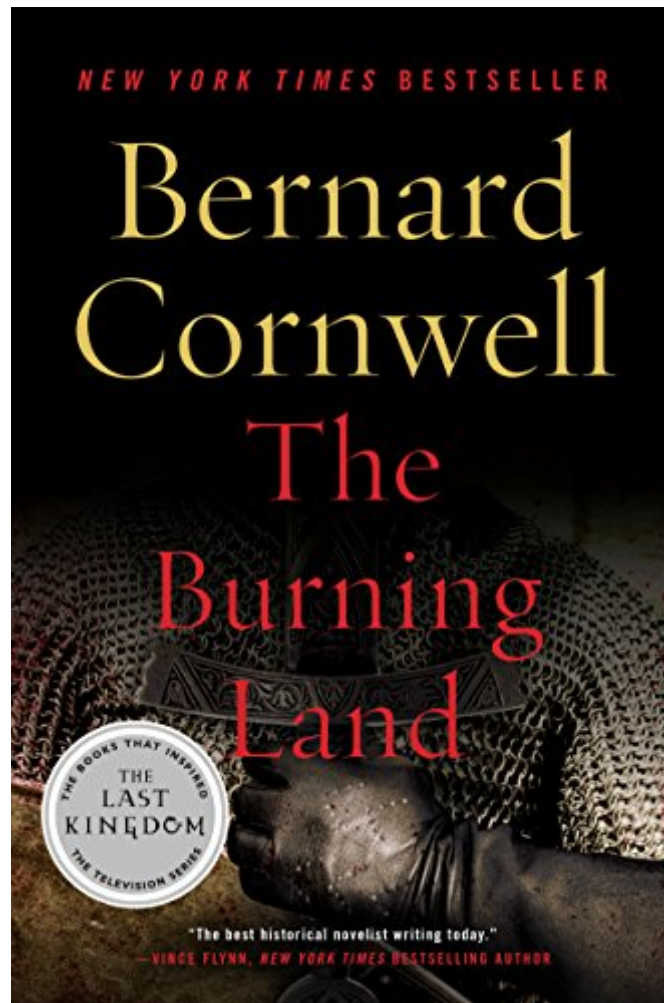


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The Burning Land: A Novel (Saxon Tales Book 5)



Synopsis

The fifth installment of Bernard Cornwell's bestselling Saxon Tales chronicling the epic saga of the making of England, as like Game of Thrones, but real (The Observer, London) "the basis for The Last Kingdom, the hit BBC America television series. At the end of the ninth century, King Alfred of Wessex is in ill health; his heir, an untested youth. His enemy, the Danes, having failed to conquer Wessex, now see their chance for victory. Led by the sword of savage warrior Harald Bloodhair, the Viking hordes attack. But Uhtred, Alfred's reluctant warlord, proves his worth, outwitting Harald and handing the Vikings one of their greatest defeats. For Uhtred, the sweetness of victory is soon overshadowed by tragedy. Breaking with Alfred, he joins the Vikings, swearing never again to serve the Saxon king. Instead, he will reclaim his ancestral fortress on the Northumbrian coast. Allied with his old friend Ragnar and his old foe Haesten, he aims to invade and conquer Wessex itself. But fate has different plans . . . In The Burning Land, Bernard Cornwell, as the reigning king of historical fiction (USA Today), delivers a rousing saga of Anglo-Saxon England—an irresistible new chapter in his thrilling Saxon Tales, the epic story of the birth of England and the legendary king who made it possible.

