



## Men of the Cross

*Charlene Newcomb*

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*War, political intrigue and passion... heroes... friends and lovers... and the seeds for a new Robin Hood legend await you...*

### 2014 B.R.A.G Medallion Honoree

Two young knights' journey to war at Richard the Lionheart's side sweeps them from England to the Holy Land in this historical adventure set against the backdrop of the Third Crusade.

Henry de Grey leaves Southampton in high spirits, strong in his faith and passionate about the mission to take Jerusalem back from Saladin's army. Stephan l'Aigle's prowess on the battlefield is well known, as are his exploits in the arms of other men. He prizes duty, honour and loyalty to his king above all else. But God and the Church? Stephan has little use for either.

Henry's convictions are challenged by loss and the harsh realities of bloody battles, unforgiving marches, and the politics of the day. Man against man. Man against the elements. Man against his own heart. Survival will depend on more than a strong sword arm.

*This tale includes a m/m relationship with a heat level of 2 (on a scale of 5), i.e., nothing too graphic.*

## Men of the Cross Details

Date : Published May 7th 2014 by Charlene Newcomb (first published April 28th 2014)

ISBN :

Author : Charlene Newcomb

Format : Kindle Edition 355 pages

Genre : Historical, Romance, M M Romance, Historical Fiction, Lgbt, War



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## From Reader Review Men of the Cross for online ebook

### Linda ~ chock full of hoot, just a little bit of nanny ~ says

So Stephan knows a bloke named Robin, and on the road they meet and befriend a couple of pickpockets with hearts of gold named Allan and Little John. Hmmmm... I wonder where this is going. Look, if you want to write a Robin Hood retelling, then do that. Don't make them side characters. It's just distracting. And really, after reading The Wode series by J Tullos Hennig, there's just no way this can come close to that series. This really just made me want to reread The Wode instead.

I'm by no means an expert of this time period, so I didn't know the battle of Messina was recounted inaccurately or that King Richard admired Saladin, or any other number of things that others have noted are poorly researched. However, it did feel off that Henry and Stephan and Robin all treat Richard like just another dude bro, and that Henry and Stephan are such experts at a longbow when that was rather a rarity back then.

I did like the banter between Henry and Stephan, and I could buy that they'd befriend a couple of wayward pickpockets once they proved they wouldn't rob them blind in the middle of the night. There's a lot of promise here, but the writing wasn't particularly gripping and it lacked detail. Even the action scenes were kind of boring me.

Time to move on!

(Side note: The KU selection has not been particularly promising so far. So many DNFs.)

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### Euraylie says

"Men of the Cross" is well written and presumably very well researched, and I really wanted to love it, but alas it didn't work for me.

As a historical novel it doesn't really offer anything new on King Richard's Third Crusade and as an m/m story there is too little focus on the relationship (which would be fine if the other characters were more gripping).

It's a good, solid novel, but it feels like it's keeping the reader somewhat at arm's length.

You never really feel like you're "on the ground" with the protagonists or really involved in the proceedings, which makes the crusade aspect a bit tedious at times; like you're just going through the motions.

There was never a 'I can't wait to see what happens next or how so and so enfolds' moment.

Also, despite the descriptions of the battles and the fatalities, it is all very sanitized, and King Richard and the royal family are portrayed as wonderfully and perfectly noble. There is no ambiguity to be had that would have made things a bit more interesting.

Saladin is only a very distant antagonist in a novel filled almost only with unproblematic, wonderful people.

The two MCs are very likable (although only one is really fleshed out), but the progression of the eventual romance between the two never really gets much of the spotlight.

There are some intriguing plot possibilities as it regards the protagonists' attitudes towards same sex relationships in the 12th century and the conflicts that arise from those views, but it all stays a bit superficial

and in the end gets resolved much too quickly.

The plot finally picks up and gets much more exciting towards the end, but I just wasn't that emotionally invested in the characters.

As for the take on the Robin Hood legend, for me it kind of got in the way of the plot, but maybe that's just because I'm spoiled by the excellent The Wode series by J Tullos Hennig (which also dealt with the crusades).

Still, the author is talented and I wouldn't mind reading her future work.

