

THE NEW VIKING INVASION – script – draft 6

R4 ANNOUNCER INTRO

One thousand years ago, the Viking Age was coming to an end. Over two and a half centuries, Scandinavians had left a lasting legacy here, and across Europe. Today, some Scandinavians are making their mark in a rather... different way. Kate Brian presents THE NEW VIKING INVASION.

0'00" OPENING CLIP MONTAGE (very short clips, with music)

LAURA: I went to a conference where someone from the Nordic Ethics committee showed a slide, and it said – these are Denmark's export products: BEER, LEGO, and SPERM.

(MUSIC STARTS)

KB: **What's the big attraction of Danish sperm?! (**RE-RECORD THIS LINE!**)**

RUTH: The blonde hair, blue eyes, the cheekbones as well I think.

OLIVIA: We quite look up to them, the Danes are seen as a solid and dependable people.

KB: Do you think about the number of children there may be who are as a result of your donation?

██████: I can make, hundreds...

██████: ...hundred children out there...

██████: ...two hundred...

KB: So is it a Danish conquest of the world? AM: Laughs... the second one after the Vikings?

ALLAN: They've invaded us once by boat, and now they're doing it by sperm.

LAURA: "Let the Vikings rule Europe!"

(MUSIC ENDS)

0'50" WHAT'S THE ISSUE?

SCRIPT: In the UK, there's a huge demand for donor sperm. Growing numbers of single women, and lesbian couples, are keen to have children... and of course there are always heterosexual couples who aren't able to do so without help, despite advances in fertility treatments. Since 2005, the number of registered donors has been rising, but more than twice as many donors now come from overseas – and increasingly from Denmark. Why Denmark?

(RCOG ATMOS)

SCRIPT: Perhaps the first question should be: why are so few men donating here in the UK? This is up for discussion at a meeting at the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists.

ALLAN PACEY: I'm Dr Allan Pacey, I am a fertility expert at Uni of Sheffield, and current chair of the British Fertility Society. Simply, we don't have enough donors in the UK to meet the national need.

KB: What's our problem – why can't we have more donors here?

AP: I think there are a number of problems – we simply don't have the clinic infrastructure sufficiently well organised to recruit donors, even when men want to donate. ... Very often there just isn't the size and scale within small NHS clinics to consider having a donor recruitment operation – plus, if you're not confident that you'll get enough donors, the economics won't work. ... NHS fees – no fee for screening donors ... So it's quite a big ask for some NHS clinics to take on – I call it a burden – of screening and recruiting donors.

SCRIPT: Until recently, UK donors could be anonymous. But this changed in 2005, when donor-conceived people's right to know about their genetic heritage was recognised. This now means they can make contact with their donors once they turn 18.

(RCOG ATMOS)

SCRIPT (recorded outside studio): Jane Stewart, you're a consultant at the Newcastle Fertility Centre – didn't this change suddenly put a lot of men off becoming donors?

JANE STEWART: We've long thought that perhaps it was to do with the change in anonymity rules – but I think most people now realise this is not just the story now ... We had a problem in Newcastle specifically where we had to shelve our anonymous donors when the rules changed, and although we had recruited for known donation prior to that it took a while to make up the shortfall. We've plateaued now, but a waiting list still exists, which we never had before.

SCRIPT: I've been writing and reporting about fertility for almost twenty years now, and I've often come across people who've been told they'd have to wait some years for a suitable donor... But every so often, you come across an exceptional example...

(FX ALPHIN)

SCRIPT: This is Alphin. He's Dorne and Angela's little boy, who's now nearly a year old. But in 2009 – when the couple decided they wanted to have a child – they were told they'd need to wait for up to TEN YEARS for a suitable donor in their local area. They couldn't understand why there was such a long wait.

DORNE & ANGELA: I'd like to ask why it's not so available, why aren't there so many sperm donors? Not being able to have a child can really destroy a relationship, and can really destroy your life. You can have failed fertility treatment, or, just not be able to get a donor and be able to afford it... but you can't escape children. They're on TV all the time, in the streets all the time, you know, everywhere you go there's babies.

SCRIPT: In their frustration, Dorne and Angela looked to Denmark... where they found much more choice. And that wasn't the only attraction.

