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The Amber Treasure by Richard Denning

Cerdic is the younger son of a minor lord living in a quiet Anglo Saxon village in sixth century Northumbria. His people are settled and the Welsh (Romano-Britons) seem contained behind the Pennines. Cedric fully expects to live out his life as a gentleman farmer, hopefully with the beautiful Aidith by his side. But as he listens to the tales told by Lilla the bard, he can't help but dream of following after his uncle, the great warrior Cynric, and finding glory in battle.

And then the village is sacked by the Welsh and war *does* come. His brother dead, his sister abducted, and his uncle's legendary sword stolen, Cerdic must move quickly from boyhood to manhood. As the Welsh army masses, can he find the courage to avenge his family's losses?

I thoroughly enjoyed *The Amber Treasure*. Britain in the Dark Ages fascinates me and it's fertile ground for novelists. Here, Cerdic is an extremely engaging central character. He's a somewhat reluctant hero, and he retains a very sane revulsion for the gore of the battlefield, unlike his friend Eduard. But he's a natural leader, and when the chips are down he is as brave as a lion. Sometimes he falls back on a sense of entitlement thanks to his high status family, but he always regrets it and takes subsequent responsibility for anything that went wrong.

The world in which he lives is vividly realised and Denning's research is impeccable. Village life and social structures are described without resort to exposition, and the political background is equally easily absorbed. But where Denning really comes into his own is in the battles - he sure does write a good fight. The heaving and sweating of the shield wall, the fear, the adrenalin, the confusion - these are the scenes I will most remember from this book. Underneath the historical narrative, there's a coming of age story. Cerdic may well have dreamed of battle glory but the truth is little like he imagined it to be. His journey is a picaresque one. He must face up to war, the responsibilities conferred on him by birth, and to the family secret which eventually threatens a whole nation.

In fact, my only real criticisms are practical: there are a few proof-reading slip-ups, and the font chosen has peculiar spacing, which doesn't make for the easiest reading.

If I'm not deceived by the last page, a sequel is planned for *The Amber Treasure*. I think plenty of people will keep an eye out for it. I'd recommend it to fans of historical fiction, this period particularly, and I also think it will appeal to the teen/young adult readership.

If Britain before the Conquest is your kind of reading, you might also enjoy [Raven: Blood Eye by Giles Kristian](#), set amongst the waves of Scandinavian raids. [Flint by Margaret Redfern](#) is set later, at the time of Edward I, but I thoroughly recommend it. Young adult and teen readers might also enjoy [Bloodline by Katy Moran](#), set in the Dark Ages and with a subtle supernatural edge.



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