



Liesmith

Alis Franklin

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At the intersection of the magical and the mundane, Alis Franklin's thrilling debut novel reimagines mythology for a modern world—where gods and mortals walk side by side.

Working in low-level IT support for a company that's the toast of the tech world, Sigmund Sussman finds himself content, if not particularly inspired. As compensation for telling people to restart their computer a few times a day, Sigmund earns enough disposable income to gorge on comics and has plenty of free time to devote to his gaming group.

Then in walks the new guy with the unpronounceable last name who immediately becomes IT's most popular team member. Lain Laufeyjarson is charming and good-looking, with a story for any occasion; shy, awkward Sigmund is none of those things, which is why he finds it odd when Lain flirts with him. But Lain seems cool, even if he's a little different—though Sigmund never suspects just how different he could be. After all, who would expect a Norse god to be doing server reboots?

As Sigmund gets to know his mysterious new boyfriend, fate—in the form of an ancient force known as the Wyrd—begins to reveal the threads that weave their lives together. Sigmund doesn't have the first clue where this adventure will take him, but as Lain says, only fools mess with the Wyrd. Why? Because the Wyrd messes back.

Liesmith Details

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From Reader Review Liesmith for online ebook

Jordan Hawk says

Queer romance. Norse mythology. Sympathetic monsters. Beautiful writing. A protagonist of color.

I'd love to go on and on about what I loved about this book, but I honestly can't without giving away things you'd be far better off discovering yourself. The first paragraph above will either turn you off or have you chomping at the bit. If the latter, then you want to read this book. Seriously.

Loved it.

Sadie Forsythe says

I thought that this was quite clever. That alone would be enough for me. But paired with how darned CUTE Sigmund was, makes it's a real winner for me. I just wanted to grab all his über-geeky, low self-esteem (what he would call realistic self-appraisal), hipster envy, good boyness and hug it and love it and call it George. I adored him. Plus, he's a not a cookie-cutter, Ken-shaped, white main character. He's plump and dark. Maybe with some Maori ancestry, but that's never clarified. I loved it, even more since this was played all sorts of cool, as if it wasn't some rare gem to be treasured when found in a book.

The story itself is quite convoluted and, honestly, readers would be well served to have at least a basic understanding of Norse mythology. I'm not saying that it's not understandable if you don't, but I think it will be more enjoyable if you do. But beyond the story of the machinations of the gods there is a lot to enjoy here. The romance is slow and sweet. It never progresses beyond a kiss, but it's obvious the end goal is love not lust. *sigh* And there is just tons and tons of Gamer/Trekkie/Trekker/Ringer/comic book/Star Wars/DnD/etc nerddom to revel in. It's glorious in its own way, but not over-played. Plus, Sigmund is never disparaged for his interests. In fact, he's quite comfortable in who and what he is.

With the tangled plot, I did find it a little hard to keep up with on occasion, it seemed to slow down and drag for a while in the Helbleed, friends accepted the impossible with aplomb, and the ending is left a little 'we'll figure it out eventually' open. But for the most part I found this a really enjoyable read.

K.J. Charles says

Oooh, I enjoyed this hugely. Delightful non-traditional protagonist in Sigmund, excellent worldbuilding, a really twisty plot (all the points for the reveal of the villain). Great use of the Norse myths and a strong idea underpinning it which pulls together what seems to be niggles and inconsistencies very cleverly. A rather lovely romance too, nicely suited to Loki's mythological character.

Lain/Loki is more of an action hero than a twisty thinker, which is very true to the original stories, where he is much more a blagger than the evil plotter of modern portrayals. Very interesting thoughts on his sexuality and the power relationship between the main characters.

I would have liked the two girl gamers to be more developed as characters - Franklin sketches the father with great deftness and skill in a relatively small number of lines, she has the skills. And honestly, I think this book could have been significantly longer (I never say this) and given the world more space to develop. I seriously wanted more romance between Loki and Sigmund, giving the latter a bit more time to grow into his own feelings and confront his situation.

Overall, a really enjoyable fantasy, a terrific, well-developed concept, great action, and fabulous queering and feministing* of Norse myth. A cracking debut.

*It's a word if I say it's a word.