DORNE & ANGELA: It actually appealed to us a bit more in some respects, no worry of bumping into a sibling, much less chance of that. We were excited about getting a little Viking! ... We were just excited because we were finally embarking on hopefully having a baby.

SCRIPT: Although Dorne and Angela did eventually find a UK donor through a private clinic – which led to Alphin being conceived – their experience shows how misinformation over waiting lists can play a part. But as Allan Pacey explains, the shortage of donors remains the real issue:

ALLAN PACEY: In order to provide sufficient amounts of treatment to UK patients, and to provide enough choice, we need about 500 donors in the UK per year. We still fall well short of this number, so the gap is filled by clinics exporting sperm from other countries, of which Denmark is one.

5'38" ARRIVAL IN DENMARK

KB (recorded in Copenhagen): This is where the story REALLY begins. I'm here on a busy shopping street in central Copenhagen. On one side there's a convenience store, on the other side there's an opticians, and behind us at the end of a passageway is a small, very unassuming door. There's no sign, you wouldn't know it, but this is actually the headquarters of the European Sperm Bank – and we're going to go inside. (25")
(...WALKS IN...)

6'00" EUROPEAN SPERM BANK

(MUSIC STARTS)

SCRIPT: **The first thing I see is a room full of containers.**

KB: How many of these [containers] are there in here?

SCRIPT: **Large, metal containers, like milk churns.**

AM: Around a hundred. KB: And how many samples in each one? AM: ... in this one, only two... in this one more..... (RATTLING FX)...

SCRIPT: **The samples are kept frozen in these containers, in liquid nitrogen, at around minus 200 celsius.**

KB: It's amazing in an office block like this, you would never imagine that all of this was inside... AM: no, no, that's right!

SCRIPT: **Another unusual sight in here is that of a giant, stuffed, fierce looking polar bear, who stands towering over the containers. They call him "Bjorn".**

AM: He's part of the cold / frozen image... also represents masculinity... he's a symbol for what we do, and who we are.

SCRIPT: **The samples become so cold, that they'll stay frozen for up to two weeks after they leave here. That's plenty of time for them to be flown out to dozens of different countries.**

AM: Everything goes out, lined up here... KB: So these are going to, around the world are they?... Brussels, Belgium, Oslo, Helsinki, ah – that one's going to the South West of England... KB: So these are all going out today? AM: Yes, and delivered tomorrow. KB: And this is a normal day? AM: Yes ... KB: That is quite something!

(MUSIC ENDS)

SCRIPT: **And this is just one of two huge international sperm banks with premises in Copenhagen. *Annemette Arndal-Lauritzen heads the team of mainly female staff here.**

ANNEMETTE ("AM"): This is the only thing we do. We don't do eggs, we don't do anything else, just sperm and sperm donation – and that gives us a possibility of being very focused on what we do.

SCRIPT: **It's certainly big business. Two hundred and fifty men regularly donate at this sperm bank alone – that's almost TEN times the number of registered donors in the whole of Scotland. And if you want to know what any of these two hundred and fifty Danish donors are like... you just need to go online.**

AM reads list entries (FADES IN)... caucasian / Scandinavian... mixed... then you go into the eyes, hair colour, height and weight... business student, will apply for the Police Academy... (FADES UNDER)

SCRIPT: In the UK you might not get much more information than that – but in Denmark, the depth of detail is incredible...

AM: ... if you press this you can hear the donor's voice – (KB: what are they talking about?) - talking about personality, what are they like, what are their family like, favourite food, film, music, spare time, who are their friends... and that's in English. Then there's a baby photo... how many siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins... (FADES UNDER HERE)

9'33" MEET THE DONORS

SCRIPT: A current photo is just about the only thing you DON'T get to see – that's in order to protect the donors' identities.

“John” – that's not his real name – is in his twenties. He donates three times a week. He and others receive the equivalent of around 30 pounds per visit, which amounts to several thousand pounds a year. Although it's not a living, it's enough to make a substantial difference. But is it just about the money?

XXXXXX (“JOHN”): The money is a big factor, I need this money – but I think I'd be ten times more happy about doing this if I actually could see some kind of reaction, some kind of pay off in the happiness of these people.

