



Devil's Brood

Sharon Kay Penman

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The long-awaited and highly anticipated final volume in Penman's trilogy of Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine—a tumultuous conclusion to this timeless story of love, power, ambition, and betrayal.

Where the second novel in the trilogy, *Time And Chance*, dealt with the extraordinary politics of the twelfth century, climaxing with the murder of Thomas Becket and Henry's confrontation with the Church and self-imposed exile to Ireland, *Devil's Brood* centers on the implosion of a family. And because it is a royal family whose domains span the English Channel and whose alliances encompass the Christian world, that collapse will have dire consequences. This is a story of betrayal as Henry's three eldest sons and his wife enter into a rebellion against him, aligning themselves with his bitterest enemy, King Louis of France. But it is also the story of a great king whose brilliance forged an empire but whose personal blind spots led him into the most serious mistake of his life.

Sharon Kay Penman has created a novel of tremendous power, as two strong-willed, passionate people clash, a family divides, and a marriage ends in all but name. Curiously, it is a novel without villains—only flawed human beings caught up in misperceptions and bad judgment calls. Most devastating to Henry was not his sons' rebellion but his wife's betrayal in joining them. How could it happen that two people whose love for each other was all consuming end up as bitter adversaries? That is the heart of Penman's tale in *Devil's Brood*.

Devil's Brood Details

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From Reader Review Devil's Brood for online ebook

Shawn says

I have enjoyed Ms. Penman's writing for many years. She seems to be able to accurately craft characters and scenes that are true to life within the context of their age. She is one of the few medieval writers that can describe strong female characters, and yet does not pander to an audience, or seem to cross the line in modernizing them. At least that is how it seems to me. Her Eleanor of Aquitaine is amazing in this book. She is the most three dimensional and conflicted of all of the major characters presented.

The only thing I would like to see more often in Ms. Penman's books are stories seen through the eyes of the peasantry. The poor souls who fight, work and die so that all these nobles can play their high-stakes political games. Her books focuses solely on the upper aristocracy of the middle ages.

As I read this book I was continually struck by the reasons a peasant with would fight and die for nothing but feudal loyalty. I do not seem to be a pacifist, but if it is a wasted life to fight and die for economic, philosophical or government systems, or even religious differences, how much more is it a waste to die for whether this brother claims inheritance in this duchy or another brother claims it. Under either lord their lives would not change nor are the the peasants even promised improvement in their lives. There were no promises of freedom or "Make Aquitaine Great Again" or even God is on our side. What was their motivation? It baffles me unlike the later wars of the Crusades or the ages of Nationalism where at least there was propaganda presented ensuring possible improvement or eternal salvation. The feudal and dynastic clashes were indeed strange.

This is a great book and I plan to continue to read more from this author.

Ernestina says

My prevailing feeling while reading this book was helplessness, I often felt like shaking one character or the other to make them see reason. It was such a heap of incomprehensions and unforgiving pride, love badly shown and bitter betrayals.

However, you can touch the love the author feels for her protagonists, always finding at least an act to redeem them, even only on their deathbed.

Eleanor talking to her dead husband best summarises all the struggle: "Ah, Harry, we were so well matched, you and I. If only we could have learned to forgive each other...Well, you'll have all eternity to learn to forgive us and yourself. Knowing you, it is likely to take that long, too".

I think this reading is addictive, because after having been pulled inside the book and having shared good and bad times with every character throughout over 800 pages, I am left with an even stronger desire of knowing more about them. Still I don't think I'm ready to forgive Richard, that's why I will shift to the more loyal William Marshal for a while...

Jemidar says

There is one thing you can't fault Penman for and that's her research. It's thorough, copious and usually

factual, almost OCD in places. But what I do fault her for is her need to include **every single word** of it in her novels. This one was so bloated by research that it floated belly up--slowing the narrative, distancing characters from the reader and was downright tedious & distracting in places. And as fascinating as most of the information was (although I could well have lived without knowing how 12th century Welshmen cleaned their teeth or that Henry had a painful abscess in his groin near the end of his life) a lot of it really had no place in the story which led to ridiculous amounts of exposition and dialogue between characters discussing stuff they would have already known. And there was 700+ pages of it to wade through!

