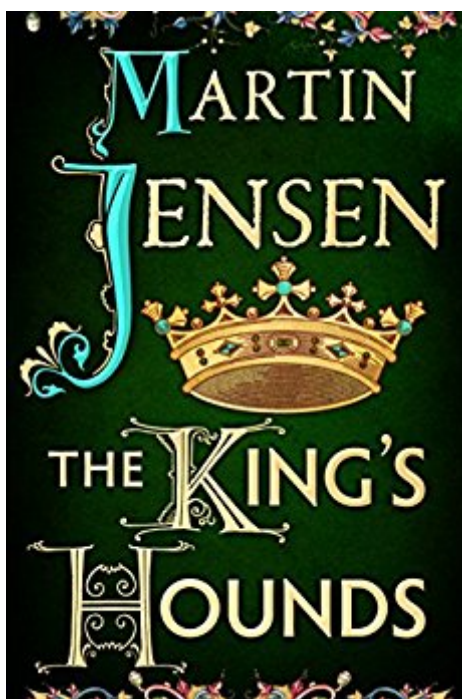


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The King's Hounds (The King's Hounds Series Book 1)



Synopsis

The first in the bestselling Danish series of historical mysteries The newly crowned King Cnut of Denmark has conquered England and rules his new empire from Oxford. The year is 1018 and the war is finally over, but the unified kingdom is far from peaceful. Halfdan's mixed lineage—half Danish, half Saxon—has made him a pauper in the new kingdom. His father, his brother, and the land he should have inherited were all taken by the new king's men. He lost everything to the war but his sense of humor. Once a proud nobleman, Halfdan now wanders the country aimlessly, powered only by his considerable charm and some petty theft. When he finds an unlikely ally in Winston, a former monk, he sees no reason not to accept his strange invitation to travel together to Oxford. Winston has been commissioned to paint a portrait of the king at the invitation of his new wife, and the protection of a clever man like Halfdan is well worth its price in wine and bread. But when the pair's arrival in court coincides with news of a murder, the king has a brilliant idea: Why not enlist the newly arrived womanizing half-Dane and the Saxon intellectual to defuse a politically explosive situation? The pair represents both sides of the conflict and seem to have crime-solving skills to boot. In their search for the killer, Halfdan and Winston find seduction, adventure, and scandal in the wild early days of Cnut's rule.

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Customer Reviews

This is basically an old school country house mystery in the vein of Agatha Christie and Dorothy Sayers, but instead of being set at an estate over a long weekend, a tour group, or a train, the setting is a political gathering in late Anglo-Saxon England. Our two protagonists, one a manuscript illuminator and the other a dÃ©classÃ© half Danish nobleman, stumble across a murder with significant political overtones early in the reign of King Canute. Canute promptly sets our heroes to work, and they begin trying to track down and interview a wide range of suspects. It is quite a fun outing, and while I sort of guessed the solution very early, I was not sure until more than two thirds through the book. There was no cheating. The history is basically fine, the atmosphere is very good, and it is fun to see this all from a Scandinavian perspective since the book is translated from Danish. The ethnic conflict and relationships between the three main groups, Anglo-Saxons, Danes living in England for centuries, and Viking adventurers is very elegantly handled. One interesting aspect is that at the end several loose ends in the investigation are left; this is lamp-shaded by one of the characters who suggest that sometimes it is very awkward to get to the bottom of everything, a suitably Nordic medieval sentiment, but I would have enjoyed the whole puzzle more if they had been addressed. The translation is solid, better than some other Crossings titles, with a good command of the two languages. It does not feel like a translation.

Prior to writing this I read some of the other reviews and was amazed that so few readers thought it worthy of 5 stars. I LOVED THIS BOOK.... The main protagonists kept the the story light and enjoyable, whilst at the same time the author has recreated a little remembered part of English history. I noted one reviewer compared this novel to the likes of an Agatha Christie novel and she is probably right, but again I hark back to the historical content. The characters in this novel (with the exception of Halfdan and Winston of course) are real. This is a great read and we learned something along the way. After you finish this novel check out King Cnut on the net. More great reading.

England, 1018. Invasions of Angles, Saxons, Danes and others are stripping the country of food, livestock and whatever peace the local villagers can wring behind their palisades. Cnut of Denmark wants to bury the hatchet between all the warring factions and requisitions the talents of Winston, the bookish ex monk who has come to illuminate Cnut's sterling qualities in a rich book for Cnut's

wife. Instead Winston and his traveling companion Halfdan, a disenfranchised nobleman, are set to solve a murder in Oxford, where Cnut has convened the Saxon witan, a local council of elders, and demanded that the heregeld, a tax on the losers paid to him, be sent. With the blessing of the witan and the dispersal of the heregeld to Cnut's army as pay, Cnut's position as king will be solidified. However one of Cnut's future subjects, a local Saxon chief, turns up dead in Oxford during the gathering after confronting Cnut in public. With Winston, a Saxon, and Halfdan, a Dane, on the investigation, both sides of Cnut's kingdom can be satisfied a clean investigation will result. Halfdan woos the female population to weasel out information and provides a strong sword arm when they are attacked while Winston flexes the mental skills he's acquired in using the smaller details to paint the overall picture of this, and the ensuing murders, and uncover the final plot. These books are translated from the original Danish and it was interesting to get a take on the history of that unsettled time from somewhere other than the usual Anglo-American point of view. The ability to pick up numerous languages, Danish, Saxon and other dialects is emphasized as England was a polyglot society. The rudimentary detective skills displayed (by today's standards) is entertaining and the epilogue promises more adventures as a series. Recommended for fans of Oliver Potzsch Hangman's Daughter series without much of the buffoonery of his more recent books.

This is well-researched and, as another reviewer observed, makes the polyglot, multi-cultural society of England in Cnut's time vivid and realistic. However, the mystery itself is weakly constructed. As the two unlikely partners (who meet in the beginning of the book and are compelled by Cnut to find the nobleman's killer) blunder around Oxford, most of their incorrect suspicions seem to exist only to display the many different peoples that had gathered there -- Dane, Saxon, Viking. The solution to the mystery was less than dramatic. The main problem I had with the story, however, is apparently the fault of the translator. The book is filled with anachronisms that jar the ear -- modern terms that make the story seem less authentic than it is. A few examples: partner Halfdane "scarfed down" some food -- a term that originated in the 1960s. Winston (the other partner) suggests that he is offering the nobleman's widow a "worst-case scenario." Another character refers to someone's "buddy" -- a term that did not exist until the 19th century. Winston later tells a soldier that he had "better listen up." There are many more such as these. Cnut, in his unification speech to the gathered multi-nationals, sounds more like a Silicon Valley CEO than an 11th century monarch. It made the story less enjoyable, much as I liked the setting and the historical authenticity.

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