



Lionheart

Sharon Kay Penman

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They were called "The Devil's Brood," though never to their faces. They were the four surviving sons of Henry Plantagenet and Eleanor of Aquitaine. With two such extraordinary parents, much was expected of them.

But the eldest-charming yet mercurial-would turn on his father and, like his brother Geoffrey, meet an early death. When Henry died, Richard would take the throne and, almost immediately, set off for the Holy Land. This was the Third Crusade, and it would be characterized by internecine warfare among the Christians and extraordinary campaigns against the Saracens. And, back in England, by the conniving of Richard's youngest brother, John, to steal his crown.

Lionheart Details

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From Reader Review Lionheart for online ebook

Deborah Pickstone says

This final pair of novels about the Plantagenets by Sharon Penman are definitely her best novels. They feature excellent storytelling, well crafted writing and truly impressive historical research. She has managed to remove Richard from his one-dimensional appearance as a gung-ho warrior of little apparent ability in the realm of statesmanship and repackages him as a much more subtle and complex man while retaining and verifying the heroic warrior as actually far more impressive than even the legend would have it. And her story convinces; here comes alive a worthy son of a very complex and talented father and a most unusual (and politically talented) mother. Was he a good King for England? Maybe not, but we forget that England wasn't the heart of his universe - his Empire was far larger and his ambitions with it. We meet a driven, controlled will with an enormous amount of charisma and energy. Had Henry still been around to see him rule, I think he would have been proud.

If you are a Penman fan, this is her best. If you have never read her, these will please any reader of HF, male or female - and the history is exemplary.

B the BookAddict says

Ms Penman - take a bow! 4.5★

Iset says

If the truth be told, I begin to run out of words for my reviews of Sharon Penman's novels. Without a doubt, the publication of *Lionheart* was the most anticipated event of my literary year, and I can hardly convey my impatience as I waited to get my hands on a copy. One of the best things about the publication of a new Sharon Penman novel is that feeling of security which creates even higher anticipation – the consistency of her level of writing over the years has built up a real store of trust amongst her readership. Unlike some authors where a new release is met with anticipation mixed with nervousness by readers to discover if it will be a sensation or a flop, we know ahead of time that we're safe with one of Sharon's novels, we know that we're always going to get the high standard of research and writing that Sharon delivers. What a relief in the frequently hit and miss world of historical fiction!

One of the things I was intrigued about ahead of time was how Sharon would portray the very different worlds of Sicily, Cyprus and Outremer, compared to the familiar settings in her novels of western Europe, but in treating these locations and their unique environments and cultures with as much care and detail as she does our old stomping grounds of Wales, England and France, Sharon creates these new places just as thoroughly and believably. As per usual, Sharon is tackling a political situation of intense complexity, with a veritable cast of hundreds of characters, but again by rendering this deftly and carefully she keeps everything clear and understandable. This is a point of particular importance for me, since so many historical fiction authors shy away from conveying the full story when the history gets complicated, and it seems to be out of fear that readers just won't understand and will then slam the book for being too confusing. I think that's

actually very disappointing and sad, if not somewhat demeaning, to not give readers the credit to believe that they will be able to comprehend complex concepts and events, and to deliberate dumb down I feel robs me of the chance to get as authentically close as possible to the real history. Not once during the course of reading *Lionheart* did I feel confused or have to go back and re-read due to bewilderment. I cannot stress enough just how much this contributes to the overall quality of the writing. Precision with clarity – it's a winning combination. Since I'm touching on the subject of historical accuracy already, a few more words on the matter: it's as high as one would come to expect from a Sharon Penman novel, and as ever the author's note – always a welcome courtesy in historical fiction – thoroughly addresses discrepancies and furthermore provides a wonderful glimpse into the research process of an historical novelist. Moreover, it reinforces that sense of trust, by creating a certain degree of openness and transparency, and the extensive bibliography was a joy for me as an historian, as I can now do the same research for myself on the points I loved in the novel and want to find out more about.

