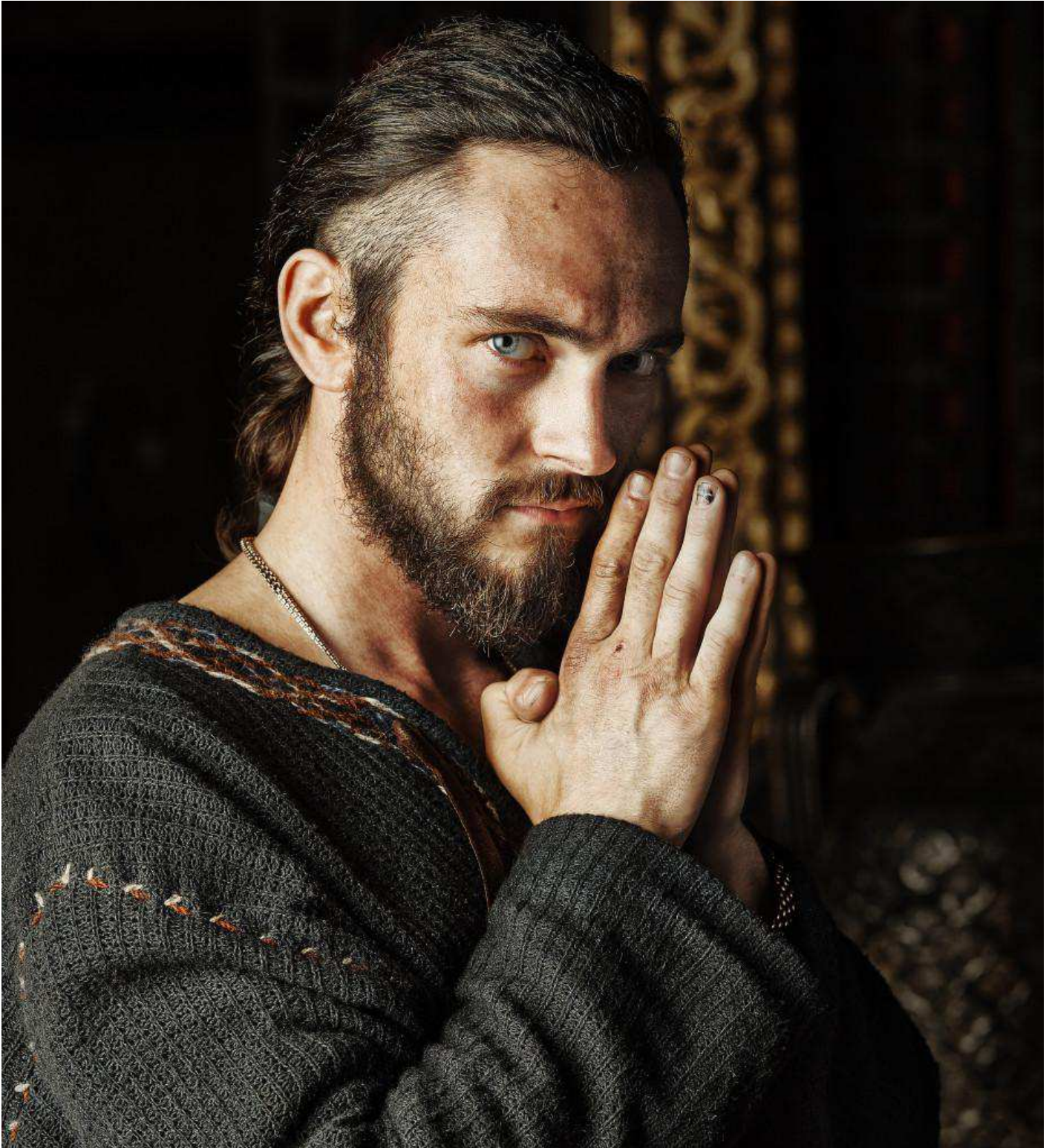


## Inside Scoop: VIKINGS George Blagden On His Future & Athelstan's Death

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**Vikings** fans were dealt a major blow last week with the death of Athelstan. OHSOGRAY participated on a press call with George Blagden to find out how he learned of Athelstan's fate and what's ahead for him.

**Vikings** airs Thursdays at 10/9c on History.

**What was your reaction when Michael Hirst told you about Athelstan's death?**

*My first reaction was to pull over [laughter], I was in a car driving and I got an e-mail on my phone that showed up saying Athelstan season three and it was a big five-page long e-mail. To be honest, reading the e-mail that Michael outlined his reasons for why he thought it was the right time to kill Athelstan, I agreed with all of them and sort of I think kind of a full realization comprehension of the character was the main*

overriding feeling. A kind of knowledge that we're on the same page about what we wanted to do with the character and how we wanted to close it. It was nice.