SCRIPT: John is an “open” donor, so he can donate to the UK and might eventually meet some of the children born as a result. But for now, he says his main reason for donating is to help others.

XXXXXX: It's a good purpose, and it helps people kinda have children. Instead of like donating blood, you can do this instead to make people really happy.

SCRIPT: “Adam” – his name's been changed as well – is now in his late thirties. He's married, but with no plans to have children with his wife. Money isn't the main factor driving him either.

XXXXXX (“ADAM”): I have a decent job so I earn my own money, so... it helps me with a week or two in the holiday, so it's positive but not the most important thing.

KB: And how was the process when you first came here, what was it like? XXXXXX: Eh... it's quite difficult. I thought I was going to have an interview and some medical exams, but it was a very long and intense process ... blood samples, and I had to fill out a lot of forms regarding my future all the way from my grandparents, any disease in the family ... they gather all my life together so they can have a full profile.

SCRIPT: Only five percent of men make it through the rigorous selection process. Adam and John were delighted to be chosen – although as John explains, not everyone's comfortable with the idea.

XXXXXX: My parents think it's a bit weird, my father says “what am I supposed to do in 20 years when someone comes knocking on my door and says Grandpa?” But I try to say, it's probably not gonna happen, but if it does it might be a good thing.

12'08" NUMBERS OF CHILDREN

SCRIPT: It's the thought of these "knocks on the door" in eighteen years' time that concerns some people back in the UK. Although each individual country can limit the number of families started by each donor, there's no collective limit worldwide. Laura Witjens is from the UK's National Gamete Donation Trust – she says that although a donor may be limited to ten families in Britain, he could also have started families in other countries too...

LAURA WITJENS: When you combined all these countries you came to a large number – and I'm sure the donor would be shocked as well. There's one thing of consenting to a number of children on paper, but if you get confirmation that you have 50 children, hmmm, I'm not sure that a man would like that. 50 children as offspring, or more, is quite a lot! I'm not saying it's a good or a bad thing, I just want to know if they're open about that – and if not, why not? Have they got something to hide?

SCRIPT: At the European Sperm Bank, Annemette Arndal-Lauritzen insists nothing is hidden.

AM: When they start being donors, they have thought about this. They don't go into this with eyes closed, they have open eyes, open mind. We have told them this is worldwide, and they know it, and they are realistic.

SCRIPT: What about actual numbers though? I ask how many children each donor might produce – and at first, it's not clear.

AM: Erm, no specific answer... I wouldn't put a number on it. KB: Ballpark figure? AM: (laughs) I can't give one... KB: So it could be hundreds? AM: Erm... it is not hundreds. KB: Twenties? Thirties? AM laughs ...

SCRIPT: Eventually, I do get an answer.

AM: Our donors have, on average, less than 25 pregnancies, in average.

SCRIPT: Twenty-five may be an average... but Sebastian Mohr, who's interviewed dozens of donors for his research at the University of Copenhagen, talks about much greater figures.

SEBASTIAN MOHR: Most men don't have a particular number in their mind... all of them were shocked to think of large numbers, such as 150. Some of them were at least uncomfortable with the thought. ... But I mean, sperm banks make money with sperm – we have to keep reminding ourselves of this.

ALLAN PACEY: It's much more of a commercial operation, so if you have a particularly fabulous donor on the books in your Danish sperm bank, the impetus would be to keep him on the books, collect as much sperm as possible, and then, dare I say you're making money hand over fist!

SCRIPT: Dr Allan Pacey, of the British Fertility Society. That said, the men I meet seem relaxed about the numbers.

KB: Does the number of children worry you? [REDACTED]: Not really, I can't see what the, if there's 100 children out there in five years who have me, I can't see what the problem could be.

SCRIPT: And not just relaxed: excited, even.

[REDACTED]: I think it's a funny thought, how many children I can make. It would be nice if there was 100, 200 in the same sample as me

KB: Do you ever get to find out if people have got pregnant? [REDACTED]: No I don't think so.

KB: Is it something you'd like to know? [REDACTED]: Sometimes, yes, it could be a great feeling to know, if I've helped some people.

