



## Blood and Blade

*Matthew Harff*

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**Blood and Blade** Matthew Harffy

**635AD. Anglo-Saxon Britain. A gripping, action-packed historical thriller and third instalment in The Bernicia Chronicles. Perfect for fans of Bernard Cornwell.**

Oswald is now King of Northumbria. However, his plans for further alliances and conquests are quickly thrown into disarray when his wedding to a princess of Wessex is interrupted by news of a Pictish uprising.

Rushing north, Oswald leaves Beobrand to escort the young queen to her new home. Their path is fraught with danger and uncertainty, Beobrand must try to unravel secrets and lies if they are to survive.

Meanwhile, old enemies are closing in, seeking brutal revenge. Beobrand will give his blood and blade in service to his king, but will that be enough to avert disaster and save his kith and kin from the evil forces that surround them?

## Blood and Blade Details

Date : Published December 1st 2016 by Aria

ISBN :

Author : Matthew Harffy

Format : Kindle Edition 318 pages

Genre : Historical, Historical Fiction, Fiction, Medieval, Fantasy

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# From Reader Review Blood and Blade for online ebook

**M.J. says**

I received a free copy from Netgalley of this novel.

Blood and Blade by Matthew Harffy is the third book in his Bernicia Chronicles following the exploits of his, quite frankly, bad-tempered warrior, Beobrand. He's no hero - he's too self-involved, grumpy and lacks any likeable characteristics, even though the author is at pains to explain this away due to the tragedies that have befallen him in Book 2.

However, these do not excuse the foul natured monster that Beobrand has become, and I did struggle to understand why any man, or woman, would want to spend any time with him, or rely on him in his guise as a warrior or a lover. He is, quite simply, lacking in any likable qualities, without even the spark of any humour to soften his harshness, no matter how often Athelstan tries to recount his exploits in the mead hall and make them appear heroic, it simply does not work for me.

The constant shifts in point of view in chapters is annoying, but this is something that I personally don't understand or like in any novel so it's not a particular complaint about this author. I'm always left feeling that if the chapter needs a shift in POV then it's either not a chapter and needs splitting, or the author needs to approach this part of the novel in a different way - give the voice of the story to a different member of the cast.

The storyline of Blood and Blade is somewhat simplistic, and you do reach a certain part of the novel and know exactly what has to happen before it reaches its end. Nothing unexpected happens to bring the novel to its conclusion. This is somewhat of a shame. I would have liked even the idea of a different ending.

The author is at pains to show society, as he perceives it, at this time, and the insistence on the small details is repetitive, as is the constant recounting of Beobrand's aches and pains, recovering wounds and new ones that he receives.

I would reiterate, Beobrand is no hero, but neither is he an anti-hero. He's been thrust into a time in history that is very exciting, and yet it seems that with his constant moaning and complaining, that he has no appreciation of this and is never likely to. For a young man, he often appears to be about 100 years old.

On a final note. I still do not like the way the author treats women of this period. They are either witches, bed companions, or someone else's bed companions, and they are presented as petty and mean to each other. This might be a novel about a (very) grumpy warrior, but Anglo-Saxon women were, and should be, given the place in society that they earned and deserved. Much of this is, obviously, to do with the author's interpretation of this time period, and I suppose, it is worth remembering that it is a work of fiction, and not fact. Still, this is also a shame and I hope, something, that is corrected in later books to allow the author to reach a wider fan base.

Overall, the novel was enjoyable to read.

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## **Kate says**

Richly evocative of an age that can appear more legend than history, this novel has Saxon warriors marching across its pages to combat Picts, Mercians, old enemies and new, while the women face battles of their own. Vigorous, well-researched historical fiction.

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## **Judy Lesley says**

I received an e-ARC of this novel through NetGalley and Aria.

This third novel in the Bernicia Chronicles starts off with an encounter between Beobrand and his arch enemy, Torran. Not only does this initial chapter set the tone for the historical time in which this story is set (635 A.D., Albion) but it also brings the reader immediately into the life and death struggles between the Saxons and the Picts. Beobrand is still recovering from an arrow wound in his leg received from Torran in their last meeting plus another healing wound which makes it impossible for him to hold his shield. This is fighting hand-to-hand in the Dark Ages.

