less consistent with the book). Lawrence, an Oxford man, had spent nearly 10 years in Arabia by 1918 when he was 30, the Turks were in rout, the Arabs (arguably under Lawrence's indirect and direct leadership) captured Damascus, and the book ends.

The hate was how tedious it can be to handle the geographical places, tribal names, and key tribal leaders. The few maps in his book were hard to read. Sometimes he went on and on about the terrain. Sometimes sentences don't make sense. After often just doing a Google search for a map or city or village I couldn't find it – Lawrence's translations often aren't current usage. I found it best to read the book on my Kindle but have my laptop open with several bookmarks available to supplement my reading. Among them were:

- [ataea.net/Hejazmap1.html](http://ataea.net/Hejazmap1.html), which is about the Hejaz Railway that plays such a major part of the campaign
- [yagitani.jp/cx/tel/sp0904\\_en.htm](http://yagitani.jp/cx/tel/sp0904_en.htm), which is like a dictionary showing variants of all the names and places in the book.
- [www.telstudies.org.uk](http://www.telstudies.org.uk), which is a web site about T.E. Lawrence

You will finish the book with a much broader understanding of WW-I than just trench warfare in France or the massacre at Gallipoli. You will have a better sense of geography - from learning it is only about 160 miles between Jerusalem and Damascus, let alone where is Jordan relative to Syria and Iraq. You will learn that towards the end of the war airplanes were very important for bombing and surveillance. You read how dirty and grubby, lice infested, and hungry Lawrence and the Arabs often were. Without doctors there is reference to having others piss on another's gun shot wounds. There is no booze. There is homosexual behavior. Oh, and it is not until 1918 that there Lawrence has access to armored cars along with the camels.

The tribes often hated each other. Lawrence got them to work together. He was a guerrilla warfare advocate who preferred to isolate and cut off the enemy rather than trample them, who blew up over 70 bridges, who did not like to fight personally, who slept little, and who weighed 7 stones (I looked it up, 98 pounds). I could go on and on, but I leave that to you!

## Richard says

Thomas Edward Lawrence's meticulously written account of his fascinating life during World War I is one of the literary treasures of the Twentieth Century. Lawrence had graduated with honors from Oxford University in 1910. He had a fascination with medieval history, and had traveled as a student to study Crusader castles in France and Syria the summer before his graduation. He worked professionally as an archaeologist in the Middle East until 1914, with extensive travel through the Ottoman Empire's possessions, including the current Jordan, Syria and Iraq. During early 1914, he was part of a geographical survey of the Negev Desert, which served as a cover for the British government in its attempts to gather intelligence on the terrain of this Ottoman-controlled area which would become important to military operations in the event of a war.

When that war came, Lawrence was commissioned as an intelligence officer assigned to British army headquarters in Cairo. He would later function as the liaison officer working with the Arab irregulars and guerrillas fighting an internal insurgency against the Ottomans. The British plan was to funnel large amounts of money and munitions to the Arabs, letting them distract and weaken the key German ally, Turkey. Lawrence became a key advisor of Emir Faisal and a trusted subordinate of the British commander in the area, General Edmund Allenby. His years of fighting on behalf of the Arabs, wearing the desert robes while traveling everywhere on camelback, helped him identify intensely with the cause of Arab independence. He was involved with the guerilla operations against the Hejaz railway and, in 1917, was instrumental in the successful surprise attack against the strategic town of Aqaba. The culmination of his military exploits in the desert was his participation in the conquering of Damascus late in 1918, and the consequent installation of a provisional Arab government under Faisal.

After the shooting stopped, Lawrence would become disillusioned over the knowledge that the cause of Arab independence had been undermined by the secret Sykes-Picot Agreement negotiated during the war to divide the Middle East under French-British influence.

