

*Nations of Théah: Book Eight*

# Vendel • Westen™

*by Les Simpson and Kevin P. Boerwinkle*



**7th Sea**  
A Roleplaying Game

1668

Roleplaying Game

TNIELSE



## Writing

Les Simpson  
Kevin P. Boerwinkle

## Additional Writing

Loren Dean  
Dana DeVries  
Peter Flanagan

## Gjæving

jim pinto

## Editing

D.J. Trindle  
Rob Vaux

## Art Direction

jim pinto

## Cover Design

Brendon Goodyear

## Line Developer

Rob Vaux

## Layout

Brendon Goodyear  
Steve Hough

## Interior Art

### Two-Page Spread

Carl Frank

### Full-Page Titles

Dierick W. Gröss

### Chapter Two Who's Who Art

Cris Dornaus

### Other Interiors

Andrew Baker  
Cris Dornaus  
Dierick W. Gröss  
A. Bleys Ingram

### Runes

Cris Dornaus

## 7th Sea Created by

John Wick & Jennifer Wick and Kevin Wilson

## Special Thanks

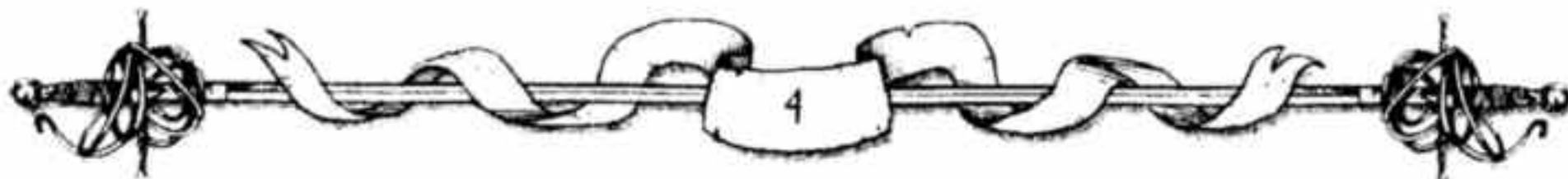
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Belated thanks to Alex Fox for his help and advice on the *Vodacce* book. You'll always be Villanova to us, Alex.

## Dedication

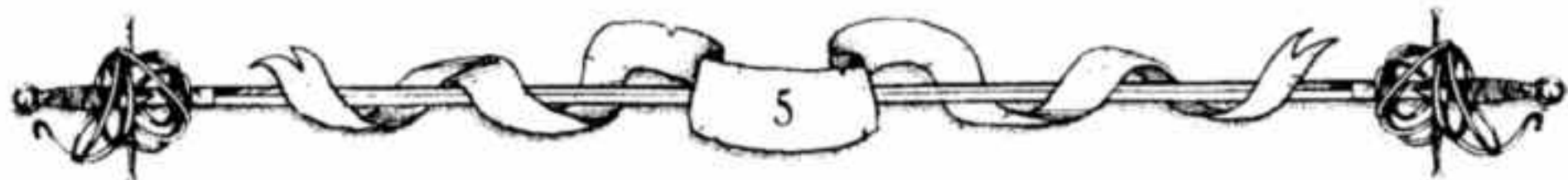
This book is dedicated to Dana DeVries and Michael Petrovich (whose creative instincts surely make their own ancestors proud) and to Nick LaLone. This is the book you've been waiting for, Nick. Now you have no more excuses not to play.





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## As Long As We Remember...

The heady aroma of stew and mead were as rich to the hooded man's senses as any treasure he had pilfered. His empty stomach rumbled its impatience as he watched the watery meal being served from a dented cauldron on the great hearth, scooped into wooden bowls for hungry men and women who had labored all day. The longhouse was dim and smoky, but he kept his hood safely in place. No one here knew him, but he did not want to be recognized.

Cautiously, he approached the crackling hearth, his head inclined so the shadows hid his features. A young girl, her blond hair in tight braids, gave him a warm smile. "Are you hungry, wanderer? We do not have much, but what we have we share."

It was a common phrase among the Vestenmannavíjar, but one the hooded man had almost forgotten. The kindness of the words caught him off guard and caused a lump to form in his throat. At last he managed to speak, his voice older than his years. "I am indeed hungry, little one, and grateful for your hospitality." He paused a moment before adding a once-favorite closing. "May Grumfather's eye always watch and cherish you."

The child's smile grew larger and she happily prepared him a nearly-full bowl and drinking horn. The food was eagerly received, and the hooded man searched for a secluded spot in which to privately enjoy her gift. The giant hall was crowded, but he finally found a lonely barrel of Montaigne

flour upon which to perch. The household obviously had connections.

He finished the hot stew and cold mead in less than five gulps apiece. Their warring temperatures tingled through his extremities, and he allowed himself to relax for the first time in almost six months.

The gathering laughed and caroused, trading compliments and insults. Their voices rose and fell like a boat on unpredictable waters. Three skinny dogs went from hand to hand in search of scraps. The hooded man shook his head with amusement. This could have been any night among his people since the beginning of time.

"More mead?" asked a small boy. Except for the shorter hair and missing front teeth, he was almost identical to the girl at the cauldron.

The hooded figure was about to reply when a shouting match erupted from the opposite end of the room. A man the size of a small mountain rose from his seat and leaped onto another, taking them both to the ground. Their fists smashed into noses, jaws, and ribs, bruising or breaking with each powerful strike.

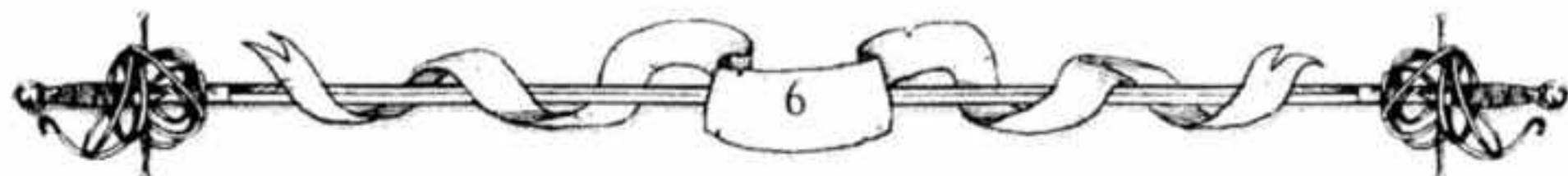
"Thrand and Hrafn," the boy explained calmly. "They're brothers."

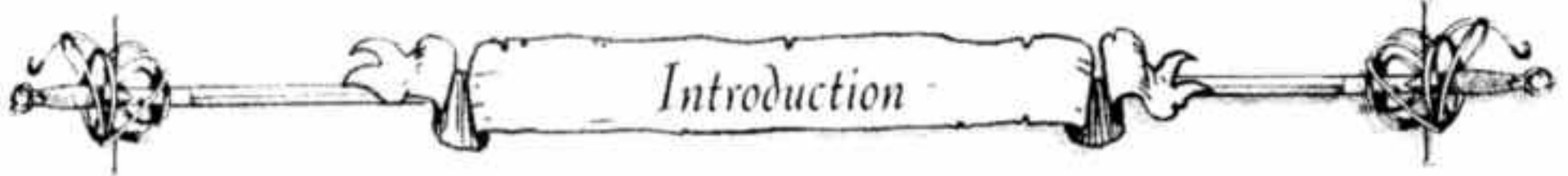
The scuffle brought up dirt, straw, blood, and spit, neither man seeming to gain an advantage. Finally, a woman stood, the fire in the hearth matching the angry color of her face. She grabbed a wooden bench and splintered it across the combatants' heads, knocking them out cold.

"Osk." The boy smirked. "Their sister. She never lets them have any fun." He regarded the hooded man for a moment, trying to discern his features but only making out the edges of a thick beard. "Would you like more mead?"

"Yes," came the answer. "Thank you." He held out his thirsty horn.

A sickly-looking man with a crooked nose and broad grin stood on a table, holding up his hands for the room to be silent. It didn't work, but he spoke anyway. "Since Borc's





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children have decided to start the entertainment for the evening, I will continue it."

He hopped from the table and walked around the hearth, his silhouette passing over everyone in the longhouse in turn. "I will tell tonight's story, the story of the Great Wyrn and the victory of the twenty-five who fought it. I will speak of the power of Lærdom, and those who have become the Living Runes."

The hooded man sipped his drink through tight lips, waiting for the skald's interpretation of the ancient tale to begin.



Listen!

You have heard of Gunnef the Ravenhaired,  
the brave warrior who made us one.  
You have heard how Grumfather,  
the Grey Wanderer himself,  
was pleased with her deeds  
and chose her to be his living avatar.  
She was the first High King!  
Her days were many and momentous.

But in the times before,  
in the dark and early days,  
we were a people divided.  
Twenty-five was the number of our tribes,  
scattered as Creation's fruitful seeds.  
Gjæving warred against gjæving,  
with no thoughts toward the Beyond.  
But the Beyond had thoughts toward us.

The Great Wyrn descended like an avalanche,  
its teeth and scales the color and fury of a blizzard.  
Its origin transcended time,  
where all evil starts,  
where all life begins.  
It spared none in its path.

It was annihilation,  
a white death over the land and water and sky.

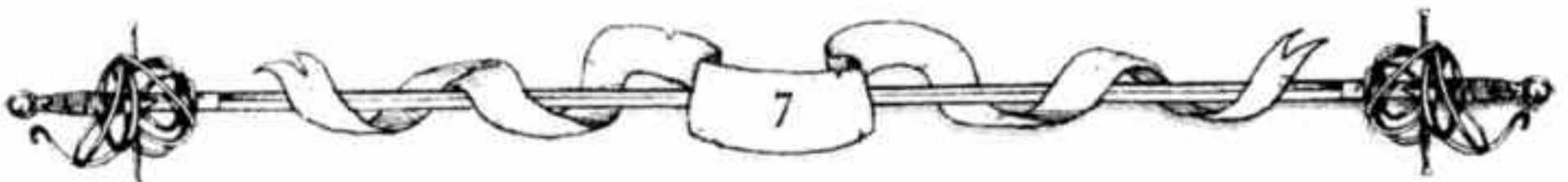
Skalds voiced woeful poems across the land,  
how the Great Wyrn tormented us,  
how no jarl, no matter how brave,  
could hope to defeat it.  
Our people suffered the worst of sorrows,  
felled in stand after stand.  
No family was unscathed.  
The evil was too strong.

At last it slithered into the Hjalmar Mountains,  
nesting in the jagged rocks and eternal ice of Tárn.  
It watched the world with a conqueror's eyes.  
Every heart felt its cruel gaze.  
The beasts of the fields and forests grew sick and died,  
fish sank deep into the waters,  
the ground refused to release its harvest.  
These were the Worst Days.

Our bodies were broken  
by the Great Wyrn's wrath.  
It demanded we forsake the Good Ways,  
but our souls remained strong.  
Never would we yield!  
Twenty-five mighty jarls went to Sanning Dal,  
a valley in the Hjalmar Mountains.  
This was the first Althing.

Resting on stones,  
the bones of the world,  
our leaders spoke many words.  
They spoke the fire of history  
and the breath of survival.  
They spoke the love of our people,  
and the power of the Good Ways.  
All knew what must be done.

By the lake of Jygor,  
twenty-five enemies put aside differences.  
Under the tree of Isendel Bjorngaard,





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twenty-five enemies became allies.  
With a solemn oath sealed in blood,  
twenty-five allies committed themselves.  
The Great Wyrn would be vanquished.  
Our people would be free.

Uvitenhet was ever the watcher.  
No mystery was too abstruse.  
He studied the Great Wyrn's ways.  
He saw its fangs rend and tear,  
sharper, stronger than a thousand spears.  
He saw its scales deflect and crush,  
sturdy and resistant like stone shields.  
He knew its strengths.

But it was Sterk, who never fell,  
that spoke for the twenty-five.  
It was he who knew the Great Wyrn,  
with its might of the waves,  
its cunning of the night,  
would find its true power  
where the twenty-five were weak.  
He knew their only salvation was unity.

Kyndighet, stout and clear-headed,  
supported the wise words of Sterk.  
He also taught the twenty-five great truths.  
Victory could not be rushed.  
Valor could not be hurried.  
Destiny could not be denied.  
His training and skills would lead them  
through the darkness ahead.

Reise was prepared for the journey,  
a man accustomed to travel.  
He was their scout, finding trails  
where there were no trails,  
making paths where no feet had tread.  
Cold weeks passed in the Hjalmarr Mountains,  
with too many hardships to name.  
But each soul accepted the pain.

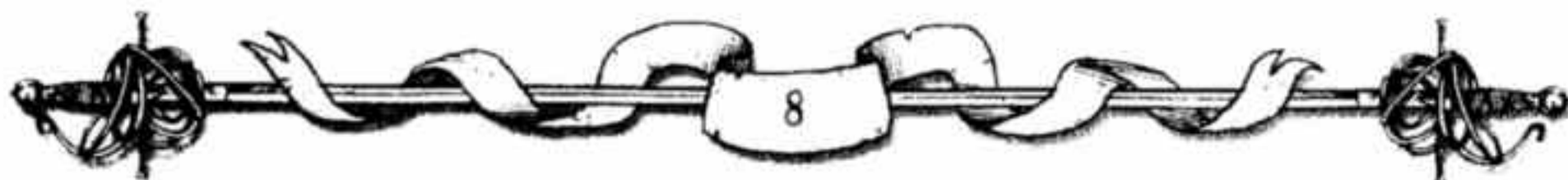
Only twenty-four made that frigid trek.  
Høst remained to help our people,  
tending the fields and farms.  
He restored our spirits  
and fed our bellies.  
He helped us remember,  
even in times of trouble,  
it is our homes that give us strength.

The twenty-four climbed up and up  
the urgency of their quest pressing,  
moving, commanding them to persevere.  
Even Tungsinn, full of despair,  
would not turn aside from the goal.  
They were like mountain goats,  
leaping from rock to rock  
until, at last, they reached ancient Tårn.

The twenty-four heard the Great Wyrn  
thundering and gnashing,  
crashing like the angry sea.  
It was the venom of a thousand snakes,  
the strength of a thousand jarls,  
the evil of a thousand sunless days,  
restless in the womb of the world.  
The monster waited deep in its lair.

Sinne, a ravishing beauty  
whom no man could possess,  
whirled about with her weapons.  
She wanted to rush in,  
to lunge into the Great Wyrn's domain,  
and defeat it where it slept.  
Her sister had died by its terrible teeth  
and her anger demanded to be sated.

Lidenskap, too, was ready.  
He was of fiery passions,  
a man whose sharp temper  
and sleek blade  
were equally merciless.  
He was a berserk,





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cunning and unruly,  
and he knew no fear.

But it was Sterk, who never fell,  
who kept them at bay.  
He knew the Wyrn was strong,  
with its fangs of fire,  
its armor of ice.  
He knew the twenty-four  
would be weak in its den.  
There had to be a plan.

So on Tårn they rested,  
and Velstand related his own tales.  
Accepted and loved among our people,  
he was born of a distant land,  
a place dominated by another evil.  
He was a wealth of ideas  
and suggestions  
for what should be done.

Bevegelse and Kjøl huddled together,  
listening to Velstand's words.  
The stench of the Great Wyrn  
rose from its cavern like smoke.  
Because it came from the Beyond,  
it was forced to become flesh.  
Its flesh was powerful,  
but, perhaps, it was a weakness.

Fornuft the artist, who lost his sight  
painting Grumfather's eye,  
could still see beyond  
the vision of man.  
He beheld the Great Wyrn,  
watched as it writhed and struck.  
Like any serpent,  
the monster would shed its skin.

It was then Kjøl understood  
the Riddle of the Flesh.  
He whispered the solution to Bevegelse,

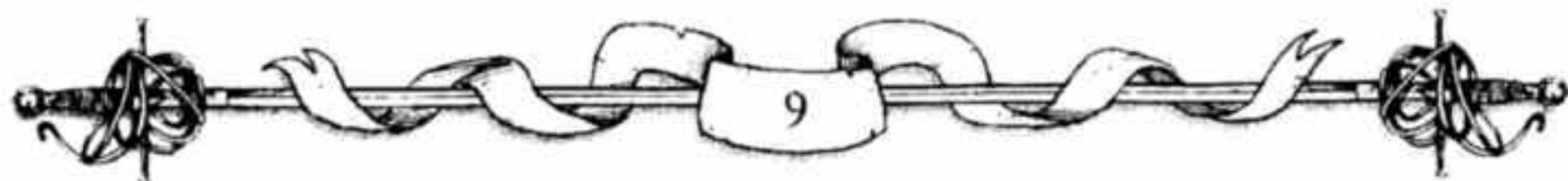
who told the others.  
If the Great Wyrn's scales  
could protect such a beast,  
they could be used as shields  
in the battle against it.

Even Kjøl, ever-brooding,  
smiled at this revelation.  
Varsel clapped his hands and laughed.  
He knew the Great Wyrn  
must be fought in the open,  
and volunteered to enter the lair  
and trick the beast out.  
Grenseløs would help him escape.

Sterk investigated the mouth of the cave  
where the Great Wyrn dwelled.  
With the aid of Styrke and Storsæd,  
he caused a collapse.  
They made the mouth smaller,  
swelling it shut.  
A man could pass through with ease,  
but not so the Great Wyrn.

Varsel and Grenseløs stole deep inside,  
a single torch lighting their way.  
The cave was smooth,  
walls as blue as winter mornings.  
Down and down they went,  
deeper into Tårn than any mortal before.  
The unnatural reek of the Great Wyrn  
assaulted their noses and eyes.

They found the beast in a nest of corpses,  
pile after pile of its latest victims.  
It ate them slowly,  
choosing different parts for different days.  
It was content in its foulness,  
smug in its carnage.  
Our bodies were broken,  
but our souls remained strong.





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Varsel danced before the Great Wyrn,  
taunting and teasing with every word,  
scorning and scoffing with every gesture.  
At first, the monster could not believe.  
Then, it could not understand.  
Then, it could take no more.  
Its roar was with the voice  
of a thousand wild and savage animals.

Varsel and Grenseløs ran.  
They ran with the desperation  
of rabbits before wolves.  
They ran with the swiftness  
of arrows from bows.  
They ran with the strength  
of gale winds in sails.  
They ran for their lives.

No matter how fast their feet  
they could not escape.  
The Great Wyrn hissed  
and the Great Wyrn struck,  
almost taking them  
with each rancorous snap  
of its dripping,  
horrible mouth.

The speed of their flight  
extinguished their fire,  
the burning torch keeping  
the darkness at bay.  
In the blackness,  
Varsel grew worried.  
He wondered aloud  
if his last trick had been played.

But Grenseløs would always break free,  
and he would not be vexed.  
Only he had escaped the pit,  
the Great Keep of Krigsfang,  
and he needed no light  
to evade the Great Wyrn.

With instincts true he went,  
and brought Varsel to freedom.

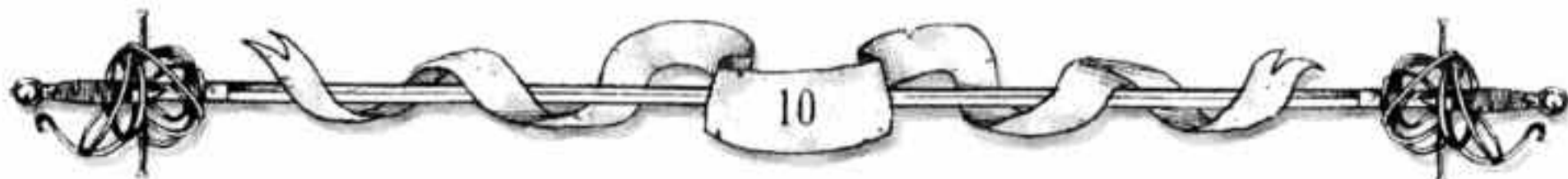
The gjævings ducked and slid,  
navigating the swollen mouth,  
the broken jaw of the cave.  
Into the evening's freshness,  
with its rich, fading colors,  
they breathlessly arrived.  
The twenty-four then waited,  
weapons hungry for the fight.

When the Great Wyrn broke through,  
it writhed like a huge, white tongue.  
Its bellows and its shrieks  
echoed from Tårn across the world.  
The mountains shook at its rage  
and all the stars trembled.  
It coiled and whipped its body,  
desperate to squeeze past.

Ensomhet was ready,  
standing away from the others.  
He reached the Great Wyrn first,  
thrusting his sword into its side.  
Alone he attacked, his blade true,  
piercing under a single scale.  
With a vigorous push,  
he pried it away.

Ensomhet grabbed the loose scale,  
its power rippling through him,  
like a stone tossed into the water.  
His past was cut away,  
every anger, fear, and obsession gone.  
He accepted the scale's endowment,  
and was the first to use the gift,  
and he drew the Great Wyrn's ire.

Because he was alone,  
the Great Wyrn chose Ensomhet first,  
the swords in its mouth







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cutting, cleaving, chopping, chewing.  
Its saliva was poison,  
dissolving, disintegrating, defiling, destroying.  
Ensomhet was the first to fall,  
but he would not be the last.

The twenty-four were now twenty-three.  
Sterk collected them as one,  
shouting orders for the next attack.  
As they rallied, the Great Wyrms snout,  
flaring with hatred,  
caused rocks to tumble from the cliff above.  
It was Herje, with the worst luck of all,  
who was caught in their fall.

Herje slipped from the face of Tårn,  
plunging the length of twenty men,  
end over end over end.  
Only the thick branches  
of a friendly, protruding tree  
saved him from the rocks below.  
Its fingers caught his tunic,  
and he slowly twisted in the wind.

Sterk moved his best warriors,  
Styrke, Storsæd, Krieg, Sinne,  
Lidenskap, Kjølilig, and Villskap,  
to the fore,  
keeping the Great Wyrms attention.  
He fought by their side,  
while the others moved closer,  
ready to attack on command.

The Great Wyrms snarled and snapped,  
almost taking each of the jarls in turn.  
On the fourth time it extended its bite,  
Sterk gave his signal,  
and the other fourteen joined the skirmish.  
Their axes and swords rose and fell,  
ripping under scales and pulling them out  
like roots deep from the soil.

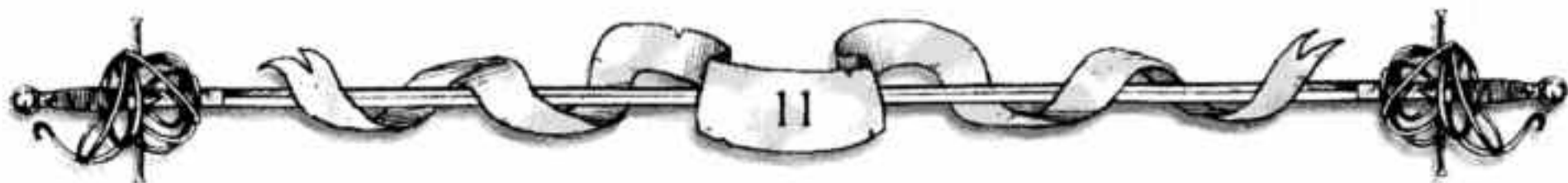
Kjøst became one with his scale first,  
taking its power into his flesh,  
understanding it in his bones.  
It spoke to his inner self,  
and, at last, he knew the mysteries  
of his own soul.  
His new insight made him stronger  
and his sword was more true.

Bevegelse and Varsel were next,  
then Uvitenhet, Stans, and Velstand.  
When Fjell took his, the Great Wyrms struck true.  
The monster seized brave Krieg,  
its fangs sinking into his middle.  
It tossed him to the side,  
where he lay broken and dying,  
his red life staining the snow.

The scale Fjell held shimmered and glowed.  
He took a long, deep breath  
and put it to his chest.  
He consumed it into his heart,  
and knew he had the power  
to restore Krieg's health.  
With no thought for himself,  
he rushed to Krieg's aid.

The other jarls kept the Great Wyrms back,  
and Fjell safely reached Krieg.  
The mans life was almost gone,  
but Fjell knew what to do.  
When he placed his hands on Krieg's wounds,  
there was a brilliant flash,  
like lightning at midnight.  
The damage healed like thunder.

But when one wound left Krieg,  
it formed on Fjell.  
He absorbed his friends suffering,  
taking it as his own.  
He sacrificed his life  
so Krieg could continue the struggle.





He died in the cold  
an example to us all.

Krieg howled with grief and rage.  
He picked up his ax and attacked,  
rushing past Sterk,  
assaulting the Great Wurm's jaw.  
Lidenskap, Kjølilig, Sinne, and Villskap  
joined his assault, their weapons  
ringing true on the creature's scaly hide.

However, they did not act as one,  
despite Sterk's shouts.  
The Great Wurm focused its might,  
and felled Lidenskap, Kjølilig, and Sinne,  
bashing their bodies  
and swallowing them whole.  
Krieg and Villskap retreated to Sterk's side,  
each holding a scale of their own.

Then Gâte released another scale.  
He staggered back,  
looking in awe at his prize.  
He was about to speak,  
to share his new knowledge,  
when he disappeared from sight.  
Even now, no one knows where he went,  
or what his eyes last beheld.

When Nød took a scale,  
she was filled with a burning intensity.  
She saw her husband, Stans,  
in silent contemplation,  
lost in the calm of the scale he also took.  
She ran past him to Sterk  
and joined the front line of the fight,  
her teeth grinding with aggression.

