



The Blood-Tainted Winter

T.L. Greylock

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“A beautifully written tale with the perfect mix of rough edges and smooth spots. It was a joy to read *The Blood-Tainted Winter*.”— David Estes, #1 bestselling author of *Fatemarked*

Raef Skallagrim wants to take the sea road. His ship is fast and sleek, his crew skilled and eager, and they will seek out new lands and win fame in the eyes of the gods. But Raef's father refuses to allow the journey and when a stranger brings word that the king is dead and a gathering has been called to choose a successor, Raef must set aside his dream for his duty to his ancestral lands and his father.

When factions split at the gathering to choose a successor, Raef finds himself mired in bloodshed and treachery. Forced to make an uneasy alliance with a man he does not trust, Raef must navigate the tides of a war among three kings while seeking revenge for cold-blooded murder.

But winter has come early to Midgard, and even the gods will feel the cold.

The Blood-Tainted Winter Details

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From Reader Review *The Blood-Tainted Winter* for online ebook

Laura Hughes says

“Dark are the hearts of men, and easily tempted.”

Raef Skallagrim is not a happy bunny. All he wants to do is go on a sea trip with his mates. He’s been looking forward to all it entails for ages: drinking, raiding, pillaging, ‘boys will be boys’ fun and games. Making memories, y’know?

But Raef also happens to be the only son of the lord of Vannheim. Now, Skallagrim Sr. is normally pretty chill, but he puts his foot down big time when the Boss calls a national snap election. When everything at said election goes tits up for Raef and his father (and everyone, really), Raef realises he has some growing up to do. Life isn’t always about getting what you want (at least, not right away). Bad things happen to good people . . . and, as if betrayal and civil war weren’t enough, someone forgot to let the gods know that they’re not invited.

The Blood-Tainted Winter has everything SFF readers could possibly want, and more. A Norse fantasy as epic as it is immersive, T L Greylock’s debut tells of feuds and friendships (and more feuds) amid legends of devils and deities that arise as organically from the evocative Scandinavian vistas as steam from a geyser. While Greylock’s novel might be more ‘axes and intrigue’ than ‘sword and sorcery’, that’s not to say it doesn’t contain plenty of both – though the magic is relatively low key, at least to begin with. Rather than fireballs and flying, the magic of *The Blood-Tainted Winter* is an insidious but natural part of a world where demigods also tend to keep a pretty low profile.

For their own safety as much as anyone else’s.

Speaking of gods: no doubt you’ll recognise a few of the names mentioned throughout this story. Odin, of course; Loki, too, as well as others such as Heimdall and the Valkyries. *The Blood-Tainted Winter* isn’t self-conscious of itself as a Norse fantasy, yet Raef’s tale evokes a vivid sense of place and time that thoroughly immerses the reader in a land of gods, battle and betrayal. Greylock doesn’t force the Norseness so much as nurture it, weaving familiar aspects of the mythology into the book in a way that doesn’t dominate or overshadow the story being told.

You could argue that the book’s beginning is a little too leisurely; however, I enjoyed having the opportunity to get to know the protagonist a little better – and to feel pleasantly surprised and intrigued when the following chapters have him reacting in a most unexpected manner. I will say that Greylock does a wonderful job of patiently unfolding the story through the eyes of its protagonist. Raef is distant and, at times, unfathomable (though not unlikeable), functioning more as a window onto events than as someone the reader can sympathise with or live vicariously through.

This is fitting with Raef’s role as a reluctant but competent leader, one who I suspect is destined to grow into a legend.

Greylock’s debut novel is strongly reminiscent of John Gwynne’s excellent epic fantasy series, *The Faithful and the Fallen*. And just as Corban had Dath and Farrell (and Arthur had Merlin and Gwen!), so Raef has Vakre and Siv – for what is a leader without his companions?

The Blood-Tainted Winter was an entry in last year's Self-Published Fantasy Blog-Off, and was eliminated quite early on. Frankly, I'm astounded it didn't make more of a splash (though, to be fair, it had stiff competition in the first round from the likes of Benedict Patrick's *They Mostly Come out at Night* and eventual fourth-place finalist *Fionn: Defence of Ráth Bládhma* by Brian O'Sullivan).

Trust me, though: this is a singularly kickass novel. T L Greylock is one to watch.

J.P. Ashman says

A very well written fantasy/mythology heavily based on Viking myth and legend - and it certainly had that feel. At times, I could have seen this as a historical fiction, but those subtle elements of gods and magic were there, tied in with the story.

