



The Forest House

Marion Zimmer Bradley , Diana L. Paxson

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The Forest House—prequel to *The Mists of Avalon*, Marion Zimmer Bradley's beloved and enduring classic—is a mesmerizing epic of one woman's mythic role at a turning point in history. In a Britain struggling to survive Roman invasion, Eilan is the daughter of a Druidic warleader, gifted with visions and marked by fate to become a priestess of the Forest House.

But fate also led Eilan to Gaius, a soldier of mixed blood, son of the Romans sent to subdue the native British. For Gaius, Eilan felt forbidden love, and her terrible secret will haunt her even as she is anointed as the new High Priestess. With mighty enemies poised to destroy the magic the Forest House shelters, Eilan must trust in the power of the great Goddess to lead her through the treacherous labyrinth of her destiny.

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The Forest House Details

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Author : Marion Zimmer Bradley , Diana L. Paxson

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Tish says

Would probably give this 3 and a half stars. I liked it, but had a harder time getting into it than I expected, given how much I remember loving The Mists of Avalon. That's one of my all-time favorites and one I've read several times. However, my most recent re-read was probably 20 years ago, so maybe my tastes have changed a bit since then. Or maybe this one just wasn't quite as good. Or maybe I'm just pickier now. :)

I had mixed feelings about the characters in this one; they didn't all seem consistent throughout the book. For example, by the end of the book, I didn't even know who Bendeigid was. He seemed totally unlike who he was at the beginning of the book and the book didn't follow his character enough to see the change happening. Gaius also fluctuated between representing the best of Rome and being decent and even noble, albeit human, and being a real slimeball.

Something I did like was the cultural and historical setting. It was interesting to see the coming of the Romans, the growth of Christianity, etc. from the viewpoint of people at that time.

Candace says

Eilan is a Druidic warleader's daughter destined to be High Priestess of the Forest House. Gaius is a Roman-British soldier among the Roman legions. Eilan and Gaius fall in love. It is a forbidden path they travel for the High Priestess must be a virgin like the Roman Vestals. Eilan carries secrets into her priestesshood. Secrets that could destroy lives if revealed. Will Eilan and Gaius's love stand the test of time, or will secrets and war tear them apart?

The Forest House is a novel of strong characters. The kind of characters the reader still thinks about when the story ends. The ending did not end the way I had thought it would, which made the book intriguing and mysterious. I highly recommend this novel.

Katie says

I enjoyed this one more than Mists of Avalon, it was more of a less-tragic Romeo and Juliet than the endless "everything Morgaine touches turns to dust and all her good intentions go awry" kind of thing. I also enjoyed the aspect of Gaius/Gawen being torn between the two sides of his heritage, British and Roman. However, toward the end it did pick back up the anti-Christian ranting and seemed to have the attitude that all men were misogynistic idiots. Another issue that continued from Mists was that Bradley changes points of view very abruptly and rapidly at times, which can be jarring. It also pushes "all gods/religions are really the same" a bit much for me. When I type that all out it's a wonder I can say I managed to set it aside enough to still enjoy the read, but somehow I did, it was certainly interesting in its way.

Ronda Tutt says

I really enjoyed this book. I was so glad to see that the book picked up where the book "Ravens of Avalon" left off.

The Arch-Druid Ardanos, Lhiannon(High Priestess of Vernemeton - the Forest House), and Caillean (senior priestess assisting Lhiannon - also Lhiannon's adoptive daughter)are characters from the book "Ravens of Avalon" who survived the fire and take over of Mona. These individuals move on to Vernemeton and rebuild the heritiage of the Priestess and Druids with the consent of the Roman Emperor

The story wraps around Eilan (the Arch-Druid Ardanos granddaughter) a Roman officer "Gaius" who is half Roman and half Britian and is also the son of Martius Julius Licinius (Procurator - financial officer of Britannia).

Eilan and Gaius story becomes complicated because of Gaius status of being a Roman but the love they have for each other is held in secret. Even though Eilan has taken vows to become a priestess, they proclaim their love in secret during the Beltane Festible. Eilan ends up pregnant but Gaius can not claim their child (son-Gawan)or her because of his status of being a Roman.