Surprisingly, for an author of Penman's reputation I also found her guilty of another historical fiction sin--imbuing some of her 12th century characters with 21st century sensibilities, and although it wasn't as bad as in some novels by lesser authors I've read, it was there. I also found several other niggles in that the religion expressed felt very Protestant to me (maybe it was all that scripture quoting) and the physicians seemed to have anachronistic medical knowledge. Fair enough, nobody's perfect.

That's not to say I didn't enjoy the book. I did. Because when Penman was able to concentrate on the story and not her research it was great stuff. Unfortunately, I would estimate the parts where the story, characters and history came together in harmony was only about a quarter of the book.

I do feel sad that I'm not in raptures over this book like everyone else. I really wanted to love it. No, more than that, I **expected** to love it and am disappointed that I didn't. However, I did learn lots but think next time I would much rather read NF than research saturated fiction.

My special thanks to Anna and Karla who supported me through the 700+ pages and listened to my gripes. Best of all they made me laugh and helped make it a more enjoyable experience :-).

Buddy read with Anna.

Cheryl says

Wow - - Penman has done it again. She manages to take a remote time in history and absolutely make it come alive, along with the major characters. Absolutely one of the best historical fiction writers around, this book is well-researched and such an easy read!

Carey says

In 1172 Henry II has been on the throne, ruling his vast kingdom that stretches from England to the Mediterranean, for eighteen years. His passionate marriage to Queen Eleanor of Aquitaine is as volatile as ever and their sons are nearing adulthood.

As Henry works to extricate himself from his problems with the Church that were created by the murder of Thomas Becket, his oldest son Hal has plans of his own. Hal has been crowned king while his father still rules and he is chafing under his father's tight leash. Like any young man, Hal feels he is ready for responsibility and freedom from oversight. Unfortunately his personality is unsuited for the rigors of ruling a kingdom. He is far too easily swayed by a quiet word in his ear and is unable to make a decision and stand

by it. Before long Hal has joined in with rebel lords against his father, the king.

Even worse for Henry, his other sons Richard and Geoffrey are eager to join the rebellion. It is even supported by Henry's wife, Eleanor. This is the last straw for Henry. Though the rebellion fails and his sons beg his forgiveness, Henry can never bring himself to forgive his wife. Eleanor is destined to spend the next sixteen years in confinement, imprisoned by the King her husband, who feels her betrayal acutely.

The years of Eleanor's imprisonment amount to a tragic deterioration of her family. Henry feels he can trust no one but himself and, as a result, refuses to allow his sons any power or responsibility of their own. He claims that they must earn it but he gives them precious little opportunity to do so. For their part, the sons are unable to understand their father and they are slowly poisoned by his lack of faith in them. Eventually they even seek alliances with their father's enemies, including the French king. Another sharp stab to Henry's heart.

The Princes also develop hatred against each other, fueled by intense jealousy and lust for power. Their battles and confrontations further rip apart a family already in shreds. The most touching scene in the book occurs when Henry and Eleanor together realize and mourn their failure as parents.

In Devil's Brood Sharon Kay Penman has continued her tour de force account of the Plantagenet Dynasty begun in When Christ and His Saints Slept and continued in Time and Chance. She has, once again, given us a thoroughly researched, clear-eyed appraisal of a turbulent political time, while imbuing the story with aching sympathy and sorrow for this long ago family who were unable to achieve the unity and love so necessary to a happy life.

Sharon Kay Penman is, in my opinion, one of the finest historical fiction writers and I have loved each one of her novels since I picked up Here Be Dragons many years ago. I was thrilled to read, in the Author's Note at the end of Devil's Brood, that the characters will not let her go and so she will be continuing the story of Eleanor, Richard, John and the rest in her next book. Hurray!

~Leslie~ says

Wow - this is the third installment in the series about Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine. Devil's Brood is the tumultuous story of Henry and Eleanor's sons and the struggle over ruling such a sprawling and diverse kingdom. This is a truly epic, and amazing story - so many characters, battles, political intrigues, family feuds, marriages are going on throughout the story. I loved every minute of. I found myself crying over events that occurred over 900 years ago. Sharon Kay Penman has the ability as an author to bring history to life in such a spellbinding way. She is the best writer of historical fiction there is today and everyone should experience her writing.

