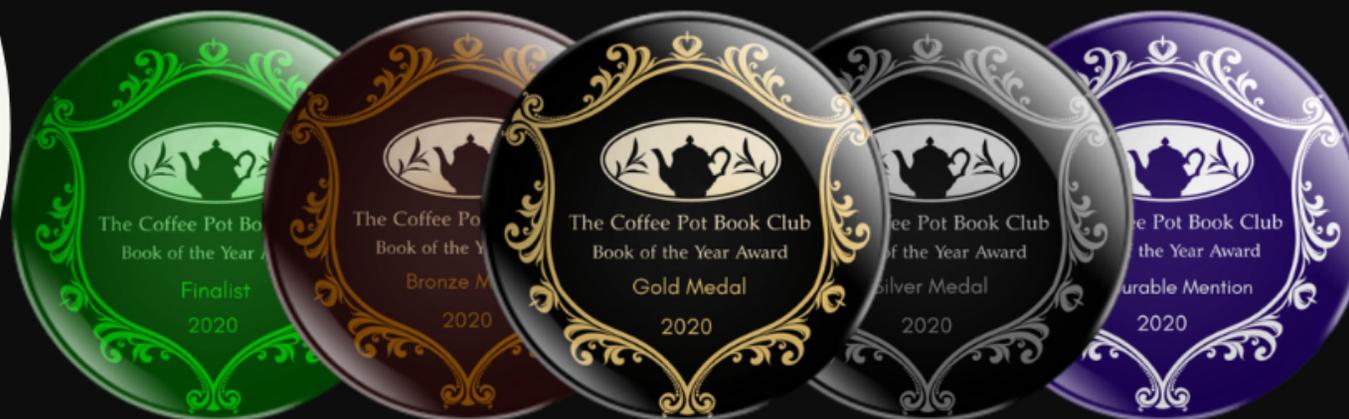


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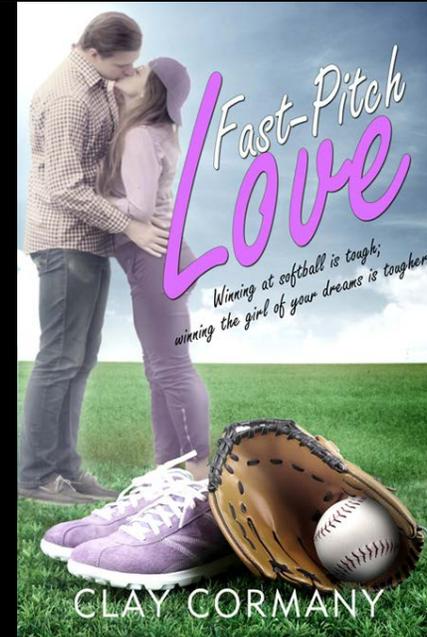
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#BookReview — Crusader's Path by Mary Ann Bernal #HistoricalFiction #HistoricalRomance @BritonandDane