New readers to the series are artfully drawn into the storyline by writing which includes good information regarding place names and their modern equivalent as well as a map. Author Matthew Harffy was excellent with his portrayal of Beobrand and his struggles with both physical and mental problems. He is trying to reconcile his mourning with his physical attraction to a thrall within his household. I liked the way Harffy didn't make this a main theme which took away focus from the warrior life of Beobrand, but did allow the reader to see how other concerns and distractions filled out his personality. This is definitely not a one dimensional character. Another element in the plot which I found enjoyable was the returning character of Nelda and the mystical aura her malevolence embodied whether she was present at that point in the story or only spoken of and remembered. That touch of magic added so much to the atmosphere and, for me, added to the growing importance of those who believed in the Christ and the monks who practiced those teachings which are so different from the old beliefs.

Beobrand and his men are summoned to attend King Oswald and find that they are going on a trip as escort for Oswald and his brother Oswiu. Oswald has decided to marry the daughter of Cynegils so a trip all the way to Wessex is to be undertaken.

I enjoyed this story quite a bit. I began the series here and had no difficulties in understand what had come before in the first two novels even though I had to refer to the place names listing quite often at first. The introduction of the Christian faith and the development of medical advances used by monks is presented in a low key manner and yet it is obvious these things are going to play a great part in the series as it progresses. This is one readers will want to follow because of the historical realism and the character development of not just Beobrand, but all those who contribute to the story and help it move forward.

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## **Paul Bennett says**

This is book three in The Bernicia Chronicles and the story of a 7th century warrior, Beobrand. When I read

book 2, I said at the end of my review that I was eagerly anticipating the 3rd. The author did not disappoint me. Skillfully intertwining fact with some robust and entertaining fiction, Mr. Harfffy takes the reader on an interesting ride through Northumbria, Wessex, Mercia and the land of The Picts. This was a violent and confusing period where warriors still fought for their lords and still sought vengeance for any slights or misdeeds; where the old gods were beginning to lose their sway over the populace as kings converted to Christ and looked for alliances with other Christ minded rulers. Beobrand is now a renowned warrior in the service of King Oswald and the lord of his own land and gesithas (his personal retinue of warriors), but he still has many enemies seeking to do him harm. And so, we have a page turning affair redolent in the violence of the age but one also of plot shifts, surprises and new forays into love; reluctant, unexpected, dangerous and forbidden love. Give yourself a treat, dear reader, if you haven't started this series, then you owe it to yourself to do so. The Dark Age of Albion awaits you. 5 stars

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## **Robin Carter says**

### Review

In previous reviews i have stated that The Bernicia Chronicles was the gritty reality that Bernard Cornwell wished his Uthred series was. Matthew Harfffy with impeccable research into the period, but also into insight into human nature weaves a tale of a troubled man, facing his past, and building a future.

### Rest of the review

<https://parmenionbooks.wordpress.com/...>

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## **Edoardo Albert says**

In *Blood and Blade*, Matthew Harfffy's recreation of the violent and crucial decades of 7th-century Britain reaches a new depth and resonance. His hero, Beobrand, is a man whose soul has been as much branded by the events of the previous two books as his body has been battered by them - and how good it is to have an action hero not shake off wounds as lightly as a shower of rain. In this book, Beobrand has to travel the path his wyrd has placed him on, between competing kingdoms and the collision of religions. Harfffy handles the many action scenes with his customary skill and realism - this is not a book for the faint hearted - but it is in the portrayal of the relationship between Beobrand and a lowly thrall that the author reveals a deepening appreciation of the human condition and how, even in the midst of the most violent of times, people will strive for love and human contact.

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## **Katie says**

*When I came to Bernicia I dreamt of becoming a warrior. Of battle-glory and fame. I knew nothing then.*

The third instalment of Bernicia Chronicles is a non-stop battle, whether is it a real battle on the field or Beobrand's personal battle with life after all the losses he had suffered. He seems to make many enemies easy, but on the other hand, he is quick to find friends even amongst the ones that are supposed to be

enemies. He is still rash but with some luck, he gets into king's good graces.

