



The Last Kingdom

Bernard Cornwell

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This is the story of the making of England in the 9th and 10th centuries, the years in which King Alfred the Great, his son and grandson defeated the Danish Vikings who had invaded and occupied three of England's four kingdoms.

The story is seen through the eyes of Uhtred, a dispossessed nobleman, who is captured as a child by the Danes and then raised by them so that, by the time the Northmen begin their assault on Wessex (Alfred's kingdom and the last territory in English hands) Uhtred almost thinks of himself as a Dane. He certainly has no love for Alfred, whom he considers a pious weakling and no match for Viking savagery, yet when Alfred unexpectedly defeats the Danes and the Danes themselves turn on Uhtred, he is finally forced to choose sides. By now he is a young man, in love, trained to fight and ready to take his place in the dreaded shield wall. Above all, though, he wishes to recover his father's land, the enchanting fort of Bebbanburg by the wild northern sea.

This thrilling adventure—based on existing records of Bernard Cornwell's ancestors—depicts a time when law and order were ripped violently apart by a pagan assault on Christian England, an assault that came very close to destroying England.

The Last Kingdom Details

Date : Published January 3rd 2006 by Harper Paperbacks (first published 2004)

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Author : Bernard Cornwell

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From Reader Review The Last Kingdom for online ebook

Mary ~Ravager of Tomes~ says

Actual Rating: 4.5 Stars

THIS WAS. THE MOST FUN. VERY BLOODY. LOTS OF BATTLE. WOULD RECOMMEND.

Willow says

I had no idea what I was getting into when I read this book. I'd never read Bernard Cornwell. All I knew was that it was a book about Vikings.

Anyway, I absolutely loved it! And I became a permanent Bernard Cornwell fan. I think Uhtred is one of my favorite characters of all time. Yes he's mean, arrogant, and a bit of an antihero, but he's a full blooded character, and I felt like I really got to know him.

This book goes through Uhtred's childhood as a Saxon raised by the Danes, and after reading his childhood, I can understand his blood thirsty nature and his conflicted loyalties. I'm always a bit amused by Uhtred's grumpy disposition.

Cornwell has a way of bringing the Dark Ages alive with gritty realism, and he makes the reader feel like they are right on the battlefield, right there with Uhtred. In fact, I've actually become quite spoiled by Cornwell, because most historical fiction doesn't draw me in this well.

This truly is one of my favorite series of all time!

Nicole says

This book was good but I had some problems with it, nothing major or about the story but rather the way it's told. Review to come. Maybe.

Jason Koivu says

The Last Kingdom is the beginning of Bernard Cornwell's take on the Alfred the Great story. The series starts in the year 866 and follows the son of a lesser Saxon lord, whose father is killed. The boy loses his inheritance and is raised by the Danes, who are threatening to overrun all of what will one day be called England.

The boy, who comes to be called Uhtred, prefers the ways of the Danes, especially their freedom and their gods, over the Saxons and their pious Christian priests. The book lingers about while Uhtred is 11 or 12, then

speeds up through his teens until he is a young man making important choices that would change battles, battles that could mean the boom or bust of England.

Readers come to Cornwell for his trademark action sequences and his attention to historical detail, and *The Last Kingdoms* provides plenty of both. Yes indeedy, there are battles aplenty here. Cornwell's research and the amount of period detail he deftly slides into his work really helps the reader get stuck in, to feel as if they inhabit the time and place. The sights, sounds and stinks of the "Dark Ages" get all up in your face without overwhelming you. And never does it overshadow the importance of his characters. Cornwell fries up a mean anti-hero. Very salty stuff indeed!

However, there were times where I felt that the way the story was told was too much like reading history. There are quite a few real life people-as-characters in this one. These are folks who are remembered even to this day for their deeds, misdeeds and colorful natures. Their larger-than-life histories read like legends and that tended to make *The Last Kingdom* read like a history book.

Cornwell is also inventing the myth of his main character in these pages and occasionally he relies on the old "tell" instead of "show" technique in order to build up this boy into the heroic man he's to become. (SPOILER-ISH STUFF A'COMING!) Cornwell has written such a series before. He knows basically what's in store for his main character before he's even started book two of what so far is a seven book series. He's going to throw a ton of shit at him, but Uhtred will persevere. There's tons of series out there in which the protagonist doesn't die, but they still manage to hold up the tension. This one kept reminding me that Uhtred would live a long life and that's something a writer should avoid. Let me get lost in the story and at least give me a chance to maybe forget that, no matter the danger, Uhtred will survive.