Misfit says

Henry II of England and Eleanor of Aquitaine thought they had it all - the greatest empire since Charlemagne, healthy children including the heir and several to spare - so how did it all go so wrong? The Devil's Brood takes up the story where Time and Chance left off with the murder of Thomas Becket, as Henry returns from his self imposed exile to Ireland. Henry's three eldest sons are chafing at the bit to have

lands and power of their own and egged on by Louis of France they join with their mother Eleanor in rebellion against their father. In time Henry quells the rebellion and forgives his sons, but he cannot forgive his wife and queen and he imprisons her. Even though Henry forgave his sons, they are still not happy with his generosity and it eventually leads to more power struggles and back-biting amongst the brothers, particularly young Hal, who suffers the ultimate punishment for his reckless deeds.

This was a fascinating story of a brilliant, powerful king whose blind love and trust in his sons lead him to making mistakes in judgment that eventually lead to his downfall. I also loved seeing a different side of the haughty, queenly Eleanor we saw in *Time and Chance*, as unlike her sons she does come to recognize the wrongness (well sometimes) of her actions and the cataclysmic effects those actions had on her family. Some readers may find the first part of this book a bit slow paced as Penman does spend time setting up the back history of Henry, Eleanor and the Becket murder, but hang in there as about half way through when the boys start turning on each other the pages literally started flying. Penman's dialogue was exceptional, although I couldn't decide who got the best lines, Henry or Richard – they just smoked off the page!

One of Penman's great strengths is to take the most complex political situations and put them into a story that not only entertains the reader but educates at the same time. Five stars and it appears from the author's notes and a recent blog interview that this will not be a trilogy, she will continue the story of Eleanor, Richard and John in one more book. Hurray!

For those of you coming away from this book wanting to know about William Marshal, I highly recommend Elizabeth Chadwick's *The Greatest Knight* and *The Scarlet Lion*. They are hard to find in the US, but readily available in the UK and Canada.

Amanda says

Wow, what a great history lesson and what a story. Sharon Kay Penman really knows how to make history come alive. I can't wait to read more of her books!

Karla says

There's probably a connection between why I read 3 Sharon Kay Penman books with such ease back in the early to mid 2000s and yet couldn't finish one in 2012. At the same time (ye olde 2000s) I was going through a high fantasy phase and huge doorstoppers with a cast of thousands riding around to villages and other countries talking about quests and prophecies, surrounded by a zillion details, fit in quite well with Penman's style of having a cast of thousands riding around to taverns and castles talking about battles and intrigues, surrounded by a zillion historical facts.

Except I no longer read high fantasy. I got tired of the bloated excess and almost OCDness of the author to leave no day unwritten about, no step of a journey unremarked upon, no situation or conversation that we couldn't hear about in at least two different scenes, etc. And now I've reached the same point with Penman. A brownie point to high fantasy, though, for actually having action scenes. Penman's are few and far between, and they don't really get the adrenaline pumping. She's more of a talky, expository novelist.

Penman even did the extra step of taking a historical drama with 100 real-life players and wedging in a

couple fictional ones, Ranulf and Rhiannon, two people who have done little to enhance this story from the beginning (but have padded it unmercifully) and whose existence has always confused me. What was the point of them? Honestly.

Her research is impeccable, but this time around I found it absurdly intrusive into the dramatic aspect of the story. Momentum would come to a grinding halt as a laundry list of sieges was trotted out in dialogue or blood ties that the people in conversation would know about were recited again and again. And why go through the trouble of having people in a scene who say nothing? So what if they were probably there in real-life because of their station/relation/whatever. It's extraneous and should be looked at with an editor's detached eye.

In short, I thought she needed to find a better balance between the historical and the fictional. There were many parts in the 185 pages I read that felt like they were lifted from history books with dialogue sprinkled in. It's the same carp I have about the driest and blandest of Jean Plaidy's novels. Biographies with dialogue.

