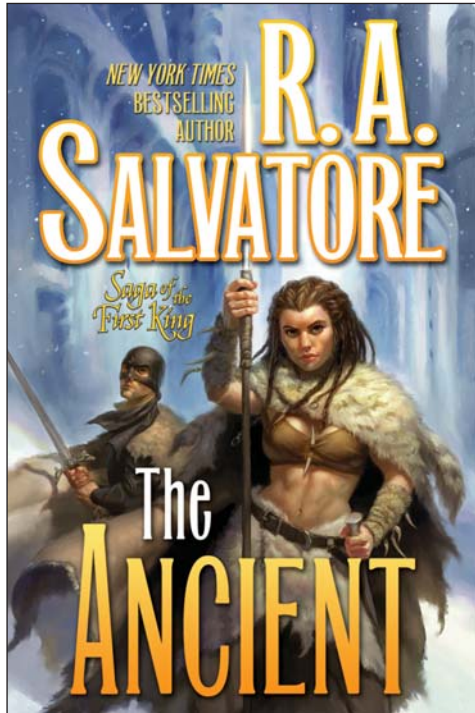




R. A. Salvatore

The Ancient



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“Salvatore excels in world-building and creating complex, introspective characters who triumph through wit and determination as well as skill in open combat.”

—LIBRARY JOURNAL

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



R. A. Salvatore was born in Massachusetts in 1959. He is the acclaimed author of the DemonWars trilogy: *The Demon Awakens*, *The Demon Spirit*, and *The Demon Apostle*; as well as *Mortalis*, *Bastion of Darkness*, *Ascendance*, and the *New York Times* bestseller *Star Wars: The New Jedi Order: Vector Prime*.

He lives in Massachusetts with his wife, Diane, and their three children.

ABOUT THE BOOK

A new book in the Saga of the First King, a four-book series set in the early days of Corona, the setting for R. A. Salvatore's highly successful DemonWars novels. Bransen Garibond is on the hunt for his long-lost father, and his quest will eventually pit him against the dread Ancient Badden, a brutal spellcaster who is readying plans to destroy several societies that are distracted by their conflicts with each other. If Bransen fails, all who live on the lake will perish, and all will fall under the shadow of the merciless Samhaists.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What brings Badden to Mithranidoon? Does Badden's ability to feel the hot springs within the frozen earth suggest contemporary environmental images? What other images from the opening pages of the novel connect readers to the fantasy?
2. How does the Highwayman's bedroom robbery of Lady Olym foreshadow the complex power dynamics depicted later in the novel? How do Dantanna and Ancient Badden disagree about the cause of the war and Gwydre's role therein? Does this scene alter your perception of Badden? What action does Gwydre tell Dawson to take to further their war efforts? Are her plans reasonable? Why or why not?

3. Cormack travels along “this muddling road called life.” How does this notion suit many characters in *The Ancient*? Does the phrase suit you or people you know? How do images of travel create a structural and thematic frame for the novel?

4. Who is “the Stork”? The “Highwayman”? Whom does this character consider his father or fathers? What argument does he make to journey north before his stated destination in the south? How does he feel about the soul stone?

5. Like the paradoxes within the character of Bransen, Ancient Badden’s hidden weapon is called the “white worm,” a term containing an internal contradiction between white, suggesting purity, and worm, suggesting decay. How does this type of duality serve as a centering image in the novel? What other dualities, in plot, characterization or imagery, are also woven through the text?

6. The people of Palmaristown experience the war as a “sanitized reality reflected in the eagerness and excitement of the townfolk.” Could this be the description of real-world home front war experiences? How are the different experiences of various groups and characters with the war, particularly in terms of its geography, important motivators in the narrative?

7. At the end of Book I, Toniquay leads Androosis into danger to teach him the folly of his desire to leave Mithradoon. As Book II begins, Father De Guilbe commands Cormack to wear the bloody powrie cap. How are these events similar? What do they reveal about the values and choices of the leading shamans and brothers?

8. How is the battle of Chapel Isle like and unlike the story of Cordon Roe? How do these battles highlight the complex and dangerous relationship between war and faith? In terms of this relationship, interpret Milkeila’s observation that “We are left in that most awful place where our hopes collide with our realities.”

9. How do Bransen and others feel about having to serve Gwydre through Dawson’s trickery or as prisoners of war? Can an army forced to fight for a leader in whom they do not believe be a good army? How are prisoners’ constructive acts of building and destructive acts of fighting critical to the novel’s plot and themes?

10. While Cormack is afraid at what can happen if “good” men can foolishly slaughter in the name of their faith, Giavno wonders, “Why would anyone not appreciate such healing and utility, and with the promise of everlasting life beyond this mortal coil?” Discuss the paradox established by these two notions.

11. As Bransen finds community amongst Gwydre’s soldiers, he recalls something “comfortable and comforting in my infirmities...the world of the Highwayman is not as simple as that of the Stork.” What is the meaning of these reflections? Early in the story Bransen wonders whether it is “better to have the hope of paradise than to pursue it truthfully and find that it is not what you expected”; is this community the paradise that he feared to find? And was his worry warranted?

12. How does Badden view the war between Ethelbert and Delaval? Why does he not fear the increasing Abellican power? What does he see as the flaw in the promise of a merciful god? What does Badden believe holds civilization together? Is this belief correct? Is it a belief reflected in present-day world leadership?

13. How does love—between Cormack and Milkeila, Bransen and Cadayle, and other characters in the novel—introduce an element of uncertainty into characters’ religious convictions? Do bonds of friendship or combat comradeship have a similar effect? Does this make love valuable or dangerous?

14. For a novel contending largely with a battle between conflicting faiths, why are the terms “good,” “evil,” and “god” used so sparingly? Cite instances from the story in which the author invokes these terms and describe your reaction to these moments.

15. Is “victory” the best word to describe the conclusion of *The Ancient*? In battling to save their lands, Cormack observes that “from the powries to the Alpinadoran shamans to the Abellicans and even the Samhaists there lay a common magic, a bonding of purpose.” How would you define this “common magic”? Is this notion connected to the fate of the Highwayman and/or to the future of Vanguard? What might this suggest about the function of a common goal—or a common enemy—in terms of the power balances extant in our contemporary world?

PRAISE FOR R. A. SALVATORE

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“[A] swift-moving tale of sword and sorcery.”

—*PUBLISHERS WEEKLY ON THE HIGHWAYMAN*