

The Chronicle of the Ostmen: Book One: Maelstrom

Ian McKay Nunn

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The Chronicle of the Ostmen is a fascinating historical novel; set in the mid-ninth century, it follows as the Vikings invade what are now the British Isles.

An Irish boy is kidnapped and enlisted into a Viking army in Ian McKay Nunn's historical novel *The Chronicle of the Ostmen*.

Set during the ninth century, when the Vikings were a powerful force, the novel begins as the invading forces of the Ostmen plunder other kingdoms in search of wealth and slaves. They are led by Ímar the Boneless. In one of Eireann's kingdoms in 869, Mael, a boy of noble heritage, is taken as one of their slaves.

The story is led by suspenseful twists, beginning when Mael is taken. He struggles to accept the capture of his people, and wrestles with his inability to help them. Instead, he awaits his fate. He becomes part of a ship's crew, headed by Sidroc, one of Ímar's warlords. Aboard, Mael witnesses a variety of the Viking invasions of British kingdoms, all leading up to Alfred the Great's ascension.

Still, Mael fades into the background as the story progresses; it shifts attention to the conversations and experiences of Ímar's men, including a shipmaster, a commander, and a skilled fighter. Graphic details about their gruesome invasions are a frequent feature, showing women screaming, men stomping on human throats, and soldiers being killed; one man is stabbed in the face, and another (a lord) is flogged and killed.

More compelling are the book's religious details, as of those around Norse mythology, with its ideas about the world of the dead. Two straightforward black-and-white maps with clear labels help when it comes to tracking the book's place names, and details about the ancient kingdoms' economic activities and weapons help to bring the settings to life. And the book's language is also formal and archaic, further vivifying its sense of the past; terms are explained in context where necessary. Only the illustrated renderings of the characters and scenes are not useful; many appear later than the prose they're meant to complement, while others aren't made to relate to the events at all, as with a depiction of figures from Irish myths that's shared amid coverage of the ship's crew.

Set in the mid-ninth century, the historical novel *The Chronicle of the Ostmen* follows the bloody Viking invasions of what are now the British Isles.

EDITH WAIRIMU (August 10, 2021)

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