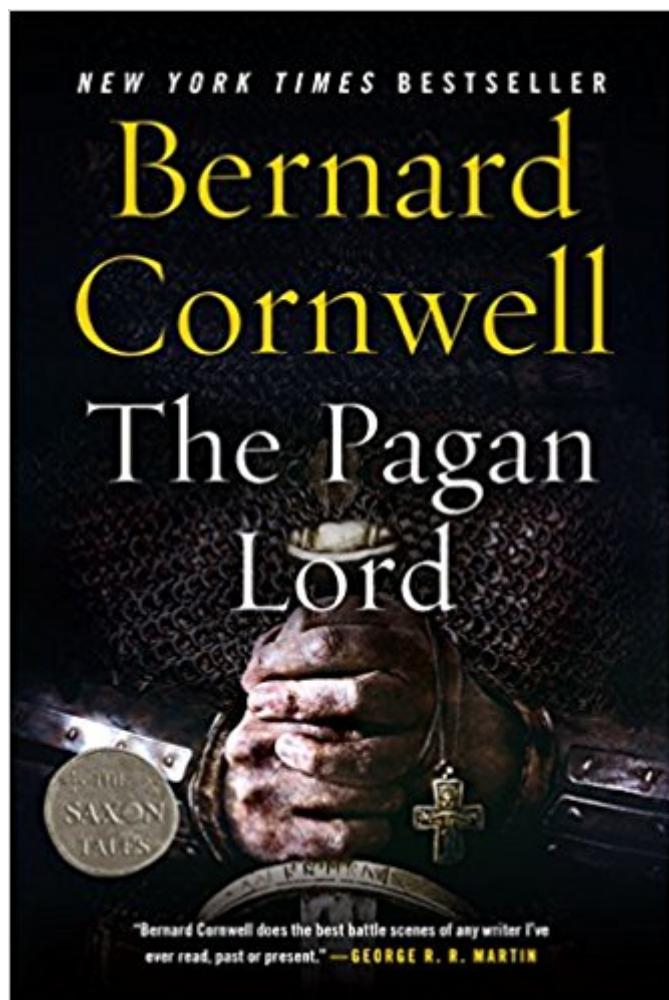


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The Pagan Lord: A Novel (Saxon Tales)



Synopsis

The seventh installment of Bernard Cornwell's New York Times best-selling series chronicling the epic saga of the making of England, à œlike Game of Thrones, but real. (The Observer, London) "the basis for The Last Kingdom, the hit television series. At the onset of the tenth century, England is in turmoil. Alfred the Great is dead and his son Edward reigns as king. Wessex survives but peace cannot hold: the Danes in the north, led by Viking Cnut Longsword, stand ready to invade and will never rest until the emerald crown is theirs. Uhtred, once Alfred's great warrior but now out of favor with the new king, must lead a band of outcasts north to recapture his old family home, the impregnable Northumbrian fortress Bebbanburg. Loyalties will be divided and men will fall as each Saxon kingdom is drawn into the bloodiest battle yet with the Danes "a war that will decide the fate of every king, and the entire English nation. With The Pagan Lord, New York Times best-selling author Bernard Cornwell "the most prolific and successful historical novelist in the world today. (Wall Street Journal) continues his magnificent epic of the making of England during the Middle Ages, vividly bringing to life the uneasy alliances, violent combat, and deadly intrigue that gave birth to the British nation.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is instalment seven of the Warrior Chronicles set in the time of King Alfred and his successors, with Uthred, the pagan warlord brought up by the Danes, still fighting on the side of the Saxons, although getting a bit long in the tooth. Unsurprisingly, a number of reviewers who (just like myself)