Frances says

An outstanding novel set in England during medieval times in the year 866 AD. The author introduces real historical figures; Guthrum the Unlucky, Ubba the Horrible, and Ivar the Boneless, all fearless Dane warriors' intent on taking over the English kingdoms. They arrive in their magnificent ships outfitted with rich colorful shields, finely carved prows, sterns with ominous dragons and serpents, and mastheads painted with bold eagles. A frightening sight for many townspeople who flee their homes trying to avoid the slaughter they knew would come. The story centers on an English lad, Uhtred of Bebbanburg, a fervent believer in the spinners of fate. As he follows the destiny he feels he cannot avoid, Uhtred is eventually caught between his loyalty to his country and unexpected love for the Danes. An incredible read!

Will M. says

*Update 10/11/15

There are two episodes out already for *The Last Kingdom*! I had no idea they were adapting this whole series into a TV series. Will have to read the next novels really soon.

I've been a huge history fan ever since I was young. Especially Greek, Roman, and Egyptian history. I've never really read or watched other histories like UK, American, Russian, Asian, etc. Lately though, I've been

wanting to read more of UK and Russian, so I was pretty excited to read this.

This was a fantastic novel about the life of Uthred. That kid's freakin' amazing. He started out strong, as a child, and continued to develop into a powerful man. Despite being held captive, he found a way to make the situation in favor of him. Truly a shrewd man. He was once a Saxon, but because he was held captive of a Danish man, he was forced to convert. Despite learning to love his Danish father, in his heart, he will forever be a Saxon. This novel also tackled the topic regarding Christianity and Norse Mythology[Paganism]. Reading about Thor and Odin was really fun.

This was my very first *legit* historical fiction novel. I don't think I want to consider Dan Brown's novels as Hist-Fic, cause it was more of Crime-Thriller. So that being said, I was excited yet I didn't know what to expect. What I got was an amazing novel that truly engulfed me to a beautiful world.

While reading this, I felt like I was reading an epic-fantasy novel. I was fully engrossed and I loved the main character. I couldn't think of any dull moments, because this novel was really great. It was so good that it even felt like a *short read*, despite the length of the novel.

At first I rated this 4 stars, but after a few days of contemplating, I decided to change my rating, and give this book the very deserving 5. It would be a crime not to do so. This novel was vivid. Everything was described to near perfection. This would be the book to read if you want to be fully engrossed, and feel like you're actually the main character. It felt like I was Uthred, and everything that happened to him happened to me.

I also liked the setting very much. Despite the awesome countries mentioned, I also really liked the medieval setting of this novel. I'm a huge fan of medieval history, more so of the fictional ones. I'm now planning to read more Britain related history, and historical fiction novels. British history is truly entertaining.

I'll surely be checking the next few books of the series, as I heard from Markus [the one who recommended this to me, thanks dude] that the second book is the best of the bunch [as of now]. I'll surely have to read and see for myself. Time to be engrossed in yet another seemingly amazing novel. This is a must read novel, and it looks like a much read series. Bernard Cornwell might be added to my favorite authors, as long as his other books are just as good, or even better.

Bookdragon Sean says

The Last Kingdom, by Bernard Cornwell, is a triumph of a novel; it is historical fiction at its finest. Uhtred's story is as fantastic as it is gripping, and most importantly it feels realistic. It's like I've read a chapter of a man's life that could have existed, that could have been a part of history. His character is just that well written.

The book begins with an aged Uhtred narrating his life to the reader. He is full of a life's wisdom and a warrior's experience as he tells the adventures of his youth. He looks back at the decisions he made with equal measures of regret and joy at his foolhardiness. This is where the author triumphs most: he tells the reader where his protagonist is going to end up, at the end of his life, and urges them to discover how he got there.

But I am Uhtred, son of Uhtred, and this is the tale of a bloodfeud. It is a tale of how I will take from my enemy what the law says is mine. And it is the tale of a woman and of her father, a king.