Disclaimer: the author swapsied me a copy, which is how come I got it early. /radiates smug/

Elsbeth says

This isn't going to be much of a review, because I can't say much without ruining the plot. All I can say that even with the twist at the end it wasn't enough. I thought it was going to be sharper, wittier than what it was. Yeah that is my problem not the books, but its how I feel.

There were some fun parts, the writing was well done, but overall it just wasn't enough for me.

Miranda says

It can be awkward, being a modern day Heathen reading someone else's ideas of your Gods. Most of the time the interpretations of my Goddess, Sigyn, are so offensive that I drop the book in a rage and never touch it again. (Touch of Frost, anyone?)

Initially I overlooked *Liesmith* because I didn't want to read yet another novel where Loki has a mortal lover and the book completely ignores his actual wife. However, I stumbled across an interview the author did that talked specifically of Sigyn, and how she thought there was more to Sigyn's story than what we have.

So, I gave it a shot. And I'm not sorry I did, but... man, it was odd sitting there reading a book that tries its best by your Goddess, but She's going, "No, I wouldn't do that."

I'll just get this out of the way first: While I do applaud that Sigyn is respected and a main driving force of this novel, at times she came across more as Freyja than she did the Goddess I know. *Liesmith's* Sigyn was much colder, harsher and sharper than Sigyn would ever be. The main point of Sigyn, Goddess of Constancy, is that She's *constant*; even in Her grief over Her sons, She doesn't allow Odin to change who She is. She's still compassionate, loyal, and gentle. She's as strong as a mountain. She looks Odin in His eye and defies Him in order to stay by Loki's side. Her strength isn't in your face -- it's subtle and easily overlooked.

Hence the other slight issue I had: Sigyn wouldn't ever go to war or wield a sword. Sorry. There's a reason She chose a bowl to protect Loki with instead of a weapon. While this makes sense in the context of the story, it still rankled me a lot, because there's an irritating habit people have of thinking Sigyn can't be awesome in Her own way. They have to give Her a sword and have Her murder people in order to be badass.

There are other discrepancies in my own personal beliefs compared to the story *Liesmith* presents us, but honestly, they're not important. While Sigyn is most certainly not a mortal that was turned into a goddess by Loki, I appreciate how narratively, that particular storyline came together in conclusion with Sigmund and Lain's.

And really, it was wonderful to read a story that focuses on two un-stereotyped gay men who fall in love with each other and then have to deal with the world possibly ending. Added to that is the fact that Sigmund is black, overweight, and a huge nerd -- in other words a real human -- and it gets even better.

Though I will say that I expected more of an emotional introspection on his part when the big reveals happen. It feels like he kind of skims the surface of what it means, but the big questions aren't asked and he doesn't have any kind of worry over it, save for a brief moment. Still, I really enjoyed Sigmund as a character, even if it feels at times that he doesn't really grow past who he was in the beginning.

His relationship with Lain was cute too, enough that I could ignore my own personal issues with Loki being in a relationship with someone other than Sigyn.

But I found the ending rather confusing, even though I understand more or less what happened. It was a mad rush of action and there wasn't a following moment where things quieted down and the reader could make sense of what happened. I'm still not entirely sure about who or what Lain is, when I think I should.

Still, I enjoyed *Liesmith*, enough to possibly look into the next book. It gave enough respect to Sigyn that I can forgive Franklin's differing portrayal of Her. It really means so much to me that an author finally gave this to me.

(A copy of this book was provided by the publisher through NetGalley for a review.)

M'rella says

I am DNFing at roughly 40% and it's totally me, not the book.

Gender games & fluidity is not my kink to begin with, but this book messed it up for me even further.

Otherwise, a little nutty, but ok enough to enjoy, if you get past some editorial funnies (another fine mess). I might, or might not pick it up again.

Megan says

Above all else this book was a lot of fun. It's basically Loki exiled in Australia running a tech company, and one of his lowly (male) IT workers has the reincarnated soul of his dead wife, and that's the kind of set up that you're either going to think sounds awesome or.... not so much.

The prose is snappy and fun, and Loki's character was fantastic. But Sigmund (aka dead wife IT man) was kinda bland. I get that the fact that he wasn't anything special was a plot point, but it seemed like Loki/Lain was pursuing him solely because of the dead wife thing and not because there was anything attractive about Sigmund himself. (A point Sigmund almost seems to make when he finds out the truth of the situation, but it

doesn't really get addressed). It doesn't help that Loki keeps thinking about what a bad kisser he is, or describing him as smelling like "self-conscious lust." Basically any scene with Loki in it was vibrant and compelling, but whenever he wasn't around things felt flat.

