



The Circle of Ceridwen

Octavia Randolph

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It is the year 871. Of seven Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, five have fallen to the invading Vikings. No trait is more valued than loyalty, and no possession more precious than one's steel. Across this war-torn landscape travels fifteen year old Ceridwen, now thrust into the lives of the conquerors.

Epic...immensely satisfying...an impressive achievement - Historical Novel Society The English Adventure loved by over 100,000 readers in 125 countries...

Lost in the frozen woods, Ceridwen is discovered by the warriors accompanying young Ælfwyn, daughter of a Saxon lord, sold against her will in marriage as part of a peace treaty with a marauding Viking war chief. Their destination is the captured fortress of Four Stones, a ruin holding glittering treasure. There Ælfwyn must keep her vow and wed Yrling - and Ceridwen must do all she can to support her new friend in the rebuilding of the ravaged village and great hall.

But living with the enemy affords Ceridwen unusual freedoms - and unlooked-for conflicts. Amongst them she explores again her own heathen past, and learns to judge each man on his own merits. Yrling's nephews Sidroc and Toki, both formidable warriors yet as different as night and day, compete to win Ceridwen for their own.

Through both guile and goodness Ceridwen and Ælfwyn begin transforming the world of Four Stones. But the threat of full-scale war escalates, and a midnight party of furtive Danes delivers someone to Four Stones who destroys the girls' hopes of peace and contentment. Now Ceridwen must summon all her courage - a courage which will be sorely tested as she defies both Saxon and Dane and undertakes an extraordinary adventure to save a man she has never met..

The Circle of Ceridwen Details

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From Reader Review The Circle of Ceridwen for online ebook

Raven says

This book is set in a time period after the Roman Empire during the time the Danes were overtaking the land. The story is told from a first person point of view. The main character, Ceridwen, was orphaned as a young child and her story starts just prior to her 13th/14th year. She tells of her early years and then we go along with her on her adventure when she reached her 15th year and left the Priory. It is a wonderfully told story and kept my interest from the first page. This book is one that is much longer than many of the books I have gotten lately and is the first book in a trilogy. It took me a couple of afternoons to read and I thoroughly enjoyed it. I look forward to getting the other two books in this trilogy. I highly recommend this book to anyone who is interested in the times that followed after King Arthur.

Angela Ryser Bahling says

First I must commend the publisher of the e-book format for the lack of errors included in this novel! Error-free reading is so much more enjoyable....

The novel is set in 870 - 875 AD in England just at the beginning of the Danish invasion and is the first in a trilogy. It tells the story of a girl who possesses courage, wisdom, and maturity beyond her years. Ceridwen is the daughter of a deceased earldoman (chief of the shire) who is raised by her uncle until his death and then raised by the local priory until she leaves there at 14 or 15 to seek a station. Ceridwen meets Lady Aelfwyn (a young maid from Wessex who is on her way to be wed to a Dane as part of a peace pact). Ceridwen and Aelfwyn become fast friends. The first portion of the novel portrays their new lives in a Danish stronghold.

The second half of the novel centers on the escape of a young Lord from Wessex from the Danish stronghold. The Lord, Gyric, and Ceridwen have many adventures as they make their way back to Wessex and Gyrics family (who believe him to be dead).

The characters are well developed and I was saddened that I would no longer read of some of them in the second part of the novel. I hope they are reintroduced in the subsequent novels.

druidessprincess says

3 stars. Because I loved it. Then hated it.

Wow....what a bizarre reading experience. I was completely riveted and enthralled for the first 50% of the story. I couldn't wait to pick it up and keep reading.

