



The Leopards of Normandy: Devil: Leopards of Normandy 1

David Churchill

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****From the co-author of the No.1 bestselling Wilbur Smith novel, WAR CRY. ****

In DEVIL, David Churchill writes with the immediacy of Conn Iggulden, the epic ambition of Bernard Cornwell and the plotting of CJ Sansom. The *Leopards of Normandy* trilogy tells the story of William the Conqueror in all its wild, intoxicating, unfailingly dramatic glory.

The fate of England hangs in the balance of a fight between brothers

The noble families of Europe are tearing themselves apart in their lust for power and wealth.

Emma, Queen of England, is in agony over the succession to her husband Canute's throne ... while her brother, the Duke of Normandy's sons battle in the wake of his death.

Robert, the younger son, has been cheated of Normandy's mightiest castle and sets out to take it by force. He emerges from a bloody siege victorious and in love with a beautiful - and pregnant - peasant girl.

Robert's child will be mocked as William the bastard. But we have another name for him
... *Conqueror*.

The first instalment in the *Leopards of Normandy* trilogy paints a world seething with rivalry and intrigue, where assassins are never short of work.

The Leopards of Normandy: Devil: Leopards of Normandy 1 Details

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Lynne says

This book brought alive historical characters I knew nothing about. William the Conqueror has always been a shadowy king, but this series makes this period of history come to life. Looking forward to reading the second book in the series.

HDubois says

The book is about: the history of William the conqueror, this is the first part of a trilogy and covers William's parents and earlier antecessors.

I liked: the historical background (which I scarcely knew), the portrayal of links between the different reigning families, the role of illegitimate children of nobles, the conspiracies between the different noble families all tied to each other, the sudden turns in the story and especially the end.

I didn't like: some characters are a bit obvious (amongst which the heroes Richard and small William).

Liz says

My heart must have broke about 4-5 times during this wonderful book... Bloody hell, I seriously cried... Twice! And I feel like I have so much to say about this book without knowing where to start...

This book is based on historical events of Britain, and is the first book in a planned trilogy. I look forward to reading the next one as William the Bastard (Robert the Duke's illegitimate son) will have some pretty difficult situations to overcome. Some of the characters are based on real life historical people and some of them are fictional. Author makes it easy for the reader to make a difference in between them but providing an overview of both. There is also a guide to the different houses of lords, kings and dukes explaining who is related to who.

The book starts with a prologue around Rollo the Strider. A giant of a Viking who sets this whole book, the history in motion. I don't think I have ever enjoyed a prologue as much as I did starting this book. It was so effective and pulled me in to the whole story, to the whole world yet to evolve on the pages.

The 450+ pages of this book are full of power struggles, personal sacrifices, politics, religion, hypocrisy, but also wit, respect and banter. And love. Love, as we tell ourselves, will conquer all. But will it?

Author uses simple short sentences which make the action scenes and the complicated politics and relationships so much easier to understand and in this case the proof is in the pudding- simple does work. Long, complicated, overly described scenes are not necessary to deliver an impactful book. And this is exactly how I would describe this creation- impactful. This simple structure of sentences helps a lot in keeping the story flowing perfectly and the reader's focus throughout.

The way author describes characters and situations is so wonderfully done, that the rest of the world around

the reader dissolves. It's just the book and those words. Magical. I liked Rollo from the prologues so much so that I was sad I only got to read about his actions in the prologue. Thankfully, Robert, Rollo's descendant, inherited much of his forefather's personality. Robert the Duke was most definitely my favorite character. Headstrong, fair and sadly, ends up in the clutches of religion. Life really isn't easy when you're a powerful man. I can't tell you how many times I yelled at the book, trying to get through to Robert to flip off the Archbishop (Robert's uncle) and go back to Viking ways.

There was so many characters I thought I could take a liking to, only to find out, every single mofo is out for their own benefit and it made me so angry, I wanted to be at the scene and start "Jarl the Viper-ing" people out of equation. Jarl the Viper is one of the fictional characters who is basically, what you'd call in a modern day world, a Hitman. An interesting character who I cannot wait to catch up with in the next installment of this series. But there were also characters whose loyalty saw no bounds. People without whom the kings, dukes and lords could not survive.

If you enjoyed watching Game of Thrones and Vikings, then this book is definitely a must read, and will not let you down. You'll read about battles, wins and losses, horrible characters and death. You'll read about deceit and difficult decisions. It's dripping with hypocrisy and if there's one thing I can't stand, it's hypocrisy, but as we all know, despicable acts make the most interesting reading material!

I received this book via bookbridgr! Thank you!

I wish to congratulate author David Churchill for writing this magnificent book, for writing so brilliantly and for creating those exciting fictional characters to carry real historical events!

Stephen says

interesting read of the first part of a trilogy detailing the dukes of Normandy especially Richard and Robert and how interlinked with English history with Emma of Normandy (Edward the confessor's mother) and all the court politics and how in the latter parts of the book William enters the fray as a child as feel this book is the background for later events as all the major players are introduced in this book. felt however in parts the author had used a lot of licence but the series can only get much better.

