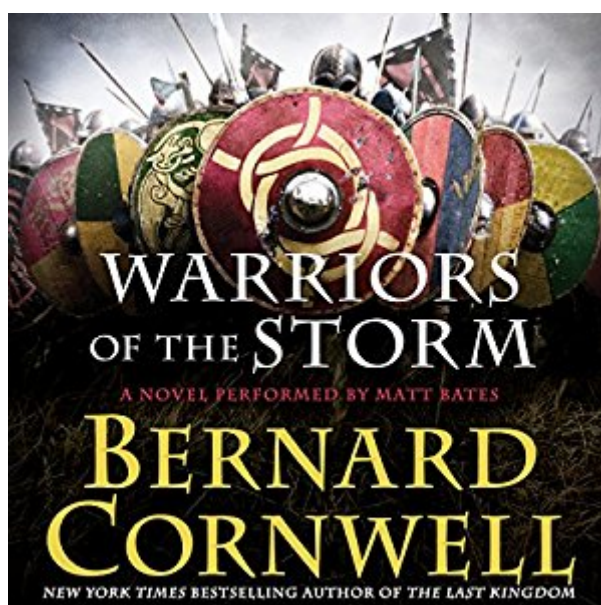


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Warriors Of The Storm: A Novel



Synopsis

The ninth installment in the New York Times best-selling Saxon Tales, the epic saga of the making of England, magnificently brought to life by "the reigning king of historical fiction" (USA Today). A fragile peace reigns in Wessex, Mercia, and East Anglia. King Alfred's son, Edward, and formidable daughter, Aethelflaed, rule the kingdoms. But all around, the restless Northmen, eyeing the rich lands and wealthy churches, are mounting raids. Uhtred of Bebbanburg, the kingdoms' greatest warrior, controls Northern Mercia from the strongly fortified city of Chester. But forces are gathering against him. Northmen allied to the Irish, led by the fierce warrior Ragnall Ivarson, are soon joined by the Northumbrians, and their strength could prove overwhelming. Despite the gathering threat, both Edward and Aethelflaed are reluctant to move out of the safety of their fortifications. But with Uhtred's own daughter married to Ivarson's brother, who can be trusted? In the struggle between family and loyalty, between personal ambition and political commitment, there will be no easy path. But a man with a warrior's courage may be able to find it. Such a man is Uhtred, and this may be his finest hour.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

First posted on .co.uk two minutes ago...This is the ninth book on Uthred, the pagan warlord fighting for King Alfred in the first episodes, for his heir King Edward (generally known as "the Elder" or rather little known - as Edward the Elder) and, since the last few episodes, for Aethelflaed, Lady of the Mercians, respectively the daughter and sister of the two kings. Despite this, and despite Uthred

getting a bit *Ælong on the tooth*, Bernard Cornwell still weaves his usual magic, and his usual tricks. The result is yet another superb read, with all of the usual ingredients including quite a few liberties with the historical record in general, and the chronology in particular, with which he manages to get away with. The menace is, this time, a Norse warlord - Ragnall Ivarson *“*who, together with his brother Sitric, has been expelled from Dublin by the Irish. As those who have read the previous volume might remember, Sitric has become Uthred’s son-in-law after having been his enemy. However, the other brother and his army land near and threaten Chester, and Mercia more generally, which is defended by the Lady of the Mercians, busy building Burroughs across the land to secure it, and Uthred, her (semi-independent) warlord. I will (barely) refrain from spoiling the story by summarising it, although it is an exciting one, and one which is skilfully told. Both Ragnall and Sitric are historical characters and they did manage to carve themselves another kingdom after having *“*temporarily - lost their Dublin heritage. This, however, was not achieved with Uthred’s involvement since he is a largely fictitious character and the brothers seem to have very much worked together. It is also quite true that Edward the Elder did not attempt to conquer Northumbria during his long reign (AD 899 to AD 924) simply because he already had his hands full in subduing East Anglia and the Five Burroughs. It is also very likely that his sister (the Lady of the Mercians) did not enough forces to attempt this conquest on her own. She probably had barely enough to defend her territory and nibble at Northern Mercia, still held by Norse and Dane settlers, little by little, and consolidate her piece meal acquisitions by building fortified settlements. All of this is well shown in the book. Then you have the second usual ingredient: the campaigns, battles and fights. These are what you would expect if you have read any of the previous titles in the Series: quite superb! One of them was even more impressive than the others. It is a rather wild cavalry charge that will provide one explanation for the book’s title. Also interesting and well described are the fluctuating allegiances that Viking warriors could have towards their warlords. Those that did not win consistently and were deemed to have lost the favour of the Gods were liable to suffer large-scale desertions, something that existed throughout the Viking Age and was also quite typical in pagan Germanic armies. Yet another well described set of features are the tricks and ruses employed by both sides while campaigning, with the crafty Ragnall being largely a match for Uthred. Again, the author can be commended for his descriptions of so-called *“*Dark Age *•* warfare which are simply excellent and, this time, the story moves forward, with Uthred’s way home to Bebbanburg being (almost) cleared out by the end of the book. Finally, you have the third ingredient: the characterisation. Once again, Uthred takes centre stage, with Bernard Cornwell succeeding in making the ruthless, successful but ageing warlord into