Uhtred is the second son of Earl Uhtred. Consequently, as second in line, his farther wanted him to be a priest, which is a life Uhtred would never choose for himself. After the death of his brother, his farther names him is heir and expects him to witness battle, which the invading Danish fleet provide. His farther is killed in the battle and Uhtred captured by a Danish warrior called Ragnar. It sounds all doom and gloom, except Ragnar is what Uhtred wanted his father to be. He is a fearless warrior without religious restraints. Furthermore, and more importantly, he shows Uhtred warmth. Something his farther withheld. It is no surprise that his would be captor becomes something of a role model to the growing warrior that is Uhtred.

"And that is how I met Ragor, Ragnar the Fearless, my brother's killer and the man whose head was supposed to grace a pole on Bebbanburg's ramparts, Earl Ragnar."

This leaves our protagonist in an odd situation. He is an Englishman, but is living as a Dane. So where do his loyalties lie? These questions do not occur to Uhtred till he is a man grown and spent his youth as a Danish warrior. He worships Thor and Odin and marvels at the Danish pride that is their magnificent ships. The inner conflict that builds is tremendous. We know where his path will eventually take him, and what side of the bloody shield wall he will belong on, but are clueless to how he will actually get there.

Suffice to say, I liked this book a lot. Uhtred is a terrific protagonist. This series, however, is not just Uhtred's tale. It is the tale of how Alfred the Great conquered the Danish invaders and how Christianity further purged pagan beliefs; it is the tale of how Uhtred, a very believable fictional warrior, helped Alfred eventually be considered great. **At least, that is the ending we know will happen and the ending we can't wait to see happen.**

The Saxon Stories

1. *The Last Kingdom*- A fine five stars
2. *The Pale Horsman*- A brilliant five stars
3. *Lords of the North*- A vengeful four stars
4. *Sword Song*- A familiar four stars
5. *The Burning Land*- A loyal five stars
6. *Death of Kings* A mighty five stars

He was my king and all that I have I owe to him. The food that I eat, the hall where I live and the swords of my men, all came from, my king, who hated me.....

I do love this series. What are your thoughts on the new television adaption?

Cait • A Page with a View says

I've been staring at this book on my shelf for several years and finally just picked it up after liking the show on Netflix. I reallllly wish I would've read it sooner! The writing totally pulled me in and I read the whole thing in one sitting.

Uhtred is a Northumbrian boy who's taken and raised by Danes, so he's a bit confused over his loyalties and identity. The story was told from the POV of his older self looking back on his life, but somehow managed to sound like both an older man and young boy at the same time. Uhtred's personality really came through in the narration and I absolutely loved his character! His frank views were hilarious.

And I truly have no idea why I'm so obsessed with this time period because it's not like it would've been particularly fun for me to live back then as a woman (even though I'd like to pretend everyone was a shieldmaiden). The women in this book are mostly there to get raped, be sold as wives, bear a lot of sons before the age of 17 (or die trying), and/or do endless manual labor:

Every woman had to spin and weave. Ragnar reckoned it took five women or a dozen girls a whole winter to spin enough thread to make a new sail for a boat, and boats were always needing new sails, and so the women worked every hour the gods sent. They also cooked, boiled walnut shells to dye the new thread, picked mushrooms, tanned the skins of the slaughtered cattle, collected the moss we used for wiping our arses, rolled beeswax into candles, malted the barley, and placated the gods."

This book was so much more than what I was expecting, though. Yes, it's a lot of Viking raids, death, and battle... but the complex characters felt refreshingly authentic. I loved how the book didn't romanticize the time period, yet didn't dwell on any brutality for shock value either. It felt more like an honest account of a character's life then.

If you're into Vikings, medieval Britain, or historical fiction (or just liked the Netflix show) then I definitely recommend this!!

Lucia says

„Wyrd bið ful āræd.“ – „Fate is inexorable.“

I had a super long review written for this series but I deleted the document accidentally so let me share with you at least some major points to explain my reasons for loving this series so much:

* Astonishing storytelling skills. Bernard Cornwell brought 9th and 10th century England alive for me.

* Unforgettable narrator. Uhtred of Bebbanburg is unapologetic and ruthless yet lovable and admiration worthy character with brilliant military strategic mind. He is a true hero!

* Complex and fascinating side characters that you will love to come back to.

* Constant philosophical battle between paganism and Christianity that depicts given period precisely.

* Well thought-out storyline and twists.

* War and fight scenes are chillingly realistic. I really felt like I was there with Uhtred, fighting every new enemy or being part of countless shield wars.