Many of Lawrence's exploits are chronicled in "Seven Pillars of Wisdom." However, the text available to most readers today is from revised editions of the original. Lawrence wrote a manuscript from his notes and his memory in 1919, reported to contain 250,000 words. The title is from the Book of Proverbs, and is also the name bestowed by Lawrence on a rock formation at Wadi Run (now located in Jordan) during the war. This first manuscript was the one that was lost in a railway car and never recovered. A second, longer, text was reconstructed from Lawrence's memory in 1920. During 1921, a third edition was published; this is referred to as the Oxford edition, and was printed in just eight copies. Later, in the mid-1920's, a subscribers' edition with a printing of 200 copies was released. Lawrence lost money on all of these editions.

Finally, an abridged version was authorized by Lawrence to be printed for more general circulation; this edition was titled "Revolt in the Desert." Lawrence assigned the profits from this book, which became a best seller, and from his other writings to trusts which generously funded the RAF Benevolent Fund. His surviving brother A.W. Lawrence later (in the 1930's) sold the U.S. copyright to "Seven Pillars of Wisdom" to Doubleday Doran, of which this reviewed edition derives.

As you can see, Lawrence's need for frugality and privacy trumped trying to get rich from his war adventures, even though he did feel strongly that the events occurring in Arabia at that time needed to be recorded. There was little chance for Lawrence to live in post-war obscurity, however, since media exposure from Lowell Thomas made him famous. Thomas was a war correspondent who traveled with Lawrence and Faisal. He took many photographs and even had a cameraman to film some of the action surrounding the

battles with the Turks. After the war, Thomas became rich as the narrator of a slide show of the Arab revolt which toured the world; it was especially well received in London. He was shrewd enough to exploit Lawrence's dashing persona, going so far as to have additional photographs taken of Lawrence in his robes in London after the war in order to add to the visual appeal of the picture show, which was titled: "With Allenby in Palestine and Lawrence in Arabia."

All of this unwanted attention, disillusionment, war-and-literary fatigue caused Lawrence to literally drop out of public view. By 1922, when he was still in the process of directing the printing of various editions of his memoir, he joined the Royal Air Force as an enlisted man. This former officer (I think he rose to the rank of Lt. Col. in the war) served humbly, if bizarrely, under the names of John Ross and T.F. Shaw; he also served for a time in the Royal Tank Corps, until the age of 35. He died at the age of 46 in a motorcycle accident.

I had wanted to read "Seven Pillars ..." for some time, having read a biography of Lawrence when I was in high school. That book, by an author I don't recall, gave an interesting account of Lawrence's life, but referred to the literary beauty and authenticity inherent in Lawrence's own words. It would be interesting to be able to read through one of the exquisitely bound and illustrated early, rare editions of "Seven Pillars ..." , regardless of how many hundreds of thousands of words are contained therein, but a later, widely available abridged edition will have to suffice and, in the end, is very satisfying.

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## Ron says

"Wisdom has built her house; she has set up its seven pillars." (Proverbs 9:1)

This eyewitness report of the Arab revolt against Turkish rule during World War One is exhaustive in scope and detail. Lawrence fills six hundred plus pages with details of who, what, where, why and even the weather. Much of it will only interest academics and students of war and rebellion. But hidden in all that dry, sandy strata are nuggets of wisdom about politics, war and irregular warfare in the middle east—some of it relevant today.

"They were weak in natural resources ... otherwise we should have had to pause evoking in the strategic center of the Middle East new national movements of such abounding vigor."

This is Lawrence's second draft. The first and many of his notes were lost. I can't imagine what was left out. At every turn, Lawrence lists the principle players (and often names their camels), the name of the topography, the weather conditions, the water quality at this waterhole (vital in the desert), and comments on the quality of shade and local vermin. Did I mention it was exhaustive?

"In mass they were not formidable. The smaller unit the better its performance."

Lawrence's style is archaic. Some sentences required several readings to glean the meaning. He extends "thanks to Mr. and Mrs. [George] Bernard Shaw for countless suggestions of great value and diversity: and all the present semicolons." There are lots of semicolons. I recorded over seventy quotes for extra attention. A few frame this review, unfortunately out of context.

"The Wahabis [sic], followers of a fanatical Moslem heresy, had imposed the strict rules [of the desert] on easy and civilized [town folks]. Everything forcibly pious or forcibly puritanical."