#### **What do you think Athelstan would have done if he knew that Judith was pregnant?**

That's a very good question. I think Michael and I talked a lot about how Athelstan perceived the situation with Judith by episode four and five. I think what we tried to portray was that it was sort of like a first love relationship for a young man who had never really been through that process before and without kind of [laughter] condemning all men throughout the world [laughter] in this statement. If I can be hugely generalized, it was sort of saying things in the heat of the moment I think was what we really wanted Athelstan's trying to be doing with Judith. I guess what we'd call in the U.K. a fling. I think that's the main tragedy of the situation and what Michael brilliantly did with the right thing was make it that Athelstan will never ever know that he was to have a child. I don't know if Athelstan would have dealt with the news very well. I mean it was the first time that he had kind of been through that process and it's at the end of it. He was told that he was going to be a father. I think I don't know if he had coped with it very well.

#### **How as the fan reaction been to Athelstan's death?**

Yes. I have to admit, I think the emotional process of it all was fascinating for me from finding out to then getting on set and realizing that it will be the last time that I would be on that certain island and not letting anybody else know about that. A lot of the other actors actually didn't know until after we've started shooting season three. It was that kind of secretive. Then of course wrapping on the show, I burst into tears. They had this big surprise for my last scene and I think it's just very emotional when you're working in our industry with a group of people that you get that close to over – with episodic television over a number of years. It kind of becomes like family. So yes, I suppose anyone who says as an actor that when their character is killed off in the show it's not an emotional experience, I think they're probably lying. [Laughter] Yes, but I've been biting my nails since I left the show in August last year. I hope that we did lovely Athelstan justice.

#### **Hopefully, Michael Hirst will write you into some flashbacks or visions.**

E-mail him please. [Laughter] Tell him.

#### **With the death of Athelstan, who was Ragnar's last trustworthy friend, where do you see Ragnar going?**

It's a very good question. I think the fact that Athelstan is no longer in Ragnar's life leaves Ragnar very, very open and potentially weak and the fact that he doesn't have maybe anybody in Kattegat got left who he really feels like he can trust. To be perfectly honest, my guess is as good as yours, really. I've not seen any of the scripts through the remainder of season three, so next week I'll be tuning in and I'll be watching the show as a fan. I guess I would like to see Ragnar kind of be able to discover who the murderer was and I think I'd love to see how that relationship plays out and how things resolve with Floki and Ragnar and I don't know if they ever do but I would like to see whether he takes a kind of Pagan view perhaps where punishment could be very, very serious or whether maybe he takes a Christian view and maybe there's some kind of forgiveness in both. I have no idea. I'm excited.

#### **Did you have a particular favorite scene or episode that you filmed or perhaps one that was the most challenging for you?**

There were plenty. I think in this season, the whole sequence of when Athelstan is visited by God and in home of the light was particularly challenging because on the show so far, we have had a limited amount sort of supernatural elements to the show. It's not a fantasy show, it's a historical show. The element that we had in six where Athelstan is visited by God was very much a real thing. It was kind of interesting how we would try to visualize the reality of what it would be, actually visually what you would see onscreen with this religious experience and kind of taking our own take on it and how that would affect him emotionally in that moment. It was just a really kind of interesting process to tackle and discover how this man would behave in that exact moment and it was quite emotional and quite kind of scary and yet something I've never really done as an actor before. I think I only saw the episode today for the first time but I think it was revealing in a way that I wanted it to be and that was probably the most challenging thing.

#### **What would you say about the remainder of season three to encourage Athelstan fans to continue tuning in?**

Wow. Well I suppose I would say that I think Michael said to me even though he didn't tell me what was going to happen to the rest of season three, he said that he would find it very difficult to not have Athelstan as a very strong presence and central theme going forward. Even after death, how he would affect all of the characters' relationships and how they would move on past his death. So I would like to think maybe he's still a driving force in the narrative as a character even though he's no longer there and I think a lot of the decisions and choices that the characters have to make as they go forward into Paris, the raid on Paris and dealing with the relationships abroad I think I would like to think that Athelstan has a part to play in all of that. So if some people are serious about not tuning in because of Athelstan then they should tune in. [Laughter] They should tune in next week.

#### **What's up next for you? What's your next project?**

I have just finished filming a television series in France, in Paris believe it or not. Athelstan ended up going to Paris. No, it's called Versailles. It's for Canal+ in France and it's about how Louis XIV decided to centralize his government and build this monstrosity of a palace, Versailles that we know and love today. It was very, very different to Vikings. I actually finished filming Vikings on the Friday at 6 PM, got on a plane on Saturday, had hair and make-up test on Saturday, rehearsed all day Sunday with the director of the Versailles and we turned over on the Monday morning in Paris. So I had a weekend to prepare for Versailles. It worked out quite well [Laughter] let's say with the scheduling but the main difference was that weekend, I spent most of it having my hands manicured like crazy. I just spent three months in Ireland in the fields in mud being as Pagan as I could be. Yes, that was the main difference between the shows was the hand care, honestly like nail care, it was extreme. No, there was obviously a lot more amazing different things but no, it was an amazing project and I can't wait for the world to see it. It's very different to Vikings and yes, I'm excited to see it.

