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Wolf Brother

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Editor's Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

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Set in the forests of north-west Europe - post-mammoths, pre-monarchs - **Wolf** Brother is the first book of the 'Chronicles of Ancient Darkness'. The opening of the novel is gripping in every sense: hero-to-be Torak's father is savaged, **Grendel**-like, by a demonic bear. In his last, guttering gasps, Fa(ther) warns his son that the Bear's power will grow with each kill and instructs his young son to find the Mountain of the World Spirit. Torak accepts. He will do it for his Father. He will do it for the Forest. The orphaned boy is soon befriended by an orphaned wolf cub and, although later accompanied by Renn, a runaway girl from a rival clan, the story's central focus is the growing bond of friendship between boy and baby wolf. There is plenty of page-turning drama in the story of their adventures - quite apart from the ever-present threat from Torak's beary nemesis. The undocumented world of the clan-people of six thousand years ago is vividly depicted in elegant prose, coloured with kennings like 'smoke-frost' and 'Thundering Wet' and alliterative chains such as 'the Bright-Beast-that-Bites-Hot'. The 'hunter-gatherers' are shown to be great survivors who know the medicinal properties of plants, are able to read animal tracks and can fashion fishing lines out of rawhide. In a world steeped in spirits and superstition, rather than brackened backdrop to the drama, the Forest is depicted as a sentient being. Needless to say, Torak succeeds in his quest, although in achieving his goal he is separated from his wolf cub companion. On the last page, however, in a final (melodramatic) flourish, Torak proclaims the absent animal his 'wolf brother'. And so this taut and ever-compelling book ends as it began - with a journey beckoning for both the living and the dead.

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