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Viking Boy

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Editorial Choice:

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Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

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From Henry Treece and Rosemary Sutcliff to Kevin Crossley-Holland and Francesca Simon, there's a robust tradition of writing about Vikings in children's literature. Introducing his own contribution to the genre, Tony Bradman declares a love for the Vikings that started in his childhood, with avid readings of Treece and Sutcliff (as well as viewings of 1958 film **The Vikings** starring Kirk Douglas) which inspired him to discover the great Viking sagas. "**Viking Boy**" he says, "grew out of my desire to write an adventure story that I would have loved to read when I was young".

His own Viking saga concerns Gunnar, the son of a Viking chieftain, whose sixteen summers have passed peacefully enough until the fate-filled day the family steading is razed to the ground by the Wolf Men, and his beloved father is murdered. Gunnar swears a blood oath against Skuli, the warlord who perpetrated this heinous crime, but before he can hope to fulfil it, he must travel to Valhalla and back, doing battle with the forces of his own destiny along the way.

I charged through this pacy tale of blood, fire and vengeance at the speed of an invading horde. As arrows fly and severed heads bounce around, it has that real sense of peril that young readers love. Gruesome deaths abound. But there's also wry humour. Magic and prophecy. Mythical characters like the omnipotent Odin, and Brunhild, the fearsome Queen of the Valkyries bring an extra allure to the proceedings. Not to mention the Norns, the three weird sisters who weave the threads of our lives into a web, thereby setting the patterns of our destinies. And there is just the right amount of period detail to intrigue young readers? and older ones too. Who knew that a Viking handshake entailed the gripping of forearms? Not I.

Alongside the entertainment, Bradman does not fight shy of showing younger readers how death can cast a shadow over any of us; and his story could easily prompt a fascinating discussion about the role of fate and destiny in our lives. "What about the Norns?" asks Gunnar. "Don't they decide our fate?". "What if they do?", replies his mentor, Rurik. "You don't know when they're going to cut your thread, so you should carry on as if it's not going to happen. Otherwise you might just as well not have bothered to be born in the first place?"

Viking Boy will also appeal to fans of cartoons and graphic novels, thanks to its striking cover, and arresting illustrations by young French illustrator Pierre-Denis Goux. All in all, enthralling stuff. Although not in the Viking slave sense, you understand.

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