



Saint Magnus The Last Viking

Susan Peek

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Come back in time 900 years, to the fierce and desolate Northern lands, where Norsemen ruled with ax and sword. A dying king, a shocking death-wish, his heirs divided with an oath of blood . . . In this fast-paced new novel by the highly popular Susan Peek, the conflict unfolds between Magnus Erlendson, a heroic young prince aflame with the love of God, and his outlawed cousin Hakon, who blames Magnus for his banishment from their kingdom. What follows is a tale of betrayal and revenge, bravery and forgiveness, as Magnus seeks to restore his father's vanquished kingdom to its rightful hands. Entertaining and inspiring from start to finish, a must read for all those who thrill to learn the life of a saint we never knew existed! The first book in Susan Peek's exciting new series, "God's Forgotten Friends: Lives of Little-known Saints."

Saint Magnus The Last Viking Details

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From Reader Review Saint Magnus The Last Viking for online ebook

A.K. Frailey says

I was impressed by how well the author carried off this rather astonishing story. The characters seemed very real and life-like. No wooden saints here. I was a little confused initially because, though the setting is over 900 years ago, the characters were using modern expressions. But when I considered, they weren't really speaking in English either, I realized that creative licence allowed the author to set the tone. Otherwise, the setting, events, and descriptions all fit very well with the times. My teenage daughter found the last chapters rather distressing, and I understood why. I think this is a good book to discuss with students & young people, since it does cover some very painful realities. By the end, I felt that I was a part of the scene; I too have to choose between heroic good and terrible evil. Considering the events of our day - this might be a very timely position to consider.

Silver Swan says

"In many chapels, reddened by the setting sun, the saints rest silently, waiting for someone to love them."

These beautifully poetic words, written long ago by an anonymous priest, serve as an introduction to *Saint Magnus, The Last Viking*, a book in Susan Peek's series on little-known saints. Upon reading this quote, my interest was instantly piqued, and I turned the page to begin the story. The more I read on, the more I became convinced that this book was not only *good*, but *important*. As indicated on the back cover, it is geared towards teens (although relevant for all ages). With an engaging style that prompts you to turn the page, not to mention captivating adventure and suspense, this volume will undoubtedly capture the attention of young people with the misconception that learning about saints is "boring". Peek's choice to tell the story through narrative form rather than a textbook approach was also apt. I found myself, as an adult, wanting to soak up every historical detail while following the characters (or, in this case, real life people) in their compelling and, at times, heart-wrenching, journey.

I love St. Magnus. This may not seem like a unusual thing to say, for I am indeed a Catholic who looks to the example of the saints for inspiration and guidance in leading a holy life. Yet I had never heard St. Magnus' tale and, as far as I can recall, had never even heard of this saint. After reading his story, I am utterly baffled as to how his existence managed to elude me. Several times while reading, I found myself picturing the scene in a movie, and that is a testament to Peek's solid writing skills. St. Magnus became *real* to me, a living, breathing boy with his own struggles and victories, made manifest through the revelation of inner thoughts, as well as his actions and dialogue with others. I found that I cared about him deeply, as well as the other players on God's stage, from his fiery brother Aerling to the sympathetic Kol Kalison, a good man of faith who found himself drawn to friendship with Magnus despite the fact that they were on opposite sides in the conflict. Themes such as forgiveness are sprinkled throughout the text, inspiring a desire in the reader to grow in holiness. While there are many serious scenarios that take place in this book, Peek did not shy away from using humor when appropriate, particularly in dialogue. There were many relatable moments that will bring this foreign landscape of times past to the here and now, proving that the stories of the saints are still relevant today. While it is a page-turner with modern appeal, it is not an overly simplistic or watered down version. Peek chooses her language well---in particular in her masterful conclusions to chapters---painting both lovely imagery and emotionally evocative moments with the stroke of a pen. The ending of the story

will tug at your heart, and may perhaps bring a tear to the eye.

I highly recommend this enthralling narrative that brings to life the world and life of an incredible, holy boy who became a courageous saint. Two thumbs up!

Mark Adderley says

This is the tale of Magnus, Jarl (Earl) of Orkney, also known as Saint Magnus the Martyr. According to contemporary sources, Magnus was always a tender-hearted and pious child, which didn't seem to fit his position as a prince of Orkney during the turbulent Middle Ages. (Not the Dark Ages, as some reviewers would have it: all the events of this novel, with the exception of the opening chapter, occur after the Norman Conquest.) The conflict throughout this novel seems to involve how Magnus will maintain his virtue, in spite of frequent temptations to violence, and the occurrence of actual violence all around him.

