



THE HALF-HANGED MAN

DAVID PILLING



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In the year 1395 the famous French chronicler, Jean Froissart, comes to England in search of tales of chivalry and warfare to complete his life's work, the Great Chronicle of England, France, Spain and Adjoining Countries. Disappointed by the decayed state of England under Richard II, he visits a tavern inside Eastcheap, where a beggar comes to his table and claims to be Thomas Page, the famous soldier of fortune. Thought to be long-dead, Page was otherwise known as the Half-Hanged Man or The Wolf of Burgundy.

Froissart challenges the beggar to recite a convincing version of Page's life, with money and food as a reward if his tale rings true. So begins a tale that encompasses the Hundred Years War in England and France, the Free Companies as they rampaged throughout Western Christendom, and the deeds and sins of the great mercenary captains of the late 14th century...

The Half-Hanged Man Details

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From Reader Review The Half-Hanged Man for online ebook

Jerry Mercer says

Cleverly Written Tale

This story, written from the point of view of a medieval scribe gives a good picture of the violence and politics of those days. The characters are real and the plot is well-constructed. The battle sequences are suitably violent.

Marita says

The year is 1395 and the place is London. Having been set upon by thieves, the famous French chronicler, Jean Froissart, limps to a nearby tavern for a drink. He is drawn into conversation with a man who asks to join Froissart.

"Froissart looked up and ran his eye over a stocky figure with a seamed, weather-beaten face and streaks of grey in his thinning, slicked-back hair. He wore an old brigandine, much worn and stained, cracked boots, and a falchion at his hip.

Despite his obvious poverty, the man seemed to consider himself something of a fop. He wore a greasy red scarf tied at a jaunty angle about his neck and a gold stud in his right ear. Chunky rings made of some cheap imitation gold adorned the index and ring fingers of both hands. He also sported an impressive set of greying whiskers, neatly trimmed and oiled."

And so begin, not one, but three stories:

- i) that of the stranger himself who claims to be Thomas Page, also known as the **Half-Hanged Man** or the **Wolf of Burgundy**;
- ii) the story of the **Raven** - a beautiful Spanish girl with - you guessed it! - black hair;
- iii) and finally a story by someone who I won't identify as it might spoil the plot for you.

The three stories are actually all part of the same story but told from different perspectives. The storytelling is excellent, and the novel gets better as the story unfolds. It takes place during the Hundred Years' War between England and France, but during this time the Black Prince was also involved in the war between Pedro of Castile and Enrique of Trastámara, and some of the action also takes place in Spain.

Unfortunately the novel could do with some editing. A Cast of Characters might also be useful, as the story could be confusing for someone who is not familiar with the history. For example, it mentions King John dying in England, but this of course does not refer to the English King John, but is the English name for King Jean of France who died as a prisoner in England.

Beverley Newman says

Excellent read

Fast paced tale of the English companies at large in France and Spain during the Hundred years war. Overlaid with the personal stories of two men desperate for the other's destruction. The battle scenes are well researched and horribly realistic. A real page turner.

Ron Nurmi says

A novel looking at English men at arms during the 14th century in France and Spain

Jules Frusher says

A stirring tale of a man, cut down just in time before he died (hence the Half-Hanged Man) of the title and thence thrown into the savagely violent world of the Free Companies during the Hundred Years War in France and Spain. Thomas Page, the protagonist, later to be known as The Wolf of Burgundy, is no saint, but neither is he as psychotically ruthless as some of those he serves under.

Told in three parts, as narrated to the medieval chronicler Jean Froissart in the novel, the first part concerns Thomas himself - how he became a feared and cunning war leader himself. The second concerns the story of his lover, The Raven, and the third part is told to Froissart by Page's sworn enemy Sir Hugh Calveley (one of the 'real' personas in this tale).

Throughout the book, the story flows along at a brisk pace, never shying at depicting grisly details along the way. But this is not at the expense of the characterisation: Page and Calveley come over as clear, distinct voices - men you really wouldn't want to meet in a dark alley! The dialogue and scene setting, too, is very good, apart from a couple of jarring modern words (hotel and sofa) that I could have done without. But what My Pilling exceeds at, in my opinion, are the battle scenes, often very difficult to write. They are perfectly written, very much along the lines of Bernard Cornwell, and you feel almost involved in the middle of them at times.

My only little gripe was that there were quite a few typos, and one name error - which is why I couldn't give it 5 stars, but hopefully these can be corrected if there are any other editions. But overall, if battles, swords, blood and treachery are your thing, then buy this book. You won't be disappointed!

Phil says

Intriguing

A very interesting book that sheds light on the perilous lives of all, both peasants and landed gentry. It brings you into the lives and deaths of all during the continuous wars of the mid fourteenth century.

john fraser says

Brilliant

A story well worth the reading.

