

# *ars memoriae*

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*beth bernobich*

introduction by kage baker



## **ARS MEMORIAE**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

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editor@pspublishing.co.uk / <http://www.pspublishing.co.uk>



Years ago, during his mathematical studies—studies broken off, or discarded, he no longer knew which—Adrian Dee had proposed certain theories involving time and its equations. The modern scholars were wrong, he declared, when they talked about measuring time in discrete units. The ancient philosopher mages had touched closer to the truth when they described time as a continuous ether, its flow rising and falling like a river’s current.

Ah, *but I was wrong, too*, he thought. Time was like sunlight pouring in all directions, susceptible to prisms and mirrors, or even a child’s hand.

An automobile horn bleated in the streets below, penetrating the quiet study where Dee sat with Doctor Lusk. Off in one corner, a grandfather clock ticked away the seconds, its muffled rhythm a counterpoint to Lusk, who spoke in hushed tones about trauma and its effect upon memory. It was an old topic—one they had often discussed over the past year.

“Commander Dee? Are you well?”

Lusk was studying Dee closely, a look of mild concern on his fair round face.

“My apologies,” Dee said with a smile. “My attention wandered. You were asking?”

“About your dreams, Commander. Specifically, the nightmares.”

*You asked about them last week,* Dee thought. *And the week before.*

He was being unreasonable, he knew. Lusk was an expert in disorders of the mind. More important, Lusk had treated Dee since the beginning of his illness, when nightmares had consumed his life, and they had needed restraints and strong sedatives to conduct these sessions. Lusk did not repeat these questions from mere curiosity.

And so Dee dutifully answered him. Yes, the nightmares had stopped entirely. No more violent, bloody images broke his sleep, and he was no longer plagued by a sense of vertigo, as though reality had shifted beneath his feet. Throughout, the clock ticked on, dividing time into minuscule bits that dropped away into the past.

The clock's machinery whirred; chimes sounded the hour. Lusk finished off a last note and smiled. "Once more, we are at the end of our session, Commander Dee. Until next week?"

Dee stood and resumed his frock coat. "Until next week."

There must have been something amiss in his tone, because Lusk glanced up sharply. "Is something wrong, Commander?"

*Careful,* Dee thought. *He is not someone to underestimate.* "Nothing is wrong, Doctor Lusk. Why?"

The doctor's pale eyes narrowed. He appeared about to ask more, but then shook his head. "We can talk about it later," he said, half to himself. Dee did not disabuse him of the idea.

Outside, it was a brisk cold day, more like winter than early spring. Gusts of wind carried along the scents of melting snow and wet earth. Dee pulled his hat low over his forehead and glanced at his pocket watch—half past one o'clock. An hour remained until his train departed. He decided to walk to the station. As he turned in that direction, his eye caught on Aonoch Sanitarium, a high, handsome building, which stood on a rise overlooking the boulevard. Dee shuddered, remembering its stark corridors, the terror no amount of drugs or electricity could banish.

That was one set of memories. He also remembered the sani-

tarium from a different perspective, as a police detective seeking clues to a murder.

Both were true. Both were subject to time's distortions.

*Why did I lie to Lusk?* he wondered.

A profitless question. One might as well ask why he remembered an unreal past.

He crossed the boulevard, threading his way between the automobiles and horse-drawn carriages, to a pathway that led through a pleasant green park and down to the Blackwater River. It was against Lusk's warnings about indulging in false memories—it was against his own instincts—to walk beside that river.

*I've changed,* he thought, as he turned into the park.



Once more, he stood in the examining room. Once more, all the details were wrong. He clearly remembered that the news had come just after sunrise. He could not have arrived in Awveline City before mid-morning, and yet before him lay a room washed in moonlight, all colors faded to black and grey.

In the center stood a single, raised pallet draped in a coarse white sheet. Dee drew the cloth back and felt an involuntary shock, even though he had known what to expect. The assailant had strangled his victim first, then slashed her face with a knife. He could clearly make out the indentation of the man's fingers around her throat, livid marks against her whitened skin.

"Her name was Maeve Kiley," the medical examiner said. "Lord Kiley's youngest daughter."

"I know," said Adrian Dee.



A knock at the compartment door brought Dee alert. It was the Atrain's concierge. "Ten minutes to Osraighe Station, sir. You asked to be notified?"

"That I did. Thank you."

