



The Bones of Avalon

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Religious strife, Glastonbury legends, the bones of King Arthur and the curse of the Tudors...can Renaissance man John Dee help the young Queen Elizabeth to avoid it? It is 1560. Elizabeth Tudor has been on the throne for a year, the date for her coronation having been chosen by her astrologer, Dr John Dee, at just 32 already famous throughout Europe as a mathematician and expert in the hidden arts. But neither Elizabeth nor Dee feel entirely secure. Both have known imprisonment for political reasons. The Queen is unpopular with both Roman Catholics and the new breed of puritanical protestant. Dee is regarded with suspicion in an era where the dividing line between science and sorcery is, at best, indistinct. And the assignment he's been given by the Queen's chief minister, Sir William Cecil, will blur it further: ride to the ruins of Glastonbury Abbey, bring back King Arthur's bones. The mission takes the mild, bookish Dee to the tangled roots of English magic and the Arthurian legacy so important to the Tudors. Into unexpected violence, spiritual darkness, the breathless stirring of first love...and the cold heart of a complex plot against Elizabeth. With him is his friend and former student, Robert Dudley, a risk-taker, a wild card...and possibly the Queen's secret lover. Dee is Elizabethan England's forgotten hero. A man for whom this world - even the rapidly-expanding world of the Renaissance - was never enough.

The Bones of Avalon Details

Date : Published 2010 by Corvus

ISBN : 9781848872707

Author : Phil Rickman

Format : Hardcover 445 pages

Genre : Historical, Historical Fiction, Mystery, Fiction, Crime, Fantasy, English History, Tudor Period, Historical Mystery, Thriller, Mystery Thriller, Mythology, Arthurian

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From Reader Review *The Bones of Avalon* for online ebook

Kara says

Imagine a season of *True Detective* set in early Elizabethan England.

It's well written and well researched and an excellent presentation of a slice of life, but good lord it leaves you with little faith in humanity.

I liked how it showed where everyone was coming from having just survived Henry VIII and Mary I (going so far as to hint the whole country may have had PTSD after those two) and how it showed the people known for being well established members of Elizabethan life – Dr. Dee, Walsingham, etc. – just starting their careers in 1560, but it is just sooooo dark and depressing I won't be continuing with the series.

Lisa says

Dr John Dee is astrologer to Queen Elizabeth I and, in most people's eyes, a conjuror. Not because of his magical ability (as he has none) but because...well, mostly because the general population back then wasn't exactly known for its reasonability, and seemed to really enjoy watching people get executed (and accusing someone of witchcraft virtually guaranteed getting them killed). Menaced by apparent portents of doom, Queen Liz sends Dr Dee on a secret mission to help protect her - recovering the bones of King Arthur, known to have lain at Avalon but having disappeared following the dissolution of Glastonbury Abbey. He's accompanied on said mission by her probable lover, Sir Robert Dudley, who's almost immediately out of action thanks to a bout of illness, leaving Dr Dee alone to rub shoulders with the eccentrics that now people the town that remains. Only to have it turn out that the location of Arthur's bones isn't the only secret in town, nor is it the only which people are prepared to kill over.

Normally, *The Bones of Avalon* is the sort of book that I'd revel in, set as it is in one of my favourite historical periods as well as promising a touch of mysticism and magic. For some reason though, I found myself struggling to get into this, bored by the narrator and mostly spending my time checking how much was left before it would end. I couldn't say that the writing or the plotting was particularly bad, although the pacing was an issue for me at times, but I can't say I'll be bothering with the rest of this series either.

Also posted at Cannonball Read 10

Linda says

There are few Elizabethan figures more infamous and mysterious than John Dee, the Virgin Queen's personal astrologer. Author Phil Rickman imagines a young John Dee, and sends him to Glastonbury, reputed resting place of King Arthur, on a secret quest. Rickman ups the ante by making Dee's cohort none other than Robert Dudley, the queen's favorite suitor. It isn't long before a kidnapping, a gruesome murder, and a

blossoming love affair make this quest a perilous one.

Any novel set among the ruins of a famous abbey and Glastonbury Tor would promise intrigue, magic, and mystery, but throw in solid historical research, brilliantly drawn characters, skillful plotting and evocative period detail, and you've got a winner. Not since *Pillars of the Earth* (Ken Follett) have I encountered as dastardly a villain as the one who holds dominion here, and the touches of the paranormal, never over the top, add to the aura of eeriness. Phil Rickman never fails to deliver, and *The Bones of Avalon* is one of his best.

Recommended for fans of first rate historical fiction, first rate mystery, and first rate writing.

