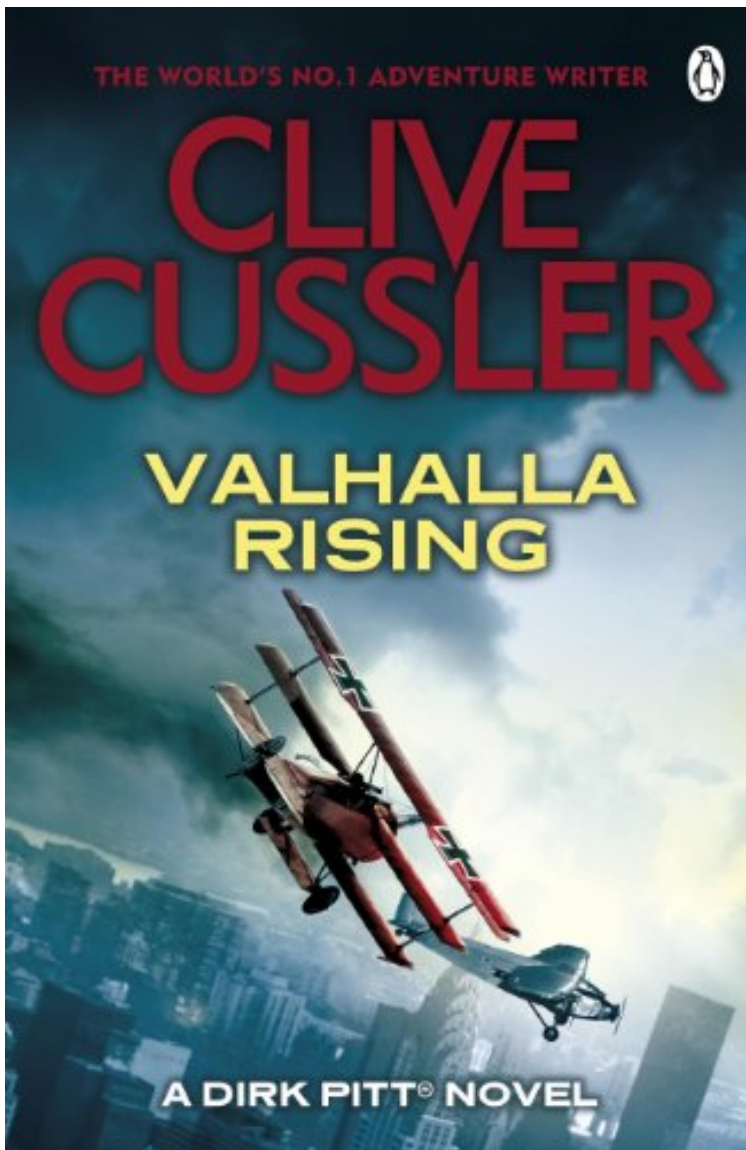


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## Valhalla Rising: Dirk Pitt #16



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[E-BOOK] Valhalla Rising: Dirk Pitt #16

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**Description :** Description du produit"Clive Cussler has no equal," writes Publishers Weekly, and he proved it again with the intricate plotting and astonishing set pieces of his number-one bestselling Atlantis Found. Fans wanted to know how he could possibly top it-and the answer is Valhalla Rising. It is July 2003. In the middle of its maiden voyage, the luxury cruise ship Emerald Dolphin suddenly catches fire and sinks. What caused it? Why didn't the alarms go off? What was its connection to the revolutionary new engines powering the ship? NUMA special projects director Dirk Pitt races to rescue the passengers and investigate the disaster, but he has no idea of the bizarre events that are about to engulf him. Before the next few weeks are over, Pitt will find himself confronted by an extraordinary series of monsters, both human and mechanical, modern and ancient. He will tread upon territory previously known only to legend. And, at the end of it all, though many lives will be lost, and many saved, it is Pitt's own life that will be changed forever. . . . Filled

with dazzling suspense and breathtaking action, Valhalla Rising is Cussler at the height of his storytelling powers.