Dee drank down the last of his tea and glanced over the papers in his lap—reports from the Queen's Constabulary, which had arrived by royal courier the day before. They were incomplete, which piqued his curiosity. Or rather, they were carefully edited summaries of what had to be longer, more detailed accounts from agents in the field. Still, they proved good summaries of the current situation throughout Europe, western Asia, and the Mediterranean colonies.

*—Frankonia's king facing opposition within his Council from those who favor an alliance with the Prussian States . . .*

*—sources from the Turkish States confirm the official heir's recent death was the latest in a series of assassinations conducted between Koptic and Muslim factions . . .*

*—Serbia appears to be maneuvering to take control over the Balkan States. Austria still maintains its sovereignty over Hungary, Slovakia, and portions of Croatia, but we have reports of Serbian militia units engaging with Austrian troops in the eastern provinces, while Montenegro's Prince Danilo II continues to press for kingship . . .*

Delicate times, Dee thought. Especially for a prominent nation like Éireann, which had to negotiate a careful path between these many conflicts. He stowed the reports in the case at his feet, then drew an envelope from his coat's inner pocket. The Queen's personal courier had delivered the packet and letter to Dee late the night before.

*Do not fail me, Adrian,* she had added at the end.

*I come as you command,* he had replied at once.

Within an hour of arriving at Osraighe's busy train station, Dee found himself established in a richly furnished suite of rooms in the Royal Enclosure of Cill Cannig. Servants had already fetched his trunks from the station and laid out his clothes. He changed swiftly into his best black suit and brushed his hair smooth. Ran a

hand over his thin face, made thinner still from the events of the past eighteen months. Well, he could not help that.

A runner escorted him to the audience chamber where he was to meet with the Queen and her Council. It was one of the smaller rooms in this wing of the Enclosure, long and narrow, with windows set high in the walls. Below, a series of portraits alternated with centuries-old tapestries depicting Éireann's rise from province to kingdom to empire. Dee recognized the Queen's coronation portrait among those of her ancestors.

One Councilor had arrived already and sat at the far end of the table—a middle-aged man in a dark blue suit, with iron gray hair swept back in waves. Lord Kiley.

Dee paused.

*Lord Kiley's eyes were like dark bruises against his paper-white skin. He had wept in private, of course. Like all the men of his generation, he would display his grief to no one outside his family. Perhaps not even to them.*

*They tell me a lunatic murdered my daughter, Commander Dee. Find him.*

*I promise, my lord.*

Dee blew out a breath. There was no help for it. He would have to face these false memories as they came. "My Lord Kiley."

Kiley jerked up his head from the papers he'd been studying. "Commander Dee. They told me you might make an appearance today. Come. Sit. The others should arrive momentarily." His gaze shifted to a point beyond Dee. "And so they do. Melville, good to see your watch now runs in order."

Lord Melville, a bent old man, limped into the room. "Don't know what you mean," he said, scowling at no one in particular. "Damned wet air mucks up the works now and then, but nothing outrageous." He eased himself into a chair next to Kiley.

Melville's entrance must have signaled the servants, because six liveried men quietly appeared with silver tea carafes, crystal water pitchers, glasses etched with falling leaves, and delicate porcelain cups painted in the Oriental fashion. Lord Melville continued to

grumble until he held a tea cup in his trembling hands. “Much better. Can’t think when I’m soaked to the bones with cold.”

“It’s age,” Kiley offered. “Comes to all the old men.”

“Damn the age. I don’t like it. Neither do you.”

Kiley tilted his hand, as though to agree. “How does Lady Melville?”

Dee took a seat several chairs down from the two Councilors, grateful to be ignored as the two men chatted about family, their respective estates, the likelihood of good hunting come autumn. Two episodes within the day. Two moments revisiting a past that had never existed. Willing his hands to remain steady, he poured himself a cup of tea and drank. Dimly, he heard Kiley speak complacently about his daughter Maeve, who had just received a degree with honors in mathematics.

“To what purpose?” Melville asked. “Damned fine accomplishment, to be sure, but what will she do with a paper about numbers?”

Kiley for once appeared uncertain. “She hasn’t said definitely. She’s spending the summer with the family. After that, she mentioned the possibility of taking a position in some new institute, run by that Simon Madoc fellow and his sister. There’s talk about a new physics. New everything. I could not follow the subject, though it pains me to admit it.”

More names from the past. Dee closed his eyes against the vertigo. Maeve Kiley had lived—lived and prospered. Why should that be such a terrible thought?

