

Valhalla

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By Sam Went

Third Draft  
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LOADING STATION

MICHELLE (22), dressed as a Viking Peasant Woman, and JESS (22), dressed as a Shield Maiden, are already on stage. Their outfits shouldn't look too good, these are costumes made on the cheap. Each wears a walkie talkie on their belt. MICHELLE is bored out of her mind, JESS is enjoying herself as much as she can. MICHELLE steps forward addresses herself to the audience/queue.

MICHELLE

Ladies and Gentlemen, welcome to the Viking Experience. Before we begin our immersive tour of live in Viking Britain -

JESS makes air quotes at the word "immersive", unseen by MICHELLE

MICHELLE

- I need to ask you to please fill up every seat in the ride vehicle.

We hear people move forward, ancient poorly maintained lap bars creak as they're pulled down. JESS and MICHELLE help unseen patrons board the unseen ride vehicle.

MICHELLE

Come on, there's room at the back!

JESS

We know none of you want to sit there but someone has to, think of it as a metaphor for life.

MICHELLE speaks loudly, so everyone getting on the ride can hear what she is saying. JESS surreptitiously provides insider knowledge to her chosen patrons.

MICHELLE

Pull your lap bars all the way down!

JESS

Unless you're in seat eight, that one hasn't worked in six months.

MICHELLE

Pull your lap bars all the way down, whatever seat you're in!

JESS

We have to say that for liability reasons, but she knows.  
[Speaking to Seat Eight] Just hold on.

MICHELLE

A reminder that children under five years of age must be accompanied by an adult!

JESS

Although if a lone toddler did wander into the Viking Experience don't you think that raises questions beyond ride safety? How did it get here? Why does it have such a thirst for knowledge about the dark ages?

MICHELLE

Okay, it's full!

MICHELLE gives a thumbs up offstage to the ride operator, the vehicle groans then moves off. MICHELLE returns to her starting position with little enthusiasm. JESS performs a Shield Maiden pose for the audience/queue and does the same.

JESS

You know, I could do the welcome speech, if you didn't want to.

MICHELLE

It's fine.

JESS

I'd do it in character.

MICHELLE

What character? I'm dressed as "Viking Peasant Woman".

JESS

You've not named your character?

MICHELLE

No, of course not. You have?

JESS

Came up with a backstory too. I am the famed shieldmaiden Sigrid the Bloody. First over the side at Lindisfarne I killed enough monks that day to make a complete set of drinking cups from their skulls! When monasteries heard Sigrid's name they quaked in fear, made futile prayers to their false God and tried to make their skulls look more porous. It did them no good however, for -

MICHELLE

I don't need to hear your whole made up backstory. How come you got to be a shieldmaiden while I'm stuck as "peasant woman"?

JESS

I think I give off more of a shieldmaiden vibe.

MICHELLE

I could give off a shieldmaiden vibe, if they gave me the opportunity.

JESS

Roar for me.

MICHELLE

No.

JESS

Go on, fill your lungs with Odin's fury and roar for me!

MICHELLE

Not at work.

JESS

And this is why you don't give off a shieldmaiden vibe. A shieldmaiden doesn't care whether she's at work or out on the town, she's always looking for shiny relics to steal and monks to kill.

MICHELLE

Hmmm

JESS

I think you look really cute in your peasant dress.

MICHELLE

It's not meant to look cute it's meant to look... historically accurate.

JESS

Sure, but come on Michelle, use that history degree -

MICHELLE

I try not to.

JESS

All that pointless lacing, the random leather and fur -

MICHELLE

Fake fur.

JESS

How much of that do you think is historical?

MICHELLE

Less of it than should be.

JESS

Exactly! People aren't just coming here for dry, historical, accurate facts about what the buttons were made from on a Viking farmer's dress. They're here for the blood, the guts, the whole Viking experience! Like they've seen on 'Vikings' or 'How To Train Your Dragon' So, why not let me do the welcome speech and let me do it in character?

MICHELLE

Isn't "doing it in character" why you're not supposed to do it anymore?

JESS

I don't know what I did wrong.

MICHELLE

Jess, you told a child you were going to show him how to make a comb out of bones.

JESS

Very historical.

MICHELLE

He cried the entire ride.

JESS

It wasn't supposed to be a threat! His parents got it, they were very encouraging!

MICHELLE

That only made it worse.

Pause.

MICHELLE

What if I did a voice?

JESS

What sort of voice?

MICHELLE

Like a Viking voice. When I did the welcome speech.

JESS

I don't know if that's a good idea.

MICHELLE

Why not? You were the one who said I should do it in character?

JESS

Yeah, in character. But, Michelle, and I say this with love, accents have never been one of your strengths.

MICHELLE

What do you mean?

JESS

Whatever you were meant to be doing you always sounded French. Remember that play you were in second year? The one where you played the police officer? You were very French in that.

MICHELLE

I thought I was alright.

JESS

The play was set in the Soviet Union. It was like Inspector Clouseau had joined the KGB

MICHELLE

I wasn't that bad!

