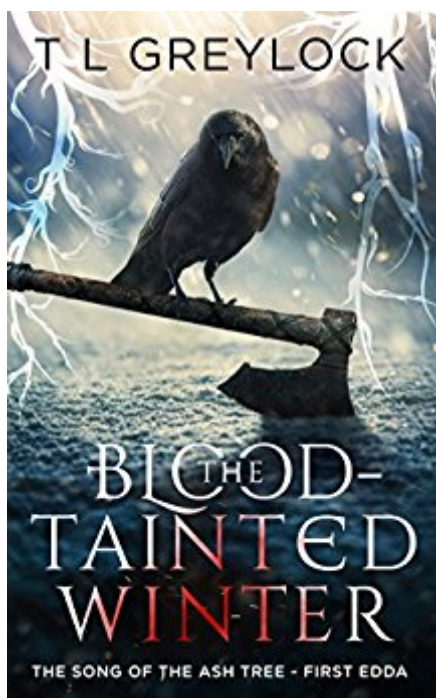


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# The Blood-Tainted Winter (The Song Of The Ash Tree Book 1)



## Synopsis

“The Blood-Tainted Winter has everything SFF readers could possibly want, and more. A Norse fantasy as epic as it is immersive, T. L. Greylock’s debut tells of feuds and friendships (and more feuds) amid legends of devils and deities that arise as organically from the evocative Scandinavian vistas as steam from a geyser. Raef’s tale evokes a vivid sense of place and time that thoroughly immerses the reader in a land of gods, battle and betrayal. a singularly kickass novel. • Fantasy-Faction Raef Skallagrim wants to take the sea road. His ship is fast and sleek, his crew skilled and eager, and they will seek out new lands and win fame in the eyes of the gods. But Raef’s father refuses to allow the journey and when a stranger brings word that the king is dead and a gathering has been called to choose a successor, Raef must set aside his dream for his duty to his ancestral lands and his father. When factions split at the gathering to choose a successor, Raef finds himself mired in bloodshed and treachery. Forced to make an uneasy alliance with a man he does not trust, Raef must navigate the tides of a war among three kings while seeking revenge for cold-blooded murder. But winter has come early to Midgard, and even the gods will feel the cold.

## Book Information

File Size: 2597 KB

Print Length: 368 pages

Simultaneous Device Usage: Unlimited

Publisher: Grass Crown Press (November 20, 2015)

Publication Date: November 20, 2015

Sold by: Â Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B0166PLKL0

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Enabled

Screen Reader: Supported

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #33,637 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #48

Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Science Fiction & Fantasy > Fantasy > Myths & Legends >

Norse & Viking #48 in [Books > Science Fiction & Fantasy > Fantasy > Myths & Legends > Norse & Viking](#) #264 in [Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Science Fiction & Fantasy > Fantasy > Historical](#)

## Customer Reviews

In Midgard, the king is dead and a gathering is convened to choose the successor. Raef is forced to stanch his desire to discover new lands and must attend the gathering with his father, Lord of Vannheim. When murder disrupts the search for a new king, war breaks out and Raef burns with a new desire: a thirst for revenge. "You know as well as I the rumours of battle in the northern lands, of foul betrayal and cursed blood." Greylock effortlessly portrays the gritty world of war in this sweeping Nordic fantasy. Against this backdrop, we follow Raef's struggle to forget youthful dreams of adventure and glory, and face a stark reality of grief, revenge, duty and power. Difficult lessons follow, and Raef has to make tough decisions about trust and loyalty. In short, he must grow up, and quickly. "You cannot please all men, Raef." "I do not wish to. But neither can I only please myself." What I enjoyed most about this story was the way in which the mythology was such an integral part of the plot. The gods have a strong presence and their machinations are evident in a number of mysterious ways that unfold in a tantalising fashion. One concern of such a plot device is a potential lack of character agency, a result of determinism. Like puppets on strings. Not so. These characters have the choice to stand up to the gods, or accept their will, and therefore do have an effect on the world. To be sure, the gods and half gods throw obstacles and advantages in the characters' path, and it makes for an intriguing story; one filled with mystery. As the story goes on, and particularly in the second half, more mysteries and revelations unfold. There are twists and turns that will surprise and spellbind readers. From about the two-thirds mark, I was completely captivated by the story and the book became unputdownable. I also enjoyed the setting descriptions. Greylock's writing is superb, and she describes the places and events in such a vivid way that it was a pleasure to 'see' Midgard in my mind's eye. "... the day grew dark and the sky filled with thrumming, writhing clouds that soon burst open, sending a fast and furious snowfall to the ground. Winds howled through the trees, blowing snow in all directions..." I'd recommend *The Blood-Tainted Winter* to fans of Norse mythology and Vikings. I'd also recommend it to fans of George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire*, as there are some story elements that are similar (in a highly enjoyable way) and such fans will appreciate them. *The Blood-Tainted Winter* is the first book in *The Song of the Ash Tree* series. For more information, visit T.L. Greylock's site.

