



## The Crusader Road

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## **The Crusader Road** Michael A. Stackpole

When the aristocratic Vishov family is banished from Ustalav due to underhanded politics, Lady Tyressa Vishov is faced with a choice: fade slowly into obscurity, or strike out for the nearby River Kingdoms and establish a new holding on the untamed frontier. Together with her children and loyal retainers, she'll forge a new life in the infamous Echo Wood, and neither bloodthirsty monsters nor local despots will stop her from reclaiming her family honor. Yet the shadow of Ustalavic politics is long, and even in a remote and lawless territory, there may be those determined to see the Vishov family fail...

From *New York Times* best-selling author Michael A. Stackpole comes a new novel of frontier adventure set in the world of the *Pathfinder Roleplaying Game* and the new *Pathfinder Online* massively multiplayer online roleplaying game.

## **The Crusader Road Details**

Date : Published July 15th 2014 by Paizo Publishing

ISBN : 9781601256577

Author : Michael A. Stackpole

Format : Mass Market Paperback 395 pages

Genre : Fantasy

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## From Reader Review The Crusader Road for online ebook

### Dave Walls says

A tense fantasy story set in Pathfinder's River Kingdoms. An exiled noble sets out into the wilderness to establish a new town. She has to overcome political enemies, family issues, sprites, goblins, ogres, and a magical forest. This book also is an introduction of the setting that will be used in the Pathfinder MMO. I admit it makes me a bit more impatient for the game's release. The end may be a bit predictable, but the path there is not. So a good story in my opinion.

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### Peter says

Actually 2,5 stars.

This is the story of starting a town in the River kingdoms. I have to admit that it was ok, but nothing more than that. It suffered a bit from being predictable. Also the characters were not as well worked out as they could be.

It felt like this would make a better adventure module than the novel it made.

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### Pablo says

I enjoyed the play with the Fay forest. Lady Tyressa was a wonderful character. Slightly predictable ending but enough surprises to keep you wanting to know what happens next. Wish there were a second book to find out what happens next. Only drawback is that there are references to the overall pathfinder world that were just taken in stride that the reader already knew or had knowledge of the larger map beyond the one supplied in the book.

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### Stephen says

There's a lot to be said about reading books by your favorite authors, regardless of the setting. When it comes to the Pathfinder campaign setting, I'm a complete noob. I've never heard of the game or its subsequent books, but Michael A. Stackpole I knew. With a picture of a female warrior decapitating goblins in a burning town on the cover, The Crusader Road looked like a story that was worth checking out. I didn't even need to read a description of the book. As they say, fortune favors the bold, and Stackpole did not disappoint. This is a great book.

Set in Echo Wood, this is a story about a family of three exiled nobles making a new home for themselves in a harsh forest. In Echo Wood, next to Silvershade Lake, they start a settlement. They deal with dangerous locals: vengeful fey, violent Kellid barbarians, marauding goblins, and deadly ogres. Yet the deadliest threat of all is their own kind: ambitious humans set on vile schemes no matter what the costs.

Woven into that story is a cast of intrepid characters. There's Lady Tyressa Vishov who leads the founding of the settlement. She's a strong willed character and a natural leader, a contrast to the corrupt nobility she must work with and against. Then there is her daughter Serrana, a girl bred for court but forced to adapt to a lifestyle completely foreign to her. She's matched by Nelsa, a native to Echo Wood who, along with her family, help educate the struggling settlement on how to survive. Nelsa's quick wit and fun way with words makes her one of the most likeable characters in the book. Yet the primary character of the story is Jerrad.

While I don't want to give too much away, Jerrad is a meek, intelligent boy living in the inescapable shadow of his father. Jerrad does not long to be a hero like his father because he thinks it's completely impossible. He knows he isn't a hero. His interactions lead him to constant trouble, but also humorous and exciting adventures. Through his interactions with others, he becomes a likeable character, despite his clumsiness, weakness and even cowardice. Stackpole skillfully takes an unlikely 13 year old noble with no combat prowess or courage, and carefully reveals the hidden character beneath that shell.