Ruth says

c2010. I agree with the Daily Mail's comments that "Its high time we praised Phil Rickman". Mr Rickman is able to blend magic and mystery into the world without any seeming effort and yet his protagonist manages to calmly investigate these on goings with a scientific air. I think this is the first novel to feature Dr Dee where I actually quite liked him! I like the author's use of dialogue to move the story along and to impart information without feeling bombarded with facts or that it is contrived in any way. The sun is frequently mentioned becoming almost a symbol for the tone ie "tired sun" and "as heavy as a new coin". In fact, typically for a British person, the weather plays an upfront role. I found it really beguiling that some of the sentences are abbreviated - not too much to cause annoyance - and done in the fashion that I think I would use if I kept a diary. They certainly make for a lightening of the tension. (Think of some Shakespeare's asides). Possible typo on Page 208. FWFTB: ambition, superstitious, scholar, investigator, vulnerable. FCN: Dr John Dee, Elizabeth Tudor, Robert Dudley, Joseph of Arimitheia, William Cecil. "I could hardly deny that a ritual sacrifice in the Abbey of Glastonbury might well be thought to invoke a demon of substance."

Penny says

I'm so divided over this book. Let's get one thing straight, I didn't like it. I'm not sure whether it has something to do with my high expectations of a novel entitled 'The Bones of Avalon', or if it was simply boring.

It is well-written in so many ways, language, research, sentences that flow smoothly etc etc, which is why it gets two stars rather than one, but it just didn't ignite much of a spark. It seemed to take half the book to set up the story, about 40 pages of excitement (possibly, I haven't counted), a very rushed and short 'main conflict/drama point', and a windy explanation of whodunnit in the end that I had trouble following. I eventually got 'who did what' but there was no satisfying 'oh, my God, it was there all along and I didn't see it!' moment. It felt like the end result was hastily added on and just not exciting. I did not care enough for the characters. I didn't want the badies getting their comeuppance, and I didn't want the good guys to win. Total apathy. I don't think it's my fault, but I guess only critiques from others can tell.

Carol Douglas says

I enjoy reading about the Tudors and love the Arthurian legends. This book was a natural for me, though it had more about the former than the latter.

The protagonist is the astrologer John Dee, who many believed to be a conjurer. In this book, he's an intelligent searcher who wishes he could communicate with beings in another world, but can't. As in many books, the protagonist journeys with a friend, in this case Robert Dudley, who was rumored to be a lover of Queen Elizabeth.

Elizabeth appears briefly in this book as a commanding yet fragile young woman. England is full of Catholic vs. Protestant intrigue.

I don't want to spoil your reading pleasure, so I won't say too much more, except that I found it a good read. However, I dislike the fact that this book and some other historical fiction I've read shows gay characters who have strange perversions and are weak or evil. Authors, please stop doing this. It's dumb and dangerous. Have at least some decent gay characters.

Dieleserin says

Dr. John Dee – Wissenschaftler und vertrauter von Elizabeth I. – wird an einem regnerischen Morgen zu einem mysteriösen Vorfall gerufen. Passanten haben am Ufer der Themse einen Sarg gefunden, der eine verkrüppelte, aus Wachs gefertigte, Leiche enthält. Es wird vermutet, dass es sich dabei um eine Anspielung auf die Königin handelt – ein böses Omen.

Wenig später wird Dee damit beauftragt mit seinem langjährigen Freund und Schüler Robert Dudley nach Glastonbury aufzubrechen, um die Gebeine des legendären König Artus ausfindig zu machen. Grund dafür sind Visionen der Königin. Kurz nach ihrer Ankunft in Glastonbury kommt es zu einem entsetzlichen Vorfall. Dr. John findet in den Ruinen der alten Abtei den ausgeweideten Leichnam eines Dieners seines Freundes Robert. Doch wer ist für diesen grausamen Mord verantwortlich? Wird es John Dee und Robert Dudley nach diesem grausamen Zwischenfall noch gelingen die Gebeine von Artus, dem Schöpfer der Tafelrunde, zu finden?

„Die Gebeine von Avalon“ ist der erste historische Roman von Phil Rickman und ein durchaus gelungenes Werk. Obwohl die Haupthandlung der Fantasie des Autors entsprungen ist, ist der Roman unheimlich reich an historisch belegten Fakten. Rickman zeichnet ein lebendiges und in meinen Augen sehr glaubwürdiges Bild der damaligen Zeit. Es sind gerade die kleinen und dezenten Hinweise auf die historischen Gegebenheiten, die dieses Buch so lesenswert machen.