Prsentation de l'diteurValhalla Rising is Clive Cussler's thrilling sixteenth Dirk Pitt adventure. Sabotage, conspiracy and piracy in the air, and below the waves, finds Dirk Pitt plunged into his most dangerous adventure yet. When the luxury cruise lined Emerald Dolphin - powered by a revolutionary new propulsion system - becomes a raging inferno and sinks mysteriously, it is lucky that NUMA special projects director Dirk Pitt is on hand to rescue the passengers and investigate the tragedy. Sifting through the undersea wreckage for signs of foul play, Pitt is unaware of powerful, dark forces playing their hand against him. Forced to fight for his life - and those of friends and colleagues - against evermore ruthless enemies from a shadowy organisation, Pitt finds himself caught between the secrets of the past and the intrigues of the future. A future that will hold the world to ransom... Filled with breathtaking suspense and dazzling action, Valhalla Rising sees Clive Cussler at the height of his storytelling powers. Valhalla Rising is the sixteenth of Clive Cussler's bestselling Dirk Pitt novels - the series that also includes Atlantis Found and, his first novel, Mayday - in which our hero finds himself caught up in a web of shipwrecks and dark secrets. Praise for Clive Cussler: 'Cussler is hard to beat' Daily Mail 'The guy I read' Tom Clancy.com Dirk Pitt, Clive Cussler's aging but still potent superhero, returns in the 16th adventure in this popular series about the director of special projects for the National Underwater Maritime Administration (NUMA). Pitt's NUMA survey ship happens to be in the vicinity when the world's newest and biggest cruise ship founders and sinks, giving Pitt the chance to stage the daring rescue of nearly 2,000 passengers. Among those who perish is a famous scientist whose revolutionary engines powered the ship to her watery grave; while Pitt is unable to save Dr. Egan, he rescues his beautiful daughter Kelly from the sea, and later from a murder attempt aboard the rescue vessel. Pitt and his trusty pal Al Giordino track the sinking to the boardroom door of a multinational conglomerate called Cerberus, whose evil CEO has designs on the world's oil supply. He'll do anything to keep Egan's advanced engines and secret formula for frictionless oil off the market--even sabotage another vessel, this time a luxury passenger submarine. By the time our heroes have foiled the mastermind's nefarious plots, they've also uncovered the existence of a working submarine nearly a century before one actually existed--irrefutable proof of a Viking landing on the Hudson River--and the remains of the British sailor who inspired Jules Verne's Captain Nemo. A solid page-turner that even features a cameo appearance by the author himself, Valhalla Rising snaps, crackles, and pops with Cussler's usual brio. --Jane Adams

Extrait Chapter One June 1035 Somewhere in North America They moved through the morning mist like ghosts, silent and eerie in phantom ships. Tall, serpentine prows arched gracefully on bow and stern, crowned with intricately carved dragons, teeth bared menacingly in a growl as if their eyes were piercing the vapor in search of victims. Meant to incite fear into the crew's enemies, the dragons were also believed to be protection against the evil spirits that lived in the sea. The little band of immigrants had come across a hostile sea in long, elegantly shaped black hulls that skimmed the waves with the ease and stability of trout in a peaceful brook. Long oars reached from holes in the hulls and dipped into the dark water, pulling the ships through the waves. Their square red-and-white striped sails hung limp in the listless air. Small lapstrake boats twenty feet long and carrying extra cargo were tied to the sterns and towed behind. These people were the precursors of those who would come much later: men, women and children, along with their meager possessions, including livestock. Of the paths Norsemen had blazed across the oceans, none was more dangerous than the great voyage across the North Atlantic. Despite the perils of the unknown, they'd boldly sailed through the ice floes, struggled under the gale-force winds, fought monstrous waves and endured vicious storms that surged out of the southwest. Most had survived, but the sea had exacted its cost. Two of the eight ships that had set out from Norway were lost and never seen again. Finally, the storm-worn colonists reached the west coast of Newfoundland, but instead of landing at L'Anse aux Meadows, the site of Lief Erickson's earlier settlement, they were determined to explore farther south in the hope of finding a warmer climate for their new colony. After skirting a very large island, they steered a southwesterly course until they reached a long arm of land that curved northward from the mainland. Continuing around two lower islands, they sailed for another two days past a vast white sandy beach, a great source of wonder to people who had lived all their lives on unending coastlines of jagged rock. Rounding the tip of the seemingly unending stretch of sand, they encountered a wide bay. Without hesitation, the little fleet of ships entered the calmer waters and sailed west, helped along by an incoming tide. A fog bank rolled over them, casting a damp blanket of moisture over the water. Later in the day, the sun became a dim orange ball as it began to

