



## Saint Camber

*Katherine Kurtz*

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**Saint Camber** Katherine Kurtz

**The breathtaking history of the Deryni continues as the greatest hero of a medieval fantasy realm is forced to make the ultimate sacrifice**

The evil king is dead, and thanks to the efforts of revered Deryni magic-user Camber of Culdi, a human liege occupies the throne of Gwynedd for the first time in nearly a century. The yoke of tyranny has finally been lifted from the shoulders of an oppressed people who suffered for decades under the cruelty of the ruling magical race. But Camber's job remains unfinished. The dangerous remnants of a conquered enemy still mass at the borders. Worse still, the former monk and new ruler King Cinhil is desperately unhappy wearing the crown, and is resentful of all Deryni, Camber in particular, and their arcane abilities. Now, with the stability of a fragile kingdom at stake, its greatest champion must make the ultimate sacrifice: Camber of Culdi must cease to exist.

## Saint Camber Details

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Author : Katherine Kurtz

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## From Reader Review Saint Camber for online ebook

### Sverre says

== A plot carried out with trickery, lies and deceptions ==

“Camber of Culdi” was the fifth book published in the long series of fifteen Deryni fantasy novels (plus two books of short stories and two reference books, including the massive guide of the Deryni World, *Codex Derynianus*). But chronologically this it is the second tome, covering the time from June 905 to January 907. It is also the second volume of the trilogy named “Legends of Camber of Culdi”. If you have not read any of these novels I would suggest going chronological but with a caution: the back of the books can include charts of lineages of kings and the MacRories which may serve as spoilers to what happens in later books. The publication history spans thirty-six years and yet another book has been anticipated for seven years but will probably never be written.

In Volume I, the cruel Festillic King Imre of Gwynedd was deposed and died by his own hand as he surrendered to his fate. After eight decades of Festillic reign the Haldane line was restored by the reluctant priest Benedict taking the throne to become King Cinhil I. This Volume II starts with a war which is forced on Gwynedd by invading troops from the kingdom of Torenth to the east. That is where King Imre’s sister Ariella fled when her brother was deposed. Having relatives and allies in Torenth, she lays claim to Gwynedd and is supported by in that venture by Torentian partisans. Since fleeing she has given birth to a bastard son, Marek, who was incestuously conceived with her brother the king. The existence of this infant prince poses a future threat to the Haldane reign.

From Volume I we continue to follow Camber MacRorie, Earl of Culdi, patron of Deryni magic, and his surviving adult children, son Joram, a priest, and daughter Evaine, who is engaged to Lord Rhys Thuryn, a physician and Healer. We also become well acquainted with Alister Cullen, Vicar General of the Order of Saint Michael; Anscom, Archbishop of Gwynedd; Jebediah, Earl Marshal of Gwynedd; Guaire, Lord of D’Arliss and personal attendant to Camber; as well as King Cinhil, all of whom feature prominently as the story develops. In order to hasten the reluctant king’s fervour to embrace his regal role and administrative responsibilities, Camber and Joram hatch a plot to get into his good graces through friendly encouragement and persuasion. But their use of trickery, lies, deceptions and large doses of Deryni magic threaten to unravel their scheme at every turn.

Katherine Kurtz is a master storyteller, creating settings and characters that come alive. Yes, there are some boring sections in this book but the reader is well rewarded by the time the conclusion arrives. Shadows of foreboding are lurking about what will happen in Volume III, “Camber the Heretic.”

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### Joseph says

So when last we left our heroes, Cinhil Donal Ifor Haldane had (reluctantly) been plucked from his monastic life and assumed the kingship (by chucking his predecessor Imre's dead body off of a balcony into the royal courtyard).

Saint Camber picks up six months later. Cinhil is still uneasily settling into his new role; Camber & his

friends & children are still trying to keep the kingdom from running off the rails; and Ariella, sister of the deposed Imre, has fled, with her & her brother's incestuous infant son, to more friendly climes.

Mild spoilers: Camber's influence with the king is waning and/or in danger of backfiring; Cinhil *really* would've preferred to stay in his monastery; his surviving children (infant twin sons) are both sickly and/or flawed to one degree or another. So there comes a point midway through the book when, in an act of desperation, Camber arranges to "die" (by using his Deryni powers to swap forms with another character who has died at a particularly unfortunate time). Events leading to the titular sainthood are inadvertently set in motion as a result of some of the real Camber's actions once the masquerade is underway; and much of the latter portion of the book is Camber (and the few who know his secret) agonizing about how to respond; as a man of genuine faith himself, he's obviously reluctant to see himself canonized under what can only be described as false pretenses.