Beobrand is still presented as a flawed hero, with many virtues and many faults. In this book, he becomes more isolated at times, especially after the birth of his son, the event that should be joyful. He also manages to get more enemies, such as the brother of deceased friend Leofwine, and the new neighbours of the fortress he was given who were presented in the previous book. One of them survives and is Beobrand's sworn enemy. He allies himself with Hengist's mother as they share the hatred of Beobrand. But he also has his friends and his warriors who are loyal almost to a fault.

Beobrand is still burdened with the curse and it is only at the end of the book that he realises that the losses do not have to burden him as much as they did and that he still has a child to look for.

It is time for rest for a while, but new battles will come, as they always do and Beobrand and his warriors will be put to new tests soon enough.

(To be honest, I've read book 2 and now book 3 in two days and I may have added some of the details of the previous book in the review here as the stories have merged together into one)

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## **ELizabeth Livingstone says**

### **Character building**

Once again the characters are brought to life, their thoughts and actions, emotions appear very real. Will wait impatiently for the next journey. Hope that the young Mercian Prince recovers and meets up with our hero.

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## **Samantha says**

Another great story by Matthew Harffy! If you have read the first two books in the Bernicia Chronicles, you already know that this one is going to be packed with action, perfectly described battle scenes, and the sort of bantering that only takes place between men who risk their lives together. What makes this series stand out is that all that testosterone is balanced by Beobrand's deeper search for love and meaning in his life. His character continues to develop in this story as he serves King Oswald.

When we first met Beobrand in *The Serpent Sword*, he was young and impetuous, full of righteous indignation, and attempting to discover if he could be a better man than his father had been. Some of that struggle continues, but he has also been through much of the refining fire of life that has formed him into a man who others depend on despite his youth. He is still impetuous, and to some extent still trying to figure out what the future, or the gods, or the One True God, have in store for him. Whatever it is, he will face it head-on with sword in hand.

Besides the ongoing battles for supremacy in the land that would become England, Beobrand has personal demons that make him a more complex character than what one typically finds in this type of story. He misses his wife, isn't sure what to do with his infant son, and has feelings for a woman that leave him feeling confused and guilty. If I have any criticism of this wonderful novel, it would be that I would have loved to see Beobrand with his son more and Reaghan less. It struck me as odd that little Octa, Beobrand's only

remaining link to Sunniva, was rarely on his mind, while the girl he barely knew rarely left it. Yet, this is a minor point and is only my personal opinion.

What makes this book - this entire series - amazing is that Harfffy transports the reader into the 7th century. The lifestyles, the beliefs, the struggles, the raw reality of it. The reader may not always find themselves agreeing with Beobrand, but they will always be cheering for him.

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### **S.J.A. Turney says**

I had the opportunity to read an advance copy of Matthew's new *Bernicia Chronicles* novel a few weeks back, which pleased me immensely, as his work had been on my radar for some time and I'd been meaning to find time to fit in his first book.

I'll say at the outset that *Dark Age*, Anglo-Saxon Britain is not my era of choice and an author has to work hard to draw and keep my attention. I have discarded a dozen *Dark Age* novels unfinished. Kudos to Harfffy then that I stayed riveted to *Blood and Blade* right to the end, especially given that this is the third book in his series and I had been dropped in the deep end, unfamiliar with the characters and the ongoing story arc.

One of the strengths of the novel is the characters. The lead, a little like Cornwell's Uhtred, is a little straightforward for my taste, but that works well in the book, as he becomes the linchpin around which the fascinating cast of supporting characters work, and some of those secondary cast really did intrigue and delight me.

The tale ranges across the length of England, from Northumberland down to Essex and Wessex, then back up to the north and beyond into the wilds of southern Scotland where it reaches a breakneck, action-packed conclusion, resolving a long-term thread that has clearly been developing in earlier books.

The pace is good, the characterisation excellent, the writing absorbing. All in all a very good read.

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### **Eric Schumacher says**

#### **Great read!**

*Blood and Blade* is third book in *Bernicia* series and it's a great read. I have not read the other two but Harfffy does a good job of introducing new readers to the series and taking them along on a well-written adventure with vivid characters and chilling action. Well done!