Though Eilan is pregnant, Lhinnanon on her death bed chooses Eilan as her sucesor. Once Eilan has her boy, the boy is protected by the Forest House but his idenity is kept in secret and he does not know his mother is the High Priestess Eilan.

Even though Eilan and Gaius life can not be joined, the continue to love each other from a part but go on with their lives. Eilan serves the Goddess and Gaius goes on to marry another Roman girl "Julia" and has 4 daughters.

During this time, christianity has moved from Rome into the Britannia and after the death of Gaius and Julia's daughter and their preborn son, Julia turns to the christian faith and vows chasity and to never sleep with her husband again which qualifies Gaius for grounds for divorce according to law. With this in mind, Gaius desides to seek out Eilan and claim his son and get a new bride.

But things don't go as planned and both Eilan and Gaius end up in the Beltane Fires as sacrefices to the Gods.

This was a very good read and after reading 4 out of the 7 books in this series, I have not lost interest and the books keep getting better and better.

Terry (Ter05 TwiMoms/ MundieMoms) says

I expected to like this book better than I did since I loved Mists of Avalon. The story is pre-Arthur and as a story it had a lot of possibilities. Somehow it seemed kind of disjointed. It is the story of Eilan who is the daughter of a Druid during the time when the conquering Romans are taking over the land. I just could never really connect with Gaius, the soldier that Eilan falls in love with and whose live is entwined with hers. He was a mere human after all and I suppose I wanted him to be above the ambition and life that was calling him. I think part of what I did not care for is that this book is full of tragedy. I realize it was a tragic time so

perhaps there is a great deal of realism in the story, but it was not a fun read. I was never tempted to stop reading, so it did hold my interest and in the end I do not regret that I read it. Two stars means "it was okay" and I would agree with that. I might have given it 2 1/2 if I could.

ADDITION: Now reading the third book, Lady of Avalon. I see now why I needed to read this one even though I did not like it as well as the one I am 2/3 of the way through now nor as well as Mists of Avalon which is a real favorite.

Tati says

This was a book that lost much of its magic on a re-read.

The writing style felt a bit odd, with some words thrown in that did not fit the rest of the wording. It also made the book drag a bit, even though it felt hurried (I mean, it does span the lifetime of Eilan and Gaius, but the time jumps could have been smoother).

In terms of plot, it was a bit hard to keep track of who wanted what and why. There were far too many tribes and names to keep track of. As for the main characters, they all felt flat, their motives not clear enough.

Avid says

I hadn't planned on reading any more of her books after the Mists of Avalon. As interesting as the Mists of Avalon was, I had found it rather dry.

However, I came across this book as part of a sale for a store that was going out of business and thought, at 40% I could afford to pique my curiosity.

It is as dry as her other book, but there is a moment in that book that made me think several themes that seem to run through the book. The first one is the nature of the Christian God and the Goddess. The second one is blood line and purity.

It was during the time of the Roman control of Great Britain, or when they were just tribes.

The Druids had control of the Priestesses. Or rather, when it was time for the Goddess to speak through her priestess, the Head Druid would translate for the crowd. Mainly to make sure nothing was said that would threaten Roman power or anything that was not what the Druids wanted to hear as they were playing games as well.

But anyway, one the Celts had joined with an organization to fight the Romans. A kind of Freedom Fighter group. And when the Druids had been distracted and the Goddesses voice had come through, he ran up to her crying and whining about how the Romans had taken their lands, women and so on. He had asked her to bring the Morrigan (A celtic battle Goddess) to destroy the Romans.

But much to his dismay, she said this was all part of her plan. That she wanted the blood of the Dragon and the Eagle to mix. And why was he crying when his people had done the same thing to their people for

generations.

I found that insight to be rephreshing.

In another part of the book, she mentions that it was ok to mix blood, because it strengthened the race so long as the old ways did not die. This is in contrast to many of our races today that believe that the blood of a race must be pure. That we shouldn't mix because it would weaken the race and so on. These are male philosophies.

Now I know why God was invented. Man could control him. His God would honor what he believed instead of an independent spirit running around promoting individual freedom outside of human traditions that sought to suppress it.

This book also gave some insight into the Roman psychology as well. Particularly their views of religion.

They didn't believe that a man was a reincarnated form of God but that some people were choosen to carry that spirit and that he should be honored for what he did as a result of that spirit, but not as if he were a God. If he started to have delusions of Godhood, he was to be taken down.