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### **Diverse says**

Men of the Cross is book one in Charlene Newcomb's Battle Scars series. Men of the Cross is every historical fan's dream! It's a truly epic adventure. It's war, love, blood, sweat, tears, triumphs, and failures.

This is told in the POV's of Stephan l'Aigle and Sir Henry de Grey, Knights in King Richard the Lionheart's army. They develop a friendship; which in war, so close to so much tragedy, is normal.

Stephan and Henry's love affair isn't an easy one to fold into. Stephan falls hard for Henry. Stephan being gay and Henry being religiously bound; presented moral questions and a tangle of situations.

We deal with so many political and religious battles in this book.. Written within a time when same sex relationships were forbidden. Where such relationships were a fatal crime. That always pulls at my heart. To have love be denied but it being so strong that the lovers involved would rather die than be forced apart  
\*sigh\*

When you take Stephan and Henry's personal and professional situations and meld them together, you get a very intense, rich, intoxicating story.

Charlene Newcomb's writing is exemplary. Her grasp on history is breathtaking; add in the fact she created a love story within history... I must applaud her.

This book, in no way, could have been easy to write, even though it's flawless. It was breath-stealing at times to read.

This is a book for everyone. One I highly recommend for those who love literature.

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### **Marie Loughin says**

Men of the Cross is historical fiction with two intertwined plot lines--the effects of the brutality of the crusades on young Henry de Grey, and his struggles with his growing feelings for his fellow knight, Stephan. Although the novel focuses on Henry and Stephan, their story is embedded within the larger tale of King Richard's crusade. Henry and Stephan befriend Robin Hood and other familiar figures of legend, and join King Richard's inner circle of trusted knights. Through their eyes, the crusade unfolds with excitement, passion, and historical accuracy.

This book appears to be the first in a series, but it stands well on its own. Although the story deals with some serious themes, there are plenty of light and humorous moments, and lots of action. I would consider this a fast, fun read, with serious overtones.

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### **Lex Allen says**

In "Men of the Cross," author Charlene Newcomb opens the "Battle Scars" series with a resounding, epic novel of love and war. This historical romance novel, set primarily during the Third Crusade led by King Richard the Lionhearted of England in the 12th century, is told through the eyes of Sir Stephan l'Aigle and Sir Henry de Grey. The two knights become acquainted prior to shipping out with King Richard's army and a close friendship develops. Later, Stephan, an avowed homosexual, falls in love with the inexperienced and religiously dedicated and indoctrinated Henry. With great skill, Ms. Newcomb produces a beautifully written story that adds another layer to this historical romance series. That being the level of intensity that combines and displays all sides of the homosexual issues that began with the Church's dogma prohibiting love or sex outside of a male/female married relationship, and includes the stigma of the LGBT community that continues to this day.

The love affair and the associated conflict that drives the story are handled exceedingly well; all the more phenomenal because the author is a woman, telling the tale of male to male love. The background is the Third Crusade and here, Ms. Newcomb displays amazing skill in mixing historical facts, down to and including the names of people, animals and things that are no longer in our lexicon, with legendary characters. You'll meet a knight by the name of Robin and two squires befriended by Stephan and Henry whose names are Allan and Little John among others. I was continually amazed at the dexterity by which Ms. Newcomb intertwined all of the facets of this story into a seamless, exceptionally well-written story. Not only do I highly recommend "Men of the Cross" to all readers of historical fiction and romance novels; I also recommend it to everyone who lives or open-mindedly supports the LGBT lifestyle. I loved this book, and I'm eagerly awaiting the next episode.

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### **Jody says**

I read an advance reader copy of Battle Scars #1 - Men of the Cross. Henry de Grey has left his home in Lincolnshire to join the men of Richard the Lionheart in the 3rd Crusade. He feels a religious obligation to be part of the movement to reclaim Jerusalem from the Saracens. His father disapproves, but was unable to keep him from doing what he felt was right. From the time he meets Stephen l'Aigle in Southampton in 1190, the two men are joined, first by comradeship, then friendship, and eventually love. Henry takes his servant Roger with him and in their travels they meet Robin, and two young boys who get into trouble but are rescued. The boys, Little John and Allan, share the adventures of the Crusaders. The stories of the short alliance with Philip of France, battles, and failure to recover Jerusalem are gripping. The reader even spends time with Richard's mother Eleanor of Aquitaine and his wife Berengaria of Navarre. The book ends near Dover in 1193.

