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Hrafnkel's Saga And Other Icelandic Stories (Classics)



PENGUIN CLASSICS

Hrafnkel's Saga and Other Stories



Synopsis

Written around the thirteenth century AD by Icelandic monks, the seven tales collected here offer a combination of pagan elements tightly woven into the pattern of Christian ethics. They take as their subjects figures who are heroic, but do not fit into the mould of traditional heroes. Some stories concern characters in Iceland - among them Hrafnkel's Saga, in which a poor man's son is murdered by his powerful neighbour, and Thorstein the Staff-Struck, which describes an ageing warrior's struggle to settle into a peaceful rural community. Others focus on the adventures of Icelanders abroad, including the compelling Audun's Story, which depicts a farmhand's pilgrimage to Rome. These fascinating tales deal with powerful human emotions, suffering and dignity at a time of profound transition, when traditional ideals were gradually yielding to a more peaceful pastoral lifestyle.

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Customer Reviews

The best way to start reading the realist fiction of medieval Iceland is to read the short stories.

Slowly acclimating oneself to Icelandic literature with small doses will definitely yield greater

enjoyment when you decide to tackle the sometimes lengthy and tedious masterpieces of the genre (Njal's Saga, Egil's Saga, Laxdaela Saga, The Saga of the Volsungs, Gisli's Saga, etc). These stories are from thirteenth century, the Golden Age of Saga writing, and explore the key themes and values of Medieval Icelandic culture. Often, Icelandic stories describe actual historical events (with liberal use of the imagination). The seven stories in this volume can be divided into two groups. "Hrafnkel's Saga", "Thorsteinn the Staff-Struck", and "Ale-Hood" are set in the native Iceland. While "Hreidar the Fool", "Halldor Snorrason", "Audun's Story", and "Ivar's Story" describe the adventures of Icelanders at the royal courts of Norway and Denmark (8). This volume has extensive and useful footnotes, a wonderful introduction, lists of characters (for even the short stories have tons of names), and maps. "Hrafnkel's Saga" is the longest story in the volume and is structured similarly to the longer sagas. It follows the actions of Chief Hrafnkel (a real historical person) and the conflict that emerges between him and Bjarni. The feud begins when Hrafnkel's kills Bjarni's kinsman who rode Hrafnkel's special horse. This story introduces key features of Icelandic society: the Althing, the Law-Rock, lawyers, and lengthy family feuds. The story of "Thorstein the Staff Struck" follows similar lines. A vicious feud begins at a horse fight when Thorstein does not avenge his honor when Thord (a servant of another man named Bjarni) strikes him with a horse goad.

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