set over an unseen western horizon. A conference was shouted among the commanders of the ships and it was agreed to anchor until morning, in hopes the fog would lift. When first light came, the fog had been replaced with a light mist, and it could be seen that the bay narrowed into a fjord that flowed into the sea. Setting out the oars, the men rowed into the current as their women and children stared quietly at the high palisades that emerged from the dying mist on the west bank of the river, rising ominously above the masts of the ships. What seemed to them to be incredibly giant trees forested the rolling land behind the crest. Though they saw no sign of life, they suspected they were being watched by human eyes hidden among the trees. Every time they had come ashore for water, they had been harassed by the Skraelings, their term for any foreign-born natives that lived in the alien country they hoped to colonize. The Skraelings had not proven friendly, and on more than one occasion had unleashed clouds of arrows against the ships. Keeping their usual warlike nature under firm control, the expedition leader, Bjarne Sigvatson, had not allowed his warriors to fight back. He knew well that other colonists from Vinland and Greenland had been plagued by the Skraelings, too, a situation caused by the Vikings who had murdered several of the innocent inhabitants purely out of a barbaric love of killing. This trip Sigvatson would demand that the native inhabitants be treated in a friendly manner. He felt it vital for the survival of the colony to trade cheap goods for furs and other necessities, without the bloodshed. And, unlike Thorfinn Karlsefni and Lief Erickson, whose earlier expeditions were eventually driven off by the Skraelings, this one was armed to the teeth by men who were blood-hardened Norwegian veterans of many battles with their archenemies, the Saxons. Swords slung over their shoulders, one hand clutching a long spear, the other a huge axe, they were the finest fighting men of their time. The incoming tide could be felt far up the river and helped the rowers make headway into the current, which was mild due to the low gradient. The river's mouth was only three-quarters of a mile wide, but it soon broadened to almost two miles. The land on the sloping shore to the east was green with lush vegetation. Sigvatson, who was standing with his arm around the great dragon prow of the lead ship, gazing through the dying mist into the distance, pointed to a shadow in the steep rock palisades looming around a slight bend. "Pull toward the left bank," he ordered the rowers. "There looks to be an opening in the cliffs where we can shelter for the night." As they drew closer, the dark, forbidding entrance of a flooded cavern grew in size until it broadened wide enough for a ship to enter. Sigvatson peered into the gloomy interior and saw that the passage traveled deep under the sheer walls of the cliff. He ordered the other ships to drift while the mast on his ship was unstepped and laid flat to permit entry beneath the low arch at the cavern's mouth. The fjord's stream swirled around the entrance, but the hardy rowers easily drove the ship inside, shipping the oars only slightly to keep them from striking the flanks of the opening. As they passed through, the women and children leaned over the bulwarks and stared down through water of startling clarity, schools of fish clearly visible swimming over the rocky bottom nearly fifty feet below. It was with no little trepidation that they found themselves in a high-ceilinged grotto easily large enough to hold a fleet of ships three times the size of the little Viking fleet. Though their ancestors had embraced Christianity, old pagan traditions died hard. Naturally formed grottos were regarded as the dwelling places of the gods. The walls on the interior of the grotto, formed by the cooling of molten rock 200,000 million years earlier, had been sculpted and worn smooth by the waves of an ancient sea against the volcanic rock layers that were an extension of nearby mountains. They arched upward into a domed ceiling that was bare of moss or hanging growth. Surprisingly, it was also free of bats. The chamber was mostly dry. The water level stopped at a ledge that ascended three feet and stretched into the inner reaches of the cavern for a distance of nearly two hundred feet. Sigvatson shouted through the grotto entrance for the other ships to follow. Then his rowers eased off their strokes and let the ship drift until its stem post bumped lightly against the edge of the second cavern's floor. As the other ships approached the landing, long gangplanks were run out and everyone scurried onto dry