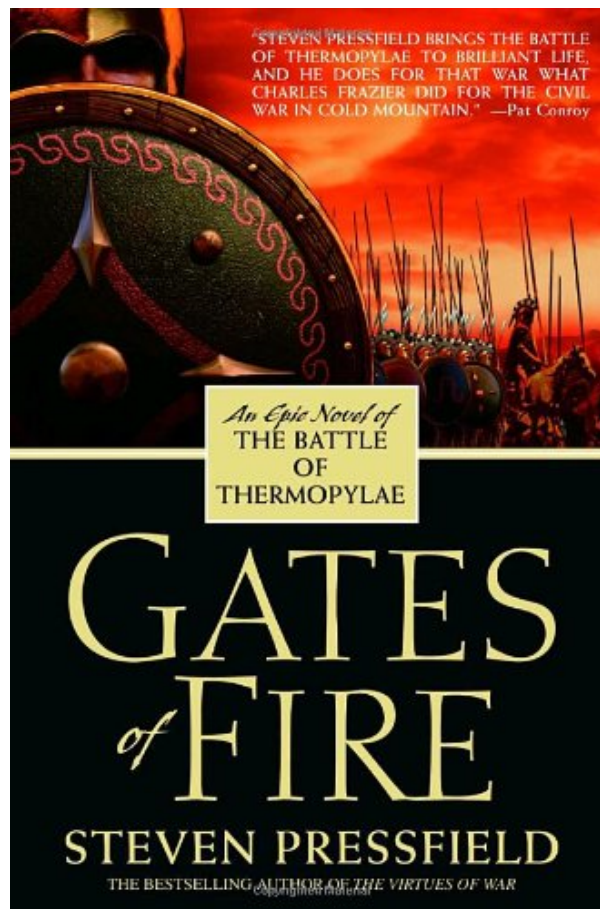
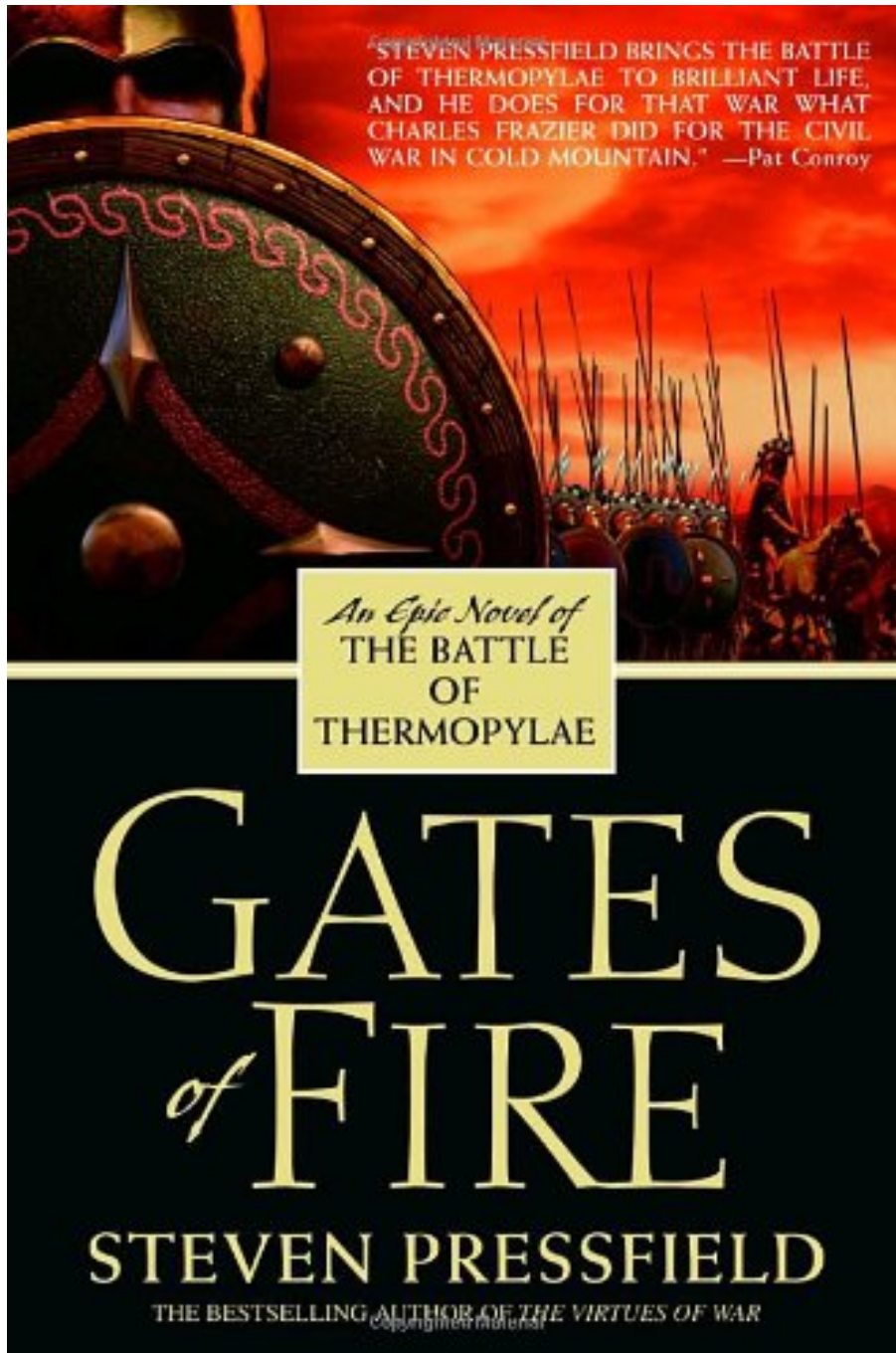


GATES OF FIRE: AN EPIC NOVEL OF THE BATTLE OF THERMOPYLAE BY STEVEN PRESSFIELD



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The national bestseller!