### Is there any chance for a resurrection of Athelstan?

*Like I've been saying, my guess is good as yours. I really don't know what Michael has in store for the rest of season three. I don't know what he has in store for season four. So I'm going to e-mail him all of your suggestions. No, it's a great suggestion. I think it would be an amazing story going forward. That element was there somewhere. I have yet to hear and I don't think anyone on the show has received the scripts for season four yet. I'd love to.*

### What did you think Ragnar's eulogy for Athelstan?

*I welled up. It's amazing on shows like this, you read the script and you see what all of the other characters will have to film, but of course you're not there on the day when they're doing it. So you just see the scenes, see when it's being shot and you imagine, "Okay, Travis is off doing that somewhere." I didn't even know where they were filming it and then coming to watch the episode through to the end and seeing Travis then climbing that hill and realizing it was the same place that we had the prayer together in the end of season two, this beautiful, beautiful, beautiful performance sent me over the edge. So yes, it was really, really lovely to watch as a kind of rounding off for the whole episode. Yes, really amazing and I think it's quite rare when you're in something to be that effective. I'm sure lots of people you talk to in the industry who are actors are involved in things, probably talk a lot about it's quite hard to look at things objectively because you're so close to it. So when you are able to just be sucked in and be emotionally affected by something that you're actually involved in, I think it speaks volumes, how powerful that is. It's an amazing thing what Travis did.*

### What do you take away from this experience compared to all other projects you worked on? What will you miss the most?

*I think the group of people I got to work with in Ireland for three years is something that is very rare. I think we got to a point in season three where everybody just had as much fun as they were working hard on the show. I think it's rare when you're on something where everyone gets along with everyone and there's not a tough day at work because everyone is trying to make it as easy as possible for one another. I think the people were very, very special, rare group of people, the actors, the crew, everybody involved. I miss them all hugely.*

### How was it working with Gustaf on your final scene?

*Yes, I think we both knew just before we started shooting episode one. So it was interesting knowing that six episodes prior and being able to work that through the narrative without maybe making it too obvious. They gave his character I think a lot of drive and emphasis with decisions about how he was going to try and start this revolutionary thinking against Ragnar's way of thinking. I think the scene that Helen directed us in culminated in this beautiful clash of religions and in a very respectful way and what we really wanted to achieve was seeing two characters that have a lot of respect for one another. I think hopefully people took that away from it, that it was a mutual understanding between the two characters. I'm fascinated to see what people's perceptions of Floki are going forward because I've always known him for the last two or three years to be a fan favorite character and everybody loves his character and rightly so. I hope that this... I hope it doesn't affect people's view of him because I suppose in a way he was doing what he believed in and yes, we'll see when Michael wants to take Floki whether he lets this action consume him or whether there's a revival from it.*

### Athelstan's went out as a pacifist note because of his rebirth. During season two and then during that time frame, he was on the warrior path and now he came back to being a pacifist. Is that the way you always would have wanted them to go out or would you rather him going out with a sword?

*That's a very good question because the little boy part of me, George, would just love to seeing Athelstan and go out in some big heroic battle scene. The reality is that doesn't look right when you stood next to Travis, and you're little George Blagden and you can't really go out in the heroic battle. No, I think Michael was very, very clever in how he kept the needle swinging backwards and forwards with Athelstan throughout the three seasons. It's amazing how many times he could switch his character from side to side. I think there's a nice resolution in coming full circle back to the religion in which he started and the place the devote Christian faith in which he so strongly believed in. I think it made the whole process feel a bit more complete in doing that. So I think Michael's choice to have him go through this rebirth was definitely the right one.*

### Was there ever any discussion about having a scene where Ragnar discovers Athelstan's body?

*No, to be perfectly honest. All the script that I saw from Michael always had the murder of Athelstan take place and then very, very quickly making that time cut of Ragnar having discovered his body. I think actually, the scene that Michael and Travis came up with and how episode six ends is sort of in a way a lot more beautiful. I think there could have been a risk maybe if we had played out that scene where Ragnar discovers his body that we could have lapsed into a sort of melodrama or something that wasn't maybe as reverential as it needed to be at the end of episode six. I remember Michael saying that episode six originally, we were going to move on very quickly and we would actually see one of the Vikings getting on the boat, sailing out towards Paris. Talking with Travis, it really felt as though we needed to close the book on that chapter. I think we needed episode six to end in that way with Travis sort of saying goodbye to his friend.*

### Michael Hirst recently said that Ragnar's children will eventually come into conflict with Athelstan's son, Alfred. If the show were to do a huge time jump, would you play Alfred the Great? Would you be up for that?

*Absolutely, yes. Yes, I would love to. I think it would be a little bit weird and I'm not sure if people would fully buy into that. I'm there if they want me. No, that's amazing. I didn't actually know that. I should do a bit more research into Michael's interviews. Yes, I had no idea that-that is where he wants to end up, that's hard down the timeline with all of the sons and babies and children that we have at the moment in the show being grown up, that would be amazing. I'd be tuning in every week if I wasn't in fact there on the set being Alfred.*

### In what way do Siggy and Athelstan's deaths impact the show?

*Yes, I think what we saw in season two was like you referred to the deaths of Jarl Borg and King Horik. Both those deaths were extremely violent and I think that was a result of the fact that Michael's writing for Ragnar mainly as a character was quite dark throughout season two. He'd*