Kyndighet's scale fueled his thoughts,  
giving him wisdom and skills  
previously unknown to mortals.  
His eyes shone bright with insight,

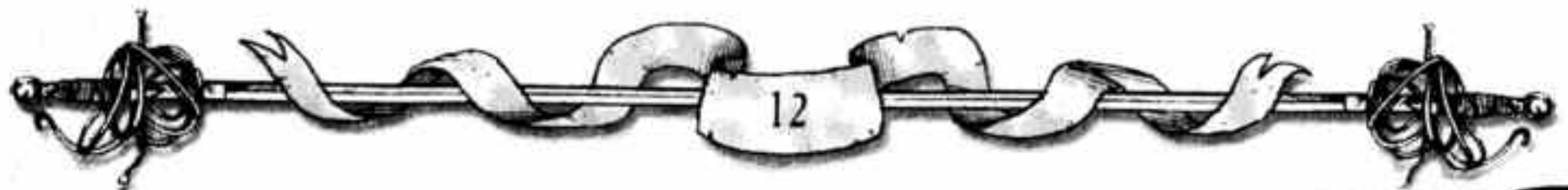
and a smile formed on his lips.  
He knew what the Great Wurm knew,  
all of its strengths  
and all of its weaknesses.

The Great Wurm's scales,  
hard and white like glaciers,  
were not just its protection  
and more than just shields.  
When the monster became flesh,  
when it came from the Beyond,  
it took the words of Grumfather  
spoken at the creation of the world.

Every scale was a word,  
an element of existence.  
It was a perfect embodiment  
in shape and form,  
marked deep with a symbol.  
These binding runes  
were the Truth of the world  
and kept the Great Wurm here.

Like a boulder on the beach,  
the Great Wurm was now heavy,  
and could not be washed to sea.  
But, like a boulder,  
its resistance could be chipped away.  
Every scale taken was a crack,  
a fatal flaw where ice could grow  
and break it apart.

Kyndighet shared his knowledge,  
shouting out to Sterk and the others.  
The jarls cheered and struck their weapons,  
coming together for a fresh assault.  
The path to victory was clear,  
and hope gave them new strength.  
As one they attacked,  
each taking a scale and its bounty.





for the sake of his world.  
He saw the runes,  
his words that had bound the Great Wurm,  
and he bestowed them upon the jarls.  
Never again could they be used for evil!

Those that had died returned,  
every warrior taking a word for life.  
Even Høst received this reward.  
Then Grumfather took them home,  
where they could share their powers  
with all of our people.  
They became the Living Runes,  
and our Skjæren still carve their names.

The twenty-five have a place  
between our ancestors  
and Grumfather.  
They are our gods  
and they are our heroes,  
examples for us to follow.  
They smile when they see us  
and their names will never be forgotten.



A chorus of appreciation met the skald when he finished, and he waited a few moments to let it subside. "They are with us," he told his audience. "Just like our ancestors. Our ancestors live on in everything. As long as we remember, they always will."

Murmurs of agreement supported his claim, and the hooded man smiled. The ancestors were here, gathered in this smoky longhouse of their descendants. He could see they were pleased. He drained the final sip from his horn, glad the spirits were taking a rest from lecturing him about his destiny. Maybe they would let him have a full night of sleep since he had finally agreed to come here.

His fingers went under the hood, adjusting the make-shift eye-patch and sweeping the graying hair away from his troubled brow.



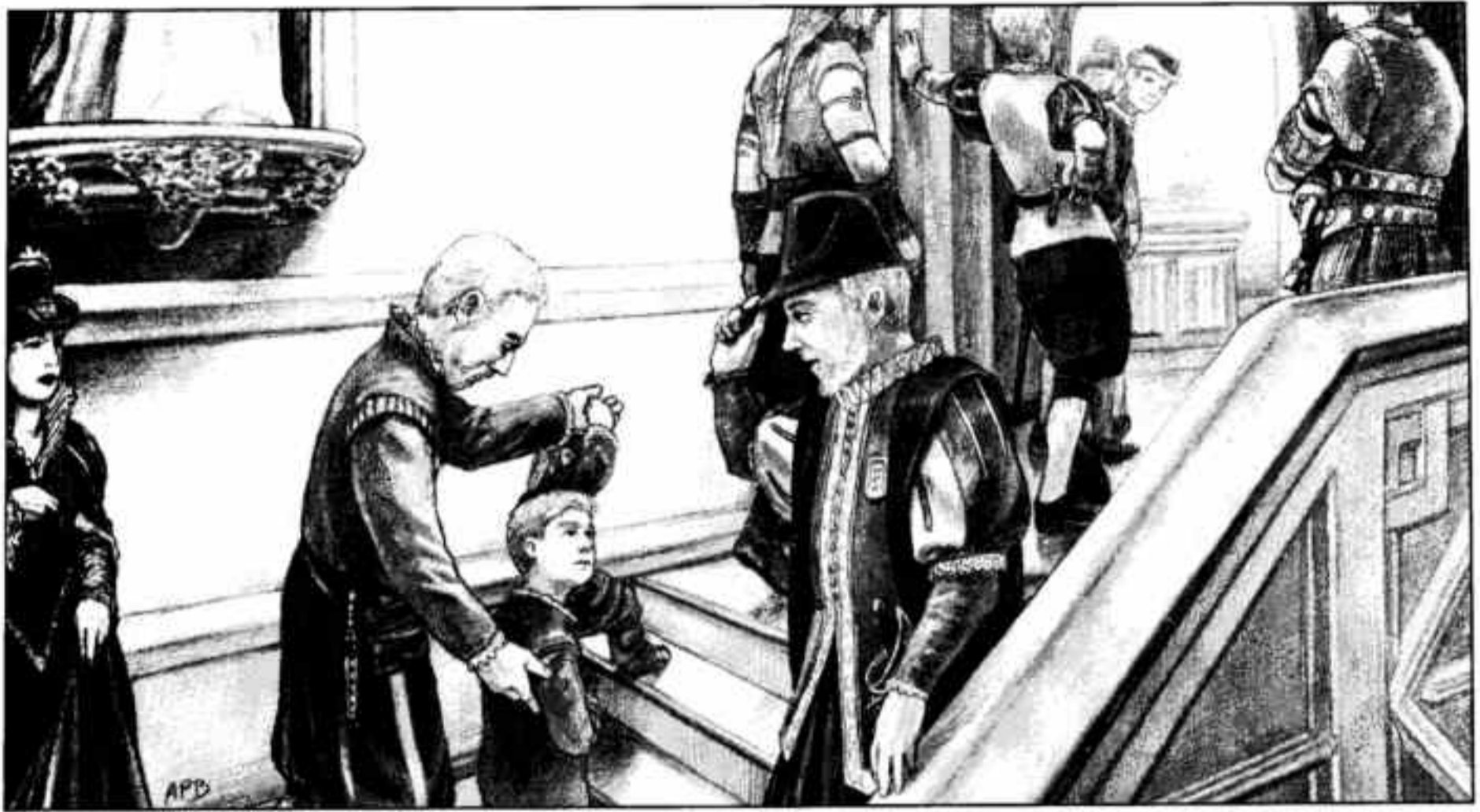
Less than two hundred years ago, the islands of Vestenmannavnjar held nothing but snow, ice, and primitive coastal raiders who lived much the way their ancient ancestors had. They used powerful rune magic to keep their homes safe. They favored axes and bows over muskets and firearms. When simple farming or hunting could not meet their needs, they launched savage attacks against foreign nations, pillaging whatever they needed before returning to their homes. Though feared throughout Théah, their simple lives held a rough sort of honor, and their closely-held traditions bound them to a proud and noble past.

Today, however, that same nation looks radically different. It calls itself Vendel, and has transformed itself into a model of culture and progress. Gleaming cities rise where there was once nothing but longhouses and communal fires. Merchants sell the finest wares in the world, while representatives from every nation come to bargain for their support. Their enemies still fear them, but not for their martial prowess. They fear their business acumen, their dominance of markets and trading ties. They fear the little pieces of paper Vendel has introduced – guilders – which stand poised to transform Théah forever.

Yet beyond Vendel's modern streets, the Vestenmannavnjar still remain, refusing to change as their "modern"



## Introduction



countrymen have. Their traditions have been disrupted forever, and the Vendel's advancements threaten to destroy everything they hold dear. What the Vendel call progress, the Vesten call sacrilege. What the Vesten call honor, the Vendel call butchery. Both sides grow increasingly bitter and resentful, and the widening division between them threatens to unleash a civil war.

This book is about that division.

Vendel/Vestenmannavnjar is a land full of power, but that power has different origins depending on who you ask. Neither side will admit just how similar they still are, and therein lies their terrible tragedy. They have the opportunity to control all of Théah if only they could keep from killing each other.

The first chapter of this book details the nation's bloody history, her emergence from barbarism, and her current status as an economic powerhouse. It includes details on Vesten and Vendel culture and an overview of important locations within their shared country. The second chapter

provides details on the most powerful people in the country, including the influential Vendel Guildmasters and the fierce Vesten warriors who oppose them. The third chapter covers new rules unique to Vendel/Vesten, including new swordsman schools, rules for astrology and a new type of Destiny Spread. Finally, Chapter Four contains advice for players of Vesten and Vendel Heroes, as well as GM secrets and a powerful new monster who terrorizes the snow-blown wastes. It also includes a trio of ready-to-play character templates for use as either Heroes or NPCs.

Vendel and Vestenmannavnjar are linked by common bonds, which transcend their growing differences. They both have unique strengths and their mutual pride ensures that neither side will ever back down. Understanding both viewpoints is essential to surviving their feud. If you walk down her streets or journey through her icy countryside, you need to know how to behave. Those who don't never reach their destination.

In Vendel/Vestenmannavnjar, there's no such thing as neutrality, and choosing sides isn't as easy as it looks.





*Vendel* ♦  
*Vesten*



**(Note:** Several times in the following text we use the name “Vesten” as a shortened form of “Vestenmannavnjar.” This measure has been taken strictly to conserve space, and no affront is intended to the Vestenmannavnjar or their honored dead.)

In recent years, many scholars have attempted to attach dates to various historical events of the Vestenmannavnjar and Vendel. Unfortunately, this is nearly impossible. Like Avalon, the Vesten islands have a rich oral tradition, and until modern times had no use for written records. Their history fades into misty legend, and it often becomes impossible to winnow facts from the creations of an imaginative *skald*. The Vesten adopted no real calendar besides the counting of “moons” or “summers” until the rest of the world found them. Even then, only a few sagas record any real dates and scholars have little faith in such material regardless – some records mention Vesten chieftains living three centuries or more.

In Avalon, it is said that legends are more important than history. Among the Vestenmannavnjar (and even some Vendel), legends and history are one and the same. Of course, there are many different versions of history to choose from, with each *skald* adding his own flourish as each situation warrants. What follows below are some of the more popular interpretations of the nation’s past, presented in chronological order.

## The Beginning

According to *The Grumfather Cycle*, a collection of epic Vestenmannavnjar poems, the world was born out of the eternal struggle between fire and ice. The realm of fire was called Muspell, while the domain of ice was called Niflheim. These opposing forces bordered a great empty space named Ginungagap.

Over time, Ginungagap began to fill with ice from Niflheim, which melted when it grew close to Muspell. Many things formed out of the thawing ice, some good and some evil. The most important was Grumfather, the Grey Wanderer, a being of great power and knowledge. Alone, he traveled the watery wastes of Ginungagap, searching for someone to share his wisdom with. He found no one worthy.

At last, he rested under a great tree that spread its branches high above his head. He was almost asleep when a fierce giant named Värld attacked him. They struggled and struggled, but Grumfather finally slew the creature.

The giant’s body floated lifeless in the cold, dark waters of Ginungagap, which gave Grumfather an idea. He fashioned a world from Värld’s remains, using his flesh for the soil and his teeth and bones for the rocks and mountains. The skull was made into the dome of the sky, a barrier to the other realms. Grumfather then plucked out his own left eye and cast it into the water. It traveled into the sky, becoming the sun in the day and the moon at night, allowing him to continually observe his creation.

That world was Théah, and for many centuries, it existed alone with only the Grey Wanderer to observe it. At last, Grumfather decided to populate the world, making the first humans from the roots of the blooming tree. Knowing they needed a special place to live, he took Värld’s heart and tore it into nine pieces, creating the nine islands the Vesten and Vendel now call home.

## The Order Of Things

After leaving them for a short time on their own, the Grey Wanderer decided to visit the people he created. He disguised himself as a young man and called himself Sven, then began traveling all across the Vesten isles.



The first house he arrived at was small, built from dirt and grass. He asked the childless couple who lived there for food and shelter, which they gladly gave to him. They dined on hard bread and meatless stew for three nights. When it was time to go, he repaid their kindness by giving them a son. The boy was named Thrall and, in time, he married a woman named Bondmaid. They became the ancestors of all future *thralls* (serfs).

Sven next traveled to a thriving farm, owned by another childless couple. They invited him into their home as well and he stayed for three nights, eating calf-stew and other treats. When he left, he rewarded their kindness by giving them a son named Carl. He, too, would marry and have children, becoming the ancestor of all future *carls* (farmers).

At last, Sven wandered to a great hall, owned by a wealthy couple who had no family. He asked for food and shelter, which they happily supplied. He was entertained with the best of everything for three nights. Pleased, he gave them a son named Jarl. Jarl grew up to be a skilled warrior and even more wealthy than his parents. He became the ancestor of all future *jarls* (warriors).

His journey complete, Sven again appeared as Grumfather. He gave his people four virtues to cherish above all others: courage, loyalty, honesty, and luck. He said that these were the secret to life and called them the Good Ways. As long as his people adhered to them, he would be watching.

## The Worst Days

Though they kept to the Good Ways, the people of the nine islands had anything but an easy existence. They attributed this to Grumfather's wisdom, however, so they would appreciate the value of everything in life. They struggled against the weather, land, and sea to survive, living day to day and somehow managing to populate the islands. Then, as if fighting the elements wasn't hard enough, they began to fight one another.

They eventually clustered into twenty-five tribes and warred upon each other without mercy. They battled over everything, from good croplands and hunting areas to

personal offenses both real and imagined. This probably would have proceeded unabated had not a colossal threat appeared, jeopardizing their very existence.

A giant serpent called the Great Wyrn came from one of the strange lands beyond the sky, bringing death and destruction with it. The divided people of the islands were not prepared and did not come together in time to stop its initial attack. However, they quickly realized that if they wanted to survive, they had to unify, so each tribe sent an envoy to Sanning Dal, a secluded valley at the feet of the Hjalmar Mountains. They agreed to cease their hostilities and form an alliance against their common enemies. Bound by a mighty oath of allegiance, they tracked the monster to its lair and destroyed it.

In the process, they discovered the Great Wyrn's scales had magical properties, sealed with the Grey Wanderer's words of creation. Each of the twenty-five warriors took a scale, becoming the living embodiment of one of these *larls*. (The details of this battle can be found in the excerpt from *The Grumfather Cycle* in the Introduction.) When they returned victorious to their people, they were worshiped as gods. Collectively, they became known as the Living Runes.

## Time Of The Living Runes

Though the jarls that became the Living Runes were now divine, they could not ignore the influence of their mortal origins. Their new powers exhibited themselves in all-too-human ways, with both benign and catastrophic results. Stories abound of the ways in which the Living Runes used and abused their abilities. Most of them contain some sort of moral, and Vesten children are still brought up to heed the lessons they contain.

Some of the more well-known stories involve Kjot (who rejected civilization for his hermetic pursuits), Varsel (a prankster who tested his followers at every opportunity, with results ranging from hilarious to lethal), and Kyndighet (who roamed from island to island, bestowing his knowledge where he thought it would do the most good). However, it is the tragedy of Krieg that truly captures the hearts and minds of the Vesten people.





In the struggle with the Great Wurm, Krieg became the personification of victory in battle, the apotheosis of everything a successful jarl would want to be. The misfortune was that, after fighting the Great Wurm, the land finally knew peace. There were no battles left to be waged, and Krieg slowly went mad from his suppressed bloodlust. He attracted a horde of fanatical disciples that branded his lærd into their eager flesh. Together, they ravaged and ransacked the islands' coasts, destroying all life that dared cross their path. They launched these raids not for fortune or glory, but for the primal satisfaction of destruction and the thrill of the conquest of the weak. Krieg the Warrior fell from grace, becoming the merciless warlord Krieg the Inhuman.

His bloody course drew mixed reactions from the other Living Runes. Some (including Ensomhet, Tungsinn, and Herje) refused to get involved. Others (like Kjøligr, Nød, and Lidenskap) supported their comrade with words and often deeds, claiming that he only acted under the Grumfather's command. But the anguish caused by Krieg's wrath did not go unnoticed. Styrke, Storsæd, Sinne, and Villskap once again took up arms, vowing to stop Krieg and his minions at any cost.

Krieg at last had another war to wage, and he reveled in it. The bloody conflict raged over every island. Neither side could gain a lasting victory, but Krieg's unending fury kept him from organizing his forces the way the others did. His blind rage slowly took its toll on his army. Finally, the fight progressed back into the Hjalmar Mountains, where he and his followers made their bitter final stand.

Styrke was killed right at the beginning of the fray, strangled by Krieg's massive hands. In turn, Sinne slew Kjøligr, and with Storsæd's help, Villskap tore into Krieg with a series of lightning bolts that threatened to reduce the mountains to rubble. As Villskap sent the last lethal blast into Krieg, Lidenskap's blades struck true. Villskap's body joined the growing pile, but he was immediately avenged by his two remaining allies. When the battle finally ended, the once brilliant snow was stained red.

The souls of the fallen Living Runes immediately passed into the spirit world, where they underwent a series of trials and tribulations. They could now only interact with the world of the living in the same fashion as the other ancestors, but they could still bestow their abilities among their faithful.

When word of the conflict's aftermath began to circulate, most of the remaining Living Runes went into seclusion. No one knows how many still survive in physical form to this day, but as any Skjæren will attest, their powers remain as potent as ever.

## AV 818: Gunnef The Ravenhaired

After the Living Runes departed from mortal eyes, the islands again fell into chaos. Not content to simply wage war on each other, a few ambitious tribes sent explorers and raiders to other lands. This proved to be a liability, as no single tribe had enough strength to pursue such extended campaigns for any length of time. When the few months of warm weather ended, so did hostilities, only to thaw again in time for spring. Many tribes were wiped out, while others were exiled to distant lands. Invariably, a new tribe would arise to replace them.

Many dark years followed when, at last, a valiant and charismatic jarl developed a new battle strategy. Her name was Gunnef the Ravenhaired, a visionary leader with dreams of a mighty kingdom. Instead of hit-and-run raids, she conquered and settled. Instead of converting her prisoners of war into thralls, she let them retain their social standings – but only if they swore allegiance to her. Every tribe she conquered added to her power, and she was respected by those she defeated for her compassion and gallantry.

Her remaining enemies could see that their destinies were in her hands. Instead of choosing to fight, they wisely decided to sign a formal treaty. Gunnef met with them in the valley of Sanning Dal on the grounds of what would soon become Thingvallavatn. After three days of animated discussion, the scattered tribes joined together under

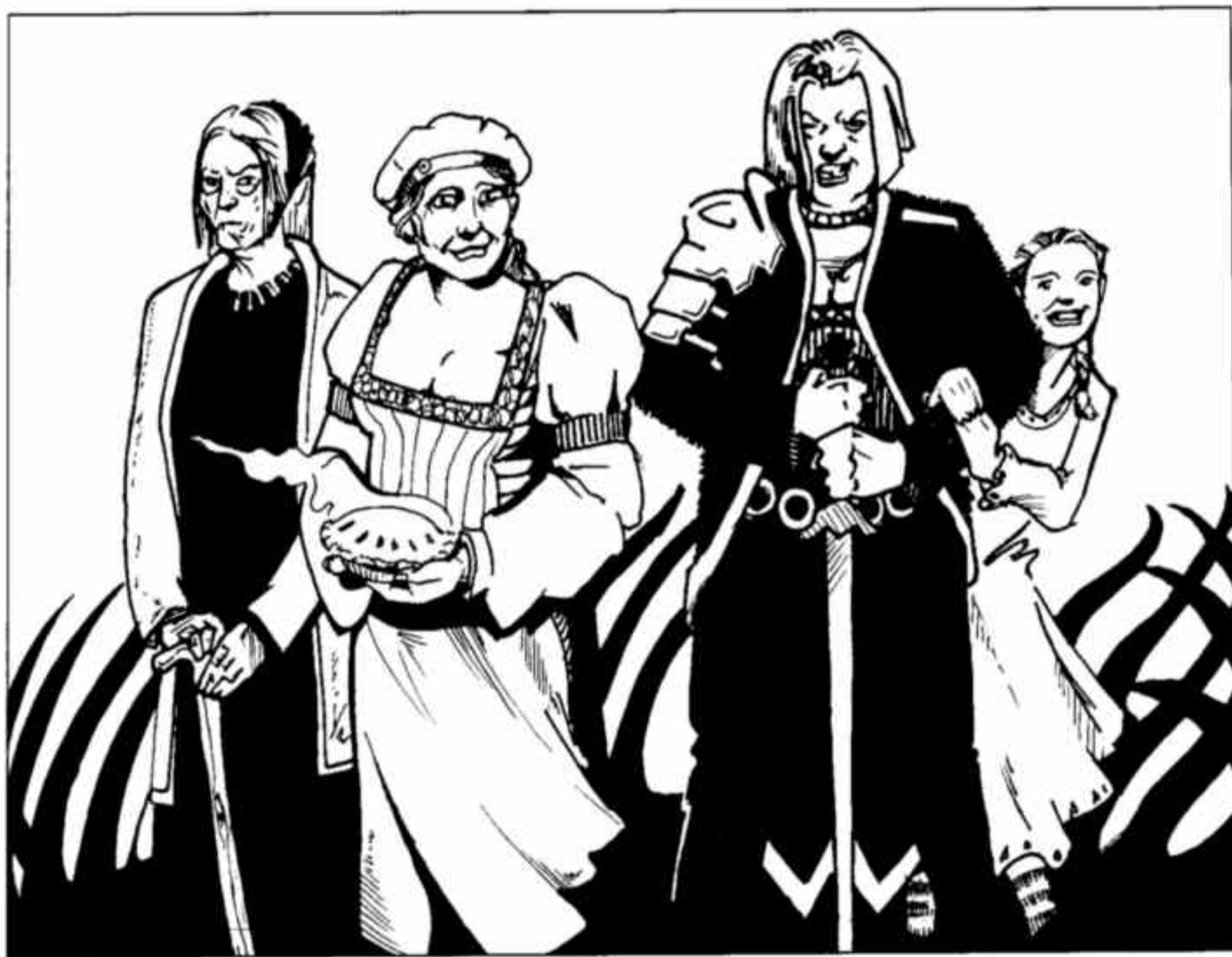


Gunnef's authority. The people of the islands were now one, and Gunnef sealed the pact by giving them a unifying title. She called them Vestenmannavnjar, meaning "one people, west edge." The year was 818, the first confirmed historical date in Vestenmannavnjar's history.

Gunnef knew that governing all of her territory would take considerable work, so she appointed nine of her most loyal jarls to help her rule. Each jarl held jurisdiction over a single island, which would be renamed after its respective ruler. In addition, the capital cities of each island would take the

names of the jarls, losing whatever name they had previously possessed. Thus, the first jarl of Eskjö was Kivik Hallvard Eskjö, the first jarl of Oddiswulf was Kirkjubæjarklauster Bragi Oddiswulf, and so on. This single act set the framework for the Vesten naming ritual, where history is remembered by honoring the names of ancestors in locations.

During construction of Thingvallavatn, a sudden blizzard sprung up, halting building efforts and forcing people to take shelter indoors. Gunnef herself did not reach any of the





longhouses or huts before the winds swept down, and quickly became lost in the swirling snow. When the blizzard ended, she returned to her people... but she had changed. Her dark hair was streaked with gray and her left eye was missing. She assembled her jarls and told them that Grumfather was pleased with what they had accomplished. To show his gratitude, he had made her his living avatar and said that, as long as the Vestenmannavnjar kept his favor, he would always be there to guide them. With great solemnity, she declared herself High King, Grumfather's proxy in the mortal world.

Gunnef then gathered all of the tribal leaders, telling them that Grumfather found great satisfaction in their unity and would bless them in their endeavors. She drew her sword and tossed it high into the air. It caught the sunlight and turned end over end in its decent. When it landed, the blade pointed west. Gunnef smiled and declared all of the people to the west to be the enemies of the Vestenmannavnjar. In a few short days, longboats landed on the shores of the Glamour Isles.

#### **AV 820-1020: Raiding Abroad**

The invaders reached Avalon first, finding the island divided among dozens of kings – similar to Vestenmannavnjar before the coming of Gunnef. The native Avalons stood little chance against the united strength of the Vesten, but one king in particular, Elilodd of the East, had the resources to launch a counterattack. He pushed the raiders to the coast at great cost of life to both factions.

The truth of what happened next has been lost in the mists of time. The people of Avalon claim that Elilodd assembled the first navy in their country's history, sailed across the sea, and fought the Vestenmannavnjar on their own turf. They say that he defeated the High King and called for an alliance between the two warring peoples. With his new comrades, he returned to Avalon and united his country under one crown.

