



The Soul Thief

Cecelia Holland

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They were one soul in two bodies, Corban and Mav, twins born to the lord of a Irish coastal farmstead. Mav had the Second Sight, and was her father's delight; Corban, though, was a deep disappointment, finally exiled for refusing his father's command to go and take up a sword for the High King

But on the night of Corban's exile, as he slept in the woods and brooded on injustice, the dreadful dragon ships of the Vikings bore down on his home with fire and the sword. The farm was plundered and burned; all the people were slain, save the young women - they were raped and dragged off to a life of slavery.

From the coast of Ireland to the occupied village of Dublin, across the Irish Sea to a Viking stronghold in Britain, and then across the sea to the Kingdom of the Danes, Corban is drawn in the track of his ravaged sister, fighting for his own life and to earn the influence and money he will need to buy her freedom. His quest is not hopeless, for Mav's second sight, made stronger by the dreadful fate that has befallen her, has brought her to the attention of the Lady of Hedeby. The Lady, wealthy and influential in the Kingdom of the Danes, has bought Mav; she intends to use the twins ,and their link with each other, to extend that influence far beyond Hedeby.

The Soul Thief Details

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From Reader Review The Soul Thief for online ebook

J.S. Dunn says

2.0

Only made it halfway. By page 15, the lack of hard research was evident. A reference to bears: Ireland's great brown bear has been extinct for around 3000 years after the LGM (last glacial max). Another error referencing a linen dress---just wrong for the peasant girl and the period and the style also. Also reference to a loaf of bread. Wrong, wrong,wrong.

Hugely wrong error to refer to hills turning brown in winter. ahhhh, NO: the hills and fields stay green all winter, thank you very much. That's one of the reasons Ireland is called the Emerald Isle. Again, this is all before page 15. Barely made it over 100. Writing just adequate.

Not to sound flippant, since this author is revered, but it isn't possible to churn out a masterpiece every year. Just does not happen. This item is another sad example of Tor Forge not vetting what it is publishing; anything for a fast buck.

Michelle says

None character development whatsoever, the exposition was boring or confusing, and it is impossible to sail to and from America in a three weeks.

The worst part was, the main character wasn't even a Norse, he was Irish either pre-Celtic or Celtic (who knows? It's never explained!), it was supposed to be a Viking saga. The main female protagonist, Mav, was both boring and useless. Corban had almost zero character development, and what little he had was heavy "told-not-shown" writing.

Normally I am not so critical, but this book disappointed me greatly.

Cayleigh says

Since I accidentally read book #4 in this series first, I came to know somewhat of Corban and Mav from the POV of someone close to them. (Not saying who to avoid spoilers) Reading The Soul Thief it felt like I was coming home to Corban, Mav and Benna.

I very much enjoyed this book. Once again my only complaint is that there is no map. Even a rough sketch of towns and how they were situated to each other would have been a great help. There was a lot of traveling in this book.

Corban Loosestrife. We see him grow from a young man, certain he does not want to be under any person's or god's thumb but still young and clumsy at life. He felt 100% like a very real person. He makes mistakes, has to learn and to grow into his own skin. The romance was light, sweet and strong. Though not overly expressed the reader gets the strong sense of passion Corban and Benna have. Perfectly done in my mind.

Grod, Arre, Ulf and Sweyn were very real side characters. Cecelia Holland gave every character enough attention that all felt like fully fleshed out people. Side characters don't often get that treatment, that aspect certainly made the book stand out.

I cannot wait to get my hands on book #2!

Bernard Farrell says

While this is regarded as historical fiction, the history part is lightweight. The author's writing is evocative and very readable. I thought she did a great job portraying what life was like at that time. I'm planning on reading the rest of the series.

Ruth says

I loved this book much more than I thought I would. It is written from the viewpoint of the starving, set upon villager in the midst of Viking raids and royal oppression. It has just a touch of mysticism to make it fun and to fit the beliefs of the times. Can't wait to read more books by this author now!

