

Yule Island

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Toxic sisterhood leads to Viking-inspired ritual murder in Johana Gustawsson's gothic-infused Scandinavian novel *Yule Island*.

Karl, a police inspector, arrives at a crime scene where a girl has been found dead with her body covered in odd cuts and her toes tied together with string. He experiences a feeling of déjà vu. Nine years before, another girl's body was found under similar circumstances. Her murderer is still on the loose.

The murder investigation takes Karl back to the remote island of Storholmen in the Stockholm archipelago, where the mysterious Gussman family lives. In their garden, the first murder victim, Sofia, was found hanging from a tree. Darkness looms over the family: the Gussmans live in an island mansion that's filled with treasures, antiques, and dungeons. Karl already suspects that the two murders are connected, but the case truly cracks open when he meets Emma, an antiques appraiser working at the mansion—and Sofia's sister, hiding in plain sight. This reveals a gruesome connection to the island's Viking Age past.

Drawing on the unsavory parts of Viking Age culture, this modern crime novel features direct prose and sparse descriptions, as of Storholmen itself:

the imprint of time is everywhere, from the vivid heritage façades that were built to be as narrow as possible to outsmart the taxman, to the cobblestones polished by horses' hooves and the blood of the defeated.

The islanders address one another with an excess of formality and use odd idioms; Swedish snuff is misidentified as a type of chewing tobacco. But head-spinning plot twists result in unpredictability, and the perpetrators stand to take the audience by surprise.

Yule Island is a page-turning noir novel set in a place steeped in the past; it stands to keep audiences guessing until its unexpected end.

ERIKA HARLITZ KERN (May / June 2024)

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