Not surprisingly, the Vesten disagree. According to them, the raiders received reinforcements at the shoreline and fought Elilodd into a stalemate. Impressed with the man's

steadfastness, Gunnef decided he would make a better ally than a foe. She extended her hand in friendship, promising to aid him in becoming the "high king" of his own country. In return, she would recognize him as one of her jarls, and the Vesten carls would be allowed to trade with the Avalon people. Elilodd quickly agreed and soon consolidated the nation under his rule.

The precise facts of the matter have been lost to history; what happened depends solely on who you ask. The Sidhe almost certainly know what happened, as do the Living Runes, but none of them feel inclined to clarify the issue.

In any case, relations between the two nations soon stabilized, and settled into a long tradition of trade and cultural cross-pollination. Of the three cultures among the Glamour Isles, the Highlanders were the most accommodating. After a few initial raids, the Vesten set up small trading communities. Over time, these communities flourished. The Vesten and Highlander people inter-married and forever changed the gene pool of certain regions. Longboats oftentimes carried as many Highland traders to distant lands as Vesten carls.

Some Vestenmannavnjar delivered Highlander brides (and a few grooms) back to their islands. These expatriates found an active role in their new Vesten culture. Of particular interest to historians has been the recovered journal of Leila MacDonald, a Highland woman with knowledge of the Théan language. In it, she makes references to *The Grumfather Cycle*, claiming she was writing down the entire epic in Théan. If found, it will be the oldest copy in existence and could yield startling insights into Vestenmannavnjar beliefs that have grown murky with time.

### AV 900-1500: The High Kings

These developments took centuries. During that time, the fledgling nation had its hands full. After a long, revered life, Gunnef the Ravenhaired's spirit joined her ancestors. Never before had the Vestenmannavnjar felt such grief at the loss of a single life. Skalds say there was no light for three days after her death, and even the sky wept salty tears in mourning. Her people gave her a tremendous funeral,

sending her on her final voyage in a new boat loaded with the finest foods and treasures they could find.

After her passing, it seemed as if the mourning people would again become divided. A few prominent jarls were ready to make their move when, from the north, came a wandering man with long gray hair and a flowing beard. His name was Ash Dagfinnrson, and he was missing his left eye. He told of a mysterious blizzard which had sprung up, forcing him to find shelter in a secluded cave. He said Grumfather had not forgotten his promise and made him the new living avatar, the new High King.

The people were skeptical, so Ash summoned the Skjæren who had served as Gunnef's personal advisors. They made him answer a series of questions and run a battery of tests that only the High King could pass. In the end, they endorsed his claim, and the reign of a new High King began.

Unlike his predecessor, Ash was not a military genius. Fortunately, he knew it, and left the matters of raiding and warfare in the hands of the more capable jarls. What interested him the most was the continent of Théah and the possibility of new, unexplored lands to the far west. He sent longboats of explorers past the shores of Avalon, some of whom set up outposts in a distant chain of islands. One legend states that a particular group discovered a new continent in their travels, but the journey was too long and arduous to set up regular relations with its strange natives.

Because of Ash's curiosity about distant shores, the Vestenmannavnjar learned much about the rest of the world and prospered. To their credit, however, most kept to their own ways and beliefs. Their way of life had been good enough for their ancestors and it was good enough for them. To change, they felt, would be displeasing and disrespectful to Grumfather.

The Grey Wanderer continued to keep his promise by providing new, worthy High Kings, each unique and fit for the times of their rule. Under them, the Vesten lived in relative harmony with each other.



Unfortunately for the rest of the world, their harmony did not extend past the Vesten islands. While the Avalon Isles eventually made their peace with Vestenmannavnjar, the coastal kingdoms of Montaigne, Eisen, and Ussura were not so lucky. The jarls, ever in search of new enemies to fight, launched countless raids against the towns and villages there, using their fast-moving longships to devastating effect. They struck without warning, burning homes without mercy and carting off untold amounts of booty. Their Lærdom magic – manifested by the signs of the Living Runes – gave them potent powers to turn against their victims.

Sometimes, the continental kingdoms sent soldiers against the raiding parties. The jarls welcomed them as a test of their military skills. Entire raiding parties often fell to the fierce counterattacks from Eisen or Montaigne soldiers. But just as often, the jarls inflicted terrible casualties and continued their plundering unabated. This cycle of attack and retribution continued throughout the Middle Ages.

Vestenmannavnjar rarely showed interest in conquering other lands. A few High Kings tested their mettle by launching an extended campaign against Montaigne or Eisen, only to be quickly and thoroughly rebuked. Vesten battle tactics favored quick, sudden strikes; glory was to be found in the front lines of battle, not in the drudgery of garrison duty, so these raids rarely resulted in a long-term occupation of territory. The jarls soon learned to limit their attacks, gaining what they could when they could and leaving their opponents to pick up the pieces.

Woe be to any country who attempted to strike the Vesten homeland, however. With the questionable example of King Elilodd, no assault on the Vesten isles has ever succeeded. A few Montaigne attacks have suffered the terrible wrath of Vesten's rune mages, who destroyed the invasion fleets almost as soon as they arrived. Coupled with the islands' inhospitable climate and geographical isolation, it allowed the High Kings to rule their native lands relatively unmolested.

In addition to raids by the jarls, the less-militant carl class made some inroads abroad. Beginning with High King Ash,



carls were encouraged to develop trading relations with other parts of Théah. They secured treaties with notable inland communities, trading furs and jewelry for more refined goods. While their efforts never stretched beyond a few cities, the things they learned would have immense repercussions on the future of their county.

For almost six centuries, this pattern continued. The jarls raided, the carls traded and farmed, and the thralls served their lords. The Vestenmannavnjar lived their lives as they always had, adhering to the High Kings and the traditions of their ancestors.

It was not to last.

## AV 1501: The Rise of Vendel

When the rest of Théah was undergoing its renaissance of culture and learning, the Vestenmannavnjar were still living in their past. The jarls were content with their lives of raiding, hunting, and limited warfare. As time went on, they spent more and more time on their foreign attacks, and less time addressing the needs and concerns of the carls and thralls beneath them. This was a terrible mistake. Life on the islands remained unbearably harsh. People suffered and died, as they always had, from disease, starvation, and exposure to the elements. The jarls' raids provided some sustenance in the form of captured goods, but too often, such resources went toward decorating the local lord's longhouse instead of feeding his people.

The carls knew something of the outside world from their limited trading agreements. They saw the changes being wrought on the Théan mainland, and watched with growing envy as their merchant counterparts in other lands grew wealthy and lived lives of relative leisure. They saw how men and women in other cultures were respected not for the strength of their arms but the strength of their ideas. They saw the world was changing. Like the wolf growing thicker fur in winter, they knew that, to survive, they would have to change as well.

Eindridi Utterstrom, the High King at the time, recognized their unrest and tried to address it. He warned his jarls that

they must listen to their subjects, to help ease their suffering, and to care for them as good rulers should. Despite his words, most jarls ignored him, centered as they were on their own dreams of glory. The breaking point came in the year 1501, when a small village on the island of Grimstadd starved to death because their jarl had taken their meager grain stores for his warriors. An enterprising carl named Inger Holmstrom – who had spent many years among the flourishing southern nations – asked the High King to call a new *althing*, a yearly meeting normally reserved only for the jarls. The previous meeting had taken place only a few weeks before, and most of the jarls were away on raids. In an unprecedented move, Eindridi agreed to his request.

Carls came from all over Vestenmannavnjar to attend the gathering. Blacksmiths, farmers, and craftsmen of all types arrived in the High King's longhouse at Thingvallavatn. Holmstrom spoke forcefully of the need to take control of the nation's increasingly precarious position. If they did not act, then more villagers would starve and the people would continue to suffer. In previous centuries, their trade with the outside world had been limited. Holmstrom now resolved to expand it. He admonished them to go forth into the world, to learn as much as they could and to apply their knowledge for the good of the country. The Vesten nation had few goods to exchange, but Holmstrom explained that they didn't need tangible products. All they needed was their craftsman's skills and a willingness to learn. Moved by his bold arguments, the carls agreed to aggressively pursue trading interests abroad.

They traveled on longboats to Montaigne, Eisen, and Avalon, contacting merchants and offering them their services. They used their knowledge of smithing, jewelry, and agriculture to establish themselves as reputable craftsmen. At the same time, they studied the burgeoning intricacies of commerce and proved extremely fast learners. They discovered that their ships could transport cargo much more quickly and easily than mainland Théan vessels. They opened banks, which allowed them to use the money they made to make more money. They learned how to stretch their money by making advantageous deals, and sought political connections in Théah's noble courts. They also



learned that their native lands were not as resource-deprived as they originally believed. The miraculous hot springs which native Vesten had always taken for granted proved irresistible to foreign nobles. They began allowing Montaigne and Avalons access to their springs (for a small fee, of course). In a comparatively short time, Holstrom's plan began to bear fruit.

The process was slow and subtle. At first, the jarls didn't notice that so many of their underlings were gone. They simply went about their lives as they always had. The High King kept silent, reasoning that the warrior-lords had already had their chance to address the situation. As the years went by, the jarls continued to focus on their raids while the carls grew more and more successful in their mercantile endeavors. They became the *de facto* leaders of their communities, providing resources, building new houses, and ensuring that their neighbors no longer suffered.

#### 1516-1528: Formation of the Vendel League

So successful were the carls' efforts that they needed to further organize in order to keep track of them all. In 1516, Holstrom formed a *de facto* council in the city of Kirkjubæjarklauster. The council had no real name, but represented both the carls and the thralls. It theoretically existed to organize the growing number of Vesten merchants, but also served as a "day-to-day" government for the country: providing resources to needy villages, resolving disputes in the absence of the jarls, and the like.

Holstrom knew that the jarls would seek to destroy such a council as soon as they learned of it. He and the other carls could not hope to match such armed might on their own; so they arranged to purchase some. Holstrom contacted the Eisen Emperor, Franz II, and offered him a bargain: protection from the jarls in exchange for a seat on the council. The Emperor, weary of Vesten raids and sensing a change in the air, agreed to their terms. He sent a small force of Eisen bodyguards to protect the council and its members, as well as an "Official Eisen Advisor" to represent him in their debates.

As Holstrom suspected, his actions finally shook the jarls out of their complacency. The High King, previously so supportive of the carls' actions, was appalled at the formation of the council, and ordered it disbanded — forcibly if necessary. Unfortunately for him, the disorganized jarls were still scattered on raids, and the few close enough to take action were no match for the Imperators' men. A brief, fierce fight took place just outside of Kirkjubæjarklauster; in the end, the jarls were repulsed. The High King grudgingly conceded the council's legitimacy, provided they still recognized his authority as Grumfather's chosen. Despite that condition, the power base in Vesten had fundamentally shifted. In time, this unnamed council steadily gained political power until it became the present-day Vendel League.

During this period, a curious trend developed among the carls. Their foreign customers had a difficult time pronouncing Vesten words and names. It made business transaction increasingly difficult and prevented the carls from forming closer ties with continental powers. In response, they began shortening their names. "Karlsefni" became "Karl," "Hildigunn" became "Hild", and so on. They began shortening the names of places as well, and soon the entire language began to be affected. Again, this happened very slowly, and the more traditional Vesten were slow to pick up on it. By the time they finally realized what had happened, they were furious — names were a vital link to the past and the power of the Living Runes — but the change had already been made.

Emboldened by their success, the carls continued their transformation of the country. They abandoned their traditional caste name, calling themselves "merchants" as their continental counterparts did. Many of their countrymen began flocking to them, tired of the old ways and eager for a fresh start. They began refurbishing cities like Kirkjubæjarklauster, bringing modern architecture and planning to its streets. Most importantly, in 1528, they voted to officially change the name of the nation from Vestenmannavjnar to Vendel. Traditional Vesten, growing increasingly frustrated by these developments, howled their protests but could do very little to stop them. The Vendel



had learned the power of currency, and used their new wealth to protect themselves from their kinsmen's rage.

### 1565: The Disappearance of the High King

The jarls still had one potent weapon against these changes: the High King. Eändridi Utterstrom still wielded clout among the Vendel merchants, and they honored his edicts as their ruler. In 1547, however, Utterstrom died, and was replaced by an intolerant warrior named Ulf Hövsgaard. Hövsgaard despised the Vendel and challenged them at every turn. For nearly twenty years, an extended political conflict raged between the merchant council (now referred to as the "Vendel League") and the High King. It came to an abrupt end in 1565, during an argument over military matters. The Montaigne King had barred the Vesten from a vital trade port, and seized several longships and their crews. The King wanted to send his finest jarls to burn the city to the ground. The League wanted to send in Eisen mercenaries, who could get the job done more cleanly. Enraged, the High King sent out his attack force without the council's permission. They were slaughtered to a man by Montaigne troops. The council subsequently contracted the Eisen, who facilitated the return of the Vesten without a single shot being fired.

Disgraced and humiliated, the High King vanished from Thingvallavatn. Some say that he retreated in gloom to the caves at the center of the world, where he withered and died. The most militant Vesten claim that the League slew him in a cowardly assassination, although such an act would require power the likes of which the League could not match. In any case, no one knew precisely when he passed, and when a new king failed to emerge after several years, the Vesten took it as a sign of the end times.

Many of them retreated from the growing cities into the northern wastes, where they struggled to keep their ancient ways alive. Their raids continued as they always had, but now they did not limit their attacks to foreign nations. Slowly, bit by bit, the Vendel became targets as well. Ships were mysteriously sunk; traveling merchants were captured and harassed. Not every Vesten took such brutal measures,

but those who did widened the gap between themselves and their modern countrymen.

By the turn of the century, the Vendel League had settled more or less into its present form. The merchants effectively controlled the national government, and the league's success ensured Vendel a place among the world's leaders. Many Vendel had embraced Objectionism, abandoning their pagan religion as "outdated superstition," which helped distance them from the Vesten's fearsome reputation. While the Vodacce Merchant Princes held far greater economic power, their internal squabbling gave the Vendel a perfect opportunity to gain ground against them. By the time the War of the Cross, Vendel merchants had a definable presence throughout northern Théah. And their greatest coup was yet to come.

### 1620–1666: The League Triumphant

By the 17th century, the Vendel's success finally earned the attention of the Vodacce Princes. Like the Vesten jarls, they had failed to recognize the threat Vendel represented, but they at least had the resources to respond. Vendel merchants soon found themselves harassed in many insidious ways. Shops burned down. Ships were seized on the high seas. Resources subtly changed hands while economic opportunity slowly shifted southward. The Vodacce found eager allies in the remaining Vestenmannavnjar, who were desperate to halt the Vendel's progress.

The Vendel, of course, knew full well who was behind these incidents, and quickly responded in kind. They began harassing Vodacce merchants and an unspoken trade war slowly calcified between the two sides. The Vodacce Princes could not organize sufficiently to bring all of their power to bear against the Vendel, allowing the northerners to consolidate their positions. This unspoken war has continued for over four decades and continues to this day. It might have eventually turned against the Vendel were it not for the growing turmoil in nearby Eisen.





### The War of the Cross

In 1636, war broke out between Eisen's Vaticine majority and its swelling numbers of Objectionists. The country fell into turmoil, providing Vendel with a golden opportunity to expand its markets. They eagerly traded with both sides, providing weapons, food, and military equipment to the growing armies. As Objectionists, they naturally favored the Objectionist forces (it didn't hurt that the Vodacce were Vaticine), but League policy dictated strict neutrality, and plenty of Vendel traded with the Vaticine armies as well.

In 1637, a "volunteer army" left from Kirk for Eisen, led by a Objectionist Vendel named Stefano Wulf. Though not officially sanctioned by the League, Wulf ardently supported the Objectionist cause, and had more than enough military experience to turn the tide of battle. What had begun as a clear Vaticine victory soon bogged down into a bloody stalemate, thanks to his keen military mind. For thirty years, the war dragged on, destroying Eisen in the process. Vendel, while maintaining its neutrality, benefitted immeasurably from the chaos (For more on the War, please see the *Eisen* soucrebook.)

### The Guilder

In 1664, the War slowly began to wind down, stymied by exhaustion and horrific casualty rates the Vendel League began to debate a new idea which would change the face of Théah. National currency, such as Montaigne Sols, was theoretically based on precious metals, which could be exchanged for goods and services. But those Vendel who had studied the flow of money theorized that coins didn't need to be made of gold or silver. They could be made of manure for all it mattered. A coin was just a symbol, ultimately backed by the crown or some other suitably powerful entity. If people had faith in the government minting the coins, then the coins would remain valuable no matter what they were made of.

With that in mind, the League hatched a bold plan: their banks would provide paper currency – guilders – which could be exchanged (for a small fee) for any coin in Théah. If successful, it would give them a nearly unlimited form of moneymaking and open every market in the world to

Vendel influence. Certainly, there were risks involved – no one had ever tried anything like that before – but the League considered the rewards worth it. Their banks immediately began issuing the guilder, backed by the resources of the League and exchangeable for any official form of currency in the world.

It was an astounding success. Though national governments failed to grasp the implications of this new money, foreign merchants leapt upon it with gusto. International trade exploded, since merchants could now keep track of prices across a wide swath of territory. Shipping increased exponentially, leading to new treaties and increased prosperity. In the space of less than a decade, the guilder had become the dominating force in the Théan economy... and the League reaped the benefits. The trade war with Vodacce, trapped in a stalemate for decades, began to turn toward Vendel, allowing them to dominate the Théan economy.

### Present Day

Today, the nation stands at the head of a new golden age. Vendel, along with Montaigne and Avalon, is among the most powerful nations on Théah and the guilder continues to expand Vendel influence throughout the world. The Vendel city of Kirk is vibrant and alive, a model of the new Théah. Education and learning has come to the islands, and everywhere you turn, Vendel can be found leading the world into the future.

But all is not well. The Vestenmannavnjar remain, lurking in their distant wastes. They hear the cries of their ancestors, and see Vendel "progress" as nothing less than a harbinger to apocalypse. The Living Runes ebb and weaken as the old ways are slowly forgotten, leading Vestenmannavnjar to cling resolutely to their ancient traditions. Vendel efforts to "civilize" them are met with anger and hostility, while their longboats continue to launch raids against Vendel shipping. Every day, it seems, some new incident arises, and outsiders believe that it is only a matter of time before civil war breaks out.

The future awaits this transformed nation, but it may not be as bright as the League believes.

## The Vestenmannavnjar

Vendel and Vestenmannavnjar have grown quite distant in the 150 years or so since their split. To the outsider, it appears as if two completely separate cultures exist side by side on the islands. Upon closer inspection, however, those differences quietly fade, replaced by eerily similar trends and behaviors. Vendel and Vesten cultures are twisted reflections of each other, each exhibiting common characteristics. This might explain their increasing hatred towards each other. We begin with a look at the Vesten.

### Prominent Tribes

Though they have been unified as one people for hundreds of years, the Vestenmannavnjar still segregate themselves into twenty-five tribes, sometimes referred to as the Norvik Tribes or even the Norvik Nation. This is both for tradition and respect to their ancestors, and each tribe knows for certain which of the Living Runes came from their stock. Over time, this system has warped as tribes split, declined and reformed, but each still has a connection to a Living Rune, and the Norvik Nation still refers to itself as "twenty-five tribes."

Tribal names are a simple matter, consisting of a founder's name and the Vesten word for people, *folk*. When a Vesten wants to incorporate her tribal name with her own, she uses the word *af* (meaning "of" or "from"), as in Darda Bergensdottir af Larsfolk. Because of their de-population

over the last century, the remaining tribes have spread out and often mingled with each other among the remaining provinces (what the Vesten refer to as herdings). This has caused many of the tribes to decline in power and influence, with only the following eight maintaining a semblance their former glory. Below are a few generalizations about each one. (GMs and players are welcome to create others if they wish, although each must have a Living Rune connected to it in some way and few, if any, have the numbers or influence that these do.)

### Aarensfolk

Even before the Worst Days, before the Living Runes won the gift of Lærdom, the Aarensfolk were known for their mystical ways. They have always had a strong connection to the spirit world, able to see and perceive things beyond the realm of most people. The abilities of the artist Fornuft are just one example of their special genius.

As a result, many of the Vestenmannavnjar's most gifted Skjæren come from Aarensfolk parents. Because of their affinity to the supernatural, they have developed a peculiar physical trait. Their eyes gleam more purple than blue, and become darker as they grow in magical power. An Aarensfolk Master's eyes often resemble brilliant amethyst.

### Bodilsfolk

The Bodilsfolk have the honor of having more High Kings come from their tribe than any other. They have a reputation for wisdom and fairness, and encourage understanding and empathy in all their dealings. The Living Rune Bevegelse belonged to them, and remains a constant source of inspiration for her people.

In the absence of the High King, representatives of the Bodilsfolk ensure that the annual althing occurs at Thingvallavatn. They see the swelling political authority of the Vendel, and know that they must soon have equal power or perish. Their leaders have searched vainly for some way to counter the League while still remaining true to the Living Runes.



### **Enhedsfolk**

The Enhedsfolk are the only tribe which has yet to lose a single member to the ways of the Vendel. They are a people of strong unity and purpose, confident in themselves and their role in Grumfather's creation. Like their ancestor Sterk, they know that their strength lies in their wholeness.

The members of this tribe accept the traditional caste system and follow it without question. They act as an extended family, looking to one another for support in good times and bad. They see the other Vestenmannavnjar (and even Vendel) as part of this family, and welcome them into their homes with warm food and a place by the hearth.

### **Handelsfolk**

The Handelsfolk is one the smallest tribes remaining. More Vendel have come from their line than any other. They are natural craftsmen, and find it difficult to resist the temptation of growing wealthy from their work. However, those who remain exert great influence over other tribes, and contribute much to Vestenmannavnjar society. Kyndighet, the most skillful of the Living Runes, fought the Great Wurm on their behalf.

Handelsfolk especially love to work with their hands. They produce wonderful jewelry and fabrics, and know how to make a premium trade for them. Such training starts early. A favorite Handelsfolk childhood past-time is to trade toys and treats for the best deal.

### **Jordsfolk**

When the Grey Wanderer came to the first Jordsfolk, he entrusted them with a sacred duty. They would be responsible for keeping and nurturing his creation. For their reward, he taught them how to gather bounty from the sea and soil, and to make mead from honey. Even their mightiest jarls serve as hunters and fishermen, developing battle tactics from observing the ways of nature. Høst, the celebrated Rune of the Harvest, is their most loved and venerated ancestor.

Like the land they cultivate, the Jordsfolk can be both pleasant and fearsome. They despise their Vendel relatives,

seeing the expanding cities as a deadly fungus that will rot the world unless properly cleansed. The ranks of Vesten's raider ships are filled with angry Jordsfolk.

### **Larsfolk**

The Vestenmannavnjar have a near-legendary reputation as warriors, and the Larsfolk are the legends made flesh. When not engaged in a fight, they are preparing for one. Krieg exhibited every quality that makes them noble, and every flaw that could destroy them.

Even the carls and thralls among the Larsfolk know how to handle themselves in a fight. Children learn how to hold a weapon by the time they start to walk. Their lives are filled with constant conflict, and their greatest desire is to die in glorious battle and be remembered in stories by the generations that follow. They have little use for the Vendel, seeing them as easy targets upon whom to hone their skills.

### **Stjernasfolk**

Among a race known for its sailors, navigators, and explorers, the Stjernasfolk have produced some of the best. They claim they were the first people Grumfather taught how to build a longboat and the first that made contact with the other tribes. Not surprisingly, they claim the Living Rune Reise as one of their own.

Stjernasfolk have also developed a reputation for excellent mapmaking, especially maps of the stars. Their carls have used these maps in trade for generations, amazing foreign scholars with their accuracy. Other Vesten say that the Stjernasfolk see the world differently, like an eagle soaring from the clouds. From the startling details they frequently supply about terrain and geography, this saying may hold considerable truth.

### **Tillitsfolk**

The Vendel like to say that the Vestenmannavnjar are "stuck in the past" and "unwilling to accept change." Such charges certainly hold true for the Tillitsfolk. They are staunch believers in the old ways and would like nothing more than for the rest of the world to pass them by. The



hermetic Kjøt hailed from this tribe, and his people follow his example of seclusion.

The Tillitsfolk are self-sufficient isolationists. They occasionally tolerate other Vestenmannavnjar, but shun all others to the point of aggressive hostility. They refuse foreign goods, tools, and supplies, often resorting to very primitive alternatives (such as stone instead of steel) in order to survive. To live among the Tillitsfolk is to live out of time.

## Culture

Vestenmannavnjar culture has remained virtually unchanged for centuries. It is the center of everything they hold dear and the epitome of everything they struggle to preserve.

### Castes

For hundreds of years, Vestenmannavnjar society consisted of three clearly defined social groups. At the top of the hierarchy stood the *jarls*, comprised of warriors and warlords. Beneath them were the freemen, *carls*, who handled trade and agrarian matters. At the bottom were the *thralls*, slaves and those who performed tedious serf duties. All three castes were bound together in their fealty to the High King.

As discussed in the history section (page 24), the majority of carls grew powerful and independent of the jarls in the 16th century, separating and eventually becoming the population now known as the Vendel. They "liberated" most of the thralls and left behind a broken mess.

Without the strong economic and agricultural center of the carls and labor force of the thralls, the caste system fell apart. Survival became more important than social standing, though, and proud jarls soon found themselves working shoulder to shoulder with their remaining vassals. Hunting, fishing, and farming became everyone's concern and

responsibility. Through adversity, the Vestenmannavnjar became united like never before.

