



Hero: The Life and Legend of Lawrence of Arabia

Michael Korda

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Michael Korda's *Hero* is the story of an epic life on a grand scale: a revealing, in-depth, and gripping biography of the extraordinary, mysterious, and dynamic Englishman whose daring exploits and romantic profile—including his blond, sun-burnished good looks and flowing white robes—made him an object of intense fascination, still famous the world over as "Lawrence of Arabia."

An Oxford scholar and archaeologist, one of five illegitimate sons of a British aristocrat who ran away with his daughters' governess, Lawrence was sent to Cairo as a young intelligence officer in 1916. He vanished into the desert in 1917 only to emerge later as one of the greatest—and certainly most colorful—figures of World War One. Though a foreigner, he played a leading and courageous part in uniting the Arab tribes to defeat the Turks, and eventually capture Damascus, transforming himself into a world-famous hero, hailed as "the Uncrowned King of Arabia."

In illuminating Lawrence's achievements, Korda digs further than anyone before him to expose the flesh-and-blood man and his contradictory nature. Here was a born leader who was utterly fearless and seemingly impervious to pain, thirst, fatigue, and danger, yet who remained shy, sensitive, modest, and retiring; a hero who turned down every honor and decoration offered to him, and was racked by moral guilt and doubt; a scholar and an aesthete who was also a bold and ruthless warrior; a writer of genius—the author of *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, one of the greatest books ever written about war—who was the virtual inventor of modern insurgency and guerrilla warfare; a man who at the same time sought and fled the limelight, and who found in friendships, with everyone from Winston Churchill to George Bernard and Charlotte Shaw, from Nancy Astor to Noël Coward, a substitute for sexual feelings that he rigorously—even brutally and systematically—repressed in himself.

As Korda shows in his brilliantly readable and formidably authoritative biography, Lawrence was not only a man of his times; he was a visionary whose accomplishments—farsighted diplomat and kingmaker, military strategist of genius, perhaps the first modern "media celebrity" (and one of the first victims of it), and an acclaimed writer—transcended his era.

Korda examines Lawrence's vision for the modern Middle East—plans that, had they been carried through, might have prevented the hatred and bloodshed that have become ubiquitous in the region. Ultimately, as this magisterial work demonstrates, Lawrence remains one of the most unique and fascinating figures of modern times, the arch-hero whose life is at once a triumph and a sacrifice and whose capacity to astonish still remains undimmed.

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Teresa Powers:

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