This book has been well researched for the historical facts. Its fiction blends with the real world history. I'm

intrigued by the idea that Robin, whom we meet in this book, is Robin Hood. We hear of Richard's brother John and his machinations. Book 2 of Battle Scars, which may dwell more on Robin, will be as interesting as this one.

For those reading this book due to the gay component, please be advised that there isn't much sex in this book. If that's all you are looking for, find another book. If any of you are looking to read a great adventure story with a cast of interesting characters, both fictional and historical, buy this book.

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### **Raji Singh says**

See my blog site <http://talesofthefictionhouse.com/201...>

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### **Misty says**

**\*\* 4.5 Stars \*\***

*Men of the Cross* is a captivating tale full of adventure, friendship and love. The author paints a vivid picture with her words, creating a very realistic time and place.

I found this story really exciting because of the characters' growth through extreme hardship and the worst of circumstances. The building relationship between Stephan and Henry is beautiful to watch. Both are trying to stay alive, while fighting their personal demons.

A colorful cast of characters gives the novel great depth and strength, they all have a role to play. Historical facts and fiction are effortlessly blending one with the other.

I'm looking forward to reading the sequel. Highly recommended!

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### **Paul Bennett says**

bold tale of love and war during the 3rd Crusade...full review coming soon to a blog near you :-)

menofthecross

When I started this book I expected a story about the Third Crusade; one that would bring to the fore the majesty and the folly of the venture. Those elements were certainly on display as the author leads the reader on an exciting, entertaining and surprisingly evocative tale. From the mustering of Richard's knights to the taking of Sicily and through all of the adventures they encountered before arriving at Acre. The action is portrayed in nice detail, the political intrigue between Richard and Phillip gives the reader a taste of what that time was like and mimics a little I suppose what our time is like even now...that old adage that history repeats. As to the characters, well I for one was drawn into their feelings, the ones of joy and the frequent

bouts of sorrow and confusion. The two main protagonists are fictional characters, Henry DeGray and Stephan l'Aigle, two knights in the retinue of King Richard. Henry is on his first Crusade, indeed his first time going into harm's way while Stephan is a seasoned veteran having fought by Richard's side before. Neither one of them comes out of this adventure the same way they went in. So much angst, so much confusion, so much revilement, and yet so much love. Among the co-stars of this tale are the very real King Richard Lionheart, Sir Robin(yes that Robin), Allan(yes that Allan), Little John(yes oh you get it by now) :-) However, Robin and his two mates are given here with a slightly different slant...there is no taint of an outlaw to Robin and his companions are younger in this story and play some interesting roles throughout. Now as for Henry and Stephan, I cannot say enough about how well crafted these two are; kudos to Char. I recommend this book highly and cannot wait for the sequel. 5 Stars

About Char

me1sCharlene Newcomb. Char. That's me.

Librarian.

Navy vet.

Mom to 3 grown, amazing children.

I live in Kansas. Yes, Toto. Kansas.

Born & raised in South Carolina, I wanted a life of adventure and travel. I realized that dreams of hitting the big time with my all-girl rock band Liberation were just that – dreams. And becoming an astronaut wasn't in the cards. So I joined the Navy to see the world and spent six years as a communications technician/voice language analyst. I fit college into my life (BA in History, and many years later an MA in Library Science). That desire to travel in space translated into writing science fiction: I published 10 short stories in the Star Wars Expanded Universe, many featuring a Rebel underground freedom fighter named Alex Winger. I have published 2 novels, one a contemporary drama, Keeping the Family Peace; the other, Men of the Cross (book 1 of Battle Scars), which allows me to share my love of history with readers. Book 2 of the series will be published in 2015.

Welcome to my worlds.

Contact me at charlenenewcomb at gmail dot com.

Follow me on Facebook or on Twitter. I'm also on Goodreads though I don't keep up with that site as much as I should!

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### **Denise Novak says**

I've been waiting to review this book because I know the author and I didn't want that relationship to affect my review of Men of the Cross.