The three caste titles still exist today, out of respect for the old ways. But, unlike in the past, they act more as job titles than social ranks. Anyone can be a jarl (warrior), carl (craftsman/farmer), or thrall (laborer), and it is not unusual for someone to hold all three positions within a lifetime.

Despite this new social mobility, community leaders still hold the rank of jarl, and criminals and prisoners of war are still called thralls. While this may seem confusing to outsiders, the Vestenmannavnjar have no trouble making the distinction.

### The High King

Before the exodus of the Vendel, the High King was the ultimate power in the Vestenmannavnjar islands. Every jarl, carl, and thrall was beholden to his authority. But the High King did not choose this position: the position chose him. Without fail, whenever the current High King died, a new one would arrive to take his place, and his story was always the same.

Traveling alone, the would-be leader found himself lost in a sudden, violent snowstorm. He took refuge in a cave in which he discovered a giant tree in full bloom. Its massive branches stretched higher than he could see and its powerful roots reached around a well of sparkling water. A sudden thirst gripped his soul, and he began to drink deep. Afterwards, he heard the voices of his ancestors, telling him that the time had come to see and understand the true nature of the world. Guided by an unseen force, he plucked out his left eye and cast it down into the well, promising to keep and honor his people. The words of his ancestors grew quieter, replaced by the single voice of Grumfather, king of all creation. He was now the Grey Wanderer's physical incarnation, a new avatar manifest into the world.

By the time the new High King returned to his people, he had already begun to exhibit physical signs of the Grumfather's presence. His hair grew longer and quickly turned gray, along with his remaining eye. His voice



deepened, becoming more commanding, and he manifested strength and skills not previously possessed. The High King could clearly see the once-invisible spirit world of Valhalla, and glimpses of the future revealed themselves in dreams and meditative trances.

Though the story was always the same, every High King was different. Each had unique qualities that would see the Vestenmannavnjar through whatever perils lay ahead. Not every High King has been male – indeed, the first High King was a woman – though the title did not change out of respect to the almighty Grey Wanderer (the precise Vesten term is actually gender neutral).

The last recognized High King died almost a hundred years ago, and has yet to be replaced. Dozens of brave young men and women have since ventured into the northern wastes, hoping to become the leader their people need. Few returned. Most of the remaining Vesten have given up hope that a new High King will ever appear. Little do they know that a new High King has been chosen. When Gjæving Asbjornsson accepts his destiny, the Grey Wanderer will once again take an active role in the affairs of his people, much to the anguish of their enemies.

## Laws

Vestenmannavnjar laws never truly differ from those in other parts of Thëah – they are meant to protect people and their property from harm by others. The noticeable difference comes in the enforcement process. The offended party gathers an impromptu peer council, called a *thing*, where he explains all his grievances. If the thing agrees that the party has a legitimate complaint, they grant permission to seek retribution. This retribution can take myriad forms, from replacement of lost goods to a physical confrontation. Whatever the desired end result, the offended party must resolve the matter him- or herself. The thing simply gives its approval to do so.

If a problem becomes a physical confrontation, it is usually resolved quickly and decisively. Assuming the two parties don't immediately kill each other, the *thing* lays out a large

blanket and the rivals square off in opposite corners, armed with whatever weapons they have agreed upon. These duels are usually fought to the death, and the loser's body is typically wrapped in the blanket when it ends. (As can be inferred, the Swordsman's Guild has no presence among the Vestenmannavnjar, nor are they particularly welcome.)

Matters regarding Lærdom receive special attention. Skjæren must take the moral responsibilities of their power very seriously. If one fails in that responsibility by committing a crime, the punishment is severe indeed. The sorcery is literally ripped from his body in a tortuous ritual called the *bestraffning*.

First, the Skjæren is stripped of all his clothing and hung upside down from a tree. Over the course of an evening, blood is drained from his ankles and wrists, captured in four wooden bowls, and burned in a great fire to appease the ancestors. He receives three opportunities to repent. Should he confess a serious regret for his actions, he is mercifully put to death. After his first refusal, he is ritually scalped. After the second, he loses his right hand. After the third, he loses his right arm. Even if he survives, Vesten society considers him a pariah and can never wield the power of Lærdom again.

For more mundane concerns and daily guidance, people can also look to the Fagerords (Fair Words), an assortment of wise sayings, collected into a long poem that the Grey Wanderer supposedly delivered to the first Vesten. Some of the more interesting verses include:

- Honor no day until night, no ice until crossed, no weapon until proven, no mead until the next morning.
- The best that can be carried is common sense – the worst is too much drink.
- A fool is the man who lies awake upon his bed and worries – in the morning, he is weary and finds nothing has changed.
- To have good questions and good answers are the marks of the wise.





## Althings

Traditionally, an *althing* takes place early every summer in the High King's court of Thingvallavatn. Jarls from every island make the annual journey to Viddenheim to voice their concerns and re-unify their people after the long winter. With the absence of a High King, althings now have more in common with family reunions than governing sessions. Without fail, the jarls still send messages into Vendel cities with the futile hope that leaders there will come and join the discussions. None have... yet.

## The Good Ways

The Vestenmannavnjar like to keep life as pure and simple as possible. They believe in four virtues which, when properly honored, keep a person grounded in what is truly important. Collectively, these virtues are known as the Good Ways.

The first of these virtues is courage. Only someone with true courage in his heart can face the hardships of daily survival. Courage is also important in battle: the ability to face any enemy and not back down. More recently, this virtue represents the ability to avoid temptation, specifically the temptation of an easy life among the Vendel. It is courage that keeps a family adhering to the ways of its ancestors.

The next virtue is loyalty. Traditionally, this represents loyalty to family members first and foremost. If a person is in trouble, he knows he can count on his family to back him up or bail him out. However, times have changed. Families are often divided now, with relatives lured into the perceived quick wealth of Vendel society. More often than not these days, Vesten treat their communities as family, and are as loyal to them as blood. With their dwindling numbers, they know that loyalty to each other and their shared way of life is their only true hope of survival.

Honesty is just as important as the previous virtues. A man with courage and loyalty must also be honest, not just to those around him but to himself. In the harsh environment the Vesten call home, self-delusion can be fatal. A man



## Skalds

Traditionally, skalds were the only people free of the caste system. These respected poets and tale-tellers could advance in the world from any background. The rest of society judged them solely on their skills of memorization, creativity, and voice. Today, their talents are more valuable than ever before. They act as the Vesten's moral support, and their stories maintain the memories of those who might otherwise be forgotten.

A festival is held every summer during the annual althing on Viddenheim, where those who wish to become skalds recite stories to the gathered audience. Many master skalds attend as well, and many use the opportunity to choose promising students. It generally takes at least five years for a skald to memorize enough of the old stories to strike out on his own. Until then, he travels with his teacher, providing small tales between his master's epics.

Skalds never request payment for their stories. However, if a skald is invited into a home, it is understood that he will receive some kind of compensation for his time. Also, skalds receive a lot of leeway when it comes to drinking. Their hosts always ensure that they have plenty of mead, for it is believed that it has magical properties that brings forth the best stories.

must know his limits and the limits of those around him if he wants to endure. This doesn't mean that the Vesten never boast or brag. They just know they must be able to back up any outrageous claims with their very lives.

The last virtue every Vesten holds dear is luck. Luck is often used to describe incidents beyond anyone's control, both good and bad. Every Vestenmannavnjar is born with a certain amount of luck, some good and some bad. But this doesn't mean that they must blindly accept whatever fate tosses their way. The Vesten also believe that they can earn good luck, usually through vigorous work and faithfulness





to the other facets of The Good Ways. The harder one works, the more luck accumulates. Every good deed is eventually rewarded, and every evil is eventually punished.

## Names

The Vestenmannavnjar typically give a newborn the name of a favorite relative or ancestor, commonly one who has recently died. Of course, this makes some names occur more frequently than others. To tell everyone apart, most families also use a patronymic name. The father's name (or the mother's if the father isn't known) simply has "son" or "daughter" added to it (i.e. Olan Eriksson and Hildir Eriksdottir are the son and daughter of Erik). Unlike other Théan cultures, women do not customarily change their names when they get married.

Most Vesten earn a nickname at some point in their lives. These can come from physical characteristics, heroic deeds, or even locations. When someone receives a complimentary nickname, friends gather celebrate. Some nicknames have a derogatory connotation, and a Vesten will spend years trying to earn a new one.

## Religion

Religion is not simply a practice among the Vestenmannavnjar, it is an essential part of life. They are a devout people and see evidence of their faith all around them. The hierarchy of the Vesten pantheon is shaped like a pyramid. At the top stands the supreme god, almighty Grumfather, the Grey Wanderer. Just under him are the twenty-five Living Runes, the incarnation of Grumfather's words of creation. After the Living Runes come a variety of nature spirits, creatures from the outer realms that now reside in worldly environments. Lastly come the souls of the Vesten ancestors, the forebears of every Vesten alive today.

Dubbed the Living Mythology by outsiders, these spirits all exist in the invisible spirit realm of Valhalla, a nebulous place that surrounds and interacts with the living world. Only a chosen few can perceive this domain, but none doubt its existence. When a Vesten dies, his soul journeys

to Valhalla over strange waters where the stars drift backwards and the moans of the forgotten rise from beneath the waves. When the soul finally arrives, it takes its place with its people. If a warrior dies in battle, his worthy soul immediately goes to the Great Hall and joins others in feasting and drinking until the end of time. Then begins the great battle of Ragnarok, when the angry Great Wyrn returns and attempts to devour the world. The souls in Valhalla will rise to fight the Wyrn, and perhaps allow a better world to rise from the ashes of the old.

This belief has caused some major concerns since the Vendel began to change the names and destroy the landmarks associated with the dead. The souls only stay in their rightful place in Valhalla while their descendants remember their names. Those that are forgotten either lose their identities or, worse, fall into the Sea of Death and drown for eternity. Every soul lost to the Vendel renaming is one fewer soul to combat the Great Wyrn.

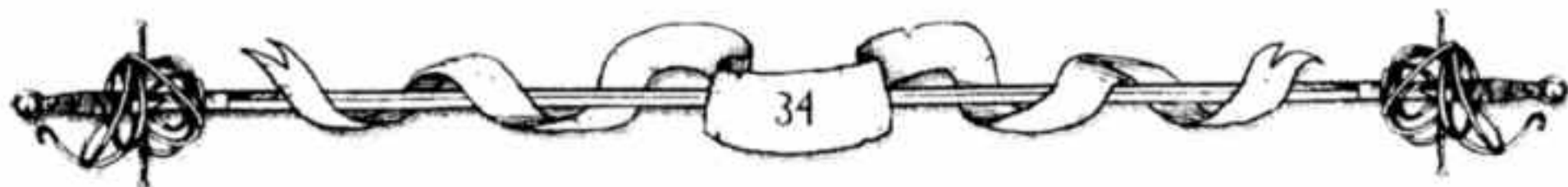
Vestenmannavnjar religious practice differs from the rest of Théah because it consists of individual worship. Ypperste Priests serve their people as sages rather than spiritual leaders. There are no churches or temples, though many homes have carved statues where the family leaves offerings.

When a Vesten really wants to get a spirit's attention, he will make an animal sacrifice. Most sacrifices of this nature require a horse, but the Vesten remain practical even in their supplication. They prefer to kill a very old horse, which they then cook and eat afterwards. If only healthy horses are available, the worshiper simply promises the animal to the intended deity or spirit upon its death.

## Daily Life

### Lodging

Vestenmannavnjar family life centers around the common longhouse, which gets its name from its oblong shape. Longhouses are constructed from layers of stone, wood, and dirt, with roofs of thatched straw, reeds, and more dirt. There are few if any windows, which keeps the dwelling warm but poorly lit.



The interior of a longhouse consists of one large room where everyone sleeps, eats, and works. The Vesten cover the hard sod floor with straw and leaves and the typical furniture consists of a table, stools, and a few wooden chests for storage. At the center of the room stands a giant hearth that provides the sole source of heat. Since there is no chimney, the smoke must exit through a small hole in the ceiling. Bedding, which is folded up during the day, surrounds the hearth at night. The most important members of the household sleep closest to the fire.

### Diet

Vesten eat two main meals during the day — one in the morning, after working for a few hours, and one in the early evening at twilight. Food is eaten on wooden plates or from wooden bowls with spoons, knives, or fingers. Everyone washes their hands in the same bowl of water before and after the meal.

Because of the exodus of carls to the Vendel way of life, the average Vestenmannavnjar diet centers more around meat than in the past. Fish (herring, cod, shellfish, and eels) serve as the cornerstone of every meal, either fresh or preserved. The Vesten preserve their meat with several methods, including packing it with salt, smoking it over the fire, or hanging it out in the sun to dry.

The remaining farmers still produce a few crops, though not in abundance. Onions, carrots, cabbages, peas, barley, oats, and rye tend to thrive in most areas, and a few apple and plum trees grow where the weather permits. Most families plant garlic and mint around their longhouses to add a little needed variety to their meals.

### Clothing and Style

Vestenmannavnjar clothing reflects the unaffected but practical outlook they hold towards life. Women weave woolen fabric for their families on upright wooden looms, providing all the material their household needs. Men wear long-sleeved tunics over tight-fitting trousers, belted around the waist. They tend to adorn these belts with decorative metal ends, which help them remain fastened and keep them from becoming tangled. A well-groomed beard or



### Gjæving

“Gjæving” has traditionally been one of the closest terms of non-romantic endearment two Vesten can share with one another. Originally meaning “brother,” it has taken on an even broader significance over the years. To call someone Gjæving indicates that you trust him or her without question. It also means that you consider their honor impeccable, so the title is not given lightly.

hanging mustache has been the standard for centuries, and most Vesten braid their beards when they become too long.

Women wear a simple tunic over a long, pleated shift of linen. The finishing touch is usually a full-length apron. Vesten women traditionally pull their long hair back into a tight bun, and married women are expected to wear a scarf as a sign of modesty. Because all Vesten people have fair skin, a pale complexion is considered a sign of beauty. Milky white arms are considered especially attractive. Footwear for both men and women is a simple affair, with designs favoring ease of slipping the item on or off. When traveling over snow and ice, Vesten make wooden skis or fasten animal-bone ice skates to the bottom of their feet.

Though not as concerned about personal hygiene as some of the other people of Thëah, Vesten do enjoy a good bath. The nine islands hold all manner of hot natural springs, which all Vesten make use of. Voltadi is the chosen day for bathing, when entire families congregate at the community sauna. This small building usually stands over a natural hot spring; otherwise, snow is thrown upon burning coals to produce steam. The Vesten have no social stigma about men and women bathing together, and nudity carries few of the taboos that it holds in other cultures.

### Women

Though they usually perform different roles in Vesten society, women have been considered men's equal for



hundreds of years. They are entitled to authority positions, may inherit property (whether wed or single), and may marry whomever they please. They may also terminate marriages if they wish. In the home, the wife keeps the keys to all of the storage chests and, if her husband ever gets into trouble, she is expected to step in and help him out.

### Recreation

Vestenmannavnjar lead hard lives, but they still welcome occasional opportunities for leisure. Most Vesten spend their free time perfecting fighting skills, but their warrior tendencies make any activity seem like a preparation for combat. Feats of physical fortitude are popular and surprisingly competitive. Contests such as lifting heavy objects (like the trunk of a tree), running, jumping, and swimming may start out innocently, but often end in violence. For example, swimming contests are not won by whoever crosses a designated mark first, but by who can founder the most opponents.

Wrestling is another sport that can quickly get out of control. All bouts take place in clear, open areas so that contestants cannot break anything of value or use foreign objects against each other. Cheering spectators circle around the fighters, fueling their blood-lust. In the end, the victor is simply the least injured combatant – usually the one still able to stand. Watching a good brawl is so popular that some tribes even raise animals to fight for sport. (The seedier sides of certain Vendel cities offer similar recreations, both human and animal.) No matter the place or nature of the contest, though, any observers are sure to place bets on it.

Despite all this, not every Vesten amusement involves bodily harm. Board games are standard in the cold winter months, especially *hnefitafl*, a strategy game similar to Squares. Many Vesten also favor bone and wood carving, sewing, story telling, and mead brewing as ways to pass the time.



## The Importance Of Wealth

The Vesten still have one trait in common with their estranged Vendel cousins: they enjoy displaying their wealth. While the Vestenmannavnjar methods of showing off hearken back to earlier times, the motive remains the same. Other than brute strength, material possessions are the best indicator of one's power and affluence.

### Jewelry

Vestenmannavnjar jewelry has always been the most obvious and favored way to flaunt a fortune. Elaborate necklaces and armrings are standard, as are intricate brooches. The Vesten disdain large rings and bracelets, which can become a hindrance when fighting.

Necklaces are worn more often by women than men; men usually wear one as a love token from their sweetheart. The most finely made items are crafted from gold, silver, bronze, rock crystals, and other jewels. Most necklaces, however, use simple colored glass beads adorned with personal trinkets.

Armrings are almost always gold and silver, and a coiled serpent is the most common design. These ornaments are worn high on the arm, usually around the bicep, and are sometimes used to keep sleeves rolled back. Many tribes exchange armrings for goods when other items of trade are not available.

Vesten men wear brooches to fasten their cloaks on one shoulder, keeping their weapon arm free. These pins commonly resemble the face of ferocious animals and are made from a variety of materials. Women usually wear two oval-shaped brooches to fasten their aprons. A brooch may have a small chain attached, to which the wearer can attach knives, keys, sewing tools, and other useful items.

Because of the fierce struggle to retain their heritage, Vesten rarely wear any of the treasures brought back by raiding parties. Instead, craft workers melt down and re-cast most items, using the traditional lost-wax method. First, the craftsman sculpts a piece of wax into the shape of the desired piece of jewelry. He then places the wax between two pieces of wet clay to cast a mold, leaving a large hole at the top and smaller holes at the bottom. After the clay

dries and becomes hard, a molten metal of choice is poured through the top hole, melting the wax. The wax drips out of the bottom holes and, once the metal cools, the mold is broken.

### Feasts

As much as the Vesten appreciate fine jewelry, they appreciate a grand feast even more. Anyone can organize a feast for any occasion, but the great halls of the jarls host the most extravagant. Everyone who attends wears their best clothes and finest jewelry. These celebrations can last for days on end and the longer they last, the more their hosts' reputations for hospitality improves. Midwinter is therefore the most impressive time of the year to hold a feast, since food is scarce.

The seating arrangement at a feast can be a complicated affair – everyone wants the honor of sitting next to the host. The customary way of getting a choice seat is by drawing straws or casting lots. Some hosts have been so desperate to impress important guests that they rig the outcome of these supposedly random methods. This is a risky practice at best. If the truth ever emerges, their reputations suffer irreparable damage.

The foods served at a feast generally include beef, pork, horsemeat, and wild game, a welcome departure from fish. Alcohol is served in repeatedly refreshed drinking horns which, due to their shape, must be emptied before being put down. This prevents spills and also avoids insulting the host by refusing to swallow every drop. Beer and mead dominate most feasts, with imported (i.e. pillaged) wine served only by the wealthiest hosts.

So much drinking invariably leads to all kinds of rowdiness and noise. To keep everyone entertained and (hopefully) placid, skalds come to recite poems. Since they must normally shout these poems over the clamor of disorderly revelers, most begin with the command, "Listen!" A wise skald will also include a few verses of praise for the host before the poem concludes.



## Vendel Sorcerers

Some Vendel continue to practice Lærdom sorcery, just like their Vestenmannavnjar cousins. Most belong to Boli Kollsson's infamous school in Kirk, but some learn from alternate schools, or even from Vestenmannavnjar sorcerers trying to educate their wayward brethren in the Old Ways. Vendel sorcerers are highly prized for their abilities, and can draw a staggering salary for enchanting a given object. Many Vendel merchant ships now use rune-engraved items to help protect themselves at sea.

The difficulty is that Lærdom requires faith in the Living Runes and other traditional Old Ways. Most Vendel practice Objectionism, which limits their ability to truly master Lærdom. Most Vendel sorcerers never advance beyond Apprentice stage, though a few have risen to the rank of Adept. No Vendel Lærdom Masters exist, at least publicly (although your Heroes might possibly be an exception). Such a figure would have an incendiary effect on the conflict, and would rapidly become the target of extremists on both sides. Of course, he or she might also have the ability to find common ground between them...

### Funerals

The most lavish display of wealth occurs at Vesten funerals. When Vestenmannavnjar die, they believe they can take material possessions along for their voyage into the afterlife. To increase their chances of successful navigation over the silvery waters of death, most wealthy jarls are cremated in a ship. Those who cannot afford such extravagance are buried in graves outlined with rocks in the pattern of a longboat.

Jewelry, tools, weapons, clothes, and other personal effects are burned or buried with their owner, along with a good supply of food and drink. Generations ago, it was not uncommon to sacrifice a thrall for the journey as well. Because of the Vesten's dwindling numbers, however, that practice has all but disappeared.

## A People Of The Sea

Coming from a chain of nine islands, the Vestenmannavnjar are naturally proficient in sailing. They may be the greatest race of sailors ever to grace Théah's waters. The few inland roads among the Vesten islands are usually nothing more than broken, muddy trails, making travel by boat the fastest option. Navigation between or around the islands seldom presents a problem, but longer distances require the use of wooden bearing-dials that measure the height of the sun above the horizon by comparing it to 32 different points. When a shoreline is shrouded in fog, crewmen launch flaming arrows at the shore to help find land.

Called longships or longboats, Vesten ships are built with one of two purposes in mind: trade or warfare. The only real difference is that a trade ship is heavier and wider than a war ship, containing an additional half-deck for storing cargo. Both vessels are meant to be sailed or rowed, and the open decks mean any crew members or passengers will likely become cold and wet before the voyage concludes. Overlapping shields, reminiscent of scales, offer some protection from the elements.

Typically, ships are constructed in the winter months when it is too cold to hunt, fish, or farm. Construction starts by laying down the keel, which the builders brace with stout wooden stocks. They then add the forward and aft posts, along with wedge-shaped planks for the sides. These are fastened to the keel from the bottom up, overlapping on the way. Wooden ribs are then nailed to the planks to keep the vessel's shape. Lastly, the shipwrights add the keel, mast, and rudder.

Though indeed long (sometimes measuring up to 64 feet), Vesten craft are flexible enough not to break up in rough waters. Their relatively flat bottoms also allow them to traverse shallow coves and rivers with no worries. If the terrain becomes too rough, the ships are light enough to be picked up and carried. Cannon, compasses, and other modern equipment do not exist on Vesten ships. Instead, the crew relies on their innate knowledge of the seas and powerful rune magic to ward off any dangers.

## The Vendel

While the very notion of Vendel having a true culture makes other nations laugh, it cannot be denied that the young civilization has its own vitality. Everything in Vendel seems a little familiar, yet new and original. This is no accident. The Vendel leaders have scrupulously studied the world around them, borrowing elements that seem to work and creating new ones for those that do not. As a result, the nation is a living experiment, ever in motion and always evolving.

## The Vendel League

The Vendel have done away with such petty notions as social castes and royalty. They believe that everyone is basically equal and should be judged on the measure of success they generate in life — especially financial success. If a person is wealthy, he must be working hard for it, and others would do well to pay him respect. They just might learn something.

This is why the Vendel revere the League and Guilds so much. The men and women who fill these lofty positions have few peers in their respected crafts. They have reached the pinnacle of success, and their words carry a lot of weight.

The problem with this system is that it breeds and encourages corruption. Respected people do not always take on power with the most noble intentions, and competition for desired positions can be fierce and merciless. These maneuverings remain hidden, of course, dirty secrets whispered in the darkness.

All social authority ultimately comes from the Vendel League, from city planning to criminal prosecution. Matters are put to a vote, usually taken each morning. Normally, every day of the week addresses a different concern (i.e. on Amordi, the League only listens to matters pertaining to civic planning). The order is not rigidly defined from one week to the next, allowing more urgent issues to be deliberated before petty concerns.

As stated in the *Players' Guide* and *Game Masters' Guide*, the League consists of nine "Chairs" and 91 "Seats". They make laws, debate Guild rules, and generally serve as the nation's governing body. The Chairs are permanent positions held by the heads of the eight most successful Guilds. Each Guildmaster holds the Chair until he or she retires (or dies), when it moves to his or her successor in the Guild. Because of their seniority, they act as the *de facto* leaders of the League, controlling the body's agenda and general tenor of their debates. Sometimes a Guild loses its Chair to another Guild, but such an occurrence requires visible proof of superior influence (a highly subjective criterion) and a two-thirds vote in support of the measure. It has only happened twice in League history, although some say that the growing influence of the Swordsman's Guild may require a new vote sometime soon.

The ninth Chair is officially held by the Eisen Emperor, as payment for his early assistance to the League (see History, page 26). Most Emperors sent a representative to occupy the seat. Shortly before his death in 1666, Emperor Reifenstahl willed the seat to his butler, Joseph Volker, an act which spared the League the political nightmare of choosing a successor from among the Eisenfürsten.

While the Chairs are more or less permanent, the Seats can only be held for three-year terms. Every year, on the anniversary of the League's founding, an auction is held to



fill the open Seats. The highest bidders earn the Seats for the next three years. No single person can hold more than one Seat, although wealthy Leaguers have been known to "sponsor" proxies in exchange for political clout. Most guilds sponsor their most powerful members for seats, ensuring that the League addresses their concerns. Naturally, corruption within this system runs rampant. The League recognizes the need for reform, but is reluctant to take any serious steps. After all, money keeps it powerful.

