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Brian Wood , Riccardo Burchielli (Illustrator) , Fiona Staples (Illustrator) , Becky Cloonan (Illustrator)

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The fifth volume of Northlanders finds DMZ artist Riccardo Burchielli joining Brian Wood's Viking epic. Opening in 9th century Norway, Erik, a blacksmith, meets Ingrid, a girl enslaved by corrupt Christian missionaries. When Erik liberates Ingrid from her captors, they set out to live by the "old ways," hoping to find something – anything – they can feel is their own. The Church will not let them go that easily, though, and sets out to bring them back by any means necessary, driving Erik to adopt a scorched earth policy their pursuers.

Northlanders, Vol. 5: Metal and Other Stories Details

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From Reader Review Northlanders, Vol. 5: Metal and Other Stories for online ebook

James DeSantis says

It's funny. The main story in this titled is named "Metal" and while good is the weakest part for me. The two other stories here which one focuses on just a one shot of travelers going to a new land and ending up with a nice twist. The second is at the end when a old man fishing in the icelands finds a dead girl under the ice. This started off mehish but by the end I really felt some strong emotional moments hitting here.

The main story here focuses on a Viking slaughtering every Christian he sees. When he meets a nun who is abused by the order he decides to take matters in his own hands and kill everyone near her. Once that happens they send more and more christians out to meet him and kill him. That doesn't turn out well till they send a hunter of sorts to retrieve the Christian killer.

What I liked: Loved the one shot at the start. It also helps the art was done by Fiona Staples. I also REALLY like the ending to the girl in the ice arc at the end. Very powerful. The Metal storyline stays interesting and some great moments but overall the pacing was a bit iffy.

What I didn't like: The main issue with Metal is it got to "God" like. Powers, witchcraft, things began to come into play I didn't care for. Also the wrap up was far to neat for this series and felt out of place.

I really enjoyed the ending and beginning of this so much and Metal was solid enough to bump this to a 4. I'd say Volume 1 and 4 are still the best but this was a fine addition to this series. Very few bad stories throughout this long series, which is very very refreshing to see.

Dave Harrison says

Fairly awesome, though not as awesome as Plague Widow.

sj says

I LOVED Fiona Staples' story, it was perfectly creepy.

Lost interest about half way through the titular Metal (the faces were weird in that one and I don't even know why, but the heavy handed anti-Christianity theme bothered me [though I am not Christian, myself]), though I gained that interest back with The Girl in the Ice.

Meena says

Honestly, this one was my least favourite volume. It wasn't terrible, but it wasn't like the other volumes.

The Sea Road, while being very short, was actually interesting and a bit sad. The main protagonist Dag is an old sailor who seems to never get anything worthwhile out of his adventures in the sea. So he decides to deviate from that path and heads farther into the unknown, further angering his already furious crew, and ends up stranded on the shores of Greenland. He loses half of his crew on the journey and ends up killing the rest upon his arrival in Greenland, only to be killed himself by a group of natives. Poor Dag. A depressing ending to his depressing life.

Metal was just meh. It was the longest of this volume and the least interesting. The anti-Christian vibe was a little too much (I'm not even Christian...), not to mention too ridiculous. Everything in that story was ridiculous! The main character, his partner, the antagonist -- the whole damn story! Not to mention the art was a little too weird... not my favourite. In summary, I didn't care for it.

The Girl in the Ice is what saved this entire volume from getting a 1.5 star. It was sad and unfair! Set in Iceland, it is about an isolated fisherman who finds a young girl frozen in the ice and decides to 'take care of her' (find out what happened to her), only to be caught and then accused of her murder. Even though the family of the dead girl are aware that he's not the culprit, in the end, he is still found guilty by the community and is put to death as punishment. It was a depressing conclusion. But honestly, after having read most of this series, what else is new?!

Elizabeth says

I liked the Sea Road and The Girl in the Ice best.

