



Northlanders, Vol. 2: The Cross and the Hammer

Brian Wood , Ryan Kelly (Illustrator) , Dean Ormston (Illustrations)

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The second NORTHLANDERS collection, featuring issues #11-16, takes place during the tail end of Viking rule in Ireland. A series of mysterious murders and arsons against wealthy citizens leaves the Viking occupiers worried that a potential uprising might ignite. When surprising details involving the crimes are revealed, though, their jobs become much harder! Once again, writer Brian Wood teams with artist Ryan Kelly (Local) for an intriguing, gorgeously rendered peek at the inner workings of society.

Northlanders, Vol. 2: The Cross and the Hammer Details

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From Reader Review Northlanders, Vol. 2: The Cross and the Hammer for online ebook

Karol says

The very nature of this series makes each trade paperback - even, at times, each issue - not just a different narrative, but a chance for a different artist to take the helm, a change in tone, and the exploration of a different theme.

This trade was definitely a good example of that - where the first focused on homecoming, the second deals with a lot of stuff in very short order - madness, occupation, the age-old debate over ends justifying means - and it draws you in. Darker than the first trade, it's no less compelling.

Rosa says

In this volume of Northlanders we follow two new characters and move to Ireland. Magnus is a local who is killing his way through the the Vikings one higher up at a time. Lord Ragnor is the viking lord that has been sent to catch Magnus. Ragnor is trained in forensics (which felt more like extensive tracking skills) and he is able to get a bead on where Morgan is going. The story goes back and forth between Magnus and Ragnor with a couple of stops at the larger war that the Vikings are fighting as the Irish try to fight back as a group as well.

I was unable to get a real grasp of what was going on between Magnus and his daughter and was very confused about the sudden jump Brigid made in age. I can't figure out if Magnus was hallucinating or if there was a substantial jump in time that I missed. I also just felt like I didn't get enough of the characters inner workings to really feel invested in the story this time. I did like the first one enough that I am going to give the next volume a try anyway.

Javier Muñoz says

Esta colección sigue un ritmo muy irregular, y sigo teniendo la sensación de que las historias de larga duración son las menos afortunadas, en este tomo la historia más extensa es la que da nombre al tomo, en ella un antiguo sacerdote mantiene una dura resistencia contra los invasores nórdicos mientras protege a su hija, esta es una historia confusa, alargada artificialmente y mal contada, creo adivinar que parte de la confusión es porque intenta reflejar la locura del protagonista, pero no se explica bien el destino del personaje de Brigid... me parece lo peor del tomo junto con un relato de un único número que cuenta un duelo entre dos guerreros vikingos (el dibujo en este último además es horrible).

Me parecen mucho mejores los otros dos relatos "damas con escudos" en el que 3 mujeres deben resistir el ataque de las tropas que asesinaron a sus familias en una vieja fortaleza y "el regreso de Sven", en el que el protagonista del primer tomo de northlanders vuelve a la acción, ya de anciano, cuando un grupo de jóvenes guerreros intenta darle caza en su isla, deberá luchar contra estos guerreros para proteger a su familia.

En todo caso estas historias no mantienen un gran nivel, supongo que seguiré esta serie porque me encantan

las historias de vikingos y en todos los tomos siempre hay elementos que me gustan, pero la verdad es que esperaba más.

Trish says

Wow, this was darker than even I expected. And sad.

This story is about the Norse occupation of Ireland and takes place in 1014 A.D. Like in the first volume, the issues collected here tell one story - the story of Magnus and his daughter Brigid and what life was like for the Irish under Northmen rule. However, it is also the story of personal demons and how people try to cope; the story of being stuck in the past and trying to forget or to tamper with memories in order to make the present more bearable. That topic struck a chord with me on many levels so I was not just thoroughly entertained but also very much moved.

As usual, the art is wonderful; gritty in places but all the more befitting the gritty story. However, the reason I could not give this wonderful story the full 5 stars it deserves is the language. While usually the series is not only authentic in historical details but also in the way the characters talk, there were some panels here in which the language was a bit too modern which threw me off considerably.

I'm glad I was finally able to get my hands on this volume and to have it on my shelf though. It's a wonderful part of this series and like "Ain't It Cool News" says on the cover: *You really can't go wrong with Northlanders*. :D

Aaron says

A bland, derivative tale that uses violence and Vikings to try to make itself seem interesting. Basically, this is Punisher: 1000 A.D. A murderous Irish madman has taken it upon himself to carve up the Norsemen who killed his family and ruined his homeland. What follows is a lot of hacking and slashing by a single man up against many others, always prevailing offscreen so we can never quite tell how he was good enough to get away with it.