Crusader's Path

By Mary Ann Bernal



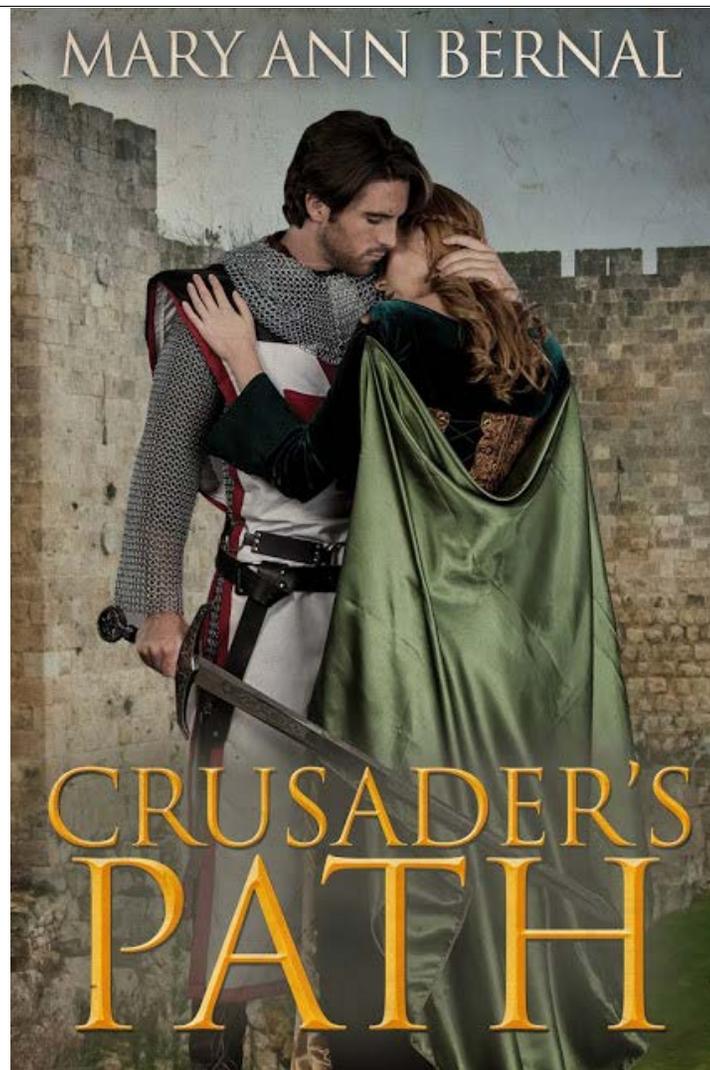
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From the sweeping hills of Argences to the port city of Cologne overlooking the River Rhine, Etienne and Avielle find themselves drawn by the need for redemption against the backdrop of the First Crusade.

Heeding the call of His Holiness, Urban II, to free the Holy Land from the infidel, Etienne follows Duke Robert of Normandy across the treacherous miles, braving sweltering heat and snow-covered mountain passes while en route to the Byzantine Empire.

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Moved by Peter of Amiens' charismatic rhetoric in the streets of the Holy Roman Empire, Avielle joins the humble army of pilgrims. Upon arrival in Mentz, the peasant Crusaders do the unthinkable, destroying the Jewish Community. Consumed with guilt, Avielle is determined to die fighting for Christ, assuring her place in Heaven.

Etienne and Avielle cross paths in Constantinople, where they commiserate over past misdeeds. A spark becomes a flame, but when Avielle contracts leprosy, Etienne makes a promise to God, offering to take the priest cowl in exchange for ridding Avielle of her affliction.

Will Etienne be true to his word if Avielle is cleansed of the contagion, or will he risk eternal damnation to be with the woman he loves?



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"Did not the walls of Jericho fall after the Israelites walked around them? ... Is not our faith equal to theirs, if not greater?"

Etienne d'Argences did not need much encouragement to heed the call of His Holiness, Urban II. If Duke Robert of Normandy intended to fight in this Holy War, then Etienne would as well.

Avielle had to get away from Cologne, for there is nothing left there for her but bittersweet memories. When Avielle hears Peter of Amiens' sermon, she feels compelled to join his army and march towards Jerusalem.

But when Avielle reaches Constantinople, her life is irrevocably changed forever...

From the mountain tops of Cologne, where the lepers made their home, to the Siege of Jerusalem, Crusader's Path by Mary Ann Bernal is the unforgettable story of two people who



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READERS' FAVORITE ANNUAL BOOK

find love amongst the carnage of the First Crusade.

What a journey Bernal takes her readers on! Crusader's Path is a richly detailed and emotionally charged story that is utterly unputdownable. With carefully crafted prose and a narrative that is as lucid as it is detailed, Bernal shows us what the Holy War was like for both the Crusaders and those who got in the way of their goal. It is a story of sacrifice and loss, but above everything else, it is a story of love. This is the kind of book that sends shivers down your spine.

