

Reader Views

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Interview with Brian Hill Author of *The Shintae*

With us today is Brian Hill, from Yorkshire, England. We are pleased that he is able to chat with us about his recent novel, "The Shintae." Welcome to Reader Views Brian.

Irene: Tell us the gist of your fantasy novel, "The Shintae."

Brian: The novel is a tale of two nations, good versus evil. It tells the story of Kaér and Angharad, the main heroes of the story, and their adventures through the Cantaén Mountains in search of The Shintae. They face the threat of the enemy leader Sartae, a man steeped in evil, all-out war and the forces of nature, which at times threaten their very existence. Only one nation can survive, but which one?

Irene: What is so important about finding The Shintae?

Brian: The Shintae is a stone, but one that possesses almost unimaginable magical powers. How these are exploited depends ultimately on the will of the user. While one person would employ it as a weapon of war, another might utilize its power for building or healing. The Stone itself is neither good nor evil, the choice lies with the person who controls it. Therefore, with The Shintae in the possession of the enemy, Kaér and Angharad must retrieve it to ensure their own country's survival.

Irene: What inspired you to write it?

Brian: Walking my dog through the local woods germinated an idea in my mind, originally for a short story. Over a period of months during that spring and summer, I expanded the storyline and, still within my imagination, the winding paths through woods took on a greater significance and the area became the forestlands of Maraé, the homeland of my hero. Late summer, after another walk through the leafy glades, I returned home to find a typewriter with a blank page waiting for someone to fill it. That triggered me to take my idea one step further. Sitting down, I ambitiously typed 'Chapter I', and The Shintae was born.

Irene: I find it interesting that you refer to a typewriter. (laugh) Do you actually use a typewriter?

Brian: (laugh) No! Not now, although it served its purpose well for many years. The first typewriter I used for writing seriously was an old manual portable, which I exchanged a few years later for an electric one. Luxury! No more long hours of heavy pounding away

at the keyboard! Then someone wonderful and kind invented PC's and Word Processing software and I have never looked back.

Irene: Readers claim that your explanation of the setting, as well as the plot, are very vivid. Tell us how, as a story teller, you are able to achieve this.

Brian: By putting myself inside the minds of my characters and trying to see things as they would see them. Imagining the landscape and situations from their point of view rather than my own. My characters, I find, tend to take on a life of their own and do not always want to move in the direction originally planned for them. As their personalities develop, the plot has to be adjusted and fine-tuned to make their actions believable.

Irene: As a writer, how do you actually put yourself into the minds of your characters? Tell us about your process.

Brian: A little Mozart or Chopin in the background always helps. I try to visualize the setting where they are – a setting that is often developed from places I have visited and this allows me to bring it to life inside my mind. From there I introduce the character and start writing from their point of view. Before introducing a new section, especially if re-visiting a character that has been out of the story for a while, I read back over their earlier entries to familiarize myself with their characteristics again.

Irene: How much research did you have to do in order to write about all the adventures throughout the book?

Brian: A certain amount of research was carried out into weaponry, housing, clothing and certain natural features. The story is set in a distant past, but uses a combination of Anglo Saxon, Dark Ages and Medieval period features to make up the imaginary setting of the novel.

Irene: Where were you able to find all your information?

Brian: Libraries and, of course, the Internet. Both are wonderful resources for the writer.

Irene: How much came from your own imagination?

Brian: The bulk of the novel comes from my own imagination. It is not based on any real events or people, although the origins of Sartae probably stem from an amalgamation of various dictators from the 60's and 70's.

Irene: And, those dictators are...?

Brian: Pol Pot and Idi Amin were the main two.

Irene: Idi Amin had multiple wives, was infested with sexual diseases, and let his people down. What character in "The Shintae" is portrayed after Idi Amin and why?

Brian: Sartae is that character. It may well be that he was riddled with sexual diseases but that side of his life does not enter into this particular story. Sartae is obsessed with power though and, as a person to whom acts of inhumanity are a part of his everyday life, he is prepared to seize control and hang on to it no matter what the cost or suffering to others. These are the common links between Sartae and Amin. Both quite happy to sacrifice their people on the high altar of their own personal ambitions.

Irene: Did you base parts of the story on any of your own experiences or fantasies?

Brian: Only in respect of the countryside as far as my own experiences are concerned. The story had its very beginnings in my own fantasies and daydreams, but once the characters had shape and form then these were about them rather than me.

Irene: Where in the United Kingdom do you live?

Brian: I live in Yorkshire, an area that contains some of the most beautiful scenery in England. The Yorkshire Dales, in particular, are my personal favorites. They contain a wonderful mix of gentle undulating land, ragged hills and glacial valleys. Trickling streams, waterfalls, raging torrents and broad slow moving rivers abound while above are bleak open moors. You can find peace and quiet in the many isolated areas where you can walk all day and scarcely see another person.

The county is steeped in history, the walled City of York with its Roman streets and mediaeval buildings on the one hand whilst elsewhere abbeys, castles and relics of all descriptions can found in abundance. Yorkshire has a rugged North Sea coastline, with its historic fishing ports like Staithes, snakes down from the north. The wonderful port of Whitby, proud of its famous Abbey and links to Captain Cook and Bram Stoker's Dracula, is one place in particular I visit most years.

Irene: Aside from the thrill of reading your book, readers come away with a message that transforms into their own lives. Please talk about the message that you want the readers to come away with.

Brian: The novel is about people and how they deal with the obstacles that life places in their way. Kaér and Angharad never gave up; they found a way round their problems, their moments of self-doubt and carried on. Ultimately, they had to have belief in themselves and faith in their abilities to succeed.

Irene: Life without obstacles would cripple us. How do Kaér and Angharad get past their self-doubts and get beyond them?

Brian: Perseverance. Giving up is never an option for them, there is too much at stake. They learn from the past and their previous mistakes but live in the present and look to the future.

Irene: Yet, many times the obstacles in life are created by our own doing with the major obstacle being fear. Did your characters display fear and how were they able to overcome it?

Brian: By the time the story takes place, the main characters are all seasoned campaigners and have learned to cope with their own personal fears. The Maraéns do have concerns for their homeland but by actively working towards their goals and supporting each other, they overcome these anxieties and occasional periods of self-doubt. The Cantaéns cover their fears with aggression and bullying.

Irene: Is there a sequel to "The Shintae"?

Brian: There are no definite plans for a sequel to "The Shintae" at the moment, although it is something I will consider in the future. At the moment a second novel is taking shape and I hope to have this completed later in the year.

Irene: Thank you very much Brian. Is there anything else that you would like our readers to know about you or your book?

Brian: Thank you Irene for allowing me the opportunity to talk with you, it has been most enjoyable. Further details about "The Shintae" can be found on my website at <http://www.theshintae.com>