Hinzu kommt ein dichter spannungsgeladener Handlungsablauf, der den Leser nicht zur Ruhe kommen lässt. Durch den dramatischen Todesfall und die daraufhin beginnenden Ermittlungen erhält der Roman die Note eines Kriminalromans. Dass diese Vermutung nicht ganz abwegig ist, lässt sich durch die literarische Vorgeschichte des Autoren belegen.

Besonders gelungen empfinde ich die Schilderung des Verhältnisses von Kirche und Wissenschaft. Obwohl John Dee ein gottesfürchtiger Mann ist, lebt er für die Wissenschaft. Für ihn bildet diese Tatsache keinen Widerspruch. Für viele seiner Mitmenschen schon. Hinter seinem Rücken munkelt man, er sei ein Zauberer und Wahrsager. Auf Londons Straßen werden sogar Pamphlete über ihn verbreitet, die seine angeblichen Visionen propagieren. Auslöser für diese Verdachtsmomente sind vor allem seine mechanischen Basteleien und Erfindungen. Für den einfachen Bürger scheint Magie dahinter zu stecken, dabei ist es nichts weiter als reine Logik. Hier wird ganz deutlich, wie Unvereinbar zu dieser Zeit Wissenschaft und Kirche waren und wie tief sich diese Auffassung in die Köpfe der Bevölkerung gebrannt hat. Ein weiteres Beispiel dafür ist die junge Heilerin Helen. Sie kommt Robert Dudley in Glastonbury zu Hilfe, als dieser einem schweren Fieber zu erliegen droht. Viele Menschen aus dem Dorf nehmen ihre Hilfe in Anspruch, doch eigentlich heißt es, dass sie eine Hexe ist – genau wie ihre Mutter. Alles Unerklärliche wird sofort mit Magie und Zauberei in Verbindung gebracht.

Einen weiteren Pluspunkt erhält die Aufmachung des Werkes von mir. Es handelt sich um ein Hardcover mit wunderschönem Einband. Obwohl das Buch mit knapp 700 Seiten eher zu den dicken Wälzern gehört, liest es sich durch die kurzen Kapitel und die angenehme Setzung sehr flüssig. Dazu tragen auch die vielen Dialoge bei, was in meinen Augen überhaupt nicht negativ ist. Denn gerade durch sie lernen wir die Protagonisten erst richtig kennen.

Das Ende des Romans mündet in ein historisches Ereignis, das bis heute nicht wohl ganz geklärt ist. Ist es nur ein offenes Ende oder deutet sich hier eine Fortsetzung an? Über letzteres würde ich mich sehr freuen.

Fazit:

„Die Gebeine von Avalon“ von Phil Rickman ist ein absolut empfehlenswertes Buch – vor allem für alle Freunde des historischen Romans und insbesondere für die Liebhaber der Tudors. Spannend, dramatisch und gut recherchiert – so wird mir dieses Werk in Erinnerung bleiben.

Judith Arnopp says

I had never heard of Phil Rickman before I stumbled, quite accidentally, upon this book. As a writer and historian myself, I am a harsh critic and have grown weary of predictable, run of the mill historical novels. Most are unconvincing both in characterisation and plot and when I picked up *The Bones of Avalon* I did not expect it to be any different. But I was wrong; Phil had me at the first line.

The Bones of Avalon is set in the 1560's; a time of religious uncertainty, Popish plot and counterplot. The people walk in fear, trusting no-one in an England still reeling from the heretical burnings and hangings of Mary Tudor's Catholic reign. Now, she is dead and another Tudor takes the throne. Another queen, the bastard daughter of Anne Boleyn – Elizabeth.

Haunted by her mother's death, uncertain if she will succeed or fail, the young Elizabeth allows herself to trust few men. Two of whom are Robert Dudley – mistrusted by the council, a wild card adventurer and rumoured to be the queen's lover; and her consultant and astrologer, Dr Dee, a mild mannered scholar and dreamer.

They are sent to Glastonbury to discover the missing bones of King Arthur, lost during the dissolution in Henry VIII's reign, so that Elizabeth might fulfil a prophecy. Without its abbey Glastonbury is desolate, the town decaying and as soon as Dudley and Dr Dee set foot there, mystery and superstition unfolds.

By the time I reached the end of the first chapter I knew I was in good hands. Mr Rickman's first person narrative is authentic enough to make me forget I was actually reading. The fumbling investigative powers of Dr Dee endears him to the reader and the primitive, wary people of Glastonbury instil the plot with ambiguity. It was delightfully refreshing to find Robert Dudley illustrated, not as a broad shouldered, devil-may-care, wife killing braggart, but as an ordinary man, torn, confused, afflicted with sickness and, throughout it all, a stalwart friend to Dr Dee and loyal to his queen.

