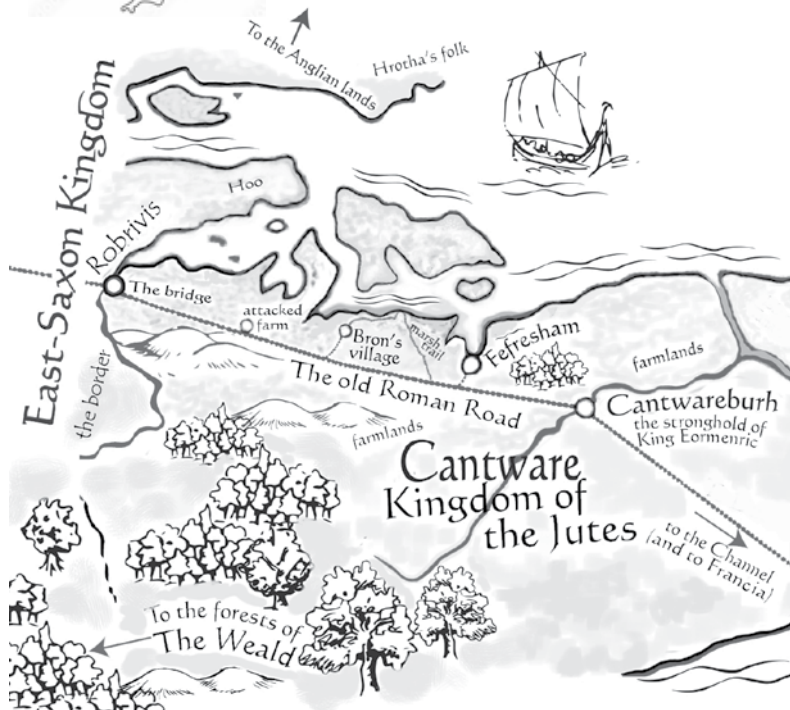




South-eastern Britain, AD 580

Some of the lands settled by

Anglo-Saxons and Jutes





Pronouncing the names

The Saxon characters

Lord Beogard (pronounced **Bay-o-gard**)

Beogard controls his own lands, the wild Weald country. He is a Saxon and is uncle to both the the Saxon king, Bricgnytt, and the Jute king, Eormenric.

King Bricgnytt (pronounced **Brich-nit**). *He controls Robrivis, the river and lands to the west.*

Saxon warriors

Sigwyn (pronounced **Sig-win**)

Edwyn (pronounced **Ed-win**)

Kenhelm (pronounced **Ken-elm**)

Sherwyn (pronounced **Shur-win**)

The Saxon gods

Thunor (pronounced **Thoo-nor**)

Woden (pronounced **Woe-din**)



The Jute characters

King Eormenric (pronounced **Yor-men-rik**)

He controls all the land from the river to the coast

Jute warriors

Jutrad (pronounced **Joot-rad**)

Havrad (pronounced **Hav-rad**)

Fornost (pronounced **For-nost**)

Jute villagers

Bron (pronounced **Bron**)

Rowena (pronounced **Row-ee-na**)

Wigstan (pronounced **Wig-stan**)

Willa (pronounced **Wil-a**)

Paega (pronounced **Pay-ga**)

Frumold (pronounced **Frum-old**)

Other characters

Hrotha (pronounced **Ha-roth-ah**)

Cloda (pronounced **Cloe-dah**)

Cleava (pronounced **Clee-vah**)

The place names

Robrvis (pronounced **Rob-ree-vis**)

Frefresham (pronounced **Fef-ra-shum**)

Cantwareburh (pronounced **Kant-ware-bur**)

Prologue



The Romans ruled Britain for hundreds of years, their legions keeping order at the point of a sword.

But then the Roman Empire fell apart, and the soldiers left.

The fine stone buildings they had made fell into ruin, and their great roads became overgrown and tangled with weeds. Fear spread across the land and order fell into chaos.

New people were settling, arriving from across the sea: tribes of farmers, craftsmen, metalworkers, story-tellers, warriors, makers of gold. These tribes called themselves Angles, Saxons, and Jutes, and in time they become known as the Anglo-Saxons.

The languages they spoke would one day become English. But not yet – not for a thousand years or more. In those distant times, they still spoke in words that would sound strange and

ancient to us.

At that time, they had no books, they did not read or write. The stories they told were spoken out loud, shared in gatherings beside the fire.

So imagine yourself beside a great fire now, warming your hands as it flames against the night.

It is winter. You are seated with your friends, your backs to the dark, your faces glowing. You are huddled in woollen cloaks, with sweet drinks of honey-mead to keep you warm, and the smell of a feast roasting. Soon you will eat.

But first... a tale!

The story begins with a group of children. And one in particular, the youngest, a boy called Bron. His eyes are keen but anxious, his knees scuffed with dirt. He is a Jute, and lives in a village of Jutes, in flat farm lands close to the sea...

The tale begins

The older children said they were going hunting, so Bron followed them. He hadn't eaten all day. Maybe they would catch squirrels to roast.

He went after them, doing his best to keep up.