The Norse mythology aspect is full on too, and it's something a lot of reviewers mention struggling with. However, in the the time since this book was published the world was graced with a little game called God Of War, and if you've played that you'll find all the umlauts and 'heims a lot easier to parse. If you play games it will also help with the gaming slang that gets thrown around. (And if you're Australian is will help with the delightful Australianness of it all).

I would have liked to have seen more of the fledgling relationship between Lain(Loki) and Sigmund. Not because I think the book ignored it or anything, it was just my favourite part. Watching Lain try and be a bit more human, watching Sigmund try and get his head around everything, it was so much fun to read and I kind of resented the plot when it kicked into a higher gear and this all took a backseat.

But overall, a lot of fun. I'll be reading the next book for sure.

Ellie says

I enjoyed a lot of things in this book but the Norse mythology was too much for me and a few things left baffled in the end.

Full review also posted on my blog - <http://elliereadsfiction.blogspot.com/>

This is a rather unusual read for me, a queer urban fantasy, which I picked up after a recommendation from a friend.

I liked a lot of things in the story and enjoyed reading most of it but at some point I felt lost in the the complexity of the Norse mythology which was presented in overwhelming detail. I had to google far too many things in order to make sense of the story and this took away from my overall enjoyment of the book.

The strongest element in the story for me was the way the author played with/subverted traditional sexual roles and romantic standards. Sigmund was an adorable, so-not-typical romantic lead - geeky, neither ubermanly, nor gay, just ordinary, yet capable of loving without a question. His two best friends were interesting and unusual female characters, together with his father they made strong supporting characters who contributed a lot to the main story.

The other main character, Lain/Loki was rather complicated and difficult to understand and evaluate. His was interesting and his episodes were both amusing and confusing. Sigmund and Lain's love story was very sweet - real, intimate, there was no pretence, despite how non-traditional it seemed.

The writing was strong and convincing, creating an intriguing and complex world building. Besides the strong romantic element the story was really action-packed, especially the second half of it. I'm not a gamer myself, but I found the gamer perspective and jargon which permeated some of the story telling well done and interesting.

Still, I felt there were to many unresolved issued by the end. It was difficult to appreciate the subversion of

traditional mythology in the story when I'm not sufficiently familiar with the original myths. It's a HFN ending and I hope that the sequel which is coming next year it will clarify some of the things that baffled me here.

Overall, it's a curious, unusual story, well told, which will be better appreciated by people who are more familiar with Norse mythology than me.

Yzabel Ginsberg says

(I received a free copy through NetGalley, in exchange for an honest review. However, at the time, it was an ARC, so some things may have changed.)

This is an extremely frustrating book to rate, because I cannot decide whether I actually liked it, or only liked parts of it, with the rest being OK, and nothing more. I've mulled over this for some time (since the previous evening, in fact, which is when I finished reading the book), and I haven't come closer to a conclusion.

What I liked:

- The use of lesser known figures from Norse mythology (or, should I say, of figures that are less often mentioned and would deserve more spotlight). Everybody's heard of Loki and Odin, and probably Baldr as well, but what about the others? This is both a strong and a weak point of this novel: if you know enough, it's going to be alright, yet if you don't, you'll probably have to look up quite a few things (including places).
- The relationship: it was much closer to "two people falling in love" than to "two gay guys falling in love". Sigmund displays both "male" and "female" traits—he comes across as "human" first and foremost. Lain isn't even human to start with. And it doesn't matter, and the fact that it doesn't matter is what makes this great. I'm not a gender-driven person. I consider people as, well, "people", not as "men" and "women". Although the story comes close to brushing on sexuality issues at some point, with Sigmund's father mentioning how he tried to react to his son "being gay", it doesn't go too far down this road. At the end of the journey, it's about two individuals having feelings for each other, period. (The part about the reincarnated soul didn't feel like it warped the character towards being female.)
- The Bleed concept. Not exactly original, but hey, I'm a sucker for plot devices that make the protagonist(s) fall into some nightmarish version of their world. Yes, I played *Silent Hill*. There's a reason I like that type of horror-driven story.

