



The Icebound Land: Book Three

By John A. Flanagan

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The international bestselling series with over 5 million copies sold in the U.S. *alone!*

Kidnapped after the fierce battle with Lord Morgarath, Will and Evanlyn are bound for Skandia as captives aboard a fearsome wolfship. Halt has sworn to rescue Will, and he will do anything to keep his promise—even defy his King.

Expelled from the Rangers he has served so loyally, Halt is joined by Will's friend Horace as he travels toward Skandia. On their way, they are challenged constantly by freelance knights—but Horace knows a thing or two about combat. Soon he begins to attract the attention of knights and warlords for miles around with his uncanny skill. Even so, will they be in time to rescue Will from a horrific life of slavery?

The smash hit series continues with another heart stopping adventure.

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The Icebound Land: Book Three By John A. Flanagan Bibliography

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Editorial Review

From Booklist

The third book in the Ranger's Apprentice series features a dual story, switching between the ranger's apprentice, Will, accompanied by princess Evanlyn, and the ranger, Halt, accompanied by Will's friend Horace, a young knight-in-training. After an unsuccessful attempt to escape from the ship where they are captives, Will and Evanlyn are taken to Skandia and put to work as slaves. Meanwhile, Halt and Horace ride to the rescue, or at least toward the rescue, only to be detained by a series of petty thieves and a nefarious knight. Although both strands of narrative feature journeys, each provides its own challenges for the characters and pleasures for readers. The Halt/Horace strand combines elements of knightly combat with a certain dry wit, and the Will/Evanlyn strand offers a good adventure story with a surprising twist. Throughout the novel, Flanagan's deft character portrayals and well-paced story will engage readers, and the ending will leave them clamoring for the next volume. Phelan, Carolyn

About the Author

John Flanagan grew up in Sydney, Australia, hoping to be a writer. John began writing Ranger's Apprentice for his son, Michael, ten years ago, and is still hard at work on the series and its spinoff, Brotherband Chronicles. He currently lives in the suburb of Manly, Australia, with his wife. In addition to their son, they have two grown daughters and four grandsons.

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Two

Halt stood motionless against the massive trunk of an oak tree as the bandits swarmed out of the forest to surround the carriage. He was in full view but nobody saw him. In part this was due to the fact that the robbers were totally intent on their prey, a wealthy merchant and his wife. For their part, they were equally distracted, staring with horror at the armed men who now surrounded their carriage in the clearing.

But in the main, it was due to the camouflage cloak that Halt wore, its cowl pulled up over his head to leave his face in shadow, and the fact that he stood absolutely stock-still. Like all Rangers, Halt knew the secret of merging into the background lay with the ability to remain unmoving, even when people seemed to be looking straight at him. *Believe you are unseen, went the Ranger saying, and it will be so.*

A burly figure, clad entirely in black, now emerged from the trees and approached the carriage. Halt's eyes narrowed for a second, then he sighed silently. Another wild goose chase, he thought. The figure bore a slight resemblance to Foldar, the man Halt had been pursuing since the end of the war with Morgarath. Foldar had been Morgarath's senior lieutenant. He had managed to escape capture when his leader died and his army of sub-human Wargals faded away.

But Foldar was no mindless beast. He was a thinking, planning human being—and a totally warped and evil one. The son of a noble Araluan family, he had murdered both his parents after an argument over a horse. He was barely a teenager at the time and he had escaped by fleeing into the Mountains of Rain and Night, where Morgarath recognised a kindred spirit and enlisted him. Now he was the sole surviving member of Morgarath's band and King Duncan had made his capture and imprisonment a number one priority for the Kingdom's armed forces.

The problem was, Foldar impersonators were springing up everywhere—usually in the form of everyday bandits like this one. They used the man's name and savage reputation to strike fear into their victims, making it easier to rob them. And as each one sprang up, Halt and his colleagues had to waste time tracking them down. He felt a slow burning of anger at the time he was wasting on these minor nuisances. Halt had other matters to attend to. He had a promise to keep and fools like this were preventing him doing so.

The fake Foldar had stopped by the carriage now. The black cloak with its high collar was somewhat similar to the one Foldar wore. But Foldar was a dandy and his cloak was immaculate black velvet and satin, whereas this was simple wool, badly dyed and patched in several places, with a collar of crudely tanned black leather. The man's bonnet was unkempt and badly creased as well, while the black swan's feather that adorned it was bent in the middle, probably where some careless bandit had sat on it. Now the man spoke, and his attempt to imitate Foldar's lisping, sarcastic tones was spoiled by his thick rural accent and clumsy grammar.

“Step down from the carriage, good sor and mad’m,” he said, sweeping a clumsy bow. “And fear not, good lady, the noble Foldar ne’er harms one as fair as thee art.” He attempted a sardonic, evil laugh. It came out more as a thin cackle.

The “good lady” was anything but fair. She was middle aged, overweight and plain in the extreme. But that was no reason why she should be subjected to this sort of terror, Halt thought grimly. She held back, whimpering with fear at the sight of the black figure before her. “Foldar” took a pace forward, his voice harsher, his tone more threatening. “Get down, missus!” he shouted. “Or I’ll hand you your husband’s ears!”

His right hand dropped to the hilt of a long dagger in his belt. The woman cried out and cowered further back into the carriage. Her husband, equally terrified and more than fond of his ears where they were, was trying to push her towards the carriage door. Enough, Halt thought. Satisfied that no one was looking in his direction, he nocked an arrow, drew and sighted in one economical motion, and released.