No one escapes Lawrence's magnifying glass, including himself. Some characters fare better than others. He is honest, but not necessarily politically correct. He indulges in the racial, class and national stereotypes

common to an educated Englishman of that day, but he is frank in his admiration for those who suffered most: the common soldiers.

“We should use the smallest force in the quickest time at the farthest place.”

His analysis of the development of irregular warfare echoes in the tactics used worldwide today. The text suffers from many uncorrected OCR transcription errors. Added to Lawrence’s penchant for details, the reader often finds himself adrift in a trackless desert.

“I know the British do not want [Arabia], yet what can I say, when they took the Sudan, not wanting it? Perhaps one day will seem to them as precious.” Feisal bin Hussein

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### ???? says

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96: "... ..".

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### Annmarie says

I selected this book to read as part of the research I was doing on my novel. I had seen the film "Lawrence of Arabia" in the past and now wanted to mine the book for details I needed to know about life among the Bedouin in 1920. I had planned to only read the parts I needed for my novel, but ended up devouring the whole thing. Then I read it again, parsing out what had now become an intense interest in TE's psychology. I

then retreated to a biography and selected John Mack's "A Prince of our Disorder", not only because it won a Pulitzer, but because it was a psychological biography rather than the more materialistic ones that focused on TE's war efforts. (I do not care how Lawrence learned to blow up a train). As Lawrence's personality was dissected in that fabulous biography, I could not help but draw on a curious aspect of human-ness. There is a correlation between being deeply psychologically disturbed and fantastic achievements in some of history's greatest artists. Van Gogh, is the first who comes to mind, but Beethoven and Mozart and Wagner all had personality problems (I am being polite here), Degas, Cezanne, Gauguin: not particularly well-balanced. There are any number of examples, too many to discuss here. The opposite is true as well, as other men who are infamous rather than famous, and their achievements might be better categorized as harmful to humanity rather than having enriched it (these men tend to enter politics rather than the arts). But the point I am making is that in order to step out of the ordinary, the mold has to be broken, and cracking that mold often corresponds to a cracking the psyche. Reading Seven Pillars again after reading Mack's biography underlined the most poignant parts of the book, and watching the film again after being immersed in the two books brought out the fierce intent of the filmmakers to illustrate in sound and color what Lawrence meant to other people and to history, but not what that medium could convey to us what was churning in Lawrence's soul. They tried, they tried, and Peter O'Toole does a fantastic job looking like a tormented soul, his eyes at times full of humor and then pathos and then fear. But the screenplay cannot put the words in our ears that we need to hear in order to understand Lawrence. Only his own words can do that, and they are heartbreaking.

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## **Kelly says**

I'm going to first off state something very confusing. I really loved this book. I love T.E. Lawrence, I think he's an enigmatic, mysterious and overall heroic man... however, I didn't actually finish the book.

If you aren't quite sure of who this man is, simply think back to that amazing, award winning movie, "Lawrence of Arabia." Lawrence's main initiative in this book is to act as an intermediate between the rebel forces of Arabia and the English, who were organizing against the Ottoman Turk's. More than anything, the book is about the unification of Saudi Arabia and the many conflicts which helped to achieve that end.

Although this is generally thought of as an Autobiography, especially since it was written by T.E. Lawrence himself, I hesitate in naming it as such. There is a lot of controversy that surrounds Lawrence, and, while the word of the man himself should be the most accurate, there are general rumblings about whether many events have been embellished. So, this is, as Charles Hill has stated, ""a novel traveling under the cover of autobiography." (Spoiler)

The books extends from Lawrence's first rumblings of revolt against the Turk's. It's very clear by his writing that Lawrence has absolutely no respect for the Turk's, whom he views as culturally absent and reliant upon numbers, rather than strategy and wit. He frequently travels across the country, eventually uniting enough tribes to push the Turk's from nearly every major post by sabotaging the huge Hejaz Railway that extends from the north to the south. The main drive of the book is to capture Damascus for the Arabs, which can only be achieved by the outstanding military ambition of Emir Faisal.