...The second half of book made me want to prize my eyes out with a hot poker (that's a spoiler, by the way) ;)

Why would you spend the entire first half of a book establishing character and story and plot and setting and

tension, and then drop EVERYTHING half way through and have the protagonist walk away from it all? Only for the rest of the book to be an insipid love story with a character that we've just met and don't give a damn about?? ...Maybe we were supposed to give a damn about Gyric, but I didn't. I thought Sidroc and her had a much more interesting dynamic, and that all got thrown away. As did the driving relationship of the novel, the friendship between Ceridwen and Aelfwyn, because she leaves her to rescue this guy (who is Aelfwyn's old love from before her marriage to the Dane jarl, at her friends own request) AND THEN STEALS HIM FOR HERSELF. What the actual f? I just...I don't understAnd. She was absolutely FAITHFUL to Aelfwyn, and then does THAT? And expects her not to mind? Am I missing something here? It's like she got amnesia and forget every single thing that mattered to her, including her own moral compass??

I skim read the last 100 pages (including the love scenes and marriage, ugh yawnfest), so there's a good chance I might be actually missing some explanation for all that, but I seriously doubt it.

This is such a thoughtless outpouring right now but I just can't. I can't even. I don't know what to say. I enjoyed the first half SO MUCH and I'm so completely disappointed and angry with the second half. I feel like I've been robbed. It was like reading two different novels. Or like the author swapped to someone else half way through.

I'll probably keep reading the series, just because I need to know if this is going to come full circle. Because the title. But damn, this shit was not cool.

Patty Rodriguez says

Great series! Couldn't put it down, just as good as Outlander. Loved Sidroc from the beginning will reread again!!!!

Darlene Williams says

Stellar Novel

The author notes in the foreword that the novel is written in Olde English fashion, and she does a remarkable job. A novel that captured my interest and held it to the end. I will most certainly be reading future novels in this series. Well done Octavia!

Kathleen says

I very much enjoyed The Circle of Ceridwen and the time or history it illuminated. Historical novels that verify the times and people utilizing the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle appeal greatly to me. Ceridwen was mostly a believable character although some of her life choices seemed improbable.

The Danish invasions are important reading to me on several levels, and this time period especially so, as it lays a framework for when the Normans began to come to England.

"A.D. 871. This year came the army to Reading in Wessex; there was much slaughter on either hand, ; but the Danes kept possession of the field"

Such was the time that Octavia Randolph wrote about and Ceridwen lived. It seems accurate and believable to me and times, people and places all developed extremely well.

I plan to go now and purchase the other two books in the series as I am missing my daily trips into Essex and Mercia.

Erika Altensee says

I found myself a little dissatisfied with Ceridwen's choices as a person, which means Randolph made her a truly realistic character. Indeed, you come to love and hate all of the characters (and their flaws). Also, the book reads very lyrically, which is a great way to tell the story. This is a fast read because the story is beautifully told--the author's imagery of countryside, culture, and day-to-day goings-on is impeccable. She truly paints the setting from which the reader can totally be lost in the book.

Morgan says

I love when a book is a portal to another world. The Circle of Ceridwen transports readers to the world of the Anglos, the Saxons, and the Danes. Octavia Randolph does a masterful job of using dialect to create Angle-Land. I could see the forests through which Ceridwen and Gyric traveled when I looked out the car window. I could see the scar on Sidroc's face. I could hear the conversations, taste the ale, and feel the heat of the bone fire as rain fell outside of the shelter. I do not believe this book is romantic in intention, but it has some of the most romantic relationships I've encountered in reading in a long time. Aelfwyn and Ceridwen's relationship one of the top among all. For me this book is almost on level with Mists of Avalon, and I can think of no higher praise than that. I can't wait to continue Ceridwen's journey in the next book.

Betty says

I really enjoyed this book. Although first in a series, the author tells a mostly complete story, with one thread left unfinished that could be resolved in a later book.

The characters, both main and supporting, are developed gradually, as are their relationships to each other. Their good and not-so-good sides are shown in their histories and interactions, but qualitative judgements are left to the reader. In a tale of war, it is not very common for both sides to have both their good as well as their darker sides shown.

The settings in the story are so well done, so descriptive, that I sometimes felt that I could have been watching a movie. The bleakness of a ransacked town contrasts with the richness of treasures. Mild, sunny days and cold, dreary days are so vivid as to direct the mood of the reader. The use of adjectives for the sake of filler was skillfully avoided, but at no loss to completeness.