“Foldar”, real name Rupert Gubblestone, had a brief impression of something flashing past, just in front of his nose. Then there was an almighty jerk on the raised collar of his cloak and he found himself pinned against the carriage by a quivering black arrow that thudded into the wood. He gave a startled yelp, lost his balance and stumbled, saved from falling by his cloak, which now began to choke him where it fastened around his neck.

As the other bandits turned to see where the arrow had come from, Halt stepped away from the tree. Yet to the startled robbers, it seemed as if he had stepped out of the massive oak.

“King’s Ranger!” Halt called. “Drop your weapons.”

There were ten men, all armed. Not a single one thought to disobey the order. Knives, swords and cudgels clattered to the ground. They had just seen a first-hand example of a Ranger’s black magic: the grim figure had stepped clean out of the living trunk of an oak tree. Even now, the strange cloak that he wore seemed to shimmer uncertainly against the background, making it difficult to focus on him. And if sorcery weren’t enough to compel them, they could see a more practical reason—the massive longbow, with another black-shafted arrow already on the string.

“On the ground, belly down! All of you!” The words cut at them like a whip and they dropped to the ground. Halt pointed to one, a dirty-faced youth who couldn’t have been more than fifteen.

“Not you!” he said and the boy hesitated, on his hands and knees. “You take their belts and tie their hands behind them.”

The terrified boy nodded several times, then moved towards the first of his prone comrades. He stopped as Halt gave him a further warning.

“Tie them tight!” he said. “If I find one loose knot, I’ll . . .” He hesitated for a second, while he framed a suitable threat, then continued, “I’ll seal you up inside that oak tree over there.”

That should do it, he thought. He was aware of the effect that his unexplained appearance from the tree had on these uneducated country folk. It was a device he had used many times before. Now he saw the boy’s face whiten with fear under the dirt and knew the threat was effective. He turned his attention to Gubblestone, who was plucking feebly at the thong securing his cloak as it continued to choke him. He was already red in the face, his eyes bulging.

They bulged further as Halt unsheathed his heavy saxe knife.

“Oh, relax,” said Halt irritably. He slashed quickly through the cord and Gubblestone, suddenly released, fell awkwardly to the ground. He seemed content to stay there, out of the reach of that gleaming knife. Halt glanced up at the occupants of the carriage. The relief on their faces was all too obvious.

“I think you can be on your way if you like,” he said pleasantly. “These idiots won’t bother you any further.”

The merchant, remembering guiltily how he had tried to shove his wife out of the carriage, tried to cover his discomfort by blustering.

“They deserve hanging, Ranger! Hanging, I say! They have terrified my poor wife and threatened my very person!”

Halt eyed the man impassively until the outburst was finished.

“Worse than that,” he said quietly, “they’ve wasted my time.”

“The answer is no, Halt,” said Crowley. “Just as it was the last time you asked.”

He could see the anger in every line of Halt’s body as his old friend stood before him. Crowley hated what he had to do. But orders were orders and, as the Ranger Commandant, it was his job to enforce them. And Halt, like all Rangers, was bound to obey them.

“You don’t need me!” Halt burst out. “I’m wasting time hunting these imitation Foldars all over the Kingdom when I should be going after Will!”

“The King has made Foldar our number one priority,” Crowley reminded him. “Sooner or later, we’ll find the real one.” Halt made a dismissive gesture. “And you have forty-nine other Rangers to do the job!” he said. “For God’s sake, that should be enough.”

“King Duncan wants the other forty-nine. And he wants you. He trusts you and depends on you. You’re the best we have.”

“I’ve done my share,” Halt replied quietly and Crowley knew how much it hurt the other man to say those words. He also knew that his best reply would be silence—silence that would force Halt further into the sort of rationalisation that Crowley knew he hated. “The Kingdom owes that boy,” Halt said, with a little more certainty in his tone.

“The boy is a Ranger,” Crowley said coldly.

“An apprentice,” Halt corrected him and now Crowley stood, knocking his chair over with the violence of his movement.

“A Ranger apprentice assumes the same duties as a Ranger. We always have, Halt. For every Ranger, the rule is the same: Kingdom first. That’s our oath. You took it. I took it. And so did Will.”

There was an angry silence between the two men, made all the uglier by the years they had lived as friends and comrades. Halt, Crowley realised, was possibly his closest friend in the world. Now here they were, trading bitter words and angry arguments. He reached behind him and straightened the fallen chair, then made a gesture of peace to Halt.

“Look,” he said in a milder tone, “just help me clear up this Foldar business. Two months, maybe three, then you can go after Will, with my blessing.” Halt’s grizzled head was already shaking before he’d finished. “In two months he could be dead. Or sold on as a slave and lost forever. I need to go now while the trail is still warm. I promised him,” he added after a pause, his voice thick with misery.

“No,” said Crowley, with a note of finality. Hearing it, Halt squared his shoulders.

“Then I’ll see the King,” he said.

Crowley looked down at his desk.

“The King won’t see you,” he said flatly. He looked up and saw the surprise and betrayal in Halt’s eyes.

“He won’t see me? He refuses me?” For over twenty years, Halt had been one of the King’s closest confidants, with constant, unquestioned access to the royal chambers. “He knows what you’ll ask, Halt. He doesn’t want to refuse you, so he refuses to see you.”

Now the surprise and betrayal were gone from Halt’s eyes. In their place was anger.

Bitter anger.

“Then I’ll just have to change his mind,” he said quietly.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Sandra Murray:

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