

# *Sworn Sword*

## JAMES AITCHESON

### Reading Guide

1. *Sworn Sword* views the events of the Norman Conquest from the unconventional point of view of one of the invaders: an ambitious knight named Tancred.
  - a. Why do you think Aitcheson made this choice? How might the same events look from an English point of view?
  - b. How easy is it to engage and sympathise with Tancred? What makes him a likeable protagonist?
  - c. How has this different perspective changed your understanding of the Norman Conquest?
2. The action begins in January 1069, over two years after the Battle of Hastings. What are the advantages of setting the novel in the aftermath of 1066, rather than in the lead-up to it?
3. Throughout the novel, place-names are given as recorded in contemporary sources (e.g. Dunholm, Lundene), while English personal names are rendered in their original rather than modernised forms (e.g. Eadgyth, Eadgar). What effect does this create?
4. How significant is it that Tancred is of Breton rather than Norman origin? Does this affect how other characters regard him?

5. Were you surprised by Ælfwold's treachery towards the end of the novel? Do you feel sorry for him?
6. A significant role is played in the story by Guillaume Malet, an aristocrat of mixed Anglo-Norman parentage. How does Tancred's attitude to him develop over the course of the novel?
7. As shown in the novel, knights in the eleventh century were a long way from being the paragons of chivalry with which we are familiar from later medieval sources. Do Tancred and his comrades nevertheless hold to a moral code? To what extent do they subscribe to the chivalric virtues of honour, loyalty, valour and courtesy?
8. Both Tancred and Ælfwold find that doing the right thing sometimes involves betraying the trust of others. Are they justified in their actions?
9. *Sworn Sword* ends with a historical note, clarifying what is fact and what is fiction. How does this add to your appreciation of the events that inspired the novel? Does it make you want to find out more about the Norman Conquest?

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