Jo says

3.5 stars

Most of the book was agonizingly slow. Each time the main characters met was a chance meeting at a festival. When a festival was coming up, I braced myself for them to meet. I am hoping that this was a set up for the next book, and that The Lady of Avalon will be better.

Jessica says

Decisamente ho preferito le nebbie di Avalon della stessa autrice. Scritto benissimo comunque e mi è piaciuto davvero molto.

Mary Claire says

Meine Mum hatte das Buch vor x Jahren via Bertelsmann Club bekommen.

Das Cover gefiel mir unglaublich gut und auch die Story sprach mich richtig an. Druiden? Römer? Magie? I'm sold, baby!

Ich habe, wenn ich mich recht erinnere, das Buch innerhalb weniger Tage durch gehabt - jaja, die Freuden der Jugend, wenn man sich um nichts anderes kümmern braucht... *lach*

Mochte ich es? Nuuuuuuun.... es hat 4,5 Sterne von mir bekommen und ist als favourite gelistet. (Oooos, war's doch nicht, hab's korrigiert hehe)... Ich hab's so geliebt. Die Story war toll, hat mich von Anfang an

gefesselt und auch Jahre später muss ich immer noch daran denken.
Ich hab Gaius geliebt, ich hab Eilan geliebt. Die Sachen über die Druiden waren so freaking interessant.
Es war einfach nur wow. Zu schade, dass ich das Buch nicht mehr habe. Seufzt. Na ja... irgendwann kauf ich's mir noch einmal. :)

Kythe42 says

The Forest House by Marion Zimmer Bradley is one of the books in her Avalon series. The story is set during the Roman occupation of Britain about a generation after the uprising of Boudicca. Much of the story is centered around the Forest House, which is the sanctuary for the Druid priestesses that was established after the destruction of the Druid complex on the isle of Mona by the Romans, and the woman who serve there. All of the books in this series have elements of romance, but it is a particularly strong theme in this book and a major plot point is the forbidden love between Eilan, a Druid priestess of the Forest House, and Gaius, a half-Roman soldier. The story follows their lives parallel to each other and the few times they are able to meet. Although they can never truly be together, in their own ways they both work to try to keep the peace between their two peoples as certain British factions vie for revenge against the Romans for the atrocities they committed years before.

This book takes place after Ravens of Avalon and I would strongly suggest reading that book before reading The Forest House. Ravens of Avalon provides much of the background story for The Forest House and I definitely felt less confused about events mentioned in The Forest House on this read than on previous reads before having read Ravens of Avalon (despite some minor inconsistencies between the two books). You might also want to read The Fall of Atlantis before reading this book in order to understand certain references, but it's not wholly necessary. I wouldn't say that The Forest House is my favorite book in the series, but I did enjoy it and would recommend it to other fans of the series and to people who enjoy British history.

Kitty says

Pleasantly surprising. Pre-dates "Mists" and King Arthur. All about the war between Romans and Druids - made me want to read the "real" history of this time period! Eilan, grand-daughter of Arch Druid, falls in love with Gaius, son of bigwig Roman.

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Mele says

good, but too sad/fatalistic/heart wrenching, like "mists"... at least it didn't torture me for as long, since it wasn't as long. liked learning about the druids and romans before the "mists" story, though. and i'm going to read the middle book too, but i don't expect to enjoy it (no matter if it's well-written and gripping, like the others... now that ken follett has shown me the pleasures of good historical fiction with a positive view of history... why keep torturing myself? i don't know... gotta finish that trilogy! i won't be reading the related diana paxson ones, though)

Gary says

A beautifully written prequel to the magnificent Mists of Avalon, the story of a doomed star-crossed love between British Priestess, Eilan and a half British half Roman legionnaire Gaus, in first century southern Britain, also takes us to Caledonia (Scotland) , Germany and Rome. Gives us rich insight to and brings to life both the Roman Empire and Celtic Briton society, especially that of Druidic persuasion.

At this time the Roman are ruthlessly destroying the Druidic culture and a small band of British nationalists sworn to drive the Romans from Britain, called the Ravens' led by Eilan's foster brother Cynric.