I'm really grateful to a reviewer for one of her other books who notes that Penman's scene structure has a format: People are standing around talking about the current political situation, then someone rushes in to give news about a far-off battle or siege or other turn of events. Then everyone either rushes off or sticks around to contemplate the ramifications of these new developments. Once I was clued in to that, it was obvious that it happens a LOT and finally let me put my finger on why there was a **sameness** about everything, no matter how far I read. The pacing wasn't stagnant or moribund, but it wasn't exactly kicking either. So thank you, Reviewer!

I'll also add that she has a motif of having her male characters wrap or lay their lovers' hair around their throat while lolling about in post-coital delight. That's been in every Penman I've read and I always thought it sounded a little weird, as well as repetitious. So many Plantagenet men have the same quirky little bed habits, spanning centuries! Bizarre! Or one might conclude the author merely has little imagination when it comes to the sex lives of these real people.

Anyway, there had to be a reason why, despite thinking her books were great back then, whenever I grabbed a chunkster off my shelf to read these past 6 years, it wasn't ever one of hers. My subconscious was trying to tell me something, and I'm glad I've realized what it probably was. My tastes have changed so that I appreciate dramatic license and the condensing and tweaking of fact into a narrative that flows better. She's a stolid and "safe" writer. No historical boats will get rocked in her vicinity, and you're guaranteed of every i and t getting their dots and crosses. But this time around I found her style decidedly lacking in snap and dramatic primacy, and I put more importance on that than if Character A was in the historically correct place at the historically correct time.

This was the one book in the trilogy that I really wanted to read, dating back to those ye olde early 2000s, but by the time this was finally published, I'm afraid that my tastes had already outgrown Penman's stodgy stylings. So I'll content myself with another re-watch of *The Lion in Winter*.

And a big sloppy kiss to the hack-n-slash movie *Ironclad* for making me so impatient with the non-action in this book that I decided to bail and save my time and sanity. Smooches!

Deborah Pickstone says

There is much less in the way of historical error in this book. Ms Penman's research has tightened up and become outstanding, by fiction standards and actually by historical standards - I have read less convincing historians.

This very comprehensively tells the story of the dysfunctional family dynamics that tore the family of Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine apart, the tragedy of the death of two sons and the heartrending end of Henry himself. Along the way, we also get the story of William Marshal, which is a dramatic bravura performance in its own right!

There is not a single major character in this novel who is not well drawn and interesting. Henry II was - in my own view - one of the most interesting of the English kings. He was also, arguably, one of the most successful, despite the dire family dynamics. And, despite history's ordure throwing, John was the son most like him as King. The politics of the reign remain fascinating.

Ms Penman is a favourite HF author of mine because even her early work is characterised by honest research and willingness to accept her own mistakes. This novel is one of her best three, in my view - the other two are the two Lionheart novels.

Betty says

I always like an historical novel, and Penman's attention to detail and development of character are superb. I have a fascination for Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine and this novel fleshes out the motivation for their behaviour as well as giving the reader an overall picture of life in the 12th Century. The story of the family discord, the ambition and Henry's desire to retain power remind me of a current mining magnate and her children!

Laura says

I LOVED THIS BOOK!!! Of course I loved it- it's Sharon Kay Penman, but this is SKP on the top of her game. Opening this book was like falling into the 12th century & becoming completely immersed in it. I'm starting "Lionheart" right away so that I can prolong the experience & my own enjoyment of her fabulous books!! I can't wait for "A King's Ransom" to come out, & I hope she continues the series with another book about John after that. Bravo, Sharon... this really is one of the best books of all time!!

Laura Andersen says

Nope, waiting doesn't change things. Everybody still dies. The death that really hurt was the one I knew the least about . . . the third son, Geoffrey, Duke of Brittany. I really hope his marriage was similar to Penman's portrayal, because at least Constance had some happiness for a few years. When he died, my alternate-history mind went a little crazy, wondering what might have been if Geoffrey had been there to A) protect his son, Arthur and B) actually inherit the throne after Richard's death. If there had been no King John? No one knows. But maybe I will think on it for a while . . .