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### **Greg at 2 Book Lovers Reviews says**

*The Bernicia Chronicles* continue with Matthew Harfffy's third book *Blood and Blade*. It's always fun to get back into the lives of familiar characters, that whole get to know them period is over and we can get straight to the meat and potatoes of the story. That being said, *Blood and Blade* is part of a series, it really should be read in order, as each new book builds off of the previous.

Despite his flaws, and he has many, Beobrand is a likeable character. Harffyy has created an intricately balanced character. Beobrand knows the right thing to do, he wants to do it, but sometimes his anger and thoughts of vengeance take over and, well, all of that good and noble stuff goes down the drain. It makes him real. I much prefer this kind of protagonist than some perfect hero who always does the right thing without emotion.

So, here we are now at book three; what can I say without giving key events away from this story or the previous two? Well, first of all, I've read the three books, Harffyy has kept me coming back for more. He has created an exciting world where the difference between good and evil is based simply on perspective. It is a world of violence and inequality and one that is driven by revenge. Really it's not all that different from our own world.

If you've been reading along with *The Bernicia Chronicles*, you definitely want to read *Blood and Blade* to see how Beobrand copes with his loss. If you haven't read book one, *The Serpent Sword*, hang on tight, you're in for a wild ride.

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### **Melisende d'Outremer says**

I arrived at this one rather late - two volumes too late, and as such did not really connect with the characters which is a shame as this period in English history usually sparks my interest

The novel is set in the time of the turmoil in the Kingdom of Northumbria in the AD7th century - a similar period covered by Edoardo Albert in his trilogy (which I read a roughly the same time - and have the opportunity to read again).

I gave this two star as the writing and plot kept me captivated, and I guess had I read the books in sequence, a higher star rating would have ensued. That doesn't mean that I won't return to these in sequential order (so a second review could be in the future).

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### **Gareth says**

This is another fantastic entry in the Bernicia Chronicles series. Harffyy's skill has grown as the series has developed, and the book is a gripping, entertaining read. There is plenty of intrigue, tension, and of course, action, throughout. Highly recommended. Looking forward to book 4 already!

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### **Stephanie says**

Let's travel to England, shall we? But let's not go to modern England. Oh, no. No, no, no... nothing that simple. Let's visit an older England, one existing before the coming of the kings and queens you learned about in school, an England before it was England. Let's visit the island when it was a cocktail of Angles, Saxons, Jutes, and other Germanic tribes living alongside the native Britons. Let's go to 7th Century Bernicia.



Never heard of it? I hadn't either before beginning Matthew Harff's wonderful *Bernicia Chronicles*. Bernicia was a kingdom in the modern English counties of Northumberland and Durham, and the Scottish counties of Berwickshire and East Lothian, stretching from the Forth to the Tees. In the early 7th century, it merged with its southern neighbor, Deira, to form the kingdom of Northumbria. At the time of the book, the region was constantly at war between everyone and anyone, all vying for power and the right to rule.

I reviewed the first two books, *The Serpent Sword* and *The Cross and the Curse*, here, so I won't spend time repeating the things I already covered. I am a fan of the world Harff created in the opening two books, and *Blood and Blade* is no exception. But what keeps me coming back each time is Beobrand, the hero of these tales.

The plot is pretty straightforward, and there is action and tension enough to make the story clip along at a fair pace. What I loved most however, was the continuing internal struggle that Beobrand wrestles with. There are many factors that drive him: a self-prescribed vengeance for his long-ago-murdered brother, his duty as the king's thegn – both to the king directly and to his people, the often overwhelming responsibilities of leadership, and an ongoing battle within himself for identity. All of these voices swirl and compete for supremacy in his head as the story marches on, but it's that last one, his search for identity, which is the real appeal for me. I adore characters with depth and nuance, but also those with a dark complexity that makes it difficult for them to even understand themselves, much less me, the reader.

Readers who love masculine books with battle scenes and lots of action and adventure will not be disappointed. But I submit to the rest of you that if one reads beyond the pace and story, taking a slower, deeper look, there is a feast to be found in young Beobrand. He is a hero, sometimes willing and other times not. But beyond that, under that heroic outer layer, we discover that he is human, and in that humanity there is much to which we can relate.

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