Sam Quixote says

"Metal" contains the stories of a merchant captain in need of adventure, taking his crew off to distant shores and seeing strange creatures; an old man living in the mountains discovering the frozen body of a young girl beneath a lake; and a Viking Bonnie-and-Clyde taking on the anything Christian in their land.

It's this last story that's the longest, taking in 5 issues, while the frozen girl is 2 issues and the merchant captain is a one shot. The book is self-contained so it could be read as a standalone book despite being Book 5 in the series, the only thing you need to know is that the stories take place around 1000AD (often give or take a couple hundred years) and they take place in the North (Scandinavia, Iceland, Faroe Islands, etc).

There isn't a bad story in the bunch, all are excellent fun to read though the Bonnie-and-Clyde story, called "Metal", does include a lot of magic into the story which Brian Wood hasn't done before in the series so far. I didn't really like it, not just because Riccardo Burchielli's artwork is sub-par and makes some of the magic scenes even more confusing to understand, but because I think the series has enough wonder and brilliance without reverting to fantasy tropes.

Magic aside, it's still a great story to see a young Viking couple attacking burgeoning Christian settlements in guerrilla style while also showing that even then the Christian religion was corrupt and full of hypocrisy. Also, the main character has strange hallucinations believing an old Norse God commands him to rid the land of Christians and I found those sequences particularly memorable. The magic works in the story quite well until the final confrontation and then it becomes distinctly manga-esque and silly.

The other two stories are fine too, not up to the standard of the longer narrative "Metal" but still nice additions to the book. Fiona Staples and Becky Cloonan's artwork in the stories are fantastic, especially Staples' who manages to capture the breath-taking scope of a single man living on a mountain range in the middle of an Icelandic winter.

If you love Northlanders as much as I do, you'll love this volume as well. My own personal gripes about this book aside, it's a great book and the series is definitely worth investigating if you're new to this. In fact, this is the perfect place to start! "Metal" rocks!

Nancy says

This review (plus Book Four) can be found on my blog: <https://graphicnovelty2.com/2018/09/1...>

After how much I loved *The Plague Widow*, this book turned out to be disappointing in comparison. *Metal* is the long middle story, with two much shorter stories book-ending it.

The Sea Road

Illustrated by Fiona Staples who is now known for the *Saga* series, this short story takes place on the open sea in AD 760. Captain Dag is running cargo along the coast when he suddenly decides to turn the tiller and sends him and his crew westward towards the unknown. Putting his men at risk on a moment's whim, he wishes for greater glory but instead encounters storms, mutiny and crew members experiencing hallucinations and going berserker. When they finally make landfall on Greenland, the few surviving members are met with treachery by the captain and their epic journey is for naught. This was an interesting take to show that many unknown sailors died ignobly with their discoveries unrecorded.

Metal

I recently read *Boxers & Saints*, about how Christianity changed China forever, and how many fought the new religion as it significantly changed their culture and resulted in many old traditions being outlawed. So it was quite a coincidence that a week later I read another graphic novel story about Christianity changing Norway in AD 700.

Erik is a young blacksmith who is tied to traditional Norse Gods and is against his settlement allowing a new Christian church to be built. He watches as priests and nuns move in, along with a teenaged albino girl whom the nuns mistreat. In the night Erik burns down the church but first rescues the girl Ingrid and they run off together. The story then becomes a Bonnie and Clyde caper, with a strange magical realism aspect, that doesn't match the rest of the series of realistic fiction. There was no subtlety, it was just Eric slaughtering any Christians he encountered, so the reader could not take his side at all in his wanting the Nordic Viking traditions to live on.

The art by Riccardo Burchielli was awful. Not only was I unable to get into the story, but the people he drew were grotesque looking. Erik is drawn as a hulking troll, not even resembling a human. Ingrid is drawn slightly better, but there are some sequences that she was drawn so horribly, and I didn't understand why. In the concluding pages, Erik is drawn so differently that I question if the same artist drew him.