All in all, The Warrior Chronicles/Saxon Stories series (all 10 available books) is spectacular story with spectacular writing. It is one of the best historical fiction stories I have ever read and it is the perfect example of how to write engaging historical fiction series that never get boring or predictable!

Moreover, I loved author's note at the end of every book where author explained which parts were based on historical facts and which parts of his novel he made up.

RECOMMENDED!

Melissa ♥ Dog/Wolf Lover ♥ Martin says

\$1.99 on Kindle today 6-10-17

BLOG: Melissa Martin's Reading List

EVERYONE SHOULD COME RIGHT ALONG AND READ THIS BOOK/SERIES!

ME THINKS THERE'S GOING TO BE SPOILERS!

♣ ♣ ♣ ♣ ♣

I am Uhtred, son of Uhtred, and this is the tale of a blood feud. It is a tale of how I will take from my enemy what the law says is mine. And it is the tale of a woman and her father, a king.

He was my king and all that I have I owe to him. The food that I eat, the hall where I live, and the swords of my men, all come from Alfred, my king, who hated me.

↓

This story begins long before I met Alfred. It begins when I was ten years old and first saw the Danes.

♣♣♣♣♣

I thought this book was magnificent! I heard about it from some friends on GR awhile back and have the series listed in my notebook to read, but it was put by the wayside like so many other books. Then one night I got to see an episode of The Last Kingdom on BBC with my best friend while we were on the phone and he said the books are better. I'm like, "What Books?" and he proceeded to tell me about the books I already heard about and have listed in my handy notebook. I promptly put the first book on my Amazon Christmas Wish List and my friend promptly bought it, and here we are, a book that I have missed out on for so long. I loved it! I loved it! I loved it! I have the second book on the way and hope to get the rest SOON!

I find some books very hard to read or understand and get lost in translation. I was afraid that would happen with this book, but that is not the case. No, I can't remember all of the names or how to spell them, but I do that in any book... what I mean is... I wasn't lost... I understand all the author was trying to convey! I think this author is brilliant in the way he writes a story. I loved learning some of the history, even though some of the characters are fictional, it's still a wonderfully told story! This only makes me want to read more into the history that is factual in the book.. anyhoo.. moving on.

When Uhtred was ten-years-old, the Danes came and attacked England. Uhtred and his family had a fortress in Begganburg. The Danes took some places around Uhtred's home. Then some peeps and Uhtred's father all got together to duke it out with the Danes at a place called Eoferwic and things didn't go so good for the Saxons. Uhtred lost his father that day and was taken by the Danes, Uhtred was made a son of Ragnar the Fearless for his heroic effort in trying to attack Ragnar.

You have to love that, "NOW YOUR MY SON AND GET THE HELL OFF MY HORSE!" ↑

Uhtred grew to love Ragnar because he was kind to him, taught him things, was proud of him when he did great things. He was so unlike Uhtred's real father who seemed to be a cranky, non-caring father.

♣♣♣♣♣

I liked Ragnar. I liked him so much more than I had liked my father. I should, by rights, be dead, yet Ragnar had saved me and Ragnar spoiled me and he treated me like a son, and he called me a Dane.

♣♣♣♣♣

Uhtred grew up learning how to fight and he was so smart, this boy was so very smart and he was even smarter as he grew. He seemed to know what to do and say from a small child.

There is a female character in the book I loved, her name is Brida. She wasn't a Dane either, but she lived with them and grew up with Uhtred. They were best friends, warriors, lovers. She is fierce in the book and I like her!

I have to mention that Uhtred gets his own sword made and names her Serpent-Breath. He says in the book that he still has her and this is him telling this as an older man. Uhtred also helped make his own saxe which he called Wasp-Sting because she was short :) What can I say, I thought that was cool!

The author writes such beautiful pieces in the book, not just blood and guts and this and that, here is an excerpt of some of the way he describes things.

♣ ♣ ♣ ♣ ♣

Ships on the winter Temes. Ships sliding past brittle reeds and leafless willows and bare alders. Wet oar blades shining in the pale sunlight.

♣ ♣ ♣ ♣ ♣

I don't know, maybe it's just me, but I loved how he wrote things like that, the words seemed to flow like the water.

There were a lot of things happen in just this first book. Some really sad things, some good things. I can only image what happens in the other books. At one point Uhtred fights for Alfred, he gets married, has a son. And carries on trying to get back to his home and take over his rightful place.