Faisal is one of the major individuals of the war, whom acted as a united front against the Turk's and a close friend to Lawrence himself. Unlike in the movie, there is almost no mention of Ali, who seems to be taken from Faisal's character and modified to suit the audience's favor. There is definitely a sense of hero worship from Lawrence to Faisal, which seems to be felt mutually. The level of respect that the English have for the authority figures of the tribes is interesting and increases the general romance of the book.

And here's where I explain why exactly why I gave this a 3 out of 5. Even though I loved this book and all of

the individuals within it, I found it so incredibly difficult to read. As an Australian girl, who is culturally naive and has only visited America and Canada, it was almost incomprehensible to understand exactly what was happening. There is just so many new words, technical terms and long names to remember that I only understood what I was reading by about 150 pages. It's difficult to admit this but I haven't actually finished it because it is probably one of the most difficult books I have ever read. And I've read a lot of books. Lawrence does have a very poetic style of writing and I think that without that, I wouldn't have been able to make it past 50 pages. For example:

"For years we lived anyhow with one another in the naked desert, under the indifferent heaven. By day the hot sun fermented us; and we were dizzied by the beating wind. At night we were stained by dew, and shamed into pettiness by the innumerable silences of stars. We were a self-centred army without parade or gesture, devoted to freedom, the second of man's creeds, a purpose so ravenous that it devoured all our strength, a hope so transcendent that our earlier ambitions faded in its glare."

As you can see by the quote above, Lawrence is immensely talented in his writing and there are scenes that literally make the heart ache with its beauty. However, those moments are often separated by lengthy explanations of who is who, where they are and what strategies they have planned. It is also interesting to note that Lawrence himself is a very unusual and complex person, who is described as being sexually ambiguous, effeminate and strategizing. He isn't a typical hero, in any sense.

So, for the romance of the book, of Lawrence and of the landscape, I give this book a 3. However, I can not award this book points for readability, consistency of ideas and the quality of the every chapter. I do know that one day I will come back to this book, it's hard not to when you fall in love with Lawrence, but I don't think, as a young girl, that I can fully appreciate this book at this stage in my life. However, if you understand what it is to follow complex storyline's and are interested in the man itself, please do read this book. After all, this is a personal review, based on my own experiences with it.

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## John Farebrother says

I've read this book twice now, and seen the film countless times. When a colleague once asked me which was my favourite war film, I didn't need to think about it for long.

But as is usually the case, the book blows the film away. For detail of the inside story of the war in the East, description of life with the Arabs in the desert, and sheer adventure, it's unparalleled. It is also directly relevant to our day, for as TE Lawrence wrote:

"We could see that a new factor was needed in the East [...] No encouragement was given us by history to think that these qualities could be supplied ready-made from Europe. The efforts of the European Powers to keep a footing in the Asiatic Levant had been uniformly disastrous [...] Our successor and solution must be local".

A shame Tony Blair with his privileged education didn't read that passage. And as for Syria:

“the Syrians had their de facto government, which endured for two years, without foreign advice, in an occupied country wasted by war, and against the will of important elements among the Allies”

If people like TE Lawrence who know what they are talking about, were listened to, the Middle East wouldn't be in the mess it is now. But it's always the same in politics: the decision-makers are by definition those who are closest to the fount of all power, and furthest away from the real world.

## Maggie Emmett says

I first read Thomas Edward Lawrence's meticulous account of his fascinating life during World War I when I was 11 years of age. It had a profound effect on me. I think it is a literary treasure of the Twentieth Century. The title is from the Book of Proverbs. It was a name bestowed he used to name a rock formation at Wadi Run (now located in Jordan) during the war.

Lawrence graduated with honors from Oxford University in 1910. He had a fascination with medieval history. He travelled, studied and wrote about the Crusader castles in France and Syria during the summer before he graduated. He worked as an archaeologist in the Middle East until 1914, travelled extensively through the Ottoman Empire, including places such as the modern Jordan, Syria and Iraq. In early 1914, he participated in a geographical survey of the Negev Desert, which was really an attempt by the British government to gather intelligence on the terrain for possible military operations in the event of a war.