I took a long time reading this because I read it on Kindle, and I'm a nightmare with my Kindle. I have fads of reading it and times where it sits there, neglected. Each time I picked it up, however, I fell right back into the solid worldbuilding and story. It follows a young warrior come leader who seems to still be finding himself as a person (intentional, I am sure) and who is surrounded by allies and enemies that leave you guessing to their real intentions and loyalties; clever plotting and writing caused this. I fully trusted some at times, before suspecting them of things. Then I'd change my mind again. It kept me guessing and enjoying.

The combat is brutal, but not drawn out. The action in general is exciting and well done.

I gave this a 4* harshly (although a 4* means I enjoyed it, obviously). It's an excellent Viking fantasy, but it took me a while to get into it. The second half of the book, however, and the ending - that ending! - left me wanting more (in a good way). The fantasy element came through in leaps and bounds in the second half, and tenfold at the end. Boom! What a battle!

I'm excited for the rest of the series (which I already have on my Kindle) and I'm excited to see what the author releases next. The writing is already excellent and the series is sure to expand and excite and reward us readers.

Fan of gods and Vikings? Fan of camaraderie, daring escapes and gritty combat and battles, couples with mystery and legend? Read this epic tale!

PS/ This review doesn't do it justice. I'm hammering the keys because I can hear Poppet stirring up in her room. Before the shouts of, "Daddy? Daddy!?" ring out, I'll love you and leave you and once again encourage you to start this series.

Cheers,

JP

Dyrk Ashton says

I love me some Norse mythology inspired fiction, so deciding to read this book was a no-brainer. Other than

knowing that about it, though, I had no idea what to expect. As it turns out, the story takes place in Midgard (Earth, where the humans dwell), as opposed to Asgard (where the gods party down and Valhalla is built), or any of the other "worlds" in Norse mythology - which is cool. We follow a young Lord's-son warrior named Raef Skallagrim, as he becomes embroiled in what on the surface seems like the same old political "who's going to be king?" shennanigans, running around on a horse with a sword and an axe, chopping off body parts, worrying about alliances, hoping to avenge his father's death, gaining and losing cohorts, and fighting a lot. There's a bit of magic, some demigods, but mostly it's a human tale of survival and the struggle for power in a brutal land and time.

That said, this book rocks. Raef is impetuous, ornery, and makes some very bad decisions, but his heart is in the right place. The landscape and characters are fascinating, and there's plenty of action. Never once did my attention wander as I followed the journey - and here's the best part - turns out that maybe, just maybe, the story is actually leading up to Ragnarok itself, the cataclysmic final battle of the gods, which could be what's coming in books two and three. My TBR is huge, but the next two books in the series are already out and are rising on the pile very quickly.

My only problem with the story is small. There are some characters who travel with Raef who get very little attention, particularly one of the shield-maidens who, oddly enough, is also a love interest. She won't even be mentioned for quite some time, even though she's obviously right there with them. I think some of this might come from the fact that Raef, from whose POV the story is told, is pretty self-absorbed for much of the book, and, there may be things we're not meant to know about her that will be revealed as the story continues. As I said, though, small issue, and it certainly didn't change that fact that I enjoyed the hell out of this book.

Check it out. A very well written, exciting story, chock full of glorious battles galore - and a fire cloak! Can't wait to get to the next book. Highly recommended!

Jon Adams says

I have a soft spot for Norse fantasy, and this book nailed it. I immediately purchased the next two. :)

Brandi says

T.L. Greylock's "The Blood-Tainted Winter" is an original, fast-paced adventure. Raef is unlike other protagonists and has very human qualities. He is neither portrayed as a superhero nor a bumbling fool, making him a more believable character. The writing flowed well and kept my interest. I didn't notice too many lulls in the story (or boring parts) like many other works within this genre. Overall, I enjoyed this book (I'd rate it about 4.7) and would not hesitate to read more of T.L. Greylock's works in the future.

Kareem says

4.5 stars

This is a great book that really needs more noise making about it.

A viking fantasy that takes Nordic mythology, mixes it with a boot load of shield walls, swords, axes, fire and death, and blends it all to create a fast paced and engaging story.

T.L. Greylock really captures the viking culture and landscapes in this book. But what I especially love is how she can make sneaking through/scouting in Scandinavianesque woodland feel so closed in and claustrophobic. There is a real sense of threat in the pages, and when it does end up blowing up it REALLY blows up.

The action hits hard and fast, though be warned, it is not for the faint of heart.

