



The Virgin in the Ice

Ellis Peters

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In the winter of 1139, raging civil war has sent refugees fleeing north from Worcester, among them an orphaned boy and his beautiful 18-year-old sister. Traveling with a young nun, they set out for Shrewsbury, but disappear somewhere in the wild countryside. Now, Brother Cadfael embarks on a dangerous quest to find them.

The Virgin in the Ice Details

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From Reader Review *The Virgin in the Ice* for online ebook

Stephen says

Another fine installment in the Cadfael saga. This one is set outside the normal setting of Shrewsbury. This has always been one of my favorite episodes from the PBS television series but is better in printed form. As usual the storyline for the TV adaptation is simpler and not as rich and where Ms. Peters uses new characters freely the TV series recycles some of the cast regulars.

M Christopher says

This is another fine entry in Ellis Peters' acclaimed "Cadfael Chronicles." In this book, Brother Cadfael is drawn into the adventure of three young people seeking refuge from a fresh outbreak of the war between forces loyal to the Empress Matilda and those of King Stephen as the cousins vie for supremacy in England. With only a few longeurs, the pace is good, the characters engaging and the mystery of "The Virgin in the Ice" kept me guessing until the very end. There is also the introduction of a character who will reappear later in the series; one who is quite significant in Cadfael's life.

My one quibble is that this is yet another Cadfael mystery in which the foolhardy actions of young lovers and children provide the initial impetus for the story and several turns along the way. I had not remembered how prominent a feature of these books this particular conceit had been until I began re-reading them in order and relatively close together. Perhaps as Peters continued to refine her style and approach, this particular feature was less of a staple.

Ned Hanlon says

I love all of Ellis Peters' Cadfael mysteries and this is no different; I would actually go so far as to say that this is one of the best. While for much of the novel it feels more a historical fiction thriller than mystery, Peters brings the story around very nicely and finds a very Cadfaelian mystery: a tragic injustice that is overlooked in the chaos of the age that only Cadfael can unravel.

What makes these novels is not the stories nor the characters (although they are frequently wonderful), it is the atmosphere. Peters allows us to truly be in medieval England; the rules and beliefs of that time apply. The dominance of the Catholic Church over the minds of the inhabitants, for better and for worse, is taken for what it was then, not how it is often perceived now. In a novel like *World Without End* by Ken Follett the characters are judged by our modern values; Follett cheats by having the principles with whom we are supposed to identify with most be those that share our modern values closest. In doing this modern beliefs become equated to good and contemporaneous beliefs with bad, a terribly frustrating and unfair situation to anyone who wants to read a legitimate attempt at historical fiction. (as you can probably tell I really disliked *World Without End*!). Peters does not fall into this trap. Her heroes and villains are heroes and villains in the context of their time, not ours. Cadfael preaches reliance and submission to God in a very medieval way: hardly the ideas that are associated with heroism now: "Cadfael went to Matins and Lauds before seeking his bed. The order of observances must not be disrupted, even to go out in defense of innocent lives." However, it is not one-sided dogma ("Beautiful!"... "Even sub-priors," said Cadfael mildly, stirring the bubbling

cough linctus he was simmering over his brazier in the workshop, “have eyes”.’) Ellis Peters’s world of Shrewsbury and its environs is real but it’s the reality of dark ages England, not now.

If I had one little niggle with *The Virgin in the Ice* it is in the setting of the action. Most of the story occurs outside of Shrewsbury abbey while Cadfael is visiting Broomfield. This essentially frees him from the confines of the Benedictine order and Cadfael can act and do whatever he wants. One of the great paradoxes of his character is that he is a man of action who has voluntarily devoted himself to a life and rules of peace and inactivity. It creates a r through which Cadfael must act when and how he can; free from this structure, Cadfael loses this internal antagonism. Like with other great historical fiction heroes such as Horatio Hornblower or Richard Sharpe if you remove them from the rules that bind their society (the navy and army respectively), it becomes easy for them to become superheroes capable of everything. Peters largely avoids this with Cadfael so it really is not a problem. However, I hope that removing Cadfael from the Abbey so he may act more freely is not a device that Peters employs more frequently as the series continues.

This is a fantastic novel and a great representation of a great series of mysteries. Read them!

Kathryn says

Ist recorded reading: September 2002

I had forgotten just how good this particular Brother Cadfael mystery is; I had read it in September, 2002, and remembered, as usual, very little of the book. But this is indeed one of the best ones, and is the one I would recommend to anyone who wished to read just one Brother Cadfael mystery.

