Clarion Review

Young Adult Fiction

Vimp the Viking's Epic Voyage
Peter L. Ward
Trafford
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★★★☆☆
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In the small eighth-century Viking settlement that Vimp calls home, life is relatively simple: when he's not building boats, he's being trained to loot, pillage, and kill as his elders do. The only trouble is, Vimp doesn't want any part of it; he doesn't even want to hunt, and prefers eating fish or vegetables to killing animals. That's why his parents call him a wimp, or "vimp." When he and several friends are forced into an aggressive combat training regimen, they decide to steal the funeral ship they've been building for the village chief and make an escape. Thus begins *Vimp the Viking's Epic Voyage*.

Of course, an epic voyage with no girls along wouldn't be much fun. As fate would have it, Vimp has befriended Freya, a woodland beauty who can charm animals and whose dearest friend, Emma, a slave kidnapped from Saxon, England, is slated to be sacrificed on the chief's funeral pyre. So it's a good-sized party that sets sail with angry villagers chasing them. Along the way the group battles storms, defies an angry sea god, and never seems to run out of food—an indication that Freya may have more power than she's admitting to. When they make landfall in Saxony, Emma helps the citizens to see that her friends are harmless and that they seek sanctuary and a new beginning. Then Freya mysteriously disappears.

Peter L. Ward has the makings of a great story here, and Steve Crisp's illustrations nicely complement Ward's work, bringing some of the characters and battles vividly to life. But Vimp suffers from editing problems, not only for punctuation but also for tone. Some of the humor here seems to target very young readers, while the battle scenes and themes of death and leaving home and family behind are appropriate for older kids. A few of the obstacles the characters face seem to dissolve with very little effort or explanation. The notion that Vimp's

parents meant to call him a wimp but Vikings can't pronounce a w correctly is a long way to go for a small joke, especially when throughout the rest of the book Ward's Vikings use w's correctly, and often.

That said, at the heart of this epic voyage is an exciting story about bravery and the many forms it can take, including the choice not to fight. It's also the first book in a trilogy, so there's time for the characters to grow and explore their new surroundings. It's not perfect, but *Vimp the Viking's Epic Voyage* is a strong start to what looks like a good series.

Heather Seggel