This is one of the great virtues of Peek's writing: she makes virtue compelling. She does it by depicting the way in which virtue comes into conflict with the standard modes of behaviour in the historical period about which she is writing. In this case, the times were very violent. It was not considered unvirtuous to use pretty horrific violence against political enemies or against ordinary populations in order to profit one's kingdom. But Magnus refuses to do this. In the middle of a battle, for example, he simply kneels and prays the psalms. In doing so, he becomes an inspiration for other characters around him, and for the reader too. I don't know of many authors today who can do this. They generally have to depict their characters as "dark," with a number of flaws mixed in with their virtues ... if they even acknowledge the existence of virtues. But Peek is able to describe virtuous characters and make them exciting as well. That's a very important skill!

The violence of the novel is pretty hard-hitting (pardon the pun), particularly the martyrdom at the end. But Peek neither glorifies it nor sentimentalizes it, and I think that comes down to a solid grasp of her characters. We see the violence through their eyes, and because we care about them, we react to the violent events as they do. We're perhaps disturbed by it, or we see it as unfortunately necessary; we can never dismiss it. But this trick of Peek's prevents us from trivializing it.

One reviewer claimed that the ending was not a happy one. Well, Magnus gets martyred. That's not a spoiler, that's where you know his character is going from the very first time we meet him. But the ending is only an unhappy one if we accept that death is a defeat, and an ultimate loss; it's neither, in this case. Death is the gateway to glory, but it also enables the survivors to grow in virtue. The ending of the story is deeply moving, dealing as it does with redemption and forgiveness. When a story confronts the necessity of forgiveness and the consequent redemption of a wrongdoer, it is not an unhappy ending. It's a complex and nuanced ending.

I should point out that, just because the novel is about forgiveness, it is not a pacifist book. A pacifist would reject violence at all costs, but Peek acknowledges that violence is occasionally necessary, as when one's home is invaded. Magnus does not shy away from violence when it's necessary, but he does pray for the souls of his enemies.

Two minor criticisms one might have about Saint Magnus: The Last Viking are 1) the very contemporary style, particularly in dialogue, which can be a little distracting; and 2) the minor characters who sometimes verge on the caricature. Certainly, as a medievalist and avid reader of historical and fantasy novels, I found the modern idioms in the dialogue a little disconcerting at first. But it doesn't take long to accept that as

simply part of the style of the novel. The idioms seemed to me to be translations of medieval Scandinavian idioms which wouldn't necessarily mean anything to modern readers. As for the minor characters who seem a little two-dimensional, well, we can't give in-depth treatment to all characters. We'd end up writing very long novels. It's worth sacrificing a little depth in the minor characters for the advantage of writing such a compelling conflict between Magnus and Hakon.

In conclusion, this is a fast-paced, event-filled narrative that makes virtue compelling and foregrounds forgiveness in a violent and harsh setting. I would certainly recommend it to other readers, especially to the teen boys for whom it is written.

Catherine says

From the first few pages, I was completely drawn into this dramatic life-story of a Viking prince from the Orkney Islands, north of Scotland. When the story begins, Magnus is a pious young teenager who would love nothing more than to retire into a monastery and avoid the constant fighting and bloodshed that is the everyday life of your typical Viking lord. But God has other plans for Magnus. Through the treachery and bloodthirst of his older brother and cousin, Magnus gets pulled into an epic ordeal that involves battles, imprisonment, exile, and eventually an ascension to the Orkney throne himself.

Throughout this very fast-paced, action-packed novel, the author traces the development of Magnus's deep spirituality and the internal battles he fights to align his will with God's. Although he is often mocked by his peers for being so "holy," in reality Magnus struggles constantly to overcome sin. This was a very strong aspect of the story: it's easy to write off saints as impossibly patient and good, when they actually are just working a lot harder at virtue than the rest of us.

I assume the author invented some of the minor details about his life. In general, the plot flowed very well. The only part that I questioned was that in this story, after St. Magnus's father the king of the Orkney Islands dies, his mother the queen marries a simple farmer. This seemed extremely unlikely to me, given the rigid class separation during the medieval period.

My other criticism is that some of the writing was a little informal, with some modern language that would not have been used at that time. However, I think this could actually appeal to the intended young adult audience, and I would encourage my children to read it for a late middle school or high school study of medieval history.

In all, I truly enjoyed reading this book and was impressed with Susan Peek's ability to tell a spellbinding story.

I received a copy of this book from the author in exchange for an honest review and received no other compensation.

Read a longer version of this review at my blog: <http://catholicmomapologia.wordpress...>

Christine says

Oh wow! This was a great – GREAT – read. I'll confess that I was skeptical at first. Another saint story? Sometimes my kids are tired of the saint stories. YaknowwhatI mean? But this one, this one, my children will read and savor and my guess is that they will read it again.

