

Today's News

Vikings Postmortem: George Blagden on Athelstan's Shocking Fate



By **Sadie Gennis** | Mar 20, 2014 11:00 PM EDT



George Blagden

[WARNING: The following contains major spoilers from Thursday's episode of *Vikings*. Read at your own risk.]

Vikings is no stranger to violence, but what happened to Athelstan this week was almost too painful to watch.

The former monk-turned-Viking warrior was captured by the Anglo-Saxons and, in a cruel twist of fate, strung up and crucified wearing a crown of thorns. **George Blagden** spoke to **TVGuide.com** about filming the excruciating ordeal, what's next for Athelstan and more.

What was it like filming the crucifixion?

George Blagden: I remember coming off set that day, and I saw [**Clive Standen**] on the way back into Dublin. He said, "How was your day? It was your big crucifixion scene. How was it?" And I said, "Today was the most emotionally and physically challenging day I've had so far as an actor." Even six months on from when we've filmed it, I still remember it as that ... It was an amazing thing [creator **Michael Hirst**] gave Athelstan to tackle. It was a gift in a way, if that doesn't sound too sadistic.

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What was going through Athelstan's head while he was on the cross?

Blagden: When we arrive at the end of Episode 4 and he's recaptured by Anglo-Saxon warriors and tortured and beaten and put on a cross of wood, I think his mind is torn into so many different scary directions. He really is a broken man psychologically. ... I'm very excited for people to see where Athelstan moves forward after his very trying act of torture in Episode 4 because it's in the aftermath of the act that hopefully viewers will be able to see how much that event has affected his poor soul.

What sort of state will we find Athelstan in Episode 5?

Blagden: I think people will see an Athelstan who they've not seen before. We've seen a very sort of devout religious man who's been taken away from everything and anything he knows and thrown into this Viking society. [He] managed to survive there, and now he's become a part of that. Now that he's recaptured, he's come full circle. ... I

hope you'll be able to see a man who's been through so much more than he should have really at that point in his life.

While on the cross, was Athelstan praying in Latin?

Blagden: I was praying in Latin ... which is quite a revealing thing about this man. He's been living in this Viking community for several years and clearly bluffing to all his friends around him, Ragnar (**Travis Fimmel**) and the Viking community, that he is really part of their society and believes in their gods. And when he's put to test on the cross, he's praying in Latin to a Christian God. As Season 2 progresses, there's a fantastic scene where Athelstan explains his conflicted mind. [It explains] how Athelstan survived in this purgatory type world between two religions.

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Now that Athelstan is surrounded by Christians again, will we see him consider reverting back to that way of life?

Blagden: What you will see is Athelstan trying to make some sort of sense of [how] he's arrived at this place and the hierarchical nightmare that he finds himself in. Just as challenging as it was for him when he was uprooted from Lindisfarne and the Christian world there and sucked into the middle Scandinavian life and pagan ways, it's inevitable that this man will find it just as hard to adapt to this Anglo-Saxon life again. If that is indeed where he is or where he lives after Episode 4.

Will we see Athelstan's relationship with the King of Wessex (Linus Roache**) now that Ecbert rescued him?**

Blagden: It's inevitable really that the first meeting that King Ecbert and Athelstan have is [when Athelstan] is nailed to a wooden cross and this man strides into the field and saves his life. ... Athelstan realizes that what happened here is a complete mirrored act to Ragnar saving Athelstan's life in Season 1. So once again, Athelstan is presented with this really powerful man, who, for one reason or another, decided to spare his life. I hope the viewers will be wanting to see what happens in this developing relationship with King Ecbert.

Would you characterize what Athelstan feels towards Ragnar as Stockholm syndrome?

Blagden: Throughout the filming of Season 1, the really complex relationship that Michael Hirst gave Travis and I to play with Ragnar and Athelstan — this master-slave hierarchical relationship that develops into companions — is a classic case of Stockholm syndrome ... Essentially, they're two men who are now at a place in the story where they can't really live without each other, as romantic as that sounds. But it really is that sort of relationship when we start Season 2 ... Athelstan seems to be a mainstay for him, a rock that he can lean on. I think moving forward through Season 2 that only continues.