Ellen Ekstrom says

I'm seeing Richard I of England in whole new light and it's as dim as a gutting candle . . . but I digress. Richard is a product of his time and that time was dark and disturbing.

Ms. Penman once again makes medieval life and history as palpable as what we see on the news today, the persons as real, whole and flawed as ourselves - separated by a thousand years. "Devil's Brood" concludes the story of Henry II of England and his queen Eleanor Duchess of Aquitaine and concentrates on the ill-fated rebellions of Henry and Eleanor's sons, The young king Hal, crowned during his father's lifetime as a surety of succession, Richard, Geoffrey and John. The rebellion is sanctioned by Eleanor who is tired of being seen as merely Henry's queen and not as a duchess in her own right with power and intellect in a man's world. A few of the mythic causes of that rebellion are swept away in Ms. Penman's meticulously researched book, leaning on fact.

Henry is arguably one of England's greatest rulers but he failed miserably as a father to his children, especially his boys - four spoiled, willful and vengeful brats in my opinion, Geoffrey being the most sympathetic. Hal, the eldest, is a 'celebutante' of his day - handsome, popular, free with favor and money, but weak as a commander and ruler, easily swayed by hangers-on. Geoffrey is the son in the middle: overlooked, underappreciated but cold and calculating and turning when the wind blows in his favor. John is a boy learning from his older brothers and gets a lesson in mistrust and treachery. Richard is just downright scary. Sorry if you, dear Reader, hold the historical legend that he was a champion of the weak, poor, downtrodden - nope, that was Robin Hood. Richard is portrayed here as cold, calculating, mean, bloodless while suffering bloodlust as he hacks and stabs his way through Normandy, Poitou, Anjou, Maine and Aquitaine. All of the sons have plenty considering the times, it's just that they want their father's trust and attention and more lands and castles, but everyone goes after that trust and attention all the wrong ways. If you're expecting the witty banter and political savvy of that outstanding play, "The Lion in Winter," you're in for a surprise. This is real, gritty, poignant and outstanding. As I mentioned in an earlier post, this is a medieval reality show, Plotting with the Plantagenets - a family that put the capital 'D' in Dysfunctional.

Krista Baetiong Tungol says

This story is several hundred pages of epic dissension between brothers, sons and father, and husband and wife—cheered on by those wanting to shatter the empire said to rival that of Charlemagne's, and supported by their expedient sycophants. I would jump off to their time if I only could and give each of Henry's four sons a smack in the head for being so self-serving and power-hungry, for still wanting more of the pie when they were already given their share, for brewing deception and discord and distrust among themselves, and for wounding Henry as a father most of all (as I've truly come to sympathize with him since Time and Chance). But then I would often hear of present-day news about siblings fighting over their parents' inheritance, or influential families that were torn apart because of materialism, and lament that nothing has truly changed much about the *deadly sin* that is greed even after some 850 years. Only, this particular Plantagenet brood makes family/sibling rivalries of today look simply mundane and uncomplicated! Sigh.

Laura says

Another wonderful book by SKP, where the struggle for the power between Richard's sons prevails over most of his kingdom. The strong character of Eleanor shows already her fight for women rights on state decisions even in a medieval era. The dialogues between the main characters are very well written within an historical context based on a very careful historical research performed by SKP.

Iset says

Devil's Brood is an absolute rollercoaster of a novel. Now in my mind, there are two types of "rollercoaster novels". One kind swings wildly from one extreme of emotion to another, melodramatically creating mountains out of molehills, its plot twists coming out of nowhere, the kind of rollercoaster that leaves you feeling queasy and desperately wanting to get off. The other kind of rollercoaster novel sweeps you up and off you go, the highs and lows built up ahead of time, creating anticipation, but, when they come, even more thrilling and exciting than you thought, every moment sheer breathtaking enjoyment, and when you get off you immediately want to join the queue and ride it again. Needless to say, *Devil's Brood* is firmly in the second category. I was swept up in the story from the first page to the very last, so thoroughly immersed that I must confess I don't remember too much of events over the past seven days, outside of what happened in this book!

