



*PHOTO: Lee Swanson expertly weaves history and fiction, crafting compelling characters who navigate the complexities of medieval Europe with stout hearts and sharp swords.*

## Unveiling History's Tapestry

# LEE SWANSON

## A Life Shaped by Treks, Travels and Literary Legends

Lee Swanson discusses crafting historical fiction, creating strong female characters, and balancing authenticity with suspense in his acclaimed novels.

Lee Swanson's journey from soldier to scholar has been as adventurous and diverse as the historical landscapes he vividly brings to life in his novels. His fascination with medieval history, honed during his years living in Germany and England, permeates every page of his work, blending meticulous research with captivating storytelling.

In our exclusive interview with Swanson, we delve into the intricate tapestry of his writing process, where historical

accuracy intertwines seamlessly with imaginative narrative. His superlative *No Man is Her Master* series introduces readers to Christina Kohl, a fiercely independent protagonist navigating the treacherous waters of 14th-century Europe. Swanson reveals the inspirations behind Christina's character, born from a desire to defy the limitations placed upon medieval women, and the challenges he faced in crafting her compelling arc amidst a backdrop of political intrigue and danger.

With each novel, Swanson paints a vivid portrait of medieval society, populated by richly developed characters drawn from the ranks of merchants and nobility. His latest instalment, *She Serves the Realm*, delves deeper into themes of love, duty, and sacrifice against the backdrop of civil unrest, inviting readers to join Christina on her journey of self-discovery and resilience.

Through Swanson's storytelling prowess, readers are transported across centuries, experiencing the trials and triumphs of characters whose struggles resonate across time. Join us as we explore the captivating world of Lee Swanson, where history comes alive through the power of fiction.

**Your background in European**

**History, particularly focusing on the Hansa, seems to heavily influence your writing. How do you blend historical accuracy with fictional storytelling in your novels?**

It's essential to be aware of the facts first and then move the characters to fit the historical reality. Historical accuracy is just as important as crafting an excellent story in writing historical fiction. I am painstaking in my research, doing my best to provide my readers with the authentic flavour of the times in which the novel is set. The final days of Piers Gaveston are well documented; consequently, Christina Kohl's movements and interactions in *She Serves the Realm* are shaped by the necessity of her being in particular places at specific times.

In 'She Serves the Realm,' Lee Swanson masterfully continues the captivating journey of Christina Kohl. Set against the tumultuous backdrop of Edward II's reign, Swanson weaves a tale of love, duty, and intrigue that keeps readers on the edge of their seats. A must-read for fans of historical fiction.



**Christina Kohl, the protagonist of your *No Man is Her Master* series, defies societal norms of her time by seeking adventure and independence. What inspired you to create such a strong and unconventional female character set in the 14th century?**

I set out to craft a female character who would not simply be defined by the men in her life. This proved difficult, as there were few opportunities for medieval women to live independently. So, I cheated by having Christina assume her brother's identity. This allowed her to experience life with the freedom enjoyed by her male counterparts, but expressed from a woman's perspective.

**In *Her Perilous Game*, Christina faces political intrigue and danger. How do you approach crafting suspenseful plots while maintaining authenticity to the historical setting?**

*Her Perilous Game* is set in 1310, as King Edward II mounts an expedition to the Scottish borders in a futile attempt to force Robert the Bruce to battle. Christina sails to Berwick-upon-Tweed to warn her friend, the Earl of Cornwall, of a supposed scheme against his life. The real-life plotting and peril facing Gaveston during this time made a believable backdrop for incorporating Christina's story in tandem with the earl's own?

***She Serves the Realm* introduces readers to Christina's complex journey as she navigates her identity, love, and loyalty amidst the political**

**turmoil of Edward II's reign. What challenges did you face in portraying this turbulent historical period?**

A challenge was in portraying Piers Gaveston as a sympathetic character. Throughout the first three novels in the series, the unlikely friendship between the teenaged Christina and the powerful Earl of Cornwall grows, although it is rarely central to the plot. In *She Serves the Realm*, Gaveston is a major character whose predicaments drive the development of the story. I want readers to discover that the man Christina has grown to love and admire is very different than the despicable caricature commonly depicted in history.

**Your novels feature richly developed characters drawn from the lives of merchants and nobility in medieval Europe. How do you research and develop these characters to bring them to life on the page?**

In creating characters for my novels, I try to base them initially on people I have discovered in nonfiction sources. For instance, there is a great collection of the correspondence of Hildebrand Veckinchusen that provides great insight into the life of a Hansa merchant of the early 15th century. Then I flesh out the cha-

acter with attributes of someone I had read about in fiction, seen in films, or even people I know in real life. After these traits are established they just seem to take on a life of their own.

**Your latest novel, *She Serves the Realm*, delves into themes of love, duty, and sacrifice against the backdrop of civil unrest. What do you hope readers take away from Christina's story and her experiences serving both her own desires and the demands of the realm?**

I hope readers view Christina as a person who tries to stay true to herself. She is not infallible; she makes mistakes and sometimes suffers for them. She can be overly impetuous, which has at times placed her and her companions in mortal danger. But she also has a good heart and a strong sense of right and wrong. Not only is she willing to come to the aid of those she holds dear, but will also defend those who have wronged her when they are treated unjustly. I think it is also important to show that romantic love between two women is a universal truth that transcends history.