The Girl In The Ice

The best of the three stories is illustrated by Becky Cloonan and is a character study of an Icelandic fisherman set in AD 1240. Jon is an elderly widower who discovers a young girl frozen in the lake ice. He carves her out and brings her back home to investigate who she is and how she died. With no obvious trauma on her body to explain her death, he doesn't understand why no alarm in the nearby settlement would have been sounded when a girl went missing. Soon some patrolling soldiers discover Jon trying to hide the body and take him into custody believing he is the killer. He is taken into town to be tried for the murder, and we learn how the girl came to be in the ice. It ends on quite the melancholy note.

I have the last two volumes on hold and look forward to wrapping this series up. My only real complaint is that the art in the various volumes is so inconsistent. While I liked the first and last illustrators in this book and the cover art throughout by Massimo Carnevale was top notch, when a story has sub par art the entire story suffers.

Aaron says

Another strikeout in this series I am finding so overrated. This book collects three shorter stories from the Northlanders "universe," though after this volume I think it's safe to say there is no universe. No consistency, no unity. It's just a bunch of random ideas Brian Wood had, damned if they even work together as a whole.

My reason for saying this is the story Metal, which is the bulk of this book. Before Metal, Wood's Northlanders was inconsistent in terms of its storytelling, but at least one thing seemed to always remain true: it attempted to depict real Viking life. No big crazy myths, no gods or spirits or valkyries. Just real Viking-era people and their lives. But then Metal comes along and throws that whole thing out. It's straight-up supernatural. It blatantly reveals the existence of magic in this world. At first I thought the magic was just going to be based on a shroom hallucinations by the main character, but no. The magic shit really happens.

Now, if this was some sort of interesting examination of Norse beliefs via a magically realistic story, I might be able to get behind it. But no. It's a boilerplate revenge/killing-spree story that feels like Viking-era Natural Born Killers, and then also magic happens. I can't even wrap my head around why someone would flush their entire grounded approach down the toilet for a story this boring, but hey, Wood's willing to do pretty much anything just to pay homage to another genre.

The other two stories in here aren't great, either. First is The Sea Road, a story of the first Viking to sail west into the unknown. It's a single-issue story and thus too compact to be effective. There's not enough setup, world- or character-building, so we're basically left with a rushed story of a man going crazy.

Then there's The Girl In The Ice, a frustrating story of a man who finds a dead girl in the ice where he fishes and then gets blamed for her murder. This is 2-issue story, but it still feels ultra rushed. We're given no real chance to learn about him or the dead girl. Everything's just barreled past, wrapped up in one convenient scene, and then it's over.

I guess I'm this far along so I'm going to finish these books (I owned the whole thing for years and never got around to reading it), but I'm not looking forward to them. What a deeply squandered opportunity this series is.

Laurance says

I picked this book up mainly because of my love of Black Metal, and the advertised ties between the genre and this book. And those ties are there, the principle story being about a pair of Norwegians who burn churches and kill Christians in defense of native Paganism and the old ways. Varg would be proud. And its a fun story, delivering a sword and sorcery narrative for the most part.

Unfortunately, since Christianity eventually won, the author has to do something with the ending. It didn't happen in a generation, so the author could have dodged it that way, but he didn't. Without putting out spoilers, I'll just say he didn't end it at all. He's hardly the first comic writer to have problems with endings, but its becoming an increasingly common and infuriating problem. And my two stars reflects that.

There are two other stories, the first a pretty forgettable tale of an obsessed small time longboat captain, and the second an old man trying to figure out the cause of death of a young woman he found frozen in a lake. The second story is the strongest in the book, working perfectly as a short story about a community's need for truth and justice, and how it doesn't necessarily match up with objective truth, and questions if it really needs to. If the whole book were this strong, I probably would have given it 3 or 4 stars, but it wasn't.