In November of the Year of our Lord 1139, word comes to the Abbey of the sack of the town of Worcester. King Stephen is in possession of the Crown, but the Empress Maud holds the town of Gloucester, from whence those who attacked the town of Worcester came. Refugees from Worcester make their way to the Abbey; and on the last day of November word comes of three people who fled from the sack but who have not reappeared yet; the thirteen-year-old son and eighteen-year-old daughter of a deceased noble, who were under the care of the Benedictines of Worcester. They fled with the daughter’s tutor, one Sister Hilaria; and their noble uncle, Laurence d’Angers, cannot make search for them himself, because he is recently returned from the Crusades to his home town of Gloucester, and is thus considered an enemy of the Crown, not least because he is a supporter of the Empress Maud.

Thus matters stand until the fifth of December, with the snow laying deep across the countryside, when an urgent message comes to the Abbey at Shrewsbury, requesting Brother Cadfael’s aid; a monk has been brought half-dead to the priory of Bromfield, who had been beaten and left to die in the snow, and the Prior of Bromfield fears for the monk’s life. So Brother Cadfael makes his way forth into the snow to the priory of Bromfield; and for the rest of the book, it seems that every major character is going out into the snow for one purpose or another. Brother Cadfael hears of lawless men, who suddenly appear from somewhere to rape, kill, pillage, and burn at outlying settlements, and who apparently hope that the attention of King Stephen and the upholders of his law are concerned elsewhere; and it is Brother Cadfael who finds a young woman, wearing only her shift, dead and frozen into a stream. Whoever killed her put her into the stream before the last iron freeze, and her eyes gaze upward when Brother Cadfael looks down as he crosses over the stream.

Again, this is one of the best Brother Cadfael books (in my humble opinion), and is one that I regret having finished, even though I am now free to move to the next mystery in the series.

Sarah says

Another excellent entry in the Cadfael series. This one was perhaps a bit more harrowing than others, but it allowed the goodness at the center to shine through all the more (and honestly, was probably more realistic for the 12th century as well).

There were several excellent twists, including the personal one for Cadfael himself, that leave me looking forward to the next books in the series.

Kim says

It's 1139 and England is in the midst of civil war. Brother Cadfael is called to Bromfield Priory to care for a visiting brother, victim of a brutal attack by a band of marauders roaming the countryside. He also seeks the whereabouts of a sister and brother of noble birth who fled their village to find refuge in Shrewsbury, but never arrived. When Cadfael finds the body of a young woman frozen in the ice at the edge of a stream, it's the beginning of an investigation that will force him (and Hugh Beringar) out in the dead of winter to track the murderer and find the missing children. The ending is very satisfying and includes a personal revelation for Brother Cadfael.

Cecily Felber says

Confession: *This* is my absolute favorite Brother Cadfael story! (although *The Sanctuary Sparrow* and *Dead Man's Ransom* follow closely)

In the middle of a harsh winter, a band of marauders is on the loose, killing, raping and pillaging the countryside. Also on the loose are a pair of noble children and the nun that is their guardian, refugees from the sack of the town of Worcester to the south. Hugh Beringar and Cadfael are called in, the hunt is on...and Cadfael is destined to find that which he never suspected he had.

Brother Cadfael (pronounced Cad-file) has definitely entered the ranks of great fiction detectives alongside Sherlock Holmes and Lord Peter Wimsey. But these stories are more than just murder mysteries in medieval drag. Ellis Peters actually lived in Shrewsbury, England, where Cadfael's monastery of St. Peter and Paul can still be visited. Her knowledge of the land and people and history permeates her work and gives her the incredible gift of transporting her reader into the past. You really do feel as though you are in that long-lost world lit only by fire, where it's quiet and green and life moves at a pace most people can be happy in.

Cadfael is a suitably complex man. He's from Wales, but now living in England (though Wales is not very far away). He was once a soldier, but now he's a monk. He's lived a full life, now he wants to be quiet. But he also has a strong sense of right and justice and refuses to compromise on these things, even when it means getting himself in trouble. He's also picked up a lot of knowledge, especially of herbology and medicine and (somehow for the time) logical analysis that stands him in good stead as a solver of mysteries.

Another charming step along the journey of Cadfael!

Joyce Lagow says

No. 6 in the Brother Cadfael series.[return][return]In the late fall of 1139, the civil war between King Stephen and the Empress Maude for the throne of England flares up and engulfs the city of Worcester which lies close to the Welsh border and not far south of Shrewsbury. As a result, a tide of refugees washes over Shrewsbury Abbey and the town itself. To the abbey comes a messenger from a brother house in Worcester, seeking the whereabouts of two children of a noble family, Ermina and her younger brother Yves Hugonin. Part of the refugee crowd, they were making their way north to Shrewsbury accompanied by a Benedictine nun, Sister Hilaria. But they have disappeared, and their uncle, newly returned from Jerusalem, is frantically seeking them. [return][return]Brother Cadfael becomes involved when he is summoned to the abbey at Bromfeld, where a monk, who has been beaten nearly to death by brigands, turns out to have a connection with the sought-for Hugonins. [return][return]In one of the more complicated and excellent plots of the series, Peters, through the eyes of Brother Cadfael and his efforts to both heal the wounded and rescue the Hugonins, describes the human cost of the civil war: missing relatives, bandits who take advantage of the civil chaos, murder, rape and the poignant human tragedy of families split asunder by differing allegiances.[return][return]One of the best in the series. Highly recommended.