When the war came, Lawrence became a commissioned intelligence officer assigned to British army headquarters in Cairo. He worked as a liaison officer working with the Arab irregulars and guerrillas fighting an internal insurgency against the Ottomans. The British plan was to provide large amounts of money and munitions to the Arabs, letting them distract and weaken the key German ally, Turkey. Lawrence became a key advisor of Emir Faisal and a trusted subordinate of the British commander in the area, General Edmund Allenby.

He spent years fighting on behalf of the Arabs, wearing the desert robes and traveling everywhere on camelback. He spoke Arabic and he strongly identified with the Arab cause of independence. He was involved in planning and taking part in guerilla operations against the Hejaz railway. In 1917, he planned and helped organise the successful surprise attack on the Turkish held coastal town of enormous strategic importance, Aqaba. His military exploits in the desert culminated in his participation in the conquering of Damascus late in 1918, and the consequent installation of a provisional Arab government under Faisal.

Lawrence quickly became disillusioned after learning that the cause of Arab independence had been undermined by the secret Sykes-Picot Agreement negotiated during the war to divide the Middle East under French-British influence.

Seven Pillars of Wisdom tells the stories of Lawrence's exploits. Lawrence wrote a manuscript from his notes and his memory in 1919, reported to contain 250,000 words, so what most people read is a significantly abridged version. The first manuscript was supposedly lost in a railway car and never found. A second manuscript was reconstructed from Lawrence's memory in 1920. In 1921, a third edition was published; this is referred to as the Oxford edition, though only eight copies were printed. In the mid-1920's, an abridged edition with a printing of 200 copies was released. Lawrence lost money on all of these editions. Finally, a version was authorized by Lawrence to be printed for more general circulation; this edition was titled *Revolt in the Desert*.

Lawrence was a very private man and despite this amazing story to tell he didn't get rich from his war adventures. He never stopped believing in Arab independence and he felt strongly that the events in Arabia had to be recorded - to show there were promises made to the Arabs, unkept in the WWI post war carve up. He could not live post war in obscurity thanks to the media exposure from Lowell Thomas. Thomas was a war correspondent who traveled with Lawrence and Faisal, taking photographs and even filming some of the military action of the battles with the Turks. After the war, it was Thomas who became rich narrating a slide show of the Arab revolt. He toured the world and was adored by Londoners. He was shrewd enough to exploit Lawrence's dashing persona, going so far as to have additional photographs taken of Lawrence in his

robes in London after the war in order to add to the visual appeal of the picture show, which was titled: "With Allenby in Palestine and Lawrence in Arabia."

Lawrence found this attention as unbearable as the disillusionment he felt with his own government and their treatment of the Arabs. After the war he was physically and psychologically exhausted, trying to write; so he literally dropped out of the public sphere. In 1922, he was still organising for the printing of various editions of his memoir, yet he joined the Royal Air Force as an enlisted man. This former Lt. Colonel in WWI enlisted somewhat bizarrely, under the names of John Ross and T.F. Shaw. Also, he also served in the Royal Tank Corps, until he reached the age of 35 years. He died at 46 years old in a strange motorcycle accident.

I think he was a homosexual who had to live a series of lies in a very hypocritical post war British Empire, which had served with honour. He felt betrayed. He undoubtedly enjoyed the relationships he was able to have in Arabia with young men and it must have been dreadful to return to all the constraints and limitations of his historical time in England.

Yes I saw the movie, fell in love with Omar Sharif and Peter O'Toole - but it was the book and not the film that made him real for me. He was an obsessive, research focussed intelligent adventurer and idealist and he was my hero for many years.

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## Hadrian says

In bare terms, this is an autobiographical account of a British liaison officer and his adventures leading an Arab rebellion against the Turks. But there is much more than that. An account by a philosopher-traveler-soldier about war and adventure and heroism and all that.

It is a product of his time. And Lawrence does seem a bit patronizing about the Arabs and Turks. But in other times, he is astonishingly sensitive and well-attuned and insightful to their needs. How else could he have helped led a successful guerrilla campaign?