Capping this book off, the great characterization is melded with some truly enjoyable moments. There are scenes that made me laugh out loud, and others that had me yelling and fist pumping. Unexpected character deaths keep things unpredictable, yet the story always keeps a positive, light-hearted edge, never delving into a grim-dark tale. As the story progresses, there are moments of self-discovery and transformation, bravery and self-sacrifice. Be they heroes or villains, the characters are moved and shaped by the events that unfold. It comes together to make a truly entertaining adventure.

Whether its the humorous antics of goblins or the ferocious terror of ogres, *The Crusader Road* delivers a good amount of action. It adds depth with a cast of complex, evolving characters and simpler ones driven by the strength of their personalities. The twists and turns of the story cranks up the drama and keeps things interesting right up to the end. Altogether, Stackpole weaves a character driven fantasy that satisfies and yet leaves you begging for more. With characters this good, you can't help but ask for more stories with them in it. I really didn't know what to expect going into this book, but on leaving it, I had an enormous smile plastered on my face. I give *Pathfinder Tales: The Crusader Road* a five out of five. It's that fun of a read.

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### **Larry says**

I'd give it a solid 3.5. Its essentially a frontier town tale mixed in with pathfinder elements (dungeons and dragons). This is overall a good mix that gives the adventure and wonder of seeing a frontier town grow from nothing while having all the fun of epic fantasy elements (magic, monsters, and much more). Some of the dialogue was really well crafted, at least in game terms. At times I could hear the dice rolling around in my head as the characters tried their diplomacy checks, or perception checks, etc. So, in short, this was the story of the creation of silver lake, a little town set in the wilds of Golarion in the pathfinder universe, a little place I wouldn't mind visiting again someday.

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### **Steve says**

*Crusader Road* is an excellent tale of perseverance for one family against the wilds of an uncontrollable forest called Echo Wood and political enemies determined to see the family perish. The third book (that I have read) of this bi-monthly series, delights from the beginning.

We meet the Vishov family, exiled from their homeland, in the court of Baron Blackshield of Thornkeep. Tyressa Vishov demands of supplies to begin a new town she will dub Silverlake. Tension is palpable as Blackshield and Tyressa spew vehement hate for one another.

The next chapter we meet Jerrad, son of Tyressa. He is our main character and we follow him for most of the novel. His character goes through the greatest change for mousy teenager to confident and brave wizard. Throughout, Jerrad questions his actions as he tries to get out of the shadow of his presumed dead father; tales of whom as a great crusader.

As the story goes, we cheer in the triumphs as the Vishovs begin to build Silverlake. Deftly aligning themselves with Echo Wood residents the Murdoons and the Kellid barbarian tribe, and even some Fey. During its construction, Baron Creelisk visits, but is he friend or foe?

I thoroughly enjoyed reading this novel as Vishovs struggle over the constant challenges from the forest (which is described as a living, magical entity) as well as political enemies from their home. Tyressa is one badass mama, and even Jerrad's sister makes a nice story arc from angst teen to protector. The whipping scene is truly beautiful.

Complaint Department: Despite giving this book 5 stars, I do have a complaint. I feel the title does not accurately reflect the story. The Crusader Road (which refers to a path in which survivors of the Crusade travel as Broken Men) is barely referenced. Heck the Broken Men play only a small role to story as a whole. But I cannot punish a great story for having a misleading title.

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### **Timothy McNeil says**

It took some time for me to get into this rather generic fantasy story. Stackpole, ever the professional writer, serves up the fantasy tropes with skill and ease, but it doesn't do much to benefit the story beyond letting some characters shift from one archetype to another. Maybe part of the problem is that Ustalav's history (or lycanthropes, undead, vicious political intrigue) is more hinted at than allowed to come to the front. Likewise, the choice of setting the tale in the River Kingdoms doesn't do anything to stir my (perhaps too long dormant) enthusiasm for Pathfinder. My largest criticism would be that the twenty year challenge is allowed to be played out in the span of a handful of months. Those flaws, real or imagined, don't make for an unreadable or unenjoyable experience. The second half of the book moves with much better speed, the tropes play out as expected but still retain some life and dramatic value.