What I disliked:

- The subverted tropes that weren't so subverted in the end, such as the geeky characters. They felt like they were supposed to look like the stereotypical nerds, but wait, not exactly, because they meta it by cracking jokes at themselves, but by doing this they're becoming the stereotype again, and... At some point, it was a bit too much. It may have worked for me if dealt with in a different way; unfortunately, it didn't.
- The novel felt too long in parts, too meandering through useless happenings: gaming, the camping trip, etc. They made it read more like fanfiction, and I think they could've been shortened without their role in the story being lost along the way. Those parts were probably the reason why it took me so long to read

Liesmith—normally, I should've been done in 3-4 days.

- Among such scenes were several of the romance ones. Granted, I find getting those right always tricky and difficult. Here, some were good, but others veered towards the mushy side, and contributed to that “fanfiction” aspect I mentioned above.

- Sometimes, the writing style was rather weird, with a connection made between two clauses using an italicised “[insert word]” device. However, sometimes it highlighted something that wasn’t so relevant, and it made me wonder what was the point.

- Sigmund’s friends. Their role didn’t seem so important, and made me wonder why they were here. Either they could’ve been downplayed, or should’ve been fleshed out some more. In my opinion, they kind of hung in between. (This is worth for many characters in general in this story. Sigmund was the only one that felt “real”.)

And after writing this review, I *still* can’t decide if I liked it, if I’d recommend it... Let’s say that on a scale from 1 to 10, I’d give it a wee 5, an “it’s OK” as far as opinion goes, and a “maybe” as to whether I’d recommend it or not.

Karen Wellsbury says

Another review that didn't make it

There were so many things that were great about this book.

First the clever premise, that Loki the shape shifter, has for Reasons been living in Australia doing various things in IT. Norse mythology woven into the mundane worked fantastically well for me.

Sig, a wholly believable character, a man, with doubts about his masculinity in all aspects, black Jewish and slightly overweight, a sense of lies and a man who cannot tell a lie himself. His relationship with his dad, David is beautiful, complicated and real.

Lain/ Loki is defiantly the action version, a complete charmer, keeping his version of events and half truths close to his chest.

Wayne and Em, Sig’s game playing female best friends – are the best supporting female characters that I have come across in a long time, the kind of women that you want to spend your Friday night gaming sessions with. Credible women are hard to come by – and here are two of them in one book.

The world building, the Really Real World and the Bleed, got me every time, most of it was genuinely scary and I so wanted to know – what’s going to happen next. I had no sense of what was coming of who was going to ‘win’, and that, all by itself was more than enough to keep me hooked.

But there was more, the relationship between Sig and Lain was great – both of them I would describe as gender fluid, Sig is, as I said before male, and initially his concern of not being ‘manly’ enough shines through, However as the story develops, so does he. I really want to see how he progresses.

Lain – he’s a god.

It could have been a little longer, as I could have done with more exploration of Sig and Lain, but I'm just being greedy.

Although this is part of a series, there is no cliff hanger and it does end solidly.

Ije the Devourer of Books says

I really enjoyed this Urban Fantasy novel which has gay and minority ethnic characters who don't meet an untimely end or endure lots of angst and heartache. These characters are involved in action, battles and lots of peculiar creatures, dimensions etc etc

Sigmund is a twenty year old nerd. He is a computer geek, plump, lives with his Dad and lives for his computer games, and dungeons and dragons. He has two close friends who are girls and just as nerdy as him and life although mundane is generally ok. Sigmund is also a junior employee in the IT department at LB a global technology firm.

But there is more to this firm than meets the eye and much more to Sigmund. Sigmund has a gift and is able to tell when people are lying. He doesn't understand this gift because it is something he has always had, but he doesn't understand it because he doesn't understand who he truly is.

Along comes Lain. Lain is hot, funny and attractive and the newest member of staff in Sigmund's team. Sigmund is attracted to him but has never had a boyfriend or any friends apart from his childhood friend Em and their mutual friend Wayne (a girl). Lain really likes Sigmund and does his best to engineer time together and flirts with Sigmund who after a long time and along with hints from other staff members finally gets that Lane likes him.

And then the first date, first kiss and everything explodes because Lain isn't who he says he is either. He is a Norse god and even though Sigmund can't remember he and Lain go way back and both of them have enemies. And these enemies are back and out for vengeance.