I think one of the key points of anticipation was wondering how Sharon would portray Richard. We'd seen him as a prince before, got insights into his early years and glimmers of the man he would become, but you just know that everyone was waiting for the Lionheart king of semi-legendary status in the modern British consciousness to appear on the stage. What's wonderful about the character of Richard in this novel is that we get a rich blend of the larger than life figure and the real man – there's no mistaking Richard's military prowess and leadership presence, with an occasional dash of pomp and circumstance, but the down to earth, grounded man is also readily apparent, and the story is woven full of marvellous moments of private humour and personal intimacy. This is something I've said before in another review of a Penman novel, but you really believe that this could be the real Richard. I think this is another one of the big secrets of a great historical fiction novel – part of the fun and appeal is the idea of a glimpse into what really happened, and what our most fascinating historical people were really like, and getting this right is treading the line between immersion and disengagement. It's about believability. It's not just Richard either – though his significance in this novel was such that I felt I had to address the point of his portrayal separately – but all the characters are a delight. Henri, André, Eleanor, Joanna, Berenguela... it's the subtlety in the way these characters have been built up. The transformation and growth of Henri... the fleshing out of Berenguela, especially as this quietly brave young woman when she's so often portrayed as a timid mousy type. One of my favourites scenes has to be the dinner between Eleanor, Berenguela and their party and Constance and Heinrich and their party, after a chance meeting. It's simply magical. The political groundwork is set in place, the joy of knowing that this chance meeting actually happened and is not an implausible author invention, and Eleanor's moment to absolutely shine, drawing on all her past experiences and vast political acumen. What a scene! And I can't credit Sharon enough for being able to write the subtle scenes of political discourse equally as well as the action scenes of chaotic battle – and yet still keep it all clear for us. What a writer!

That's really all I have to say. *Lionheart* ticks all my boxes of what I look for in historical fiction: sophisticated writing, subtle characterisations, historical accuracy, and a coherent and compelling plot.

10 out of 10. At the risk of raising a few festive groans: quality Penmanship. :)

Debbie says

Here's the problem with historical fiction - the fiction part has to ring true and be as interesting as the historical part. It doesn't with this book. I know it got great reviews and I really wanted to like it but I just lost interest. Partly it was because of some of the inane conversations that the author made up between

characters (the fiction part of the story) - for example.. the author could have Richard and Berengaria discuss anything from fabric swatches for one of his many palaces to papal politics - but instead the author creates a conversation where Berengaria is worried because Richard's 'member' is so big and so suggests to him that maybe they can use scented oil so sex might be more pleasurable...really..that's what the author wants us to go with?

The other major problem with this book is point of view - It opens with Joanna (his sister), moves to Eleanor (his mother) and continues with everyone's point of view except Richard. We are with Eleanor as she wonders what Richard wants of her instead of in Richard's head as he worries about asking his mother to go to Rome; we are with Joanna and Berengaria stranded at sea off the coast of Cyprus - worried about what they will have to do if Richard doesn't find them...we are not with Richard, who gets ill and then has to look for his sister and future wife; we are with Joanna as Richard goes to battle in Cyprus - not with Richard in battle; and while Richard is dealing with the aftermath of battle (off stage somewhere) we are with Joanna as she contemplates a bath..

The book is called Lionheart - not 'those who know Lionheart' - I just lost interest.

Rio (Lynne) says

Where to start? As soon as I started this hardback I was hooked. Sadly, my shifts at work required driving in Los Angeles rush hour twice a day (4 hrs a day) leaving no free reading time. My solution, buy the audiobook. I loved it and realized just how bad I had been slaughtering pronunciations ;) When I look back to review this, there was so much history, many characters and lots of battle scenes. I enjoyed Penman's intense research and chuckled at her comment about trying to not make it too Hollywood, but Richard, like William Marshal actually did these things! A brilliant, strategic war leader, who was loved by his troops. This book covered the Third Crusade, just a portion of Richard's life. When Henri of Champagne thought "Will there ever be peace in Jerusalem?" it made me think. How sad 800 years later religious wars still continue. I enjoyed every minute of this story. Penman's interpretation of each character, the descriptions (I felt like I was in that hot heat, exotic land with them.) I already have part 2 The King's Ransom audiobook ready to go. Great read....aka....listen ;)

Stephanie says

I have enjoyed all of Sharon's books, but this one ranks up there with Sunne in Splendor in terms of completely resetting my opinion of a person from history. I started the book being indifferent to Richard. I grudgingly had to admit, chapter by chapter, that he began to grow on me. By the end he really had endeared himself to me.

As with all of Sharon's books, the characters are classic Penman -- luring you into their world where you see them as more than just figures from history, but living, breathing humans. I have not come across many authors who have the ability to make you feel so much for the characters in a story the way Sharon does. Be prepared for some powerful emotions to be evoked in this one!

Here are some of my thoughts posted on Facebook immediately after finishing:

"Finished. What a ride! I think Lionheart is my favorite of the "Angevin series" because it surprised me more than any of the other books and changed many of my views. I did not expect to have my opinion of Richard changed nearly this much. It sounds so trite to say the book is full of dimension, but I don't know any other way to put it. When others have managed to portray the same events in 2D, Sharon has managed to go somewhere between 3D and 4D. As Sharon states in her A.N. that a friend of hers said, "There was a reason Richard was Eleanor's favorite." I can see it now. Thank you, Sharon. Brilliant! Absolutely brilliant!

