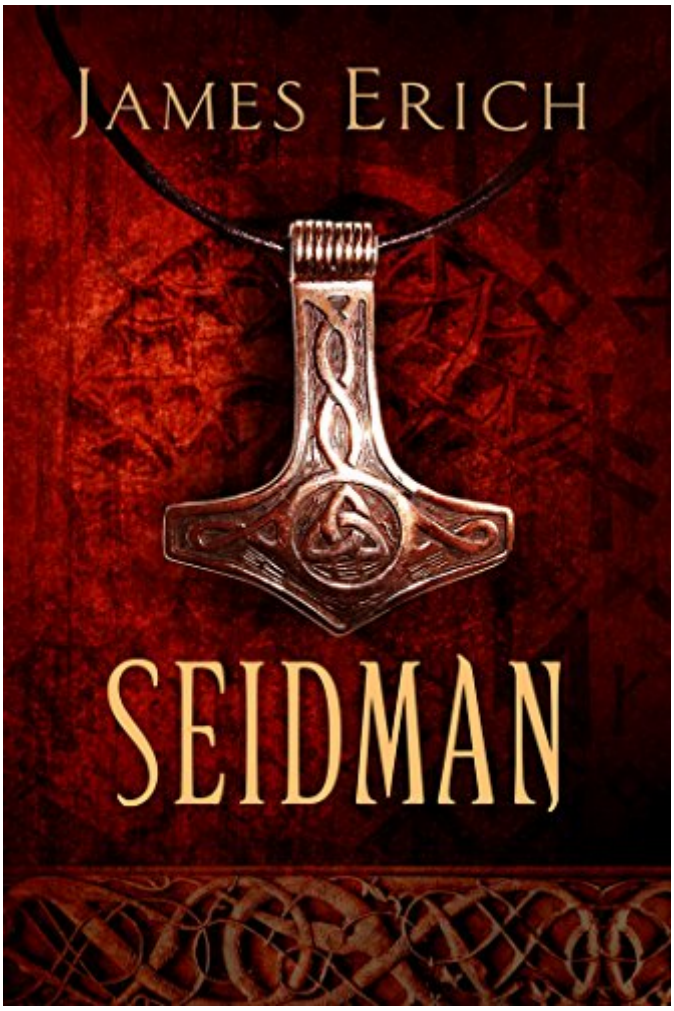
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Seidman



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Synopsis

In Viking Age Iceland, where boys are expected to grow into strong farmers and skilled warriors, there is little place for a sickly twelve-year-old boy like Kol until he catches the eye of a seiÃƒÂ -womanÃ¢â ¬â •a sorceressÃ¢â ¬â •and becomes her apprentice. Kol travels to the sorceressÃ¢â ¬â„¢s home, where her grandson, Thorbrand, takes Kol under his wing. Before long Kol discovers something else about himself that is differentÃ¢â ¬â •something else that sets him apart as unmanly: Kol has fallen in love with another boy.But the world is changing in ways that threaten those who practice the ancient arts. As KolÃ¢â ¬â„¢s new life takes him across the Norse lands, he finds that a new religion is sweeping through them, and King Olaf Tryggvason is hunting down and executing sorcerers. When a decades-old feud forces Thorbrand to choose between Kol and his duty to his kinsman, Kol finds himself cast adrift with only the cryptic messages of an ancient goddess to guide him to his destinyÃ¢â ¬â •and possibly to his death.Honorable Mention:Ã Â Best Gay Debut Novel/BookHonorable Mention:Ã Â Best LGBT Young Adult / Coming of Age

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Customer Reviews

I don’t do a whole lot of 5-star reviews, and while there were places where the dialogue felt a little "modern" to me, there was too much to love (and I was too easily sucked into the story) to let that drag it down. (It can--and has in other cases--been argued that the dialogue is "a translation" anyway. After all, the characters would be speaking Icelandic, not English, so why not translate their speech into "modern" English rather than have a bunch of stilted "old timey" speech? Especially in a book geared towards a YA audience, it makes sense to keep the language up to date.What really pushed this up to Five Stars was that the morning after I stayed up until the wee hours finishing it, I woke up looking forward to getting back to the novel to read the next chapter--only to realize "wait, there isn’t one, I finished that last night", which was followed by a deep sense of disappointment, because while the ending is satisfying, I still wanted *more*. (And without giving anything away, not only was the ending happily satisfying, but it was entirely realistic in terms of history and culture--which pretty much sums up the entire book.)Finding historical accuracy without feeling like I’ve been dropped into a history lesson is a real treat--and essentially why I picked up this particular book at this particular moment. (It’s been sitting on my Kindle for a while). The story-telling is wonderful, characters thoughtful and three dimensional, the plot *works*, and while the dialogue might a little "modern", it’s a good fit for the target audience. (That said, I’m an adult, and would recommend it to other adults interested in the culture or the era.)

