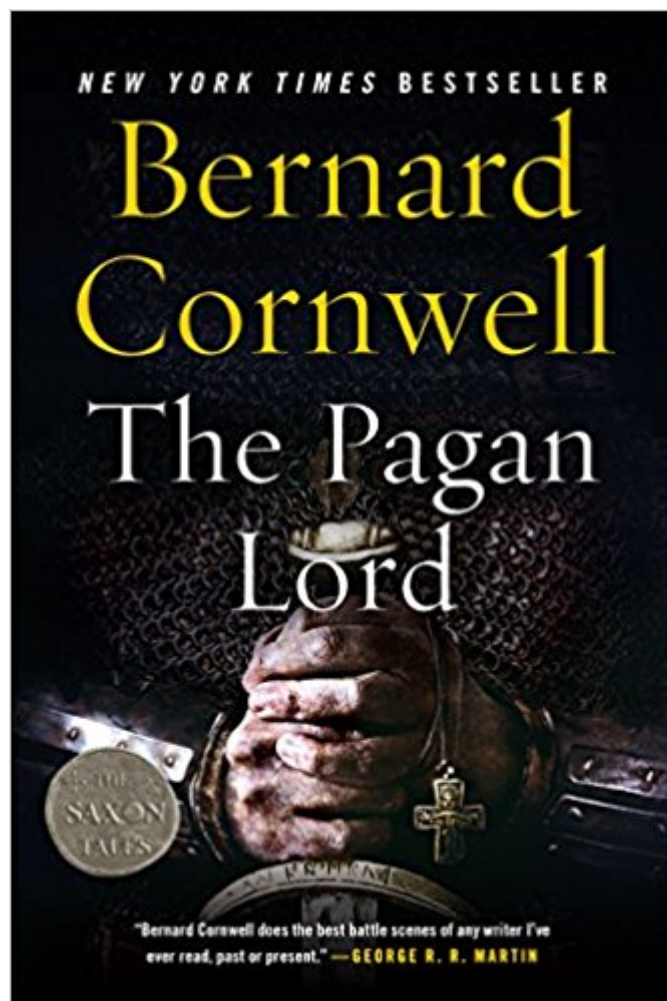


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The Pagan Lord: A Novel (Saxon Tales)



Synopsis

The seventh installment of Bernard Cornwell's New York Times best-selling series chronicling the epic saga of the making of England, "like 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 Edward, his son, 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 not 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, that great Northumbrian fortress, Bebbanburg. In The Pagan Lord, loyalties will be divided and men will fall, as every 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 British nation.

Book Information

Series: Saxon Tales (Book 7)

Paperback: 320 pages

Publisher: Harper Paperbacks; Reprint edition (January 6, 2015)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0061969729

ISBN-13: 978-0061969720

Product Dimensions: 5.3 x 0.7 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 7.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars 982 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #21,654 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #124 in Books > Literature & Fiction > Genre Fiction > Historical > Military #179 in Books > Literature & Fiction > British & Irish > Historical #240 in Books > Literature & Fiction > Genre Fiction > TV, Movie, Video Game Adaptations

Customer Reviews

Uhtred of Bebbanburg rides into battle once again in the seventh installment of Cornwell's stellar Saxon Tales series. This time it is a decidedly older but no less ferocious Uhtred who, after the death of King Alfred, is determined to reclaim his birthright the Northumbrian fortress of Bebbanburg once and for all. Of course, this being the tangled tale of the bloody birth of England, nothing is as straightforward as that. The Danes (who incidentally raised the Saxon-born

Uhtred) are poised and ready to expand their territory in the north, threatening the sanctity and safety of all the Saxon kingdoms. Although on the outs with the Saxon kings and Christian priests currently wielding the real power, a warrior as cunning and as skillful as Uhtred is always in demand when the Vikings come to call. Cornwell excels at depicting gloriously gory battle scenes as well as the inherent religious, political, and martial conflicts upon which a great nation was born. --Margaret Flanagan --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

“A violent, absorbing historical saga, deeply researched and thoroughly imagined.” (Washington Post) “Cornwell successfully brings an unjustly obscure era in British history to life. The conflict between Dane and Saxon is examined with sympathy and insight—without projecting 21st century values onto cultures now alien to us. In the course of this, he shows how historical novels should be written.” (Publishers Weekly) “Cornwell, a master of historical fiction, has written another energetic and involving mix of history and storytelling that will please his many fans. A sweeping story.” (Library Journal) “Cornwell does a masterful job of showing not only how Uhtred fights, but also in how he uses his wits to backstab, threaten, bluff, and maneuver his way into a position where he’s able to fight with the best possible odds.” (Bookreporter.com) “Plunges the reader into the world of the past, with all of its cruelties, nonexistent plumbing and deplorable personal grooming.... Cornwell is a master at writing these historical novels, and *The Pagan Lord* as usual, is no exception.” (The Oklahoman) “Uhtred of Bebbanburg rides into battle once again in the seventh installment of Cornwell’s stellar Saxon Tales series. Cornwell excels at depicting gloriously gory battle scenes as well as the inherent religious, political, and martial conflicts upon which a great nation was born.” (Booklist)