At Thermopylae, a rocky mountain pass in northern Greece, the feared and admired Spartan soldiers stood three hundred strong. Theirs was a suicide mission, to hold the pass against the invading millions of the mighty Persian army.

Day after bloody day they withstood the terrible onslaught, buying time for the Greeks to rally their forces. Born into a cult of spiritual courage, physical endurance, and unmatched battle skill, the Spartans would be remembered for the greatest military stand in history--one that would not end until the rocks were awash with blood, leaving only one gravely injured Spartan squire to tell the tale....

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Features

- War

Amazon.com Review

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Most helpful customer reviews

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Tell the Spartans, Stranger Passing By

By Edwin C. Pauzer

Pressfield manages to bring one of the most historic and pivotal battles of civilization to life through characters of his invention. The battle is Thermopylae where 7000 Greeks led by 300 Spartans held an enormous Persian army of 200,000 at bay for several days, an army that would have changed our civilization had the Greeks not died fighting it. Never before or since has such a badly outnumbered army fought so valiantly nor effectively.

This story is told through the eyes of a Spartan slave who comes to admire his Spartan masters' fraternity, loyalty, and pride they have for themselves, their laws, and their city. It begins after the battle where the slave is wounded, and through a Persian interpreter, recounts his odyssey to Sparta, and his life that led to the moment the battle is over.

Pressfield brings us several ironies in this tale based upon historical fact. The Spartans who ruled the Peloponnesus ruthlessly seem to be the least likely saviors of a civilization from which we draw our roots. The Spartans were the only city-state that could have rallied the other Greeks to fight. And King Leonidas was the only Spartan who thought the best way to preserve his city was to preserve everything Greek. He sacrificed his life and lives of his men to rally a disunited country to attack, and defeat a ruthless invader which they did within the year.

It is also ironic that the Spartans who owned and killed slaves on a regular basis, saved their countrymen from becoming slaves themselves, and in a time of absolute crisis provided the leadership they were so reluctant to give, that saved Greece in the end.

In King Leonidas, Pressfield describes a king who feels it his duty to serve his people rather than being served. Leonidas is the pivotal Spartan, at a pivotal time and place in history that establishes his immortality making him as important as Charles Martel. He could not get his city to move his army, but he got all of Greece to move against the invader.

The fictitious characters in this story seem all too real. We admire them because they know they are making the supreme sacrifice for something greater than themselves. In spite of their society, it provided them with the means to make that sacrifice.

Some have criticized this book because the Spartans owned slaves. Slavery was the consequence of the loser from then until the Age of Progress. It is the valor, sacrifice, and skill that armies ever since have admired about Sparta, not the weakness of their Lyncurgic tradition. Their culture, peace, and ruling others sealed their fate. Anyone who judges this story and Spartan society by 20th century standards misses the point, and the debt we owe a warrior class of people who protected the democratic traditions that survived them.

The story ends with the Persian defeat on the Plains of Plataea, and the death of the Spartan slave whose story was faithfully recorded. The Persian interpreter is spared the sword by calling the names of the dead and living Greeks he learned from the dying slave. With his life spared, he is able to establish the fate of the dead and the living he had come to admire and respect.

Every Spartan mother handed her son his shield and said, "[Come home] with it, or on it." The Spartans certainly did. It is everything Greek, it is ironic and it is tragic.

The Persians never attacked Greece again.

Tell the Spartans, stranger passing by,
that here obedient to their laws we lie.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

A superb retelling of the Battle of Thermopylae

By Mary Soon Lee

This is a superb retelling of the Battle of Thermopylae and of the protagonist's life leading up to the battle. I note that it took a little while for the book to fully hook me, but then I was captured by it. The scenes about the soldiers' training, the scenes of actual battle, and most particularly the scenes after or between battles, are all excellent. The discussions of fear, and of how officers and soldiers should behave are likewise excellent. The characters are surprisingly diverse (including among them servants who have varying degrees of loyalty to the Spartans, plus a Spartan boy who is not by nature a warrior though he is being trained to be one, a merchant, a supreme young warrior, and an older platoon leader). Unsurprisingly the book portrays the Spartan warriors as heroic and honorable--and does so extremely well. But it did surprise me that it also includes very strong portrayals of women as secondary characters, the strongest depictions of women I've met in fiction for a while. The women don't fight in the battles, yet are courageous and compassionate, intelligent and influential. I was also very taken by the portrayal of Leonidas, the Spartan king who commanded at Thermopylae. One of my favorite speeches in the book is addressed to Xerxes, the King of Persia, and contrasts Xerxes with Leonidas: "I will tell His Majesty what a king is. A king does not abide within his tent while his men bleed and die upon the field. A king does not dine while his men go hungry, nor sleep when they stand at watch upon the wall. A king does not command his men's loyalty through fear nor purchase it with gold; he earns their love by the sweat of his back and the pains he endures for their sake...." A wonderful book.

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful.

Terrific book on warrior mentality and why Soldiers fight

By Chris

One of the best books on why Soldier's fight, the warrior mentality, and the horrors of war. This book was mandatory reading for one of my classes, and it is still one of my favorite books many years later.

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