



Bloody Hel

Clayton McCormack

Clayton McCormack, Illustrator

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A Wave Blue World (Nov 16, 2021)

Hardcover \$24.99 (120pp)

978-1-949518-15-3

Norse gods and ancient Vikings square off inside a World War I battle zone in the action-packed graphic novel *Bloody Hel*.

In 1917, in Belgium, a battlefield explosion awakens five Viking warriors who fell afoul of the Norse goddess Hel a thousand years before, and were cursed to eternal sleep. Meanwhile, Hel and a fellow god, Fenrir, commiserate: Hel is angry about Odin plucking dead heroes for Valhalla while she makes do with less desirable deceased people to inhabit her own realm; Fenrir waits, bound but growing more powerful, eager to destroy the human world and begin Ragnarok. Hel asks the five warriors to stop Fenrir, but four of them embark on a path to conquer humanity, while one, Astrior, seeks revenge against Hel herself. Lars, a human soldier, convinces Astrior to forget vengeance and help defeat Fenrir, and she in turn recruits her fellow Vikings to assist in their effort to avert the apocalypse.

The book combines Norse myths, World War I combat, and elements of horror into a fast-moving fantasy. It's an adrenaline rush of a story that still makes room for developing its characters' motivations and personalities. Though it's an inventive tale, with conversations that ring true throughout and resonant statements about the futility of war, the art is an even bigger attraction. Whether through a nine-foot-tall Viking warrior, a resilient human soldier, or the demon-zombie skeletal heralds of Fenrir, the book's confident, aggressive lines and colors propel the action and result in memorable images. *Bloody Hel* is bloody good graphic entertainment.

PETER DABBENE (November / December 2021)

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