JESS

(in a thick French accent)

Bonjour Moiseur, are you ready for your electric torture? I vill just attach zees cheeky electrodes to your derriere. Zis may `urt enpeut, you capitalist swine.

Pause.

MICHELLE

Is this really where you saw yourself after uni?

JESS

We're the family friendly face of the dark ages, putting a funducational spin on centuries of near constant violence and cultural decline.

MICHELLE

People wouldn't work so hard getting degrees if they knew they'd end up as a Disney Princess.

JESS

Wow, you'd compare what we do to being a Disney Princess?

MICHELLE

It's basically the same.

JESS

I don't think we're that beloved. Cheer up, at least the costumes are fun.

MICHELLE

I'm a peasant woman.

JESS

My costume is fun.

MICHELLE

I just, I assumed that if I got a history degree I'd get to keep doing history.

JESS

We work in a museum.

MICHELLE

No we don't. We're mascots for a ride that's adjacent to a museum.

JESS

Sure, but you can't get to the museum unless you go through the ride.

MICHELLE

So we're the gatekeepers of real history?

JESS

No! Not gatekeepers! The opposite actually, we're the trap!

MICHELLE

You're going to need to elaborate.

JESS

Why do you think Warwick Castle has all those shows and rides now?

MICHELLE

A complete lack of dignity in the heritage industry?

JESS

Because it brings people in! And once they're in the trap swings shut and they have no choice but to accidentally learn some history! Same with us, people come for the ride, but the only way off the ride is through the museum. The rise is the trap for the museum, which is itself the trap for the gift shop.

MICHELLE

Meaning the real end goal is the gift shop?

JESS

The end goal is always the gift shop. Why do you think the British Empire plundered the world? To sell overpriced plushies and tiny ice cream.

MICHELLE

Yes, I remember proofreading your dissertation. But it's hardly an inspiring conclusion.

JESS

Sure, selling a five pound pencil sharpener is hardly going to light up the eyes of anyone whose soul didn't already die when they chose to do a business degree. But try not to think about the battleaxe themed summer dress that's funding all of this or the sort of woman who's buying it -

MICHELLE

Us.

JESS

Yes. We are the target market - Instead try to think about *what* its funding. The museum. The dig site. And we are a part of that process. The pretty red leaves on the venus fly trap of historical education.

MICHELLE

But where does that attitude end? If we need rides and shows and traps to get people to give a shit about history. Alton Towers -

JESS

Here we go -

MICHELLE

Alton Towers, the historic seat of the Earls of Shrewsbury, one of the most important Catholic families in British history. Granted to Bertram de Verdun in the 12th Century as a reward for his service in the Holy Land. Before that the site of an iron age hill fort! Then in the 20th Century the Earls thought they could raise a little extra money for repairs to the house by adding a model railway to "draw in more visitors".

Harmless by itself, but then it's a children's play area, then it's a few carnival rides, then it's -

JESS

The Smiler?

MICHELLE

The Smiler, Nemesis Reborn, Thirteen -

JESS

I agree Thirteen is kind of a disappointment.

MICHELLE

The very stately home the Earls started this to refurbish has now been gutted to make way for "Hex: Legend of The Towers".

JESS

You're just mad because you threw up after we went on The Smiler.

MICHELLE

Do you think anyone who's ridden Oblivion has ever learned anything about the Talbot's family's role in the internal divisions of the eighteenth century Whig party?

JESS

I think that would be a weird theme for a rollercoaster.

MICHELLE

Likewise, how many people who come to The Viking Experience for the ride or because they've seen two embarrassed former history students in anachronistic costumes -

JESS

I'm not embarrassed -

MICHELLE

Actually learn or retain anything about Viking Britain? Or do they just remember a mediocre day out? Because no one actually cares, do they? They see history as a ride or an attraction or a TV show, but actual history, the sort of history we fell in love with, the vast tapestry of real stories of real people and the lives they led, no one gives a shit.

Even worse are the people who say they care about history, but the "history" they care about is some made up racist nationalistic bullshit simplified to the point of lies. A story they've made up in their heads that bares as much resemblance to the real history as Oblivion does to the story of Charles Talbot's opposition to Catholic emancipation in Ireland! It's not history they care about, just a bullshit story to justify their bigotry.

JESS

Michelle, I agree with you. But that doesn't mean I think people are getting nothing out of the Viking Experience.

MICHELLE

Really?

JESS

Look, I'm not going to stand here and make the argument that the Viking Experience is great history or a good attraction or doesn't smell of cat urine.

MICHELLE

You know they pump that smell in? For authenticity.

JESS

See, a small and very specific commitment to historical education.

MICHELLE

Great, the one place they've taken a stand for historical fidelity and it's the one that means I have to smell cat pee for eight hours a day.

JESS

Was there no shitty anachronistic attraction you were taken to as a kid that inspired your love of history?

MICHELLE

I don't see a lot of inspiration here.

JESS

Sure, no little girl is going to walk up to you, give you a big hug and say "Thank You Viking Peasant Woman, because of you I'm going to pursue a research focussed Masters on the development of 19th Century Town Planning" -

MICHELLE

It would be nice if they would.