If you like well written urban fantasy with a frisson of gay romance, characters from Norse mythology, battles, monsters, and things that go bump both night and day, then this is the book for you. The story is solid and engaging and has a way of keeping you on tenterhooks.

As a reader you quickly get to suspect that Lain is something 'other' but you don't know what or whom. And you don't know what is at stake.

The characters are well developed and drew me in from the first page. The story gives a real feel for how boring and mundane life is for Sigmund before the 'incident' which opens his hidden life to him. Once it hits that point the book picks up a dynamic pace.

I loved the way the story had a jigsaw feel to it because it takes time to figure out exactly what is going on and the why, where and who. It can be a little confusing because the where keeps changing with flash backs to the past and appearances into another dimension which criss crosses with reality. I think a small glossary

explaining the different Norse characters would have been helpful. But otherwise this is a really great start to a new series.

BUT Who is Lain truly? Who is Sigmund? Why are they in our present time and how come Sigmund doesn't know who he is. I had so many questions and the story had a great way of revealing the answers bit by bit and there were plenty of surprises.

If you like KJ Charles or Ginn Hale then you will probably like this one. I am really pleased I took the risk and bought this and I am really pleased that it appears there is more to come because everyone knows I simply adore a good series :)

MLE says

I received this book as an ARC through Net Galley in exchange for an honest review.

I have to admit I have a weakness for a certain kind of main character. All the stories with main characters that start off big, bad, and kick ass are fine. They make sense in a certain context, but I've always found it boring, and anti-climatic to read about someone who you're pretty sure is going to triumph over whatever the plot throws at them.

I also understand the books about people who long for adventure, and challenge. I mean most of the time it's that desire for something new, and different that drives the action of the story, and it's usually hard to write about someone who'd rather stay home, and read than slay dragons.

This book however found my personal favorite main character: the reluctant, ordinary person.

It's probably pretty easy to see this love from my favorites list; from Arthur Dent who would rather have a nice cup of tea than intergalactic travel to Richard Mayhew whose act of kindness sends him on an adventure he never wanted, I love the main character who has to almost be dragged into the action of the plot. I think I identify with that kind of person much more easily than the invincible swordsman or the girl who sets off to find her destiny without a backwards glance. I'm a bit of a coward, and I like tea, and reading by the fire.

Sigmund Sussman, for me, fit the bill perfectly. I liked that he was not immediately excited about the prospect of intrigue, and mystery in his life. I liked that he was an ordinary guy, a bit of a nerd, who didn't feel too much like a complete stereotype. He was not defined by his interests, and I didn't feel like the author overwhelmed the story with references to prove their nerd cred.

The relationship between Sigmund and Lain was well done, and I liked the pace at which it developed. It never felt like instant love, or that they were destined to be together, which all things considered, is a very good thing. Another thing I appreciated was that the love story never took over the plot.

It wasn't a romance novel thinly disguised as an urban fantasy, but fully fledged urban fantasy with a bit of romance.

The plot was nicely developed, and I loved the twists, and turns. It kept me guessing, and I enjoyed that. The mythology fit very nicely into the plot, and story. It was well integrated, so it never felt like awkward information dumps or stilted exposition. I liked how the mythology fit into the modern setting, and how much it added to the plot, the setting, and the characters. I also loved reading an urban fantasy that wasn't set in the United States, or England. It made for a nice change of pace. Overall I really loved this book, and am really looking forward to reading more from this author. I love it when a book sweeps me off of my feet.

Alis Franklin says

So... yup! This is my book. Obviously I think it's pretty awesome, and I had a blast writing it.

Liesmith contains some of my very most favourite things in the entire world, including Norse mythology and geek/tech culture. I wrote it over the period of... a long time. Too long, probably; the original drafts for certain chapters (the intro, the middle scenes at the Sussmans', and the ending) date back to my university days, circa '04. The main bulk of this version was written for NaNoWriMo in '09 (actually in the October beforehand), finished and polished in '13, and finally published in '14.

I hope you enjoy reading it as much as I did writing!

Lila says

Ok, first thing you need to know about *Liesmith*: Book 1 of *The Wyrd* is that it's "queer modern version of the saga".

So, what does that exactly mean in this book?

It's a modern take on Loki and Sigyn.

