

Broken Eagle: The Adventures of Germanus the Gaul: Volume 1: Sacred Blood of Prythain: Struggling for Britannia and the Roman Empire

David Baker

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Broken Eagle is a sober historical novel set during a significant period of political transformation.

David Baker's ambitious historical novel *Broken Eagle* chronicles a hero's adventures amid the decline of the Roman Empire.

In the fifth century CE, the pope dispatches Germanus, a Roman general who became an archbishop, back to his home in Britannia, where he is charged with vanquishing a warlord, Vortigern. There, Germanus finds his wife slain, his son missing, and himself embroiled in a power struggle between Britons, Celts, and Saxons. But as he's torn between the different factions, as well as between the church and the state, Germanus also finds himself in a position to shape the future of the island, even of the empire.

This is a sweeping saga that follows the future saint through various battles and conflicts, dramatizing how the Great Britain of antiquity was forged as Roman rule faded. In the process, the narrative takes liberties with history for dramatic effect, as when it elevates Vortigern to the position of a threat to the entire Roman church and empire. Still, deep and broad research is apparent in its turns: in covering battle tactics, espionage stratagems, cultural practices, and religious rituals, the text is thorough, though much of its exposition is delivered via unnatural conversations. An extensive glossary of Latin terms and a map of Germanus's realm further amplify the book's historical credibility, though.

Still, the book's cast of characters is too expansive, and its story too sprawling, to invite the audience's interest in far. For example, the text follows the trajectories of several different people during its battle scenes, but its characterizations of them are thin to prioritize the action. Indeed, the book is so dense with developments that its central thread is often obscured. Its chapters are short but too numerous; its secondary story lines spin off in a variety of directions. Exciting scenes are rushed through, as with a much-hyped duel that fades toward an anticlimactic ending.

The prose is most often dry and detached, though dark humor invades a few of its moments, as when a character who is being crucified, and who is expected to pray, unleashes a profane tirade. Concrete images embellish the story well, though its errors in punctuation are a detraction. And the book's climax is overly condensed, while its cliffhanger elements end the volume with anticipation alone.

Broken Eagle is a sober historical novel that centers on a storied figure during a significant period of political transformation.

JOSEPH S. PETE (April 4, 2022)

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