It is a tale of clashes - religious, cultural, political, and personal.

Janine says

You will not find a more enjoyable series of books! Historically accurate to a T, down to even the smallest detail these books transport you to 9th century England before it was a united England. Ceridwen comes of age and sets out on her own path instead of one set out by the priest who has finished raising her after the death of first her ealdorman father and then her uncle. On her journey, she meets Aelfwyn on the way to marrying the Jarl of Four Stones, a Dane, a Viking. The two become like sisters and their lives are interwoven forever as they both experience things that change them and shape them into remarkable strong women. The journey through this saga is a real joy and will affect you long after you have finished the books. Octavia Randolph is a weaver of tales like no other. Her books are works of love for her readers.

Janine Eitniet

Jennifer (JC-S) says

‘I was born in 856, at a time when the Island of Britain was divided into many Kingdoms.’

This is the voice of Ceridwen, the central character in this novel. The story itself opens in 871, when Ceridwen is aged about 15 years old. By this time, five of seven Anglo-Saxon kingdoms have fallen to the Vikings. Ceridwen, having left the Priory where she has lived since she was 9 years old, meets Ælfwyn and her attendants. Ælfwyn is on her way to be married, against her will, to Yrling, a Viking war chief. Ælfwyn’s marriage is part of a peace treaty.

Thus begins ‘The Circle of Ceridwen’, the first of six (so far) novels about the life and times of Ceridwen. The story unfolds slowly. Ms Randolph provides a wealth of detail about the world in which this novel is set, about the impact of war on individuals and villages, about the differences between cultures and religious beliefs. I found myself reading the novel comparatively slowly (unusual for me) to immerse myself in the world and to appreciate the development of the story.

While I wondered about some of Ceridwen’s choices, I became caught up in the story. Ceridwen’s adventures were too interesting for me to quibble about plausibility, and I enjoyed the three-dimensional characters peopling the pages.

As soon as I finished this novel, I bought the next two in the series. If you enjoy historical fiction with well-developed characters, with a likeable female protagonist and set in 9th century Britain, I recommend this novel.

Jennifer Cameron-Smith

Shelley says

4.5 Stars

This was a great Outlander type read due to its historical backdrop and its well done romantic elements. It does not have a great complexity of politics and characters, but somehow it still felt rich and epic. The female lead is headstrong and confident, but not obnoxiously so! The author does well to create nuances in the characters, which is what made some of the male characters genuine and captivating.

I would have given it 5 stars but the closing section of the book took a bit too long and I ended with sort of lackluster feelings. Nonetheless, I am on to the next pile of books in this series!

David says

What I found interesting about this book is seeing the Dark Ages through the eyes of a woman. Most fiction of this era is written from a man's viewpoint. This isn't a bad thing, but this author shows us an entirely different look at this turbulent era. The main character, Ceridwen, is found wandering along a road by a princess who has been sold to a Danish jurl in exchange for a vow of peace between her father's realm and the Danes. Ceridwen becomes a part of this society and feels at home until a badly wounded warrior from her homeland is brought in as a prisoner. She vows to help him recover and escape to return home. The last third of the book involves the long trek back to his homeland and I won't divulge too much here in the interest of not providing spoilers.

There is much more story and much less violence in this book than in many of this genre. The story is interesting enough to keep my interest and make me want to read more of this series, but a good battle scene now and then would add some spice to the story, in my opinion.

Octavia Randolph did a lot of research in writing this series. It shows in her descriptions of villages and towns and of life in general. The dialogue used in conversations also reflects the period. I enjoyed this book and will read more of this series.

Arie Farnam says

I am a reasonably easy reader to please... and a very hard reader to enthrall. I like a lot of books, but I passionately love only a few. My favorite authors can be counted on one hand. And if Octavia Randolph keeps it up I may need another finger.

The world of digital books is like a great mountain of ash. You step into it and you're instantly up to your waist in dust. You know there are jewels of incredible power hidden in the grime and fluff, but finding them is a mammoth task. After more than a year of searching, I have finally found one of the jewels in The Circle of Ceridwen, the first book in Randolph's historical series.