Gavin says

Yet another strong entry in the Series by Brian Wood, who's obviously immensely talented. 3 stories in the 5th Volume, Girl in the Ice - about just that, a girl in the ice, and the old man who finds her; The Sea Road - about a ship captain who decides to strike out Westward into the open sea where none have ventured before, and what that brings him and his crew; and Metal, a 5 parter about a young Blacksmith and girl who find themselves together and pillaging/destroying all the Christianity that has crept into the Northlands.

Girl in the Ice is simple in the beauty of a solitary man at the end of his days who fishes and finds the body of a young girl, becomes fixated on discovering how she ended up there, which puts his own life at risk. I really enjoyed this one for the sort of stoic dignity it gave the old man in the later years of his life, strong in ways younger people could never imagine.

The Sea Road was an interesting take on the ship captain who said Fuck this, I'm going to do something bigger than haul cargo, and headed West into the unknown world. Along the way, he runs afoul of his crew, and they all come across strange creatures, feelings, and places until they reach the end of their journey in a final way.

Metal is a good solid one, but the main character, Erik, is so dumb and high on mushrooms half the time, it did take away some of the dignity and grace I've felt from other characters. However I did really enjoy Wood's examination of Christianity in Norway in 1000AD era, and how corrupt and evil it was in exterminating the Old Ways from the Viking world. I also liked how Wood didn't let the Old Ways get off without a bit of a look at their downsides too. There's a bit more mysticism here, but that's OK for the mostpart until the end when it kind of goes off the rails.

All in all a strong collection just like the rest. I'm sad that I'm nearing the end of this Series. It's been solid gold really. But I look forward to the last few Volumes, and then getting to read them all over again!

Angie says

Synopsis: *"The fifth volume of Northlanders finds DMZ artist Riccardo Burchielli joining Brian Wood's Viking epic. Opening in 9th century Norway, Erik, a blacksmith, meets Ingrid, a girl enslaved by corrupt Christian missionaries. When Erik liberates Ingrid from her captors, they set out to live by the "old ways," hoping to find something – anything – they can feel is their own. The Church will not let them go that easily, though, and sets out to bring them back by any means necessary, driving Erik to adopt a scorched earth policy their pursuers."*

My Review: I have been very slowly following the Northlanders series and have finally picked this one up. I do find it odd that this is a bind up of several single issues but in reality there isn't any kind of cohesive story to several of them. It is several individual stories, without any real connection other than the setting. I keep waiting for something to pull this series together and make connections with all these different characters and time periods. I will continue the series since I am nearly done and I do like the setting.

David Accampo says

Seriously... this series just keeps getting better and better. I truly appreciate what Wood has accomplished here, jumping around to different time periods and different casts of characters, telling all sorts of tales within this particular culture, location, and era. METAL contains three different stories. All are fairly grim, but they're so damn good you just don't mind. Very sad to hear this series is coming to an end, but I'm excited there will still be a volume or two left for me to read. ;)

Harley says

Very good book, really realistic with the pagans killing the Christians, and the last bit was a bit sad how the old man got thrown into jail for a crime he did not commit overall great book art was amazing story that you could follow.

Sud666 says

A very, odd and interesting tale. Erik the blacksmith, from 700AD Norway, decides to resist the encroachment of the Christians. He communes with the old gods, Hulda, in particular and goes to war against the Christians. He meets an albino woman and together they wander around attacking Christian churches and settlements. The story has some really strange things from old gods, to trippy visions and a draugur (Norse mythos undead). It is sometimes hard to tell what is real and what isn't. The artwork under the new artist is just ok-which bring be to a long standing complaint with this series-it's is deficient in terms of art. But, a great tale of a Norseman who keeps faith with the old gods, and loves his albino woman. The rest I leave to you to decide. Is the draugur really an undead? Does Erik really see Hulda? Is what sometimes happens..really happening? The first part strongly implies the uses of mushrooms, so what we "see" is always debatable. Good story, not the best artwork. I don't know why Mr. Wood is unable to find a good artist..the covers are amazing. Use that artist for God's sake.

Aildiin says

weakest Northlander book so far for me...