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### **Derek says**

The premise drove me into obtaining the book. This is not a story of treasure seekers looking for trouble, or of heroes arrayed against some large menace. It is a story about a family pushed into a corner and deciding to turn that into an opportunity by striking out to form a new settlement at the frontier. The scope is smaller, the menacing creatures more mundane, and the characters more unformed. It feels like an introduction-to-adventure story wrapped around the growth of Serrana and particularly Jerrad, as well as the beginning history of a colony.

The problem with tackling 'history of a colony' is that it is not adventure. It is painstaking leadership and diplomacy, and that can only be made really interesting in terms of conflict or mistakes, of which there is neither. Tyressa unfailingly chooses the correct path to navigate crises, and there is no point where the reader really doubts for Silverlake's future.

Likewise, neither Serrana nor Jerrad make the adolescent errors that would force them to learn at the cost of something precious. They are, or become, appealing characters imported from a Young Adult or traditional Juvenile Adventure story--bright, talented--but without the rebellious streak that would send them to the Dismal Caves or the ruins of Mosswater for some dungeon-crawling adventure that we didn't get enough of.

The background threat posed by Baron Blackshield--whose township of Thornkeep stands to diminish if Silverlake prospers--fizzles out, while the immediate threat (view spoiler)

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### **Joel Flank says**

The Crusader Road tells the story of an exiles Ustalavic noble family, forced to found a town in untamed wilderness. While this story is a good fit overall for the River Kingdoms, the main character of the story is the teenaged son of the exiled family, and the combination of a coming of age story and the relatively low level threats faced in the book (goblins, ogres, and a politically evil bad guy) make for a somewhat subdued story line.

While the book is entertaining overall, the tone of the story felt a bit aimed at the young adult crowd, and lacked the high fantasy and grittiness that most Pathfinder Tales books have. In addition, there a few details that seem out of place and/or simply against established canon in the Golarion world, mainly that the retired adventurer/novelist Alison Kinder can be bought off to tell stories favoring her patron politically, rather than being a tough independent voice, and that the main character can learn wizardry from a magical spellbook which seems semi-sentient and reveals just the right lessons. I guess such an item could theoretically be created, but for me it added to the slightly YA tone of the book, rather than having wizardry being a craft learned over years of study.

Finally, the main villain of the story has vastly unrealistic goals based on his actual capabilities, with plots that seems over complicated and containing too many conditions to seem likely to happen. With this being a tie-in novel for the upcoming Pathfinder MMO from GoblinWorks, I'm wondering if some of the constraints/details that didn't feel authentic for the Pathfinder world were somehow dictated to fit the game, rather than the established tone and details of the game world.

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### **Michael says**

Not a hack and slash book.

As far as these types of books are concerned this is a good read. I've read about four of the Pathfinder series books and this is by far the best. It is a stand alone novel and doesn't require any prerequisite reading or knowledge. While there are battle scenes the meat of the book is about a family forced to make their way in the wilderness. A nice touch is the interplay of politics about the book that adds a mafia feel to it.

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## Jonathan Hicks says

A very long time ago I had the pleasure of helping to craft some interview questions for Michael A. Stackpole for the UK website Lightsabre, a Star Wars fansite now merged with [www.jedinews.co.uk](http://www.jedinews.co.uk). Before then and since I read his science fiction work – primarily the BattleTech novels and Star Wars - so this book is the first fantasy work of his I've had the chance to delve into. I've mostly enjoyed the Pathfinder Tales books so what could Stackpole's talent bring to the mix?

'When the aristocratic Vishov family is banished from their native Ustalav due to underhanded politics, they're faced with a choice: fade slowly into obscurity, or strike out for the nearby River Kingdoms and establish a new holding on the untamed frontier. For Lady Tyressa Vishov, the decision is simple. Together with her children and loyal retainers, she'll forge a new life in the infamous Echo Wood, and neither bloodthirsty monsters nor local despots will stop her from reclaiming her family honor. Yet the shadow of Ustalavic politics is long, and even in a remote and lawless territory, there may be those determined to see the Vishov family fail...

From New York Times best-selling author Michael A. Stackpole comes a new novel of frontier adventure set in the world of the Pathfinder Roleplaying Game and the new Pathfinder Online massively multiplayer online roleplaying game.'