Mixed in with all this over-the-top bloodshed is a Viking Sherlock Holmes; a man who, in 1014 AD, can analyze blood spatter and minute details of a crime scene (which is how he treats these murder scenes, anachronistically) to perfectly track his mark. It's patently absurd that this would happen in this time period. It's also absurd that he's continually referred to as a "commanding officer," a term straight out of the modern day that would have had no place back then.

Then, there's the twist. I somehow saw it coming from 10 miles away *even though it doesn't make sense*. I basically thought "What's some dumb nonsense this story would do?" and then was rewarded for the thought. My prize: a pile of bullshit. Early in the story, Sherlock Holmes the Viking analyses The Punisher's attack pattern and footprints and deduces that (view spoiler). This kind of lazy writing really speaks to how thrown-together this story feels, how unearned its ending is, and how unclear its ultimate takeaway is. I don't know what Brian Wood was trying to say about Vikings, the Irish, vengeance, war, or anything, really. It's just a

story about some Ye Olde Crazye People going Ye Olde Crazye.

At least the art's good.

Ignacio says

Una historia alargada que en dos o tres números no habría estado mal pero estirada hasta los seis resulta cansina y pierde su sentido. Además incluye elementos anacrónicos increíbles (el nórdico que introduce métodos policiales modernos en el siglo XI), o ya directamente ridículos (esos escudos con tres leones).

Y así me bajo de Northlanders.

Sud666 says

From issue #9 (Lindisfarne):

"I called upon the Gods...not the White Christ or the Saints....But the Ones who meant BUSINESS...The old Germanic ones with terrible names and terrible deeds. The ones who make little kids shake in fear long after the bedtime stories end."

So starts the 2 part story of Lindisfarne. The plea of a young Saxon boy raised by a brutal and very pious Christian father and his equally cruel older brother, in the shadow of the Lindisfarne monastery. The Norse Gods answer- Lindisfarne is the monastery off the coast of England that was first to feel the wrath of the Vikings in 793 AD. An epic tale of the sacking of Lindisfarne and how this young boy joined the ranks of the Sea-Wolves.

The rest of the volume is called "Hammer and Cross" and takes place in 1014 AD off the coast of Ireland. It is the story of a Celtic warrior waging a guerrilla campaign against the Viking overlords. Both stories are good (though the Lindisfarne one was truly excellent) but there are two deficiencies- the first being the use of modern day language.. sometimes when Mr. Wood writes a story the conversation between Norsemen from the year 1000 sounds like it belongs in the mouths of people from 1960. That can be a little off putting and just a slight editorial tweak could make it far more palatable than the sometimes discordant nature of the Vikings using modern English. The second thing is...the art. Mr. Wood..go out and get a good artist. It can make a huge difference. The artwork is at best pedestrian. That minimalist style requires that you be very tight with the story and writing. Also not to be pedantic but a LITTLE bit of historical accuracy goes a long way. I don't know if Mr. Wood assumes that people who read comics are uneducated or children but some things that are put to paper could easily be more realistic with just a little bit of research. For example I'll let it pass that the battle of Clontarf was NOT the definitive battle that broke the Viking hold on Ireland (that is a popular myth)..but the kite shields being used by the forces of Brian Boru clearly show 3 golden lions rampant on a red background. Ummmmm why would Brian Boru be displaying the arms of Edward I ,the Longshanks, of England? The 3 lions representing his Lordship of England, Normandy and Aquitaine. The rampant lion was the sigil of the Plantagenet family. Edward Plantagenet was the first to use 3 lions. The insignia starts being used by King Edward around the year 1198...when the story being told is taking place in 1014. Also the character of Ragnar- uh where did he go to college? None of that exists for another 300 years. At this point even if he was an UNUSUALLY educated Norseman- his education would have come from tutors. Probably Christian monks. So unlikely that Ragnar learned his "investigative" skills at college. Still things like this aside (which make me doubt the writer's education and knowledge-but never his story-telling talent) I suspend all sense of accuracy and enjoyed an interesting detective story with a surprise ending about

Mac the Irish protagonist that I will not spoil. When you factor in modern English, weird historical mistakes AND this art that makes me say "meh" then you only get 4 stars. This could have been 5 star volume if the artwork was better and just a wee bit more research or factoring in what year it taking place. Still if you like stories of the Vikings, pick this one up I am glad I did. Here is hoping Mr Wood finds us a good artist for Vol 3

Alex Telander says

Posted with permission from the Sacramento Book Review

Wood continues his powerful Northlanders series in this second volume with a look at two cultures fighting over one piece of land. The year is 1014, the place is Ireland. The Vikings have invaded, quickly taking over and subjugating most of the people, claiming what they consider to be rightfully theirs. But there are some who disagree, including one hero, Magnus, who seeks to wipe out any Vikings he sees, while doing what he must to protect his precious daughter. Magnus is a powerful warrior, who seems unstoppable, yet his one failing may be that he has lost his mind. But Lord Ragnar Ragnarsson thinks little of this, stopping at nothing to end Magnus and clear the way for a full Viking conquest.