A book which still shines and has much to teach. If only he was in charge of the post-war partitioning of the world.

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## Akiva says

This is an incredible book. It starts out slow and it is quite long. After about the first half I was convinced I should have just gone to see Lawrence of Arabia again instead.

But from there it picks up. Not that the storytelling gets more gripping per se. Indeed, the whole thing is kind of choppy, in a "We did this and then we went here" sort of way. They spend a lot of time blowing up trains.

But the strangeness of Lawrence's situation and what it is doing to him comes though clearer and clearer.

He's becoming super bitter about having to be loyal to both the Arabs who are his friends and companions, and the British who are making all sorts of promises they have no particular intent to keep.

So he's helping to lead and foment an Arab nationalist rebellion while simultaneously trying to advance the goals of the Empire. And it's not even a cause that has anything to do with him except that World War I is going on in the background and this is his part. By the time they're marching on Damascus he is completely

done. Fortunately the war almost is too. It's nuts.

And that's without even getting into the grueling weather, the sleepless nights, the getting shot at, the endless killing, and the time he gets violently raped by an enemy leader while captured in disguise!

Throughout he is brutally honest about his mistakes, strategically and emotionally, things that got his men killed or lead to them committing massacres.

And even after that, at the very end you have no idea what he's even doing in Arabia in the first place and then he says, my strongest motivation for my actions has been totally unmentioned in this book.

Unbelievable.

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### **Brent says**

Well, I've been working on this one for a while. It is by turns majestic, tiresome, enigmatic, and written in the grand manner of the 19th Century. It is interesting to find the big moments of the film, "Lawrence of Arabia", almost made light of in his memoir. He seems to be vain about all the wrong things. I imagine he wasn't a very likable chap but you have to admit he did remarkable things, and I marvel at some of the writing here.

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### **James says**

"All men dream, but not equally. Those who dream by night in the dusty recesses of their minds, wake in the day to find that it was vanity: but the dreamers of the day are dangerous men, for they may act on their dreams with open eyes, to make them possible."

The source of the title of T. E. Lawrence's masterpiece is the book of Proverbs:

"Wisdom hath builded a house: she hath hewn out her seven pillars." (Proverbs, 9:1)

This quotation is used as an evocative phrase for the title of a book that Lawrence compared to Moby Dick and The Brothers Karamazov, and Nietzsche's Thus Spake Zarathustra. He considered these "titanic books" that were distinguished by "greatness of spirit". I would agree that his literary achievement at least approaches those levels and also demonstrates the bravado demonstrated by his comparison to them. His book was published in 1926 even though he wrote most of it about 1919 following his return from the desert.

Reading this classic account of Lawrence's exploits is both exhilarating and informative. I was impressed by his depiction of Arab culture of the time and its seeming connection with past and present. The importance of tales told around the hearth as the heart of Arab culture seems to be similar to the culture encountered by Muhammad as he was growing up centuries earlier. Under the most arduous conditions, Lawrence found time for keen analysis: he applied that analysis to the differing forces that were interdependent within the Arab culture and did so with out betraying his loyalty to all or surrendering his loyalty to any.

Further, Lawrence's keen ability to describe his surroundings and bring the events, of which he was often the center, alive is shown in almost every chapter. He is able, through the extensiveness of his narrative, to share both bristling detail and a sense of the intricacy of the events he portrays. He often takes time to share

descriptions of the terrain and the weather which provide background for his continuing struggle. At the same time this detail provides as sense of both a documentary approach and also the drama of his escapades. The portraits of the Arab leaders from Abdulla and Auda to Feisel are fascinating in their detail and psychological insight. Lawrence, it seems, was born for this journey and fated to share it with us. T. E. Lawrence acted upon his dream 'with open eyes' and made it happen. In a book filled with deception he gives us a view into the world before the end of World War I changed everything. We see the various Arab factions and the deals made with the British. More importantly we are given insight into the men through Lawrence's eyes, his acute judgement, and his poetic narrative. He notes the keys to the Arab Revolt in the common language they shared and their heritage of the greatness that existed under the Caliphs going back to the six centuries following the death of Muhammad. We share in his pangs of conscience and his judgements of others and his own life and actions.