Eilan falls in love with Gaus after he is rescued by her and her family after falling into a pit and being wounded, and convalesces with them without their knowledge that he is a Roman Legionnaire.

Gaus is forced by his father Marcellus, a wealthy and powerful tribune to marry a Roman girl, and Eilan pregnant with his child is now a priestess on Avalon.

Years go by and the political and religious intertwines with love and hate between people , leading to a tragic end.

Playing a role are the Irish high priestess Cailean , the Arch Druid, Elain's granfather Ardanos and her cruel father Bereigid and her resentful sister Deida.

The new sect know as the Christians has come to Britain and Gaus' wife Julia and the young trainee priestess Senara joins them. We learn of insights into faith, including the Christian concept of the female side of G-D known as the Sophia, which might have had its roots in the Jewish concept of the female incantation of the holy spirit known as the Schechina.

An absorbing and at times heartbreaking tale, which makes the experience of reading the Mists of Avalon richer reading of the ancestors of the protagonists in that feminist retelling of Arthurian legend.

mrs. fig says

i guess because i loved 'mists' so much i expected more from 'forest house' and 'lady of avalon' and i was alittle disappointed. but the books were good, just not great.

Marsha Altman says

I really love these books. I feel a little guilty saying that because these books are about emotion - they're not really an art form - but MZB was really good at what she did, and you can really envision the world and you care about the characters. There's still the standard tropes - young lovers who never are able to sort things out

thanks to society, women are good at religion and men are bad, and the patriarchy sucks. Also, never ever ever let Christians into your country (Which, as a Jew and a historian, I can verify) unless you want things to get totally terrible for everyone.

Pam says

I read these backwards. Read this one before the Lady of Avalon, and then read The Mists of Avalon. That way you have them in order. This book was a bit harder read than the other two, but quite good. My bias may have been a result of reading them out of order.

El says

Someone recently suggested to me when I was reading The Mists of Avalon to stop reading the Avalon series at that point. She said she had read some of the other books in the series and they were "appallingly bad". I don't know if this was one she was referring to or not, but I should have listened to her. She is wise.

I didn't love The Mists of Avalon upon rereading it now, but I did appreciate it more, I think, than I had over twenty years ago when I read it originally. There are aspects to the book that appeal to me, and as far as world-building, Bradley did a pretty decent job.

None of that exists here in the prequel.

Blah, blah, something, something, first century. Basically you have a Druidic priestess, Eilan, who falls in love with a Roman officer, Gaius, and the entire story is pretty much about that. "I love you", "I love you too", "But this cannot happen", "You're right, wanna do it?", "Shyeah!"

And then the inevitable happens (view spoiler), and everyone is all freaked out because it's so wrong for a Druidic priestess and a Roman officer to be in love with one another, it goes against nature or something. What. A. Drag.

Some other stuff happens, believe it or not. There's a battle sequence where there's lots of "crimson gash"ing going on, some stiff dialogue, awkward phrases, and basically the most boring encounter of a battle ever. Although, to be funny, I started reading some of the phrases out loud to my boyfriend, being all goofy and shit, and he's like "That sounds like it's from one of my history books!"

Uh. NERD.

It's just not good, guys. In comparison to The Mists of Avalon, which I didn't even love, I have to say this book probably should never have been written. I understand Bradley's sister-in-law, Diana Paxson, helped her in writing this book and then went on to write other Avalon books after Bradley's death. I think therein lies the problem. I don't know how much of this book was written by Bradley or by Paxson, but anytime another writer gets involved, the story is rarely ever good. (The one exception I can think of is Roger Zelazny, whose books I don't generally enjoy when he wrote them by himself... but the ones he cowrote with someone else? Those are pretty great.) I feel there's a conflict of voices in this novel, or maybe it's all entirely Paxson's voice, but she isn't as good as Bradley? That's strange to say, again, considering I don't think

Bradley was that great a writer either.

I strongly suggest if you loved Mists of Avalon just stopping there. Trust me when I say this book is just not as good. After a while you will want to punch everyone in the throat, you will get tired of the repetition, you will hope everyone dies a slow and painful death.

Hermien says

I started this book because I was going to see Bellini's Norma in Venice and thought this would be good preparation. I loved the opera but after a quarter of the book didn't feel motivated to finish it.