land, happy to stretch their legs for the first time in days. The foremost matter of business was to serve the first hot meal they'd eaten since an earlier landing hundreds of miles to the north. The children spread out throughout the caverns to gather driftwood, running along the shelves that eons of water erosion had carved in the rock. Soon the women had fires going and were baking bread, while cooking porridge and fish stew in large iron pots. Some of the men began repairing the wear and tear on the ships from the rugged voyage, while others threw out nets and caught schools of fish teeming in the fjord. The women were only too happy to find such comfortable shelter from the elements. The men, on the other hand, were big, tousle-haired outdoorsmen and sailors who found it unpleasant to exist in rock-bound confinement. After eating and just before settling in for the night in their leather sleeping bags, two of Sigvatson's young children, an eleven-year-old boy and ten-year-old girl, came running up to him, shouting excitedly. They grabbed his big hands and began

dragging him into the deepest part of the cavern. Lighting torches, they led him into a long tunnel barely large enough to stand in. It was a tube passage, a rounded cave system originally formed when underwater. After climbing over and around fallen rock, they ascended upward for two hundred feet. Then the children stopped and motioned to a small crevice. "Father, look, look!" cried the girl. "There is a hole leading outside. You can see the stars." Sigvatson saw that the hole was too small and narrow even for the children to crawl through, but he could clearly see the nighttime sky. The next day, he put several men to work smoothing the tunnel floor to ease access and widening the exit hole. When the opening was expended so a man could walk through while standing straight, they found themselves stepping into a large meadow bordered by stout trees. No barren, Greenland timberless land here. The supply of lumber to build houses was limitless. The ground was thick with wildflowers and grass to graze their livestock. It was on this generous land high above the beautiful, blue fjord bountiful with fish that Sigvatson would build his colony. The gods had shown the way to the children, who led the grown-ups to what they all hoped was their newly found paradise. The Norsemen had a lust for life. They worked hard, lived hard and they died hard. The sea was their element. To them, a man without a boat was a man in chains. Though feared throughout the Middle Ages for their barbarian instincts, they reshaped Europe. The hardy immigrants fought and settled in Russia, Spain and France and became merchants and mercenaries, renowned for their courage and ability with the sword and battle-ax. Hrolf the Gange won Normandy, which was named after the Norsemen. His descendant William conquered England. Bjarne Sigvatson was the image of a golden Viking. His hair was blond with a beard to match. He was not a tall man, but broad in the shoulders, with the strength of an ox. Bjarne was born in 980 on his father's farm in Norway, and like most young Viking men grew up with a restless yearning to see what was over the next horizon. Inquisitive and bold, yet deliberate, he joined expeditions that raided Ireland when he was only fifteen. By the time he was twenty, Bjarne was a battle-ripened, seaborne raider with enough pillaged treasure to build a fine ship and mount his own raiding expeditions. He married Freydis, a sturdy self-reliant beauty with long golden hair and blue eyes. It was a fortunate match. They blended together like sun and sky. After amassing a vast fortune from plundering towns and villages up and down Britain and sporting numerous scars from battle, Bjarne retired from raiding and became a merchant, trading in amber, the diamond of its time. But after a few years, he became restless, especially after hearing the sagas about the epic explorations of Erik the Red and his son Lief Eriksson. The lure of strange lands far to the west beckoned, and he became determined to mount his own voyage into the unknown to found a colony. He soon put together a fleet of ten ships to carry 350 people with their families, livestock and farming tools. One ship alone was loaded with Bjarne's fortune in amber and plundered treasure, to be used for future exchange with ships transporting goods from Norway and Iceland. The cavern made an ideal boat and storage house as well as a fortress against any attack by the Skraelings. The sleek craft were pulled from the water onto trees cut into rollers and placed in hewn cradles on the hard rock shelf. The Vikings constructed beautiful ships that were the marvel of their age. They were not only incredibly efficient sailing machines but also masterworks of sculpture, magnificently proportioned and lavishly decorated with elaborate carvings on stem and stern. Few vessels before or since have matched their lines for pure elegance. The long ship was the vessel used for raiding around Europe. She was extremely fast