XXXXX: My genetics are being spread all over the world without me having to do anything about it, which is great.

SCRIPT: We've heard what John and Adam think – but of course, what we don't know is how the children conceived from Danish sperm will feel about it in the future, as they're still young. In the UK things have developed at a remarkable pace: in 2006 we weren't importing any Danish sperm, but by 2010 – the most recent figures available – Denmark was providing around a third of our total sperm imports. And they're still recruiting donors.

16'35" QUALITY, SAFETY & CHOICE

(SFX – nitrogen tank being re filled... receptionist / lab technician explains what's being done.)

KB: I'm looking through the microscope, at lots of tiny little, tiny little sperm down there, moving around. Very fast, some not so fast. Is that a good sample? GIRL: It's an all right one, it's a potential donor, first sample today, so I've diluted it to see how well he's performed.

SCRIPT: With the exception of one high profile case, in which a donor passed on a rare genetic condition to several of the 43 children he produced, there's general agreement that the Danish system is safe, and robust. As for the extraordinary amount of detail that's available online... well, SOME people have reservations about this.

(FX – BABY EUAN)

SCRIPT: Jo and Sarah's son, Euan, was created with the help of a Danish donor. Euan's a very happy and healthy little boy – but before he was conceived, Sarah was almost put off the idea completely.

SARAH: I found the website, and I was overwhelmed by the set-up... it had lists and lists of donors with ... a flood of information. It felt surreal, because I'd thought of having a family – I had never thought of the commodity "sperm", and it freaked me out.

JO: I didn't look at this part of it at all, to find out more info about the donor, I just wasn't interested.

SARAH: Looking online did freak me out ... I just wanted a sample, but it's getting a face, it's become much closer than I wanted, I didn't want those details. So it took me a while to get over that.

19'00" ACCESSIBILITY & LEGALITY (HFEA)

SCRIPT: Although Jo and Sarah went through a clinic, not everyone does – and Ruth Wilde, from the British Infertility Counselling Association, has some concerns about this.

RUTH WILDE: Some sperm banks overseas will supply for home insemination – and that's a worry because these people don't have any access to any counselling at all, and can import anonymous sperm, rather than identity release sperm – storing up what I'd consider are potential problems for their child in the future.

SCRIPT: In 2013, one particularly alarming case came to light – that of a British woman who bought so-called "DIY sperm" from Denmark's other big sperm bank, Cryos... and used it to inseminate her 14-year old adopted daughter. This is an extreme example of what can go wrong – and some people still do buy Danish sperm for home insemination. But is this legal in the UK? Juliet Tizzard is from the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority – the HFEA.

JULIET: It's quite a complex picture. Sperm donation is regulated both by our own domestic legislation, and there are certain rules imposed by Europe through the tissue directive. That directive has been implemented slightly differently in the European member states. So whilst in the UK we have established requirements that our centres should not send donor sperm or eggs to private individuals outside of the UK (within Europe), some other sperm banks within Europe have sent sperm samples to private individuals in the UK. I think the bottom line for us is that we wouldn't recommend it. We'd always recommend that people have their treatment under the care of a fertility doctor, and that the standards are properly maintained for providing that treatment as well.

20'55" UK CLINICS & DONOR RECRUITMENT

SCRIPT: European Sperm Bank says it doesn't deliver directly to patients' doors in the UK. But then, it doesn't need to. It's already exporting direct to fertility clinics across the country – many of which find it easier than recruiting their own donors.

KB: What's the attraction of Danish sperm for so many clinics and patients?

JS: Probably as much as anything, availability... we have a relationship with the unit we've dealt with mostly is accessible, they're reliable, continuing relationship means we don't have to set up new paperwork every time, so it's relatively easy for us to encourage patients to look there first.

SCRIPT: That's Jane Stewart, a consultant in reproductive medicine in Newcastle – and it's the same for Mark Hamilton, who's a fertility specialist in Aberdeen.

MH: If a patient seeks advice, we would certainly point them in the direction of ESB or one of the other facilities. The availability and choice is quite remarkable.

SCRIPT: We still don't really have answer to our original question: why are so few men donating here in the UK? Laura Witjens, from the National Gamete Donation Trust, says the current British system simply isn't geared towards recruitment.