Lily says

screams READ IT.

Review from my blog at <https://lilypadblogs.wordpress.com/20...>

Oh wow. Oh wow.

This is an earthy, gritty, brutal piece of historical fiction – and I love it.

Characters – realistic. They are so brilliant in their grey morality, and Churchill shows that you can write women well without them having to be strong. The struggles these characters faced broke my heart – I was hoping that certain conflicts would be resolved and happiness gained but I knew it was unlikely to happen.

Churchill managed to more than tug on the heartstrings; the first time that happened, I knew I'd started something good. These characters are more than just engaging – they are so very human, and the novel is all the more wonderful for it.

I should point out that this novel is not for the faint hearted. Devil is set in a bloody period of history, and so of course there was going to be violence. And we get it in spades. I have to admit, I quite like gritty violence in literature, so this discovery was excellent. Churchill brings a fairly obscure tale behind William the Conqueror to the table, and manages to make it into something compulsively readable – and easy to read, at that. I flew through this; I will definitely be looking out for the sequel (this is a planned trilogy).

Despite being a medieval history student, I know very little about William the Conqueror and his familial history; Devil has made me more inclined to research more about this, and if you're a lover of historical fiction, pick this up. It's great. You'll love it. Now go read it. It comes out two days (26th February) after I post this review. Plenty of time for you to get excited.

Marita says

With the signing of a treaty between Rollo the Viking and Charles, King of France in 911 a large tract of land was handed to the former and his followers subject to various conditions, and thus the founding of the Normans. Rollo's descendants were the Dukes of Normandy, including William the Conqueror. After a prologue to set the scene, we are introduced to Robert the Magnificent (also known as Robert the Devil) who eventually becomes the Duke of Normandy in 1027. Robert was of course the father of William the Conqueror, and his mother was Herleva, a tanner's daughter - hence his other moniker of William the Bastard. This novel focuses on Robert, Herleva and to a lesser extent child William.

The story is action packed as Robert had a busy time defending his territory and title. There are some very nasty characters, in particular the notorious Bellême family. Their abuses made me cringe, BUT they were actual people in history, notorious for cruelty much worse than that meted out in this novel. In addition to the excellent characterisation of the main protagonists, there are some larger than life portrayals of minor characters:

"Both were well past their youthful prime, assuming that either had ever had one. He was unshaven and greasy-haired, with a large boil on his chin from which grew two long, wiry black hairs. She had the pinched features of a woman whose individual discontents had merged to create a single, unbroken air of disapproval and resentment."

And:

"He was a veritable Goliath. His neck was as thick as most men's thighs, and there were prize bulls sold for stud in the cattle markets of Rouen that would envy his barrel chest and the massive slabs of muscle bunched around his shoulders, back and tree-trunk limbs."

In this account, Robert has a loving relationship with Herleva, but as he is Duke and she but a tanner's daughter, the relationship is fraught with problems and opposition.

"Robert arrived back at the ducal palace late that afternoon. He found Herleva in the solar, the private room decorated with beautiful tapestries and intricately patterned rugs where she spent

her days with the other women of the household. She was standing by a window with the shutters wide open, heedless of the cold draught as she looked out, lost in thought. Robert slipped into the chamber as quietly as he could, trying not to disturb her, and stood for a moment by the doorway, just to watch her. He wanted to paint a picture of her in his mind, an image he could keep with him for the rest of his life, whether she was with him or not. He wished his uncle could see her now. Surely he would see that she looked fit to be a duchess."

Good too were the various descriptions. Here is a hunting scene:

"He was too entranced by the sight and sound of the beaters as they floated out into the marshes in small round coracles, smacking their hands against the surface of the water, blowing horns and banging tambours. The racket sent great flocks of ducks, geese and waders into the air, and then the falcons were loosed to dart up into the sky. The hunting birds hovered for a moment as they chose their prey, looking for the smallest and weakest. Then, folding their wings behind them, they plummeted down on to their unsuspecting targets, which struggled for survival in mid-air fights to the death that ended with the prey either somehow managing to escape the falcon's grasp, or, much more likely, tumbling down to the marsh, to be retrieved by the waiting dogs."

And there is a fair bit of wry humour:

"'You're absolutely right about that. But we will end up a lot further from Winchester. That will mean it will take us longer to get there, so . . .' Rabel left the sentence hanging, hoping that the king would pick it up.
And Edward duly obliged. 'So our enemies would have more time to organise and oppose us, making the danger even greater.'
'Your Majesty, you are a born general. You spot strategic strengths and weaknesses in an instant.'"

I thoroughly enjoyed the fiction spun around the facts of this part of history, and I look forward to further novels in this series. Having read several books about William the Conqueror, it was interesting to read more about Robert and other family members.

Vicky says

I am very happy with this trilogy. Here is one of the best historical fiction I came across for a long time. The language is flowing, the characters are well researched and one of the most important chapters of the European history is colourfully described.
Can not wait for the next 2 books.