Ron says

(After fourth reading, June 2016)

“Never go looking for disaster. Expect the best, and walk so discreetly as to invite it, and then leave all to God.”

Among the most popular of the Cadfael chronicles, this tale heralds the first appearance of Oliver de Bretagne. (You’ll have to read the book to discover his significance.)

“In a land at war with itself, you may take it as certain that order breaks down and savagery breaks out.”

By this sixth volume, Peters has reached her stride. Firmly set in the history and geography of twelfth-century England, these tales dig into the always-current dirt of humanity and find both gold and dross. Often it’s our favorite monk doing the digging.

“It would have been an insult to repent of having loved a woman like Mariam.”

Here the series takes a decidedly personal turn with the lives of Cadfael and Hugh Beringar becoming part of the warp of future tales.

“Youth destroyed for a folly. When youth should be allowed its follies on the way to maturity and sense.”

As always, there’re dead bodies--more than usual here--young lovers, pride, deceit, humility and honor. A very different culture than the one we live in now. And yet, not so different.

“Don’t arrogate to yourself God’s own role of apportioning blame and praise, even when the blame lands on

your shoulders.”

A friend’s definition of a five-star novel is one you re-read regularly. Since this is my fourth reading, that seems to apply. But, while I may yet read it again (because it’s so much better than what’s being written today) it’s not monumental; just very good.

“Need you always be the one to put your hand straight into the hornet’s nest?”

Also a personal favorite. Our first glimpse of--I can't tell you that! Read it for yourself. (Mystery was close on this one.)

Cadfael series: excellent historical fiction. Ellis Peters draws the reader into the twelfth century with modern story telling but holds us there with a richness of detail which evokes a time and place which might as well be fictional. Though the foreground of each chronicle is a murder mystery, behind it a nation and a culture are woven in a wondrous tapestry.

Deborah Pickstone says

Enjoyable re-read of an old favourite.

Ryan Patrick says

All of the Cadfael books move at a decent pace, but this one really sped along. The murder mystery, and the quest for its clues, was just one strand in a much larger plot. All the strands working together meant a lot of action occurred, without much pause. This made for quite an enjoyable read.

Peters has created a lot of enjoyable and memorable characters, and they keep coming back! While the enjoyment of the story might be slightly less if you haven't read the other books, it could still be enjoyed by a newcomer to the series. For those in the midst of the series, though, all the major characters (including Cadfael) get some personal development. I look forward to the next book in the series.

One persistent theme of this book is to not take more blame unto yourself than is proper. Whether out of humility or self-loathing or embarrassment, we cannot blame ourselves for all the unintended consequences of our actions, for we must allow each man to stand before God to be judged of his own actions. We should step up and rightfully suffer for the effects of our bad choices, but others must also suffer for their evil choices. If we would take credit for all the misfortunes and evil acts of the world, we would be laboring under the great sin of pride, and trying to deprive God of his rightful role as the judge of all. In a day and age when so many try to pin the blame on someone else for their choices, this proves an interesting reminder to those who are on a different path.

Jane Jago says

I'm not doing plot spoilers.

Instead I want to talk about Ellis Peters' impeccable ear for dialogue, and the way she evokes her period with seeming effortless. There are also wonderful characterisation and intricately woven plot lines.

If you have never attempted a Cadfael story, now would be a good time to take the plunge.

Dagny says

In the Sixth Chronicle of Brother Cadfael, *The Virgin in the Ice*, it is the winter of 1139. This chronicle is one of the first ones I read and still a favorite. Three refugees of the feud between Maud and Stephen are missing. While Brother Cadfael is on another mission, he discovers clues to the fate of the missing travellers.

Moonlight Reader says

My favorite so far - absolutely loved it.

Barb in Maryland says

Lovely book to read during hot weather.

December 1139--the civil war may have flared hot in November with the fighting in and around Worcester, but here in December winter is starting to set in with a vengeance. The story opens with the sub-prior from Worcester's Abbey visiting Shrewsbury in search of Ermina and Yves Hugonin, two siblings of a well-connected family who had been in that Abbey's care. They went missing during the period of chaos, supposedly headed for safety in Shrewsbury, accompanied by the young nun who was tutor to 17 year old Ermina. Alas, they had not made it to Shrewsbury after all. Are they lost? Did any harm befall them? A lot of questions, with very few answers at this point.