A truly special little book. Well written, well presented, well worth your time!

Alec Hutson says

Over the centuries much of the magic and mystery has leached from the world - science now tells us that thunder is caused when air fills the void left by a bolt of lightning, but a thousand years ago men might have believed that sudden crack was giants arguing in the hills. The poetic explanations for nature have been dispensed with, but in *The Blood-Tainted Winter* I really felt like I was interpreting the world through the eyes of the Norseman Raef, and it lent the story a dream-like quality that I savored. It reminded me of a Gene Wolfe novel, honestly, and this was reinforced by the excellent prose. Just to give an example of this: midway through the story Raef and his band arrive at a ruined castle to find the lord of this fortress on his deathbed. He dies in the night, but on the return trip days later they stop at the same castle and find that the castle's lord is alive and well - but he looks different and claims to never have met them. No explanation is given as to which lord was the true one, or what happened, which lent the narrative a sense of the surreal. I'd highly recommend TL Greylock's book to any reader who enjoys a rich tale of adventure and intrigue set in the age of gods and longships.

Marielle says

Very much enjoyed it! Review will follow...

T.O. Munro says

As a child I was captivated by John Borman's magnificent "Excalibur" and particularly the score that drew heavily on Wagner's Ring Cycle. Fortunately my room was at the back of the house so the endless replaying of Gotterdamernung late into the night did not disturb too many people.

But that long ago musical crescendo heralding the twilight of the Norse gods came back to me as Taya Greylock's first volume drew to its conclusion.

Raef Skallagrim's story is set in an explicitly viking milieu, though the world map of Midgard owes little to terrestrial, still less scandinavian geography (beyond perhaps the existence of fjords). The gods though, are

as Norse as they come. The warriors with their axes, their arm rings of gold and silver, and their determination to gain entry to Valhalla by dying with a sword in their hand, will be comfortingly familiar to many readers rehearsed in myth and history.

Greylock departs from convention in giving warrior roles to female vikings - not just the Valkyrie - but a company of formidable shield-maidens join Raef as he tries to navigate the turmoil that follows in the wake of the old king's death. Siv and Eira are not bit players but stand shoulder to shoulder in the shield wall with Raef and his enigmatic friend Vakre. Greylock, publishing in 2015, was perhaps prescient in anticipating the recent (2017) DNA analysis of the Birka warrior that recast the occupant of the sumptuous viking burial site as a woman. (<https://news.nationalgeographic.com/2...>)

Raef Skallagrim's ambition to sail overseas in search of wealth and adventure is diverted by the political crisis at home, yet still he ends up on a land-based odyssey. His travails take him through the a variety of domains where - at times - even the earth shifts as abruptly as the allegiances of the rival war lords each striving to pin their fortunes to the winning side in a three cornered struggle for the crown.

To help the reader navigate their way through the political and geographical maze there is a helpful map at the beginning of the book and a cast of characters (many listed under uncertain loyalties) at the end - though to be fair I missed the map and managed without the cast list.

Greylock's writing style is an easy read that swept me along at a comfortable pace. It is in essence a road-movie - so much so that at one point Raef even wonders if he is cut out for the staid life of a warlord heir to Vannheim. Along the way, battles are fought, blood is spilt, friends who were enemies fall as do enemies who were friends. The combat descriptions are visceral, conjuring up the frenetic pace of hand to hand combat, though I was surprised on a couple of occasions at how easy it apparently was to sneak into a viking encampment.

In some ways *The Blood Tainted Winter* reminded me of Joe Abercrombie's *Shattered Sea* trilogy with its love of raiding, of blood lust and of heroic kings who fought face to face in the frontline of their warriors. It also had something of Mark Lawrence's *Prince of Fool's* and *The Liar's Key* about it, where Snorri the viking journeyed for revenge, where Loki played with the lives of men, and strange magic ensnared its protagonists. In the enduring treachery and political infighting it had a touch of *Game of Thrones* - as Raef is swept up in his own war of the three kings.

Greylock takes the Norse tradition in some new (to me at least) directions with the notion of Half-Gods, men (and perhaps women?) sired by gods and granted powers beyond those of normal mortals. I am curious to see what threads will be picked up in future books. I would know more of the past of the fiercely enigmatic Eira, or the future of the stubbornly independent Cilla, or the present of Siv, peace-keeper, wise-counsel. But then - that's me, it's the bad-ass female characters that always inspire my curiosity more even than the fey Vakre, or the stubbornly resilient Raef.

