



Empire of Sand

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1915: While the war in Europe escalates, a young intelligence officer named Thomas Edward Lawrence is in Cairo, awaiting his chance for action. His superiors, however, have consigned him to the Map Room at GCHQ. But there's more to Lieutenant Lawrence than meets the eye. A man of immense energy, he runs a network of agents across the Levant. Lawrence is convinced that an Arab revolt is the only way to remove the Ottoman presence, and leave a free, self-governed Arabia. Soon alarming reports reach him of trouble in Persia, orchestrated by infamous German agent Wilhelm Wassmuss. Intent on taking down Wassmuss, Lawrence assembles a small group and travels to Persia. Little does he know that his actions will bring about a resolution that might just save the lives of millions of men in the trenches of Europe.

Empire of Sand Details

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Author : Robert Ryan

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Soho_Black says

I've long thought that 'historical fiction' was a bit of a misnomer. After all, fiction by definition has to stop where real history begins. However, that doesn't mean that wrapping fiction around historical events or people can't lead to a decent story and that's what has happened here.

It is 1915 and with the First World War raging in Europe, events are also progressing in Africa and the Middle East. In Cairo, a British Intelligence Officer by the name of T. E. Lawrence has come to believe that the only way to beat the German supported Turks is for the Arab tribes to unite and revolt against them. Unfortunately, he doesn't have the opportunity or the influence to put his ideas into practice, as he is confined to a Map Room in Cairo.

On the German side, one of their field agents in Persia has taken a number of British people hostage in an attempt to reclaim some important possessions and information that has fallen into the hands of their enemies. Thanks to this agent's familiarity with some of the Persian tribal chiefs, previous rescue attempts have failed and the only thing that remains is for an exchange to be made.

This sounds like it could be a fairly standard war story, but what links it with fact is the character of T. E. Lawrence, who subsequently became better known as Lawrence of Arabia and whose actions are still reverberating around the Middle East today. The events that make up the story here, however, pre-date that period by a year or two and aren't quite as exciting as his life was later to become.

This means that the story here seems a little unevenly paced. Much of the early parts show what motivated Lawrence to become as involved in the Arab revolt as he did, but don't actually tell that part of the story. Whilst the motivation is quite interesting, because the story stops before the events it eventually led up to, it seems a little disjointed. The story here does eventually lead Lawrence into the desert on an active mission, but it takes so long getting there that by the time it does, it's been a bit of a struggle and the excitement of the last part of the adventure doesn't quite make up for it.

It's possible that in my ignorance of the details of the war in the Middle East, I have missed something important in the early parts of the story. I can certainly see how events would have motivated Lawrence to become who he did, but as someone without the knowledge of the history and who was reading this purely as an adventure story, the early pace felt a little slow to me. I did very much enjoy the latter parts, as the setting and the writing reminded me of Desmond Bagley's *Flyaway*, which I read many years ago.

It was this reminder that allowed me to relax and enjoy the story to its fullest towards the end. I have been a great fan of Bagley's work for many years and the reminder of his style enabled me to mostly put all the posturing and preparation behind me and settle into the story. Ryan's writing style mixes fact in with fiction in a way that with my inexperience I wasn't able to tell which might have been which and let me forget that this was based in part on true events. The more experienced historian may be able to see the joins and this may reduce their enjoyment of the book, but for me Lawrence seemed like a decent action hero and that was enough for me.

Perhaps the main let downs for me were the epilogue and the prologue. These sections took events two years into the future and allowed for the story to be told almost in flashback. Whilst the stylistic device was slightly unnecessary, the main issue was that the life Lawrence was living at that point was actually more exciting than the one he was living at the time of the story. Whilst I was able to forget this in between the two parts, the epilogue reminded me of it again and left me wondering why Ryan didn't tell the 1917 story

instead of the 1915 one. That said, Ryan himself has since commented that the 1917 period of Lawrence's life has been so well told by others that he had no wish to repeat it and less scope in which to work.

This certainly isn't a history book, as I'm sure many of the events here are the result of imagination and not research. Besides, history never really interested me all that much at school and this managed to hold my interest pretty well. I'm not going to try and guess what a historian may make of this book, but I suspect that if a Tom Clancy fan ever wondered what war would be like eight decades before Jack Ryan ever came across the concept, this would be the ideal answer.