This is an interesting book. For one thing, there's no real villain. Well, sure, there's Ariella, but she plays a relatively minor (albeit pivotal) role. The closest things to an antagonist are either Cinhil (who is kind of desperately unhappy in his new role as king, and not above spreading some of that around), the folks behind the drive for Camber's sainthood (who are only responding to events as they perceive them), and maybe Camber's own conscience, especially in a situation like this where there are no easy answers.

I'm also generally quite pleased with Kurtz' treatment of (explicitly Christian) religion in the books; it's clearly a major part of the characters' lives (as would be appropriate given the historical models for the setting) and treated seriously and respectfully both by the characters and by the author.

Given that the final book is called Camber the Heretic, though, I can only assume that there are bad times a-comin' ...

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### **Lauren says**

The continuing saga of Camber, a character I alternately find very amusing but at times extremely irritating.

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### **Lisa says**

I'm re-reading this book, which I've liked in the past, and my perspective on the protagonist has suddenly changed. "What a manipulative, self-righteous bastard!" I think. Oh sure, there are other characters to provide "balance" and caution, but hey, they go ahead and mess with the humans anyway, invading memories at will and messing with perspectives. This book is rife with lies and deception, and I'm a little sympathetic to the human caution instead of being entranced with the magic, as I have been in the past.

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### **Penelope Green says**

So it's an interesting premise. And it's competently executed. And it's clearly written by someone steeped in Catholicism but not evangelical about it so it feels like you are learning about that perspective without being

lectured plus there's magic wielders trying to put a lost heir to the throne in order to replace evil, usurping, incestuous sorcerous brother-sister monarchs so really it should be good.

But it's let down by the sheer arrogance of the main character who had determined that he gets to judge who should sit on the throne (regardless of the wishes of the chosen candidate) and he gets to decide what counsel his candidate needs and he gets to trample on the minds and wills of everyone else around him and take over identities and distort legacies of whoever he wishes. And he does this on the justification that he is the wisest and best equipped (as attested by his children) while making idiotic mistakes that, sure, drive major plot points but are still imbecilic. So I had to take off a couple of stars because I kind of wish the hero of the book gets killed. But I'll still read the 3rd of the trilogy.

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### **Paca Sad says**

Personally I found this a trifle boring, too much emphasis on clerical affairs and intricacies to hold my interest for long and I still don't feel any engagement with the characters

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### **Pam says**

This is not the first time I have read this book...or any of Ms. Kurtz's books. In fact, it's probably the third or fourth. But Katherine Kurtz has a wonderful way of pulling me into her stories of the fictional kingdom of Gwynedd...a kingdom of Deryni (magical) and non-magical humans which can't help but bring to mind the Arthurian legends. Ms. Kurtz herself, in her dedications of her books, says that she has had a long intellectual love affair with the medieval world and its church, and this is so very readily apparent in her Gwynedd novels. The way she interweaves both magic and Catholic religious views and practices is nothing short of magic in itself, and perhaps this is a large part of what has always drawn me to her work. I have always had a "love affair" with the idea of true magic but my spiritual upbringing taught me that magic did not truly exist but that if it did, it was evil. Thus the attraction of Ms. Kurtz's books for me...a world where both magic AND religious devotion existed and co-existed, side by side and in harmony. This is actually the second book in the first trilogy of Ms. Kurtz's long series of books on Gwynedd and its various kings...but mainly about the fortunes (and quite often misfortunes) of the gifted Deryni folk that populate her novels.

I would have read the first book of this series...Camber of Culdi first but I lost my copy in a recent flood so until I could get another copy of the first book, I reread the second. The first book tells the story of a Deryni...Camber MacRorie...and the fight of his family and Deryni friends to oust a Deryni pretender king (Imre) from the throne of Gwynedd. It is Camber...with the help of family and friends...who do oust Imre and his sister (Ariella) from the throne of Gwynedd. But before they do, they have to come up with a legitimate replacement...a Haldane king where there has been none in recent memory. Their search for an heir to accomplish the Haldane Restoration takes them to the sole remaining male Haldane...Father Benedict, a monk. They kidnap Father Benedict, make him understand the situation and the kingdom's plight, and with Father Benedict's grudging acceptance and using their Deryni powers, bring forth the "Haldane" potential...a power that lies hidden within the Haldane males until it is called forth by the appropriate Deryni ceremony. The Haldane power itself, in the right individual, can rival that of any Deryni...but the new king, King Cinhil, doesn't really want to be king. Yes, he has the Haldane powers but he doesn't want them and doesn't know what to do with them. He only wants to return to the monastic life. This, in a nutshell, is what happens in the first book. Of course, the book itself is far more satisfying and has all the richness of historical and liturgical

detail that Ms. Kurtz is famous for but I wanted to give a preface to my review of Saint Camber for those reading this review.