An influx of voices recalled him. Servants and pages swept into the room, followed immediately by several more Councilors, their secretaries and aides. Then the chaos subsided as the Queen of Éireann entered and everyone rose to their feet.

Áine Lasairiona Devereaux.

She had changed completely. She had not changed at all.

He remembered her as a slim girl who delighted in silks and jewels and other finery. The young woman today wore no gems except a narrow gold circlet for her crown. Her gown swept in

straight lines to the floor; her blood-red hair was pulled back smooth and tight over her skull. She was not beautiful, not in the conventional sense—she had inherited her father’s strong jaw and arched nose—but Dee thought her so. He saw traces of anxiety in her face, and the way her mouth tensed as she spoke to her secretary, before she turned to face her Councilors.

“My lords. Commander Dee.”

Lord Kiley bowed. “Your Majesty. We are at your service.”

“Then let us begin.”

She waited until the secretary had cleared the room and they were all settled. “You have all read the initial reports concerning the situation in Europe,” the Queen said. “I have invited Commander Dee to join us because I believe the situation is more complicated than we first suspected. One where Commander Dee’s long and varied experience will prove useful to Éireann.”

Dee observed the reactions around the table. Polite. Wary. Interested. Disturbed. Understandable if they knew his recent past. In turn he studied the men who now advised the Queen. Melville, Kiley, and Bierne were all Councilors from the old king’s reign, and he remembered them well. They were experienced solid men. Paor and Liath were relative newcomers; he knew them only by name and reputation. There were others who served as Councilors, but these five men occupied the innermost Council.

“So you believe the crisis is greater than we first thought, Your Majesty?” Melville said.

The Queen nodded. “The Balkan situation grows more troublesome. I know there is always unrest in the Balkans, but lately I’ve received reports of certain events that appear to concern us directly.”

“How so?” said Lord Paor. “And you say Commander Dee has experience in this region?”

“Indirectly,” Dee said. “I spent two years at the University of Vienna. My field was mathematics, but I also dabbled in languages and politics—or rather, political science. One does,

abroad. Afterward, I traveled throughout the region, before I returned to Éireann.”

“Ah, a most complete education,” Paor said. “I had not realized it.”

There was the hint of a smile beneath the man’s polite expression. Dee turned to the Queen, whose face was harder to read. “Your Majesty. You honor me by inviting me to your Council, but if I might be blunt, I do not see the reason for it.”

“Nor do I,” Lord Kiley said. “Unless, you have new information.”

The Queen’s gaze skipped from one Councilor to another, the silence broken only by the *scratch, scratch, scratch* of the secretary’s pen. Did she trust no one? Dee wondered, as he studied her face. There were faint blue marks under her eyes, clear signs of a sleepless night.

“I have,” she said at last. “Three very disturbing reports arrived here last Friday. It appears the Austrians have arranged a meeting between their prime minister and Montenegro’s Prince and certain of his advisors.”

“What of it?” Bierne said. “A local affair.”

She smiled thinly. “Formerly, I might have agreed with you. Austria alone poses no threat. They’ve lost prestige and territory, and besides, Serbia and Prussia keep them busy. It is Montenegro that concerns me, given what I’ve learned from this third report.”

At her signal, the Queen’s secretary handed around folders to all the men. Dee flipped open the blank cover to see a half dozen pages of closely written lines. It was another summary, not a first-hand account. His attention caught on the words *Montenegro* and *recent elections*, but it was the final paragraph that made him straighten up.

“Anglians?” he said.

The others had reached that same point. Kiley frowned. Bierne and Liath appeared gravely disturbed. Paor gave no other sign except to gaze steadily at the Queen, as though waiting for further clues.

“Yes, Anglians,” the Queen said. “Montenegro’s elections last summer brought Austrian sympathizers into the majority. Certain local political groups mistrust the Austrians’ goodwill. Sensing an opportunity, our own Anglian nationalists have joined with the more outspoken of these factions. If I can trust these reports, they have entered a pact to further each other’s revolutions.”

Dee released his breath slowly. Civil war in Éireann. That would be a crisis.

“But you are not certain,” Melville said.

“I—No. And we cannot make any intelligent decisions until we know more. That is why I summoned Commander Dee, to investigate the matter.”

“You want a spy,” Dee said.

The Queen’s wide grey eyes measured him coolly. She had changed, he thought. She was less the girl, more the dispassionate ruler. The change might prove to Éireann’s advantage, but he wondered what it had cost her.