Brother Cadfael gets involved, in a very roundabout way, when the prior at Blomfield Abbey (near Ludlow) seeks his medical expertise for the care of Brother Elyas, who had been attacked and left for dead. It comes out that Ermina, 13 year old Yves, and Sister Hilaria had safely made it as far as Blomfield and Brother Elyas was added to their party to escort them on to Shrewsbury. Now, the good brother is near death and the other three are missing.

What follows is a complicated dance of people found, lost, found again--it would almost be a farce, if the stakes weren't so high. A large, well-organized group of outlaws is pillaging the area; burning, looting and killing with impunity. Of course, just what was needed! As if heavy snow and bitter cold weren't enough to complicate matters...

There is a murder to solve as well as missing people to be found. The two cases go hand in hand. The outlaws are prime suspects in the death of the young woman, but are they guilty of that particular crime?

There's a wonderful fight between the outlaws and the local forces, complete with the daring rescue of an important hostage as our dramatic finale. By the time the reader gets to the end all the story threads are tied in a nice bow: mysteries are solved, the lost are found.

As always, Cadfael is wise and wonderful. It was so nice to see under-sheriff Hugh Beringer in a major role in this one. The politics of the day weave their way through the story, adding difficulties to the search. All in all, a worthy entry in the series.

Phil says

Probably one of the best so far in the series as it brought a certain reality to the period along with more connections to Cadfael's past. There was also more action to this plot that livened things up for the series..

Ikonopeiston says

This is one of my favourite of the Brother Cadfael series. The evocation of England during the Little Ice Age is precise enough to make me shiver and the images of the land under the blanket of snow are beautiful. The first appearance of Olivier is worth the price of admission all by itself. It is well nigh impossible not to fall head over heels for that young man on sight.

As usual, the plot is impeccably tied up with no annoying straggling ends. Peters has her story well in hand again. We come to expect her to perform in a thoroughly professional manner. At no time does she seem to 'phone her book in' as so many authors with a long running series and established reputation tend to do. (I speak here specifically of the "Cat Who..." series.)

Reading Peters led me to research into the Stephen/Matilda battle for the crown. It is a fascinating time in history. England had nothing but civil wars for so much of its early history. Peters manages the difficult feat of coming down on neither side and letting Cadfael generate understanding for both.

Chrissie says

I have to be honest. Throughout most of the book I thought it was just OK, two stars, even though from the very beginning I did really like the atmosphere of the cold and snowy winter; it was perfectly depicted. It wasn't until the last chapter that I understood the importance of this book. It too is a must read! These books hold together; to get the most from them they must be read as a group. Each builds upon the other, and in a beautiful way! Ellis writes beautifully, with humor, descriptive ability and with plot content carefully planned. You effortlessly learn about a past era.

I do not agree with those who say this series need not be read in order. Maybe you do not need to, but that is how you will get the most out of them. However start with book two and read the rest in order. Throw in book one when you want to fill in lost details. The more you read, the more you will fall in love with the different monks and other influential characters. They grow; you learn who they are. Each action builds upon another.

This book, book 6, isn't wow until the end, and then you realize its importance. I am not saying it is bad, it is just not one of the best, but it must be read!

Narration by Vanessa Benjamin was in my view not as good as narration by Johanna Ward (alias Kate Reading) or Stephen Thorne.

BEFORE READING:

Previously, I have listened to the abridged version at BBC and disliked it, but since I know now I like the series, I will listen instead to the unabridged audiobook. It is not abridged and not destroyed by BBC dramatization!

Mike (the Paladin) says

This is a mystery/historical fiction of the Cadfael Chronicles. I read it some time ago but somehow neglected to share my deep and insightful views with everyone here at Goodreads.

How remiss of me.

If you are familiar with Cadfael and his "history" then you know that our monkish mystery solver is never allowed a peaceful life for long. (sad considering he lives in Shrewsbury Abbey [a real place by the way]). Here the love "interests" (Cadfael seems to draw "star-crossed lovers like honey does bees) are a bit different than in most of the other books I won't say why or how as that would be telling). That said murder is also still a factor in Cadfael's life.

As always we have a good mystery here with a nice "chunk" of history thrown in to boot. You don't go to these books "for" history but if you're interested in the period (as I am) you'll also find these interesting. I suppose it's like more seasoning on a good steak....

I can recommend this one as I can most of the other Cadfael books for mystery and historical fiction fans.

Enjoy.

Faith Justice says

I enjoyed this one more than the other two I've read, but I still guessed the murderer and surprise ending well in advance of the reveals. I've just read too much. What I did enjoy was the "voice" of the book, the dialog, and the beautiful descriptions of the countryside under snow. I find myself getting these books as a palette cleanser. They are fun, fast reads and this one does not disappoint.