I'm no stranger to the Pathfinder world so it was nice to see the book dive straight into the plot. The opening wastes no time and sets the scene, giving us backgrounds, personalities, plot direction and, most importantly of all, gives us a reason to get attached to the primary characters:

Lady Tyressa Vishov is a sharp-witted, clever and determined woman who intends to do the best for her family as well as prove her doubters wrong. I like strong characters and she was definitely one of the strongest I've come across in any book. Her shoulders have a lot of weight to bear and it's a delight to see how she confronts all kind of problems. She certainly has no qualms about getting her hands dirty.

Her daughter, Serrana, is a noble woman of the court who has to adapt to her new, crude and less than perfect new lifestyle. It's a classic fish-out-of-water story.

Finally, there's her son Jerrad. He's the one you root for as he's young, inexperienced and very, very scared of this sudden change to his once privileged lifestyle. He knows, and you know, that he's nothing special but he has a good character arc in which, yes, you do think he's something of a coward, even a fool, but there's something endearing about him that makes him a very likeable character.

As the plot unfolds we're entertained with plenty of action, conflicts of both violence and personality. There's not only battles against the local rampaging goblins (amongst others) to contend with, there's also political shadows being cast that threaten to topple the Vishovs and destroy their plans for a future. It makes for not only a great adventure but also an intriguing thriller.

Stackpole has written a great story that kept me entertained from the opening chapter to the very end. The complex and interesting characters and enjoyable plot makes for a satisfying read and I have no problem in recommending this to not only Pathfinder fans but also fantasy fans in general. Hopefully this will not be Stackpole's only venture into the worlds of Pathfinder, and a sequel to this particular book would certainly

be welcome.

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### **Matthew Baker says**

The fine folks at Paizo definitely know what fantasy-lovers want, and they are not hesitant to deliver. When I think of fantasy, I think of sword-wielding adventurers and pitch-black dungeons...monstrous creatures and wizened mages...epic adventures and smoke-filled taverns...well, you get the picture. I would wager most other fantasy-lovers do, too. The Pathfinder Tales series is an engaging compliment to Paizo's Pathfinder RPG series, and any lover of high fantasy will want to check it out immediately. **THE CRUSADER ROAD** is author Michael A. Stackpole's latest entry into this collection. And while it is his first foray into this alluring franchise, I'll bet it won't be his last.

Stackpole is no stranger to fantasy. In the 1980s, he designed roleplaying games for both the tabletop and PC formats. Later, he started writing fiction. He published his first books in the BattleTech series and then moved into the Star Wars universe. Shortly after, he started in with actual fantasy and published many titles within the genre. As you can see, Stackpole has more than enough qualifications to publish a Pathfinder Tales novel.

**THE CRUSADER ROAD** is written well and fits perfectly within the Pathfinder universe. Stackpole's prose flows smoothly, and the story he tells is riveting and engaging. I was consistently immersed within it and had no problems believing it was actually happening.

The characters are vivid and detailed. They are flawed, but believable, which makes them more likable. I particularly like Lady Tyressa Vishov, Jerrad's mother. She is the epitome of strength in the face of overwhelming odds.

**THE CRUSADER ROAD** is a definite win for me, and I suggest you give it a read yourself. Even if you're not already familiar with the Pathfinder realm, you'll quickly learn it as you read this book. And then continue the adventure later on with future Pathfinder Tales, as Paizo is releasing several more very soon.

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### **Gabriel says**

Adventure filled with character development and twists. If you play Pathfinder this one is a must! If not, read this book anyway because it's great and easy to read.

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### **Eric Overkamp says**

I've read quite a few Pathfinder Tales already by a variety of authors. I believe that the Pathfinder Setting is very exciting and should be worth a peek from Dungeons & Dragons (Forgotten Realms) fans. I know there is some animosity between D&D and Paizo (Pathfinder) roleplaying systems and each have a fan-base that is usually very supportive of only one of the roleplaying systems. I feel that great fantasy books by good authors rise above their roleplaying settings and are there to give us (hopefully) a good and entertaining experience.