Full of emotion and feeling also the excitement and thrill of combat. Intend to read some more of the books.

Samantha says

This book, which appears to have originally been released as a series of three novellas, covers the story of the Wolf of Burgundy from three different perspectives. As always with Pilling's work, the story is not for the weak of heart. All the violence, betrayal, and hardship that often is given the veneer of chivalry is front and center in this story that takes the reader from England to Castile and many places in between at the turn of the 15th century.

The title character is Thomas Page, who is the first narrator and was literally hanged until almost dead to earn his nickname. He tells his story of becoming an outlaw and winding up in France being trained as a soldier to a chronicler that he happens upon in an English pub long after his supposed death.

The second section takes up the story of Eleanor Menezes de Alonchel, who made a future for herself completely at odds with the one her father had planned for her. Caught up in the war between Pedro the Cruel and his half brothers for the prize of Castile, Eleanor chooses the life of a spy and worse rather than that of a bored housewife. Her path intersects with Page's and they become devoted to one another, fighting for others but loyal only to each other.

Both of these stories are taken up years later by one who had vowed to take his vengeance on Page for past wrongs, of which many occurred during these bloody years in France and Spain. The Bull of Najera feeds his growing obsession with catching Page and his Company of Wolves with failures to capture him, until it becomes a hatred that drives him to unexpected cruelty that bordered on insanity.

As with each of Pilling's works, the historical background of this novel is rich and captivating. Characters are far from romantic knights and ladies, but rather are rough, selfish, and violent. The gritty realism of the prose is something frequently missing from historical fiction. Battles are not a pretty place, and the picture painted here is realistic enough to make the reader cringe at times. But that's what makes it worth reading. Though many of these are fictional characters, their story is one that was lived by far too many real people whose names we will never know.

Alison Bahmüller says

This story, set in the 14th century, is the gripping tale of a man, Thomas Page, who was cut down just in time before he died by hanging, and then left England to fight on the continent in the hope of making a fortune. It is also the story of a beautiful Spanish girl, who becomes a spy and Page's lover, and of Sir Hugh Calveley (a real historical character), who becomes obsessed with revenge on Page. The story is told in three parts, as narrated to the medieval chronicler Jean Froissart by Page himself and later continued by Calveley.

This book has a very original plot, like all the other books I've read by Pilling. The storytelling is excellent, and the characters are interesting and realistic. This novel gives a good picture of the politics of the day. It is brutal, with a lot of violence and treachery, and also a bit sad. But several parts also made me smile, a few even laugh out loud. I found it captivating and very entertaining.

Tinney says

This book contains battle scenes that are actually readable (as in, you can figure out what's happening). So often I wind up skimming such scenes because of lack of clarity, but these really work. The book is original and interesting, the frame story works for the most part, and the main character is vividly depicted. The frame story is used quite cleverly to create a sense of immediacy for the last part of the book, making the reader feel as if the story is unfolding in the present rather than the distant past.

Alissa says

It's always a pleasure to read a story set during the Hundred Years' War, particularly if built around the Free Companies.

This is an indie book, so I expected its share of editing mistakes and inaccuracies (Sir Hugh Calveley the elder died in 1394, for example); also, there is nothing groundbreaking or especially noteworthy in the story, but the author managed to convey the brutality of those times and the narrative flows easily, so I found myself -as easily- immersed in the eponymous character's adventures.

The premise - a man who rose from obscure beginnings to become one of the most famous veterans of his day recounting his tale to the historian Jean Froissart - is one I'm familiar with from the most excellent William Gold books by Christian Cameron.

Making a comparison would be unfair (for the record, *The Half-Hanged Man* was published first), because I enjoyed them both even if there are completely different levels of narrative skill and historical knowledge at play.

The story was originally published in three novellas, each with a different PoV. The first is pacy and intriguing, the second is somewhat confusing and simplistic, though the main character has lots of potential, while the third is okay and the ending...well, it is fitting, if a bit abrupt. Nice read.

Honour is lethal, and I have often thanked God for my lack of it.

Stephanie says

The Half-Hanged Man is about the French Chronicler Froissart who comes to England in search of tales to add to his life's work of chivalry and so on. He visits a tavern to gather himself after he was robbed in a alley and runs into a man who claims to be Thomas Page, a famous soldier of fortune. Froissart challenges Page to tell his story of adventures and so the story begins.

This captivating tale is set in the late 14th century and is laced with action, intrigue and will entertain you from beginning to end and leave you wanting more. Pilling's characterisation of Thomas Page is genius and Pilling has a flare for writing dramatic and vivid battle scenes. So well-written in fact you feel like your right in the thick of it. I rated this story four and a half stars! I highly recommend!

Stephanie
Layered Pages

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