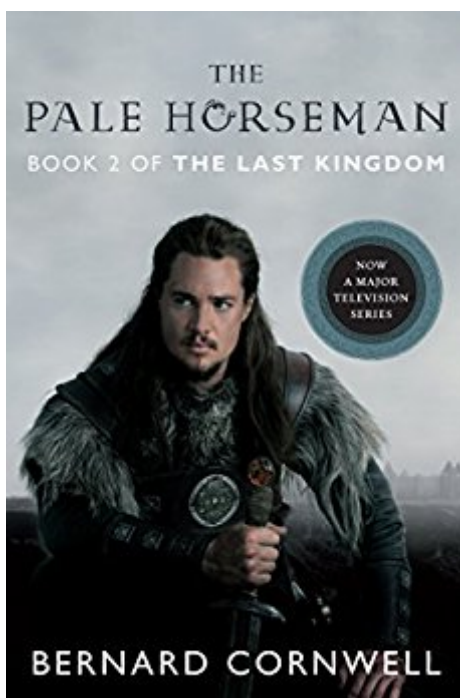


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The Pale Horseman: A Novel (Saxon Tales Book 2)



Synopsis

The Æ a second installment of Bernard Cornwell's New York Times Æ bestselling series chronicling the epic saga of the making of England, Æ "like Game of Thrones, but real" (The Observer, London) Æ the basis for The Last Kingdom, the hit Æ television series. As the last unvanquished piece of England, Wessex is eyed hungrily by the fearsome Viking conquerors. Uhtred, a dispossessed young nobleman, is tied to the imperiled land by birth and marriage but was raised by the Danish invaders Æ and he questions where his allegiance must lie. But blood is his destiny, and when the overwhelming Viking horde attacks out of a wintry darkness, Uhtred must put aside all hatred and distrust and stand beside his embattled country Æ's staunch defender Æ the fugitive King Alfred. The Pale Horseman is a gripping, monumental adventure that gives breathtaking life to one of the most important epochs in English history Æ yet another masterwork from New York Times bestselling author Bernard Cornwell.

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Customer Reviews

Cornwell has done it again. Brilliant story telling. I don't know the history of the Saxons, Wessex, King Alfred or Uhtred but I do know that Cornwell can dissect the history, insert fiction in a

believable reenactment of the tale that successfully puts me right in the action. The characters are multidimensional with lives that matter (to the story) and are filled with joy, misery, triumph, pain, pride, piety, heroism, cowardice and more. Cornwell puts you into the mind of Uhtred who sees the world in a very practical, if not sometimes simplistic way. He's got a complicated life but he approaches it with a straightforward point of view, kill your enemies and spare your friends. His friends and enemies can sometimes be more a more fluid grey than distinctly black and white so the reader is always on the lookout for the next betrayal. In the end you may predict that the hero will survive and his side will win but how you get there is an unpredictable rollercoaster ride that Cornwell is a master at building. This is an outstanding book and I highly recommend it. Start with the first book, "The Last Kingdom" and read from the beginning. This is hours of inexpensive entertainment.

Uhtred Ragnarson is a divided man. He was a Saxon, born in 9th century Northumbria, at a time when England was regularly being raided by the viking Danes. He grew up in a time of warfare and learned to fight at his father's side, which is where he was when his father was killed by Danes in battle. Uhtred was still a child but he fought so savagely against his father's killers that he impressed Ragnar, their leader. Instead of killing him, Ragnar captured and eventually adopted him, and so the Saxon boy grew up as a Dane. Uhtred was fully Dane in his culture. He admired the Danes and loved his adoptive family. He received his post-graduate course in fighting from them and so he learned both the Saxon way and the Danes' way of battle. It was to serve him well in later years. We meet Uhtred here as a brash and arrogant twenty-year-old, cocksure of his own strength and his power to overcome all enemies. Not a pleasant bloke. Not the guy with whom you'd want to sit down and have a cup of tea. In spite of the fact that he loves the Danes and considers himself one of them, Uhtred is still a Saxon and still hopes to reclaim his family lands in Northumbria. In his pursuit of that goal, he aligns himself with Alfred of Wessex. He gives Alfred his oath. He will fight against the Danes. By the ninth century, the Saxons, Uhtred's people, had taken most of the territory of the future England from the Britons and the Welsh. They had, in fact, held most of the land for hundreds of years. It had been divided into seven different Saxon kingdoms, but by the 870s when the action of this novel takes place, all those kingdoms had fallen to the Danes one after the other until only Wessex and its king, Alfred, were left standing. This Alfred is, of course, the one who will later be known to the English as "the Great" and in this book we catch glimpses of why he may have come to earn that name. Alfred is a sickly man, who suffers greatly from intestinal complaints. He is a Christian and he wants all of his kingdom to be Christian. His strongest character trait may be his