The older ones scrambled to the top of the bank and crouched, looking down at something. Bron squeezed in behind.

That's when he saw it for the first time, the road. A wide way, cutting through the woods, dead straight and level, overhung with trees.

"The Romans made it," Olfric was telling them. "A long time ago."

Bron stared. The road stretched into the distance.

"We shouldn't stay here, it's dangerous," said Rowena. She was the eldest, and Bron always felt safer when she was around.

But Olfric carried on talking.

Bron knew Rowena was right. They shouldn't

be here – especially not him. He should be back at the forge. That’s where he lived now, with the blacksmith.

But the blacksmith and his wife had left this morning at first light, without a word to Bron, without saying where they were going. They had taken the cart, its wheels squeaking as they heaved it along the track, away from the village.

Bron watched them go. His stomach had been rumbling, but he knew better than to go into their house and help himself to any of their food. His place was under a bench, beside the forge.

“Where does the road go?” one of the boys was saying.

“That way,” pointed Olfric, “It goes to where the Saxons live. The other way, is to our king’s hall.”

“Are the Saxons bad?”

“Dangerous. And good fighters,” said Olfric, standing up. “But not as good as Jutes.”

He threw a heavy stone and it thudded across the cobbles.

“One day I’ll go along there. I’ll go to see the king,” he told them.

“We’ll come,” the others agreed, and Bron joined in – “we’ll come!”

But Olfric looked down at him and laughed.

“You can’t come Bron. You’re too small. And anyway, you’re a slave. Only warriors can visit the king.”

Bron felt ashamed. He tried to think of something to say.

And then he felt someone pulling his hand. It was Rowena.

“We’re going back now,” she said. “It’s not safe here.”

As they headed back to the farms, she smiled down at him.

“Don’t listen to them.”

Bron nodded.

“Can we eat soon?” he asked.

Olfric never got to visit the king. A year later, a winter fever came to the village, and he

was one of the children who died.

Bron grew though. He spent his days working at the blacksmith's forge. And sometimes he thought about the road, and he dreamed of where it might lead.

Summer turned to winter, and winter turned to spring.

And ten years passed...

Chapter One



A decision on the road

Beogard cursed and sat down. After a day of walking his leg was stiff and he was getting tired. He shielded his eyes and watched the three Saxon warriors racing up the road towards him.

They were running easily, keeping their spears low.

The hot sun didn't bother them.

Ten summers ago he would have moved like that and he would have been faster than any of them. Five summers even.

But not now.

These days he had to stop and pretend to

adjust his shield strap while really he was catching his breath. And his young companions had to pretend not to notice.

Beogard could tell, even from here, that they'd found something.

Edwyn reached him first and his eyes were bright. Aged sixteen, he was carrying a full length sword for the first time.

“Well?” asked Beogard.

“River-men,” replied the young warrior, kneeling down next to him. “Five of them, like you said.”

Beogard nodded.

“Aye lad, I thought as much. They'll have a boat hidden down there somewhere. A coward's escape on the tide and they'll be back up the coast before nightfall.”

He shook his head.

Since that morning they had been following the river-men's trail, away from the burning farm. The farm, a cluster of low thatched buildings, had been a nice place before the raiders found it.

Beogard gripped his axe at the memory.

The farmer had been lying dead, still holding onto the stick that he'd tried to use as a weapon. His sword, if he had one, had been somewhere out of reach. There was no sign of the farmer's family but a dog lay panting beside him. Alive but only just. Its fur was matted and bloody.

The dog had growled feebly until Beogard laid a gentle hand on its head, talking and soothing it, before swiftly breaking its neck.

Edwyn was speaking again.
“Lord Beogard? Lord, we can attack the river-men now, while they're resting. We can make them pay for what they did.”

“Do they have prisoners?”

“None that I saw.”

“What about dogs?”

“None, lord. And no look-outs either. They don't expect to be caught.”

The old warrior fell silent and watched the two others approach.

Sigwyn was a bold lass and Beogard liked her. She was fair-haired like her brother, and tall. She carried her own spear. And a sword hung from her belt. It was a fine weapon, given to her by her uncle, King Bricgnytt of the East Saxons.

Beside her came Kenhelm. Tall, young like both of the others, fast and strong.

“There’s another farm down there,” Kenhelm panted, his eyes glinting. “The raiders are hiding, watching it.”

“Like wolves,” snorted Sigwyn.

Beogard nodded.

“And there are *five* you say?”

“Yes. Or maybe six.”

Maybe six.

Beogard looked at his young companions.

“That’s too many. We can’t fight them.”

At once Sigwyn protested.

“But the farm! If we hurry we’ll be able to help...”

“Six is too many. I promised the king, your *uncle*, that I’d keep you safe. I’ll not risk breaking my oath to go scrapping with bandits.”

“But Lord Beogard, there may be children down there!”

Her eyes flashed and she looked to the other two, appealing for support. Her brother nodded.

Beogard rubbed at his stiff knee and cursed. Children. Of course there would be children, there always were.

“Lord?”

They were all waiting, looking at him.

Beogard sighed.

“Very well,” he said at last. “Go on then. Show me this farm.”

