



Dragon's Way: Book Two: The Chronicle of the Ostmen

Ian McKay Nunn

Xlibris AU (Aug 24, 2022)

Softcover \$17.99 (382pp)

978-1-66983-035-1

Dragon's Way is an epic historical novel in which Vikings battle with Saxons for control of medieval Albion.

The Great Heathen Army marches on in Ian McKay Nunn's medieval historical novel *Dragon's Way*.

Hygel, son of Guthorm, returns from battle to find that his keep has been raided by men who were once loyal to him. Upon tracking the deserters and meting out retribution, he joins his father's army to march on Northumbria. Guthorm is intent on securing the oaths of those Danes who claim lordship in the north so that he may use their combined might to conquer the Saxon kingdoms of Mercia and Wessex. The Saxon kings will not give up their lands and wealth without bloodshed. Thus begins an epic of Danish strength and Saxon determination.

The book is steeped in medieval history, culture, and religion. The ruins of Roman architecture create interesting barriers to movement, especially when it comes to river crossings. Old English spellings for place names are used throughout, lending credence and atmosphere to the book, if also necessitating the extensive use of the included place-names index. In addition to the Danes being an invading force, much of the tension with the Saxons rests on their differences in religion, Christianity versus Norse paganism. The story incorporates Norse oaths and rites in a seamless manner and devotes equal attention to discussions of Christian customs from both Danish and Saxon perspectives.

The scale of the book is vast. Spanning almost a decade, its story alternates between checking in on various Saxon figures, including Alfred the Great, as they strategize on how best to engage, and following the Danish army as they camp in abandoned villages and create clearings. It also showcases the ways the war affected the nonfighting folk on its periphery, sharing their fear and apprehension as they flee the invaders to little avail.

Knowing that a marching army needs food, shelter, clothing, clean water, and medical care, the narrative also covers the logistics of moving and housing a column of thousands of men, women, and children. Its details are ample, and they extend to the realities and brutalities of war, including the pillaging of sacred sites, the taking of prisoners and slaves, the stench of diseased flesh, and the crush and splatter of the battlefield.

Guthorm's familiarity with the other warlords' temperaments couples with the information that he gathers through his emissaries. As the novel progresses, it's clear that he's a strong tactical threat who knows that gathering a horde takes patience, money, and strength of mind and arms. Through numerous negotiations with Danish warlords, several tense discussions with Saxons, and more than a few bloody skirmishes, Hygel, Guthorm, and the jarls of the heathen army secure Danish dominance across large swaths of Saxon territory.

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DONTANÁ MCPHERSON-JOSEPH (May 15, 2023)

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