



The Dark Age

Traci Harding

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The white light surrounded her, exuding from the ground within the circle. The mist rose towards the sky to form a billowing cloud. From within the largest stone a ball of blue light steadily made its way towards her.

Late one evening, a car accident leaves Tory - a daughter of a prominent history professor - stranded near a ring of stones in the English countryside. She resolves to spend the night at the sacred site; a black belt in Tae-kwon-do, Tory holds little fear for her safety...

But across the vortex of time and space, she is being watched. The Merlin knows of the legend Tory is to become, and through the wisdom of the Old Ones, teleports her back to the Dark Age.

Prince Maelgwyn of Gwynedd and his band of knights stumble across this mysterious woman dressed in jeans and a leather jacket. Believing she is the witch of the stones, they threaten to kill her. Rising to her own defence, Tory challenges the Prince's champion to unarmed combat. With her superior fighting skill she easily overwhelms the warrior, winning the admiration of the Prince, and changing the course of British history forever.

The Dark Age Details

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Author : Traci Harding

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From Reader Review The Dark Age for online ebook

Jill Smith says

I was fortunate enough to meet Traci Harding at Somerset Literary Festival a few years ago. She was giving a session with Kim Wilkins and another author. Being that Science Fiction/Fantasy/Gothic Horror is my favourite genre, I was fascinated to hear Traci explain her writing techniques. I was heartened by the fact that she was dyslexic and not highly educated and often writes with heavy metal music playing!

This book is an amazing adventure and as intriguing as its title, and it is the first book of a trilogy, a series I can't wait to immerse myself in. Traci did say at Somerset that she based many of her characters on pieces of her family and friends characteristics, drawing on the unique relationships she knows intimately. I'm certain all authors draw on their own experiences to create a realistic fabric to a tale but in this case the backdrop is so remarkable the relationships create an intense and wonderful world.

Essentially, this story is about Tory Alexandra, a solitary woman who is grieving the untimely death of her brother. Her car breaks down near some ancient monolithic stones dating back to Stonehenge era when England was still a clan based and feudal system. She is forced to stop for the night without realizing that she is part of history and that a vortex will send back in time to the Dark Ages. She meets Prince Maelgwn who is in her own history books as a King of England with a powerful effect on the unification of the clans. Tory becomes trainer to the Prince in martial arts and the ways of the future world. With dark magical enemies and Merlin the Kings confidant who aids them both in the battle to secure their own clan and unite with others. Maelgwn nearly does not triumph and Tory pays a huge price for bearing the Prince a future King of England. In the Dark Ages Tory Alexander becomes the link between past, present and future that saves the Kingdom and changes the history books forever.

This is a difficult book to summarize in brief as it is complex. The characters are very strong and leave a deep sense of longing in the reader to continue the tale. This I will happily do with the balance of the Trilogy in 'An Echo in Time - Atlantis' and 'Masters of Reality – The Gathering'. For those of you who love to loose yourself to satisfying characterization and complex cause and effect tale this series will be a must read.

Penny says

I don't want to give this book a rating because I only read the first third of the book, and it might have gotten better after that.

What I didn't like:

Firstly, the romance aspect of this book is understated in the blurb. The first part of the story is basically a romance novel. The blurb talks about the main character being an awesome fighter, so I really expected that to be the main focus of the story. I expected to like the main character more, but I just didn't.

Character development was very limited, with a rather dry "telling" rather than "showing" approach. Actually, the whole story took this telling rather than showing approach. There was little room for me to imagine anything, anticipate anything or to feel anything.

The first approximately three chapters go to great effort to make the premise of the novel plausible. This is a goal that has varying degrees of pointlessness in this genre and in this case it just reads like a tedious fleshing

out of the blurb.

It seemed like there was ample opportunity in the first part of the novel for the characters to undergo some growth, but it just didn't happen, or when it did there wasn't enough of an emphasis on those characters. There were possibly too many characters, which made the emphasis of the story a little odd. Some really big events happened in the plot and the main characters just went on with things as though very little had changed.