Sunne and HBD series are still topping the list of favorites, but each of these books is appealing to me for vastly different reasons. Lionheart did not have the same gut-wrenching pain as Sunne and HBD, but it was full of so many other things. I could quote Sharon's entire A.N. and it would basically say it all for me. The colorful details, the better-than-Hollywood events, the complexity of emotions surrounding a certain "massacre" between political need and personal disgust at it. Each little detail was like a dot of paint on a canvas. Combine those dots of light with the compelling complexity of Richard's fully developed personality as seen in a way I've never experienced before and you have a very compelling painting. I spent most of Devil's Brood being very confused by Richard and wanting to thwack Henry upside the head. Lionheart was a lightbulb for me regarding Richard. On a completely different note, my mind was swimming from the overwhelming amounts of research that Sharon had to do. Her list of references was astounding. I always tell everyone she is my favorite novelist, but she is also an historian of the highest order!"

Paula Lofting says

It has taken me awhile to get to grips with how I will write this review. I guess I should start by saying that I have always in the past enjoyed this author's books but for some reason, this book did not have the same wow factor I got when I read the others. This could be for a number of reasons; one being that since I have started writing myself, I have a more discerning eye, or I have simply out grown Ms Penman's style and lean more towards the rather more masculine re-telling of history rather than the romantic slant that some authors put on their novels. The last book I remember reading of Ms Penman's was Devil's Brood 6 years ago. I remember then wishing that there was more action in the book, but I loved it nonetheless. Since then, my tastes in writing style has obviously changed -a lot, as I was to find out when I read Lionheart.

For me, the problem started early. I was irritated that I had to wade through the scenes with women discussing various things about sex, babies and love etc to page 70 before Richard - who is Lionheart appears. To me this was baffling. When he does appear, suddenly my interest is ignited and I am totally there. The scenes that followed were more masculine, and I was enjoying it immensely only to want more and then suddenly the scene and point of view would change and I am left feeling unfulfilled. There was a curious scene in which William Marshall and his wife open it from their point of view for about a paragraph, maybe more and then it suddenly changes to someone else's point of view. The Marshalls don't appear ever again throughout the book which felt somewhat bizarre. Why bother to put them in for a few lines in the limelight and then not appear again - ever? It seemed odd.

But that is the author's style, she switches point of views throughout the book on numerous occasions and head hopping is rife throughout the book. Whilst this is not always a bad thing, and i know it is the author's style, but for me it made it difficult to feel that Richard was the main character of the book and that perhaps the title should have been something else.

But this book was not without its greatness. Ms Penman is faultless in her research of this subject. Her descriptions of the places and the way she creates a visual ambiance so vividly are second to none. At times,

she crafts her words into the stuff that makes be have a sharp intake of breath. At other times the language used was a little anachronistic sounding, a little too modern.

the characters were many, and at times developing nicely but even the main character, Lionheart himself, was overshadowed by the supporting characters who were given far too much attention. I think the author would have done better to have written it in a sort of Game of thrones style where everyone has time devoted to them and titled it, as someone else has mentioned in their review, Lionheart's Crusade.

Overall, I liked this book, which is why I am giving it 3.5 stars, but mainly for the quality of research and the vast undertaking. To write this topic in such detail is an amazing feat and despite the niggles I had with the style, the head-hopping and constant POV changes, it is a worthy book. There were times, like Richard's stand in the besieged city (I think it was Jaffa) that the writing was so good, I wished for more of it.

3.5 stars

Terri says

What rating does one give a book that was not only not read to the end, but was only read to 60 pages? Only on special occasions do I actually give a rating to a book if I have not made it to around 100 pages - or in the case of a book the size of this brick - roughly 250 pages.

This is one of those special occasions. I learned enough about this book in those 60 pages to write a 10 page review. But I won't of course. That would be beyond excessive and more than a little obsessive.

I am writing this review and giving this book a star rating, despite my lacklustre effort to read the book, for those who know me. For those people, let me explain my 1 star and my reasons for disliking this book so much. For those who don't know me, just ignore my review.

First cab off the rank. The book isn't about Richard the Lionheart. It is about the personal relationships and lives of those around him. Now, when I pick up a book called 'Lionheart' I expect the book to be about him. I expect the author's fictional biography of Richard the Lionheart. I don't know when Richard becomes a regular feature of the story, but he wasn't around nor a feature of those first 60 pages and I have it on good authority that he isn't around in any 'biographical' sense for a long time in the book. then when he is, it is from afar.

