

Across the Plain of Shining Books

A SHOWCASE for BOOKS and THEIR AUTHORS



Thursday, June 14, 2012

**My little pen travels
Across the plain
of shining books...**

*(Columille the Scribe
Irish, 11th Century)*

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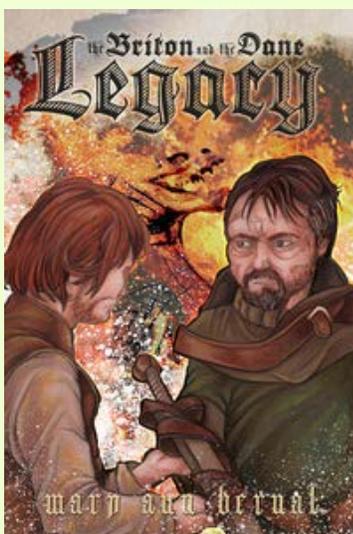
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Mary Ann Bernal - The Briton and the Dane: Legacy



A Shining hello to historical novelist Mary Ann Bernal, author of *The Briton and the Dane* stories, epic adventures set in the Dark Ages during the time of the Viking raids.

Mary Ann will be giving away a print copy of *Legacy*, the third book in this exciting trilogy. Or should we say series? A fourth title, *The Briton and the Dane: Concordia*, is due out in 2013. Be sure to leave your contact info if you'd like to win a copy of *Legacy*.

Welcome, Mary Ann. Tell us a little about yourself. Where are you from?

I'm a New York "expat," having moved to Omaha, NE a few years ago to be closer to my son and his family. Omaha is a lovely city

that reminds me of White Plains, NY, which made an East Coast to the Heartland transition relatively easy.

What sparked your interest in writing?

Reading and writing go together, in my humble opinion. I have read a variety of genres since Junior High School, but it was my love of history that prompted me to set pen to paper, or more aptly, key stroke to computer screen. I enjoy historical fiction novels pertaining to Great Britain, and do admit to being an Anglophile. Of course the Hollywood epics of years past, when Vikings ruled the seas, piqued my interest to write a story about the Viking threat to Britannia's shores, and Erik the Viking was born.

You chose a turbulent and riveting era. What components, in your opinion, make a great story?

Action and adventure with a dash of romance, all of which comprise *The Briton and the Dane* trilogy - an epic adventure set in the reign of Alfred the Great when the formidable Vikings threatened Britannia's shores.

How would you generally categorize the books/stories you write?

Since I write fiction, my books are listed in the trade category. While historical fiction is my genre of choice, my short stories encompass a variety of themes set in different centuries, but the message to the reader transcends time. Betrayal is betrayal whether you're in Julius Caesar's Rome or in the twenty-first century.

Do you set your books/stories in your hometown, or do you prefer more exotic locations?

My novels are set in Ninth Century Britain and the European continent where many of the places referenced no longer exist. However, since my novels have been published, I have traveled to the U.K. Ireland and Italy, visiting the ruins that still stand with thousands of pictures to document the adventure, thanks to my Canon Rebel with multiple 4 GB memory cards.

You must have been thrilled to see some of the places you've featured in your stories! How much of your writing is based on people or events familiar to you?

Since my stories are set in the Dark Ages, I tend to weave in historical events that "run in the background" so to speak so the events do not get in the way of the story. For example, in the first book, the treaty between King Alfred and King Guthrum is referenced, but the conflicts are brought to the forefront. One of the terms of the treaty was the forced baptism of King Guthrum and his pagan Danish subjects. I shed light on a dilemma that can be seen today that raises the question, "Would you be willing to die for your religious beliefs?" The multiple themes in the novels remain with us to this day, making my characters believable.

How did you come up with the title?

"The Briton and the Dane" was not my first choice for the trilogy, but then I did not plan on writing a trilogy when I started the first novel. Originally, the book was to be about Erik, the Viking, but as I started writing, many characters who played a minor role wanted more "air time," and suddenly the story was of epic proportion, and too much story for one book. Since God is my muse, He came up with the title, awakening me in the middle of the night to write down the title lest it was lost by morning.

What was the hardest part of the story to write?

Since I try to use "non-modern" words to help transport the reader back in time, I have to consciously remember to write with a selected vocabulary. For example, healer, not physician; wager, not bet; belly, not stomach, and so on. My short stories are not written in this style, so remembering which cap I am wearing can be a challenge, especially when the words are flowing faster than I can type them.

What was the easiest part of the story to write?