The Queen’s expression remained unreadable. “The word spy implies ugly things,” she said. “Call it what you will. I want a pair of eyes and ears, thinking eyes and ears, to observe the situation at close hand.”

“To watch, but not to act.”

She hesitated. “Let us say I empower you to act as your discretion dictates, if doing so will ensure Éireann’s welfare.”

“No restrictions?” That was Lord Paor.

“We shall work out the details before the Commander departs. Do you have any concerns about this assignment, Commander Dee?”

Now it was his turn to hesitate. It was a chance to reinstate himself—in Court, in the Constabulary, in the Queen’s trust. A flutter of doubt intruded. He suppressed it. “More questions than concerns, Your Majesty.”

Her gaze dipped briefly. “A fair point. My Lords, do you have reservations?”

Liath and Melville exchanged glances. Paor's expression had turned distinctly bland, in marked contrast to Bierne, who scowled absent-mindedly at the table. Kiley continued to study his copy of the report through slitted eyes, as though searching for more clues. He said nothing, however.

The Queen nodded. "Very well, my lords. Then let us make our desires clear. We desire Commander Dee to meet privately with each of you. You will brief him as thoroughly as you can and may." To Dee she said, "We shall have copies of all our reports sent to your quarters for your review. Let us know if you require more, but do it quickly. We wish you to start for the continent this Thursday."

She rose. The Councilors filed past her, already murmuring among themselves. Dee waited until they had all departed. The Queen had turned to confer with her secretary. The man caught Dee's glance and touched her arm, indicating his presence. She glanced at Dee, and with the barest hesitation, nodded.

Once they were alone, she resumed her seat and folded her hands together.

"Speak, Adrian. I know you want to."

How well had she read him over the years? Better than he had her, obviously.

"Why send for me?" he said. "Are you doing this from charity? Pity?"

Áine jerked up her chin. Her color was high. "No. The matter is too important."

"Then why? You surely have others with equal experience."

"Because I need a man I can trust," she said.

Not a friend. A counselor. He suppressed a pang of disappointment. Well, he'd proved himself adept at being the faithful servant before. He could do that again. "You have my service, Your Majesty. But you should know that."

"I should, but—" She broke off with an unhappy smile. "My father once said a king did not issue absolute commands, he could only provoke loyalty and inspire obedience. I sometimes

think I have proved a bad student in these matters. I did not wish to presume.”

A neatly practiced speech, for all her genuine anxiety about a crisis. Out of curiosity, he said, “And if I had refused, Your Majesty?”

Again that quick coloring which faded to white. “But you did not.”

*Because I could not, he thought. And that you surely knew.*

He turned away to stop the words before he spoke them. Felt the air stir as the Queen left and the door silently closed behind her.



A runner waited outside Dee’s rooms with the promised reports. Dee ordered a plain supper for later, and sat down to review them. He was glad to be alone, glad to have so much to occupy his thoughts. Coming to Cill Cannig had upset all his assumptions, even those he had not previously been aware of.

He opened the packet and skimmed through the lot. Here were the detailed field reports behind the summaries he’d already seen. Reports from agents in Austria, Prussia, Serbia, the Turkish States—all the relevant players he would have expected.

In addition, the Queen’s secretary had included Dee’s schedule for the next two days.

*Ah, that is not what I expected.*

Of course he was to meet with Kiley, Melville, and Bierne. These were the men responsible for matters touching the military or foreign affairs. (Though he wondered at Kiley’s being placed later and not earlier in the schedule.) Even Paor’s name did not entirely surprise him—Paor oversaw matters of internal intelligence, which would encompass the Anglian connection. But Liath? Economics

and finance? Clearly, there was more going on than a minor crisis in a distant country.

A note in the Queen's hand added, *I want there to be no questions in your mind when you start for the continent. If you find anything lacking, please apply directly to me.*

He set down the paper. Laid his fingertips lightly upon the pages spread over the table, as though to read more from their texture. Considered the circumstances, the small details of the courier, these luxurious private rooms, the Queen's private words about trust, her public ones about his experience.

*She wants someone who knows the Court, but who is outside it. Someone skilled in delicate investigations.*

Taking up the topmost report, he started to read in earnest.



He read past midnight, taking notes as he went. By sunrise, he finished what little sleep came to him, and rose to prepare for his day. Lord Geoffrey Liath's name came first on the agenda. At eight o'clock, Dee presented himself to the Councilor's secretary, who escorted him into Liath's impeccable private office. It was a large pleasant room, lined with tall bookshelves and many cabinets. Liath himself appeared hard at work. At Dee's appearance, he set aside his pen and dismissed the several clerks who had been taking notes at his dictation.