This review may also appear, in whole or in part, under my name at any or all of www.ciao.co.uk, www.thebookbag.co.uk, www.goodreads.com, www.amazon.co.uk and www.dooyoo.co.uk

Lango142 says

I enjoyed this book as a quick read and a change of pace from some others I've read lately. It's a good romp through the early imagined history of T E Lawrence and as I've never read 'seven pillars' it gives a flavour of how Lawrence may have been. The story has a drive to it and introduces a number of historical figures that I will investigate further. So worth a read.

Caz says

I really enjoyed this book, I wanted to learn some more of Lawrence of Arabia. This book was captivating from beginning to end. The author had carefully researched facts known about Lawrence and mixed fiction with non-fiction to give a very convincing account. Clearly the author was in awe of Lawrence and made continuous references to his natural leadership, intelligence and master thinking - so much so that any of Lawrences' flaws or mistakes were also written in a positive way which made him come across as heroic and wiser than the average person. Descriptions of people, places, rituals etc were so good, I felt like I was experiencing desert conditions and opened up to many different cultures.

Iceman says

D.E. Lawrence foi uma personagem fascinante na revolta árabe durante a 1ª Grande Guerra. Fascinante e deveras misterioso, pois a sua história ainda hoje não é totalmente conhecida, existindo muitos pormenores e factos por esclarecer, assim como acontecimentos sem quaisquer explicações.

Em todo o caso esta é uma obra de ficção, mas os acontecimentos descritos sucederam mesmo e isso faz com que o presente livro seja, de facto, um romance notável.

Mas a estrutura e a escrita simples do autor ajudam. Uma escrita simples que nos faculta todas as informações necessárias para a percepção da época e do seu contexto, o autor constrói uma narrativa que nos envolve e nos situa na acção e na época.

Aqui presenciamos o nascimento da lenda e do porque de ele ter tido uma importância tão elevada na revolta.

Gostei muito deste romance e da forma como o autor conseguiu situar toda a acção, pois é precisamente isso

um dos propósitos do romance histórico: situa e envolver o leitor na época descrita.

Stefan says

"Empire of Sand" explored the early military career of T. E. Lawrence. The story explored the dynamic conflict that occurred Lawrence and Wilhelm Wassmus (a German agent). The author effectively incorporated numerous historical events and people. I found that the plot, at times, became somewhat tedious. Otherwise, it was a decent thriller.

Peter says

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

T.E Lawrence

It is 1915 the First World War raging in Europe, events are also progressing in the Middle East. In Cairo, T.E Lawrence is serving as a British Intelligence Officer who believes that the only way to beat the German supported Turks in Persia is for the Arab tribes to unite and revolt against them. On the opposing side, a German field agent has been stirring up Arab tribes to fight against British rule in Egypt, although these are doing so generally for far less altruistic reasons, and to this end have taken a number of British citizens hostage. Previous rescue attempts have failed so an exchange is agreed upon.

In many respects this is a fairly standard war story, but it is the character of T. E. Lawrence, who subsequently became better known as Lawrence of Arabia that is the real point of interest.

Much of the early parts show what motivated Lawrence to become as involved in the Arab revolt as he did, he was initially at least primarily a back room officer as opposed to a front line one. This background then means that it takes quite a while before he finally goes into the desert on an active mission. This unfortunately meant that the book felt a little disjointed and the final action part of the story never really heals this rift. On top of which both the prologue and the epilogue which takes place some two years after the events feel pretty superfluous. It meant that it was at times rather difficult which to work out which parts of the story were real and which were fiction as there is little doubt that many of the events are purely the result of the author's imagination. However, once I settled back forgot the real life persona's and read it as a pure adventure story I rather enjoyed it. But it had the potential at least to be so much better IMHO.

Alison Smith says

A great Boy's Own Adventure story : 1915 - the Middle East - T.E. LAWRENCE (AKA Lawrence of Arabia)a network of spies in Cairo, wily German provocateur- rifles, horses and camels race across the burning sands, the Arabs are treacherous,the Turks are cruel, there's plot & counter plot - men drop like flies;

but officers act and die like gentlemen; brave men pilot bi-planes AND there's a woman, disguised as an Arab boy ... I REALLY had my money's worth with this one! Bravo, Mr Ryan!