Story is set in present time, in Pandemonium, Australia. Loki, the Trickster god is residing here under the cover of Travis Hale, being a businessman and good at it. At one office party he falls in love with Sigmund, a nerdy and awkward guy. Loki left some angry gods behind him, and when they get information on his

whereabouts, Sig is danger, too. But Sig is not what he seems, and he's going to get a crash course on Wyrd. Just like with every myth, gods are a bit petulant, reasons for ending the world are way too exaggerated and don't get me started on speeches.

What worked for me:

There is some beautiful writing in this book:

"Everything is true, especially the lies.

That's the trick.

Every tale ever told, every whisper, every song, every single string of words ever uttered by mortal mouths or carved in rocks or scrawled on paper. It's the ultimate human trait, this endless urge to speak and name and label. To attach sounds to things and meaning to sounds. To make language."

Loki is very interesting narrator and his pov has that old, "Let me tell you a story.." vibe, that sucks you in. I also have a feeling author wanted us to have Tom Hiddleston in our heads because Loki in his Travis persona has black hair and green eyes and in his Lain persona he is this charming red-haired guy. I approve this. His Loki is so memorable, I feel like if description of Loki would differ from his image in my head, my brain would protest and skip like a mechanical failure messing up pc. ;)

What didn't work for me:

In her own words, author is a huge fan of Norse mythology, light queer romances and happy endings. And reading this book, anyone can tell. This book is everything Alis Franklin loves.

So, romance between Loki and Sig is cute and fluffy. They have their hea. But the problem is about first one: Norse mythology.

Here is the thing: If your entire knowledge on Loki can be attributed to Tom Hiddleston performance in Marvel movies, you may be a bit lost here. For example, some pieces about Sigyn and their 3 children: Hel, Fenrir and giant snake I knew about because I read urban fantasy. And if there is one genre authors are trying to incorporate mythology it's UF- I often get interested and look into something I read. Like goddess Hel I read in Jacqueline Carey's series. Hence I knew who some of relevant players are (not all, I admit). But, I was 100% lost on those meta, surreal parts of mythology that are more advanced, for someone who knows more about it than me. For example, Bleeds or the fires of Múspell or tons of other references I am not sure I even caught (but I know there is 90% chance I would spell it wrong here even if I did without looking). I don't say this is a bad thing, I just say that for someone like me who wants to understand entire backstory it required additional looking up on some words/references.

Now, the thing I noticed and it bugged me to no end is that Sig is written like every cliche ever on geeks, but even more accentuated. I was annoyed with how many times there was "like" in his pov. If he can tell me everything on DnD, there is no need for verbal filler to show me he's awkward, nervous guy **all the time and in that amount.**

Julio Genao says

some of this was lots of fun, but most of it wasn't for me.

didn't think the horror elements were all that well-done; lots of stupid-people-doing-things-stupidly (seriously, dad? *seriously*?) and lots of gross things that aren't really all that genuinely terrifying, just... gross. felt gratuitous.

the beginning is portentous and BEHOLD THE APOCALYPSE COMMENCES but then the focus shifts to an IT dork in his underwear frowning at his slacks.

which is an approximation of this book's tone issues in general: one minute it's supposed to be a snarky office romantic comedy and the next it's angling for stephen king's *gunslinger* finale.

honestly, i didn't mean to spend this much energy cataloguing my thoughts on this book but the more i type the more i recall how sharp my disappointment was.

the author's talented as fuck, but between multiple useless POVs—dead people, alive people, the spirits of dead people occupying people who are alive—and the irritating shifts in tone *and* the occasional WTF moment that makes no sense—(view spoiler)—i found it hard to get into the spirit of the thing.

things made no sense so often i gave up caring. i swear it's an editing issue—the narrative just gets away from the meat of things too often to manage every single stray implication and intimation attendant to 3000 years of norse mythology and modern day queer politics and the semi-urban australian racial diaspora and—

however!!! i can tell you that of the friends of mine who read this book i am (of course) pretty much the only one who was in any way bothered by any of it.

which means a lot of things, but mostly that your milage will almost certainly vary, so give it a go if you, like the author, enjoy things like feathered dinosaurs and norse mythology and splatty horror and things like 1000 years of corrosive eyeball torture being a minor background detail that gives a particular character the faintest edge of irony to his winsome sense of humor.