"Commander Dee. Welcome. Would you care for coffee? Tea? No? Well, then, let us settle to the business at hand. Though to be quite honest, I'm uncertain how I might assist you."

Dee smiled briefly. "I believe the Queen simply wishes to reacquaint me with her concerns, whether they touch directly upon this matter or not."

Liath pursed his lips, as though uncertain. "If you believe,

then, that I have information you need, then of course, I will do my best . . .”

Over the next two hours, Dee’s initial impression remained unchanged. The man appeared exactly as his reputation suggested—a conscientious servant of the Crown, and he answered all Dee’s questions with unfailing politeness. Yes, a civil war would prove unhealthy for the Treasury. Éireann had stretched itself thin over the past few years by sending aid to its many allies. And yes, any internal crisis of that proportion would certainly endanger the international exchange rates. No, he had not any reports of unusual activity with banks or investment firms to indicate funds moving from the Anglian Dependencies to points east.

“None that are regular,” he added. “For the irregular kind, you must inquire of Lord Paor.”

“Indeed I will, my lord.”

Their gazes met and held a moment, and Dee had the distinct sensation he was being studied as thoroughly as he had studied Liath. Was he wrong about the man? Was his outward nature a shield for something more sinister?

He was still pondering Lord Liath’s character as he walked to his next interview, which was with Lord Melville. Melville had served as an officer during the Anglian Uprising thirty years before, and now advised the Queen on military matters. He expounded upon the topic with more vigor than Dee expected from such an old man. “The sticking point,” the Lord said in his wheezing voice, “is when to signal the first shot.”

“Surely the first question begins with if, not when,” Dee said mildly.

Melville laughed softly. “You’ve not served in war, young man. However, I see your point. So then, let us return to the matter at hand. If the Anglians do succeed in bringing their Balkan allies to these shores, here are the items that will govern our possible responses . . .”

He plunged into a detailed account of Éireann’s four military branches, one for each of four knobby fingers while Dee attempted

to keep notes of the main points. The navy came first. It had blossomed in the last century, and proved well enough to defend against minor incursions, but clearly could not hope to equal the Dietsch Empire's astonishing fleets.

"Hence our withdrawal from Africa, the Hindu Archipelago, and the Far East," Melville said. He bent one finger down, grasped the next. The aerial corps, a minor branch, relatively speaking. The army used it for tracking troop movements, but there was talk among the engineers about improving the balloons' maneuverability. Some thought they might carry small cannons or fire bombs.

"Soon?" Dee asked.

"Not before the next decade," Melville replied. "So you see it is our army and our militia who guarantee our security." Two more fingers bent over, as he went on to those branches. The army defended the kingdom and the neighboring Dependencies; the militia concerned itself with internal matters. "Against disruptions. Uprisings."

"Rebellions," Dee murmured.

Melville shot him a calculating glance. "Indeed. We've been fortunate these past few centuries, apart from the Revolt. My concern is that another uprising, combined with any significant crisis in Europe, would prove too much for us. It has been eight hundred years since Albion and Denmark came to our aid, to drive the Anglians from our shores. If we show ourselves weak, they might decide to abandon us. Indeed, Albion might decide to support its southern neighbor outright—they being citizens of one island, as the radicals like to remind us. We cannot afford that, not with the continent so uneasy."

"Is it so uneasy then, my lord?"

For the first time during their interview, the older man hesitated. "You understand, I speak now of my own impressions, nothing more. There are, let us say, more incidents. More bickering and maneuvering between neighboring kingdoms. My fear is that any crisis, even a seemingly insignificant one, might incite violence,

which in the present atmosphere, would spread as rapidly as fire through dry kindling.”

Meaning war, of the kind Éireann and the continent had not witnessed for a hundred years or more.

They were all so circumspect, Dee thought, as he returned to his quarters for dinner. He had missed the clues in the first meeting, but clearly the Queen’s Councilors were uneasy amongst themselves. Of course they feared the possibility of an all-consuming war, but they also knew the Queen had not shared all her thoughts about this current matter. If only he could remain at Cill Cannig another week to study the factions at Court. It made no sense to send him off so ill-prepared—not if the true problem lay inside Éireann.