Other things I didn't like about this book. It is entirely too feminine for me. It is what I call a 'lady book'. These kinds of books that are about personal relationships and feminine details don't work for me. Feminine details like, how she wears her hair, how glorious she looks that day, what gorgeous silks she has in her coffers, where she keeps her jewellery, how everyone is beautiful who should be beautiful and everyone is ugly who should be ugly, inner most thoughts of women about their husbands and girlfriends and babies, how every woman on woman scene is like the girls from Sex in the City meeting at their favourite cafe or nightclub.

I found the writing feminine. There is no doubt that this book is written by a woman for women. And those kinds books always make me run for the hills. The only reason I decided to try this one was because it was a group read in my group and because every now and then I have people trying to tell me how good Penman is and how her books aren't romance or lady book.

Finally I have first hand knowledge and I can say...I came, I saw, and I found out for myself that these books by Sharon Kay Penman will never be to my tastes.

I understand they are to others, that they are well loved, but for me personally, they are not to my tastes.

Krista Baetiong Tungol says

Today, April 6, 2016 (we're hours ahead on the time zone), mark the 817th death anniversary of Richard I of England, famously known as the "Lionheart" for his legendary military skills and daring exploits. I am reposting my review on the book Lionheart by Sharon Kay Penman, which I read last year. :-)

One word that can justifiably illustrate King Richard I, and that Sharon Kay Penman has used in this book thrice: *bravura*. Indeed, he was never short of audacity, always leading his men to the front line and proving himself a capable military tactician as early as sixteen. For all his blunders as a son, a husband and a king, or even the risky exploits he had committed himself into that almost bordered on perverse tenacity and perhaps a strong disregard to his self-preservation, no one could ever dispute his sound warrior skills and great courage in the battlefield. Reading this book felt like watching a far-fetched movie about a hero who is glorified excessively for his ability to run through the enemy line on his own, come to his wife and sister's rescue in the nick of time and in a rather dramatic fashion, and reclaim a besieged town and hold fast to it even when they were greatly outnumbered by the enemy—only, these aren't merely whimsical hero's tales but a few of the many testimonies that proved Richard's legendary valor.

No wonder he'd been referred to as the "Lionheart" in his lifetime and thereafter. He was definitely a force to reckon with, a "medieval rockstar", to quote one book reviewer. So admirable was his authority that many were enamored to follow him to hell and back and sacrificed themselves on his behalf, like one Norman knight did. I think I would do the same if I were part of his retinue; I would also stay loyal and trusting and confident even to be sleeping soundly every night knowing that my liege lord could easily outdo the saints in performing miracles and bringing good fortune in his favor every time. Sadly, though, that with all the illustriousness surrounding King Richard's life, his death had come out rather tragically lackluster (actually, his later years and death aren't covered in this book, all the more reason to read the next—and final—installment of Penman's Plantagenet series, *A King's Ransom*).

I detested his selfish and skeptical nature in the previous book, *Devil's Brood*, although my general sentiment about him after reading this story has now quite mellowed to ambivalence (or even perhaps a bit more on the approving side). Penman has painted King Richard here in a different light—a pleasant kind of different in my opinion, and a satisfying divergence from the many chronicles practically underlining his disreputable deeds. I also appreciate how the author has narrated the events of the Third Crusade in a very detailed fashion that didn't turn out flat in the end. I find that she has a witty way of describing historical events, and if she were a History professor, she'd surely have lots of eager enrollees in her class!

Alicja says

I gave up on page 77. It is not a badly written book and it is very historically accurate but... gah, the first 77

pages of marriage and babies instead of war and crusades (as I assumed when I picked it up) boooored me to death to a point that I couldn't even force myself to the promised "it gets better later" part. If you are looking for the women's POV and their concerns regarding marrying the right noble and popping out sons then this is the book for you. If like me you think there will be gore, battles, and disembowelment then this isn't the book for you, at least not based on the first 77 pages.

Samantha says

This is another one of those books that requires a star-level breakdown review. I adore Sharon Kay Penman and really wanted to love this book 5-star all the way, but after rereading it over the past couple of weeks I have to admit that it just doesn't captivate me like her other books.

5-star qualities:

The settings. Nobody can make the reader feel like they are in medieval France, Sicily, Cyprus, or Outremer like SKP. I could picture Richard standing at the prow of his galley with the sunset blazing behind him like I was standing there on the shore of the Holy Land.

The historical accuracy & research. I don't feel like I have to fact-check anything SKP writes, and *Lionheart* was no exception. Penman does not lazily write another fluffy record of the mythological exploits of Richard I. She digs deep and looks for the truth, then makes it informative but entertaining for her dear readers. This is no light read, but that is exactly what I love about it.