Meanwhile, he takes a bath.. sorry.. I couldn't help myself.

I will say it again, I loved this book. It kept my interest from the very beginning and I did not find one point that was boring, it did not drag at any point. Kudos to Bernard Cornwell for making such a wonderful series. On that note, I will leave you with a large excerpt and parting scenes....

♣ ♣ ♣ ♣ ♣

Mildreth was well. She was safe. She had not been raped. She wept when she saw me, and I took her in my arms and wondered that I was so fond of her, and she said she had thought I was dead and told me she had prayed to her god to spare me, and she took me to the room where our son was in his swaddling clothes and, for the first time, I looked at Uhtred, son of Uhtred, and I prayed that one day he would be the lawful and sole owner of lands that are carefully marked by stones and by dykes, by oaks and by ash, by marsh and by sea. I am still the owner of those lands that were purchased with our family's blood, and I will take those lands back from the man who stole them from me and I will give them to my sons. For I am Uhtred, Earl Uhtred, Uhtred of Bebbanburg, and destiny is everything.

♣ ♣ ♣ ♣ ♣

Hana Zakova says

Asolutely loved it. I went to the library and randomly picked a book. It was The Pale Horseman, and I realized it was second part of Ulthred's life, so I went back and got this first part out. I love England and so I loved those 3 books. (now waiting for another to come out. There must be 4 book.) It's the same feeling like waiting for Harry Potter books to come out.

Athena Shadbeare says

I am Uhtred, Earl Uhtred, Uhtred of Bebbanburg, and destiny is everything.

Love, all I feel is love for this book. It's like an epic love story but for a man who fought for what was rightfully his.

Definition

Love, noun. Pronunciation: luhv

A feeling of strong attachment induced by that which delights or commands admiration; preëminent kindness or devotion to another; affection; tenderness; as,

the love of brothers and sisters.

Of all the dearest bonds we prove

Thou countest sons' and mothers' love

Most sacred, most Thine own.

Affection; kind feeling; friendship; strong liking or desire; fondness; good will; - opposed to hate; often with of and an object.

Love, and health to all.

Smit with the love of sacred song.

The love of science faintly warmed his breast.

[^]All that and more is what I feel about this book. I don't know where I have been that I haven't read this sooner. This blows all the books that I've read recently out of the water. I'm actually thinking of going through and really thinking about the choices and ratings I've made on previous books because of this book.

I have a real love for the characters, the world, the dialogue, the timeline and of the religion and mythology of these two worlds. These two kinds of people clash to bring bloodshed, war and turning the world upside down. I mean, I'm still speechless, I still don't know what to say about what I went through reading this book. It made me hate the Christians, and then I later disliked the Danes. I was suppose to be on one side, but yet I

couldn't see myself siding with what I know was right? I couldn't decide if Uhtred should go back to the world he came from and if it was even a good idea. I didn't want a people to influence this character because of their beliefs but for him to choose what he knew was right in his heart. In the end I feel in love with Uhtred and his fight to survive and his cleverness and his will to get what he knew he deserved.

War is fought in mystery. The truth can take days to travel, and ahead of truth flies rumors, and it is ever hard to know what is really happening, and the art of it is to pluck the clean bone of fact from the rotting flesh of fear and lies.

This is a tale that begins in 866 with Uhtred, who was the son of Uhtred and only 10 years old when he confronted and captured by Ragnar the Fearless. Ragnar takes Uhtred into the lives of the Danes. Now, he's not Ragnar Lothbrok but he's just as amazing and Ragnar Lothbrok's sons make appearance. I don't want to say anymore but there is family and unity, blood and gore, fighting and war and Uhtred is learning how to be the best he can and still take back what is rightfully his.

Blood on the grass now, so much blood that the ground was slick, and there were bodies that had to be stepped over as our shield wall thrust forward, leaving Brida and me behind, and I saw her hands were red because blood seeped down the long ash shaft of her spear. She licked the blood and gave me a sly smile.

Ships on the winter Temes. Ships sliding past brittle reeds and leafless willows and bare alders. Wet oar blades shining in the pale sunlight. The prows of our ships bore their beasts to quell the spirits of the land we invaded, and it was good land and rich fields, though all were deserted.

I have deep love for this book.
I have deep love for this story.
I have deep love for the writing.
I have deep love for the feels and the air it brings.
I have deep love for the way this book takes you traveling to a world that is sometimes forgotten.