Finally, the dialogue makes ample use of the words thou and hast and their derivatives. This bothered me, but I am not sure that it would have if I had not made myself more aware of it by reading somebody else's review before I had finished the book. I have certainly read other books which employed similar techniques and they did not bother me.

Juliette says

Okay... So I bought this book at a 50% off sale, and so I figured that I didn't have much to lose. Let's just say I was glad I didn't buy it at full price. I mean... to be fair, the story started off with a lot of potential and I really liked it... but when Tori was teleported into the Dark Ages, it began to drive me nuts. I didn't read the book properly... I did a mini translation in my mind when I read it. I'm sorry, but the dialect used when she visited the past drove me nuts!!!!!! There are definitely better ways to portray that she wasn't in modern day world so to speak... The different dialect made it a difficult read...

I would also like to say that somehow whenever I think about this book the author Diana Gabaldon and her Cross stitch series somehow come to mind... Maybe it's the whole going back in time and marrying some very powerful man, and falling in love with him and having his child... Dunno...

Don't get me wrong, I did enjoy it a little... Just... she could have done a lot better...

Pauline says

I don't think I can actually give this any stars. I'm far too conflicted lol. I read this when I was... 13(?) and absolutely loved it. It had a wicked strong female lead, magic, time travel, castles, romance, martial arts... It was like a shopping list of all of the things I found kick-ass as a kid, so of course I lapped this up.

But is the story and writing actually any good...? Umm.. Well.. Probably not.

However it did fire up my imagination, and push me to learn more about taekwondo and history and even some of the new-age hippy ideas it explores. It kept me reading during a time when lots of kids lose interest, and was a good 'in-between' book from children's to adult's fantasy.

These days I feel like there are lots more (better) options for teen & YA/NA fantasy, but 20 years ago we were pretty limited when it came to books with strong female leads and fantasy, so I'm kinda thankful for Traci Harding's Ancient Future series. (However I don't think I'll be going back to re-read them as an adult... Let's just keep those shiny memories from my childhood all squeaky clean and happy lol).

Mike says

Truly awful. Mary Sue, uh, I mean, Tory is at the same time conveniently one of the few modern speakers of early medieval Welsh, a black belt in martial arts - and a shallow, ignorant idiot who the author would have us believe is a great woman of destiny.

The editing is terrible, but then, the manuscript probably started out worse (hard though that is to believe). There aren't many good places to go when you start out with an author capable of using, or misusing, two 17th-century English words ("thee" and "hast") to represent the fact that people are speaking early medieval Welsh - a fact that's abundantly clear from context without this marker, which is therefore simply annoying. Especially since those two words are used without any regard for grammar - they are always "thee" and "hast" regardless of their role in the sentence or the subject of the sentence.

And there's no sense of genuine history. Tory convinces her Welsh prince that the "state" needs to educate the children. What "state" would this be? What books would they use, hundreds of years before printing? What would peasant children conceivably do with their ability to read? And how would their parents feel about not having their essential labour while they learn this unneeded skill?

I'm not even sure why I finished this unoriginal and muddled piece of vague New Agery. I certainly don't know how it, and a number of sequels, managed to get published.

Steph says

Let me start by saying this is very different to the kinds of books I've been reading recently. My partner is a big fantasy fan and has been pestering me to read it for a while, so when I left my book behind on a weekend together he handed me this in an instant.

The writing was jarring at first, it felt clumsy and clunky, and I was rolling my eyes at the simplistic spelling it out and telling rather than showing approach. But I struggled on, and found that somewhere around the 100-200 page mark I was really invested in the plot and enjoying it.

Plot (ish) ** spoilers ** Basically, modern day kick arse Aussie girl, Tory, fluent in ancient language and a black belt stumbles into magic stones whilst on holiday in Britain and BANG/FLASH is transported back to the dark ages. "Woah! Where am I?" Love, adventure, drama, merlins, witches, Otherworld stuff, evil kings, British history stuff, sexy king, changing history, more time travel and drama.