To me, the easiest part is to allow my characters to change direction as the story unfolds. For example, a hated character becomes loved or vice versa. There is no black or white reasoning motivating my characters - we deal in shades of gray, and you soon find yourself sympathetic to the villain's plight - you may not agree with a decision, but you can understand the why.

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Our characters do like their limelight. Your stories include so much detail. Was there much research involved?

Research is the fun part - no stress - no deadlines, and with the internet, you no longer have to spend long nights in the library. Since Dark Ages documentation is rare, I used creative license to fill in the blanks. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle is an excellent resource for events occurring during the timeline of my story, which gives credence to the plot and subplots in this epic adventure.

Is there a message in your story you want readers to grasp?

There are multiple themes throughout the trilogy, but the point I wished to address is the plight of the warrior, but more specifically, how going to war affected family life. Can you imagine not knowing the fate of your loved one who left home to fight for a cause he/she believed in? How many years would you wait before "moving on?" Even though news is "instant" in today's day and age, anxiety remains while the soldier is away from home. The only change affecting warfare over the centuries in the technological advances in weaponry, the mindset of the soldier has not changed, nor has the pain softened when honoring a soldier who has made the supreme sacrifice.

What's next for you? Can we look forward to a new story in the near future?

When I finished *The Briton and the Dane: Legacy*, I should have had closure with putting my characters to rest, but I just couldn't do it, and I wasn't ready to leave Wessex! I was considering writing *The Briton and the Dane: The Beginning*, but Concordia demanded her own story, so I am currently writing her novel, which will be available in 2013.

We'll look forward to sharing Concordia's adventures. And now, let's have a look at *Legacy*.

The Briton and the Dane: Legacy - Synopsis:

It was a time before England's Golden Age; before Chaucer's poetic tales; before the revered Lionheart took the Crusader Cross; before the legend of Robin Hood. It was after the invading Germanic tribes settled the land and petty chieftains vied for supreme sovereignty that a great King sought to unify the British nation.

Travel back in time to Dark Age Britannia and the turbulent reign of Alfred the Great who successfully prevented the Great Heathen Army from conquering his beloved Kingdom of Wessex.

Journey throughout a war-ravaged country where Lord Richard and his offspring swear allegiance to a visionary King; where a cultural renaissance, not seen since the rule of Charlemagne, defies the savagery of Barbarian raids; where a decisive sea battle establishes naval supremacy.

Excerpt:

Preface

Southeast Britannia / Two Years Earlier

The Pilgrims spoke softly amongst themselves as they walked the forest path. Brother Martel had favored the well-traveled main road but their leader chose to save time by following a more direct route through the woods since the tired band of travelers wished to reach the abbey before Compline.

Sunbeams illuminated the lush green foliage and a soft breeze crackled the branches and rustled the leaves in the towering trees while furry creatures scuttled between overgrown shrubs as a doe and her fawn jumped over a fallen tree.

"You seem unsettled," Sidonius whispered. "What troubles you?"

"We are easy prey," Brother Martel murmured while pointing to the sloping terrain and massive oaks overshadowing the rock-strewn trail.

Sidonius nodded while noticing that Brother Martel kept his hand instinctively upon the pommel of his sword as both men warily searched amongst the trees for any sign of mischief as they walked deeper into the forest.

Sidonius kept Tarren protectively close and was grateful that the little ones slept. He whispered comforting words when he saw the fear in her eyes while offering to take Emidus.

"Nay, carrying two is tiring, but I will give you the boy should the need arise," Sidonius murmured.

Tarren smiled anxiously, but she grasped Sidonius' hand as she too scoured the threatening landscape. She tightened the wrap carrier when Concordia stirred, and comforted the child silently when a flock of chirping birds flew frantically out of the swaying treetops just as mounted warriors rode over the crest of a nearby hill.

Bone chilling howls and war cries resonated throughout the woodland as brigands with drawn swords rapidly approached the startled travelers. Women screamed as they ran amongst the trees, but the men grasped the reins of the seasoned warhorses and tried to unseat their attackers before falling to the ground with wounds that would readily mend.

"Save your family!" Brother Martel shouted to Sidonius as he freed his weapon and prepared for battle. "Seek refuge at King Alfred's court."

"Leave with us," Sidonius yelled as he freed his dagger. "You are but one sword."

"Nay! My sword will give you time to flee. Await me in Winchester," Brother Martel replied. "Go! Make haste!"

Tarren was terrified as a mounted fighter charged towards them but Brother Martel easily deflected the blow, yet he was not able to defend himself against a crazed fighter who ferociously wielded his sword and savagely slashed the holy man's eyes. Blood seeped down Brother Martel's face as the blinded religious stumbled against a warhorse. Brother Martel instinctively grabbed the reins, his hands grasping for his mounted enemy, but he fell to his knees when a spear penetrated his back.