LAURA WITJENS: It's much easier for British clinics to order sperm from Denmark, which is Fedex-ed the next day... much easier for a clinic to do this than to try to recruit their own donors, and all the hassle that goes with them.

SCRIPT: Jane Stewart agrees that the Danes are several steps ahead.

JANE STEWART: They're a business. I've asked them how they recruit so successfully, when we're struggling, and they say, that's what they do. That's ALL they do. Is it much more efficient, do they make it easier for them, do they recruit a bigger proportion... I don't know, are we all amateurs?! (laughs)

SCRIPT: But Olivia Montuschi, from the British-based Donor Conception Network, thinks the REAL problem lies with the clinics themselves – and what they're not telling patients.

OLIVIA: They are not told that there may be a clinic down the road, in the UK, that has a very good supply of UK recruited sperm donors.

KB: Why not told?

OM: Because of the competition between clinics. Clinics like to retain their own patients, not share them, and they won't tell them. They contribute to the problem, if you like, by keeping it to themselves. And so people have to find those clinics for themselves.

(MUSIC STARTS)

23'50" COULD THINGS CHANGE IN THE UK?

SCRIPT: Most people agree that if we're ever to catch up with the Danish sperm banks, the UK system needs to change. But how?

OM: The change I would love to see is having one central place where information about the availability of sperm and eggs was held. That's what we need – one central place.

LAURA WITJENS: We're actually proposing to run a National Sperm Bank under the wing of the NGDT. The biggest thing is that we'll guarantee independence because we're not a clinic. We know that donors can be recruited, we know there's a shortage, we've seen the issues – so, with knowledge from Denmark..... the Danish model is a slick model. It's customer service driven, it really knows how to do well with donors, it has a good website – and that's what we can do in the UK as well, it's not rocket science.

KB: Could other countries – the UK – replicate your model and become as successful as you have? ANNEMETTE: Yeah why not? It's probably a question that you make a nice spot with your donors, treat them well, they have confidence in you, and that you are able to convince the clinics that you have a good quality... and that the material is good for the women too.

(MUSIC ENDS)

25'35" THE DANISH PSYCHE

SCRIPT: It seems that the Danish system of having sperm banks separate from clinics makes a big difference. But is there something about the Danish psyche that Britain just doesn't have?

JANE STEWART: If you went round the stereotypes... whether the Danes are more open, I don't know if there's any actual evidence of that, but I think it's probably part of the issue.

LAURA: The Danes are more open to talking about these issues, and proud about it – the English man, ultimately it's a sexual act ... there's a bit of a smutty thing about it.

SEBASTIAN: Is it part of a national identity, part of the Viking race? There's so much talk about this. Italian Vogue had coverage with a muscular guy with a Viking helmet on...! It's not that they see themselves as part of a superior Nordic race trying to fertilise the whole world – and there's nothing particularly Danish about being a sperm donor.

26'45" THE VIKINGS

KB IN BRITISH MUSEUM: In the year 1014, a Danish Viking was – briefly – sitting on the English throne. Exactly a thousand years later, a huge Danish warship returned... to spend several months here, in the British Museum, as the centrepiece of a major Viking exhibition.

KB IN BRITISH MUSEUM (slightly different location): Today, the Danes supply a growing proportion of donor sperm to the UK – leading to more and more pregnancies and babies. But are there any parallels to be drawn between what happened then... and what's happening now? Allan Pacey again.

ALLAN PACEY: Denmark is geographically close to the UK, I think there's some kind of philosophical and intellectual bond between us and Denmark. It's a bit like the Viking invasion of 800AD, they've invaded us once by boat, and now they're doing it by sperm... and I don't think we see that as half as frightening as we do thinking about importing sperm from other parts of the world. So I really do think there's an interesting cultural thing going on here that is working at perhaps the subliminal level.

(MUSIC STARTS)

KB: Is it a Danish conquest of the world? AM: Laughs... the second one after the Vikings? It's more like being able to help the women out there, and being able to accomplish their wish of having a child with a donor they have chosen themselves and giving them the best possible insight to make that choice.

