

## From Bird Mountain

**Lyle Fugleberg**

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*From Bird Mountain is a fresh tale of the Viking world.*

Lyle Fugleberg's historical novel *From Bird Mountain* is set in the Viking age and tells a familiar tale from a different, more realistic, point of view.

Brothers Gyrth and Gunnar own neighboring farms on Bird Mountain in Norway. A land dispute between Gunnar and the local earl leads to violence. Gyrth learns that his brother and entire family (with the exception of a toddler, Sigurth) have been slaughtered. That Sigurth is alive is unknown to Gyrth, though. Sigurth is raised by kind foster parents and is eventually reunited with Gyrth and Sveyin, a cousin near his age. The book spans half a century, following the lives of the two families into the next generation.

Sigurth and his relatives have no taste for raiding or pillaging; this sets the book apart from standard Viking fare. Like the vast majority of their countrymen, they are farmers and market traders. The novel's spark is lit by Gyrth's desire to wrest his dead brother's land back from the earl who took it, and Sigurth's reappearance awakens the haunting notion that other members of the large family may have been taken and sold into servitude.

This fresh, sturdy plotline often disappears in the telling. Though the main characters are farmers, most of their time is spent in battles or at sea. As bloody battles come one after another and voyages and boat building take up more and more pages, the characters are diminished, becoming pieces on a large game board. The homes, wives, children, and way of life that Sigurth and his clan are fighting for are seldom seen. The book's battles and voyages become repetitive, and the central plot thread is lost.

The lean, unemotional style of classic Nordic literature is here, but the mood is repeatedly spoiled by ill-chosen anachronisms. The prose is overreliant on lengthy, aimless dialogue that bogs its pace and hinders character development. Sigurth, Gyrth, and Sveyin emerge as main characters, as do Sigurth's foster parents, but the remainder of a fairly large cast blurs together.

As Sigurth finds himself increasingly engaged in foreign trade and voyages of discovery, the narrative strays further from its original theme, straining to become an adventure tale. This turn toward a standard Viking adventure is less compelling than the story's original premise, while the layering on of a second generation extends the book without adding resonance to the story.

*From Bird Mountain is a fresh tale of the Viking world.*

SUSAN WAGGONER (October 2, 2018)

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