To begin with, the story is very well written. Peek knows how to draw the reader into the plot and keep her (in this case, anyway) there. The plot moves quickly, and the story doesn't dwell too much on the inner sanctity of Magnus. Rather, Magnus shows us what he does. Let's us hear what he is thinking. Let's us see when he is struggling to do the right thing. That last point, I think, is especially noteworthy in the story of a saint. That heroic virtue is just that: its heroic and isn't necessarily "easy" to come by. In fact, its hard! The saints are people, too!

Also, this is a story of Saint Magnus! Who's that? Well isn't that the point? No offense to St. Anthony, or St. Patrick, or St. Joseph, or even to St. Pope John Paul II: but here is the invigorating tale of a man mostly unknown. Sometimes, its good to take a peek into one of "God's forgotten friends" to reinvigorate the faith a little. Its a story that isn't familiar to most of us and so its almost with fresh eyes that we see the struggle to forgive, and the power of forgiveness.

No, St. Magnus isn't a saint that you will probably find on last year's list of Confirmatti. But my guess is that it's coming soon, to a parish near you.

Note: I received a free copy of the book in exchange for my honest review. This does not affect my opinion of the book or the content of my review.

Carolyn says

Say goodbye to dry and dusty lives-of-the-saints tomes better suited as flower presses or door stops. Saint Magnus, *The Last Viking* is lively, engaging, humorous, and as you might guess since Magnus was martyred, bloody.

Instead of boring the reader with an inhumanly pious saint story or bogging down the tale with details of centuries-old Norse life, Susan Peek has written an inspiring tale showcasing both the depth of human depravity and the glory of heroic love. All in a way that is appealing to the modern reader.

Throughout the novel, it's clear that saints are mere human beings with weaknesses, flaws, desires, and ambitions. What sets them apart is their reliance upon God and the saints and their aim to become more Christ-like in spite of temptations.

Beautifully-written scenes of brotherly sacrificial love and a meditation on Christ's suffering for our sins are worth reading and re-reading.

Saint Magnus, *The Last Viking* deftly portrays the power of forgiveness in the face of evil. Its powerful ending resonates in the heart long after the book has ended.

Leslea Wahl says

St. Magnus is one of three books in Susan Peek's series – Gods forgotten friends. First of all, where were these books when my own kids were learning about saints? This is just such a great idea, sharing the stories of little known saints in exciting novels based on their lives.

Susan Peek did a masterful job of bringing to life this saint from the early 1100's, and giving the reader an exciting look into the Viking way of life. Ms. Peek has woven the facts surrounding St. Magnus into a wonderful story that makes him real and relatable while dropping the reader in the middle of a dramatic period of history. I especially loved Magnus, his brother Aerling, and their relationship.

This teen book is equal parts geography, history, and theology lessons in a thoroughly engaging fictional story. I found it so compelling and interesting that when I finished the book I began researching St. Magnus wanting to know even more about this saint that I'd never heard of. I think any teen would enjoy this book but boys especially will love the adventure, danger and action that drives this novel. What a fantastic idea for a series, I look forward to discovering more of God's forgotten friends.

Theresa Linden says

Susan Peek's saint stories combine all the best: deep conflict, struggles, and heroic virtue.

This story begins with the last will and testament of an 11th-century Norseman warrior, Thorfinn the Mighty. The opening scene sets the stage for the novel as the dying ruler makes a startling decision for the sake of the kingdom. The conflict begins here and never lets up.

Susan has an outstanding ability to begin and end chapters with lines that keep you from putting the book down. Chapter two begins: "It had never occurred to Magnus, second son of Erlend, to arm himself with a weapon before setting off for Vespers." You absolutely know something exciting is going to happen! And it does. Peek pulls the reader from one tense moment to another. We go back in time and become witness to the dramatic trials Magnus endured and the sacrifices he made.

As the mother of three boys, ages twelve to fifteen, I can't say enough about this book. My boys love to read and they enjoy saint stories, but Saint Magnus, The Last Viking appeals to them in ways no other saint books have. This is not a sterile retelling of the saint's life. The characters leap off the page with energy my boys can relate to, keeping them completely engaged as the story of this saint unfolds.

With all the battles, fighting, and conflict, it's obvious why this story appeals to boys, but I love it, too. In fact, I read it first. As a writer, I thoroughly enjoy Peek's powerful writing style and vivid descriptions. I marvel at her ability to develop every character in the story. Some lines and sections moved me so much that I found myself re-reading them for pure enjoyment. Then I shared them with my husband. "Listen! Don't you just love this?" I laughed to myself when my twelve-year-old son read the book and did the same thing. "Mom, listen!"