Vendel's plutocracy grows less corrupt the more local it becomes. The average citizen has a direct say in the selection of his or her local leader: the Lord Mayor of each city. This official enters office by popular vote every five years. There is no limit to the number of terms a Lord Mayor can serve in a lifetime, but he cannot serve more than two back-to-back terms.

Once secure in his position, the Lord Mayor appoints a staff of advisors, the most important being the Lord Sheriff, who maintains the peace and enforces the laws. This has become such an important part of election strategy that candidates for Lord Mayor usually declare who they will appoint to their "cabinet" long before any votes are cast. As a result, several unpopular mayoral candidates have been elected on the shoulders of more favored associates. All Lord Mayors must obey the edicts of the Vendel League, but have a great deal of leeway in the interpretation of these edicts. The League generally leaves local officials to act as they see fit, stepping in only during periods of great emergency.

## Guild Structure

Whereas the Vestenmannavnjar people divide themselves into herdings, tribes, and castes through circumstance of birth, the Vendel segregate themselves by profession. Most Vendel can be identified by what Guild (Skrá) they belong to, and Guild devotion often runs just as strong as any kind of familial love.

The Guilds act as a natural progression of traditional Vesten craft and trade ethics. When someone enters into a trade, he starts as an apprentice (*lärning*) under the tutelage of a

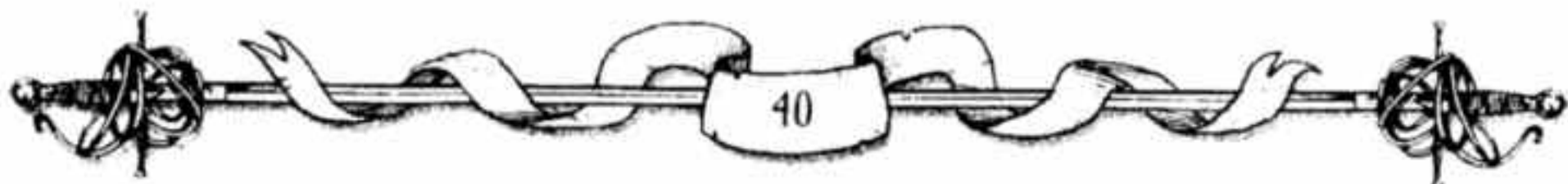
master craftsman (*mästare*). The apprenticeship normally begins in late childhood and lasts through the mid-to-late teens, giving time to learn the basics of the craft. Not all apprentices enter their profession willingly, but a contract of indentures always ensures the legality of his or her position.

When the master feels the apprentice is ready, he assigns a small task called a *gesällprov*. This can be almost anything, from the creation of a unique piece of work to the performance of a certain duty (most guilds have guidelines stipulating the conditions which must be met). If the apprentice completes the task to the satisfaction of a panel of designated masters, he rises to the level of journeyman (*gesäll*), and the approval is documented in the journeyman's diploma (*gesällbrevet*).

In order to improve as a craftsman and gain more experience in the trade, the journeyman is expected to travel both within Vendel territories and abroad (hence the name). The Vendel refer to these travels as *gesällvandring* and view them as a unique opportunity to work with different masters and develop new techniques. Because of the nomadic lifestyle, journeymen do not normally marry and usually live in the household of whichever master they work under.

In order to eventually operate as an independent craftsman (and earn the ability to admit an apprentice), the journeyman must take the final steps of becoming a master. First, he petitions the guild masters for an opportunity to prove his skills. Because there are so many journeymen waiting to be raised to the master level, the petition may not be recognized for years. Eventually, the Guild masters will study the journeyman's record, and then summon him before them and pose a series of questions about the craft. If he answers them satisfactorily, he must still pass a final exam, usually consisting of the completion of a superb piece of work in a given amount of time. This last test is known as the *mästarprovet* and serves as a diploma.

To keep wayward members from falsely presenting their status, most Guilds have implemented a special code of unique handshakes, grips, and passwords for their members. Only those of appropriate rank receive the codes,



which are imparted with harsh oaths. If a member ever reveals them to any outsider, the punishment is harsh indeed. Officially, the Guilds respond by banishing the offending member, but, more than a few transgressors have simply disappeared, never to be seen again.

Since the rise of Vendel, Guilds have come to see the importance of having a single figurehead or public face. To resolve this matter, the Masters of most Guilds hold elections, voting the most trusted and respected members into positions of authority. However, some Guilds (like the Blacksmiths below) still use inherited positions, whereby a retiring leader designates a successor.

## Prominent Guilds

At last count, there were over seventy-five Guilds across Théah, each supported by hundreds of members. Of course, some of these are more prosperous than others, and the Guilds of the nine Vendel League Chairs wield far more clout than the others. Below is a sampling of the most important Vendel Guilds. Keep in mind that the Vendel do not monopolize trade in Théah – plenty of independent merchants continue to do business as usual, and Vodacce's tradesmen are practically Vendel's equal. But they still represent a powerful economic force, and other merchants must often take them into consideration before making any significant decisions.

### Blacksmith's Guild

Like the Carpenter's Guild, the Blacksmith's Guild has a long tradition of crafting quality goods. Working closely with the Miner's Guild, they have developed new smelting and forging techniques that are several years ahead of their time. They are respected and their services command a considerable price.

Behind the scenes, however, the Guild is a political mess. Mistress Sela Cole assumed her title only four months ago. Her predecessor, Master Ivor Johansson, was murdered when pirates attacked his pleasure boat. Though everyone knew Cole stood to inherit the position, no one was ready for her to come to power... least of all Cole herself. As she

is the first woman to hold the position, the male-dominated Guild is determined to test her mettle at every turn. Fortunately, Sela has considerable steel in her spine and doesn't wilt in the face of adversity.

### Carpenter's Guild

For almost one hundred years, the emblem of the Carpenter's Guild has been a sign of quality. Under Master Joris Brak's quiet guidance, it has become a sign of excellence. The Carpenter's Guild sees its craft less as a labor than as an art. Their wooden buildings, vehicles, and furniture not only meet the strongest construction demands, but are also aesthetically pleasing.

### Jenny's Guild

The Jenny's Guild is one of the youngest but most wide-spread Guilds in Théah. It is also one of the most profitable and beloved. Madame Lorraine Weller has





instructed her members in public relations, and has done more to change common perceptions about prostitutes than any woman since Jenny Malone. Perhaps her greatest triumph was making brothels perfectly acceptable places of leisure: "social clubs with a kick," as she likes to call them.

She is also deeply concerned with the welfare of her members and uses her connections to provide them with care. She knows that many of her "girls" did not choose the life of a Jenny and wants to help them move on to whatever different avenues they desire. Her members appreciate her devotion and return it in kind.

### **Merchant's Guild**

All across Théah, the middle class prospers like never before. New markets and trade opportunities appear almost every day, mostly due to the continued efforts of the Merchant's Guild. Under the determined strategies of Master Val Mokka, this Guild has quickly become the nation's largest and most prosperous, an advantage not only to members but their clients.

Should people (especially customers) have troubles with a member or service of the Merchant's Guild, they are encouraged to file a complaint with the nearest Guild house. If deemed especially troublesome (or if several complaints are received), a special team of investigators arrives to look into the matter further. If the complaints are deemed legitimate, punishment can range from fines to immediate expulsion from the Guild.

### **Miner's Guild**

Though quite powerful, the Miner's Guild has troubles that other Guilds never have to face. It owns the deeds to numerous shafts in Eisen, Castille, and elsewhere but has difficulty maintaining good relations with foreign governments. Most rulers don't like the Vendel "plundering" their natural resources, and while crafted goods are always welcome, raw materials are a completely different matter. To compensate for this, the Guild has admitted an unusual number of foreigners into their ranks, allowing other nations to influence their decisions. Their current Guild Master, Eladio Ballesteros, is Castillian, the

first member of his country to ever serve on the Vendel League. He currently acts as the League's *de facto* foreign minister, negotiating treaties on the League's behalf with other governments.

### **Printer's Guild**

The Printer's Guild produces scores of books and newspapers every day, and the sheer number of Guild members and their keen skills make competition with them very stiff. The head of the Guild is Master Arnwolf Gebauer, a stocky Eisen who has slowly made most of the other Guilds dependent on the services his members provide. As a result, he stays well-informed about various goings-on.

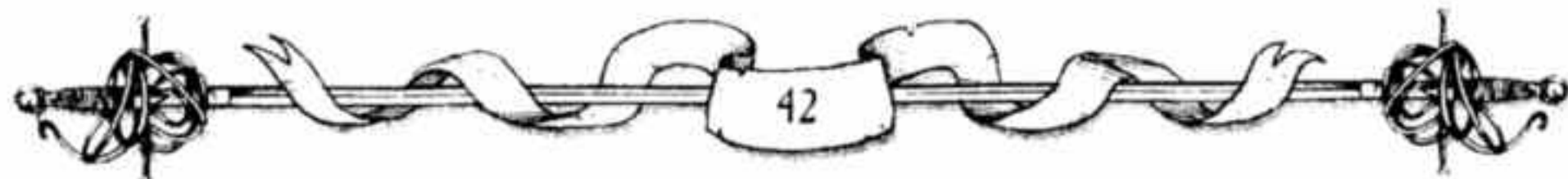
### **Sailor's Guild**

The Sailor's Guild can be a traveler's best friend or worst enemy. Master Allen Trel has members in almost every port, carefully checking commissioned ships for Guild papers and inspection documents. Any non-conscripted Vendel vessel can be searched at a whim, and any cargo or passengers not listed in the manifests can be seized and turned over to local authorities for bounty.

Members of the Guild receive numerous advantages, not the least of which is the Sailor's Trust Fund. A sailor can contribute any part of his wages to this reserve, which the Guild matches with one guilder for every two invested. The money can be claimed by designated beneficiaries upon the member's demise, and can also be used for financial aid in a member's latter years. The Sailor's Trust Fund has proven wildly popular, and many other Guilds are considering implementing their own versions.

### **Swordsman's Guild**

Though barely two decades old, the Swordsman's Guild has gained great power in a very short time. It has a presence in every nation, and holds uncontested sway amidst the Vendel cities. Nowhere else are its edicts regarding proper dueling followed so closely. Vendel's city guards uniformly belong to the Guild, and they have even commissioned a new Swordsman school – Larsen – to meet the needs of Vendel's night watchmen.



Master Linnae Knute has just opened the Guild's new dueling academy in Kirk and the waiting list for his private tutelage has already surpassed three years. He claims to have studied every known fighting style in the world, and that his new techniques can defeat them all. Only time will tell if he is telling the truth or merely boasting.

### Tailor's Guild

The Tailor's Guild has one nation to thank for its rise in power and prestige: Montaigne. The Sunflowers' fancies for fashion keep the Guild's coffers filled. In fact, the Guild's earnings in Montaigne are almost triple the take from any other nation. Mistress Amity Neveu has strong influence with the Mode du Lac (Montaigne's Fashion Society) and has instructed her members to actively compete against one another, encouraging feats of one-upmanship in their craft. If one style or cut grows too popular, they have strict orders to divert attention to new, more exciting fare.

Neveu's grandmother gave her the brilliant idea of using Empereur Leon in order to set fashion trends. To her delight, *l'Empereur* has proven easy to manipulate. With his focus sewn up, the rest of the country is easily kept in stitches, waiting for the latest designs to spend their fortunes on. Neveu appreciates her countrymen's currency, and thanks her grandmother every night for such a clever idea.

### Laws

The Vendel have adopted most of their laws from the Montaigne, a nation whose culture they clearly respect. However, they place special emphasis on codes dealing with goods and property, even more than other factors such as order or public safety. The Vendel work hard and want to make sure their rewards are protected.

Town guardsmen and members of the Swordsman's Guild handle most aspects of law enforcement, overseen by the local Lord Sheriff. The Guild keeps an open eye for infractions against its laws for dueling, eager to collect fines or (if necessary) make examples of troublemakers. The town guards, on the other hand, have a notoriously mercenary nature. It is an open secret that anyone in

trouble can get out of it by filling enough purses with guilders. As a result, Vendel's wealthiest members are often the most corrupt. The rest simply cannot afford to be.

When it comes to punishment, the Vendel favor fines over incarceration. Instead of keeping criminals in jail, they prefer to make them literally work off their debt to society. Vendel courts act both to determine guilt and to measure the magnitude of a crime in guilders and man-hours. Felons toil in the mines, row on ships, or perform menial tasks for the city (such as garbage collection or sanitary work). Once they have paid their debt, they may resume their normal lives. However, if they ever try to escape during any part of their sentence, they are executed on the spot.

For extreme cases like murder or piracy, criminals are put to death. Murderers are executed before a private firing squad, but pirates are publicly hanged; the Vendel value clear trading routes. The bodies of most murderers are displayed outside of town as a warning to others. If the pirate was Vestenmannavnjar, the body will not be on display more than a single night.

### The Good Ways Revisited

The Vestenmannavnjar like to say that the Vendel have forgotten the Good Ways. They haven't. They just re-interpreted them. Luck and loyalty still matter to the Vendel. It is often luck as opposed to skill that makes a man his fortune, and loyalty to one's Guild ensures that it will prosper and continue to care for its members. The Vendel speak of loyalty and luck whenever they speak of the guilder as well. They must create a loyalty to the new currency if they want it to work... and they'll be lucky if Vodacce doesn't start a war over it.

Courage and honesty, however, have been supplanted by two other virtues in Vendel philosophy: cunning and resourcefulness. Courage is a noble idea, but it does not get a person far in business. In fact, it can often cause a business to fail. Instead, the Vendel prefer to be cunning in their dealings, which requires a similar amount of boldness, but doesn't reveal one's intentions to one's enemies. Vendel's





cunning has kept it neutral in foreign matters, making the greatest armies in the world its allies instead of its conquerors. As Vendel parents tell their children, "a sharp mind is more effective than a sharp knife."

Resourcefulness allows a man with a little to become a man with a lot. It is knowing how to get the most out of the resources around you, when to take risks and when to back away. It is honest in that it recognizes the world's realities and seeks to make the most of them. These are all important in business, which is all-important to the Vendel.

Well, most Vendel.

Some Vendel youth have grown disenchanted with their parents' ideals. They claim to feel a deep emptiness in their souls and look to their distant Vestenmannavnjar kinfolk for answers in finding completion. The younger generation of Vendel feel a growing longing to return to the old ways, to live a life they see as full of honest adventure. So as many young Vesten come to Vendel cities seeking fortune and

prosperity, many young Vendel are retreating to the wilderness, looking to re-claim their heritage.

## Daily Life

### Lodging

Vendel has the best-planned cities in the world. The streets stand wide enough to accommodate pedestrian, wagon, and animal traffic. Sewers are efficient, water sources remain available in case of fire, and nothing is built without careful consideration.

This is especially true for their buildings and homes. Vendel structures stand tall and compressed, averaging between four and six stories with large windows on each floor. These windows not only permit much-needed natural lighting, but make moving furniture much easier. Protruding crossbeams and pulleys jut from the triangular roofs, allowing goods to be hoisted into the rooms above. Cellars are a common luxury, but the weather remains cool enough that almost any part of a building makes for good storage.

The street-level floor of a building is usually rented out to some kind of business, while the upper levels can be used for anything from stocking areas to living quarters. Vendel love to furnish their homes with the finest goods possible and have eclectic decorating habits. A given household, for example, might feature chairs from Montaigne surrounding tables from Castille that are set with dishes from Avalon. To visitors it often looks like clutter, but the Vendel see it as a monument to their growing world power.

### Diet

The average Vendel has a more varied diet than his counterparts in any other country. Vendel farms yield wonderful native crops but they have plenty of other options as well. During most times of the year, they have easy access to exotic meats, fruits, vegetables, and spices imported from every known land. The Vendel have also discovered the joys and convenience of eating in restaurants and cafés. Kirk has more restaurants per capita than any city, followed closely by Västeras. Any type of cuisine is



readily available, much to the comfort of tourists who miss the tastes of home.

### **Clothing and Style**

The styles of Montaigne strongly influence Vendel fashion, but it still manages to keep its own identity. The Vendel consider themselves too practical for such things as powdered wigs and feathers, preferring a more dignified and professional look.

Vendel women have developed a social dress that is both functional and attractive. Instead of cutting the bodice and shirt as separate pieces that are later sewn together (as is the style in Montaigne), they cut them in one length from shoulder to hem. The cut falls in the front and back and is worn over a corset and chemise. For casual wear it stays loose, but for more formal occasions it can be pleated to silhouette the lady's form and belted to display her waist. Small jackets are worn over this when the weather turns cold.

Vendel women favor corsets, sometimes worn without a bodice and over a simple skirt. Sleeves are directly laced on and fastened to the corset for modesty. The most standard accessory for women is a collapsible parasol, protecting her pale complexion from the sun and her hair from the rain. Hairstyles are a far cry from the often outlandish designs of the Montaigne; the hair is usually kept shoulder-length in tight curls. To make sure the curls hold, fashionable women brush on egg whites, then allow them to dry. A small hat is the finishing touch to any outfit.

Vendel men take an even more sensible approach in their clothes. They wear both full pants and breeches with stockings, both cut to rise to the stomach instead of the waist. A simple tunic serves as an undershirt and is usually covered with both a vest and a jacket with long, puffy sleeves. In colder months, overcoats with fur linings have become more popular than the traditional cloak, and a variety of top hats complete the look. Whereas a lady carries a parasol, a gentleman strolls with a cane. These canes are often weighted for use as an impromptu weapon, and many have swords hidden inside them.

Shoes for both sexes are designed for comfort, since most Vendel stand on their feet all day. The Cobbler's Guild has made some remarkable progress in this area, sometimes lining the interiors with soft wool or even velvet. The shoes of Vendel farmers have gained a small amount of fame; they are carved from wood, and keep the feet dry in muddy conditions.

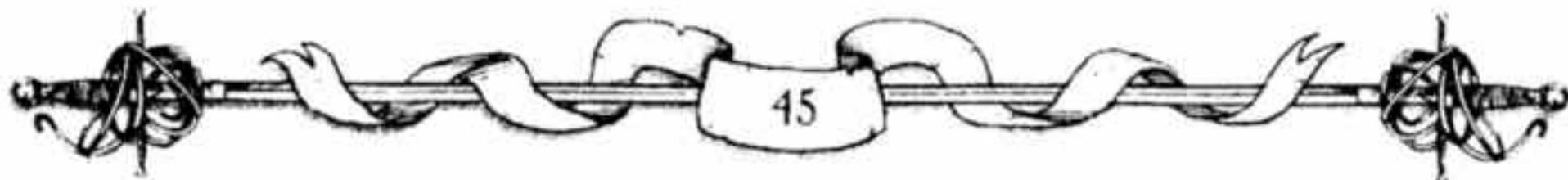
### **Recreation**

Leisure activities for the Vendel are less strenuous than those of their Vestenmannavnjar cousins. While the Vesten prefer challenges of the body in the wilds of nature, the Vendel enjoy socializing and improving their minds in the comfort of their homes.

Parties both large and small form the basis of recreation time. The Vendel have a knack for creating new and exciting entertainment, such as bobbing for apples, hiders-and-seekers, and a wide variety of guessing games. Squares has become more popular than *hnefitafl*, but games involving cards have surpassed them both because they allow for more than two players.

Concerts and theatrical productions draw large crowds, and museums displaying the works of famous artists have many patrons. Virtuosos of every calling come to Kirk and Västeras in search of wealthy benefactors, and most find gainful work. Public speaking is considered an art form, and the Explorer's Society sometimes finds backers for excursions simply by lecturing on the importance of their latest discoveries. Most works of art are imported from Montaigne, Avalon, and Castille, but a growing movement in Kirk has begun lobbying for the creation of a "national artistic movement." These artists have begun experimenting with traditional Vesten forms, adding "modern" flourishes in an effort to spark an interest in their artistic heritage.

The Vendel enjoy their quiet times as well. They are often fluent in two or more languages, which gives them a wide choice of imported books and newspapers to read. Letter writing and diaries are quite common, so much so that a system of etiquette has developed to dictate what can and cannot be written about. Many Vendel also practice



sketching and painting, preferring to focus on inanimate objects as their subjects. Astrology has recently become a popular hobby. Vendel astronomy is among the best in the world, and astrologers apply that hard scientific knowledge to more fanciful pursuits. Rare is the well-to-do Kirk couple without a few astrological charts in their home.

## Names

Though the Vendel and Vestenmannavnjar still speak the same language, the Vendel modify their words to make them easier for outsiders to understand. Nowhere is this more more apparent than in their own names.

To the Vestenmannavnjar, names have inestimable value, a link to one's eternal soul and ancestors. The Vendel see this notion as a little dramatic. They know that outsiders have trouble saying their names and, since they depend on commerce with foreigners to survive, have no problems shortening their names into something more easily pronounceable. This practice extends to the names of locations as well. It is more convenient for a Montaigne to say or write "Kirk" than "Kirkjubæjarklauster." The Vendel don't believe that they are actually re-naming anything. They are simply condensing the original name into a more concise and familiar form — adapting it rather than destroying it.

## Religion

Vendel initially embraced Objectionism as a step away from their pagan past. It was a viable alternative to the primitive practices of their ancestors, which they felt were leading their nation to extinction. The "modern" idea that the world was created by a mysterious supreme deity who left hints of Himself in His work was quite appealing, and the message of the Prophets was more relevant to their new lives than the superstitions of their ancestors. During the War of the Cross, Vendel opened its borders to fleeing Objectionist refugees, which swelled their numbers immeasurably. Today most Vendel practice Objectionism. Almost all



## League Agents

The Vendel League does not maintain its tight control of the northern trade routes with words and contracts alone. Sometimes a more direct hand is needed to counteract competitive and piratical threats to their interests. The League employs special agents for exactly this purpose, investigating and dealing with anything that threatens the League or its goals.

One of the more promising agents is a Vendel woman named Jens Bjørn, hand-picked by Master Val Mokka after she saved his life from an assassin's blade. Her curly blonde hair frames a face too cold and stern to ever be considered pretty, but her ruthless ability to gather facts and the quick wits to act on them more than makes up for her lack of social graces. While not brutal, she strives for efficiency, using expedient means to achieve her goals. Harassment, bribery, and blackmail are her methods of choice, but she isn't afraid to use violence if necessary. Smugglers in particular are her favorite targets.

Vendel see the Vaticine Church as antiquated and backwards, doomed to extinction just like the Vesten faith.

Clergy among the Vendel sometimes lead missionary expeditions to convert the heathen Vesten, and multi-tiered wooden churches (called stave churches because of their unique construction) have sprung up in Vesten lands, adorned with beautifully carved serpent heads and Prophets' Crosses. Even the most devout Vesten warrior grudgingly acknowledges their splendor.

Like the majority of their countrymen, members of the Vendel clergy change their names, but not in the same way or for the same reasons. They often assume the name of saints or simply give their own names a more "religious" feel out of a love for their faith. They do this by finding one that sounds similar in the old Théan language. As an example, Brother Broderick might become Brother Bromius.

A few Vendel still believe in the gods of the Vesten, but do not flaunt their convictions. It wouldn't be progressive. However, it is not uncommon to see even non-believing Vendel wearing rune-carved jewelry, buttons, and cufflinks – just for luck, of course.

## Relations with Other Nations

The Vendel and Vestenmannavnjar have surprisingly similar relations with the rest of Théah. Both cultures have kept strong ties to Avalon, dating back centuries. The Triple Kingdoms have maintained open trade between both Vendel and the Vesten tribes without unduly upsetting either faction. Neither side cares much for Castille – Objectionism and pagan beliefs never go over well with the Inquisition – while Ussura earns a guarded respect from Kirk and the tribal territories alike. The destruction of Eisen has provided Vendel with a potent opportunity, and they work diligently to forge greater ties with than nation. The Vesten view Eisen as a great tragedy, and try to aid its desperate people whenever they can.

The two major differences in international relations are Montaigne and Vodacce. Vendel and Montaigne have forged a huge trading alliance, and Vendel emulates many aspects of Montaigne culture. This enrages the Vesten to no end. Furthermore, the Vesten see how *l'Empereur* treats his subjects, and their blood howls to correct such an injustice. Montaigne shipping has become a favored target of Vesten raiders – which in turn, irritates the Vendel (who have no wish to jeopardize their trading ties).

In Vodacce, the positions are reversed. The Vendel League has ben embroiled in a lengthy cold war with the Vodacce Princes, and would like nothing more than to destroy their power base forever. The Vesten, on the other hand, see the Vodacce as potential allies, and have quietly courted their support in the ongoing struggle to thwart Vendel progress. Though the Vesten do not trust Vendel (and stay far away from the Sorte-wielding fate witches), they know better than to turn down such valuable help.

## Places

The Vendel/Vestenmannavnjar islands have some of the harshest geographic features in the world. Humanity could not have gained a toehold in the Vendel chain without the westerly winds that blow from Avalon, or the Trade Stream, a warm water current moving directly through the chain. Even today, the Vesten endure a bleak climate, serious obstacles to communication, and severely restricted resources. Farmland is scarce (save on the largest two islands), and permafrost prevents plant growth in the coldest areas.

Ice blocks much of the northernmost three islands for several months of the year. During spring months, dangerous icebergs float throughout the chain, and some of these mobile menaces last long into the summer. Sailing the Vendel chain north of Oddiswulf is not for the timid, but neither the Vesten or the Vendel have ever been called timid.