He notes that "feeling and illusion were at war within me" and it reminded me of the birth of modernity with Faustian man. Also important are his comments on the British in the Middle East and the nature of the soldier in war. Reading this treatise was a moving experience as I gradually found support for my own subjunctive mood in this inspirational book.

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## Steve Birchmore says

This is the book that the film Lawrence of Arabia is loosely based upon. I say loosely, because after finishing the book I rented the film and watched it all the way through for the first time since I was a kid. It was only then that I realised that although the film is a magnificent piece of film-making, it is very inaccurate in places and often just simply wrong.

T.E. Lawrence was much more extraordinary and his achievements and much more astonishing even than the amazing portrayal of him in the film. But, I suppose the difficulty of making a film of 'Lawrence of Arabia' is, how do you compress so much into so little time and how do you explain certain things simply and quickly. Hence the film seems to me now like a series of snapshots of events that did happen and some that didn't, but perhaps including the made up stuff to make the story on screen flows better.

T.E. Lawrence was like Indiana Jones and James Bond and some SAS type hero all rolled into one. This archaeologist's assistant was turned down by the Army for being too short. He was no soldier, but he read Clausewitz and all the other great military theorists, created his own war and applied all he learned to great effect. Nobody told him to capture the strategic port of Aqaba - that was his idea. He didn't even inform his superiors. He enrolled the Arab tribesman in the project, rode across the desert and took it. And that was almost just the start!

There are two books I was reminded of when going through *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* and they are '*My War Gone By, I Miss It So*' by Anthony Lloyd and '*The Lord of The Rings*'.

The first because I think this book is surprisingly personal or intimate for a book written shortly after WWI. I was at times actually quite shocked and disturbed by Lawrence's thoughts and feelings. Not so much that he had them, but that a national hero, who turned down a knighthood and a Victoria Cross not to mention two Croix De Guerres, writing shortly after World War One, would share such things with the general public.

It made me think of *Lord Of The Rings* not only because what Lawrence did in mostly just two short years is an absolutely epic tale, but because so much of it revolves around ancestor worshipping/respecting tribesmen with bizarre sounding names from bizarre sounding places. So a typical paragraph may be Lawrences meeting with Maahmoud, renowned desert warrior of the Abu-Orense, son of Ali, scourge of the Waddi-

Odd, blood enemies of the Abu Tayi, and so on. Fortunately It's all online and you can search the text to see where those particular names came up before and avoid your head spinning with confusion.

I'm no judge of prose but it seems almost poetic at times. According to Michael Korda, author of *'Hero: The Life And Legend Of Lawrence Of Arabia'*, Lawrence was a skilled writer and examination of his letters demonstrate he would very much alter his style depending on who he was writing to. Korda also describes Lawrence's description in *'Seven Pillars Of Wisdom'* of the attack on the train at Mudowwara as the very best of war writing. So much happens in just ten minutes and Lawrence's style is perfect: the mine is detonated, the Turkish troops on the roofs machine gunned, some Turkish troops take shelter behind a bank and are hit with mortars, the train is looted, some Austrian officers and NCOs are taken prisoner, one of them pulls a pistol and they are massacred by the Arabs, Lawrence has time to reassure and old woman passenger and find her servant/slave, a badly wounded Arab, who Lawrence should have protected is left behind by mistake and Lawrence is distressed as he should have been killed as they cannot take him with them and the Turks will horribly kill the badly wounded, and so on. It makes me think of the helicopter attack scene in the film *Apocalypse Now* in that a lot happens in short space of time, much of it is horrible, some of it is incongruous and some of it weird, and you are on the edge of your seat trying to imagine what that must have been like. I found the battle scenes compelling. A.P. Wavell (later Field Marshall Wavell) wrote of Lawrence's description of the battle of Talifah, that it was "*one of the best descriptions of a battle ever penned*".