Richard Nell says

Fantastic read. Absolutely recommended for really any fantasy reader, particularly for any fans of Norse mythology, but really even historical fiction lovers. Three main reasons:

1. The writing. For me, bad writing ruins a good story, and good writing hardly needs a story. Fortunately this book actually *has* a good story, but nevermind. Ms. Greylock knows how to show, rather than tell, and it's obvious on every page. The description is great, efficient, and nothing feels overly-described. Really, nothing. The only thing worthy of criticism here is quite a bit of passive voice. But even then, stories like Beowulf are full of passive voice, so it kind of works for this.
2. A slow build to a strong finish. Loved the ending, which actually is a little strange since it isn't the ending you'd expect after reading the first quarter of the book. Anyway, it's great, and at about 90% I completely ignored the world until I was finished.
3. The setting/style. Who doesn't like Norse mythology done well? Greylock presents it here in a genuinely authentic-feeling, magic realism style. These Norsemen are brash, glory-hungry, treacherous killers, just as they should be. And if there's a few half-gods living amongst them? Well, no big deal. So Loki's his dad. Not his fault. But maybe keep an eye on him...

I always like to criticize something, so...give me a...second here...oh! As an inhabitant of a mostly frozen wasteland, I quirked a brow as our heroes swam through a nearly frozen river for several minutes, and then went about their raiding like it was a quick dip in the pool. But you know what, they're vikings, so I let it slide. That's literally all I've got.

The only reason this isn't a 5 star review is because I'm stingy and 5 stars is reserved for my absolute favorite books of all time (and yours should be too, you overly generous other reviewers!).

Excited to see more from the author, and will certainly finish the series.

Petrik says

A good book but honestly, I'm a bit sad with my rating for this Norse inspired fantasy.

Well, 3 stars is still a good rating and I did enjoy the book, but I expected this book to be at least a 4 or even reaching 5 stars for many reasons. Norse mythology is one of my favorite mythologies in the world, it's up there at the top of my favorite list with Greek and Japanese mythologies. After hearing about this trilogy and reading Greylock's incredible short story in the anthology *Lost Lore*, I was super excited to finally have a chance to start this one. Plus, hearing from some readers that the book reminds them a bit of Gwynne's *The Faithful and the Fallen* series—which is currently my favorite completed series of all time—just raised my expectations even more. Unfortunately, there is one thing that stopped me from enjoying the book even more: fast pacing in exchange for characterizations.

If you look at my list of favorite first book of a series or debuts, there's one very prominent similarity within each of them, slow pacing for great characterizations. Yes, for the first book of any series, it's mandatory for me that the book be slow and focus more on the characterizations than anything else. *The Blood-Tainted Winter* is an extremely fast paced book, it's probably the most fast-paced first book I've ever read, because of this characterizations really suffer and their actions seem illogical and unrealistic. For example, there aren't any travel sections in this book. A character will say "let's go there" and they will arrive in one or two short chapters. I know traveling sections in epic fantasy books can be boring but this is still way too fast for me. Also, Raef as the main character was highly unlikable in my opinion.

Problem with pacing and characterizations aside, this book did integrate Norse mythology heavily in the second half of the book and I think the rest of the trilogy will implement it even more. The integration of the Norse mythology is hands down the best aspect of this book and seeing the way things progressed, I have a feeling the story line will eventually lead towards Ragnarok.

This is a fast-paced book and there are plenty of actions to be found and if tons of actions from the first book of a series is your kind of reading preferences, you really should give this book a try. Greylock's actions are vivid and great. She didn't spend time writing words that didn't provide any benefit for the story, this is especially true in the action sequences and worldbuilding.

Unfortunately, I don't know if I'll be continuing with the trilogy. Like I said before, I'm a fan of a slow-paced first book of a series. I don't mind fast-paced books in any sequels but in the first book, it's a must for me for it to set up the characters and story for the rest of the series. Great characters are single-handedly the most important factors that affect my enjoyment of any book, doesn't matter what the genre is. By the end of this book, I still don't have any characters that I cared about and that kills my interest in continuing.

Overall though I think this book was good and I'm definitely more in between on whether I like or dislike the book. I still enjoy this book and this is a good start to a trilogy. But sadly, this is more or less the same case with *The Chronicles of the Black Gate* by Phil Tucker, a good book/series where I lost the motivation to continue because the characters weren't compelling enough for me. Remember that this is just my opinion and as always, reading experience will tend to vary among readers. Despite me not continuing the trilogy, I still highly recommend this trilogy to anyone who's looking to try a fast-paced Norse inspired fantasy filled with plenty of actions.