and versatile, with ports for fifty oars. But it was the knarr that was the workhorse of the Viking explorers. Fifty to sixty feet long with a broad fifteen-foot beam, the knarr could carry fifteen tons of cargo over great distances at sea. She relied mostly on her big square sail for the open sea, but mounted as many as ten oars for cruising in shallow water near shorelines. Her fore and aft decks were planked with a spacious open deck amidships that could be loaded with cargo or livestock. The crew and passengers suffered in the open, protected only by ox hides. There were no special quarters for chieftains such as Sigvatson; Vikings sailed as ordinary seamen, all equal to one another, their leader assuming command for important decisions. The knarr was at home in rough seas. Under gale winds and towering swells, she could barrel through the worst the gods could throw at her and still plunge ahead at five to seven knots, covering over 150 miles a day. Built of sturdy oak by superb Viking shipwrights who shaped by hand and eye and used only axes to work the wood, the keel was cut from a single piece of oak into a T-shaped beam that increased stabilization in heavy seas. Next came oak planks that were hewn into thin strakes running with the grain and which curved gracefully before being joined at the stern and stem posts. Known as a clinker-type hull, the planks above overlapped the ones below. Then they were caulked with tarred hair from the animals. Except for the crossbeams that braced the hull and supported the decks, there wasn't another piece of wood on the ship that lay in a straight line. The whole thing looked too fragile for the storms that swept the North Atlantic, but there was a method to the

seeming madness. The keel could flex and the hull warp, enabling the ship to glide effortlessly with less resistance from the water, making her the most stable ship of the middle centuries. And her shallow draft allowed her to slip over huge waves like a shingle. The rudder was also a masterwork of engineering. A stout steering oar attached to the starboard quarter, its vertical shaft was turned by the helmsman using a horizontal tiller. The rudder was always mounted on the right side of the hull and was called a *stjornbordit* the word came to mean starboard. The helmsman kept one eye on the sea and the other on a bronze, intricately designed weathervane that was mounted on either the stem post or mast. By studying the whims of the wind, he could steer the most favorable tack. A large oak block served as the keelson where the foot of the mast was set. The mast measured thirty feet tall and held a sail that spread nearly twelve hundred square feet cut in a rectangle only slightly wider than a square. The sails were woven from coarse wool in two layers for added strength. Then they were dyed in shades of red and white, usually in designs of simple stripes or diamonds. Not only were the Vikings master shipbuilders and sailors; they were exceptional navigators as well. They were born with a genius for seamanship. A Viking could read the currents, the clouds, the water temperature, wind and waves. He studied the migrations of fish and birds. At night he steered by the stars. During the day he used a sun shadow board, a disklike sundial with a center shaft that was slipped up and down to measure the sun's declination by tracing its shadow on notched lines on the board's surface. Viking latitude calculations were amazingly accurate. It wasn't often that a Viking ship became hopelessly lost. Their mastery of the sea was complete and never challenged. In the following months the colonists built thick wooden longhouses with massive beams to support a sod roof. They raised a great communal hall with a huge hearth for cooking and socializing that also served for storage and as a livestock shelter. Hungry for rich land, the Norsemen wasted no time in planting crops. They harvested berries and netted fish in great abundance from the fjord. The Skraelings proved curious yet reasonably friendly. Trinkets, cloth and cows' milk were traded for valuable furs and game. Sigvatson wisely ordered his men to keep their metal swords, axes and spears out of sight. The Skraelings possessed the bow and arrow, but their hand weapons were still crudely made of stone. Sigvatson correctly took it for granted that before long the Norseman's superior weapons would either be stolen or demanded in trade. By fall they were fully prepared for a harsh winter. But this year the weather was mild, with little snow and few frigid days. The settlers marveled at the sunny days that were longer than they'd been used to in Norway and during their short stay in Iceland. With spring, Sigvatson prepared to send out a large scouting expedition to explore the new and strange land. He chose to remain behind to assume the duties and responsibilities of running the now-thriving little community. He picked his younger brother, Magnus, to lead the expedition. A hundred men were selected by Sigvatson for the journey he expected would be