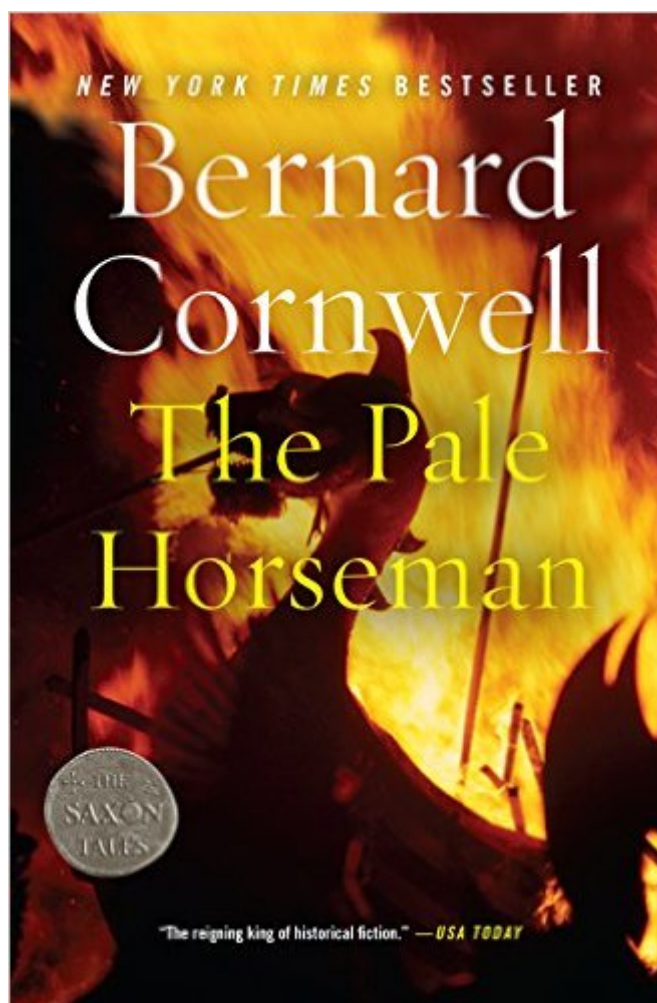


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The Pale Horseman (The Saxon Chronicles Series #2)



Synopsis

The second installment of Bernard Cornwell's New York Times bestselling series chronicling the epic saga of the making of England, like Game of Thrones, but real (The Observer, London) is the basis for The Last Kingdom, the hit television series. This is the exciting yet little known 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. At the end of The Last Kingdom, The Danes had been defeated at Cynuit, but the triumph of the English is not fated to last long. The Danish Vikings quickly invade and occupy three of England's four kingdoms and all that remains of the once proud country is a small piece of marshland, where Alfred and his family live with a few soldiers and retainers, including Uhtred, the dispossessed English nobleman who was raised by the Danes. Uhtred has always been a Dane at heart, and has always believed that given the chance, he would fight for the men who raised him and taught him the Viking ways. But when Iseult, a powerful sorceress, enters Uhtred's life, he is forced to consider feelings he's never confronted before and Uhtred discovers, in his moment of greatest peril, a new-found loyalty and love for his native country and ruler.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This novel is the sequel to THE LAST KINGDOM and it continues the exciting tale of Uhtred and King Alfred (better known as Alfred the Great). Uhtred and King Alfred's relationship is still tenuous at best, however, Uhtred has formed respect for this resilient king. Uhtred is still divided between

his allegiance to King Alfred and his Danish foster-brother, Ragnar. He knows that in the great battle that is to come he must choose between them. Uhtred is ultimately unhappy with the wife and farm he is given by Alfred as there is a great debt attached to it. He's bored and misses his raiding days. He eventually embarks on a raid with his former shipmates (under King Alfred) and disguises his ship as a Danish/Viking raider. His raiding adventures bring him to the Shadow Queen; Iseult who leaves with him after her husband's kingdom is destroyed. The adventures continue and you can feel Uhtred's frustrations with both King Alfred and his former allies. This second installment was even better than the first and I look forward to the next with great anticipation!