In The Cross + The Hammer, Wood takes a brief break from his main character, Sven, to address another part of the world where the Vikings are making themselves known. Even with a different artist, the work is fresh and interesting, maintaining an acuteness to detail and accuracy, while Wood does his work in telling a story that may well have happened at some time in the eleventh century.

For more reviews, check out the BookBanter site.

Erik says

Wood returns to his chronicles of various turn-of-the-last-millennium Viking hordes and those under their yokes in this second Northlanders collection, This time, Ryan Kelly takes over the artistic reins, and the marriage of words and pictures is a touch short of perfect compared to what Wood accomplished in book one.

Make no mistake, this is no slight on the powerful narrative itself; which rests upon a Shamaylan-style mystery that is revealed at volume's end. Kelly has certainly produced brilliant work – but elsewhere. Rather, the tracking – or panel-to-panel sequencing --becomes a bit unhinged for me towards the end of book two, during the most dramatic moments of its climax, that Wood and Kelly muddle the narrative flow at the end of chapter five when they keep switching scene and time periods. (Would that their editor caught this problem.)

Other than this slight hiccup in the narrative, Wood has once again created a deeply resonating story that challenges your point of view, and character sympathies. In the four-color world of comics, this is a compliment of the highest order.

Nancy says

This review (plus V3) can also be found on my blog: <https://graphicnovelty2.com/2018/05/1...>

While Book One had taken place in AD 980 on the Orkney Islands of Scotland, this story takes place in occupied Ireland in the year AD 1014. The story centers around brute father Magnus and his pre-teen daughter Brigid who are on the run. Former monk Magnus is on a crusade to kill as many of the King's men as he can while defending his homeland, despite having his beloved daughter by his side. Lord Ragnar, using unlikely detective skills (for that era) tracks this vigilante. But Ragnar is no noble Norse leader; he and his fellow soldiers leave as much destruction as Magnus does, each feeling their cause is worthy and justified. Then the last chapter pulls the rug out from under you, and everything you thought about this father and daughter is suddenly upended. I had to re-read the concluding pages several times to truly understand what had just happened. Not all the pieces fit (you have to have a suspension of disbelief) but I applaud the author Wood for trying something new.

The artist is Ryan Kelley, different from the artist in Book One, and he ably recreates the Irish countryside and it's inhabitants. The men are rugged and battle weary, but Brigid is always drawn as a beautiful waif, making her a studied contrast with her father.

Jason King says

The setting and invoked mood save it from being a 1. A lot of undeveloped backstory with an ending that would rank high on M. Night Shyamalan's shit barometer.

If I'm going to emotionally invest myself in characters, even a little, there's only so many times I'm going to be fooled by the "99% of the story doesn't matter because an unreliable narrator means that it was all lies" kind of garbage. Considering that there was very little indication that the reader had any reason to doubt the narrator I have a feeling that the writer realized he didn't have a decent way to end this story.

I'll try Volume 3 but my patience is running thin.

Meena says

I wasn't sure about this one.

First of all, I love the art -- this is nothing surprising; it's no different from the previous volume of the series. This one is especially raw, full of gruesome and bloody scenes.

The story is set in occupied Ireland, in 1014 A.D. We're introduced to Magnus Mag Rodain and his daughter Brigid being hunted down by Ragnar Ragnarsson (some sort of a murder investigator - or a detective, I guess).

Magnus believes he will rid his country of the Norse invaders by ruthlessly killing all the settlers and those who pursue him (led by Ragnar). The whole chase tires him physically and mentally, making him sloppier with every murder. He does get caught in the end, but there's a twist.

I was a little confused in that final volume. It seems that Magnus had been alone all this time during the hunt and that his daughter had long since abandoned him due to his violent and narrow-minded nature. It was a very sad twist.

Jocelyn Koehler says

The Cross and the Hammer is the second TPB in the Northlanders series. The first volume was amazing; this one is merely good. The basic set up is fine: an anachronistic but interesting premise in which the patient, educated policeman chases down a violent criminal. Except that in this case, the policeman (Ragnar) is a lackey of the Norse king who lords over 1014 Ireland, and the criminal (Magnus) is an Irish freedom fighter. Neither man is all good or evil. Ragnar is committed to hunting down a killer, but he also despises the Irish as a culture and has no problems killing many people to catch a single man. So there's that. On the other hand, Magnus passionately believes that he has a moral duty to oppose the Norse invaders. But every time he takes action, the immediate environment gets covered in blood.