I will never tire of marvelling at how thoroughly realistic are Sharon's characters and how authentic the environments they move through. In my mind's eye they completely come to life, jumping off the page, so fully realised that the room around me melts away and I'm instead right there with Sharon's characters, seeing what they see, experiencing what they experience. Engrossing doesn't cover it by half. I can actually believe that these characters *are* Henry Fitz Empress, Eleanor of Aquitaine, Will Marshal and Richard Lionheart, or at least a 99.9% match. Over the years I've enjoyed many historical fiction novels, and some which I haven't enjoyed so much, but it is truly a once-in-a-blue-moon event to encounter characters that I can believe in so thoroughly. Even amongst novels I've enjoyed a lot it's a rarity for me – sometimes I've liked the characters but felt like they're nothing like their historical counterparts, sometimes I agree with certain aspects of the portrayal but not others, and there's nothing wrong with that, I've certainly never marked books down for that... but how much better when well-developed, organic, complex characterisations are combined with such historicity and thorough research! How sublime the siren song seems then! How divine to sup from such a feast for the mind then!

It may seem like such a small detail to some, but often the details are the difference between a very good novel and *the perfect read*, and the gulf might be the width of the Grand Canyon or the breadth of a hair. Books are escapism, but we can choose from a wide variety of genres and the possibilities are endless. Why then choose the historical fiction genre? I can only speak for myself, but as a child I loved stories. Imagine my excitement to learn that the most thrilling, engaging stories were those that were true, that had really happened in history. As Sharon likes to say, you can't make this stuff up, it's so strange and weird and wonderful. Most of all, it's *our* story, it's the story of *us* – I can't think of anything more exciting. So when I pick up a book from the historical fiction genre, I am looking for escapism, but I am looking to escape into a realistic, authentic world that I can believe in, a world well-written but also well-researched. I want to get swept away in the true story; if I was looking for a purely fictional tale, I wouldn't have chosen that genre. Exaggeration and embellishment seem so unnecessary when I want to be told the *true* story, to gain an insight into the fascinating real people of history and understand what it meant to be living through what they

lived through. I don't want something clinical and sanitised, nor do I want my story to be juiced up into salacious, tawdry scandal – that defeats the very reason that I choose historical fiction to read in the first place – for me the thrill comes from reading a good book and knowing that this stuff really happened, or as close as possible. Sharon's books are also demonstrable proof that it is possible to stick very closely to the historical record, and still deliver a well-written, vibrant, engaging story.

Devil's Brood is beautifully written. Its construction shows all the finesse and erudition of a master of both the written word and the craft of story-telling. Its plot is sophisticated, refined, and richly detailed. There are admittedly far fewer zeniths to soar than there are nadirs to plunge, but the depths are tremendously moving and poignant without overwhelming the book. I found *Devil's Brood* just as thrilling and exhilarating as the likes of *When Christ and His Saints Slept*, *Here Be Dragons* and *The Sunne in Splendour*, and perhaps even more vivid and vibrant than those latterly mentioned. I loved every character, from the infuriating yet well-meaning Hal, the savvy Joanna, steadfast Will Marshal, right through to the inscrutable Geoffrey, effervescent Eleanor, and the unfathomable Henry Fitz Empress himself. And truth be told, reading about Richard before the Lionheart was utterly fascinating, and I must admit myself rather partial to his character, though like everyone else his vices as well as his virtues are made all too plain! In addition to being eminently believable and well-researched, *Devil's Brood* is at once an immersive experience and jumps off the page at you. Sharon's style of writing brings the subject to life, no matter what it may be, and to that end I'd like to provide some of my favourite quotes from *Devil's Brood*:

The great hall was shimmering in light, sun streaming from the open windows, and ablaze with colour, the walls decorated with embroidered hangings in rich shades of gold and crimson. New rushes had been strewn about, fragrant with lavender, sweet woodruff, and balm... the air was... perfumed with honeysuckle and violet, their seductive scents luring in from the gardens butterflies as blue as the summer sky.