4-star qualities:

The characterizations. This is something that SKP usually excels at. I have cried over numerous deaths though I knew they were coming - when, where, how - it didn't matter because SKP made me feel like I knew them and to me they were alive. I didn't feel that way in *Lionheart*. Richard is charismatic, bold, and courageous. He is everything a medieval king should be, but I just didn't care all that much. The most lovable person was Henri of Champagne whose death is dealt with as a footnote.

3-star qualities:

Sloooooowwww start. It literally took me until half-way through this book to get into it much, a problem I had the first time that I read it as well. The first 50 pages deal with a girl named Alicia who barely enters the story after those first chapters. Even SKP needs to just cut material sometimes. Once the fleet gets to Cyprus, and especially when Richard leaves Acre and the women behind, this story picks up and is as enjoyable as I had expected the entire novel to be, but it took way too long to get there.

Bedroom scenes. I don't know if they were present to convince us of Richard's heterosexuality or if it was supposed to be titillating, but the romantic byplay between him and Berengaria was cringe-worthy at best.

Point-of-view switches. Penman couldn't seem to decide who she wanted to have tell this story, so she switches quite frequently and not always for the benefit of the reader. This story about England's warrior king was told far too often from the point of view of a woman.

Overall, I did not feel that this was one of Penman's best, but I will still be eagerly waiting to get a copy of *King's Ransom* when it comes out in a few months.

Rick Slane says

Unless you are into the Crusades this probably is not for you. This covers Richard from the beginning of his reign up until his departure from the "Holy Land".

Helena Schrader says

Penman is a first-class historical novelist, whose novels are always based on meticulous research. She excels at biographical novels, as her debut novel *The Sunne in Splendour*, a brilliant, nuanced and plausible portrayal of Richard III, demonstrated.

In "Lionheart" she tackles a character less controversial than the last Plantagenet, but one who has become lost behind the legend or the "brand." Almost everyone, as Penman points out in her "Author's Note," has heard of Richard the Lionhearted, but almost no one knows anything about him. We simply think we do.

Penman succeeds in making Richard a complex, multi-dimensional character, with strengths and weaknesses. She convincingly lays to rest some of the more destructive legends – Richards' homosexuality, his "heartless" brutality at Acre, his overweening pride, and his alleged lack of intelligence or subtlety. By the end of the novel, I sincerely liked Richard, sympathized with him, and understood his behavior better than at the start.

Yet in a way that was the problem: I only started to understand and like Richard towards the end of the novel. It took me so long to see Richard, because Penman clutters the book with seemingly hundreds of superfluous characters that detract from him. The book is bogged down by plot splinters, too small and inconsequential to be called fragments. All these superfluous characters and sub-plots clog the flow of the narrative. Richard's historical accomplishments in the short time-span of the novel were stupendous, and we ought to be sitting on the edge of our seats, unable to put down the book until we've finished reading it. Instead, it took me nearly nine months to read, and it was only in the last hundred of the nearly six-hundred pages that I was finally gripped by the novel.

While I understand Penman's desire to give credit and space to some of Richard's contemporaries and companions-in-arms (and his enemies!), I found myself irritated by sub-plots with completely fictional characters. For example, why open the story with a dramatic shipwreck seen through the eyes of a frightened girl, if that girl is not going to play any role in the novel? She's hardly even mentioned in the last nine tenths of the book and is not a historical figure. Yet other characters, like Henry of Champagne, are simply names without personality until the final chapters. Penman should have given these important characters more prominence early in the book, so we could understand and care about them later on.

Altogether the book read like a rough draft, the first out-pouring of creative energy by an author still strongly influenced by recent research. Penman appears to have tried to fit in everything single historical fact that she discovered so that in the end she has got her history right at the expense of a clear story-line and momentum. At the same time, Penman apparently wanted to retain characters from earlier novels to provide continuity, while adding some new ones at the beginning that she really didn't need.

“Lionheart” would have benefited from a rigorous re-write, focused on eliminating the superfluous, fleshing out the central characters, and creating a leaner, faster-paced book. Penman can do better than this, and Richard deserves better.

Lori Anderson says

I want to caveat my Three Star rating by saying I adore Sharon Kay Penman. I pre-ordered this book and interrupted what I was currently reading (an unheard of thing for me!) to start "Lionheart". While I wasn't sorry I did that, and wasn't at ALL sorry I read this book, to me, it wasn't like her others.

Richard the Lionheart is a noteworthy, larger-than-life person in history I was dying to learn more about. This particular book covers the crusades, another section of history I didn't know much about. I learned quite a lot about the Crusades, and learned it in a way that will stick with me and was far richer and more interesting than reading a dry history text. However, one of the things I love about Penman's books are her richly developed characters, and I felt that was missing in "Lionheart". Just when I thought a character was on the verge of opening up and blossoming into a richer, more intensely interesting person, Penman moves on to something else.