She was heavy, Serpent-Breath, too heavy for a thirteen-year-old, but I would grow into her. Her point tapered more than Ragnar liked, but that made her well balanced for it meant there was not much weight at the blade's out end. And there is magic in Serpent-Breath. Ealdwulf has his own spells that he would not tell me, the spells of the smith, and Brida took the blade into the woods for a whole night and never told me what she did with it, and those were the spells of a woman, and when we made the sacrifice of the pit slaughter, and killed a man, a horse, a ram, a bull, and a drake, I asked Ragnar to use Serpent-Breath on the doomed man so that Odin would know she existed and would look well on her. Those are the spells of a pagan and a warrior.

This book=Love

StoryTellerShannon says

This is a first person narration of a child who grows up as a Briton/Saxon but is captured by Vikings, who are more accurately called Danes. He comes to love his Danish father and begins to appreciate their customs and battle lore, as well as becoming battle trained himself.

At the same time, though, his roots are with Briton, and, in the end, he joins with the future Alfred the Great, showing him how to defeat the enemy.

STRENGTHS:

- (1) Vivid details of shield walls. Think gritty and bloody.;
- (2) We get to meet Alfred the Great and his priestly advisors and witness the extreme religious views of his people;
- (3) Danish customs and fighting techniques;
- (4) Interesting interaction of the Danish tribal groups;
- (5) First person narration has a good flow, making it a quick read.
- (6) A relative good scope on the inter-kingdom struggles between the Kingdoms of Briton and their inability to work together.

WEAKNESSES

- (1) First person if you don't like it; and
- (2) A bit too gritty for the faint of heart.

ENJOY!!!!!!!

Some favorite excerpts below and then the grade breakdown.

“Pride makes a man, it drives him, it is the shield wall around his reputation... Men die, they said, but reputation does not die.”

That produced silence, except for the mutter of the interpreter talking to Ivar. Then Ubba awoke, looked startled for a few heartbeats as if he was not sure where he was, then he stared at me and I felt my flesh shrivel for I had never seen a face so malevolent. He had dark eyes and they were full of hate and I wanted the earth to swallow me.

He stared balefully across the encampment where men were drinking. “Do you know who wins battles, boy?”

“We do, Father.”

“The side that is least drunk,” he said, and then, after a pause, “but it helps to be drunk.”

“Why?”

“Because a shield wall is an awful place.”

You can hear a shield wall being made. The best shields are made of lime, or else of willow, and the wood knocks together as men overlap the shields. Left side of the shield in front of your neighbor’s right side, that way the enemy, most of whom are right-handed, must try to thrust through two layers of wood.

I lunged Wasp-Sting forward, and the Dane ran onto her point. I felt the impact run up my arm as her tip punctured his belly muscles, and I was already twisting her, ripping her up and free, sawing through leather, skin, muscle, and guts, and his blood was warm on my cold hand, and he screamed, ale breath in my face, and I punched him down with the shield’s heavy boss, stamped on his groin, killed him with Wasp-Sting’s tip in his throat.

Beware the man who loves battle. Ravn had told me that only one man in three or perhaps one man in four is a real warrior and the rest are reluctant fighters, but I was to learn that only one man in twenty is a lover of battle. Such men were the most dangerous, the most skillful, the ones who reaped the souls, and the ones to fear. I was such a one.

STORY/PLOTTING: B plus to A minus; CHARACTERS/DIALOGUE: A minus to A; BATTLE SCENES: A minus; EVOKING THE ERA: A minus; OVERALL GRADE: A minus; WHEN READ: 2010 (read thrice; revised review February 2013)

Markus says

“My name is Uhtred. I am the son of Uhtred, who was the son of Uhtred and his father was also called Uhtred. My father’s clerk, a priest called Beocca, spelt it Utred. I do not know if that was how my father would have written it, for he could neither read nor write, but I can do both and sometimes I take the old parchments from their wooden chest and I see the name spelled Uhtred or Utred or Ughtred or Ootred, and I look at the deeds which say that Uhtred, son of Uhtred, is the lawful and sole owner of the lands that are carefully marked by stones and by dykes, by oaks and by ash, by marsh and by sea, and I dream of those lands, wave-beaten and wild beneath the wind driven sky. I dream, and know that one day I will take back the land from those who stole it from me.”