Susan Peek's inspired account of the life of Saint Magnus stirs up the desire to live as he did, with courage, perseverance, and brotherly love, faithful to God to the end. Peek has taken the life of this little-known saint

whom time may have forgotten and whose story could've remained hidden, and she's re-presented it to the modern Christian.

This book is not to be missed. I walk away from it knowing I will go back. The message of Saint Magnus's life is a message for today and it remains with me even now. I can't wait to step into my next Susan Peek book.

Steven R. McEvoy says

This book is the first that I have read from Susan Peek, but it will not be the last. In fact I picked up another minutes after finishing this one. I could barely put this book down and devoured it. And even though it is a little beyond my son right now, I told him about it and said we would read it together in a year or two. This book moves at a quick pace. It has amazing characters and is very well written.

This story takes us back 900 years. To a much darker time, but a time when the light of Catholicism had spread and was being embraced in different ways in different parts of the world. It is the story of Saint Magnus Erlendsson, Earl of Orkney, also known as Saint Magnus the Martyr. It is the story of a kingdom that was to be ruled by brothers upon their father's death, and from that time forward one of their sons. It is the story of battles. It is a story of strife and ultimately a Christian story.

I was not familiar with this saint before reading this book, but will need to do some further research and reading. In many ways this book reminds me of Andrew M. Seddon's *Saints Alive II, Celtic Paths New Stories of Old Saints*. Except it is a full length novel instead of a collection of short stories. This book brings a few saints back to life. It brings them alive in the imaginations, minds, and hearts of readers. The story is wonderfully written. There are battle scenes without being over the top. There is conflict and strife without it being ridiculous. And there are a number of characters who exhibit strong faith and end up having influence on those around them.

When I read books one of my keys to judging them is would I share it with my children, now, or when they are older. And would I recommend it to others. This book gets a resounding yes to both of those questions. This was an excellent read and though written for the teen market, I loved the book and plan on giving it to my father to read, and when they are older reading it with my children as well. I highly recommend this book!

Read the review on my blog [Book Reviews and More](#).

Note: This book is part of a series of reviews: 2017 Catholic Reading Plan!

Therese Heckenkamp says

Wow! Let me begin by putting to rest any notion that this, being a historical novel, is bogged down with details and facts. The balance and delivery of fact and fiction is flawless. *Saint Magnus The Last Viking* brings Saint Magnus to life while delivering action-packed excitement and suspense galore!

From the beginning, I couldn't put this book down. A ruler's deathbed decree sets in motion a dire future for

the heirs to the throne of the Orkney Islands. When Saint Magnus, a prince, clashes with his ruthless cousin Hakon, Hakon is banished. Brooding and bitter, Hakon plots revenge.

Magnus faces hardships that would drive a lesser man to despair. But the battles of good and evil ultimately chisel Magnus into a saint.

Full of twists and turns, *Saint Magnus The Last Viking* is sure to be read with bated breath. Teen boys will devour the action, adventure, and bravery. I'm sure many, many young women will enjoy this thrilling story as well. Adults, you too!

Note that there is violence and some blood, but a story like this could not be done justice without it. Violence is not used simply for shock value; it brings home the reality of what Magnus suffered and how his sainthood was truly merited.

At its core, *Saint Magnus The Last Viking* is a most intense story of moral courage and forgiveness against all odds.

Those who've never heard of this saint before will never forget him after reading this book. It's an absolute must-read!

Reviewed by:
Therese Heckenkamp
Catholic author of *Past Suspicion* and *Frozen Footprints*

Virginia Lieto says

I must admit that I had never heard of Saint Magnus, until I read *Saint Magnus: The Last Viking*, by Susan Peek. With this action-packed novel, set around 1,000 A.D., we find a dual hierarchy established on the deathbed of the monarch Thorfinn. Rather than leaving his throne to his eldest son, he creates a dual hierarchy, where both of his sons, Erland and Paal, are to rule over the Orkney homeland together. Tensions rise as the brother's descendants seethe in animosity for each other. Hakon, the son of Paal is a troublemaker; whereas Aerling, the son of Erland, is hot-tempered. Hakon and Aerling are competitive, and do not wish to rule jointly, as their fathers successfully did. However, before that can happen, circumstances come to pass that make Hakon vow revenge.

From this point, early within the book, the story becomes mesmerizing. What will Hakon do to get revenge? How will Aerling respond? And what role will Magnus play, given that Magnus becomes the protagonist of this novel?