Book Information

File Size: 1992 KB

Print Length: 356 pages

Publisher: HarperCollins e-books; Reissue edition (February 17, 2010)

Publication Date: March 2, 2010

Language: English

ASIN: B0033V4SE2

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #10,431 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #57 in Books

> Literature & Fiction > Genre Fiction > Historical > Military #83 in Books > Literature & Fiction >

British & Irish > Historical #111 in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Literature & Fiction > Genre

Fiction > War

Customer Reviews

"Instead I burned the wooden god and his wooden cross and mixed their ashes with crushed apples, that I fed to my two sows. I worship Thor."Uhtred, son of Uhtred and the Uhtred who came before returns in Book 5 of the Saxon Chronicles (#1 Last Kingdom; #2 Pale Horseman; #3 Lords of the North; #4 Sword Song). If you haven't read the previous books, Cornwell always offers short recaps but I suggest you start at the beginning, because this is easily the best series on Alfred and the 10th century West Saxons. Cornwell crafts exceptional characters in both the men who defend the Kingdom of Wessex, and the Danish Viking villains who seek to destroy the fledgling christian nation. The story begins around 894 with the Battle of Fearnhamme (Farnham), where Uhtred leads Alfred's forces against Harald Bloodhair, who I believe is a fictional character but is certainly a great villain. Haesten returns to make trouble, and Uhtred heads north. An interesting point brought up in the Historical Note, suggests Torneie Island (Thorney), where the Danes sought refuge after Farnham, is now buried under the development surrounding Heathrow. I love the main character Uhtred of Bebbanburg. He is a peerless pagan warrior bound by oath to King Alfred who is a christian obsessed with converting the world. This is a constant source of conflict for Uhtred, who must serve the very thing he despises, and his hatred is more evident in The Burning Land than any of the prior books. "The way to wealth is to become a christian bishop or a monastery's abbot and thus be imbued with heaven's permission to lie, cheat, and steal your way to luxury." Uhtred has had a hard life filled with misfortune and violence. He is both cantankerous and noble at the same time.

Though Uhtred has endured a harsh and trying life (all told in the Saxon Chronicles - The Last Kingdom, The Pale Horseman, Lords of the North, Sword Song - all of which I highly recommend you read before entering The Burning Land, not because you must to understand the story but because the series is exceptional) in the previous offerings in this series by the great Bernard Cornwell, he continues his raging life which is entangled in the life of King Alfred, later to be known as Alfred the Great. Here we find Uhtred finally freeing himself of the burden of the oath he held to Alfred only to find that he is held under oath to Alfred's daughter. And so, Uhtred rages on against the Danes, the Vikings, the men of the North. And along with the rage comes the expected gory battles described in miserable beauty by Cornwell. The savagery is brought to life in such vivid telling that you'll swear you are there amongst the blood-shed. This book, like its predecessors, spends a lot of time on the history of Alfred and his fight to build England, then just a dream of the King of Wessex. I cannot more highly recommend a book or a series of books.

THE BURNING LAND is the fifth Bernard Cornwell tale about Uhtred, a fierce ninth-century warlord

battling his way through enemy shield walls in an England waiting to be united. You should know this right away, along with the fact that it won't be the last of the series. It's hard enough to write one novel, but it's downright difficult to pen five of them consecutively with the same characters and themes and keep the writing fresh and interesting. "Difficult" isn't even the word; "impossible" is more like it. (Even the most devout Cornwell fan is going to have a hard time getting through the whole 20-plus volumes of the Richard Sharpe series without wincing at the umpteenth explanation of how Sharpe got his telescope or the workings of the deadly seven-barreled gun.) But if you liked the first four volumes of Cornwell's Saxon Tales, the good news is that there's more of the same in **THE BURNING LAND**. There are cruel and disgusting Viking invaders, heartless and crafty priests, dangerous and exotic women, and the endless machinations of Alfred the Great, which invariably lead the doughty Uhtred into a welter of gore. Cornwell has not lost his deft touch in describing the joy of battle, the inexorable flame that runs through a warrior when he stabs someone in the eye with a spear. One of Uhtred's core beliefs is that his fate is determined by the three spinners of Norse legend --- that he is a plaything of the gods, to be turned this way and that. It's easy to see why he might think so, especially because Cornwell uses him so often as a pawn. Uhtred is forever being manipulated by one character or another, and it doesn't really help the narrative much that he is aware of this and is somewhat cynical about it.

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