This minor character development didn't ruin the story for me, though. She DID develop the characters well enough, and in some scenes, QUITE well, to make this book a page-turner. I just missed her usual style. I have to admit, I don't have any idea how any other author out there could have tackled this subject any better, so I give the book Three Stars, meaning yes, I liked it, and yes, all Sharon Kay Penman fans should read it. But a new reader who discovers Penman should start with "The Sunne in Splendour" and then her series from the first book and not skip around.

Looking forward to her next book!!!

Lori Anderson

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Susan says

I usually don't enjoy reading about battles, but that's unavoidable when reading a novel about Richard I (Lionheart) during the Third Crusade. Of course, I knew that Sharon Kay Penman would be able to draw me into her novel with her exquisite writing and her always impeccable research. Her writing makes Richard seem as alive today as he was back in 1192. Sharon, I can't wait to read more about Richard in "A King's Ransom." I join your many other readers who are eagerly awaiting that book.

Althea Ann says

A quote from Carlos Ruiz Zafón: "I think you have to be careful with research in fiction. I believe the best way to use it is to learn a lot yourself about what you're going to write, and then don't really use more than 1% of all the research you've done, at least visibly. ... the effective way to use research in fiction is to internalize it and embed its essence in the narrative fabric of the tale. Information only works in fiction when it plays a dramatic role. Often you read novels in which the author includes much of the research he's done... It could work in a journalistic context or in a nonfiction book, but in literature you need to find a way to incorporate it in the texture, the aesthetics, and the fabric of the world you're building for the reader from a purely narrative point, never as window dressing or as a display of erudition."

Sharon Kay Penman (and her fans) would doubtless disagree with everything Zafón says. By her own admission, she loves adding "random details straight from the pages of [historical] chronicles" and she says "I tend to be obsessive-compulsive about research!"

The book is indeed excellently researched - but it feels more like reading a history text about Richard the Lionheart than a novel. It relates historic events in detail, even quoting from historical sources within the text. It frequently lists names of people who were present at certain occasions, for no dramatic reason, just because it's known, and one might find it interesting. It IS interesting. It's just not exciting.

I read all near-600 pages of this book, and didn't want to stop part-way through - but neither did I have any trouble putting the book down and doing something else for a while, at any point. I read a bunch of other books before getting around to finishing it.

It will definitely educate you on the circumstances surrounding the Third Crusade, and details of twelfth-century history. But the narrative lacks dramatic tension, even when the events being described are chock-full of drama! The characters didn't really come to life for me, as people. I feel that this is because Penman makes a conscious decision not to 'make up' too much stuff. But it also means that this isn't the sort of book I really prefer.

I got the book as part of the First Reads giveaway. I entered because I'd heard a lot of good things about Penman's books, and even actually own two of them that I'd been 'getting-around-to' reading. I'm sure there are many people out there who love her style of writing, but it's just not the style I most prefer.

Ellen Ekstrom says

Bad Son, Bad King, Bad Husband, but Medieval Rockstar...

Sharon Kay Penman continues her saga of the most dysfunctional family of the twelfth century, the Plantagenets, with this first of two books about Richard, Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine's third son, who later became known by his nickname, Lionheart. In fact, he's the only English monarch not known by his reignal number. If you said "Lionheart" to someone today, they would probably know you were talking about King Richard the First of England, the epitome of the Crusader and medieval superman.

The story starts out slowly and with a fictional character that sort of, kind of, disappears into the background midway through the first quarter of the very long book, never to be seen or heard again. While I understand the author's use of the character to introduce us to the kingdom of Sicily and Richard's youngest sister, Queen Joanna of Sicily, I thought it was unnecessary. Joanna's story gives a back story to the conflict

brewing among the nobility of southern Europe and we see Richard as a loving brother and diplomat – someone you don't mess with.

I didn't like the Richard in Penman's trilogy that preceded "Lionheart." He was a spoiled, nasty boy and adolescent with nothing but vengeance on his mind. He doesn't like his brothers and sees them as the competition. Granted, his father Henry didn't have the best parenting skills, but Richard was as brutal and mean with his brothers as he was with Henry, going to war with them whenever his precious Aquitaine was threatened. He was considered Eleanor's favorite and that comes out in the story. I was glad to find Richard a more sympathetic character in "Lionheart," more mature, but just as reckless and daring, courageous on the battlefield leading his army into bloodbath after bloodbath, getting out of one impossible tight spot after another and surviving. Richard takes the cross, the oath to fight for the restoration of Jerusalem after the battle of Hattin and the fall of Jerusalem in 1187. Here, Penman gets repetitious. The massacre known as the Horns of Hattin and the fall of Jerusalem to Salah al-Din is mentioned in almost every chapter, as a lesson to be learned. No one wants to repeat this horrible mistake. Also, the description of Richard's royal ship, The Sea Cleaver, comes up more than once, as do the affinities of the men closest to Richard.