XXXXXX: I maybe feel quite international, the international father! (laughs) We're just helping you. I'm not thinking about the Vikings, so... I think it should be a great help for you in the UK, I think it's very good! (laughs)

JO: For Sarah and I it will be very important, to explain to Euan and to take him to Denmark, and to see the Viking boats (laughs)... (MUSIC) It's part of who he is, and so we have to celebrate, explain and educate about that. I was in Denmark a couple of weeks ago and, erm, I brought him back a little Viking hat! (laughs) He wasn't too impressed at first but I think he got used to it! (laughs)

(MUSIC ENDS)

28'20" ENDS

THE NEW VIKING INVASION was presented by Kate Brian, and produced by Steve Urquhart. It's a Sparklab production for BBC Radio 4 / WS.

**Ann-e-mett-e ARN-del LAU-rit-zen ("LAU" rhymes with "NOW")*

WORLD SERVICE LINKS

WS BILLBOARD (29" TOTAL)

Here in the British Museum in London, this exhibition about the Vikings shows the extent of their impact on a number of countries. That was centuries ago – but now, some Scandinavians are making their mark in a rather different way... as sperm donors.

TOMAS: It's a funny thought, how many children I can make.

EMILE: My genetics are being spread all over the world ... which is great.

I'm Kate Brian – and for the BBC World Service, I'll be meeting these Danish donors... after the News.

SCRIPT: What are the most popular things to come out of Denmark? You might be surprised.

LAURA: I went to a conference where someone from the Nordic Ethics committee showed a slide, and it said – these are Denmark's export products: BEER, LEGO, and SPERM.

SCRIPT: I'm Kate Brian. Stay with me here on the BBC World Service, as I try to find out why the THIRD of these products is in such demand.

(OPENING MONTAGE)

SCRIPT: In many countries – not just in Europe – there's a huge demand for donor sperm. Growing numbers of single women, and lesbian couples, are keen to have children... and of course there are always heterosexual couples who aren't able to do so without help, despite advances in fertility treatments. Since 2005, the number of registered donors has been rising, but more than twice as many donors now come from overseas – and increasingly from Denmark. Why Denmark?

(RCOG ATMOS)

SCRIPT: My attempt to find out begins in London, where perhaps the first question should be: why are so few men donating here in the UK? This is being discussed at a meeting at the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists.

SCRIPT: “John” – that's not his real name – is in his twenties. He donates three times a week. He and others receive the equivalent of around 40 euros per visit, which amounts to several thousand euros a year. Although it's not a living, it's enough to make a substantial difference. But is it just about the money?

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SCRIPT: In 2013, one particularly alarming case came to light – that of a British woman who bought so-called “DIY sperm” from Denmark’s other big sperm bank, Cryos... and used it to inseminate her 14-year old adopted daughter. This is an extreme example of what can go wrong – and some people still do buy Danish sperm for home insemination. But it IS lawful – at least, within certain rules imposed by the European tissue directive.

Even so, European Sperm Bank says it doesn't deliver directly to patients' doors in the UK. But then, it doesn't need to. It's already exporting direct to fertility clinics across the country – many of which find it easier than recruiting their own donors.

SCRIPT: That's Jane Stewart, a consultant in reproductive medicine in the North East of England – and it's the same for Mark Hamilton, who's a fertility specialist in Scotland.

SCRIPT: Most people agree that if it's ever to catch up with the Danish sperm banks, the UK system needs to change. But how?

OUTRO:

THE NEW VIKING INVASION was presented by me, Kate Brian. It was produced by Steve Urquhart – and it's a Sparklab production for the BBC World Service.

R4 VOICE TRAIL (record inside the BM)

Here in the British Museum in London, this year's exhibition about the Vikings has shown the extent of their impact on a number of countries, not least ours. That was centuries ago – but now, some Scandinavians are making their mark in a rather different way... as sperm donors.

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XXXXXX: My genetics are being spread all over the world ... which is great.

I'm Kate Brian – and for BBC Radio 4, I'll be meeting some of these Danish donors, in THE NEW VIKING INVASION.

Join me next Friday morning, at 11.

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Join me tomorrow morning, at 11.

Join me this morning, at 11.