Richard Derus says

Rating: 2.25* of five

Ewww. Irish twins with a mystical bond are separated by a cruel and unjust fate. Girl raped, pregnant, held hostage by evil old woman who wants to abort her unborn child; boy free, homeless, wandering the Viking world searching for his Other Half.

I can't believe I actually read this ghastly twaddle. It's simply inexplicable to me that a talent like Holland's should be deployed in service of this trite, twee, oft-told tale. And then...I looked it up. It's one of her all-time bestselling books.

Barnum was right: No one ever lost money underestimating the {taste} of the American public. NOT recommended unless you like tedious, repetitious maunderings.

Sherwood Smith says

Holland has had a long, solid career writing carefully researched, realistic historical novels. In this novel, which kicks off a much larger story arc, she employs just enough fantastic elements to evoke the numinous, balancing that with her customary realism and complex characters.

The main character is a boy named Corban. He goes off to the hills to get over his anger at his father calling him a coward. While he's there, the Vikings come and slaughter the inhabitants of his village and grab his

twin sister, Mav. After the horror of discovering his dead family, Corban begins a journey to find Mav, who has second sight. She is being held by the Lady of Hedeby, a witch-queen who wants to use Mav's power in order to bolster her own political power.

The rest of the book follows Corban on his journey as he meets all kinds of people, with a variety of belief systems and ways of life. Holland's descriptions are intensely vivid, gaining power steadily; we also follow Mav on her adventures. This book resolves well, while setting up for the greater arc.

Ozymandias says

Plot: 3 (repetitive and unfocused)

Characters: 6 (believable but not always effective in their role)

Accuracy: 9 (magic aside, the account is strong)

Oh man, this book really lost me. It started off strong with a Viking raid on an Irish settlement and the young son setting out in pursuit of his captured sister but after about the halfway point it devolves into a bizarre fantasy with an evil witch and no real narrative purpose or momentum. I'm not going to say that it has no foreshadowing of this switch, the twins' otherworldly connection to each other is established from an early stage, but the switchover from historical fiction to generic fantasy is abrupt and unwelcome. And once it arrives, the narrative that drove the plot until this point (learn how to survive on his own, discover the wider world, find the girl) vanishes and we're left confused and unclear what is going on. After a string of adventures mostly set around the city of Jorvik (York) he sails off to Newfoundland and Denmark, getting further and further away from home. And then the witch sends him right back to Jorvik, which feels like a giant step back narratively and emotively. Only now he's posing as a wealthy trader for some ill-defined reason and has no real story to tell. Lameness of witches aside, it tears the pacing to shreds. The main conflict is resolved in about a page, and then the book ends.

Honestly, the first part was truly excellent. I loved watching this Irish farmboy discover the wider Norse world and all the dangers inherent in it. I enjoyed her descriptions of characters and the regular death-defying escapes Corban seems to get into. And the world itself is just fun. I truly wish that it had just stuck to that style instead of bringing in an unwelcome fantasy element.

kelly says

I feel like I'm alone in really liking this book. It was Holland's normal fare, but I really liked it. I found the characters interesting and the setting fun. I don't usually like historical fantasy, but I liked how unremarked the elements were.

Dawson says

A few years ago I read several of her books. She does a good job recreating the history. That said, there is something of a melancholy undertone. Still, as a history geek I like her work. As someone who is highly interested in this time period I thought this book did a wonderful job of putting the reader into the era (the book's actions pretty much all take place in the year 954) and place, the Jorvik (York, England).

An example of her deft touch with history is when her protagonist encounters coins for the first time. He refers to them as "silver buttons". For a young man living on a farmstead near the early community of Dublin I thought his reactions were spot on. In many ways this is a coming of age book, at least for the main character.

The book does have a mystical/"wise woman" component to it. It's not a straight historical novel but rather historical/fantasy.

Still for someone interested in that time and place or someone who likes good characterization or just a touch a fantasy, I recommend

Vicki G says

Here's the thing I don't like about this book: that she has to go into detail on EVERY hunting trip the characters go on in this book.