Andrew A. says

Didn't know anything about Lawrence of Arabia before this book. I know it's a novel, but it was based on real life events of his contemporaries. I really enjoyed this story, even if it was totally fictional. Cool setting, interesting characters - especially the villains - and a fun plot line to go with it.

Christopher Williams says

This is part true and part fictional account of T E Lawrence in the Middle East between 1915 and 1917. Interesting historical context with many references to the problems of this area today. The main story of the rivalry with a German, with many similarities to Lawrence is pretty well done and apparently true.

Adam Ben Ali says

It took me nearly twenty six hours to devour this book, and I've got to say: Robert Ryan sure knows how to take the reader by a desert storm. Thoroughly plotted, richly detailed, vibrant characters, and unbelievably sneaky twists that will keep you gasping for air. My only regret is that I read this in the cold of November.

Josie Rideg says

Very interesting, suspense-filled, informative and enlightening fiction based on reality about Lawrence of Arabia. Impressed by the similarities and historical background to the problems of the Middle East today. Involving story.

Ron Decaigny says

Populated with mostly actual people this is a painless and enjoyable way to gain insight into the people and happenings of the time. Throw in a good (and plausible) story and you can't go wrong. Mr Ryan has certainly done his homework. Well worth the time.

Nuno Magalhães says

Este livro de Robert Ryan centra-se na personalidade de Thomas Edward Lawrence, oficial do Exército Britânico, e na respectiva influência da revolta Árabe contra o Império Otomano que ocupava a Palestina e que se desenvolveu durante a 1ª Grande Guerra do Século XX no Próximo Oriente. A prosa do autor é muito interessante, por vezes complexa, e integra de uma forma fluída relatos de acontecimentos passados no Cairo

e Aqaba, cidades controladas pelos Britânicos, bem como no Sudoeste da Pérsia (actual Irão) na região próxima do Golfo Pérsico. A narrativa permite-nos apreciar os traços da personalidade de T. H. Lawrence, ao mesmo tempo que nos permite compreender as condições em que viviam as várias tribos árabes naquelas regiões desérticas. Em paralelo, o autor constrói uma história de espionagem que evolui em torno de um segredo Alemão que foi transportado para a Pérsia por um espião cujo objectivo seria o de convencer as tribos persas a juntar-se aos Alemães e Otomanos contra os Britânicos. O livro contém descrições deliciosas daquelas paisagens inóspitas, bem como diálogos inteligentes, divertidos e provocantes. Em minha opinião, trata-se de um livro que vale a pena ler por todos aqueles que se interessam por romance histórico, apimentado com uma boa história de espionagem.

Graham S says

Hard to come to a definite conclusion as I didn't really get the point of the book. Most of the story focuses on one episode in Persia in 1915 which was a good adventure story well told. I certainly got the feel of the desert and the privations and dangers of the soldiers and local tribesman. A cruel and often short life, it seems. Were the characters real? -it seems so after reading the Author's note at the end, but Lawrence comes over as having almost magical powers, always spotting the deceptions ages before others- reminded me of Poirot explaining his discoveries after having the murderer arrested!) It's almost as if the author is indulging in hero worship -it seems that the story of Lawrence's role in Wassmuss's codes and the link to the Zimmerman telegram (both true) was pure nonsense.

Yet, the period when Lawrence was in Cairo and playing the maverick, shows him as much more complex. Ill at ease with society, a chip on his shoulder about his "family" and a (platonic?) interest in befriending boys.

Then we have the wraparound bit at the start and end of the book set in 1917 which is set right in Lawrence of Arabia/ Seven Pillars of Wisdom territory, both geographically and in terms of Lawrence's grand plan to free the Arabs from colonialism. This bit is more factual and seems to be a device to connect to the known bit of the Lawrence story. Did he go to Persia in 1915? I haven't found evidence that he did.

In summary, an enjoyable read, but perhaps not to be taken at face value.

Some background:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wilhelm_...

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gertrude...>

Stephs says

It's an interesting and complex story that makes you wish you could actually meet the man in person, even though it's a fictional work.