The author's knowledge of the period is indisputable, his understanding of 16th century uncertainty is flawless but, for me, the best thing about this book has to be the atmosphere.

I am not a believer in the supernatural but Mr Rickman had me doubting my own sound good sense. He gave me goose bumps such as I have not experienced since childhood. An undercurrent of human evil runs through this book, illustrating mankind's capacity to destroy that which they don't understand as an evil far

stronger than the supernatural. Although the author never infers that supernatural power truly exists, *The Bones of Avalon* is unsettling; it has you looking over your shoulder. It is a book to read with the doors and windows locked.

Phil Rickman has written an intelligent book. Some may find the length off putting, it certainly isn't for lightweight readers but, if you have the ability to let go of disbelief and embrace the mindset of the late 16th century, then you will love it as much as I. A whopping five stars – brilliant.

Bettie? says

Bettie's Books

Debra says

As always, Rickman gives us a winner with a compelling plot, characters you care about (and some you hate), suspense and mystery, and great historical fiction.

My only complaint is there were a lot of typos in this edition. Also, nine times out of ten, Henry VIII was referred to as King Harry. I don't know if this was a known nickname for him back in the day, but I could find no mention of it on the internet. Also, I had to brush up on my knowledge of England's kings and queens, and Mary Queen of Scots, to understand the political and religious aspects of the story.

Penny Shales says

This is fiction set round the real life figure of John Dee, alchemist, perhaps conjurer, astrologer to Elizabeth I. The Elizabethan obsession with magic and superstition is vividly portrayed as Dee struggles to fulfil a brief from Cecil to find the bones of King Arthur in Glastonbury. There is a catholic plot and the smell of burning hangs over the entire book. England is still reeling from the bloody reign of Mary Tudor while Dee himself is haunted by dreams of being burned at the stake - a fate from which he narrowly escaped.

Rickman is a great story teller - his Merrily Watkins novels are terrific reading - and this book does not disappoint. It reminded me in some ways of C J Sansom's Sheldrake novels having the same knack of recreating Tudor England in all its colourful horror. Enjoy!

Katherine Coble says

This is what leisure reading was made for. A book like this, with real characters, a solid mystery and actual contemplation of philosophy. Please read it. I don't give out five star ratings like candy; I am very exacting about my reading material. This book meets all the criteria I have for "excellent read" status, and then some.

Gary says

This historical novel by an author I had not previously heard of brings together a lot of my interests and that alone made it quite compelling for me : King Arthur and Avalon, Elizabeth I , parapsychology and the spirit world and Kabala.

England reeling from the reign of terror of Bloody Mary in her blustering efforts to force the Roman Catholic faith back on England.

The new Queen Elizabeth I aims for a more tolerant course but is beset by troubles. she sends her astrologer and doctor of psychics and philosophy Dr John Dee, together with her secret paramour and advisor Sir Robert Dudley to Glastonbury to find the bones of King Arthur disinterred 20 years earlier by Henry VIII in the Dissolution.

Dee falls in love with the beguiling and beautiful young woman doctor Eleanor (Nel) Burrows and when she is accused of witchcraft will do what he can to save her. Glastonbury is haunted and tortured place under the thumb of a dour cleric who has stamped his tyrannic theology on the town

Meanwhile a vile murder takes this story into a murder mystery. great characterization and plot, with just the right amount of the eerie and mysterious.

Annet says

This is a wondrous story, a mix of history and fantasy and the supernatural. It features Elisabeth I, the Royal astrologer John Dee, Robert Dudley, horseman of the queen and supposedly Elizabeth's lover, but also king Arthur, Morgan LeFay, Avalon, the Zodiac sign, Nostradamus....and more. Story had its ups & downs, but overall, very good. Enjoyed it.

Malla says

This book had all the right ingredients for an excellent historical thriller - but my feeling is that the author simply didn't deliver what was to hand. Writers use padding when they either don't have enough good ideas to keep the story going or when publishers are forcing them to stretch a perfectly good 70,000 words to 120,000. At least that's what this book felt like to me. I believe the author's heavy padding and slow pace killed what could have been a superb story. There was some beautiful use of language - and I love history and thrillers so the combination should have been a cracker. But I was disappointed with the pace and tension lost under long-windedness and complexity of plot that ultimately came across as contrived. This author didn't take me in at all with this story - and I'm really sorry. But judging from the number of 5 stars posted, it seems it strikes a cord with many other readers. So if you like intrigue, investigation and deep superstition in the spooky lanes and ruins of a 16th century village - this could be what you're looking for.
