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Wolf Cry

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Editorial Choice:

off

BfK Rating:

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The cold light of the Norwegian coast illuminates this fine adventure story which draws its energy from a web of contrasts. At one level there is the excitement of a blood-stained Viking tale driven by loyalty and revenge. There is much more here, however. Ohthere, the richest jarl in the North, returns from a long trading voyage. Among his cargo is Enno, a black slave, or 'Blue Man', from North Africa. Often, we watch the behaviour of his violent captors from his more subtle and cultured perspective. As events unfold, he finds more kindred spirits in Toki and Freydis, the son and daughter of Ohthere, who have been left behind to guard the farmstead. Only days before their father's return, the settlement is laid waste by his blood-feud enemy, the pirate Sulke, who seizes Toki and leaves Freydis hiding in the smouldering ruins, her leg broken but her courage intact. When he returns, Ohthere thinks only of his stolen son; his daughter is of no consequence.

The values of young and old, African and Viking, stand in contrast. So too do the Vikings and the gentle Sami, reindeer herders and farmers in the remote North, who pay tribute to Ohthere in return for his protection. Another contrast lies in the allegiance of the Vikings to their warlike gods set against the more mystical beliefs of the Sami. All of these tensions add depth to a story which is skilfully told, the action shifting swiftly from one group of players to another, leaving the reader constantly eager for news. Dialogue is a challenge for writers telling such a tale - how to sustain the sense of Otherness which is a powerful element of such stories? Golding goes for a modern - though not fashionable - idiom, perhaps to allow her readers to engage with two very different love stories as her youthful characters discover each other - African and Northerner, Viking and Sami. For some readers, language such as 'Your wish, mistress, is my command' (spoken with affectionate irony) or terms such as 'side-effect' and 'weasel words' may sit uneasily alongside 'Our fallen we will honour with the sacrifice of enemy blood at the great battle to come'. Nevertheless, the excitement of the story will undoubtedly drive those readers through to the poignant conclusion.

Running Order:

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