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Sword Song



Synopsis

Sword Song is the swashbuckling story of Bjarni, a Viking swordsman. Banished from his home for a murder he didn't intend to commit, Bjarni takes up a new life as a mercenary. He journeys from England to Dublin, and then to the islands off the west coast of Scotland. There he meets the man who is to shape the course of his life for years to come, a life that will lead him from boyhood to manhood--fighting among the clan chiefs from the west coast of Scotland in feuds as bitter and bloody as can be imagined. Discovered among her papers after her death in 1992, Sword Song is a fitting capstone to Rosemary Sutcliff's marvelous career as one of Britain's premier authors of historical fiction.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Rosemary Sutcliff's fleshing out of Kipling's fictional treatment of British history (Puck of Pook's Hill), concludes with Sword Song. Chronologically, her stories range from the Iron Age just before the Romans came, to the English Civil War, although it appears she did not write them in that order. Her books are called "young adult" novels because the themes are simple and the good guys are generally good, while the bad guys have little to recommend them. There is violence--she writes of dark times--but no sex. The bulk of her stories are on the edge of the Roman Empire, either geographically, taking place on the fringes of Britain, or in time, as the Empire disintegrates. In either case, individuals have to take care of their own business. Most young adult novels have as their primary theme the change from child to adult through danger and difficulty. Sutcliff's characters face dangers, and, most importantly, do so voluntarily. There are any number of times when they

could choose to retreat, but go forward, for honor, for their friends, or for an ideal. This, I would submit, is a terrifically important lesson to teach. Current pop literature for children seems to be trying to emulate Catcher in The Rye, where a perpetual loser is....a loser. Losers seem to be heroes. In Sword Song, the young man leaves home due to having accidentally killed a man. It's clear that Bjarni has a good deal too much energy, not enough judgment, and perhaps doesn't even know enough to be afraid. Not surprisingly, he finds work as a hired sword, although he begins to give his loyalty to one of his employers, and gets loyalty back.

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