The political battles between the Kings of England and France were telling and well portrayed – the less than Christian behavior and attitude of the Kings of England and France toward one another made taking Jerusalem even more difficult than the superior forces of Salah al-Din. If anything, the infighting between the monarchs made the Third Crusade a failure, in my opinion. They were too busy fighting each other to concentrate on defeating Salah al-Din.

We see the "Lionheart" in action from battle to battle, whether on the desert sand or in a castle hall. Richard's prowess as a battle commander and a warrior was legendary in his own day and he was mobbed like today's rockstar by his admirers. Penman shows us Richard the egomaniac: his entry into the port at Acre is an event to be witnessed. In fact he makes a spectacular entrance everywhere he goes. His men loved him because he walked among them, toiled and fought alongside them, and put his own safety aside to protect them. Above average in height and looks, he was a dashing prince and one to be obeyed. Penman does a fine job showing this.

I appreciated that Penman didn't fall back on the Victorian supposition that Richard was gay. Few if any chronicles of his time make this claim. He was promiscuous and had one known illegitimate child, a boy, and he was taken to task bishops for neglecting his wife. Penman shows a man who goes about the motions of being married, trying to be a husband. If Berenguela of Navarre had been a trebuchet or arbalest, Richard would have paid more attention. Still, he's no monster – just a man with a mission – to reclaim the Holy Land from the infidels, and the mission is his mistress. War is what Richard knows and it's what he does best. He was also well-read, a poet and a musician, but it was the warrior everyone loved and feared.

This is another Penman book that gives you history and entertains while offering a lesson.

I'm looking forward to "The King's Ransom" – I'm dying to find out what went wrong between Richard and his queen, and how Penman will deal with the Blondel legend.

A good reading experience and a great introduction for those who have never read about Richard I.

Lisa (Harmonybites) says

Penman is one of my favorite novelists, so I was happy when I won a free advanced copy of this novel, to be published in October, from LibraryThing's Early Reviewer's program. This novel has many qualities that define the best of *historical* fiction. First, Penman has an evident respect for history and well-researched knowledge of the periods she depicts. Her characters don't sound like reality tv stars nor is her history risible such as that of Philippa Gregory. In this novel of Richard the Lionhearted and his war in the Holy Land, Penman quotes primary sources such as medieval chroniclers who were witnesses to the Third Crusade from both sides, Frank and Saracen. She has a way with the telling detail, whether sexual practices, medicine, cuisine or details of dress or siege warfare that brings another age and land to life. And as with her other books, I greatly appreciate her afterwards that detail what liberties she took with history.

Most crucially Penman doesn't just write historical characters as modern people in dress up. She's a great tour guide into that foreign land--a century long past--and in that regard I rank her with the best writers of historical fiction such as Mary Renault and Robert Graves. She writes of a mindset alien and alienating to contemporary sensibilities yet manages to still make her characters sympathetic. This is no mean feat given medieval views on warfare, religious tolerance and the status of women. This is particularly so when it comes to the title character. We see Richard from a multiplicity of views, although rarely his own. There are dozens of point of view characters here in a sprawling book spanning around 600 pages covering from July of 1189 to August 1192, from the time Richard becomes King to when he leaves the Holy Land. We're taken from Normandy to Sicily to Cyprus and then on to Palestine.

And the portrait that emerged of Richard was more complex and intriguing than I expected. Penman's is a rounded picture, that neither glosses over his flaws nor paints over his virtues. This is a king who doesn't hesitate to force women into unwanted marriages nor to slaughter men who surrendered to him when required out of military necessity, who has a bad temper, holds grudges and can be ruinously stubborn. But this is also a man who can be generous and has a good sense of humor, who others willingly follow into battle because he shares their hardships, is reckless with his life but careful of the lives of his men, and who displayed an undaunted courage that earned him the sobriquet "lionhearted" even before he became a king, let alone a crusader. Nor as depicted here is he a narrow-minded religious bigot, but someone who respected his adversaries and tried to come to terms with them in ways his fellow crusaders did not. There are also other fascinating portraits here, from famous figures such as Eleanor of Aquitaine to more obscure figures such as Henri, Count of Champagne. I finished this book better understanding the Third Crusade and why it was a qualified failure, from the point of view of the European crusaders. We get some sense of their foes as well, but primarily from the Eurocentric point of view--we never really get inside the heads of the defending Muslims.