I wish the prose was richer to make this a 5 star read, but I don't really think that's the point here. This book had me up late at night reading "just one more chapter" to find out what happens. I didn't have to think too much. I could just enjoy, and I did.

Tricia Riley says

After her car gets a flat tire, Tory spends the night in a stone circle. This transports her back into the past where she meets the prince Maelgwn. Tory is a black belt in taekwondo and is a modern woman. Is the past ready for her?

I quite liked this book and I am looking forward to reading more in the series. It has magicians, faeries but with a bit of a sci-fi time travelling/reincarnation spin.

Natalia Smith says

This is a difficult review to write, because while I love this series to death, I enjoy it in the same way I enjoy the occasional bit of really bad television. I love these books, but honesty and objectivity compels me to admit that they're not very good.

I'll be frank: the writing makes judicious use of purple prose and the editing is terrible, the storytelling is uneven and at times melodramatic to the point of ridiculousness, the drama is almost always contrived, the characters are all blatant Mary Sues (in the case of the protagonist, this is literally true: in a later installment of the series she's revealed to be a future incarnation of the author), the frequent misuse of YE OLDE ENGLISH is glaringly obvious to anyone with even a basic working knowledge of the proper usage of "thee" and "thou", the author relies far too heavily on *deus ex machina* and coincidence to advance her plot, and there are some giant, gaping holes in the world building.

But I mean, other than that...

Look, I wish I had some convincing argument to defend this series against the people who say it's awful. I don't; it *is* awful. But for me, this series adds up to more than the sum of its (many, many) flaws. The writing is admittedly terrible for a mainstream-published novel (I'd expect something more along this line from a self-published work), but if you don't go into it expecting a literary classic, it's actually pretty engaging. I'm not too proud to admit that I fell in love with a few of the Mary Sue characters, and I find the whole ridiculous, overdone plot immensely entertaining even after numerous re-reads.

It's just one of those books that I inexplicably love, despite my own better judgement.

Nicole says

Read these series about twice a year just because I love these books so much. The story is amazing, the journey the characters are on is wonderful, and I still laugh, smile and cry... each and every time I read these books!

Marte Patel says

I got this book as a present, which makes it a little more difficult laying into it. I will therefore try and be balanced:

GOOD

It was interesting.

It was easy to read (despite clocking in at 672 pages).

It was different from what I usually read.

BAD

The pretend-use of the Brythanic language really grated on me and made the book more difficult to read (all the characters speak English, but with 'thee', 'thou', 'dost' and 'thine' thrown in - argh!).

It's appallingly badly written.

The whole New Age spiritualism bullshit started to grate on me after a while (it's like old Britannic myths mixed with sci-fi and a bit of tae-kwon-do! Oh, and time travel, of course...).

On balance, it was ok, but I would only recommend it if you're **really** into these kinds of books! (and even so, there *must* be books out there that are written better!)

Amber Craig says

I got given this book from a friend of my parents before they moved overseas and I threw it on the bookshelf for a while. When I got the chance to read it I loved it and I've since re-read it quite a few times. I love the storyline and I love the characters!

Carla Khoo says

This book is the gateway to a memorable series of action packed, page turning adventure. I don't know what to say here to motivate you to read it other than, if you if you consider yourself a female fantasy lover, YOU MUST read these. Traci has a way of making you adore the characters - to the point where you get that delicious sense of loss when you finish a book. The good news on that note is that Traci is still powering ahead and if you kick off with this one, you still have many more adventures ahead.

Don't delay peeps, READ NOW.

Sheridan says

THIS IS MY ABSOLUTE FAVOURITE BOOK OF ALL TIME!!!!

it makes me wish i had amnesia so i could read it again, for the fist time!

the second book is really good too, but i don't particulary like the third and all the following books in the series don't even bother with.

Joybell says

This book first came to my attention as a very young teen, and I was instantly enthralled. The elements of time travel, metaphysics and romance captured my attention. It was my first taste of fantasy that was 'easy-to-swallow'. In fact, I begged my best friends boyfriend to let me borrow the additional books in the series and I was captivated all over again.