Oddiswulf, being further south, is less handicapped by the weather. Farmland can be found in more abundance here, as well as valleys and hillocks sheltered from the worse ravages of weather. The coastline of every island is rocky and forbidding, with fjords and inlets providing welcome harbors for the Vesten's feared longships. Oddiswulf and Örnsköldsvik are dominated by the Vendel, although they have outposts on the other islands as well. Most of the northern islands belong to the Vesten, who use the harsh climate to keep their "progressive" cousins as bay.

A brief description of each island follows.



## Eskjö (The Great Sea Mount)

Only half of Eskjö's landmass is flat enough to cultivate. On that half, small villages still cultivate their land the way their ancestors have done since time began. Eskjö has a small population, has no real industry, and except for a few Vendel vacation spots, remains entirely self-sufficient. On the coast, several small Vendel communities have cropped up. Vendel merchants and politicians sometimes come here to "get back to basics," resting and relaxing in small vacation cottages maintained by displaced Eisen servants. Vacationing on Eskjö is very expensive (for reasons delineated below) and thus considered a mark of elite status among the super-rich.

The other half of Eskjö consists of a huge mountain. At the base of the mountain's southeast face stands a gigantic Vesten chief carved directly from the stone of the mountainside. No one remembers when or how it was carved – as far as the Vesten are concerned, it has always been there. The place is called Kivik, and serves as the source of the mountain's name. Some scholars believe Kivik is the name of the chief, though debate exists over whether or not the image depicts the great Kivik of the sagas, or a different Kivik unnamed in Vesten history, or perhaps even a representation of Grumfather himself. He holds his spear in a position of ceremonial respect, not combat readiness.

No one has ever climbed to Mount Kivik's cloud-shrouded peak. Indeed, the clouds resting on it make it difficult to determine its actual height. To the Vestenmannavnjar of Eskjö, Mount Kivik stands as a lesson in humility: it is so large it automatically reminds the Vesten of their small place in the world. Skjæren (and other Vesten) pilgrimage to Kivik, considering it a holy place.

Among vacationing Vendel, Mount Kivik evokes feelings of deep patriotism. Vendel who sight the great mountain swell up with pride: Kivik's existence proves Vendel clearly has the best of everything. Mount Kivik is arguably the tallest peak in the world, especially when one considers that it begins at the ocean floor many miles beneath the surface.

Small Vesten fishing communities still exist on the coast, but they operate on a subsistence level. No Vesten wants to live

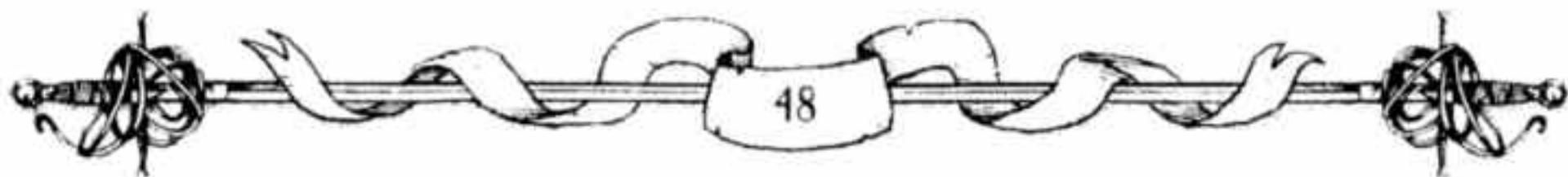
close to the Vendel, so the Eskjö fishing fleet remains very small. The Vesten fishermen adamantly refuse to do business with the Vendel, so vacationers must bring their own meat. The Vesten farmers of interior Eskjö are a surly, glowering bunch who deeply despise the existence of Vendel communities on their island. The Vesten farmers are just as unwilling to sell to the Vendel as are their fishing brethren, and thus the coastal villages must get their supplies from elsewhere. Vesten youths regularly sneak into the villages to make mischief, and the Vendel have recently begun taking guards with them on vacations, a fact much bemoaned in the councils of Kirk.

## Grimstadd (The Haven)

Grimstadd is a forlorn place, by far the coldest of the Vesten islands. Three-quarters of the island's coast is locked in by ice during the long winters, and dangerous icebergs surround the island the rest of the year. Vendel rarely sends ships into Grimstadd's waters.

The ice, however, is not the only reason the Vendel avoid the island. Grimstadd harbors the most dangerous of the Vesten raiders. The common folk of Grimstadd knew how inhospitable their island was, and put out the call to Vesten pirates early on in the Vendel schism. Now the island hosts a myriad of hidden and sheltered ports usable by raiders more or less at will. Rune mages on Grimstadd keep a maze of small passes clear of ice, and farmers and fishermen willingly tow raider ships through the ice floes in the winter months. The commoners of Grimstadd see their actions as a duty to their ancestors, and readily aid their warrior kin, even fighting to defend them if necessary.

The villages of Grimstadd buzz with activity, where noble Vesten freedom fighters rub shoulders with blackhearted foreigners in the war solely for their own profit. A rough code of conduct exists on Grimstadd, which prevents the raiders from fighting each other. The Haven (as the Vesten refer to the island) serves as a safe port from the Vendel and other enemies.



The location labeled Rannulf on the Vesten map is not really a place, or at least not a place the Vendel can pinpoint. Rannulf is actually a person — a shipbuilder, highly ranked in the Vendel Sailor's guild before defecting to the Vesten cause. He operates a shipyard in the ruins of a volcanic crater on the coast of Grimstadd. Sea floor magma warms the waters of the crater, thus keeping them ice-free. Any raider worth anything knows about Rannulf, and most of them owe Rannulf favors for services rendered.

Grimstadd also has a significant population of Skjæren who form its principal defense. These mages, as mentioned, keep passages clear in the ice for raider ships to reach the island. They have also been known to submerge icebergs, surfacing or steering them into Vendel ships, a sight that survivors say is truly unnerving: try to steer clear of a half-mountain of ice when it bursts from the sea and starts chasing you!

## Klørbulg (The Raging Storm)

Klørbulg is a Vesten stronghold with a rich history and an uncertain future. According to legend, this island was once almost as large as Oddiswulf. But it served as the site of many of the greatest battles of the Worst Days, and when Villskap killed Krieg the Inhuman, their clash shattered the already-devastated island. Ever since, Klørbulg has been considered a monument to the power, danger, and price of war's fury. Unfortunately, its newest inhabitants have forgotten the lessons that the legends teach, and only seek the power granted by pure rage.

Most Vesten on the island continue to live simply, farming, fishing, and wielding a good axe for cutting down trees and raiders. But an increasing number of those coming to Klørbulg have a new trade — Vendel lives. As howls for Vendel blood increase, a few Vesten leaders have found that the old-fashioned form of profit (power) is easier to come by with a little work at stoking the fires of hatred. They call this new power the "Roar of the Great Bear," an overt reference to the berserks of old.

At a number of secret meeting places scattered across the island, these hateful Vesten plot the downfall of the Vendel

League and their revenge against the League's allies. On the other hand, they quite happily bargain with any enemy of the Vendel, including Vodacce princes and even the Inquisition. A number of merchants and nobles from across Thèah, including several of Montaigne's most influential leaders, have placed high bounties on these murderers. These new berserkers don't care. Countless dead howl for the blood of the Vestenmannavnjar people's enemies, and by the gods, they shall have it!

## Svalden

For the most part, even an island held entirely by the Vesten isn't enough to protect them from the Vendel League's well-paid mercenaries, which is why they have to hide. The one exception is Svalden. Once the island's largest fishing village, it has recently become a holy site, meeting place, and large town all at once. On the outskirts of the city stands a hill; one night its peak was struck by an enormous bolt of lightning. The next day, when one of the Vesten leaders climbed the hill to pray, he found an astonishing sight. Villskap's rune, the rune of Fury, had been carved into the top of the mountain. The Vesten immediately proclaimed it a sign from the gods — a symbol of their approval of the berserkers' crusade. So far, however, the only Skjæren allowed to visit this "sign from the gods" are those already loyal to the berserkers. Other Skjæren wonder quite vocally just how holy this sign is if those chosen by the gods are not allowed to see it.

Meanwhile, Svalden itself has become home to hundreds of angry Vesten looking to vent their rage. Some of the original inhabitants dislike these lunatics, but Svalden's natives are mostly fishermen and farmers, unwilling to stand up to bitter warriors and wrathful living storms. Since the newcomers never vent their anger on their "own kind," the natives put up with them for the moment. But their muttering is growing louder — loud enough, perhaps, to reach Kirk and the Vendel League before much longer.

Ironically, the increase in Svalden's population has been very good for local trade. Not all of the town's inhabitants were reluctant to see new blood, unbalanced or not, and the sleepy little village has become a thriving port. Some of the



more vicious Vesten raiders stop here to resupply, and a number of Vesten smugglers bring their ill-gotten gains here for sale. Money is rarely, if ever, used – that’s a symbol of the Vendel – but profit is profit, and no one claims that the Vendel invented trade.

The most obvious change to the town, and what makes it a safe meeting place (aside from the sheer number of fanatics living there), is the series of defenses encircling the town. Svalden has a Fortification Rating of 4.1, and stands to improve on that in the near future. The more raiders and berserkers make the town their home, the more work they put into defenses of wood and stone – and the more concerned the Vendel League becomes. This minor irritation could fester into a deadly disease. Even many Vesten are concerned – what good will it do to destroy the Vendel and save the souls of their ancestors if you seal yourself in hate and rot your own soul away?

## Oddis

The island formerly known as Oddiswulf is the largest in the frigid northern waters. It may also be the most important and influential piece of land in the world. The stony spirit of the island is the indomitable Hjalmar Mountains, once believed to be the site of the epic battle against the Great Wurm. Now that the Vendel run things, such superstitions have been cast aside. True power lies in Kirk, and the Vendel intend to keep it

There is only one road on the island, connecting the cities of Kirk and Västeras to the shipping port of Eskilstuna. The League carefully maintains it and funds regular patrols, but such convenience isn’t free. Eight toll areas stand along the route, each charging one guilder to pass through. Those who can’t pay are forcefully escorted back to their point of origin and politely told to find another course of travel.

Beyond the mountains and cities, the island consists of lush farmland and fields. Vendel farmers carefully tend to their crops and livestock, incorporating growing techniques from Castille and Montaigne to raise some of the healthiest (and most profitable) produce money can buy.

### Kirk

Once known as Kirkjubæjarklauster, the bustling city of Kirk almost defies description. It is the *de facto* Vendel capital, full of fresh faces and fresh ideas. The remains of the old village (which tourists are told it once belonged to the High King) have been built over or completely demolished, making room for constant progress. Everything looks and smells new, unsullied and immaculate. Almost every street is cobblestone or brick, lit by modern streetlights and framed by shops and townhouse. As the center of this ever-growing municipality stands the Great Hall of the Vendel League, surrounded by the Guild Halls and embassies from of every Théan nation. The large square in front of the Hall is known as Hanns-Carsten Square, named in honor of two of the Vendel League's founding members. A towering pendulum clock, built by renowned scientist Clarisse Margaret Hadewig, chimes out the hour from the center of the Square.

The University of Kirk dominates the northern end of the city. Built less than seventy years ago, it has attracted all manner of renowned scholars with the promise of generous funding. Though it cannot yet compete with the universities of Castille, its faculty has made several startling breakthroughs; unhampered by the Inquisition, it is rapidly gaining ground on its Castillian counterparts.

The framework for Lieber's Cathedral rises above all the other buildings, intended as a crowning achievement of the Objectionist Church. This monument has been under construction for ten years, and will take another twenty to complete. When finished, it will be the tallest structure ever created, a testament to the strength of the Objectionist movement and a giant blow to Vestenmannavnjar beliefs.

The city's twenty-three hot springs remain a popular attraction for visitors. The springs have always been a staple

of Vesten life, but the Vendel have turned them into a thriving business. Every spring has been built over with a comfortable bath house, and each pool of steaming hot waters supposedly revitalizes a different part of the body or spirit.

Kirk's Lord Sheriff, Ivar Dags, prides himself on having the most efficient city guardsmen in the world. Swordsmen from all over the world compromise his forces, and he works hand-in-hand with the Swordsman's Guild to ensure that the streets of Kirk remain peaceful and quiet. Rumors of corruption among his men trouble him (he has begun an internal investigation to clean up the rampant bribery), but his efforts have given Kirk a reputation as the safest city in the world.

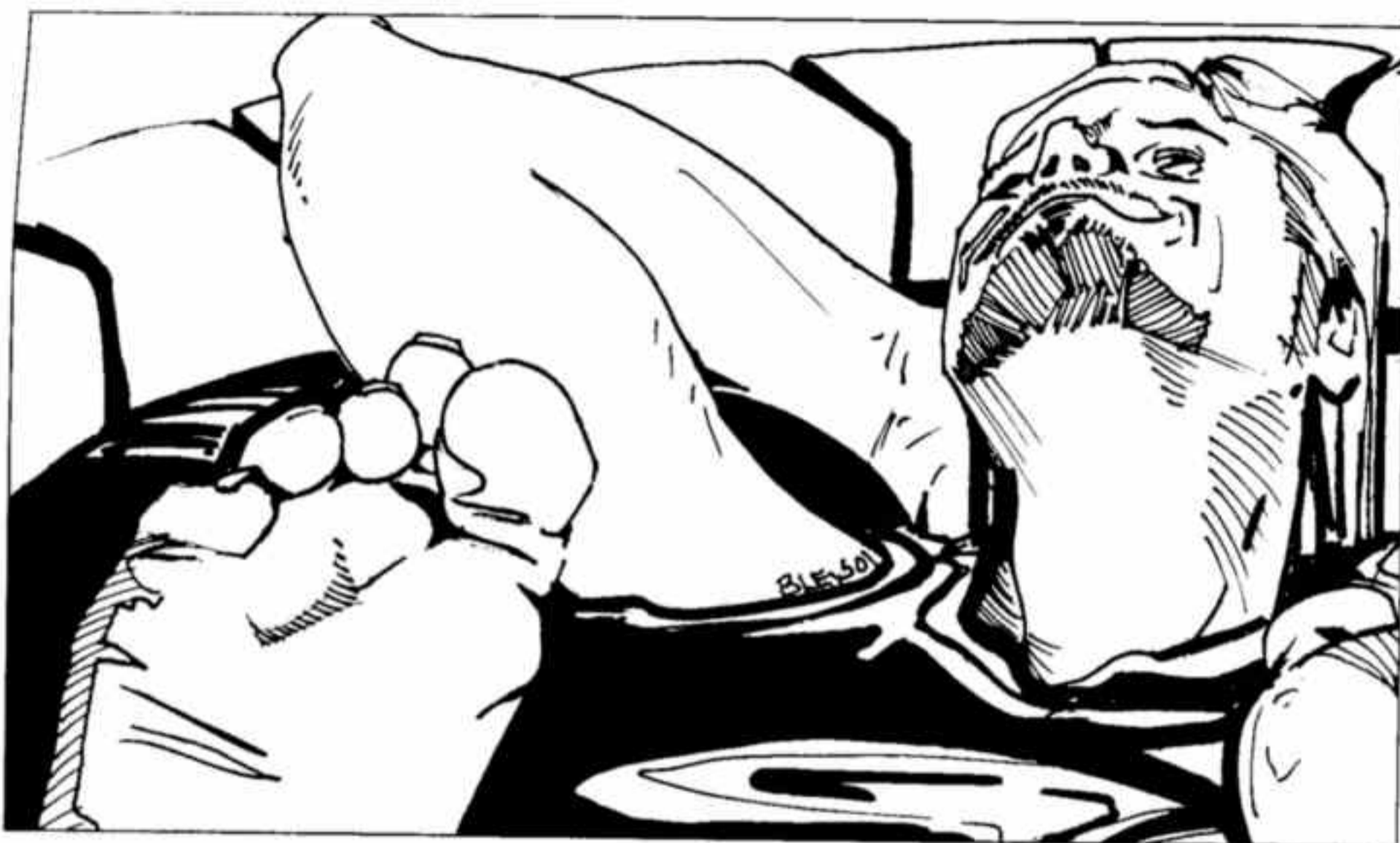
That is, until recently. Instances of civil unrest are slowly becoming more frequent in Kirk: arson, public disobedience, even a few assassination attempts. The nadir came just one year ago, when Master Gunther Solomon of the Usury Guild was murdered at a costume ball. Dags has yet to find the killer, a failure which eats at him to this day. Most Vendel ascribe these criminal acts to unhappy Vesten, but Dags believes that they are more than simple savages. He suspects that a band of sophisticated political malcontents are operating in the city, and has dedicated a team of guardsmen to tracking them down. (See the *Rilasciare* sourcebook, pages 26, 41, and 51 for more information.)

### Eskilstuna

The port town of Eskilstuna is quaint and old-fashioned, exactly as the city planners intended when they designed it fifteen years ago. Originally a small fishing village, the Vendel ousted its inhabitants and turned it into a comfortable version of what the rest of the world expects life in the northern islands to be like.

As the main port of entry for visitors to the island, the city is intended to capture the feel of the country in one compact location. The buildings all resemble longhouses and the people wear clothing similar to those of the Vestenmannavnjar (with softer fabrics, of course). The finest





Montaigne chefs prepare "traditional" Vesten dishes, actors recite updated versions of *The Grumfather Cycle* on street corners, and mock combats are held every hour in the center of town. Eskilstuna has become a favorite place for tourists who want to "rough it," and many pay top guilder to spend a few days "living like the natives." The Vesten Raiders, naturally enough, hate Eskilstuna and would have razed it to the ground several times over if not for the elite mercenaries that provide its security. Thus far, the Vendel have kept such incidents quiet.

Beyond this tourist attraction, Eskilstuna supports a modestly successful fishing industry. Vendel sailors have been encouraged to use "traditional" longships to fish, as part of the city's entertainment, but they have flat-out refused. What's the point of progress, they ask, if you only use it to emulate the past?

### Västeras

As the popular saying holds, "guilders are made in Kirk but spent in Västeras." This city is a playground for the rich, and home to some of the wealthiest people in the world. Any form of entertainment can be found here, the only limits being a person's coin purse. Concerts, casinos, and courtesans are just a starting point for those with limited imaginations. For everyone else, anything goes. It should be noted, though, that Västeras is extravagant but not decadent. It is just as clean and vigorous as Kirk, only more fun.

In addition to the pleasures provided by its entertainment districts, Västeras hosts the bulk of Vendel's shipping industry. New vessels are commissioned here almost daily, and the harbor is full to bursting with recently christened merchant vessels. The shipwrights try to steer clear of the city's tourist attractions, preferring their own quiet taverns to the "painted whirlygigs" of Västeras's other industry.



### **Thrandarness**

The first gold and silver deposits were discovered in the Hjalmar Mountains at Thrandarness and the city now serves as one of the many mouths to the mines below. Thralls who leave the Vestenmannavnjar often find employment by toiling here, earning more in one month than they would in an entire year of their old lives. The conditions are sometimes bleak and cave-ins are far too common, but most find the work quite rewarding. The families of those who perish on the job are financially compensated, a far better arrangement than they were accustomed to before.

### **Sodermanvarman**

No one goes to Sodermanvarman anymore. It is an open wound, an ugly reminder of the volatile relations between the Vendel and Vestenmannavnjar. Sodermanvarman was once a tiny community of Vesten merchants and farmers. The Vendel wanted the land as an alternative to the port of Västeras, but the people refused to leave. Undeterred, the Vendel decided to take it.

They hired a team of Eisen mercenaries to scare the occupants away, but the foreigners were far too thorough in their work. They put every man, woman, and child to the sword. When they left, they burned everything behind them. While most Vendel were horrified by the atrocity, the Vesten's fury knew no bounds. Attacks on Vendel merchant ships doubled in the months following the massacre. To make amends, the Vendel have officially returned the land to the Vesten, but none have come to claim it. They say the spirits are far too angry, and that something unnatural lives in the blackened ruins. Regardless of whether those rumors are true Sodermanvarman remains a haunted place, a sad and silent testament to the islands' increasing civil unrest.

### **Örnsköldsvik (The Rock)**

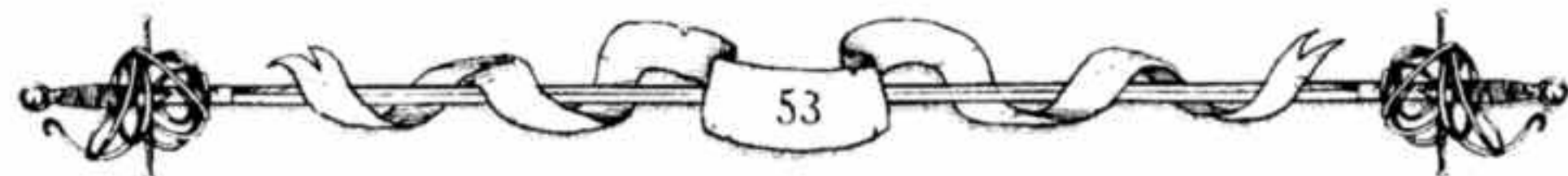
Örnsköldsvik is a small rocky island jutting from the sea just south of Oddiswulf. Soil is scarce here; the island is practically a single piece of rock, and the sea winds that whip across its face ensure that no loose deposits stay long.

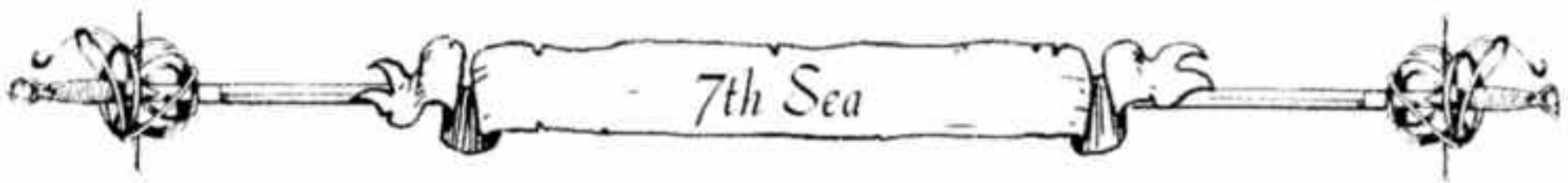
The island has no arable land, just a few hardy scrub bushes and seabird nests. There could be no more forbidding place to build a fortress; but the Vendel have done just that.

The Hofsjokull, as the fortress is known, is a solid, massive work, larger than almost any such building on the mainland. The Vendel paid an obscene amount for its construction, but the money shows. With its 20-foot-thick outer walls in a great hexagon two miles across at the center, the Hofsjokull is large enough to garrison a thousand men, with the capacity to supply them for a year. A small "town" of support personnel, craftsmen, and quartermasters lies at the center of the ring, with dedicated military buildings existing as interior extensions of the walls. Massive Eisen-built cannon (heavier than anything a ship could mount) top the walls every 100 feet, with a fifteen-gun battery at each corner. The complex also hosts naval facilities, and can shelter two ships-of-the-line in emergency situations, with exterior dock arrangements for as many as a dozen more.

The Hofsjokull was built to impress anyone sailing to Kirk – ships bound for the great city must pass within sight of the towering monstrosity. Many a diplomat or merchant has been deeply awed by the sheer magnitude of the Hofsjokull, and their stories paint the fortress as absolutely impregnable.

Of course, stories are always a touch overblown, and the Hofsjokull has several flaws which provide endless ammunition for debate among experienced soldiers. The size of the fortress, while amazing, is also potentially its greatest liability. Communication from one end to the other is difficult; a system of semaphore flags is in place, with flagmen at each corner and at other towers throughout the central area, but if the fortress ever came under heavy attack the smoke from the cannon would likely obscure such communication. Additionally, with such a large length of wall to defend, few cannon can come to bear on any one target. The Hofsjokull's huge cannons can engage sea targets some time before a ship could bring its guns into range, but fire at that range would be spotty and harassing at best. As impressive as it is, the Hofsjokull's ability to handle a direct assault is questionable.





The captain of the fortress, Niklas Lassia, is a strutting martinet with a fool's absolute faith in his men and his fortress. He believes that the Hofsjokull represents the ultimate power on the Trade Sea, and that Vendel need only show the fortress to the rulers of Théah to make them acquiesce to any demand they care to make. Lassia scoffs openly at Vesten ideals, and tolerates no pro-Vesten ideologues in the ranks of his mercenary garrison.

## Soroya (The Navigator's Dream)

Soroya's population is almost entirely Vesten, scattered into tiny farming communities throughout the island. The winter ice spreads across the northern coast, but the rest of the island enjoys plentiful fishing, and whalers often use Soroya as a port-of-call.

A great mound known as Ultost lies inland on the island. Vesten traditionalists believe the mound to be the place where Grumfather first created men (or first gave men fire, or a whole host of other legends, depending on which Skjæren one consults). The Vesten revere the site as holy, and the Skjæren who live near the mound treat Vendel tourists with hostility.

Isafjordhur is Soroya's only real city, a Vendel outpost in a hostile Vesten world. The Vesten attack the city regularly, but no raider group has ever tried to hold it, choosing instead to simply sack it and then sail off again. Isafjordhur boasts two features that have survived all destructive attempts by raiders – its lighthouse and its academy. Many hundreds of feet high, the Lighthouse (it has no other name) is an engineering masterpiece of rune-enhanced steel and stone, with a great light beacon atop it that can be seen for many miles out to sea. The students and staff of the Isafjordhur Academy of Navigation tend to it, and ensure that it survives the ravages of Vesten assaults. The Academy is run by the Sailor's Guild, and Guildmaster Trel can generally be found here when the Council is not in session.