Saint Magnus – Filled with Virtue

In this story, so beautifully crafted by Susan Peek, we see Magnus' character excel in piety, forgiveness and self-giving love; three virtues that you would want your own child to possess. In this young adult novel, Magnus displays his piety by applying St Augustine's Just War doctrine, without Peek ever making specific reference to it. As the Orkneys are invaded by a Scandinavian king, Magnus justifies engaging in battle, as being morally upright, by determining that the fighting is 1) a last resort, 2) done in self-defense, 3) with a probability of success, and 4) with minimal harm to non-combatants. These four points align with Saint

Augustine's Just War doctrine.

Saint Magnus – Facing Conflict

Later in the story, Magnus, once again, faces battle. However, in this instance, he refuses to fight, because the battle is unjustified and deemed murderous. As the battle rages, he kneels in prayer instead. By all accounts, he should have died, there and then; but not a hair on his head was touched.

Throughout the story, Magnus is provided with numerous opportunities to forgive others for injuries against him. He demonstrates that forgiveness valiantly, and also encourages others to forgive as well; where all instances require forgiveness for heinous activities.

Magnus epitomizes the self-giving love of Christ, when he is willing to die for the preservation of his brother's soul. Later, he is once again willing to risk his earthly life in reparation for the soul of his cousin.

Saint Magnus – Role Model

If you have a teen in your life, especially a son, grandson or nephew, and you are looking for quality books where your young adult can find a protagonist that serves as an excellent role model, then look no further than Saint Magnus: The Last Viking. This book is filled with action, virtue, and compelling characters. Saint Magnus is a saint you should want to know more about. I'm glad I became acquainted with such a great role model for piety, forgiveness and self-giving love. Should you read this book, you too will be glad to meet Saint Magnus!

Lorie says

This story about a little-known saint has all the historical context and adventurous elements needed to make it interesting and engaging. I enjoyed the backdrop portraying the Vikings for the historical element. It shows a masterful view of a young man becoming more and more attuned to visions of his religion. He has a strong family, but alas, a confrontational cousin who carries it to the extreme. They are royalty and will move into their fathers' places to rule their kingdom. That brings with it all manner of controversy and hardship. As the story of the young saint progressed, I felt myself completely drawn into the story. As the young man's life played out and was reaching its most glorious moments, I felt chills down my spine. It is a wonderfully told tale. I would highly recommend this book to anyone interested in history or the saints.

The characters are believable, the story line makes sense. I did feel that on occasion there was contemporary language that was a bit distracting from the historical feel. Particularly in the beginning chapters. I did wonder why the young saint put himself into such danger at times. However, upon reaching the end of this book, I find that I can't wait to read the tale of Rognavald, or the other books written by Susan Peek. Well done.

The book is listed for ages 15 and up. I do not see why middle school children wouldn't enjoy this book. Perhaps ages 12 and up. I also don't understand the focus on boys. Why wouldn't girls enjoy this story as much as boys? I did find several proof-reading errors. I received this book for free through Goodreads First Reads.

Katy says

This was an interesting slice of history from the Dark Ages about a saint I had not previously known about. Teen boys will like the fast pace and action. The title character is portrayed sympathetically, and many of the other characters are shown in three dimensions. The frequent use of modern terms and slang, especially in the characters' speech, was a distraction to this otherwise well-written story.

Nicole says

[The only other time I have felt this unsettled feeling that I have now was when watching *For Greater Glory*. Blessed José Sánchez del Río's violent martyrdom had me wishing I could save him, and not sure I should feel that way since he showed such devotion and witness to God at the moment of his death. This book had me feeling the same way. It's difficult because the book was written like a novel, but we were hearing the thoughts (or perceived thoughts) of real people (I really don

Paul says

If you're like most of us, you've probably never even heard of St. Magnus, let alone know a thing about his amazing life. After stumbling across his story (quite by accident in my case) I'm left with the feeling that maybe God saved this saint for our times, when his message of forgiveness and absolute trust in God is needed more than ever. For that's what this book is: a tale of heroic pardon of enemies and deep, burning love of God.

Like her other books, Ms. Peek writes in a very easy-going, casual style, most accessible to teenagers and young adults (and anyone young at heart). It's so easy to get drawn straight into the story, and really feel the hearts and minds of her characters. But if you're looking for an ultra-literary, heavy duty study of this saint's life, you've come to the wrong place. This is a NOVEL. It's fun, it's moving, it's inspiring, it's un-put-downable, and I personally had a blast with it. But it's not for "intellectuals" or literary critics, so if you're one of those, take my advice and buy something else. This one's for us who want to put our feet up, kick back with a good book and enjoy the ride.