T. L. Greylock has created something special in the fantasy genre. Weaving known Norse mythology with clever world-building; an exceptional story of revenge and self realization is begun. Raef Skallagrim - the First Edda's protagonist - is believable and flawed as his journey begins. I enjoyed, personally, not being able to identify very well with the story's main character in the beginning. This allowed time for me to grow along with Raef and eventually sway my feelings to align more so with his own. My initial separation from the protagonist was offset by Greylock's wonderful and varied supporting cast. Namely the characters Varke and Siv. Both bring about a grounding voice for Raef's actions and provide moments of genuine warmth and humor in a sometimes bleak and often times harsh land. The supernatural aspects of the story are subtle and when first encountered can conceivably be attributed to the religion and culture of the Norse setting. Needless to say it becomes indisputable as the story goes on, and the transition is handled beautifully. This is an amazing debut for Greylock and I look forward to getting into the Second Edda: The Hills of Home.

I'd never read a Norse-fantasy so I thought reading this one could be somewhat refreshing. Plus, I really like the cover, I think it's great and that's what attracted me to check out this book in the first place. As for the name of the book - It feels like "A Song of Ice and Fire" could have been perfect for this book, as both ice and fire are very prominent here. Unfortunately some unknown guy used this name for his series ;) It was a fast-paced and gritty story about Vikings, with enough battles, interesting characters, and a little bit of magic. As far as I know Viking stories don't have a lot of magic in them, so I hadn't expected to find a lot of magic here. Normally I'm ok with fantasy books in which magic is rare and we don't see too much of it, so it didn't bother me. Magic is a virtue of the gods, who mainly stay in the background and don't intervene in the realm of men, so there's a little bit of magic here. Having said that, I think adding more fantastic elements could have done a good service to the book. Plot The book has a good pacing from the very beginning until the end, so even though it's a relatively short book enough things happen throughout the book. The first 1/3 felt like an exposition and only after the first third things got more interesting plot-wise. While interesting stuff happened in the second third of the book, it felt uneven as there were very few good chapters among many chapters that were just ok. The last third was good all the way with interesting revelations and plot that kept me captivated. The book was wrapped-up pretty good with a satisfying ending, while there are a few loose ends that keep you wanting to read the next book. Unlike most books I've read the plot is not what drives the characters, but the characters, and to be more precise Raef,

is what drives the whole plot. Joe Abercrombie, who is one of my favorite authors also writes this way, though in his case he does that with more than just one character. Writing style  
The writing style is quite good, and shines when it comes to descriptions, which feel very vivid. While the descriptions are great, the dialogues are just ok, but they get better in the second half of the book. The action scenes were really well-written. Even though writing fantasy books on a high octane with tons of action might be far from the author's style, I'm convinced she can write such books really well. While the writing style is quite good, the story-telling craft was just ok, it's fine considering it's a debut novel. No doubt that with more experience her story-telling techniques will improve, and she has a potential to grow into really good author. Characterization Raef is a very reckless guy at the beginning and I didn't like him until I was ~35-40% through, and I couldn't see how such an idiot can carry the whole book on his shoulders, but he evolves and turns into a very calculated guy. Plus, he appeared to be a great tactician who has a great future in special ops :). I think Raef is a good character, he's flawed and feels very real. Actually I think Raef's characterization had been done well. Great job here. More characters join him on his journey  
Vakre is an interesting character who has the wits to show Raef how wrong he is. He's a quite good character, though I think he could have been portrayed a bit better. Gudrik, the poet/warrior is a really interesting character and very well portrayed, even though we don't see him that much. Unfortunately Siv and Eira felt a bit flat. I liked Siv more, but they both didn't add too much to the story. It's surprising considering she had done a much better job with the male characters than the female characters. I enjoyed reading The Blood-Tainted Winter and I'm convinced the next book will be better. It appears like the gods will have a greater role in it which is great. 3.75/5.

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