stubbornness. He refuses to give up even when greatly outnumbered. He insists that God is on his side and so he cannot be defeated. Uhtred has difficulty gaining and staying in Alfred's favor because he is not a Christian and has no desire to become one. He follows the gods of the Danes, carrying an amulet of Thor's hammer around his neck. Moreover, he has taken up with a pagan woman, a Briton, who some believe to be a witch. All this while he is still married to a Saxon woman with whom he has a son. Cornwell spends a good bit of time in *The Pale Horseman* developing the relationships and the personalities of his characters, but he doesn't stint on the blood and guts when it comes to the descriptions of battles and of the hardships that Alfred and his few followers have to endure while they are stuck for a time in a swamp. He gives vivid descriptions of shield wall warfare - much of which my eyes glided right over, frankly - and he gives us balanced perspectives from both the Saxon and the Danish viewpoints. What he doesn't give us is a feminine viewpoint, but then women had very little to do with Cornwell's tale. It makes one wonder where all those hardy men came from. *The Pale Horseman* is a rousing good adventure tale of masculine derring-do for those who enjoy the genre. Plus, it has the advantage of being based on actual events. It gives us a window into the time when England as we know it today was just becoming a possibility. It was mostly because of the man called Alfred and perhaps of warriors not unlike Uhtred Ragnarson.

Excellent!!!!!! I'm totally addicted. What an exciting tale of the Vikings and their battles with the Saxons. I love love love Uhtred of Bebbanburg. What a fierce warrior he is! I won't go into great detail of this awesome book but it continues from the first book and I have to say King Alfred almost loses his kingdom. He finally grows some balls. I'd also like to note how the Christian religion plays a major roll during this time period. It reminded me of how things were forced upon everyone and were killed if they didn't convert. I'm so glad our world today isn't like that, however I think of how close it could be like that again if the Muslims try to force their religion on us by killing all the infidels - but thinking back to that time period, man were those brutal years for every person that lived in that region. In this book the Saxons win back their land after a brutal battle. The battles are descriptively described and will have you hooked on every word. I really liked the shadow queen and was sad to see her killed. Poor Uhtred! Well his Saxon wife is still alive even though she has become practically a Nun. I think Uhtred's battle of loyalty between the Vikings and the Saxons is very interesting. I know I think I would of told Alfred to go take a flying leap and stuck with the Vikings. The writing is so vivid and is addicting. I could hardly put the book down. In a way, I wish the Vikings would of wiped England off the map just because I

hated the way the monks and the way they forced Christianity on everyone. Don't get me wrong, I believe in God, I just don't believe in all these different types of Christianity's. Those Monks literally made stuff up and or had some tale of a miracle of a heroic Saint to get their point across. What's funny about that is that the Vikings thought it humorous as did I when a lord stated the story of a saint depicted from a picture of an arrow piercing him and the lord protected him and he did not die. So the Vikings tested that theory and stated that if they fired arrows upon the Lord and it didn't kill him then they'd convert to Christianity. Well, that Lord died as they put 6 arrows through him. (I totally laughed out loud at the ignorance of that Lord) Now sorry but that's funny and made me think how stupid these people were and how their common sense was out the window gone. Over all this is just an excellent read and I highly recommend it.

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