Sidonius grabbed Tarren's arm and quickly led her away from the carnage and headed towards the river. Emidus and Concordia screamed as they tried to wiggle free, and cried uncontrollably when they failed to loosen the wrap carrier.

Sidonius and Tarren were out of breath when they reached the edge of a cliff where the mighty roar of a waterfall deafened the screams that echoed throughout the forest as the women were ravaged by their attackers.

The cool spray gently caressed their faces as Sidonius and Tarren looked upon the gushing water crashing upon the rocks, the turbulent river flowing towards the sea. Sidonius gazed upon the large boulders along the riverbed as he scoured the steep and rocky terrain for overgrown trails and hidden caves.

"Do not be foolish," a fearsome horseman said as he pulled on the reins and steadied his steed. "Your choice is simple. Take your chances with me or be enslaved. What say you?"

"We would be in your debt," Sidonius quickly replied while helping Tarren onto the animal's back.

Tarren cradled Concordia and leaned against the stranger as Sidonius swung himself atop the charger, but Emidus screamed when he found himself wedged between his protectors.

"Fear not little one," Sidonius soothingly replied while steadying himself and the child. "We are safe."

Lucian smiled as the well-disciplined animal picked its way carefully along the narrow rock-strewn path that followed the winding river and disappeared quickly amongst the trees.

* * * * *

"Brother Gervase!" A young monk cried as he ran through the abbey gate and headed towards the sickrooms. "There has been an attack in the woods! I do not know how many have been wounded or slain!"

"Fetch a wagon!" Brother Gervase yelled while grabbing a healer's bag and running out the door.

It did not take long for the holy men to reach the clearing where the vicious attack had occurred. Brother Gervase saw the vultures circling above the motionless bodies when he reached the crest of the sloping terrain. He ran down the hill and stumbled as he hurriedly approached the first victim; he knelt beside the fallen Pilgrim and gently pressed his fingers against the man's neck.

"He is with the Lord," Brother Gervase whispered as he made the sign of the Cross before approaching the Pilgrim who had been felled by the dreaded spear.

Brother Gervase once again pressed his fingers against the victim's neck and was surprised to learn that the man still lived. Blood trickled from the gaping wound as Brother Gervase deftly removed the formidable weapon. He stopped the bleeding, applied a poultice and covered the gaping hole with a clean cloth before gently turning Brother Martel onto his back; he looked compassionately upon the wounded man's swollen, blood-caked face, and feared that Brother Martel's sight had been taken.

"Where is the wagon?" Brother Gervase shouted. "His wounds are grave!"

The frightened monk ran towards the crest of the hill and was relieved when he saw that the wagon was almost upon them.

"Make haste!" The young monk shouted as he hurriedly approached the open cart. "One lives!"

Brother Gervase watched as his skillful apprentices carefully lifted Brother Martel into the wagon and waited impatiently as the dead Pilgrim was reverently placed into the cart. The younger monk nodded to Brother Gervase as he jumped onto the seat, grabbed the reins and hit the animal's back. The wagon creaked and the wheels squealed as the horse trotted through the vast forest. Brother Gervase wanted to push the horse harder and was tempted to take the reins, but he managed to conceal his growing impatience and silently praised the Lord when they finally reached the abbey gate.

The religious community watched in horror as Brother Martel was taken to the healer's dwelling; holy men and women stood vigil outside the sickrooms as they awaited the fate of the warrior monk.

"Is he mortally wounded?" One of the women asked Brother Gervase as he ran into the room.

"His life is in the Lord's hands," Brother Gervase told her as he ushered the curious from his quarters and firmly shut the door.

[View the Book Trailer](#)

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[About Mary Ann Bernal:](#)

Mary Ann Bernal, author of

The Briton and the Dane novels, is an avid history buff whose area of interest focuses on Ninth Century Anglo-Saxon Britain during the Viking Age. While pursuing a degree in business administration, she managed to fit creative writing classes and workshops into her busy schedule to learn the craft, but it would take decades before her "Erik the Viking" novel was ultimately published.



Mary Ann is also a passionate supporter of the United States military, having been involved with letter writing campaigns and other support programs since Operation Desert Storm. She has appeared on The Morning Blend television show hosted by KMTV, the CBS television affiliate in Omaha, and was interviewed by the Omaha World-Herald for her volunteer work. She has also been a featured author on various reader blogs and promotional sites.

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Posted by Pat McDermott at 12:05 AM



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