If you loved Bernard Cornwell's other books in this series, you will probably like this one just fine. So why the 3 star rating you ask! If you love his books (as I do) You are almost certainly going to down-vote my review, I just ask you to hear me out before you do. Look, I like these books. They are fun to read. This is a fine, rip-roaring page turner. Uhtred is back with the usual suspects in fine style. Several new or minor characters are introduced or fleshed out. Uhtred fights new battles....against insurmountable odds. He defeats his enemies through an unbelievable amount of guile, intelligence, personality, courage, military strategy, recklessness, psychology, and luck. He is often saved by luck. Often in the nick of time, luck comes to the rescue. Did I mention, Uhtred's uncanny luck? If you want a 5 star review from me you better provide more than a page turner. I

want character development. I want philosophical dilemmas. I want action. I want a good story. I want characters I care about. In short, I want closer to what Bernard Cornwell gave us in his first several books in this series. Uthred is a smart man with an abundance of understanding of both military strategy and psychology. Given the way he out-thinks both his enemies and his allies alike, Uthred must be the smartest man alive in Saxon England around the turn of the millennium. In the early books in this series, Uthred was a complex character torn between his early Saxon roots, his Pagan, Danish upbringing, and the Saxon entanglements he found himself ensnared in as he tried to assert his destiny as lord of Bebbanburg. But as the series has progressed - dare I say aged - it has fallen into (or should I say back on??) the formula of Uthred being treated like garbage by the Saxons (in earlier books because Alfred didn't like his paganism, and more lately because he commits some avoidable and predictable transgression against the church), Uthred then fleeing to some form of penury exile, whereupon he returns - against both his desires and better judgement - to save the Saxons from their own ineptitude. Along the way he fights battles against armies numbering ten times his own, prevailing through his inestimable intellect, his warrior's sixth sense, or the cavalry riding to his defense at the eleventh (and three quarters) hour. Look, these books are enjoyable page turners. Cornwell writes engaging action scenes - no!! He writes freaking AWESOME action scenes. They are AWESOME. They are exciting. They are BRUTAL. BUT!!!! they have become predictable, and have really seemed to have fallen into a rut of retreading the same book with a slightly different supporting cast and a different major battle against which to stage the book. And finally (minor spoilers to follow), something that annoyed me immensely was that he decided to end this book with a cliffhanger. C'mon!!! In all his previous books he had the respect for his readers to write a self contained novel which would bring us back for the love of the story and the love of the characters. Suddenly, it's the season finale of season 7 of the Saxon Tales. What happens to the boy in Lundeen? His mother? What about the twins? Will Uthred find love with the deaf girl, what of the golden one? For that matter will Uthred find anything at all. Who shot JR? I feel like I have to emphasize, I read this book non stop. It IS a page turner. BUT I feel like Bernard Cornwell has given up on these characters. He has found a successful formula and he is milking it. Give Uthred some respect and/or some financial stability. Have him screw it up through some massively stupid, miscalculated (yet somehow noble) action. Have him declared "persona-non-grata" by the Saxons. Have him retreat to the Danes (actually or metaphorically) where he will not only be happier, but accepted for who he is. Have him reject the Danes and ride on his white horse to the rescue of the Saxons who revile him. Have his strategies be repudiated by the Saxons. Have him face the dreaded shield wall along with his closest friends and family. Have

him persevere against unimaginable odds. C'monnnnnnn, again????Please Bernard, stop writing the same book over and over again and give us something to look forward to.

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 "dÃfÂ©jÃfÂ 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 "dÃfÂ©jÃfÂ 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...

This series gets better as it goes. This is historical fiction at it's finest. Interestingly, I think this book may have the least actual history of any of the books so far. Basically, there was a historical event that is known where and when it happened along with some of the players but not much more. Cornwell builds a tapestry of invented actions that lead up to the battle nobody knows much about. That's as much as I'll give away but suffice it to say, as usual, Cornwell is masterful at building the world and characters in this story and telling it in a completely believable way. I enjoyed the story and I have a lot of respect for Cornwell as a writer and storyteller. I highly recommend this book but I suggest you start at the beginning of the series and read from there if you haven't already. This is hours of inexpensive enjoyable entertainment.

Love this series. I am an avid medieval and earlier fan so anything that has historical significance is huge for me. While this installment doesn't follow history as close as previous books, it is still a great read. I am invested Uhtred of Bebbanburg's character and love reading about his newest adventure.

While I know the series will eventually end, I am regretting the time when it happens. Bernard Cornwell's writing is amazing and had me hooked with the first book. Highly recommend this series.

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