As an adult, reading it all over again the book is quite flawed in the typical ways - one dimensional

characters, unrealistic (yes, I know it's fantasy, but even the realistic parts were unrealistic!). It almost reads like a movie script, which I believe was the intent of Traci Harding when she wrote it.

The main character, Tory, is so perfect she makes me feel a bit unwell. She's amazingly beautiful (OK, I can handle that), is an expert in tae-kwan-do, brilliant at Brythanic history, and seems to just...accept that she's been transported to the dark ages. All of that I could probably manage, expect that she can be a total b*tch when she wants to be. And wears jeans and steel-capped boots underneath her beautiful medieval gowns. I can't handle that at all! Don't ask me to tell you why, I don't know.

That aside, I will still rate this as one of my all-time-faves. Simply because it made me interested in a whole realm of different subjects. It is a very, very, very easy to read book and the premise and plot is different. I just wish there was more development of the characters, and they weren't to cut-and-paste. It just...didn't feel deep enough. I've read some amazing YA books that are written in a manner more suited for publishing.

I'd recommend this book to start-out teenagers, and children who are advanced readers. Maybe even adults who are developing a desire to get into reading fiction.

Off topic, but I think the other reasons why I was quite obsessed with this book was because Tory was Australian, and she was 27. Which lead me to think 'There's hope for me yet!'. And, I suppose to some extent, there still is!

Ultimately, this book made me imagine and dream. It's exciting, fast-paced, and funny.

Gwen (The Gwendolyn Reading Method) says

Ugh. First of all, I'm never going to come around to characters who think it's ok to try to rape a woman, even if they say sorry later (though that's mostly because they find out she can kick their butts). Second of all, this just wasn't that... interesting. I gave it a good whirl but I gotta DNF this one.

Melanie says

I am wary of time-travel books at the best of times. At the worst - well, books like The Ancient Future (even the title makes me cringe) slip under the radar. (Oh, the lure of half-off books at the Salvos.)

The first thing that strikes one as odd about this book is the language, the constant use of 'thee's and 'thou's and 'art's which are no doubt only employed to help the author distinguish between the use of english and welsh in the dialogue. For me, it was ridiculous, and confusing anyway. Needless old-fashioned language that wasn't even accurate at all, so why employ its use?

The actual style of the novel was simplistic at best - it read like a Mills & Boon novel, the way it almost listed every little fact in painful detail, or not enough detail. It didn't dwell on aspects of the plot, of the universe, of the characters (dear LORD HELP US) which could have been enhanced to make the novel that much better (it was really truly lacking).

And perhaps the most offensive thing (to this reader at least) the story tried to bind together ridiculous elements into a not at all believable tale. The most important thing about a fantasy novel is that it has to be

at least a little easy to believe. One wants to think that it could happen to them, as easily as it did the character in the novel - but mixing martial arts and the dark ages? Not to mention Harding had to go that extra bit further and add time-travelling immortals to the mix. I wasn't buying it, and neither should you.

It seemed (almost unbearably painfully so) that the author was just pressing together things she happened to like a whole lot, into a novel that had nothing in the way of a pleasing cohesion of themes (if it was sophisticated enough for themes, which I doubt in any case). Please, aspiring authors out there, write what you love - but not like this...in any way but this.

And one last thing. PEOPLE REACT TO THINGS. They don't just accept time-travelling warrior-women from the future - SERIOUSLY. They don't just welcome them into the fold. They don't leave them alone (you pretended like people were going to act like ACTUAL HUMAN BEINGS WITH SELFISH DESIRES before you projected what you wanted men to be like onto your characters, Harding, don't lie) after a few rejections, hell, they just take what they want in the dark ages. They don't accept new, world-changing laws when some queen (OF NO PROVEN NOBILITY) appears out of NOWHERE and demands women have a better chance at life. NOT. POSSIBLE. Even in a fictional Dark Ages (DARK FREAKING AGES, not happy-go-lucky-we-only-had-one-real-battle-oh-there-were-saxons-ey?-let's-frolick-on-the-beach!-Ages) it's just not possible. No matter how many (small, insignificant) facts about history you threw into that tripe, it doesn't make up for the fact that it's just not right.

