



## Speculative Fiction Book Review

Book Title	<b>Windborn</b>
Author	<b>Alex S Bradshaw</b>
Date	<b>May 2021</b>
Stars	

There are some books which snag you from the first page, plunging you into their world before you can catch your breath. Windborn is one of those books.

Edda is a Viking. She is a woman of enormous courage and resilience, she's been on raids to pillage foreign lands but her motives have always been about one thing; to obtain enough money so that she and her husband, Bjolfur, can buy their own farm. For me, the hook that engaged me from the start was the sympathy you feel for this woman when her husband dies and she's left homeless and penniless. The unfairness of her treatment leaves you rooting for her straight away. It's an indication of Alex Bradshaw's skill in the way he approaches the grief of his main character. In less skilled hands, Edda would be driven entirely by vengeance. Whilst this is true to some extent, Edda's character has greater depth and credibility. She finds difficulty in moving beyond her grief, there is not just loss but survivor guilt in play here. She is afraid of the sea, she holds it responsible for the loss of her husband. Vengeance is tempered with a need for justice and the lengths to which she goes to achieve it. These are examples of the rich complexity of this character.

Complexity which exists in all the other characters too. Valna is another character we see grow and who faces her own levels of suffering whilst offering enduring friendship to Edda. They become courageous warriors, always with the depth that makes them way more than your typical "kick-ass" female protagonist. A strength of Windborn is its rich diversity of female characters, such as Katja, Gerda and Alvilda.

There's a second reason for my love of this story. It's down to the immersive world of Viking culture. Again, the skill of the author here is in the subtlety of its treatment. I learned a huge amount about the Vikings but always through the medium of dramatic events in the narrative. There is no dumping of information and exposition here folks! You learn about the way some people are owned by powerful figures, and the hardships that can provoke, by the things that happen to Edda and her friends. You learn about Viking justice, a highly developed set of rules you might not imagine from such a violent people. This is world building with a historical perspective and must have required endless research – but it has paid off because the world building becomes a significant feature for the story's quality.

Yes, there are Vikings with superpowers. It makes for amazing fight sequences and lots of excitement and tension. But to highlight this feature above the others doesn't do this story justice. Windborn is a tale of grief, a need for wrongs to be righted, set in a world that enriches everything we learned at school. I cannot recommend it enough!