The day's heat had faded and the sky was a deep twilight turquoise, stars glimmering like scattered shards of crystal. It was a beautiful evening but Henry seemed oblivious to his surroundings. Even after they'd entered the gardens, he paid no heed to the fragrant roses, the scent of honeysuckle and thyme, or the soft bubbling of the fountain.

But then he looked back, and what he saw caused him to catch his breath as if he'd taken a blow, for, thinking himself alone, Henry had leaned forward and buried his face in his hands.

Twilight was laying claim to the cité, and the sky was a deepening shade of lavender, spangled with stars and fleecy clouds the colour of plums.

This was the moment he most loved about tourneying, that first glorious sortie with banners

streaming, trumpets blaring, and the earth atremble with pounding hooves as hundreds of knights came together in a spectacular clash of sound and fury.

Dawn was streaking the sky in delicate shades of pink and pearl, the last of the night stars flickering out like quenched candles.

It's not just that Sharon researches her books so carefully and accurately, but the fact that when she brings the facts to the page she writes so imaginatively and creatively, taking the raw data and dry evidence and drawing out the vivacious, funny, flawed people from the artefacts and documents and telling their human stories – and all this achieved with no or very little alteration or embellishment of the facts. Some of Sharon's descriptions are worthy of the great historical bards, and from what fount of inspiration she plucks her words from I am often left mystified, albeit bewitched, for I am sure it never would have occurred to me to write of a "*clash of sound and fury*" or describe the sky as variously "*turquoise*" or "*pearl*" with clouds the colour of "*plums*". That is simply marvellous to me, marvellous and magical. I don't know how Sharon Penman does it!

I normally write much longer reviews than this, and I've noticed that my reviews of Sharon's books have been a lot shorter. What a pleasure it is to write a line saying "this is perfection" rather than pages deconstructing why a bad book didn't work.

Forget the pretenders to the throne – Sharon Penman deserves the accolade of queen of historical fiction, and a title richly-deserved it is too.

10 out of 10. I honestly don't know how Sharon can top this, but with *Lionheart* coming out soon, I'm eager to see if she's up to the challenge. My money's on yes.

Julie says

I had all three books of Sharon Kay Penman's series on the dynasty that resulted in Richard the Lionheart and during my first read several years ago, I had to wait between books until the next one was published. It was great to read all three in a row. I feel like I know them all so well. The investment of time paid off! I love how the focus shifts to the new generation without making you feel like you've left the old generation behind. For example, the fictional character of Ranulf was one of my favorites in the first book, but by the third book very little is heard of him. It is his sons that take the spotlight. And that generational link makes you truly feel like you are a family friend watching the changes through the years. It's the same with the significant events. What was so monumental in the first book, becomes overshadowed by the third. Just like in real life time passing heals wounds and allows you to put things in perspective. Quite frankly, I'm surprised I'm not using the 12th century vernacular by now.

I am SO excited because I was NOT aware that there was a fourth book. So I do not have to say goodbye, yet, to my Angevins and Poitevins. I still have another 594 pages of obsession.

Orsolya says

If Eleanor of Aquitaine's marriage to King Henry II wasn't passionate and tumultuous enough; it gets even more spiced up when their sons rebel against their father with Eleanor's aid resulting in her captivity/house arrest. Sharon Kay Penman leaves the drama of the murder of Thomas Becket behind in "Time and Chance" and follows the family breakdown with the third book revolving around Henry and Eleanor in, "Devil's Brood".

"Devil's Brood" follows familiar ground with the subject of Eleanor and Henry but Penman breaks some ground with her style. "Devil's Brood" is noticeably the 'strongest' after the first two books both in writing and story. Instead of a slow beginning in usual Penman fashion in which she spends too much time setting the scene, establishing characters, and recalling past events; Penman finally jumps right into the story and keeps a steady pace which heightens the emotional accessibility of the story.

"Devil's Brood" still features a lot of discussing of events versus living them but the share of this is heavily diminished and lessened in comparison to the first two books. Penman's writing/story is more alive and charged making it a much better read. The characters are also stronger and each stand out on their own feet, especially Eleanor and Henry's sons who really capture the reader's attention.