Uhtred is back with a vengeance in this continuation of Cornwell's treatment of the reign of Alfred the Great. Born a Northumbrian ealdorman, but raised by the Danes who captured him, Uhtred is a man with mixed loyalties. He loves and respects the pagan Danes, and dislikes the Christian Saxons, but is drawn to those who speak his language and share his heritage. Uhtred is a typical Cornwell hero--brash, proud, and sometimes unthinking. However, he does manage to be a sympathetic character, and we admire his courage and loyalty. Cornwell exercises his fascination with ancient feminine magic by introducing Iseult, a Briton "shadow queen" with whom Uhtred promptly becomes infatuated. It is Alfred's struggle with the Danes that drives this story, however. Will he manage to pluck victory from the jaws of defeat? You will find out after one of Cornwell's famous battle descriptions, and will be waiting impatiently for the next volume in this series.

In this second novel of what I have independently dubbed (and forgive a fan's presumption, Mr. Cornwell) the 'Uhtred Series'; the hard fighting, hard drinking and hard wenching hero, is for my money probably the best historical portrait I've ever seen. In *THE LAST KINGDOM*, where we are introduced to Uhtred as a young boy, the ending of the book as he grows to a young man, just leaves you wanting more. Happily for all lovers of real history mixed with compelling characters, Bernard Cornwell has obliged. As a writer and former history teacher, I am so in awe of the way in which he has taken a character out of the 'dark ages' of warring Saxons and Danes and brought him to vivid life. Especially since it would have been so easy to turn this sword-wielding protagonist into a cartoon 'Conan the Barbarian' type hero. Mr. Cornwell doesn't let that happen. Uhtred lops off heads where needed, steals when it's expedient and romps with abandon even though it inevitably leads to tragic consequences. I've read the majority of Bernard Cornwell's work and while the history and characters are always first rate, I can say without reservation, that *The Last Kingdom* and *Pale Horseman*, are his best yet. Write quickly Mr. Cornwell - I can't wait for the next!

Bernard Cornwell, perhaps our best writer of the historical adventure novel today, again scores high with the second book in his Saxon Stories. I'm a devoted follower of Cornwell, and in my opinion, these books rank with the better Sharpe stories and exceed *The Heretic*. *The Pale Horseman* tells the historical story of the 9th-century Danish (Norse or 'Viking') invasion and Alfred's struggle for the survival of Wessex and his idea of a united England. The Danes have already defeated Northumbria, East Anglia, and Mercia. Then the Danes broke the truce and Alfred's kingdom shrunk to an area of vast swamps and tidal flats known as the Somerset Levels. With the help of our fictional warrior, Uhtred, a man caught between loyalty and desire, Alfred rallies the fyrd - a people's army of sorts - to the great battle of Ethandun in 878 CE. Alfred's victory saved Wessex and indeed the possibility of "England" - a Danish victory and perhaps that island would be called Daneland (although had the Danes never invaded Alfred would never have had the opportunity to unite the disparate Saxon kingdoms). In any event, much remains to be done. Alas, we must await Cornwell's third installment, *The Lords of the North* due out in the US in January 2007. Highly recommended for fans of Cornwell or anyone who enjoys historical adventure stories. The battle descriptions put the reader right in the clash of steel, the chanting, the roaring insults, banging of shields, blood, earthy human odors, the bloodlust, the horrible injuries and brutal deaths.

Bernard Cornwell hit the nail on the head with this series about Uhtred the Saxon who works (controversially) for Alfred the king. The problem this book faces is that it has to describe one of the least interesting periods in Saxon warfare which reflects on the book. B.C. tends to write in a masterful way but even that cannot help the fact that the situations in the books are sometimes slightly boring. This is one of the very few B.C. books that I have to award 'only' a 3-star.

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