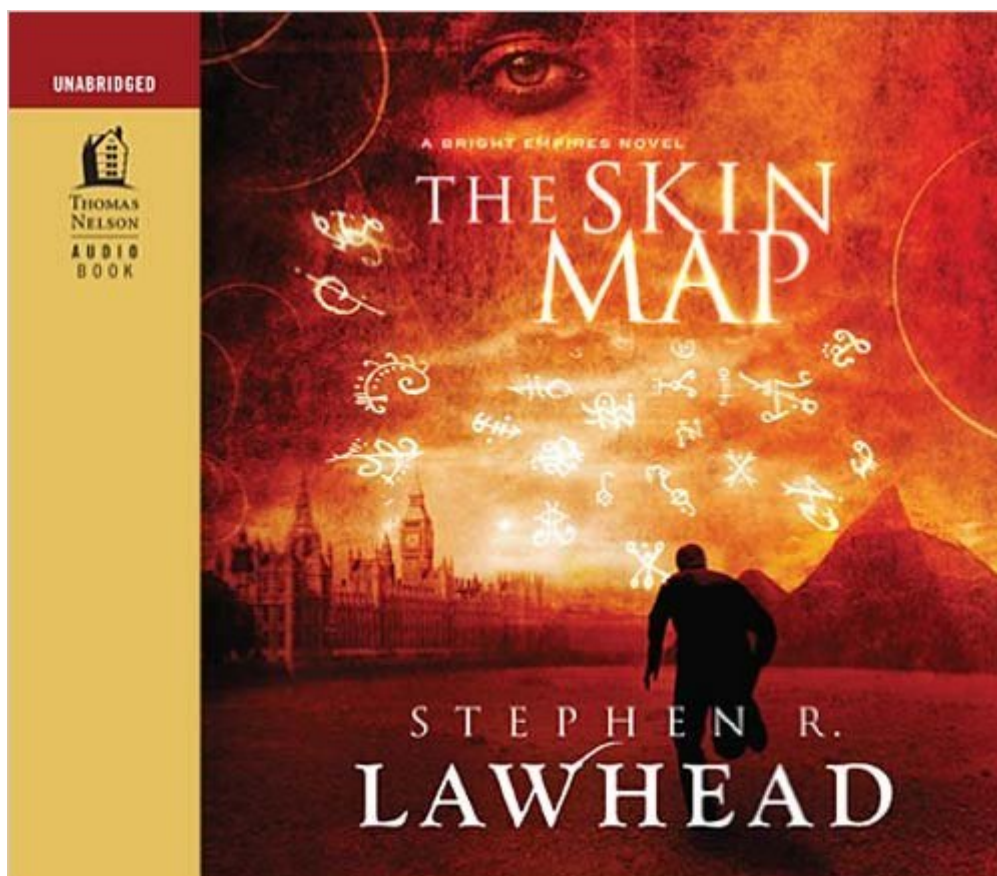


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The Skin Map (Bright Empires)



Synopsis

It is the ultimate quest for the ultimate treasure. Chasing a map tattooed on human skin. Across an omniverse of intersecting realities. To unravel the future of the future. Kit Livingstone's great-grandfather appears to him in a deserted alley during a tumultuous storm. He reveals an unbelievable story: that the ley lines throughout Britain are not merely the stuff of legend or the weekend hobby of deluded cranks, but pathways to other worlds. To those who know how to use them, they grant the ability to travel the multi-layered universe of which we ordinarily inhabit only a tiny part. One explorer knew more than most. Braving every danger, he toured both time and space on voyages of heroic discovery. Ever on his guard and fearful of becoming lost in the cosmos, he developed an intricate code—a roadmap of symbols—that he tattooed onto his own body. This Skin Map has since been lost in time. Now the race is on to recover all the pieces and discover its secrets. But the Skin Map itself is not the ultimate goal. It is merely the beginning of a vast and marvelous quest for a prize beyond imagining. The Bright Empires series from acclaimed author Stephen R. Lawhead is a unique blend of epic treasure hunt, ancient history, alternate realities, cutting-edge physics, philosophy, and mystery. The result is a page-turning, adventure like no other. "Anything but ordinary . . . Dynamic settings are mixed with unpredictable adventures [and] parallel worlds." —BookPage

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Sci-fi or fantasy? Adventure or suspense? The Skin Map is one of those special books that crosses

genres. In a way, it's all of the above, which makes for a delightful reading stew. A novel that's been cooking in Stephen Lawhead's mind for over fifteen years, it was well worth the wait. Chapter One wastes no time in introducing us to main character Kit Livingstone, a man living a mundane existence who in the span of a few minutes finds himself embarking on the adventure of a lifetime. Make that multiple lifetimes. And dimensions. And countries. From the moment he meets his long dead great-grandfather Cosimo (clearly alive and well) in a strange London alley, Kit is thrust into a web of intrigue that sets his mind spinning. Apparently Cosimo has discovered a way to travel through space, time, and alternate universes using ley lines, forces of energy that are intersections between worlds. But there are enemies of Cosimo and his cause that are bent on bringing him and his fellow Questors to ruin. All because one brave traveler tattooed on his body a map of these ley lines for future adventurers. It's this skin map everyone's after (yes, it was made from his skin after he died), and it's what Kit and Cosimo must find at all costs. Mix in a detailed sub plot featuring Kit's girlfriend Wilhelmina who accidentally lands in 17th Century Austria, and there's something in *The Skin Map* for just about everyone. The adventure elements draw comparisons to Matt Bronleewe's August Adams series, minus the rare books. Aside from a few British swear words, Lawhead keeps things clean and in the vein of the great books and movies of yesteryear. Think *National Treasure* with a lot more depth and even some philosophical references to ponder.

My last foray into Stephen Lawhead territory was with *The Pendragon Cycle*. That was back in the early 90's, and it was quite an enjoyable experience. So it was with some anticipation that I opened *The Skin Map*, Lawhead's latest and the first of a series. Conceptually, the novel appeared to be a perfect vehicle for Lawhead, who excels at historical detail. But while the concept and the detail don't disappoint, I found myself struggling through both. *The Skin Map* blends several genres, but is probably best described as time travel or urban fantasy. The story revolves around Kit, a 21st century Londoner who stumbles upon a portal between different universes within our multiverse (alternate universes with infinite possible histories). Along the way, he loses his girlfriend Wilhelmina in 17th century Prague, and in an attempt to rescue her, finds himself in a quest for a map that details these universal portals (or ley lines). As such, the story shifts between numerous possible worlds, an 18th-century Chinese port, old England, ancient Egypt, just to name a few. But what could be a wild ride was, for me, only marginally interesting. For the main characters who lead me on this fantastical journey are not very interesting. Kit and Wilhelmina's relationship, which becomes the dramatic hinge of *The Skin Map*, endeared me to neither. For instance, upon introduction, we learn that Kit believes "he simply had to get a new girlfriend at first opportunity" (pg. 29). After a rather

unflattering description of Wilhelmina's features -- mousy hair, receding chin, spinster's hump, and dark-circled eyes -- it's no wonder he feels this way. She yawns a lot, is emotionally cold, even calls him a "dope." Thus, our protagonist concludes, "Wilhelmina was no catch" (pg. 30).

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