Oddly enough, I never would have bought this book in a million years based on the cover and the description. I like a good historical novel and I'm not adverse to violent stories but I have never found a book with big swords on the front to be very emotionally powerful and a description that immediately touts the presence of "vikings with tatoos" is unlikely to have the emotional caliber I'm looking for. But I downloaded the book because of one of those free deals and I was very pleasantly surprised. I'd be willing to pay plenty for books like this.

Here's the real deal on this book:

- Its style is accessible and conversational, yet historically evocative. All the semi-literate reviewers confused about the grammar are simply wrong. There are few if any errors in this book. There is a refreshing absence of flamboyance and pompous writing. The prose is easy, flowing and without distraction, a rare treat and the very first necessity for me to love a book.

The book has the emotional impact that so few have these days. That's hard to prove without reading it. It's a mix of good characters and realism.

- The story is told in first person. Always a plus in my opinion. You experience ninth century England through the eyes of a young woman named Ceridwin.

- The characters are likable, believable and relatable, including the supposed "bad guys." I am one of those readers who demands a likable main characters. I simply won't suffer through a book, no matter how good the story is, if the heroine or hero bores me or ticks me off. Here is a young heroine who is so different from the modern vision of a "strong female heroine." She is strong and courageous without being divorced from real women. She is emotionally real and does not try to be "everywoman" so that all readers can see themselves in her. She is a distinct character but one you can love with her flaws. The other characters are also well developed and fascinating.

- The plot is riveting from the first few pages. It takes some very unexpected turns and yet it is never confusing. The tension is held throughout with a fierce desire to see Ceridwen survive and thrive.

- There is warfare, suspense, incredible tension and yet there is no classic villain. It is the real world. The invaders and those who threaten the heroine are people, in fact at least moderately understandable people. You may not agree with all of their decisions or motivations but they are understandable and even honorable in many instances. It is the sheer believability of the characters and world that make the story so emotionally gripping.

- The details of the historical world are breathtaking. I've read enough historical fiction and nonfiction to know extensive research when I see it. While it's hard to say exactly what life was like in the ninth century, this feels both true and consistent. The level of detail is wonderful with none of the vagueness that results from historical uncertainty and no facts clearly manipulated to suit the needs of fiction. It fulfills that thirst for something beautifully historical and effortless to read at the same time.

- The pace is just right. This is a subjective matter as far as I can tell. Some people may call this pace "slow." I call many books that have little emotion and character-develop to them "chaotic and rushed." It isn't constant action. It is instead ever-present story, plot and emotional tension. At no point does the story slow down in order to show off the author's excellent grasp of the history. There are no wasted words or long descriptive scenes for the sake of showing off.

- The book's only flaws may be its cover and description, which hint at a rollicking ride of battle, "weapons porn" and macho atmosphere. The reader only gets to see one "fight" in real time in this first book of the series and that one doesn't even result in anyone dying and is a minor incident in the overall plot. There is plenty of battle going on around but the main character is a girl, who isn't unrealistically placed in the middle of battles. Some readers I know who are into constant battle might be taken in by the cover and description and may be very disappointed. While other readers, who are interested in more character-based stories with flavor and conversational tone, may miss out on this one due to the cover and description.

- It is fashionable today to comment on the ending in a review. This is the first book in a series and while the ending appears to wrap up the major plot lines, it is clear that peace is unlikely to last long. There is plenty of room for more story and yet the ending doesn't feel contrived or episodic. I appreciate this. The fact that much of the plot is sort of wrapped up makes it easier to resist spending my kids' lunch money on the next book right away but I am eager to get my hands on the next book.

Emmy says

[I was really enjoying the part when Ceridwen was with the Danes because I actually really liked Sidroc. In the second half when the author lingered on Ceridwen's journey and burgeoning relationship with Gyric, I was less enthralled. I never really *felt* them as a couple like I did with Sidroc and Ceridwen.

I read the synopsis' of all the rest of the books in the series