have read through the whole series over the years might have a sense a "dÃ©jÃ vu", to the extent that some might be getting a bit tired with having similar scenes played over and over again. These include the hero getting himself into trouble by murdering and terrorising overbearing churchmen, throwing his weight around, rushing around the country waving his sword and saving the Saxons almost on his own. If the book was limited to this, then indeed I would share their feelings. But there is, at least for me, far more to it than that...As mentioned in the title of this review, the book is a thundering good yarn, regardless of whether you have read the previous ones in the series (although it is preferable to do so). It was, at least for me, hugely entertaining. It is one of these books that you can't drop until you have reached the last page and I admit to spending most of Saturday reading it from cover to cover non-stop. Hence you get comments from some other reviewers about the book being shorter than others, perhaps, and shorter than they would have wished, quite certainly. This, in itself, makes the book well worth reading. It is a first class swashbuckler adventure story, fast-paced and with lots of "blood and thunder". In this respect, Bernard Cornwell is true to form. Then there is the historical context, and the painting of what was shortly to become "England". Here also, the author has been true to form, meaning excellent. One of the strongpoints of this book is to show that while King Alfred is commonly credited for having "saved" England from the Danes, more accurately, he saved Wessex, and there was still a chance that the largest part of the island would one day be called "Daneland", rather than England. Among other features, the author shows to what extent the Scandinavians (they were not all Danes, even if these were a majority) had taken control of Northumbria, East Anglia and the northern part of Mercia, where they had settled in what seems to be large numbers. The book contains several glimpses of these Danish settlers and the author contends through his characters (and directly in his historical note) that the survival of "Anglo-Saxon England" was not at all a given after the death of King Alfred. Having mentioned this, the author does seem to have taken a few liberties with the history records. For instance, Chester (Ceaster), the old Roman legionary fortress of Deva, seems to have been reconquered by the Saxons a few years before the battle of Tettenhall, and, as Cornwell mentions, the Danish warlords that he includes in his story are mostly fictional. This, however, does not detract from the story in any way and, because of the paucity of the sources, the novelist has quite a lot of room to weave his story in between the few known facts that they mention. The characterisation is perhaps where some readers might have had the sense of "dÃ©jÃ vu" that I was mentioning earlier. Uthred, in particular, often seems to be his usual swashbuckling but cunning self, and most of the other characters also seem to be true to form. Even there, however, there are a couple of interesting and somewhat original features. One is the indulgent and

somewhat amused attitude that those who really know Uthred start to have when he is at his most threatening and blustering. They are, however, careful not to show it until the warlord's gambles have either paid off or failed. This also points to a key feature of the society in Northern Europe at the time, or at least of the war-like nobility in the British Isles. A warrior's reputation was everything, and he needed to keep it up by appearing fearless, however terrified he might actually be when in the shield wall. This is something that Bernard Cornwell yet again shows rather vividly when describing how horrible and traumatising such an experience might have been. Another feature, related to the first, is the rather dare-do, mischievous and sympathetic character of the very young Athelstan (the future king) who was indeed brought up at the court of Mercia alongside his aunt (the sister of Edward the Elder, and daughter of King Alfred). He could accordingly very well be part of this book and share at least some of Uthred's adventures alongside "the Lady of Mercia." Given all this, I simply cannot find any reason for rating the book less than five stars. For me at least, it was a superb read. I just hope it will work at least as well for you...

Uhtred is one of my favorite characters and I have liked all the book in the series. My favorite is the first one as it was the most exciting. England, as we know it, was down to a piece of swapland in the 900's and Uhtred, almost single-handedly, wins the kingdom back for Alfred. Even so I have enjoyed the progression of Uhtred and continue to do so in this one even though it's very short (296 pages and some of them blanks). Uhtred is a man of contrasts. Although he was born Saxon, he was raised by the invading Danes. A follower of Thor who fights for the Christian King, Alfred, who is now dead. His loyalty and lust has been given to Alred's daughter, Aethelflaed. Christianity is spreading rapidly throughout the kingdom and Uhtred, as a grouchy 50 year old, doesn't understand it. Personally, I don't either as Thor, as Uhtred envisions him, seems like a fun god. In Valhalla there is plenty of feasting and partying and good times. Uhtred is still trying to get his birthright, Bebbanburg, returned to him. The Danes are trying to take over more territory and the Christian priests again try to exile Uhtred so there is plenty of fighting going on. I love the descriptions of the shield wall and the battle scenes are very realistic. I can almost imagine being there. So even if Uhtred is getting long in tooth and has very few battles ahead of him, I still enjoy spending time with him. He is a man who knows who he is and is comfortable in his own skin. He lives and fights under his own rules and keeps a honorable standard of conduct. He doesn't believe in killing women and children. He dislikes most priests and wants to die with a sword in his hand. It's not often you meet a man who knows exactly what he wants. Uhtred is one and, I think, that's why I enjoy him so much.

I understand a comment comparing this work to earlier work in Cornwell's career, however I would say he may have adjusted his style slightly for this series, and not dropped his standards at all. This book is exactly what I would assume the author intended it to be, a continuation of the series, written in the same style, featuring the same uncompromising Uhtred, facing the same issues. Exactly what I wanted it to be. For me the story grips as much as it always has. Excellent story, brilliantly paced. 5 stars.

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