So here goes. It took a few pages to lose myself in the story. And what a story! Extremely well paced and the descriptions of the land, ships, desert are terrific. The relationship between Henry and Stephan is handled with great sensitivity. I like all of the characters and I really like the weaving of the Robin Hood story as a subplot. Not all of the characters escape unscathed, including the horses. Yes, I did cry a little bit. If you like history, war stories, love stories and the Robin Hood legend, then you will enjoy this novel. I can't wait to read book 2.

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## **Christina's Bookshelf says**

I was crazy in love with this story. I'm a huge lover of history. I generally go for modern history but once I started this I couldn't put it down. So much research was put into this and the devotion. I could see myself trotting next to Henry and Stephan on the journey to the holy land. I cannot wait until I have a free minute to read book #2.

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You can see my full review here: [my link text](#)

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## **Tess says**

### **4.5 stars**

Fascinating historical fiction (crusaders in the time of Richard the Lionheart) with a slowly developing m/m love story.

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## **Kaje Harper says**

The feeling of the Crusades, in all their hope and religious fervor and ugliness and futility and death, provide a backdrop to a very slowly developing love story.

Stephan is a young knight who has already proven himself in battle, and he follows his King Richard once more. He's a lover of men who has no illusions about any interest in women. Among the armies far from home, it's easy to find a man for an hour or a night, for relief of tension or lust, to escape fear, to shed boredom. Stephan is only as discreet as he has to be, and his motivations for joining the Crusades are more about loyalty to his king than any real religious fervor toward Jerusalem.

Henry de Grey, on the other hand, has never fought a battle or killed a man. He's joining the Christian army against the Saracens out of a real devotion to the idea that Jerusalem should be in Christian hands. He admires King Richard the Lionheart, and he hopes to be of service, but he's not a man who loves fighting for the adventure of it. Together with his young squire, he's making his first venture into the adult world of war and politics, and he will never be the same again. He leaves behind his 14-year-old betrothed, a young woman whom he wishes he felt more towards, and in the all-male company of the army he will find new and unexpected temptation in the person of Stephan. But both Henry's integrity and his faith are real, and they don't allow for any kind of relationship with another man.

This book is the epitome of a slow burn and a reluctant self-discovery. Most of the story is the bloody and futile adventure that was King Richard's last attempt to take Jerusalem. There is travel and scenery, battle and disease, loss and comradeship, in a very believable mix. Several fun secondary characters take the stage (and from their names - Robin, Alan, Little John - we are led to hope to continue to see them survive and play a role in books to come.) If you read historical romance mainly for the romance this may be a bit frustrating, but if you also love the historical context and realism and adventure then this is a very enjoyable

tale. A few moments (like the advancement of young pickpockets to high places) are a bit unlikely, but as a whole the story feels plausibly researched. The ending is indeterminate, one might even say a cliffhanger, but the next in the series is already available.

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### **Deborah Pickstone says**

Hum. I read this entirely but passed my 'willing suspension of disbelief' boundary by around chapter 2. Why did I read on? I think I was just agog to see what stunt this author would pull next.

Do not read this if you don't want to read spoilers - sorry, can't be bothered to keep tucking bits away - there are too many of them.

I had thought this was a debut novel but not so. It was, I think, the author's first attempt at HF and much of my complaint is to do with her awful, poor research - though she seems, from the Author's note, to feel she had done a great deal. Someone needs to tell her that the devil is in the detail.

