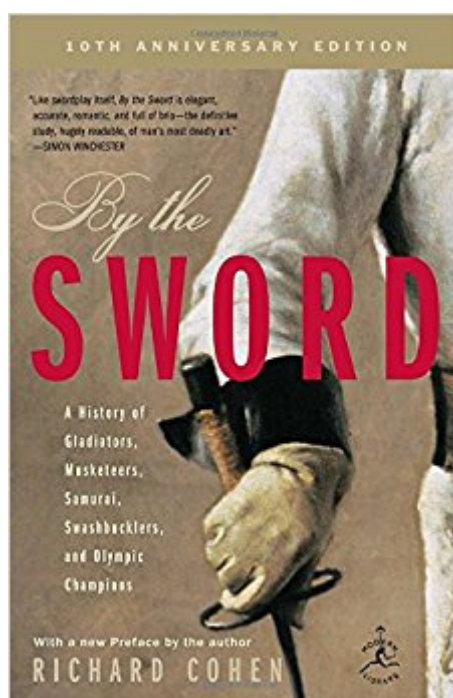


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By The Sword: A History Of Gladiators, Musketeers, Samurai, Swashbucklers, And Olympic Champions; 10th Anniversary Edition (Modern Library Paperbacks)



Synopsis

Napoleon fenced. So did Shakespeare, Karl Marx, Grace Kelly, and President Truman, who would cross swords with his daughter, Margaret, when she came home from school. Lincoln was a canny dueler. Ignatius Loyola challenged a man to a duel for denying Christ's divinity (and won). Less successful, but no less enthusiastic, was Mussolini, who would tell his wife he was "off to get spaghetti" their code to avoid alarming the children. *By the Sword* is an epic history of sword fighting—a science, an art, and, for many, a religion that began at the dawn of civilization in ancient Egypt and has been an obsession for mankind ever since. With wit and insight, Richard Cohen gives us an engrossing history of the world via the sword. With a new Preface by the author

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Customer Reviews

Cohen's enthusiastic history of the sword and of swordplay captures the adventure, romance, danger and intrigue that the weapon has represented throughout world history. The narrative contains superheroes, villains, underdogs, spies, alchemists, movie stars and champions. Rather than use a purely chronological structure, Cohen (who has written for the *New Yorker*) takes apart many of the influences that fencing has had on society and vice versa. Barely a subject escapes his eyes: metallurgy and the quest for a sword that would hold its edge and remain strong; the damage swords can do to a body (including purposeful gashes across the cheek); judicial duels (it was believed that God would intervene on behalf of the innocent party, who would win regardless of

fencing ability); the history of the Musketeers; swashbuckling movies; modern sport fencing (which countries and even families reign supreme and why), Fascists (Mussolini and many higher-ups in Hitler's regime fenced), cheating and the Olympics. Staying away from an impersonal history, the author extends his own involvement with the sport he was on the British Olympic team four times (1972, 1976, 1980 and 1984) by visiting as many of his subjects as he can, from the historically superior sword-making city of Toledo to Gretel Bergmann, a figure in a Nazi fencing scandal. There are copious playful asides as footnotes filling the reader in on wonderful facts and anecdotes. For those with even a casual interest in fencing, Cohen's work will be a delightful read; he brings the daunting breadth of the history of the sword within easy reach of the curious. Copyright 2002 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

The culture of the sword has given us everything from words like prizefight and freelance to such customs as shaking hands, the military salute, or men buttoning their coats on the right. Cohen's exuberant history of swordplay begins with an account of his own 1972 "duel" in London, then leaps into the story of civilization as measured through the evolving technology and customs around broadswords, armor, lances, foils, sabers, rapiers, and epees. Readers wanting only to escape into chivalric tales from Musketeer days will not be disappointed; however, the polished writing and masterly use of centuries of anecdote should lure them through equally vivid sections on Roman gladiators, medieval knights, Japanese Samurai, and the swashbuckling crazes in Italy, Spain, France, England, and Hollywood. (According to Cohen, a British publisher and Olympic fencer, actors Douglas Fairbanks Sr. and Jr. were exceptional fencers, while Tyrone Power might not have opened a pi\$ata without a sword double.) Cohen perhaps didn't need to explore the sword proficiencies of American presidents, but this is a small matter in a work so rich in social history: Cohen investigates the sword duels of Ben Johnson and Voltaire and the real source of Cardinal Richelieu's hatred of sword dueling. A fascinating story told with literary verve and the pride of a longtime practitioner; highly recommended. Nathan Ward, "Library Journal" Copyright 2002 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I enjoyed reading this book. It contained a very thorough discussion on the history of dueling across continents, countries and cultures. I never truly appreciated how much the art of dueling, especially the art of swordplay, was so intimately interwoven in many historical societies until I read this book.

A very nice and readable book for any swordsman. The background stories provide reality and a

stronger sense of what swordsmanship is.

Not for the "for fun" reader. This is a serious study.

Chock full of anecdotes about fencing and fencers.

Bought for a relative. He says its his new favorite book!

I bought this book for a friend that loves swords. He absolutely loves it!! It arrived on time and in good condition.

If you want a book primarily concerned with the history and politics of fencing with a short introduction to the history and development of the sword, this is your book. This book started out great and was incredibly interesting and engaging, and quite well-written. About half-way through the author decides to focus - in excruciating detail - on the sport of fencing, its stars, and its politics. I would have much rather the author spent more time on the history of swords, sword fighting, and sword culture through the ages, rather than use the history of the sword to lead up to his piece de resistance: fencing history. He also had quite a lengthy section on swords in cinema, which I didn't particularly enjoy. The book should be titled "By the Sword: A very short history of gladiators, musketeers, and samurai, followed by a lengthy history of swords in cinema and an in-depth look at the major figures and politics of fencing."

I enjoyed the book immensely. The author's writing style keeps the casual reader engaged (no pun intended), and his research and the broad amount of material he covers is impressive. It is a good sized tome as well...As far as other reviewers slamming certain points of history, I don't know. I didn't buy this book expecting to read a dissertation, and personally I'm glad it didn't read like one! Kudos to the author for a great read about the sport I love. I'd read his work again. - JPT

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