long and arduous. After weeks of preparation, sails were raised on six of the smallest boats while the men, women and children who remained behind waved farewell to the little armada as it set off up the river to find its headwaters. What was to have been a two-month scouting expedition, however, turned into an epic journey of fourteen months. Sailing and rowing except when they had to haul their boats overland to the next waterway, the men traveled on wide rivers and across enormous lakes that seemed as vast as the great northern sea. They sailed on a river that was far larger than any of them had seen in Europe or around the Mediterranean. Three hundred miles down the great waterway, they came ashore and camped in a thickly wooded forest. Here they covered and hid the boats. Then they launched a year-long trek through rolling hills and endless grasslands. The Norsemen found strange animals they'd never seen before. Small doglike creatures that howled in the night. Large cats with short tails, and huge furry beasts with horns and enormous heads. These they killed with spears and found the flesh as delectable as beef. Because they did not linger in one place, the Skraelings did not consider them a threat and caused no trouble. The explorers were fascinated and amused by the differences in the Skraeling tribes. Some stood proudly and possessed noble bearing, but others looked little better than filthy animals. Many months later, they came to a halt when they saw the peaks of enormous mountains rising in the distance. In awe of the great land that seemed to go on forever, they decided it was time to turn back and reach the colony before the first snows of winter. But when the weary travelers finally reached the settlement in midsummer expecting a joyous welcome, they found only devastation and tragedy. The entire colony had been burned to the ground and all that was left of their comrades, wives and children were scattered bones. What terrible friction had caused the Skraelings to go on a rampage and slaughter the Vikings? What had caused the break of peaceful relations? There were no answers from the dead. Magnus and the enraged and grieving surviving Norseman discovered that the opening to the tunnel leading down to the cavern where the ships were stored had been covered over with rocks and brush by the late inhabitants and hidden from the Skraelings.

Somehow the settlers had managed to hide the treasures and sacred relics Sigvatson had plundered in his younger days, along with their most cherished personal possessions, concealing them in the ships during the Skraelings' attack. The anguished warriors might have turned their backs on the carnage and sailed away, but it was not in their genes. They lusted for revenge, knowing it would most likely end in death. But to a Viking, dying while fighting an enemy was a spiritual and glorious death. And then there was the terrible possibility that their wives and daughters might have been carried away as slaves by the Skraelings. Wild with grief and rage, they collected the remains of their friends and families and carried them down the tunnel to the cavern, where they placed them in the ships. It was part of their traditional ceremony to send the dead to a glorious hereafter in Valhalla. They identified the mutilated remains of Bjarne Sigvatson and laid him in his ship, wrapping him in a cloak and surrounding his body with the remains of his two children and his treasures from life and buckets of food for the journey. They longed to place his wife, Freydis, beside him, but her body could not be found, nor were there any livestock left to sacrifice. All had been taken by the Skraelings. Traditionally, the ships and their dead would have been buried, but that was not possible. They feared that the Skraelings would dig up and plunder the dead. So the saddened warriors hammered and chiseled at a huge rock above the grotto's entrance until it dropped in a massive spill along with tons of smaller boulders, effectively sealing off the cavern from the surface of the river. The rock jammed together in a chute several feet below the waterline, leaving a large unseen opening underwater. The ceremony completed, the Norsemen prepared themselves for battle. Honor and courage were qualities they held sacred. They were in a state of euphoria, knowing they would soon see battle. Deep within their souls, they had longed for combat, the clash of arms, the smell of blood. It was part of their culture, and they had grown up and were trained by their fathers to be warriors, expert in the art of killing. They sharpened their long swords and battle axes that were forged from fine steel by German craftsmen treasured objects, highly prized and worshiped. Both sword and axe were given names as if they lived and breathed. Reprinted from Valhalla Rising by Clive Cussler by permission of Berkley, a member of Penguin Putnam Inc. Copyright 2002, Sandecker RLLLP. All rights reserved. This excerpt, or any parts thereof, may not be reproduced in any form without permission.