a rather sympathetic character. This is achieved by showing him as a human being, with his longing to return to his ancestral home, but also with his doubts and his fears, carefully hidden behind his blustering and his calculated violence and cruelty. He is yet again surrounded by the usual cast. There is Ælfthelf, intelligent, headstrong, draped in her dignity and pious behaviour to the extent that she is starting to look a bit like her father as she ages, but also somewhat annoyed when Uthred is subject to other females' attention. There is also the dashing Athelstan (the future King) and a young warrior who is once again being toughened up by Uthred. There is also Uthred's fast, old and steadfast Irish companion, Finan, about whose origins the reader will learn in this book. There are also the flamboyant Viking warlord Sitric (Sigtryggr) and his headstrong wife Stiorra, Uthred's daughter and so much like both her father and mother in a number of ways. Then you get, in addition to Ragnall, the evil and half-mad sorceress Birda, and a couple of original characters, a really saintly but witty priest, who sides with Uthred and does not want to become a bishop, and his strange and rather original wife. Ultimately, there is the first person narrative, with the story told by Uthred himself in a mixture of arrogance, blustering, self-deprecation and honesty, and there is the author himself, who manages to weave all this together into a superb (but shorter than usual) book that you will not be able to let go once you lay your hands on it. Five stars yet again and without the slightest hesitation.

Sometimes a book series starts to go dull when you reach the 10th book but that is certainly not the case with this book. In fact, it's my favorite book so far and I have loved all of them. This has everything- a trip to Ireland, Uthred's interactions with all three of his children, a reunion with his first love, magnificent battle scenes and an interesting prostitute named Mus who inspires an army. What more can a person ask for? There is just something magical about Uthred. He was born a Saxon and raised to be the Lord of Bebbanburg. He was captured by the Danes, raised as one and is an ardent follower of Thor. Who can blame him? Thor seems like a delightful God and Valhalla a wonderful place to pass eternity. And the Saxon Christianity? Uthred says he has seen people whip themselves until their back is strips of flesh, people limp on bleeding stumps to worship the tooth of the whale that swallowed Jonah and a man who hammered nails through his own feet. Uthred says, "Why prefer a god who wants you to torture yourself?" Still he aligns himself with the Saxon Christians because his final goal is to reclaim Bebbanburg, stolen by his uncle. Uthred is a brilliant military man who seems callous and has no trouble killing. Yet he is loyal and treats his friends and the men under his command well. He loves his children in spite of their very real differences. He is a

man that others love to follow. He is a natural leader. In spite of his flaws, he is admirable. This book is a wonderful addition to the series. You can read it as a stand alone as there are plenty of explanations but long time readers, like myself, will enjoy the evolution of Uhtred. And there is an added bonus. The section about Mus is just downright humorous. I laughed so hard at her inclusion at the end of the story. This is a homerun for me and I only regret that I have to wait a year to catch up with him again.

This is the ninth book about Uhtred of Bebbanburg, the seasoned pagan warrior who has fought firstly for King Alfred and now for his daughter, Ælfthelf, Lady of the Mercians. Uhtred may have grown older, but he's still a cunning and effective warrior. He's still focussed on winning back Bebbanburg, but there's always another threat, another battle to be fought first. There's a time for caution, I said, and a time to just kill the bastards. In this novel, the threat is from Ragnall Ivarson, a Norse warlord who together with his brother Sitric (Uhtred's son-in-law), has been expelled by the Irish from Dublin. Ragnall and his army land near Chester, controlled by Uhtred, and threaten both Chester and Mercia. Uhtred has decisions to make and battles to fight. There's plenty of intrigue, tested loyalties and changing allegiances. Uhtred himself is a clever opportunist who knows just how to find (or make) an advantage. There are some familiar characters, and some new ones as well. I'm particularly fond of the new bishop's wife. It is not difficult to be a lord, a jarl or even a king, but it is difficult to be a leader. Like each of the other eight books so far in this series, there are intriguing characters and plenty of action. The historical setting is great, and if the boundaries between fact and fiction are blurred, then it certainly doesn't detract from the story. Uhtred's first person narrative carries the story forward at just the right pace and perhaps he is one step closer to reclaiming Bebbanburg at the end. I love these novels. My only problem? How long do I have to wait for the next instalment?

Jennifer Cameron-Smith

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