I'd definitely recommend this book to anyone interested in the period, King Richard the Lionhearted of England, or who enjoys Penman's work. As to the reason I don't give this top marks... Well, Sharon Kay Penman has formidable competition--from Sharon Kay Penman. Her biographical novel of Richard III, *The Sunne in Splendour*, and of King John's daughter Joanna, *Here Be Dragons*, are two of my favorite novels and would certainly make my top twenty list of favorite historical fiction, and *Here Be Dragons* is high on my list of the most moving love stories I've ever read. I didn't find *Lionheart* as moving or impressive as those novels. Nor do I find Penman as remarkable a stylist as Hilary Mantel of *Wolf Hall* or Dorothy Dunnett of *Game of Kings*. But that is to set a very high bar, and I'm sure few, if any, historical novels published this year will be as good as *Lionheart*.

Misfit says

Over the years I have tried several different novels that focused on the Lionheart whilst he was on crusade, yet none of them really managed to engage me (although they did make for good sleeping pills). I'd about given up hope on ever finding one that would hold my interest until word came that Sharon Kay Penman was planning to continue her Angevin series with a book on Richard and I was dancing with joy – if anyone could do it, the fabulous Sharon Penman could. Was I bored?

No, I was not.

I think everyone knows the bare bones of this story, as well as all the myths and legends that have sprung up around it so I'll pass on trying to recap it and just share my thoughts on the reading experience. I absolutely loved how the author portrayed Richard. He is very much a man of his times, a king and a warrior who did what was necessary to get the job done and keep his men (and women) safe. I loved his sardonic wit, and had many laugh out loud moments. I felt his anguish at some of the tougher decisions he was forced to make, as well as his frustrations with the constant backstabbing and squabbles amongst those who were supposed to be his allies (damn those double-dealing Frenchmen...). His sense of timing and drama were perfection (oooh, that last-minute swoop into Cyprus to save the day once again, you just can't make that stuff up).

And how did Richard's queen Berengaria fare? Imagine being torn from your home and family, married to a virtual stranger, trekking half way around the world, surviving perils on the high sea, the stench and disease of a military camp and more, yet she handled it like a seasoned pro. Richard's sister Joanna was another favorite, very much a chip off of the old Angevin block and always there to knock some sense into her hard-headed brother when needed.

While I enjoyed this novel a great deal, this is not a light and easy read and is one best read without all of life's little distractions (no kids) so it can be savored as only a Penman novel should be. The cast of characters is large and complex (there are a lot of POV switches), as well as complicated politics and back-history the reader needs to take in. If you are looking for a light easy read with romanticized view of Richard this is probably not the book for you.

Lastly, are you going to have another great love story like Penman gave us in *Here be Dragons* and *The Reckoning*? Will they smoke off the pages like Henry and Eleanor in *When Christ and His Saints Slept*? Can't tell you that (besides, since there is one more book coming the story is only half told), but I will tell you that Berengaria's first...ummm...*cooking lesson* was priceless. The bed burning in *Here Be Dragons* is still tops, but Penmenians* will love it.

*Many thanks to you-know-who for coining that phrase and letting me ~~steal~~ use it

Review copy provided by the folks at Putnam, thank you.

Patricia Bracewell says

There is no question that Ms. Penman is a remarkable writer who has taken a huge task on her shoulders in writing this book. *LIONHEART* is written on a huge canvas. It does not cover a great span of time, but the number of characters is staggering, especially for someone, like me, listening to the audiobook, without the advantage of being able to flip back to earlier chapters to remind myself how this archbishop or that noble

connected with earlier events.

The omniscient viewpoint gives us a sprawling view of Richard I, his sister, his mother, their companions, his knights, his enemies, a clutch of servants and the vast landscape of the Third Crusade. It is richly imagined, a huge and cinematic book, befitting a huge and cinematic historical event.

But I did not love it, although I wanted to. My problem with the novel was that it was not so much about Richard I as it was about the Third Crusade, and I really don't find the crusades all that fascinating. If you do, this book may be for you, but bear in mind that much of the story focuses on the women who accompanied the crusaders to Sicily, to Cyprus and to Jerusalem. I found myself drawn most to the scenes between Eleanor of Aquitaine and her children, but that may simply be due to my own interest in the queen and her offspring.

Frankly, I think the book was given the wrong title. *LIONHEART* is misleading. *LIONHEART'S CRUSADE* may have been more accurate, because the book is about the crusade rather than Richard, so much so that there were times when it had the whiff of a history book rather than a novel. We get glimpses into the heart and mind of Richard I, but he is only one character, standing amid a whirlwind of people and events, and although he may stand head and shoulders above the rest, it's hard to get close to him through the crowd.