Lucy says

I come across this book by accident, I enjoy books about history, factual and historical fiction, I had returned some books to my local library and browsed through the historical reading section, "Devil" caught my eye,

the colour of the cover and after reading the back it grabbed my attention. I have always been interested in the Battle of Hastings and have visited the Battle site.

What I like about this book (and what the series will be about) is that it goes back to the history of Williams Father and Mother, how they meet, the politics and social status against their relationship, the rivalry between Will aims father and his brothers and why he would one day look to be a King,

The story also leaps across the channel to England and what is going on.
It has given me a bigger picture about the conquest and people in it.

The writing is at a nice pace, good character detail, bloody battle scenes (as medieval battles were brutal)

I also loaned out the second book in the series and will be reading very soon and on to the third part.

Pierre says

Very entertaining with the odd excellent dramatic moment, and plenty of historical twists and turns that can only have come from the annals. The advantage of focusing on this period of medieval history is that there is a fair amount of narrative out there with which to deal, but a lack of detail that gives the author free reign to create and play around. Churchill does this well, creating convincing (if sometimes slightly stereotypical) portrayals of real and imagined people. The book is not faultless; the world within which these characters operate is only rarely hinted at, and we don't get an impression of a full world: the narrative rather sits on top of and distinct from feudal Normandy, and with only minor changes could really take place at any period of time. Nonetheless, this is a fun and fast book that you can power through, and that will not only entertain but also elucidate and (to an extent) educate.

Marcus Pailing says

This is not in the first rank of historical novels, nor really in the second, although it would be overly harsh to give it only one star.

The underlying history is perfectly OK, but there are so many things that irked me.

First, the appalling dialogue, which was very stilted and not very believable. Medieval men and women were not as childlike or naive as this book would have us believe. It's the dialogue and the poor characterisation conveyed by it that makes one feel no real empathy whatsoever with any of the characters.

Second, the complete lack of subtlety in the cardboard cut-out, one-dimensional characterisation. Basically, it's a 'black hat for baddy, white hat for goody' book, where you can tell who the villains are, and how villainous they are meant to be, by their behaviour - basically, the villains are portrayed as being as misogynistic and coarse as the author can make them, and betray their villainy by the coarseness of their language. If the dialogue were better this might not be so bad, but (for example) the sexual perversities of the Belleme family - the main thing that tells us that they are 'villains' - read as though they were constructed by

a teenager with rape fantasies. It's neither clever nor well-enough written to pass muster.

And when will authors understand, as the most basic of research, or even reading of other books will tell them, that medieval kings were NOT REFERRED TO AS "YOUR MAJESTY"? It's basic stuff, and extremely irritating. Seriously, it happens time and time again and is just plain WRONG! Aarrgghh!

I just don't understand why there are so many 4 and 5 star reviews of this book. Sure, it was readable, and I might even read the next in the series; but it is most deceiving for the blurb to suggest that this is at all to be compared with Cornwell, Iggulden or Sansom.

Liz C says

Good

I have read this before but wanted to read the full series in one go. Good action packed read. Recommend it to anyone.

Graham Smith says

I have just finished this book and found it to be a wonderful read. History was never my favourite subject at school, but Churchill's skill as a writer really brings alive the time period as his narrative weaves fact and fiction together like an early Bayeaux tapestry.

Packed with believable characters, exquisite plotting and a real sense of place, Leopards of Normandy: Devil is a fantastic novel. I can't wait for the next one in the series.

M.J. Webb says

Not a bad novel but for some reason I did not engage with the characters and it was too easy to put down. I will read the sequel but I'm not rushing headlong into it as I would have liked. Time for a break from the genre I think for I believe I may have been spoiled of late and my expectations have risen as a result. A Lee Child novel is calling my name.

Clemens Schoonderwoert says

This marvellous book by David Churchill, which is a pseudonym for his real name is David Thomas, is the 1st volume of "The Leopards of Normandy" trilogy.

As a beginning this book is absolutely outstanding, for the author has certainly produced a very lifelike portrayal of William of Normandy, "the Bastard" or "the Conqueror", and his entire family, and especially in this 1st instalment a wonderful portrayal of his father Duke Robert, "the Magnificent", but also known by his

enemies as "the Devil".

This great 1st volume contains the period between AD 1026 until AD 1037.

Concerning the storytelling, it is very immaculate and thrilling, for it takes you as a reader right to the heart of the lives of the Dukes of Normandy.

The tale itself is mainly about William's father Duke Robert of Normandy, "the Magnificent" or "the Devil", who after having been cheated of Normandy's mightiest castle sets out to take it by force.

During these actions Duke Robert will meet Herleva, daughter of Fulda the Tanner, and after having fallen in love with her, they will soon become the parents of the child who will be called William.

This book is a most remarkable book, for it's full with wonderful storytelling and historical details, thus making this tale for me "A Stunning Opener"!

Alex Dovey says

Loved it, a really good read. A good mix of battles, politics and strategies from a part of medieval history I didn't know much about.
