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Scramasax

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~~Not a Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

5

Here Kevin Crossley Holland continues the story of Solveig, the redoubtable Viking girl, which he began so memorably in **Bracelet of Bones**. The previous novel followed Solveig's epic journey from Norway through the land of the Rus to join her father in Constantinople. Now she accompanies him, the Varangian Guard and an allied force of Greeks in an assault on Muslim Sicily. Once more, in an adventure story that mixes political intrigue, heroic battles, the gentler fascination of new faces and new places, and, for teenage Solveig, a first tragic love, Crossley Holland explores the preoccupations that implicitly characterised his previous book and the four books in his Arthur sequence; asking questions about human conflict, the possibilities of diverse societies and faiths co-existing peacefully and about the differing natures of men and women. These are essentially questions from our own time posed in the past and Crossley Holland is a good enough historian to recognise the difficulty he sets himself, for example, in sending a teenage girl out with a Viking war party. Solveig, understandably, does not want to be parted again so soon from her father, but her request is initially firmly rejected by the Viking leaders, including her father, because it has no precedent in Viking custom or legend. It is made possible only because Solveig's fate is caught up in the power struggle between Harald, the Viking commander and the Byzantine Empress Zoe: Zoe's determination that Solveig should remain in Constantinople provoking Harald into taking her to Sicily. Crossley Holland once again recreates a plausible historical world through accurate detail and an immersion in what remains to us of Viking culture, revealing a way of thinking and behaving that, although sometimes shocking to Solveig and to us, particularly in its cunning and brutality, is nevertheless heroic in its own terms. If Solveig is in some ways, a kind of modern traveller in an ancient land, so strong and clear is Crossley Holland's characterisation, so deep his knowledge and so beguilingly deployed, that he can convince us that even in such an utterly strange place, there are people entirely like us; and that, in Solveig, we have met someone remarkable both then and now.

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