

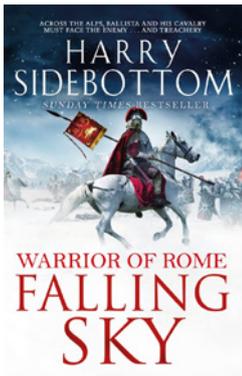
Book Review

Warrior of Rome: Falling Sky

Sidebottom (H.), Pp. 376, map. London: Zaffre, 2022. Cased, £16.99. ISBN: 978-1838778019

Brian J. Zawiski

Don Bosco Prep, Ramsey, NJ, USA
bzawiski@donboscoprep.org



Harry Sidebottom once again has a winner with *Falling Sky*, the ninth book in his historical fiction *Warrior of Rome* series. While one would benefit from having read the previous books in the series, *Falling Sky* does stand on its own in this latest episode of Ballista and his cavalry as they pursue the newest enemy of Emperor Gallienus. The book is set in 265 CE in Gaul as Gallienus prepares for war to seize the territory taken by his opponent Postumus. Ballista leads part of Gallienus' army and faces challenges

along the way – in the Alps and then in southern Gaul. Loyalty is tested at every turn. Ballista is forced to navigate the murky and complicated waters of Roman politics, and to fight fellow Romans, not knowing whom he could trust, on the frontline under terrible conditions. Ballista's unit gets isolated and finding himself in a bind, he faces whether his leadership skills, strategy, and cunning will prove to be enough for him to succeed and ultimately retire to his beloved Sicily. This page-turner of an adventure presents us with a compelling plot, strong characterisation, and an intriguing moment in history.

One is left wondering at times if the usurper Postumus might have actually been a better leader than Gallienus. He certainly comes across as a much more humane leader, where Gallienus seems much more out for himself and unreliable.

This was a thoroughly enjoyable read. One would certainly benefit from some familiarity with the Latin names of towns, villages, and geographical features of ancient Gaul, as well as a basic familiarity with Latin military vocabulary. If one enjoys historical fiction, particularly historical fiction set in the late Roman Empire, then this book, and ultimately this whole series, will prove to be a must read.

doi: 10.1017/S2058631024000357