A young adult novel stars Kol, a young man in Iceland in 994 AD, not far off the voyage Leif Erickson made to what we now call the Maritime Provinces in North America. He lives on a typical Icelandic sheep farm with his brother, mother and a father who disparages him as weak because he is subject to seizures at odd times. When the sorceress Alfdis visits his family, she recognizes his psychic potential and makes him her apprentice. This means he must live with her family, which suits him just fine as he is in love with the eldest son, Thorbrand.The two boys develop a strong relationship that has become sexual, but the old woman must take him to Norway to meet with the other leaders of the worship of the Old Gods in a time when the influence of the White Christ threatens to destroy it. King Olaf Tryggevesson is bent not so much on conversion of pagans but on conversion to dead of anyone who may pose a threat to his power. Kol manages to escape being burned alive and travels with his friend Ari until they find an opportunity to join the forces allied to defeat the opportunistic king. Who should arrive with the warriors but Kol’s love, Thorbrand.

Thorbrand is now a chieftain forced to marry so he can maintain the respect of his thingmen, or allies. Whether the two succeed and return to Iceland together is the aim of this excellent novel.The author’s meticulous research into the history of a brutal but exciting time and the way of life in Scandinavia is inspiriting, but it does not take away from the feeling that you know and understand Kol and the values he and Thorbrand must learn to accept. In a hypermasculinist warrior society he portrays relationships between men exist, as they must always have, but in the primitive and violent world, a man must be strong, and he must marry and have an heir. The author manages to paint a picture of two men who live and love in secret, but nevertheless they live and love.The spread of Christianity is generally represented as a sort of benevolent and glorious coming to recognize the Truth, and I appreciated the author’s careful representation of how much force was involved in subjugating people to a new religion. Like so many other military and religious powers of the day the message was "Christ is the bringer of peace and everlasting life and you’d better follow him or I’ll kill you and you will go to Hell." Pagan societies were hardly more just or more beneficial, but the encroaching oppression of supposedly gentle faith was far more universal.Kol represents the last of the sorcerers, called Seidmen in this telling, who has the Sight and therefore knows the future and its inevitability. James Erich pulls off a simple love story where the protagonists are able to scratch out some happiness for their short time on Earth. Young readers and older will find plenty to draw them in with this novel of Vikings, sorcerers, shapeshifters, and the conflict that comes from greed even more than intolerance.

Well written and vividly captures a different time and culture, sprinkled with some fantasy elements. Exciting and dramatic. I enjoyed the rocky progression of Kol and Thorbrand’s friendship into love, and how it was complicated by their responsibilities, political events and society’s mores. I finished it in one day because I just had to know what happened next. It’s made me want to read more about the history of Iceland and the Norse mythology.

I bought this for my twelve year old son, who devoured it in a day. The characters are compelling, the plot is lively, and the magic is well done and believable. My son found the sex scenes, in his words, "a little TMI" and he wished there was "more magic, less sex." Twelve is a little young for the book; fourteen or fifteen is probably more in line with the intended audience. But still a fun read, and my son and I had some great conversations after we finished it. I brought this book and Good Omens (Neil Gaiman/Terry Pratchett) on vacation, and my son picked Seidman to read, so I think that’s pretty telling.

Seidman is a gentle love story set against a vibrant backdrop. Woven with magic, mythology, and Icelandic history, this well-written tale explores the love between two boys, kept apart by honor and duty, and the looming threat of religious persecution. I am an author and a teacher. I loved this book and would not hesitate to recommend it to my older students.

Fabulous, arrived quicker than I thought. Thankyou!

I absolutely loved this book and definitely recommend it! I look forward to reading more from this author as well.

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Seidman

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