The "Javert vs. 24601" theme is fine, really. Lots of stories operate off this premise. But there's really nothing else to the story, and thus the chase gets repetitive quickly. Ragnar uses his skills to chase Magnus, Magnus uses his skills to evade him. Repeat until end. It's nothing surprising. You know what this story needs? A twist...

SPOILER ALERT

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Surprise! There's a twist. Magnus isn't on the run alone. He's brought his young daughter Brigid with him. He protects her even as he carries out his deadly "missions" against the Norse. But is there something a bit weird about Brigid? NO! There's _no_ hint that she's anything other than a normal human until the very last chapter, when Brigid (who's been absent for a few pages) suddenly reappears as a much older woman, who casts doubt on Magnus' sanity and beliefs..and ultimately shows the reader that the young Brigid seen in previous chapters is either a dream or hallucination brought on by Magnus's inability to deal with his wife's death.

Okaaaay. The real problem with this twist is that it is handled badly. I had to reread the preceding pages several times to make sure I wasn't missing anything. Were two pages stuck together? Did I miss a huge passage of time? Did Magnus have another daughter?

Turns out, no. There's no time gap, and no reason prior to the appearance of Real Brigid to suspect Young Brigid isn't real. She appears to eat soup in a town scene. She appears to get dirty and run into branches. She appears to sew stitches in her father's arm. There's only one hint that she isn't all she seems. After an attack on a farm with young children, Ragnar notes the small footprints and concludes that Ragnar has a "young companion" (but then notes the child must be barefoot - Brigid is usually shown wearing leather slippers). But why would Detective Ragnar conclude the the little footprints belonged to someone _with_ Magnus? He's a forensic expert. He'd see signs of children living on the farm. Occam's Razor would lead him to the obvious theory that the footprints belonged to children who escaped...which in fact was the case, since Magnus told the tykes to take a horse and run. The author clearly forced Ragnar's conclusion as a way of prolonging the "twist", which is too bad, because this would have been the perfect place to highlight the absence of a Real Brigid in a more compelling way. As it was, the hint was too subtle (so subtle that it could be read as a mistake).

So the Brigid Twist is a letdown, and it sours the conclusion.

That said, it's still fvcking Northlanders, and Norse crime sagas are hard to come by in any format. The art is both brutal and lush, and each character is given a distinct look...even the nameless, bearded Norsemen in Ragnar's party. If you like that sort of thing, pick up a copy. But I suggest you close the book after page 127.

Sam Quixote says

Occupied Ireland, 1014AD, and one Irishman, Magnus, is killing every single Norseman he can find with his young daughter Brigid in tow. The man tasked with capturing him, Ragnar, and bringing him to justice is always one step behind him but he knows something disturbing about this killer - something that will stop this rampage once and for all.

Brian Wood's second, book long story in the excellent Northlanders series takes the action from the North to the Emerald Isle and sees him telling an exciting chase story in Dark Ages Ireland. The action is intense and makes for a fast-paced read while the character of Magnus is a sympathetic one, and the art beautifully captures the best of the Irish countryside as well as the darkness of battle and death.

The one thing that stopped this book from being flawless is the ending - I think Wood tried too hard in trying to have an amazing twist at the end and wound up confusing what was a perfectly fine story into a bit of a mess. There are also a couple of moments where you wonder how the story came to that point (I'm thinking of the child's footprints early on in the book and then later how Magnus escaped). It doesn't kill the enjoyment of the book but it does feel a bit clumsy from as gifted a writer as Wood is.

Despite this the journey was worth it and most of the book makes for a visually breathtaking and well written chase thriller and an excellent read. "Northlanders" continues to be an incredible series and "The Cross and the Hammer" is a fine part of it.

James DeSantis says

Close to another 4 for this series but I'd be lying if I said I enjoyed it as much as the first. This title takes a father and daughter trying to survive being hunted. This sounds like a perfect story for me. I love family bonding and trying to survive so why didn't I love this? A story about a man just trying to protect his daughter from savages while mercicelly murdering others in defense? Sounds like a win for James.

What I liked: The viciousness of the father never feels like he kills for pleasure (except one part) and I liked that. I also enjoyed that the people chasing him aren't so "bad" but they are the other side of the story. The people trying to survive and make a living by hunting this Irish father and daughter. I also enjoyed the ending as I don't like all my stories ending "happy ever after". This one don't play that shit. And the artwork is still very solid.

What I didn't like: some of the characters didn't connect with me. I liked the father, but didn't love him. The twist was also easy to see coming. It did catch me slightly off guard cause of the way it was shown but the idea I caught in the first issue. I also thought it was too short as compared to the first volume.

Overall Northlanders is still very very entertaining. While this is weaker than the last volume it still makes me eager to continue. If this is the worst of the bunch, which I hear it is, I'm in for a real treat!