First, the premise of this novel is the relationship of two knights setting off on Crusade with Richard I. They fall in love but Henry resists this, seeing it as sin. Stephan is completely comfortable with being a man who swives men (one of her crimes is in 'writing forsoothly') - but for lust, not love. So they are both a bit confused. Into this mix come two pickpocket boys they pick up along the way and adopt (as you do); one of these becomes a body servant to Sir Robin, friend of the King and Parfait knight. Their names are Allan and Little John. Robin, Alan and Little John - remind you of anything? So, we know where book 2 will be going. The pickpocket boys end up on familiar terms with Queen Joanna and Queen Berengaria (as you do). Henry and Stephan end up on familiar terms as well (also with the Royals but not quite in the same way) and that's when the wheels really come off. The drama! The angst! I can see why Henry fancies Stephan but what on earth does Stephan see in Henry? All this aside - the author acknowledges that Richard I may not be gay but fails to comprehend that 'gay' is a meaningless term for the time. She writes all this but doesn't seem to 'get' it. Sexual orientation didn't exist. Sodomy was a catch-all term for sexual acts that were proscribed by the Church. I have to ask - had Henry been hot for another woman, would he have felt so guilty about his future wife? I doubt it. The author kills off the future wife just as Stephan finally gets his wicked way; the news is delivered to Henry (via a tear-stained letter from his father) that Alys and his mother have died of the plague. Fresh out of bed from a leg-over situation, he immediately has a monumental hissy-fit and starts flouncing around in true queenly style. Poor Stephan. Then all their friends pile in to sort them out and all reassure Henry it was 'meant to be' etc - this includes him confiding in the aforementioned children (as you would) and getting winsome and wise words in response. Sheesh! I don't even see why the author opted for a gay romance but it is carried out in modern style and none of this would have happened at that time as she portrays it. Tosh!

Next: the history - that is the other history, the one made up of fact. Was it too much to ask that the author might look at a few garments online to see what women were wearing at the time?

P108 "Ringlets....fell to her shoulders, and the jade gown she wore revealed creamy white skin. Berengaria's deep red gown was trimmed with pearls and gold and dipped precariously at her bosom." What century, exactly, were they in? It seems to me that the author went down to Barnes and Noble and looked at the front of a few bodice-rippers for her ideas on women's clothes of the time.

It is recorded fact the Richard respected his foe, Saladin. Yet Ms Newcomb has him vilifying Saladin at

every turn.

The Battle for Messina - I found two contemporary accounts of the battle online without having to press search more than once. Yet Ms Newcomb's battle didn't follow them, no, no, no, not at all! She had knights on their destriers in city streets (where they would have been on foot) *firing arrows from horseback*. 1) Robin was famed (in legend) for his skill with the long bow - you could *not* have used a long bow from horseback. Nor could you have used a crossbow. Give them a lance, spear, sword or mace and I am happy - but bow and arrow on horseback in city streets - don't make me laugh! She also has all these knights wearing cloaks at the time - how was that going to work? I'll just whip out my trusty bow and arrows.....unfff.....drat!.....just a minute while I get this cloak untangled....aaarrrggghhh!' Dead. After they all prattled about in cloaks with their destriers and bows and arrows, the Emperor Tancred (unsurprisingly) got away and none of the rest of the battle was told by Ms Newcomb who was probably ogling something in blue velvet (did not exist at the time) meanwhile. As the contemporary report tells, Tancred regrouped and planned to attack Richard the next day but Richard stole a march on him and attacked him during the night following a forced march. The two kings then made peace and formed an alliance. Ms Newcomb missed all of this.

It's good book for exemplifying the reasons not to allow sexual relationships in the army, I think. Next thing, H and S are on patrol but so distracted by their arguing over to sin or not to sin that they are both taken down by a single Saracen and almost die (heroically, of course). Robin sails in and rescues them and they both recover. Now, how Henry managed that after being shot in the femoral artery (so much blood described) and then having the really sensible idea of pulling the arrow out and THEN running off to save Stephan from the Saracen with blood spurting from his leg and promptly collapsing in his own heart's blood; he should have been made to sit on the naughty step once he got better - that's if he didn't die of an infection meanwhile.

Finally, language. Please make it believable. On p94 we have "....spouted off in agonizing detail how it took two slashes to sever the head from the body of one of their enemies. 'His eyes bulged like the young maid who saw my engorged cock and nearly fainted with fright.'" I seriously cannot imagine any man in any time or place saying that - outside a really bad bit of porn.

There was so much incorrect detail in this book that my eyes bulged like.....etc. Characterisation is wooden and dialogue uninspiring, not to mention repetitive where H and S are concerned. (How could he.....How could he not....etc). I have provided just one example of each of my problem areas.

I have no problem at all with a gay storyline, if the book is good and the story rings true, I'll read it. This book did not fit my criteria.

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## **Mark says**

4.5 Stars rounded up to 5. Review to follow at [Sinfully Gay Romance Book Reviews](#)

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