The Academy has more than a hundred students (mostly Vendel and Avalon, but a few Montaigne and Eisen pupils as well), and has a strong reputation in most sailing circles

for its quality of instruction. In Vendel and Avalon, attending the Academy effectively guarantees a navigation position upon graduation. The Stjernasfolk Vesten dislike the Academy, but for some reason can't bring themselves to support an attack on it. In fact, many secretly wish to visit and compare their skills to those of the faculty – though this desire comes more from the Vesten's competitive spirit than any altruistic motive.

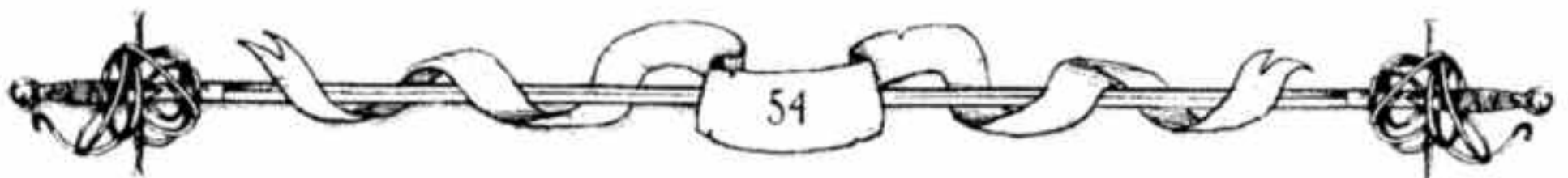
The port of Isafjordhur hosts not only fishermen, but also a preliminary port-of-call for most of the merchant traffic coming to Vendel from Avalon. A warm current runs from just north of Inismore to just south of Soroya, making the trip particularly easy. Most Avalon merchants use this trade stream (running by Soroya and between Klørbulg and Oddiswulf, and turning out of the Stream at Eskjö), which unfortunately means that many pirates also ply its waters. In sight of the Lighthouse, however, the training vessels of the Academy maintains a strong presence. They see little action, since most raiders prefer to avoid them (which they generally do with ease).

## Thorshofn (The Farmlands)

The people of Thorshofn are highly insular and tight-knit. They do not welcome outsiders. However, they define "outsiders" as anyone who does not come from Thorshofn – even other Vestenmannavnjar are not welcome. Thorshofn has no real port facilities, and no real cities. The people of Thorshofn, universally Tillitsfolk, fish and farm as they wish, content to let the rest of the world pass by.

Much of their insularity comes from their mistrust of the Vendel. The Tillitsfolk are shocked at the Vendel breaches of tradition, and have sworn to uphold the Vesten traditions at all costs. They constantly chase off Vendel merchants, and though Kirk has considered military action against the island, most Vendel believe such a course would bring too many other Vesten into the conflict, plunging the nation into full civil war.

At the rough center of the island stands Asegenir, also called the Tree of Life. A massive tree of unknown type and



age. Asegenir is roughly ten feet wide at its base, with a canopy diameter many times that. Scholars speculate that Asegenir is the tree under which lies the Well of Kings, but this has never been proven, and many who seek such proof have disappeared.

In fact, the Tree of Life is the site of several annual acts of sacrifice that would horrify even off-island Vesten. Convinced that only sacrifice can save the Vendel, the elders of several villages on Thorshofn select one person a year to be stoned to death at the base of the tree, a sentence carried out by the rest of the villagers. A lottery determines the victim, with the idea that Grumfather takes who he wants: the people of Thorshofn swore long ago to do Grumfather's will at all costs. The villages keep this annual slaughter a tightly-controlled secret, and will quickly silence anyone they think may divulge the secret.

## Viddenheim

The island of Viddenheim is the second-largest in the chain of nine, and so similar to Oddiswulf that the Vesten sometimes refer to them as "the twins." Viddheim has a low and fertile plain along its coasts, the best farmland the Vestenmannavnjar can still claim as solely their own. The Jordsfolk tend to the area like a favorite child.

The middle of Viddenheim is dominated by a series of jagged, snow covered mountains, almost identical to the mountains on Oddiswulf. They even share the same name: Hjalmar. Of course, the residents of Viddenheim claim that the Living Runs defeated the Great Wurm in *their* Hjalmar Mountains and go so far as to call the highest mountain (an inactive volcano) Tärn. This used to be a point of contention with Oddiswulf but since the Vendel have assumed power there, the matter has been all but forgotten.

## Mjoelsa

The community of Mjoelsa is the closest thing the Vestenmannavnjar have to a city. It serves as the center of trade on Viddenheim, connected to the sea by a series of small streams to the east, south, and west. In the winter, these waterways disappear, but return in the spring and





summer with the melting snows. High ramparts surround the cluster of buildings on three sides, with the only opening being directly south. Two muddy streets cross in the center, dividing the area into four equal segments. Carls occupy many of the buildings year-round, while other structures house visiting traders from the other islands and farmers who want a place to barter their extra produce during harvest time.

Outside the ramparts, the land is rich and fertile, and farmers have worked it for as long as anyone can remember. Every spring, rich nutrients from the Hjalmar Mountains' run-off replenishes the soil, allowing farmers to produce another harvest. During times of heavy trade traffic, visitors to Mjoelsa commonly request lodging among the farmers.

### **Malaram**

When a Vestenmannavnjar falls ill, the fresh springs of Malaram provide a final hope. Their bubbling, eternally cool waters have been known to cure any malady, even the rare instances of White Plague which appear on the islands. Ideally, the afflicted individual bathes in the numbing pools until their affliction disappears, but friends and family often have to fill waterskins for the afflicted and take the water to them. In these cases, they must travel quickly. The water loses its medicinal qualities after two full nights.

The Vendel have seized control of Malaram twice, only to find that the springs did not cure them or any of their clients. Discouraged, they retreated from the Vesten war-parties determined to take the springs back. However, this does not mean they will not try again in the future. Should they make the effort again, they will still be disappointed. The springs only work for those who truly believe in their energy.

### **Thingvallavatn**

As the Hjalmar Mountains extend westward, they retreat into rolling hills and valleys. Winters are relatively mild here, and ample vegetation and wild game can be found year round. At the very edge lies the plenteous valley of Sanning Dal, the legendary site where representatives of the twenty-five tribes formed an alliance to wage their

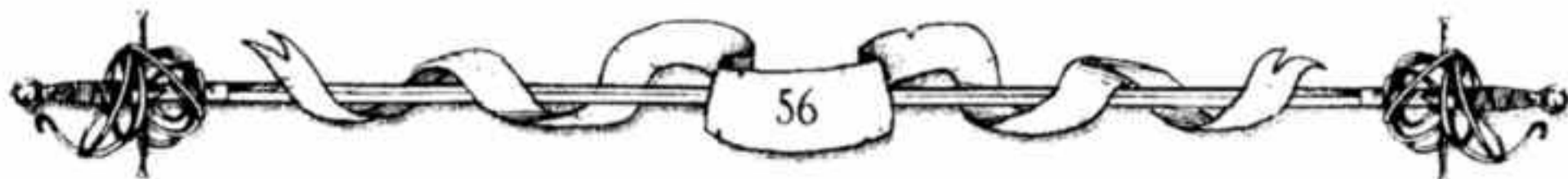
desperate battle against the Great Wyrn. Inspired by their greatness, Gunnef the Ravenhaired established the fortress of the High Kings here, the famed Thingvallavatn.

Thingvallavatn was not built with comfort or pleasing aesthetics in mind. It began as a simple dirt and rock longhouse, surrounded by deep trenches and sharp wooden spikes. The years that followed saw the addition of more buildings and watchtowers, along with an immense circular stockade and ramparts. Every High King added his or her own personal touches to the design, resulting in a stronghold as eclectic as it is functional.

The centerpiece remains the original longhouse, which has been modified through the generations into the largest Vesten great hall ever constructed. It contains four hearths and a table that can accommodate over one hundred guests. Paintings and tapestries line its walls – depicting the triumphs of the Vesten people – which have become indistinguishable with smoke and age.

At the very back, facing the building's three doors, stands the throne of the High King – a masterpiece of woodcarving inlaid with swirls of gold and silver. The faces of the Living Runes are depicted along its sides, and the arm rests are angry serpents. The back of the chair is shaped like a blooming tree, and the profile of the Grey Wanderer peers over its many branches. When the High King sits, it is as if Grumfather watches over his shoulder.

Because there has been no High King in over one hundred years, the fortress has fallen into disrepair and neglect. Volunteers from the twenty-five tribes still protect it, but they serve as guards, not a maintenance crew. During the annual althing, those who attend leave things exactly the way they found them, and no one would ever dare to sit on the High King's throne. They say their ancestors hold meetings here as well, determining what to do about the uncertain fate of their descendants.



## The Ninth Island (The Wanderer's Throne)

The ancient Vestenmannavnjar claimed nine islands as their own. There are only eight islands in the Vendel nation. Despite the best efforts of the Vendel League (and a 100,000 guilder reward), one rock jutting out of the sea eludes their control.

The tiny island that isn't on any map can only be found when its inhabitants allow it to be found. *Skjæren* have the easiest time of it, but if there is a great need, any Vesten can reach the Wanderer's Throne. In fact, the winds might lead one ship straight to the island (even against the pilot's wishes) and send a pursuer in the opposite direction, lost in a fog or a snowstorm. The Throne stands somewhere between Oddiswulf, Eskjö, Viddenheim, Klørbulg, and Thórshöfn, in the very heart of the "Vendel" nation. But wind and wave ensure that only those who deserve – or need – to be there ever find the legendary Ninth Island.

The Grey Wanderer's Throne is actually a fairly round island no more than a mile in diameter, shaped like a crude plate (higher at the shores than in the center). The Vesten say that the gods travel there to hold their *things*, and those few who have journeyed there believe it. Anyone who reaches the island can hear the whispers of a thousand spirits and more. The Valkyries can supposedly be found here as well – valiant warrior women who guard the afterlife until the coming of the end days. A few spirits of the land itself can be called on, bringing the elements themselves to life when needed. But most importantly to Vesten and Vendel alike, it is said that the gods themselves touch the world where the Wanderer's empty throne sits.

The Throne has always been a place for the faithful. Even High Kings couldn't go to the Ninth Island without good reason. Of all the living Vesten and Vendel only Gunrud Stigandsdottir can come and go at will, and she hasn't left her cave on Oddiswulf for longer than anyone can remember. On the other hand, even the lowliest thrall can reach the Throne if the gods so will it. Legends speak of ordinary men and women with desperate need finding their way to the Ninth Island, and returning as heroes. To this

day, the Throne is a symbol of hope, power and unity to the Vestenmannavnjar.

To the Vendel, it is a symbol of something else entirely. As the merchant caste has won ever greater control over both the islands and the Théan economy, this insignificant rock in the middle of their own nation taunts them. Powers that they refuse to acknowledge deny them access to it. Superstitious nonsense destroys those too persistent to be driven away by fog or wind. False gods laugh while those faithful to Theus are sent to St. Rose's Locker. The situation is infuriating. It is intolerable. It is unacceptable.

Rumors have begun to circulate throughout Vendel that the League is financing an expedition – one that uses the superstition of the *Skjæren* who must be protecting the island against them. If names are so important to their false religion, then names shall be its downfall.

A very special ship, protected by the words and symbols of the Church of the Prophets, is said to be under construction by the Explorer's Society at the behest (and guilders) of the Vendel League. Once complete, it shall act as a floating cathedral, steeped in the symbols and lore of the Prophets. Since the names of the ancestors and gods are supposedly so important to the Vestenmannavnjar, using the truly holy words, symbols and names of the Church of the Prophets will surely undo their sorcery.

The few *Skjæren* who have heard of this plan burst into helpless laughter.

A somewhat more cynical rumor insists that the Vendel League began the "floating cathedral" story in the hopes that someone else would try it, which would prevent them from having to fund it themselves. If it works, they'll gladly pay the reward; if not, the League has lost nothing.

Vesten who learn of the Vendel rumors are delighted; it means the Ninth Island is creating new legends, and drawing strength from their greatest enemies. Some forces, they insist, can't be defeated with cunning and gold. Some powers just *are*, and the Grey Wanderer's Throne is one of them.





# *Hero*



## The Vestenmannavnjar

### Gjæving Asbjornsson

Gjæving Asbjornsson was born into the jarl class, the last of eight children. When it came time to name him, his parents had run out of ideas. So, his father began calling him *Gjæving* ("friend" or "brother"), hoping that the estimable title would instill a great purpose in the boy. Perhaps it did, though it appeared to be nothing more than simple irony for the majority of his life.

While his brothers and sisters learned to be great leaders, Gjæving honed his talent for fast-talking his way out of trouble. While his siblings practiced their martial skills, he discovered how to pick locks. As he grew older, the more of a disgrace he became in his father's eyes. After an embarrassing scandal with a neighboring jarl's only daughter, Gjæving was banished from his home. His father declared him a disgrace to his name and ordered him never to return.

Gjæving wandered from one isolated community to the next. Though he had few skills to trade for food and shelter, he had a gift for convincing others that he was useful. Time and again he would be taken into a stranger's home, only to leave under cover of darkness a few days later with a couple of pilfered items to trade. He bounced from island to island, carefree and detached from the world around him.

At last he came to Västeras, home to some of the richest men and women in Théah. He had heard rumors of the luxuries to be found among the Vendel, but seeing was truly believing. His mouth almost watered with the opulence around him and he concocted scheme after scheme to liberate valuables from those who clearly had too much for their own good. His plans worked every time, and soon he could buy into the extravagance of this new world, if only to get close to its key members and rob them when he needed more funds.

His time among the Vendel taught him many things, the most important being that they were really no different from the Vestenmannavnjar. They worked just as hard in their pursuits, but certainly had more to show for it. The more they had, the more they wanted. He had seen the same behavior among the leaders of Vestenmannavnjar raiding parties and even exhibited it in his own burglaries. Wealth, no matter what its form, was addicting, and his people seemed to have a weakness for its siren call.

After three years away from Vestenmannavnjar lands, Gjæving decided that he should return home and try to make amends. His journey was cut short, however, when a village he had defrauded recognized him. He soon found himself chased by a dozen angry Vestenmannavnjar with very sharp weapons, and Gjæving thought his lucky days had finally come to an end. He ran past the point of exhaustion and, just as it looked as if his pursuers would overtake him, a freak blizzard blocked their progress. The blinding snow and wind dazed him, and he plunged headfirst into a deep cave before he realized what had happened.

When he could at last see again, he discovered a well of pure, sparkling water that illuminated the cave's smooth walls. The roots of a blooming, giant tree surrounded the well like a protective lover, but Gjæving gave the strange sight little thought. A thirst like he had never experienced drew him to the water, and he drank handful after handful. When he was at last sated, he rested against the tree, pleased and somewhat bewildered at his escape.



Gjæving Asbjornsson

Just as he was about to drift to sleep, he began to hear voices – indistinct at first, but rapidly becoming more and more dear. They told him they were the spirits of his ancestors and that he was at last ready to fulfill his destiny. The pieces came together and Gjæving felt ill. As a child, he had heard skalds tell this story around the family hearth. He had always taken it as a tale of whimsy, something to amuse the young and the gullible. Now it was happening to him.

He tried to resist, struggling to clear his mind, but something unseen overtook him. Trapped in his own body, he watched in disbelief as his hands freed a dagger from his boot and plucked out his left eye. Amazingly, it didn't hurt. In fact, it felt... right. With a quick flick of his wrist, he cast

the liberated orb into the water. It floated for a moment and then disappeared into the impossible blue depths. As it sank, words formed on Gjæving's lips, a promise to keep and honor his people and their ways.

The voices of his ancestors became excited and loud: they were so proud of him, and of the great things to which he would lead his people. Then they fell silent, replaced by the low tones of a single speaker – Grumfather, the world's creator. It was time for Grumfather to renew his promise to the Vestenmannavnjar and again have a presence among them. Gjæving would be that presence. He was the new High King.

When Gjæving regained his senses, the pain of his actions hit him full force. Not only was his eye missing, but he had a raging nosebleed and a searing headache. He knew it all had to be a mistake. He wanted to rest, to simply lie down and perhaps die. But the spirits materialized before him, got him to his feet, and led him from the cave. They urged him onward and forward, into the waiting arms of destiny and his people.

He has been wandering for six months now, fighting the things he sees and the voices he hears every step of the way. He has known no peace, always moving and observing the world around him with new sight. He knows the Vestenmannavnjar need a new leader. He just wishes it weren't him.

Every day, his hair and beard become more gray, as does his remaining eye. He hides his still-handsome face under a tattered hood, making sure that no one recognizes the features of the High King. A tiny number of Vestenmannavnjar know who he is, but they have enough loyalty to keep silent when he tells them. He knows that he will soon have to reveal himself, but he certainly isn't in any hurry to do so. He has no idea what will happen.

### Magnus Brynjulffrsson af Larsfolk

From the cradle, Magnus Brynjulffrsson (brin-YULE-fer-sun) was different. A fast learner and physical prodigy, he talked, walked, and grew faster than most children in his village. He

has always been bigger, faster, and stronger than anyone around him. Shortly after his birth, a mysterious soothsayer visited Magnus' parents. He promised to predict the boy's future in exchange for a bowl of stew. Brynjulfr agreed.

"I see a crown," said the wrinkled elder, holding the boy but staring blankly into the sky. "A crown and glory." Then, with a gasp: "I see the High King."

Magnus' parents were stunned. Every couple hopes to raise up the High King, but to be told emphatically that he would be the one... The elder, knowing that a prediction of this magnitude would cause uproar, forbade Brynjulfr and his wife from spreading the news. They obeyed.



Magnus Brynjulfrsson af Larsfolk

Magnus grew up held to an extremely high standard. Brynjulfr knew the sagas, and knew his son would face great trials. He toughened the boy accordingly. A warrior himself, Brynjulfr was a hard teacher, and Magnus learned quickly to get out of the way or take the hit. Brynjulfr taught his son how to climb, run, swim, and fight, and demanded perfection in every area. Magnus obliged, thriving on his father's discipline.

At 19, Magnus had established himself as an unbeatable warrior, and his reputation spread to the local jarl – a cruel warchief who saw a terrible threat in the young boy. He and his men traveled to the family's home, and challenged the boy to a fight to ensure his loyalty. Magnus took the deal a step further.

"I will fight you," he bellowed, his voice carrying to the assembled crowd like thunder. "If you win, I will serve you. If I win, your hall is mine."

The jarl could not refuse in front of his men, and attacked Magnus ferociously. The battle lasted nearly an hour, but Magnus slew the jarl and took control of his hall and lands.

Since then, Magnus has made his name known and feared throughout the Vendel archipelago. From his base on Klørbulg, he has declared war on the heretical Vendel and bends his considerable military skills towards undoing their wickedness. His raids are fast as lightning and ferocious as thunder. No fewer than five Vendel expeditions have set out to catch or kill him. Few survivors have returned. He has become a hero to the Vestenmannavnjar people, and there is talk of marshaling many jarls behind him to drive the Vendel out for good. He has not put out any sort of call, but already warriors and skjaeren are flocking to him.

Magnus is a bear of a man, barrel-chested and mighty of form. His battle style is uncompromisingly savage, and his band of fanatical followers wield their weapons the same way. Magnus is also a natural leader with a powerful charisma. None who meet him have ever been unimpressed, for better or for worse. He has yet to tell anyone of the prophecy, but few who know him would be surprised to hear it.

## Gunrud Stigandsdottir

Some claim that Gunrud Stigandsdottir has been alive for one hundred and fifty years. Of course, they are wrong. She is much, much older.

Centuries ago, Gunrud was a fair and beautiful maiden. Her flowing blond hair sparkled like sunlight on the water and her eyes gleamed as blue as the summer sky. Everyone she met became instantly enchanted with her. Every woman wanted to be her friend and every man wanted to be her husband. She was amused and a little embarrassed by the attention she drew, and never took it seriously. That is, until she met a spirited young artist named Fornuft.

It was love at first sight for both of them, and their affection became as passionate as it was unwavering. In no time, Fornuft's paintings focused on Gunrud, the center of his world. He drew his inspiration from her, and she fueled him to new heights of creativity.

In their time together, they had only one argument. Gunrud decided that she did not deserve such regard and that Fornuft would do better painting something else. He said that she was the only thing in the world worth his devotion or skills. Her hasty response had dire repercussions for both of them. She told him if he could not paint anything else, he was no true artist. If she was the only thing in the world he could depict, then he should look to the heavens. She pointed to the sun and said that she would only sit for him again if he could capture its beauty. Hurt and enraged, Fornuft tried to meet her demand. He eventually succeeded, but went blind from the effort.

Saddened by the extremity to which her words had driven Fornuft, Gunrud made a vow to the almighty Grey Wanderer. She declared she would always be her lover's helper and would aid him until he died. Little did she know the full ramifications of her promise. The two eventually married and, to everyone's surprise, Fornuft continued his painting, although he no longer focused on Gunrud. He received an epiphany, which he referred to as "divine inspiration," and crafted scenes of great heroes and a horrible creature from one of the outer realms. Many years later, when the Great Wurm appeared, his portrayals were



Gunrud Stigandsdottir

finally recognized as the agent of prophecy. He went as an emissary to a meeting of all the Vesten tribes to try and stop the monster's reign of terror.

When Fornuft became one of the Living Runes, he gained a measure of divinity. No longer would he age and never again would he be sick. Unfortunately for Gunrud, the same did not hold true for her. Over the years, she grew old and feeble, but her vow kept her alive. She would always serve as her lover's helper and would aid him until he died. Because of their bond, Gunrud assumed some of Fornuft's powers. She developed the ability to see a person's past and glimpses of their future. Other Vesten soon recognized her talent, and she became a seer and soothsayer for all her people.

When Krieg the Inhuman and the other Living Runes were killed, Fornuft went into hiding and Gunrud assumed a new role. Fornuft communicated to her through their shared gift, and she became the mouthpiece of the gods. This brought her even more attention than her ability as a fortune teller. At last, she retreated from her people, taking refuge in a cave that overlooked the small community of her birth. She could see its future, and morosely watched it come to pass. First, it grew into the town of Kirkjubæjarklauster. Then it swelled and bloated into the modern city of Kirk.

The years between saw her story pass into popular legend. People who faced difficult decisions or needed answers to their lives' questions would brave her mountains, many never to return. She saw it all. Those who found her cave were usually too stunned by her decrepit appearance to voice their concerns. She would just give a withered smile and crackle out their needed answers, offering a bowl of stew before her company left. She was never surprised at their refusals or their decisions not to heed her words.

Gunrud still watches the city below. She knew the Vendel would send a team of men to confirm whether or not she existed. She also knew that the truth she had for them would render them deaf, blind, and mute. When they appeared, she told them what they wanted to know – and her cackling laughter followed them as they fled in horror back to Kirk. She saw it all centuries before and waited diligently for the time to come.

Now she is expecting her next guest. Driven by the spirits of his ancestors, Gjæving Asbjornsson will soon stagger into her cave. She will deliver a well-rehearsed speech and, when she is finished, he will agree with everything she says. Unlike everyone else, he will stay and share a bowl of stew with her. Unfortunately, she does not believe he will follow the final bit of her advice until it is too late.

Gunrud appears as an absolutely decrepit old crone with withered skin and sunken bones. She has lost all of her teeth and hair, and her white eyes stare blindly at the world. She can still see, however, though few mortals would recognize her vision. She has long since renounced her remaining humanity and now serves only as a mouthpiece for the

Living Runes. She will continue to play her part until the story concludes and Ragnarok claims them all.

## Uvitenent

One of the most mysterious figures in Kirk today is known only by the name Uvitenhet, or Mystery. Rumors mark her as a Vesten rune mage dedicated to the downfall of the Vendel Guilds. Her first public act was two years ago when she posted a letter from a Vendel merchant upon the door of Kirk's burgeoning cathedral. It was a set of instructions to the merchant's minions to murder a young Vestenmannavnjar couple who refused to sell their lands.



Uvitenent



Hero

The rune of Mystery was appended to the letter in red ink; none had seen who had posted it upon the door despite the busy street it faced. The Vendel merchant spread several well-placed bribes, and was never charged with any crime. Several weeks later, an intruder entered his home and killed him. The intruder left the Uvitenhet rune drawn in blood upon the wall next to his body. A terrified maid described "a fierce blonde woman" wielding powerful rune magic as the perpetrator. Unfortunately, her description matched half the women in Kirk.

Since that time many other letters from the elusive Uvitenhet have appeared all over Kirk. They appear in public places and detail the crimes of Vendel merchants. A handful of these merchants have been charged for these crimes. Most of them have not, either because no corroborating evidence exists or because the merchants have enough influence to make the charges disappear. Most of those who escaped justice have died in strange "accidents."

Further, although it is not common knowledge, Yngvild Olafssdottir has received a number of letters from Uvitenhet detailing shipping schedules and cargo manifests. In fact, after she sent the entire shipping schedule for one prominent merchant to Olafssdottir, the Vesten Raider destroyed his entire holdings in two weeks by sinking five of his vessels. Further, although the Vendel Council does not wish to speak of the matter, the rune has recently begun to appear in other places as well. The Carpenter's Guild discovered it carved into an entire shipment of valuable maple; all of the wood was warped beyond use. When a cargo of vegetables was delayed in dock due to sabotage, sailors discovered the rune painted upon the crates of rotting food. And several notable merchants have been found dead in the homes of disreputable women, marked with the rune.