On to Saint Camber, which starts in the capital city of Valoret after King Imre has been killed and his sister Ariella (pregnant with her brother's child) has been driven from Gwynedd into neighboring Torenth. King Cinhil and his advisers...Earl Camber of Culdi, his son, Father Joram MacRorie of the Michaeline Order of warrior priests (similar to the Knights Templar??), Rhys Thuryn, a young Deryni healer (and son-in-law of Camber), Jebediah of Alcara, the Deryni Grand Master of the militant Knights of St. Michael, Alister Cullen, the Deryni Vicar General of the Michaeline Order, and Guaire of Arliss, a young, non-Deryni and one of a very few men of the last regime to retain a position in the court...are considering their options for war against Ariella and her new allies. To leave her to gather strength and more allies is unthinkable...she is as strong a Deryni as any serving with King Cinhil...and her allies in Torenth are also strong Deryni. More troubling is the fact that she is pregnant with her brother's child who, when born, could have a potential claim on the throne of Gwynedd if King Cinhil should have no legitimate heir. No...leaving Ariella alone is out of the question!! So the first part of the book deals with bringing the armies of Gwynedd together to finally end any claim Ariella and her family might have on the throne. King Cinhil still wants nothing but to return to being a priest although he realizes that he now has no choice in the matter...but he does harbor increasing ill-will toward Camber and the other Deryni who took him from his chosen calling and thrust him into a kingship that he didn't want. As a result, Camber...and his family...Joram, Rhys, and Evaine (Camber's daughter and Rhys' wife)...use their considerable Deryni skills in the background (and without King Cinhil's knowledge) to do everything they can to "stack the deck" in Gwynedd's favor. One night, the four of them perform a ceremony to try to "reach out and touch" Ariella in the hopes of obtaining valuable information as to her location and possibly her battle plans. The effort is successful...to a degree! Camber, supported magically by his family, is able to reach Ariella's mind and learn some of what he needs. But, just when he is starting to feel safe "looking" through Ariella's mind, he finds that she was asleep, and she suddenly awakens, becoming aware of his intrusion. Camber barely escapes having his mind captured or, worse, ripped apart by Ariella but he has gained valuable information that allows King Cinhil and his armies to move forward.

**SPOILER ALERT! DON'T READ FURTHER IF YOU WANT TO BE SURPRISED BY THE REMAINDER OF THE BOOK!!**

Of course, if the book and series are to proceed, Gwynedd is victorious...but not without cost. Father Alistair Cullen, the only Deryni that King Cinhil even marginally trusts...is killed in a "duel arcane" between himself and Ariella. Camber and Joram rush to aid Cullen, and Ariella is killed. But Cullen cannot be saved. Even as Cullen lies dying, Camber realizes what Cullen's loss could mean to all Deryni with their king becoming more and more anti-Deryni due to his bitterness about being "forced" to become king. As abhorrent as it is to him and his son, Joram, with Joram's help, Camber links himself with Cullen's mind even as it is dying, to merge their minds, their personalities, even their souls, and Camber takes on the physical appearance of Cullen. The body of Cullen takes on the visage of Camber. Thus it became that Camber of Culdi dies and Alistair Cullen, Vicar General and good friend of the king, lives.

The rest of the book, as you might surmise, is about Camber's life as Alistair Cullen, coming to grips with the fact that Camber, having only been invested as a deacon in the Church, has taken on the life of a bishop of the Church and the Vicar General of the Knights of St. Michael. How he does this, becomes close to the king, and slowly incorporates both his life and that of Alistair Cullen into one comprise the end of the book. Needless to say, there are a lot of surprises, both pleasant and not so pleasant, along the way...with the biggest being Camber of Culdi being put up for sainthood!! Camber, Joram, Rhys, Evaine, and a handful of others know Camber is not dead and is most definitely not a saint...but how to discourage this without revealing all the deceptions and half-truths leaves everyone desperate! Not only are they afraid of the

potential effects on their mortal kingdom if Camber is exposed but Camber himself is terrified that he may lose his immortal soul if he continues with his charade. What can he do? Well...read the book for the answer!

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### **Metaphorosis says**

Having deposed a Deryni tyrant, Camber and his family struggle to convince Cinhil, reluctant human king, to accept his new role and stop pining for his calm, monastic life.