Aside from the battle scenes, many of the descriptions of the Arabs and their way of life are marvellous. It's just a fantastic book, because its well written and fantastic story nearly every part of which could be independently verified - which is just astonishing. How many men have had such an adventure? Alexander the Great maybe? That's the sort of League T.E. Lawrence ended up in.

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## Rebecca says

I was deeply disappointed by this book, but it's possible that was my fault.

Lawrence somehow manages to be self-deprecating and completely arrogant at the same time, in a way that's startlingly oblivious. (At one point, he compares his book to Gibbon's *Rise and Fall*. Umm, no.) I had hoped that by the end of the book, I would understand both the history of the Arab Revolt during World War I and Lawrence the man better. I'm not sure I actually understand either one better than when I started.

One of the most frustrating problems that quickly emerges is that Lawrence completely assumes that the reader is intimately familiar with all details of the chronology of the war, all of the history of the region, all of the people involved. We're dropped right into the middle and never given the slightest orientation. If events happen off page, we're lucky to ever hear about them. Allenby is tossed off as if we are as familiar with him as we are with Churchill--we get no real description of him, we never even get a first name, and I don't think there's even a title attached at first. (He's the British general in charge of the entire theater, by the way. The only reason I know this is because I saw the movie. God knows, I wouldn't have figured it out until halfway through the book, otherwise.) Allenby's capture of Jerusalem, a major turning point in the war? Mentioned in the second half of a sentence.

It's like this for everything. One can never tell how important a given event might be. Major battles Lawrence is in may get two pages. Major battles Lawrence was not in are lucky to be a passing reference. The capture of major intelligence is "we found letters of interest" (whose contents are never disclosed), the thwarting of a would-be spy is a nondescript paraphrased conversation. But a description of a completely

random and meaningless feast? Four pages, in great detail. A very lame joke Lawrence once made? We get every detail, from the set-up, doubling back into the backstory of why it's funny, and then a detailed description of everyone's reaction. We find out that they've run out of supplies two chapters ago when there's finally an off-hand reference to the fact they've had no food for days. There's no way to actually understand the course of the war or any of the decisions made. There's no sense of tension, because it's never possible to evaluate stakes. It's just a never-ending round of meeting Arabs who will never be mentioned again and blowing up train tracks without a description of how it affects anything. The events of the book are as featureless as the desert itself.

As for Lawrence himself, we hear a great deal of meaningless detail but very little of importance. I know all about his costume, but not why he chose that particular costume. I know about how one time, he lay down and when he woke up, there were lice that crawled out of his hair. But I have *no idea of why he was in Arabia in the first place*. I know about his very mixed feelings about the English using the Arabs, but I don't know how he got himself into the situation. There is one shockingly intimate chapter in which he is captured in Deraa, tortured, possibly raped (or "just" sexually assaulted, it's not entirely clear). At the end, he declares that the citadel of his integrity has been breached, but it's never really mentioned again. The combination of English reserve and the overall oblique style makes it difficult to see how such a life-shattering event affected him. We know all about external details. He gives tiny hints of internal torment here and there. But we never get enough information to really understand how his mind works, despite spending almost 700 pages in it.

What we do know is that he likes flowery language. The writing is lyrical unto purple, with bits of elaborate racist theories thrown in for spice. It's beautiful, all right, but nearly opaque. Makes great cover, added to all that English reserve, so that you have to read paragraphs three times to actually figure out what the heck just happened.

Not helping are some typographical choices that I don't know who to blame for. There's a certain inability to stick to spellings. Feisal is spelled Faysul at random sometimes, for example; Jidda is Jeddah, and so on. When there's a new person introduced every other page (and usually dropped two pages later), it makes it difficult to keep track. Also, while the chapters are not named but just numbered, the top of every page has its own name. These names, however, are vague enough as to be no help at all in understanding what's going on or in finding a certain section. Someone spent a great deal of time labelling every single page with things like "Hunger and Precaution", followed by "Messengers", or "Safely Away"/"Over the Plain"/"Hot Winds"/"Until Sunset". ("Until Sunset" is a paragraph and a half. Seriously. This was worth taking the time to give its own name?)

The story is a fascinating one. It's a shame I didn't get to read it.

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