I felt like I needed to write a proper review for this book, if for no other reason than to tell every single soul that could possibly read the words I'm writing that this is the *absodamnlutely* best series ever written within the genre of historical fiction. If you're looking to start reading historical fiction and have little experience with the genre, read this. If you're a longtime fan of medieval history and vikings and anything even slightly similar, read this. If you're intending to only ever read one historical fiction series, pick this one!

Northumbria. 866 AD. Osbert, second in line to the castle of Bebbanburg, is ten years old. For the first time since the infamous sack of Lindisfarne and the start of the Viking era, the barbarian Danes return to England to pillage and plunder to the full satisfaction of their greed. Osbert's elder brother is among the first to fall to the swords of the wicked pagans. And because of tradition set in stone among the great lords of Bebbanburg, Osbert must now give up his name for that of his dead brother. From this day, he is known as Uhtred Uhtredsson. Uhtred of Bebbanburg.

"There's war between the gods, Uhtred, war between the Christian god and our gods, and when there is war in Asgard the gods make us fight for them on earth."

The Northumbrian army marches to take back the captured city of Eoferwic, resulting in a catastrophic defeat. The lord of Bebbanburg is slain in combat, and young Uhtred is captured by the Danes. He lives with the dangerous raiders from the north for years, and grows into adolescence under the watchful eye of Ragnar the Fearless. Thus begins a tale of the Saxon who becomes a Viking. Of the pagan who becomes a champion of Christendom. Of a man whose loyalties are forever torn. Of a man whose name is whispered in the ears of kings, is feared by warriors from all sides of the great war, and terrifies pious priests into making the sign of the Cross. Thus begins the tale of Uhtred.

"Pride makes a man, it drives him, it is the shield wall around his reputation... Men die, they said, but reputation does not die."

Let's settle one thing here: Uhtred of Bebbanburg is the best protagonist I've ever encountered in fictional literature. All the amazing protagonists in the genres of fantasy and science fiction can go hide in a corner when this guy is around. His fierceness in both battle, love and faith has no match anywhere else, and his twin allegiances and friends on both sides of the main conflict turn him into a remarkably interesting person who is constantly doubting his own loyalty and identity.

That praise should say a whole lot about Cornwell's skills at characterisation, especially considering that Uhtred is not even my favourite character in this series. But there are tons of great characters hidden in every chapter of the book. From ruthless and bloodthirsty Norse warriors, to Saxon leaders with their ambitions exceeded only by their piety. From pagan witches to scheming priests. And from the lowliest of slaves on the Viking ships, to kings and princesses fighting for power. All of those are to be found on the pages of *The Saxon Stories*, alongside so many more.

But this series is also so much more than the tale of Uhtred. It is the story of cultures and faiths clashing violently. Of the mythology and origins of one of the most powerful nations in history. Of how England, a name not yet widely known, was united under one great kingdom.

Cornwell's eloquent writing style, the dramatic first-person narrative, the magnificent early medieval setting, the most interesting and conflicted main character I have ever read about and historical realism gracefully and skillfully combined with masterly storytelling ; all of it adds up to a truly fascinating story of war, love and death in Anglo-Saxon England.

I'm going to say it one more time: this is my favourite series. Do yourself a favour and read it!

"Wyrd bith ful araed. Fate is inexorable."

h. says

A Review That Has Very Little to Do with This Book:

Sometimes you need a lot of book. You know what I mean.

Those Fridays you come home, lie down on the couch, and resolve not to come back until Sunday afternoon. You have vetoed faces and the spoken word. The phone will remain unplugged except for the ordering of something greasy.

On these Fridays you have two options: dissolve into a self-pitying, gelatinous blob or turn to a lot of book.

You are not without survival skills. You put stock in the usefulness of books. They've gotten you through weekends when you waited for the phone to ring, times when your flight's been cancelled, road trips with the family.

So, you know to turn to a lot of book.

What you don't need is Joyce stinking up the joint.

What you need on this weekend is something with a clean plot, a protagonist that will win, and somewhere to go far, far from here. You need good historical fiction.

Miniver might push Ivanhoe, but let's face it, such nobility will exhaust you. This weekend may I suggest the sword's song, and the whale's way, and the red dawn?

What you need is a series --- something that weighs in at 2,000 plus pages so there's no danger of running out.

Go ahead. Follow the nose of the masses. This series is a bestseller: you can count on its opiate properties.

It'll get you through til dawn. And Bloody Sunday.
