

CLIVE BARKER'S JERICHO™

AL-KHALI - A CITY SLICED THROUGH TIME.

The Crusades

The Crusades span nearly two hundred years of the bloodiest conflicts in human history as the amassed forces of Christendom and Islam fought for control over the Holy Land. Countless numbers died in warfare, thousands more during the sieges and the ruthless sacking of cities. The most sickening event of all occurred at Al-Khali.

Bishop Maltheus St. Claire feared for his eternal life, especially since he suffered from illness of the flesh. He could not control his appetites despite his increasingly severe penances. His trauma drew him to devote his life to study in the Vatican Library, the largest concentration of ecclesiastical books and manuscripts in the world and the principal library in the West, searching for enlightenment, salvation and secrets. After years of total immersion he resolved upon the idea of leading a Crusade to the Holy Land. Maltheus convinced Pope Innocent II to sanction him to lead a radical army that could not fail and would not result in the loss of more Christian lives. His crusaders would be children. Citing the purity of his child warriors, they would be protected by God; no spear or arrow could injure them.

Children were recruited from among humble young volunteers from across Europe. The children could hardly thrust a sword or handle the weight of a coat of mail. They were convinced by Maltheus, like their Pope, that the purity of their Christian innocence would save them. This was not the case.

The crusade of 'Les Innocents' began in 1212 but they did not arrive in the Holy Land for a year. Maltheus believed the waters of the Mediterranean were going to part for the holy army to cross. When they didn't, they had to wait months until one of the merchants provided boats for the crossing. Shipwrecks meant hundreds died at sea. At ports across the Mediterranean, merchants sold the children into slavery and prostitution. This did not deter Maltheus, who dragged thousands of children across the desert to Al-Khali. The weakest died of hunger and exhaustion on the road.



Sick, starving, demoralised, and convinced that their youth could not protect them, 'Les Innocents' were faced with amassed Saracen forces at Al-Khali. The Saracens pleaded for their surrender. The remaining children begged to be saved. Yet Maltheus mocked their cowardice, and demanded battle. They were massacred. Maltheus bore witness to the slaughter of his army, the destruction of his salvation, and abandoned them. He fled to the chapel at Al-Khali for sanctuary and to expiate his sins. This was his last recorded act. He did not emerge. The shredded bodies of 'Les Innocents' were left to the mercy of the carrion.