He sighed and shuffled through the papers, looking for that newest report about Montenegrin elections. There had been several notations added in the margins (Áine’s writing? Had she made them on his copy alone?) Something about the prince and his advisors.

*What is this?*

He lifted a crumpled page from the stack of otherwise neat pages. Underneath it, he found two more. All three were nearly illegible—stained by rusty brown splotches and creased through and through. Even more puzzling, each paragraph looked as though a different person had written it. In one, the script lurched across the page, while the next consisted of neat cramped lines.

But it was the contents that intrigued him the most. This was not the usual field agent’s report. One page contained a list of names and occupations. The names were Montenegrin or Serbian, he noted. Another, labeled *Meetings*, gave dates and locations. The third page contained only a few paragraphs, but Dee recognized what had to be drop points and exchange signals. Here the name Kiro Delchev was repeated several times, along with references to a larger group of Éireann sympathizers, which Delchev represented.

The sense of things unbalanced intruded upon his thoughts.

He thrust it away. This was no case of time misremembered. He knew he had not overlooked these papers last night. He also knew he had locked his rooms before meeting with Liath, and that he had found the packets exactly as he left them.

*Someone wishes me to know about Montenegro and Kiro Delchev. And they do not wish to tell me openly.*

So, it was with some curiosity he went to his next interview.

Lord Bierne's office was small and crowded with books, exotic carvings, and framed samples of illuminated text. A faint scent of incense hung in the air, mingling with tobacco. He had spent his early years in Court as a diplomat at various posts in the East, from Turkey to the Hindu Archipelago to the Japanese Empire. After running the embassy in Constantinople for six years, and establishing a network of agents, he had returned to Court to serve as the King's Councilor for those affairs. He greeted Dee with a firm handshake and an offer of coffee or wine.

"Coffee, if you please," Dee said. "I would like to keep my wits about me."

"Wise choice. Robbins, give us two cups and then you may go."

An aide poured two cups of thick black Turkish coffee and withdrew. Bierne added two lumps of sugar to his cup and stirred rapidly. "You would think I'd had enough of this goop, as Melville calls it, when I lived abroad, but it seems that familiarity has bred a great love and no contempt."

"You spent fifteen years in Constantinople, I understand, my lord."

Bierne glanced at Dee from under hooded eyes. "Near enough. Ten years rattling about Turkey. Six more in the embassy. If you know that much, you should know the rest."

Dee tilted his hand outward in recognition of the shot. "It comes from my background, my lord. It makes me indecently curious, and causes me to question everything. Did you ever have cause to investigate the Balkans during that time?"

The other man raised his eyebrows. “From time to time, as events required.”

“Did you ever come across a man named Kiro Delchev?”

“No.” A pause. A sip from the cup. “Wait, I have. There was a Doctor Delchev in Montenegro. A professor at the old University in Cetinje sometimes called in to advise Prince Danilo on international matters. I don’t know anything more than the name, however. I’m sorry. You’ll have to ask Kiley about the man.”

Dee finished off his coffee slowly. Either Bierne truly did not know, or had prepared himself for direct questions. Instead, Dee turned the conversation to the recent succession wars in the Turkish States. There Bierne showed no lack of interest, and the next few hours passed in animated discussion about the recent assassinations, and what might ensue, once a faction took firm control of the throne.

When Dee returned to his rooms that evening, after a late supper with Bierne and Liath, he locked the door and built up a fire before collapsing onto the sofa.

He could make nothing of the clues so far. Liath was competent, if bland. (Though Dee had not forgotten that flash of keenness at the last.) Bierne and Melville appeared exactly as one would expect—shrewd, practical men. Capable of advising the Queen well, equally capable of manufacturing a complex scheme that could throw Éireann into confusion. But to what end?

He sighed and poured himself a whiskey. He was reaching conclusions ahead of his data. He had another day, and two more interviews. No, three. He would surely see Áine one last time before he departed.





**Beth Bernobich** is a writer, reader, mother, geek, and sometime student of the martial arts. Her stories have appeared in publications such as *Baen's Universe*, *Interzone*, *Polyphony*, and *Strange Horizons*. Her first full-length novel, *Passion Play*, a fantasy of passion, political intrigue, history, and magic, is forthcoming from Tor Books in 2010, with two more books to follow in the series. You can find her previous Éireann stories in *Asimov's* ("A Flight of Numbers Fantastique Strange", June 2006) and *Postscripts Magazine* ("The Golden Octopus", Summer 2008). She is certain there is at least one more to follow.

