

The Waste Land: An Entertainment - Simon Acland

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The Waste Land chronicles the adventures of Hugh de Verdon, a monk turned knight, during the extraordinary historical events of the First Crusade. When Hugh's father and brothers perish in a hunt run amok, his mother enters him into the great Benedictine monastery of Cluny. Hugh had dreamed of becoming a hunter and knight like his father, but despite his original reluctance, he works diligently, learning Latin, Greek and Scripture. He quickly gains the respect of the monks and abbot, who begin to entrust him with increasingly important duties. However, he has a serious fall from grace within the monastery when he is caught secretly reading the works of Ovid, as the monks (aptly) fear that the material will exacerbate his spiritual doubts. When he accompanies the abbot on a trip to meet with Pope Urban II, Hugh encounters a long-lost cousin, Lord Godfrey who is off to lead troops into the First Crusade. Hugh persuades the abbot and Godfrey to allow him to serve as Godfrey's secretary and translator, and the dramas of Hugh's life escalate from spiritual to worldly and violent. In his travels to battles in Antioch, Constantinople and Jerusalem, the warrior blood in Hugh's veins awakens. He learns to wield a sword against foes ranging from Muslim soldiers to boars. He also becomes invaluable to Godfrey, due to the watchfulness and cunning he displays in subtle defense against plots from other factions of the soldiers. However, he must struggle with the contradictions between his faith and his actions, as well as reconcile the religious motives he wishes to attribute to the Pope with the material concerns of the Christian knights. Eventually, Hugh finds himself in numerous hostile situations that he must think his way out of -- and ends up imprisoned by Turks, and unwillingly involved in an urgent search for the Holy Grail. Will he find it in time to rescue his love? And if he does, what will the discovery mean for his faith, the Crusades, and all of Christendom? Hugh de Verdon's tale is retold by a group of desperate Oxford professors, reworking his autobiographical manuscript into a bestseller in hopes of making enough money to save the university. But tensions run high when it comes to the different professors' investments in the manuscript, and the situation escalates dangerously to a matter of life and death. Snarky, tongue-in-cheek and thrilling, their narrative also provides a commentary on the 11th century events and shows that they are perhaps not all they seem. Author: Acland, Simon Publisher:

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