Michael A. Stackpole doesn't disappoint in this exciting frontier tale that takes place in the Echo Wood. These woods have a mind of its own. Add Fey such as sprites, or goblins and blood-thirsty ogres, and things can get very challenging very fast.

The book starts off with an exiled family having to relocate to Echo Wood. They try their best to tame the surroundings so that they can live out their exile in peace. Unfortunately, the peace they seek is very hard and very slow in coming.

The Crusader's Road is a solid fantasy story with good action, but it is also a coming of age story with a dash of young romance. For this, I also recommend this book for our much younger readers as well.

The story moves along at a good pace and none of it seemed too heavy or slow. Action was spread out well. The author's use of his military knowledge in this book is also very well done. It didn't seem overly martial though. Character development was well done, but I wished we had a bit more insight into certain characters. Naturally, as a fan of magic, I wish the book would have included even more magic in this story.

The author wrote a very fine story here of frontier lawlessness and good old monster bashing fun!

Like so many Pathfinder Tales before, The Crusader Road is a good fantasy story that should attract many readers of the genre. It is certainly a book you might want to give a try even if you are currently only reading Forgotten Realms or Dragonlance books.

I'm sure fantasy readers would be pleased to end up having this book on their shelves at home (or in a cave). Happy Reading!!

Please visit my blog for further reviews: <http://book-readers-anonymous.blogspot.com>

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### **Jacob Proffitt says**

I got this as part of a kickstarter reward for the Pathfinder MMO and let me tell you, it's a good choice to invite people into the setting and a strong tale well told. The story is a relatively simple one: the Vishov family (mother Tyressa, older teen daughter Serrana, and young teen son Jerrad) comes to the river kingdoms (sparsely settled lands open for settlement) to carve a place for themselves to escape shame visited on them in their home country. They have a group of loyal folks with them so it's not *just* the family, though the rest of the settlers are kind of faceless minions (one of the few weaknesses in the book, really).

In structure, the story could be seen as a mirror of the Kingmaker adventure path because it, too, concerns building a kingdom from nothing, making deals with established neighbors, and making peace (however uneasy) with the wild things (the Fey, yes, but also a kind of gestalt presence that represents the wood itself) that have palpable presence. Fortunately, Stackpole is author enough to make this a tightly-paced story and infuse it with characters we come to care about.

The story mainly follows Jerrad as a coming-of-age tale as he morphs from the "mouse" he is in the

beginning into discovering his own strengths—both of character and of mind. It helps that he's as diplomatic as he is intelligent and that he seizes the opportunities he finds to learn and expand as he encounters this land of danger and beauty. In the shadow of the heroic father who left on the crusades a decade ago, he has to find his own way to shine and learn that real heroes are measured by those they serve rather than those they defeat.

We get almost as much from Tyressa's perspective. She's the leader of the settlement, after all, and her actions carry the strongest, or broadest, consequences. She makes a commitment at the beginning of the story to remain with this community and bind herself and her fate to the region—even after her term of exile (20 years) is up. That's quite a decision up front, essentially giving up the long heritage of her noble family to settle in the back of beyond (and without any guarantee of success let alone prosperity). She's a wise leader, though, and that bone-deep commitment infuses her actions and interactions with neighbors, rivals, and enemies alike.

But my favorite transformation is Serrana who starts off the whiny favored daughter bred for court who finds herself transplanted wholly against her will and with no recourse. She yearns for "home" and wants nothing more than to hold onto hope of return. Her transformation is kind of quick, but completely believable and I just *love* seeing her blossom as the future leader of these people as she chooses to transform herself into someone they know they can trust. She gets the least screen-time of any of the other characters, but I still loved seeing her grow and develop.

Stackpole creates some major defining moments in the life of this settlement and those moments are important, meaningful, and competently earned. But he doesn't forget those quiet moments and personal connections and decisions that are as important in the life of the growing community. I loved how completely I was drawn into the story and how much I enjoyed being there with them.

I'm not sure how broad the appeal of the novel will be to those not interested in Paizo's Pathfinder setting, but I suspect it'd hold up well as stand-alone fantasy novel. Certainly, no prior knowledge or previous work is necessary to understanding the events or their impact on the characters.

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