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Bloodsong

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Editor's Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

5

Bloodtide was good. This is better. It's the best thing I've read by Melvin Burgess. He returns to his re-casting of the Volsunga Saga into a future where genetic engineering has made the distinctions between species and the organic and the technological almost obsolete: nearly everyone is half human and half beast; machines feel and grow; and living flesh acquires the physical strength and invulnerability of metal. Burgess spends less time here than he did in *Bloodtide* on the particulars of this world. Instead, he concentrates on the working out of the fate of his central protagonists, figures who bstride the landscape of the novel like the heroes of the ancient Scandinavian myths on which he draws. You wouldn't think the appearance of the god Odin in a futuristic novel would work, but it does - and brilliantly. Burgess has a real talent, even relish, for describing violence, and the novel has its moments of stomach churning evisceration; but what this novel displays is a more subtle surgery: the ability to lay bare the souls of men and women driven by elemental desires, for power and for love, and trapped by the vagaries of fate or the unforeseen snares of their own devising. Burgess does this partly by creating a distinctive heightened rhetorical voice or, more accurately, voices. He uses his familiar device of switching point of view from one character to another, which, in the past, has sometimes been obtrusive. Here, overlaid by an ironic narration, it is seamless. The language, as you would expect, is often street conversational and scatological - Burgess uses 'fuck' when it's necessary; but it is peppered with vivid imagery and eloquent passages of question and affirmation on the great questions of human existence, delivered with an adolescent intensity that fits both the age of his characters and his readers. This is a novel that matches the power of its ancient inspiration and remakes it for another time.

Running Order:

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