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The Last Kingdom (Saxon Tales Book 1)



Synopsis

The first installment of Bernard Cornwell's best-selling series chronicling the epic saga of the making of England, as like Game of Thrones, but real (The Observer, London) the basis for The Last Kingdom, the hit television series coming to Netflix in Fall 2016. This is the exciting yet little known story of the making of England in the 9th and 10th centuries, the years in which King Alfred the Great, his son and grandson defeated the Danish Vikings who had invaded and occupied three of England's four kingdoms. The story is seen through the eyes of Uhtred, a dispossessed nobleman, who is captured as a child by the Danes and then raised by them so that, by the time the Northmen begin their assault on Wessex (Alfred's kingdom and the last territory in English hands) Uhtred almost thinks of himself as a Dane. He certainly has no love for Alfred, whom he considers a pious weakling and no match for Viking savagery, yet when Alfred unexpectedly defeats the Danes and the Danes themselves turn on Uhtred, he is finally forced to choose sides. By now he is a young man, in love, trained to fight and ready to take his place in the dreaded shield wall. Above all, though, he wishes to recover his father's land, the enchanting fort of Bebbanburg by the wild northern sea. This thrilling adventure based on existing records of Bernard Cornwell's ancestors depicts a time when law and order were ripped violently apart by a pagan assault on Christian England, an assault that came very close to destroying England.

Book Information

File Size: 1890 KB

Print Length: 384 pages

Page Numbers Source ISBN: 0060530510

Publisher: HarperCollins e-books; Repack edition (March 17, 2009)

Publication Date: March 17, 2009

Sold by: HarperCollins Publishers

Language: English

ASIN: B000FC2RR2

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Screen Reader: Supported

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #4,685 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #1 in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > History > Military > Other #16 in Kindle Store > Whispersync for Voice > Read & Listen for \$14.99 or Less #25 in Books > Literature & Fiction > Genre Fiction > Historical > Military

Customer Reviews

I hadn't known of Bernard Cornwell until I found this series, which I have enjoyed thoroughly. Starting with this book, I now know much more about the time of Alfred the Great, as seen through the eyes of Uhtred--son of a Danish mother and Saxon father. Just that combination during these times when the Saxons and Danish/Norse invaders/settlers struggled for dominance of the British Isles was a good indicator of the complexity that develops in this character. As a child of a local Saxon chieftan or lord, he was captured by the Danes when his father was killed and his uncle subsequently stole the stronghold and power due Uhtred. He was brought up as a son of the Danish chief, learning Danish ways and thoroughly adopting their lifestyle and religion. However, he became 'stuck' in defense of Alfred and his ambitions of becoming overlord of a Saxon 'England'. Uhtred was a powerful fighter, having learned how the Danes approach battle fearlessly, and his skills were leashed by Alfred, despite Uhtred's dislike of the man personally. This first installment of the series builds the story that was not a weak or boring one through all the books that followed. Without a strong appreciation of the history of the times, unequalled description of how battles were fought strategically and shifting alliances could compromise territorial ambitions of the leaders, as well as strong character development of the principles, such a long series can't sustain interest. Cornwell did not disappoint me in any part of the long saga. In fact, this book, as the intro to this talented historical writer, led me to search out his other books of the European genre (medieval period) and I've now read every one and eagerly await what may come in future.

I watch the television show but wanted to read the book. What a great story and so well written. Much more detail and picture leaving. I love the historical context which helps me understand the story as it comes alive. Watching the television show did not spoil this story one day, and I eagerly look forward to reading the next book.

As a history teacher I truly enjoyed the historical accuracy behind the riveting characters. This book gets better with each page that is turned. I am definitely buying the next book in the series.

I enjoyed this writer's style, mainly because he made the story believable and made me care about the characters. I liked reading a story from this time period, as I have rarely come across one. Though historical fiction, he made it jibe with actual events as much as possible. Although somewhat gory, the Viking invasions had to include part of that.

What an adventure. Such great characters. Mr Cornwell brings Ragnar and Uthred to life. The battle scenes are so effective that you are transported to the spot where they were fought. Great book.

The story involves the growing up of a young Saxon noble boy called Uhtred, who should inherit his father's lands, but when as a ten-year-old he accompanies his father to a battle with some invasive Danes, his father is killed. Impressed by Uhtred's suicidal charge for revenge, Ragnar easily disarms him and brings him up as a young Dane, where he learns how to fight, to man the great ships, and effectively he becomes a Dane. The Danes have come to settle, and to do that, they intend to overpower the Saxon kingdoms, leaving puppet kings paying them tribute. However, Ragnar is killed by another Dane, and Uhtred, losing Ragnar's protection, must flee. He ends up in Wessex, where Alfred decides he can use him. The story then proceeds to an event that essentially saves Wessex for the time being, then, following some treachery, to a battle that again lets Wessex survive. Regarding history, the major characters, other than Uhtred, were apparently real, the major events were more or less real (one, Ubba, is killed a year earlier than historically to make the story more complete) and the story also gives a genuinely interesting insight into how the Danes of the period lived. I am not in a position to know how genuine that is, but it most certainly gives the impression that Cornwell has deeply researched the period. That may be because he is apparently descended from an Uhtred, although from 200 years later. The character of Uhtred is somewhat overly heroic, possibly because of the personal association, while the characters of the leading known Danes are as well portrayed as could be expected, given that there are historical requirements. The technology and way of life at the time are also well portrayed, although the battle scenes, while exciting to read, tend to be more glamorized. Cornwell tells us that they were horrible, but the actual showing does not quite give that impression, although since Uhtred is telling the story, perhaps we can forgive him for glamorizing his own role. Overall it is a very interesting read, and since it appears to be the start of a series, it encourages the reader to go further. Cornwell does very well to end the book in a way that is almost an ending; my one minor criticism is that it really should have included Alfred's response to what had happened. Well worth the read.

I watched the tv series first and loved it. I thought it brought this period to life and made much more sense than the Vikings series did. But this book made it even more clear. Well written, fun and action packed. I knew what was going to happen and still I was in suspense. I'm ordering the next book now.

I admit I watched the tv show first and then checked out this book. It's a good book and a fun entertaining read. It's been a long time since I've read a book in the first person that's a true narrative like this and it took a little to get used to it but once I did it was interesting. I've already bought the second book and will be reading it as soon as I hit submit on this review.

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