Review:

One of the things I'd forgotten until this re-read of the series is just how morally flexible Camber and his crew are. In the first series, Alaric and Morgan see Camber as a legendary figure who could do no wrong. While this trilogy allows for the fact that Camber's just a man, we're clearly still supposed to see him as always on the side of good and right. In fact, it becomes a little annoying just how righteous he is – at least in his own eyes and the eyes of the author. The truth is that he's astonishingly manipulative and Machiavellian. Ends, in this case, virtually always justify the means; the token protests and qualms are just that – tokens, not to be taken as serious obstacles. Even within the heavy religious layer, devotion to god takes second place to political need. It wouldn't all be so troublesome if it weren't for the fact that we're clearly meant to see all these decisions as amply justified, because Camber is on the side of Right. He warns against Deryni exploitation of vulnerable humans, even as he exploits vulnerable humans for his own goals.

There's also a much stronger fascination with clothing than I recalled. If you're not interested in a detailed description of sumptuous religious habiliments, you'll be able to skip long paragraphs.

A big appeal of the books for me was always the magic that later generations were slowly discovering. Here, in the earlier time... they're busy discovering the magic of an earlier generation. And a lot of what they find is both awfully convenient, and thinly described. A couple of warding cubes, a religious invocation, some mumbling, and you're pretty much good to go. Need a particular skill? Camber and crew are bound to discover it just in time.

Don't ruin your memory of this book by re-reading it.

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### **Gary Sundell says**

4.5 stars. This book sets the stage for book 3. This is the calm before the storm. Cinhil secures his throne. Bad choices are made for seemingly good reasons by well intentioned characters.

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### **Suzi says**

I keep reading these even though I don't like them that much and the gender politics are horrible. WHYYYY, self? (Probably because I like to finish trilogies I have started.) Book 2 was better and more complex than Book 1, but still with the SEKRIT CATHOLIC MAGIK also the \*almost gay but NO HOMO\* communion of ... uh ... minds. Maybe I'll go cleanse with some Tremontaine.

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### **Kerry says**

Oh, how I loved these books so much when I first read them. I was so delighted when they were both published as ebooks and then being covered in a read/reread on Tor.com.

At the finish of this one, I find I don't have a lot more to say than a comment I made on the reread post for Chapters 20 and 21 of this book. I'm responding to Judith Tarr's post and the ongoing conclusion that the Deryni have little respect for humans and their rights, needs or boundaries.

"Sadly, I have to agree that you're right about the Deryni being awful. And yet, I can't quite set aside my teenage conditioning and seriously hate them, so I'm left kind of vacillating in the middle.

We haven't got to "suck fairy" levels, but I am finding it very sad that something I remember so fondly is not standing up as well as I would like to a modern reread. I still want to keep reading them, but there's this quiet disappointment riding along with me that I wish wasn't happening."

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### **Sunni says**

This is an interesting book. The only real villain isn't really in this story, leaving many of the main protagonists to also be one the main antagonists. It kind of gives new meaning to being ones own worst enemy.

One thing that always remains true throughout the Deryni novels is the respect and reverence given to the Christian religion in these novels. As religion played such an important role during the time that these novels were set, it only makes sense on one hand, but on the other, this is a fantasy world, and the author could take great liberty and have taken all, and any of this story, in any direction. Mrs. Kurtz has kept the religious aspects of her story for this time period true to the facts that described the corruption and power struggle between church and state. She has obviously done her homework.

This is a very fast moving, action packed, and enjoyable book! A great compliment to the previous Deryni novels. A must read and a guaranteed favorite of all ages.

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### **Kay says**

The politics of the Church, as well as the politics of Gwynedd, take center stage in this second book of the trilogy. I found this to be a slower read than I remembered from decades ago. My reading tastes have also changed a bit perhaps because the minutiae of the various Deryni workings became tedious to me.

I also find it difficult to empathize with Cinhil's treatment of his queen. Granted, he had never planned to marry, yet he did for the good of his kingdom. He becomes a capable ruler without any serious attempt to allow his wife to help him in that role, even though he sees a role model of a marriage partnership in Rhys and Evaine.

Since I had a couple of books reserved at the library that just dropped into my online account, I'll be leaving Gwynedd for a while. I'm not sure if I will rush back into any of the Deryni books...

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**Steelwhisper says**

Re-read. Fabulous series. Fantasy as I want to read it.

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**Jeff J. says**

Middle books in trilogies can be frustrating, but this novel manages to advance the plot without a huge cliffhanger. Can the drama be sustained with the final book in the trilogy?

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