It's like 'So they had to hunt their own food. But why does that mean we have to go through a blow by blow reenactment of every single animal's reaction to being hunted down and killed for food?'

I'm telling you, I can handle the stresses of being a paramedic way better than I can stand to read about animals suffering even if their situation is brought about due to the law of the jungle, so to speak.

I wish she'd stop detailing every hunted animal's capture and demise at the hands of the hunters. That's all I'm saying.

Otherwise, I like everything about the book.

Laura says

Vikings! What more could I ask for?

But seriously, this book was awesome. I loved it. I've read a couple Cecelia Holland books and loved them (you should all read Great Maria because it's one of my favorites and also awesome). This was no different.

I love Holland's writing style. It's just so vivid and...I don't know...magical almost. I find myself hooked instantly and I just get immersed into the worlds that she creates. I loved The Soul Thief because it really pulled me into the character's lives, and the time period of the Vikings.

I really liked Corban, and I loved watching his growth from the start to the end of the book, moving from a shy, quiet, hesitant person into a strong, tough, confident one. Holland did such a good job of showing his progression. All of her characters were great: Grod was funny, I loved Benna and her sisters, and I really

liked Mav, although I sort of wish we could have seen a little bit more of her.

I know this is book one in a series, so I'm looking forward to reading the rest of the books, as well as checking out even more of Cecelia Holland's books.

Rusty says

Holland writes as if she is telling a story so one listens (reads) with the joy that comes from encountering a wonderful tale whether it's oral or written. It's a rare gift indeed. So many novels take pages and pages to draw me into it. Not Holland's *Soul Thief*. This is the first in a series of five and I plan to read all five. Others in the series are *Witches Kitchen*, *The Serpent Dreamer*, *Varringer* and *The High City*. The series occurs over a period of fifty years with the Irish twins spending most of their time in Viking lands.

Corbin Loosestrife is a hero like one of us. He disagrees with his father. He doesn't know what he wants to do. He has little self-confidence in his abilities. He believes that he is good for little. His twin sister, Mav, has farseeing ability and is beloved by the family. The twins care for each other passionately.

When Corbin and his father have a terrible argument he is tossed out of the house. While he is gone, Vikings raid the home, killing everyone except his twin who they take with them. Grief-stricken, Corbin vows to find her but like many of us his courage waxes and wanes. Yet he persists even though he finds himself discouraged and distracted. The bond between the twins is so strong that it pulls him ever forward in his search. Whether you believe in magic or not the twin's bond compels Corbin ever onward in spite of his uncertainty about his abilities. His love is much greater.

Mav is held by the Lady of Hedeby, a witch who schemes to use the two to strengthen her magical abilities and her hold on King Eric Bloodaxe who rules Jorvik (York) as his name suggests. Corbin and Mav must cope with her sorcery in order to gain Mav's freedom. The book combines sorcery with ruthless pirates, romance, and heroism. It's a most entertaining read with well researched medieval background.

Rob says

Fair writing at best. The dialogue between characters was drool. The plot was linear and inconsequential. If I had bought the book, I would have made paper airplanes out of the pages. I was pretty unimpressed.

Annika says

Didn't finish. I made it 15%.

The writing is awful, the sentence structure awful, the need to repeat oneself to say one thing. He noticed the fat money bag. He saw the fat money bag, the fat money bag was right there. He saw it again. That kind of thing.

Also...I care nothing for this protagonist. I know nothing about him. The story opens with him getting beat for defying his father's wishes, but he is emotionally void of anything. He wants to make his own choices, but he's not sure what his choices are. His twin sister runs in and pleads for him, he leaves or is banished, his sister meets him on the hill, some squirmy moments where he may or may not be in love with his sister, I mean if there is a twin bond here, go that way, don't get all squirmy on me. So this kid...I think he's special needs but I can't tell really, uses the memory/idea of his twin sister as his motivation to move his feet and seek revenge on who/whatever killed his family and captured his sister.

His sister is horribly raped and I quit reading because we just met here.

Next.