*You can find **this** and the rest of my Adult Epic/High Fantasy & Sci-Fi reviews at **BookNest***

Kristen says

(You can see a bigger and prettier version of this review here, on my blog.)

I had thought to lay down and get a couple chapters of this book in before sleep, and suddenly it was 2am and I still didn't want to sleep because some cool shit was going down and I needed to know how it played out. To be honest, the first 1/4 or so of this book brought me back to running across Skyrim, visiting each of the Jarls. Don't look at me like that, I didn't say it was a bad thing. I spent something like 2000 hours playing that game (Now you know my secret. I have no life >.>;). It holds a special place in my heart. But yeah, this book made me want to play it again. In a good way. It made me want to start all over again.

As much as I thought Raef was a great character, who I did root for, Vakre was my favorite character from the very instant that we are introduced to him. He's sort of mysterious from the very beginning, and I love me a good mysteriously stealthy archer. He has a tendency to just show up when Raef needs him most, and then sticks around for the trip around the land. Raef tends to make poor decisions sometimes, in the heat of the moment. Vakre is there to back him up with some cool, logical arrows to the chest. I wondered about his story, and then smiled when we got a bit of it, and it made sense. Despite mysteriousness, he is unfailingly loyal to his friends, and I cheered for him even harder than I cheered for Raef. :D

There were a lot of really great characters in this story. Raef meets a lot of interesting people on his adventures, and Vakre is only the beginning. He repeatedly meets a mysterious half-god traveler who always

seems to be a step or two ahead of him. Eira was an interesting character, having little memory of her life past a few years back. She's a shieldmaiden, and is quick to take what she wants (and what she wants is Raef, to start with. Personally I would have found it more entertaining if Raef had to work for it, but whatevs). Siv, another shieldmaiden, is another character I liked. She is always quick with a grin and gives this otherwise war-torn landscape a bit of sunshine, along with Gudrik, the warrior/bard with his flute.

I really like how Raef grew over the course of the book, from the impetuous youth with dreams of sailing the seas to the battle hardened man who has seen some shit and lived to tell the tale. He does start off making rash decisions that almost always end up getting him in trouble, but he learns from his mistakes as his adventure progresses. He starts making better decisions, even if some of them are insane plans with chances in the fractions of percents of working. He's got a bit of mystery behind him too. I liked that.

The plot keeps a very steady pace throughout. There was always something interesting going on. There was enough mystery to keep me guessing about what was going to happen, where Raef and his friends were going to end up, and who was going to end up winning the war. I wondered if the gods, who seem quite real in this world, if off-camera for most of the story, would intervene in the war, or choose a side. The battle scenes were well written, action-packed and full of stabbing, setting shit on fire, and arrows and axes flying all over the place. Battle galore!

With a satisfying ending that wrapped up the story and left so much room for more adventures, I really liked this one! I will definitely continue to the next book and then the next, because shit is going down! A very good read to be sure. Action-packed and viking-tacular!

Logan says

4.25 stars. Dang, this book was really good.

I loved how realistic and distinct the characters were. But it was the writing that impressed me. The author nailed the Norse-viking vibe and I felt totally absorbed in the culture and beliefs of these people. It just felt so real. The pacing was great and there were very few dull moments.

I am intrigued by the magic and want to see more of what is going on with the gods of this world. That is the only gripe I had about this book, although I get the idea of keeping those things mysterious.

Can't wait for book two.

Nimrod Daniel says

I'd never read a Norse-fantasy so I thought reading this one could be somewhat refreshing. Plus, I really like the cover, I think it's great and that's what attracted me to check out this book in the first place.

As for the title of the book - It feels like "A Song of Ice and Fire" could have been perfect for this book, as both ice and fire are very prominent here. Unfortunately some unknown guy already used this title for his series ;)

It was a fast-paced and gritty story about vikings, with enough battles, interesting characters, and a little bit of magic. As far as I know viking stories don't have a lot of magic in them, so I hadn't expected to find a lot of magic here. Normally I'm ok with fantasy books in which magic is rare and we don't see too much of it, so it didn't bother me. Magic is a virtue of the gods, who mainly stay in the background and don't intervene in the realm of men, so there's a little bit of magic here. Having said that, I think adding more fantastic elements

could have done a good service to the book.

Plot – The book has a good pacing from the very beginning until the end, so even though it's a relatively short book enough things seems to happen throughout the book.