I almost want to change my rating from 2 to 1 star, but there were small things that I (admittedly, would have liked better if they were better written, elaborated on, and plotted out more) enjoyed. The story of Maelgwn's parents was interesting, and the angst of his brother an ACTUAL PROBABLE thing that would have happend. I also would have liked the whole Maelgwn/Miles thing to have been elaborated on, not glossed over as TBA when she reappears once Maelgwn is dead in 500AD, but there you have it, I don't know what happens in book 2 and 3.

4.5/10

Grace says

I started this book thinking I'd seen a lot of Traci Harding books around, she must be a good author. But oh no! I honestly don't know how this got published, I've read more in depth and interesting pieces written by emos on FanFiction. I understand the appeal, travel back in time and meet your true love, make your mark on history - who doesn't want to do that? It's a good idea, but I just couldn't stand the acceptance of the characters of Tory. Modern woman who flaunts her discman and camera... Wtf? And don't get me started on the tae kwon do. The moment quasi Merlin man creates a dojo for the eager ancient Welsh to learn in was when I flipped my iPad and was like "that's it, I'm out."

Seriously I'd recommend this to teenage girls or someone who isn't widely read, because if you've actually picked up any other worthy text you'll be disappointed.

Angela says

My most favourite novel ever. EVER. For some reason no other book, fantasy based or otherwise has even come close to the awesomeness that this book oozes. I first read it at fourteen years old tucked under my desk in english class (I read it in class just to piss my teacher off).

If I had to guess how many times I've read it since, it would be over fifty times.

Set in the 1990's, Tory Alexander finds herself stranded on a quite English country road with a flat tyre. The rest is history. Traci incorporates modern day quirks and references fuses it with British history and scrambles the yolk in a frying pan and cooked up this brilliant novel. Her spin with esoteric belief makes this continuing series my security blanket, teaching me so much about the world, perception and belief.

READ THIS BOOK. That is all.

Carmen says

One of the best on my bookshelf. I read this trilogy about once a year and I still love it, the characters, the history, the mysticism.

Eunice says

The No. 1 problem I had with this novel:

What people think Old English is: *Thou art indeed a fine lad, prithee yonder! Wherefore arest mine pantalones?*

What it actually is: *Syddan ?rest wearð feasceaft funden, hé þæs frófre gebád, wéox under wolcnum weorðmyndum þáh, oð þæt him ?ghwylc ymbsittendra ofer hron-ráde hýran scolde, gomban gyldan. Þæt wæs gód cyning!*

pros:

- * fast paced (there was always something happening in each paragraph)
- * ancient Wales, need I say more?
- * hot guys - all incredibly fit
- * fascinating idea and story-line
- * unicorns
- * easy to read

cons:

- * using a broken-fake-ye-olde English when characters are supposedly speaking Old Welsh
 - * minor grammatical errors (maybe not errors *per se*, but a weird choice of words/syntax/punctuation)
 - * unicorns?!?!
 - * when Harding clarified terms, she'd put them in brackets afterwards (like this) instead of using a glossary at the end, and I felt this broke up the flow of the writing (you see?).
 - * the use of 'here here!' instead of 'hear hear!'
 - * [not sure if I can really call this a 'con' because in a way, it's just a part of the author's tale] the 'New Age' positive energies and horoscope stuff
 - * how everyone just got paired off into these perfect couplings (I guess it sort of makes sense if they're one of those reincarnated ones)
 - * it felt a bit unrealistic when a character would do something a bit shitbloke and then Tory would tell them off - then suddenly they'd see the error of their ways, apologise and promise to be more open-minded/loving/respectful/not shit. Like, is she a god or something? ~~oh wait.~~
-