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Fiction

Axe of Iron: Confrontation

J. A. Hunsinger

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Axe of Iron: Confrontation is the second installment in author J. A. Hunsinger's fictional series about the migration of the Norse of Greenland to North America. In the new book, Hunsinger adds depth to the characters, including their leader Halfdan and his lieutenant Gudbjartur, introduced in *The Settlers*. He broadens the reader's knowledge of how the Northmen may have survived as they built their lives in a new world. As in the first book, the author's writing is vivid and rife with details of his research and extraordinary imagination.

Three tragic incidents set the tone for this book. The story opens with a hunting trip led by Halfdan and Gudbjartur. Gudbjartur's sons, Ivar and Lothar, and their friend Yola accompany the men on what was to be a rite of passage. One member of the hunting party meets a violent end in the middle of the hunt. During a scouting trip to explore an area outside of their settlement and to develop trading relationships with the native people, Gudbjartur is captured. In a separate expedition that includes Gudbjartur's sons, a group of natives called the Haudeno, stalk and subsequently attack the Northmen.

These events dramatically impact the lives of the Northmen, making them more aware of their vulnerability in this strange land that they have adopted. While the group desires to live in peace, they do not hesitate to protect themselves when necessary.

Hunsinger has done an amazing job of fleshing out these characters. The previous book focused a great deal on the Northmen's daily living practices and values. The new book illustrates the many dimensions of the people. Gudbjartur's personality, for example, is fully explored. The author highlights the lieutenant's skill and acumen as a warrior while also displaying his effectiveness as a father (which is apparent in the bravery and self-control that his eldest son exhibits) and his gentleness with the native people he comes to live with after his capture.

This is an exciting book, the kind that makes you cling to each word and hold your breath when something you saw coming actually happens even as you shake your head in disbelief. The world of the Northmen is dangerous and the possibility of violence is constant. Hunsinger doesn't spare the reader any details. This makes the loss of a

character due to a fight or abduction even more difficult to accept. The ability to pull the reader into the story and create characters that are cheered and mourned for is the mark of a great writer.

Axe of Iron: Confrontation is a remarkable book that will have readers longing for the third installment. I highly recommend it.

Melissa Levine

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