The first 1/3 felt like an exposition and only after the first third things got more interesting plot-wise. While interesting stuff happened in the second third of the book, it felt uneven – there were very few good chapters among many chapters that were just ok. The last third was good all the way with interesting revelations and plot that kept me captivated. The book was wrapped-up pretty good with a satisfying ending, while there are a few loose ends that keep you want to read the next book.

Unlike most books I've read the plot is not what drives the characters, but the characters, and to be more precise – Raef is what drives the whole plot. Joe Abercrombie, who is one of my favorite authors also writes a character-driven plot, though in his case he does that with more than just one character.

Writing style – the writing style is quite good, and shines when it comes to descriptions, which feel very vivid. While the descriptions are great, the dialogues are just ok, but they get better in the second half of the book. The action scenes were really well-written. Even though writing fantasy books on a high octane with tons of action might be far from the author's style, I'm convinced she can write such books really well. While the writing style is quite good, the story-telling craft was just ok. It's fine considering it's a debut novel. No doubt that with more experience her story-telling techniques will improve, and she has a potential to grow into really good author.

Characterization – Raef is a very reckless guy at the beginning and I didn't like him until I was ~35-40% through, and I couldn't see how such an idiot can carry the whole book on his shoulders, but he evolves and turns into a very calculated guy. Plus, he appeared to be a great tactician who has a great future in special ops :). I think Raef is a good character, he's flawed and feels very real. Actually I think Raef's characterization had been done well. Great job here.

More characters join him on his journey – Vakre is an interesting character who has the wits to show Raef how wrong he is. He's a quite good character, though I think he could have been portrayed a bit better. Gudrik, the poet/warrior is a really interesting character and very well portrayed, even though we don't see him that much. Unfortunately Siv and Eira felt a bit flat. I liked Siv more, but they both didn't add too much to the story. It's surprising considering she had done a much better job with the male characters than the female characters.

All in all, I enjoyed reading *The Blood-Tainted Winter* and I'm convinced the next book is even be better. It appears like the gods will have a greater role in it which is great.

3.75/5.

Jody says

"In the beginning there was only burning ice and biting flame."

I have always found Norse mythology fascinating. So, it is a bit surprising that I haven't read more books or history based on this culture. Having said that, I first read T.L. Greylock's work a couple of months ago in the *Lost Lore* anthology. Her short story, *Palesword*, was one of my favorites in that collection and I knew I

had to give this main series a try as soon as possible. I'm glad I finally followed through as *The Blood-Tainted Winter* was a very good debut filled with battles, companionship, betrayal, and revenge.

Raef Skallagrim is the heir to Vannheim territory with a future of great responsibility in front of him, but all he wants to do is take to the seas in search of adventure. When news reaches Vannheim that the king is dead, Raef and his father Einarr journey to a meeting of all the great lords to select a new king. Of course when politics get involved there will be a lot of handshakes in the dark and double-dealing taking place. Not to mention, so many powerful lords in one place. When tragedy strikes, as it usually does in situations such as this, it undoubtedly changes Raef's future and possibly his fate forever.

"You will find what you seek Skallagrim, and it will be your end. The wolf-song and serpent-breath are coming for you."

The story is told solely from Raef's POV. Single point of view stories usually don't work for me, but Ms. Greylock managed to keep me interested. One of my favorite aspects of the book was the pace. It wasn't a rapid pace, but very steady moving from one event to the next. I never got bogged down, because the story never stayed stationary long enough for this to happen.

When I think of Norse mythology, some of the first things to pop in my head are of course Thor, Odin, Valhalla, etc. All of these are represented here, but not overly done. The gods are definitely dealing in mortal affairs, at least one very nasty one is anyway, (no spoilers) while men and demigods roam the lands battling it out. Unpleasant things are being unleashed on Midgard and the age of man may be on the verge of catastrophe.

"The world of men will fall."

As I stated above, Raef's solitary POV did keep me interested, but I would've liked to have seen at least one more. Possibly Vakre or Torrulf Palesword just to name a couple. I thought they were interesting characters, but I would have enjoyed a more personal look through their eyes. There was also a large cast of characters, and it was hard to keep up with them at times. A couple of instances a person was referred to from earlier in the story, and I had no clue who they were. These were not huge issues, and it may not bother other readers at all.

Overall, I had a good time following Raef Skallagrim on this adventure. I would refer this to my fellow readers looking for any original Norse mythology escapism to give this series a try. That ending has me itching to start book 2, *The Hills of Home*, right away.

3.5 stars ***
