



The Monstrous Child

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[Clive Barnes](#) [3]

~~Editor's Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

5

Inhabiting the same world as Simon's **Mortal Gods** series, this remarkable first young adult novel, while also dealing with Norse mythology, goes somewhere a lot darker. It follows its heroine, Hel, from birth to the destruction of Asgard. Hel tells her own story in the tones of a modern adolescent, barely concealing her bitterness with sharp sarcasm and early onset world-weariness. She has much to be bitter about. The despised off-spring of giants and gods, she is the daughter of the trickster Loki, with a wolf and a snake for brothers, and the possessor of gangrenous 'corpse legs' which are in a state of suspended foul-smelling decay, an indication of her prophesied role as Queen of the dead and harbinger of Asgard's downfall. After reluctantly accepting her fate, for there is no way out from that realm, she makes the most of it, presiding with a mixture of pride and disgust. It is not a tale packed with incident, although Hel does (precipitously and unwisely) fall in love, but what does take place is of apocalyptic proportions. The power of the novel is in its compelling evocation of the cruel and grotesque world of the Norse imagination seen through the eyes of a sly and revenging god who remains a deeply wounded child. The narrative voice is so unexpected that it jars somewhat for the first one or two chapters, but that quickly fades and the novel's power is drawn from a mix of modern thought patterns and speech rhythms with the acrid language of desolation, including unobtrusive phrasing and word blending that recalls Anglo Saxon poetry: 'carrion too rank for ravens?', 'tomb-home?', 'hurled me here?', 'landing hard, hooves smashing rocks?', 'raven-dark world?', and so on. The result is a novel in the service of a vision of a world that is utterly other but made breathtakingly immediate. It's a stunning debut for an older audience.

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