As per usual with Penman, her writing in "Devil's Brood" often sweeps the literary language landscape and is rich with imagery. However, she truly steps it up with "Devil's Brood" with some emotionally-packed moments that the reader will genuinely feel in all of its essence and will be left in awe. This carries the story and teaches the history aspect by leaving a strong impact. The great thing is that Penman doesn't force this and it all flows naturally.

One of the standout features of "Devil's Brood" is the depiction of the family breakdown and rebellion that takes place. Oftentimes with this subject in both history and historical fiction pieces; Henry is simply washed as the "bad guy", Eleanor and her sons as the victims, and everything else is black and white. Penman brings the grey matter to light, voices the psychological causes/effects of these events, and doesn't exaggerate each character's roles therefore eschewing stereotypes and making "Devil's Brood" real and relatable.

"Devil's Brood" does eventually fall into some discord only in the sense that there is so much intrigue and drama between the sons and Henry; that the story becomes slightly muddied and even somewhat tedious and overwhelming. Yet, the angles that Penman spins are fresh and invigorating such as continuing to show Eleanor as a cunning woman not suffering in imprisonment but still helpless to her surrounding situations.

The portrayal of the "Young King" Hal's death is extremely moving, vivid, and rife with emotion making it a monumental and memorable part of "Devil's Brood" despite a reader's personal opinion of Hal. Penman's writing here is unarguably splendid and top-notch.

The final quarter of "Devil's Brood" regresses in strength and the story and Penman herself seems to lose some fire. The text feels compressed and tired meanwhile Penman tries too hard to tie loose strings, inform the reader of real historical conclusions, and set up events for the next book. Basically, too much is thrown into little space and thus, it is spread thin. This results in some debasing of "Devil's Brood" but luckily this doesn't take away too much from the overall value of the novel.

The final ending, however, is strong emotionally; wrapping up with Eleanor's point of view and truly bringing her emotion to the reader, therefore leaving a well-enough, memorable note.

Penman supplements "Devil's Brood" with an 'Author's Note' debunking some classic myths regarding some of the figures in the novel and also explaining some of the minor historical liberties she has taken within her composition.

Despite some flaws and a weak final quarter; "Devil's Brood" is a nuanced historical fiction piece that stands out against Penman's first two books on Henry and Eleanor. "Devil's Brood" is definitely not recommended to be read as a standalone novel but is absolutely riveting in the series. "Devil's Brood" is a lovely fire lit by Penman.

Anna says

Rating 3.5 stars

I read historical fiction for two reasons: to learn and to be entertained.

There's no doubt that Penman's research is impeccable. As a new reader to this era, I now feel I know the story of Henry II, his sons, their rebellions and their contemporaries very well. The information given is interesting and thorough - I couldn't have asked for a fuller, more complete picture.

The entertainment side was less successful for me. In her quest to tell the whole story, Penman felt she had to include everything. This started out well, and I enjoyed the family squabbles, feeling Henry's exasperations as his sons constantly pushed for more and more, and rebelled with war against him (and each other) every time he stalled over their demands. And who could blame him for being so reluctant, those boys could not be trusted! Not knowing the story of Henry and Thomas Becket, I also enjoyed the recap of the build-up and aftermath of Becket's murder, incorporating Henry's complex feelings towards that whole situation.

However, around page 500 (of 700+), my enjoyment started to wane. It's obviously not Penman's fault that the bickering brothers and their rebellions dragged on for years, but they became tiresome and repetitive and sapped my strength.

I also thought there was *too* much of everything. It's a double-edged sword: I want the complete story, warts n' all, but I also want it to be fresh and riveting – and how do you do that when the real-life historical facts went round in circles for more than a decade? Perhaps by showing more and telling less? Perhaps by not having the same characters hold the same conversations over and over. Perhaps, in a real cast of hundreds, don't add in a couple of fairly predominant but pointless fictional characters. Perhaps by not imparting all your research, by keeping your lesser facts back to give the more important ones greater impact. This wasn't a book that included everything but the kitchen sink – the kitchen sink was perched up on the dais.

Thanks to my friend Jemidar for this buddy-read – I loved your insightful (and silly!) thoughts as we ploughed through it all :-)