The heroine of this tale is a young woman called Avielle. Having suffered so greatly with the loss of her father to leprosy, Avielle has great compassion for the sick and the shunned. She risks her health, and indeed her own life, to nurse those with the disease. Avielle trusts God to keep her safe — a trust that is sometimes misplaced. And yet, her faith isn't shaken, and she continues to look to Him for guidance. Her story is a tragic one. She is a lost lamb that seems forever out of reach of the Good Shepherd. Avielle also carries a tremendous burden of guilt which leads her to some extraordinary situations. She feels compelled to follow Peter's Crusade to the Holy Land, where she witnesses the most appalling atrocities, which makes her question the holiness of the army she is following. However, she is still convinced in divine intervention and indeed, when Avielle chooses to follow her own path and not one ordained by God, she finds herself in the most desperate of situations. Avielle is an extraordinarily complex heroine who is almost like a feather caught in the breeze — she does not quite know where she is going to land. I thought Bernal portrayed Avielle with great skill and diligence. I really enjoyed reading about her and this perilous journey that she finds herself on.

Etienne d'Argences is an intriguing protagonist who is pulled in several very different directions during this book. He single-mindedly pursues his own desires. He is determined to follow Duke Robert wherever he may lead, but by doing so, he sacrifices many people along the way, including his wife. Often Etienne finds himself conflicted between reason and emotion — he knows his wife needs him, but when he is at his estate with the people who love him, he feels stifled and he cannot wait to leave again. Initially, he sees love as an

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obstacle that he has to overcome, and it isn't until he meets Avielle that he realises that love should have been his goal all along. Bernal has really captured the essence of a Crusader who longs for adventure and the comradeship of his Lord and fellow knights. His relationship with Duke Robert is an interesting one — it is not the usual relationship one would expect to find between a Duke and his knight — they are each other's confident and above everything else, best friends. His relationship with Avielle has a similar feel to it, except romantic love is also added to the equation. I adored Etienne, and I enjoyed reading about him.

This portrayal of love in Crusader's Path is slightly different when compared to what one would expect from a traditional historical romance. It takes a while for the two protagonists to find each other, which worked exceptionally well for this story. Etienne and Avielle's love is forged in the fires of a Holy War. Their love is a welcomed relief to the horrors of the battlefield and the sickroom. But it is also a love that cannot be withheld, despite the social difference between the two. Etienne and Avielle are not looking for love when they find each other, but they both recognise that they are meant to be together, which is exceedingly romantic.

Bernal has masterfully depicted the horrors of the First Crusade. There are some profoundly upsetting scenes in this book, and there are certainly many casualties in this war. Bernal's portrayal of what became known in history as the Rhineland Massacres of the Jews, in particular, the persecution and the destruction of Jewish communities in Mentz (Mainz) left me reaching for the tissues. The Siege of Antioch was also particularly well-drawn — Bernal captured the horrors in the Crusader's camp as food ran scarce and disease took hold. She also demonstrated the rivalry between Godfrey of Bouillon and Raymond IV, Count of Toulouse, fabulously. The historical detailing in this book is staggering. Bernal has captured the very essence of what it must have been like to follow men such as Peter of Amiens (Peter the Hermit) and The Army of Robert Curthose of Normandy which was led by Robert, Duke of Normandy.

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Crusader's Path by Mary Ann Bernal. I think this may well be Bernal's best book yet!

I Highly Recommend.

Review by Mary Anne Yarde.
The Coffee Pot Book Club.

Pick up your copy of
Crusader's Path
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Mary Ann Bernal

Mary Ann Bernal attended Mercy College, Dobbs Ferry, NY, where she received a degree in Business Administration. Her literary aspirations were ultimately realized when the first book of The Briton and the Dane novels was published in 2009. In addition to writing historical fiction, Mary Ann has also authored a collection of contemporary short stories in the Scribbler Tales series. Her latest endeavor is a science fiction/fantasy novel entitled

Planetary Wars Rise of an Empire. Originally hailing from New York, Mary Ann now resides in Elkhorn, Nebraska.

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