The Vestenmannavnjar see Uvitenhet as a leader to rally behind. She brings the crimes of the privileged and wealthy to light and brings justice when no one else will. Although they do not know her identity, they are willing to aid her in any way. In one instance when a rune appeared on the side of a warehouse, Vestenmannavnjar sailors in the area raided

the place. They found timber obtained from the destruction of a forest sacred to the Vestenmannavnjar. They burned the warehouse and timber to the ground. The conflagration almost destroyed the entire dock region. In all of these events, no one has seen the person or persons responsible.

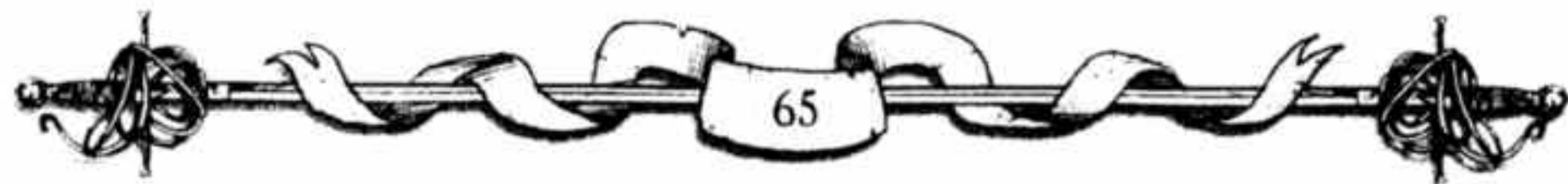
Several of the Guild's agents believe that no single person could be responsible for so many acts. They suspect "Uvitenhet" actually represents an entire criminal organization dedicated to bringing down the Guild. They use the runes to simply generate confusion and have no real magical abilities. Whatever the case, the Vendel League has placed an enormous reward for any information leading to Uvitenhet's capture. So far, no one has claimed the reward.



## The Vendel

### Boli Kollsson

To the Vendel, Boli Kollsson is a shrewd businessman and a great asset. To the Vestenmannavnjar, he is the worst of traitors, a scourge to Grumfather's eye. Boli was born a Vendel, raised by loving merchant parents in Kirk. At the onset of puberty, he started seeing things: impossible apparitions just out of his field of vision. When he finally told his parents, they felt it could signal a great talent in Lærdom. After much discussion, they moved him from the bustle of the city to a woodcutter's cottage: the home of his Vestenmannavnjar grandfather, a Ypperste Priest named Thrand Ulfson. The old man gladly instructed the youth in the ways of Lærdom and the worship of his ancestors.



Boli was miserable in his new environment. He yearned for the elegant dress, high culture, and excitement of the city. The woods were dark and oppressive, and he attempted to run away several times. He never made it far. Grandfather always seemed to know where he was going.

A horrible crime finally granted Boli his freedom. He had been sent deep into the forest to contemplate the ancient ways, meditating beside a sacred rock in a grove of hallowed trees. He was gone for just two nights but, when he returned, he found his grandfather savagely murdered. Desperate brigands had forced their way into the cottage, killing the old man and stealing his food and runic staff. Boli grieved, but knew that he could do nothing but return home.



**Boli Kollsson**

The Lærdom skills Thrand had taught him would turn out to be very profitable, but Boli had little use for the spiritual baggage that accompanied them. To the surprise and silent outrage of his parents, he declared himself an Objectivist, stating that Lærdom depended upon a wielder working with inherent characteristics and not any false Vestenmannavnjar gods. As for the ancestors and ghosts he had previously seen, he confessed that they were nothing more than the product of an overactive imagination.

In the years since, Boli gained fame and wealth by providing the Vendel League with sorcerous aid. So firmly has he embraced their ideals that when he at last inherited his grandfather's lands, he cut down the holy grove of trees to provide timber for Vendel ships, and pulverized the sacred rock for road material. He even tore down the old cottage and replaced it with a Vendel hunting lodge, charging admission for any who wished to use it. He reaped considerable profits from his actions, profits rich enough to buy his way into the Merchant's Guild as a full member. He had but one thing to sell: Lærdom.

Boli opened a small school in Kirk and now teaches the secrets of rune magic for a nominal fee. All are welcome to attend his classes, and he has produced some very promising students. As a service to the Vendel League, graduating students must inscribe ships with the power to withstand attacks from pirates before receiving their diplomas. Three nights a week, Boli teaches special classes on inscribing weapons and armor. These are considerably more expensive than his day courses, but his students never complain. A few other Lærdom schools have sprung up in Vendel cities, but none have the reputation that Boli's does.

A sizable portion of Boli's wealth goes towards funding the construction on Lieber's Cathedral – part of his lobbying effort to have the Objectivist Church confirm that sorcerers are not inherently damned. He has several influential Porté mages backing this goal, and the council of Apostles is starting to listen. (They have probably realized the number of possible converts such a declaration would yield.)

Boli always wears conservative garments, especially those with long sleeves. This is a matter of practicality as opposed

to any kind of fashion statement. Both of Boli's arms sport hideous scars, the lasting marks of his failed attempts to reach Lærdom mastery. He has tried time and again to become one with a rune, and keeps seeing the bitter face of the Lærdom Master he encountered last year. The Skjæren laughingly told him that he would never achieve true power because he had no faith in the gods he served. He refuses to renounce his adamant belief in the Objectionist Church and is desperately searching for some way to prove the Skjæren wrong. He can often be found in one of his school's workshops, speaking to himself and working diligently to find a solution.

## Bens Postma

Bens Postma was born and raised Vestenmannavnjar in a village on Viddenheim. His father, a sailor, spent long months away from home, so his mother saw to it that the boy grew up in the appropriate traditions. Bens loved the stories and songs of the Living Runes, of the heroes of antiquity. He had a knack for memorization, and by the age of 12 could recite many stories on his own.

Soon thereafter, Bens's father sent for the family, and moved them to Kirk. He spoke to the family of the Vendel League, and glowingly described the prosperity the family would enjoy as Vendel. Bens had no reason to doubt his father, but his mother grew increasingly somber and withdrawn the longer they lived in the gleaming capital. Bens's father continued to spend time away at sea, so Bens cared for his ailing mother alone. She eventually lost all contact with reality, and raved incessantly about forgotten names and damnation. When she finally starved herself to death, Bens left home.

He entered a Matthiast monastery in Kirk, seeking the solace of religion. While there, he studied both Vestenmannavnjar and Vendel theologies extensively, and reached an intriguing conclusion. The Vesten didn't have to be right about the Vendel in order to fear their actions. If the Vesten truly believed that the Vendel were inadvertently killing people through the deletion of traditional culture, then the Vesten would continue to resist, regardless of what



Bens Postma

the Vendel said. Something needed to bring the two sides to an understanding. Once that happened, Bens reasoned, Vesten resistance would wane, since the Vesten would be more comfortable with the Vendel's actions.

After four years, Bens left the Matthiasts and began travelling the Vesten archipelago, moving through town after town, collecting massive lists of names. He understood both sides of the Vendel question — the panicked horror with which the Vesten view the Vendel, and the Vendel's unquenchable desire for advancement and progress. His wants to bridge the gap between them by cataloguing the entire nation. Some villages welcome him, lauding his





preserving efforts. Others scorn him as some sort of cultural spy.

Bens still travels extensively, either heading for a town to catalog or returning to Kirk where he deposits his field notes with the monks of his former order. The monks re-copy and index the names he brings them, compiling the most exhaustive Vestenmannavnjar genealogy ever. They hope that by doing so they can help allay Vesten fears and facilitate conversions. Bens just wants to spare any other children from watching their parents torture themselves to death.

Bens also collects local legends and folklore. He submits these to the Explorer's Society, and intends to catalog them someday. His self-imposed mission has the Society's sympathies (he has been a dues-paying Explorer for nearly three years), and they provide him with enough funds to keep him in food, clothes, and ink.

In his gathering of folklore, Bens made a fantastic discovery only a few weeks ago. He came into possession of a copy of *The Grumfather Cycle*, written centuries ago by Leila MacDonald. MacDonald fully delineated the Living Myth of Vestenmannavnjar, translating it word for word into Théan. If Vesten lived as long as their names were remembered, then the existence of MacDonald's book could potentially be the greatest boon the Vesten people ever received. He is still reading and re-reading the book; once he has digested it fully he intends to take it to the Explorer's Society, who he hopes will publish it.

Bens is a pleasant fellow of moderate height and build. His beard has never been full, and he prefers to go clean-shaven. He has a contagious wit and a ready chuckle. Vast quantities of genealogical information reside in his memory, and he can recite epic sagas on demand with all the performing skill of a veteran Skald. Bens has a fondness for the gouda cheese common to Kirk, and always packs some along with him when he travels.



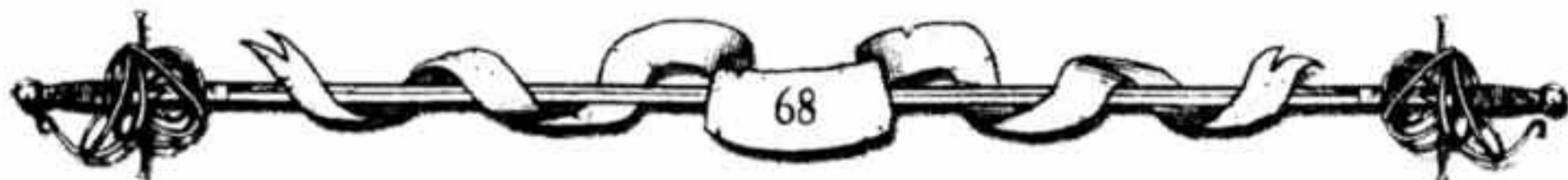
## The Guild Chairs

### Master Joris Brak

Like the other Vendel Chairs, Master Joris Braakenjor has changed his name to better accommodate the tongues of other nationalities. Even if the rest had not taken this traditional step, it is likely Joris would have. The last thing he wants is for anyone to be in an uncomfortable or troublesome situation. Whenever possible, Joris avoids conflict. He saw enough of that as a child.

Joris inherited his position as head of the Carpenter's Guild from his father, Rig. Rig was so involved with the Vendel League's politics, however, that he had little time to raise his son and entrusted him into the care of his Uncle Ai, a respected traveler. Rig felt that it would do his son well to go out and see the world, but little did he know what young Joris would behold.

Ai was indeed a traveler, but not of the merchant variety. He lived as a cutthroat and troublemaker, a man who enjoyed causing chaos and disorder in every port he entered. Of course, it wouldn't do for him to soil his hands in such matters, so he employed ruffians to do his dirty work for him. Not only did he profit from their wanton acts of cruelty, but he developed a reputation as a heroic man who would destroy them at every opportunity. He led a perfect double life as both hero and villain. Only Joris knew the truth.



To ensure the boy's silence, Ai would beat him regularly, taunting Joris with his powerlessness. The naturally shy child lived in constant fear, and found woodcarving his only source of comfort. No matter how bruised or battered Joris was, his skillful knife continually produced amazing works of art.

When Joris was fourteen, his life took a turn for the worse. Ai had been studying the conflict in Eisen, and felt that his unique sensibilities would be quite marketable there. Soon he and his nephew found themselves in the thick of some of the most bitter and unrelenting fighting in Théah's history.

One of Ai's favorite schemes was to hire a group of displaced warriors to ravage a small town. He would then come in with a few other "heroes" and (for the right fee), rid the area of the troublemakers. If the civilians could not afford his services, the brigands would return and Ai would personally help them wipe the village out. Even if properly compensated, Ai would still sometimes betray those who trusted him. Joris saw every appalling act.

His breaking point came after one such massacre. Sheets of rain were falling from an angry sky when Ai discovered his butchery had somehow missed a terrified young woman. She still wore her wedding dress, cradling her dead husband in her shaking arms. With a sadistic grin, Ai told Joris to watch and learn how a bride should be taken. When he turned to approach her, Joris leapt on his back and drew his carving knife across his uncle's throat.

The rest of the night and many of the following years have blurred from memory. At some point Joris made his way into Ussura. He honed his woodcarving skills even further, desperate to block the horrible things he had seen from his mind's eye. His crowning achievement was winning a tiny golden egg at the annual woodcarving contest in Siev, and it was this victory that gave him the courage to return home.

Rig barely recognized the pallid shell of his son, and Joris could not bring himself to tell his father Ai's true fate. Instead, he claimed his uncle died a hero's death, defending a family of Eisen farmers from a band of war criminals. No one doubted the story, and Joris quietly took his place at his

father's side, learning everything necessary to someday acquire his Chair.

Today Joris is seen as the voice of reason among the Council of Nine: a man of great silence and even greater patience, except when it comes to matters that could draw his country into a war. Then he becomes a passionate speaker, his vivid memories translated into powerful words of warning. He knows the savage cruelty and lasting heartbreak warfare spawns, and is determined to do anything he can to spare others such pain.

When not meeting with the Vendel League, Joris prefers to spend his time alone. He dons his comfortable carpenter's



Master Joris Brak



clothes and sits in his favorite yew tree, the winds tussling his prematurely graying hair and patchy beard. He whittles quietly, trying not to remember his past but knowing he can never forget it.

## Mistress Sela Cole

Sela Cole was born in a forge and iron flows in her blood. Her father, a prominent blacksmith named Colbjor Ulfson, was determined to have a son to take over the family forge. He arranged a marriage and set about producing an heir. He even insisted that his wife Selma stay near him in the forge when the time came for her to give birth. The midwife objected, but her pleas fell upon deaf ears. When his wife died giving birth, he didn't even care until he saw that his longed-for son was a girl. Enraged, he named her Selma after her mother, but insisted that she be named Colbjorsson rather than the traditional Colbjorsdottir.

Sela's father knew nothing about raising a child, especially a girl. So he forged her as he would a piece of metal: high pressure and heat, repeated beatings, sudden immersion in cold scorn and disdain. She worked in the forge from the time she could walk and handled the hammer as soon as she could lift it. The woman who emerged was hard as steel and as strong as an ox. Her father had not neglected her mind either. She could calculate prices and powder charges, read contracts in a number of languages and deal with customers unwilling to pay their bill. However she had no graces or social skills. In fact, she was gruff, taciturn, and rude, and had never worn a dress or left Kirk.

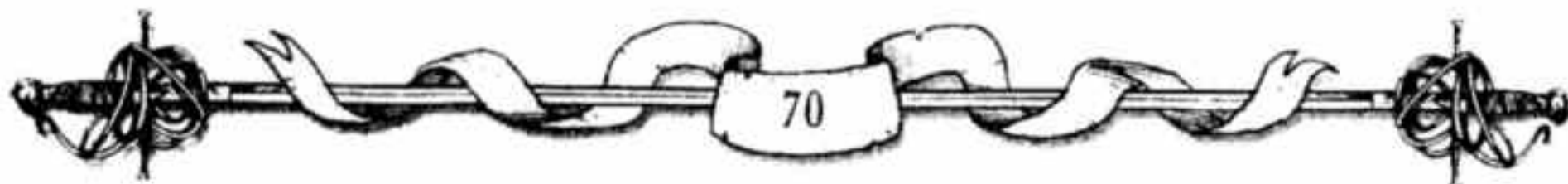
This would change upon her twenty-first birthday. She confronted her father and informed him that her apprenticeship was over. She changed her name and vowed not to return until she had surpassed him. She traveled across much of Théah for the next five years, spending time with miners, metallurgists, scholars, and merchants. She learned the tricks of their trades and the different techniques used across the various nations. She blossomed into a woman with poise, confidence and an easy manner. She spent most nights with local blacksmiths, paying for her room and board with a few hours of work or advice on

difficult projects. Her hearty smile of triumph and information about other smiths and their methods welded the various smiths together. Her own style became cleaner as she traveled, focusing on the functionality of an item with a minimum of embellishments. And her name spread as a blacksmith of uncommon talent and skill.

Her father summoned her back to Vendel for a special commission. The Gaius of Ussura had decided to close off one of his ports to keep out raiding pirates. He needed a chain over a mile long and strong enough to bar all entry into the port by pirate vessels. Colbjor accepted the commission, but could not even begin the project because of his poor health. Sela had grown beyond the hard, bitter girl Colbjor had crafted and returned to the family forge to help him. Within a month, the chain was completed and installed. Sela watched with pride as a pirate galleon's hull shattered upon her chain. The pirates soon fled for safer waters.

Sela returned to the forge and her dying father. His last words to her were that she was his finest creation. She gently closed his eyes and whispered, "I am my own creation, not yours." With possession of the family forge and her contacts with miners and metallurgists, Sela Cole grew in importance. The finest quality coal and ore gave her opportunities to experiment beyond those of most smiths. In particular, she discovered secrets of case hardening and tempering that baffled far more experienced smiths. Despite her abilities, she was stunned to learn that she had inherited the League Chair some four months ago, when her superior was killed at sea.

Since then, she has discovered what a political mess her guild has become. Infighting among senior members ran rampant, and many so-called "masters" worry more about their political standing than practicing their craft. Sela had spent all of her energy on her work, and hadn't realized how vicious the Guild's subterfuge would be. This was precisely why her predecessor chose her for the job; without entangling political ties, she could potentially earn the support of the entire Guild and end its petty bickering. Sela has embraced her duties with the methodical craftsmanship





she once applied to her wares; only time will tell how well she succeeds.

Sela is a striking figure, not beautiful, but intelligent and very much in control of herself. She continues to work in the forge every day. Her pieces contain little ornamentation, but focus on broad curves and a smooth elegant finish. She spends a portion of each day in correspondence with members of her Guild to make sure that they remain a cohesive force to be reckoned with. She still wears rough clothing in the forge and to most meetings, but has taken to donning a dress for formal Guild occasions. Then her easy gait transforms into an uncertain shuffle, her voice alternates between shouts and whispers, and she seems lost.



Mistress Sela Cole

This has not helped her Guild's standing, although she is a competent leader in most other respects.

## Master Val Mokka

Val Mokka is not a evil man. He is a patriot, a champion of the average Vendel (and even Vestenmannavnjar). He sees that the world has more to offer than freezing poverty and bloody raids upon unsuspecting innocents. He wants only the best for his country, and if he becomes filthy rich in the process, that is his just reward. He has received a chance for greatness and is determined to take it.

Of course, that's not as simple as it sounds.

He was born Sigvald Mjølkke, the only child of two bitterly poor thralls. Even though his cousins were fleeing to the cities and creating new lives for themselves, his parents adhered to the old ways, working the land for an overweight jarl on Grimstadd who took liberties with any female subordinate who struck his fancy.

Young Sigvald literally watched his mother work herself to death in the frigid winter of his tenth year. She was chopping wood for her family when she suffered a heart attack and collapsed into a snow drift. When he and his father told the jarl what had happened, the man sent his household servants to collect the wood. He said the ground was frozen too hard for a proper burial, but he would attend to the matter in the spring. Unfortunately the jarl did not have a chance to keep his promise. The winter was exceptionally cold and hungry wolves carried off the body long before the first thaw.

Sigvald was devastated by these events, but even more so by his father's continued devotion to the jarl. The boy could not imagine working in the horrible man's service any longer, and pleaded again and again with his father to help them break free. The older man refused, saying they had a duty to stay and work, as their ancestors had done for countless generations before them. In the following weeks, Sigvald grew to despise his father's weakness, seeing him as little more than a talking beast of burden. On the first warm night, the young boy ran away.



After a series of misadventures and close encounters, he wound up in the developing city of Kirk. Never before had he seen such wealth and comfort. Even the jarl his family had toiled for would be a pauper among the affluent who walked its streets. His mind raced, wondering why every Vesten did not live this way, why men and women like his parents would choose to exist in pitiful conditions just because their ancestors had done so. The more he thought about it, the angrier he became. With tears in his eyes, he promised himself that he would never again find himself in such dire circumstances and that he would somehow save his people from themselves.

To survive, Sigvald changed his name to the simpler "Val Mokka" and apprenticed himself to Daegal Haakon, a minor clerk within the Merchant's Guild. The work was tedious and taxing, though nothing close to what the boy knew back home. He threw himself into his labor and was an energetic study. His skills quickly surpassed those of his mentor, but he knew it would take a miracle to reach the heights his heart desired.

When the miracle came, it arrived in the flames of tragedy. A fire, allegedly started by Vestenmannavnjar fanatics, gutted the Merchant's Guildhouse. At great risk to his own life, Val rushed inside and helped several prominent members find their way to safety. Among these was Master Kaarlo Ottosson, the head of the guild and important Chair of the Vendel League. The Master was so taken with the boy's courage and dedication that he relieved him of his indentures and took him under his personal supervision. The Master had been searching for a suitable heir, and Val was in the right place at the right time.

Kaarlo groomed Val into the man he is today. He taught him the finer points of diction and grace, and helped him erect an emotional barrier to shut out the world. But the greatest lesson that Val learned came directly from Kaarlo's favorite saying: "You don't have to be liked to be successful, but you do have to be respected." It has since become his own motto.

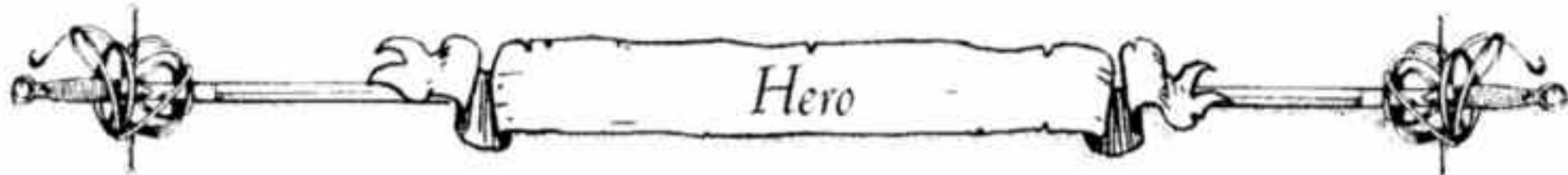
When the time came for Val to assume the Chair of the Merchant's Guild, he was more than prepared. He was a

stealthy predator in his business negotiations, always managing to get the best end of every deal. He resolved in-guild conflicts with an iron fist and soon exerted an equal amount of influence within the Vendel League, swaying votes with his powerful words and presence. He obviously had a natural talent with politics, and his ultimate goal was equally clear. The nation of Vendel would dominate the world economy and every person in its shores would prosper, whether they wanted to or not. Everyone agreed that if such a lofty objective could ever be reached, Val Mokka was the man to do it.

Val continues to press for his dream. He works constantly, and takes no time for a personal life. To compensate, he has



Master Val Mokka



surrounds himself with the best of everything his phenomenal fortune can buy. He studies everyone he meets, sizing them up in a glance and determining if they have anything to offer. If they do not, he sees no reason to waste his valuable time. However, if they appear useful, he will not rest until they are securely in his pocket.

When it comes to the Vestenmannavnjar, Val is especially stern. He knows that their devotion to their backwards ways is the greatest threat to his goal. He has no quarrel with those who wish remain isolated, for he knows they will eventually die out. Only those few zealots who bring bloodshed into business matters are a real concern. After surviving two assassination attempts, he has come to realize that these extremists must be dealt with as harshly as they deal with others. The Vestenmannavnjar hate him with an undying passion, and he knows they blame him for all of the ills which have befallen them. He doesn't care.

As he grows older, Val becomes more distinguished-looking. Though not considered traditionally attractive, there is something magnetic about his presence. He wears only the latest fashions, always with the most severe cut possible. He is also constantly aware of any room's lighting and acoustics, using both to his advantage at every opportunity.

## Master Red

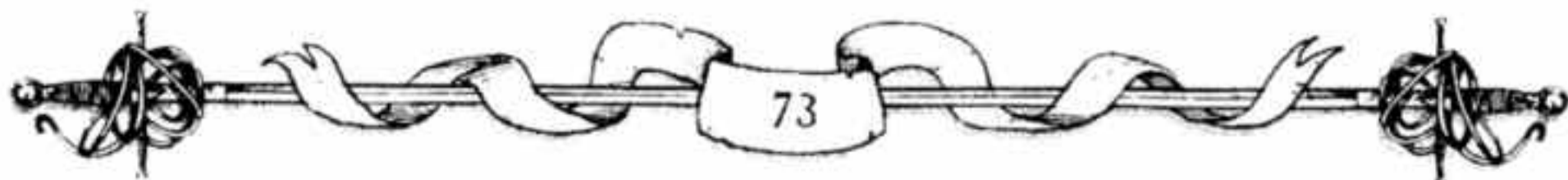
Reidar Engnestangen was the only son of a counting-house clerk in Eskilstuna. His father retained the family's Vestenmannavnjar name, and the other children teased Reidar mercilessly about it. He grew up short and pudgy, which only added to his capacity as a target for mockery. A withdrawn and sullen child, he spoke little and looked up less.

His father worked hard, leaving for work before the children woke, and arriving home only minutes before the children's bedtime. Still, the man always had time to pat their heads with his ink-stained fingers, and smile through bedtime stories every night. Reidar did not really know his father, but loved him nonetheless, and grew up determined to make him proud.

In time, Reidar's father became a partner at the counting-house, helping the company to establish "franchise" houses in Kirk and Västerås. A teenaged Reidar moved to Kirk, where his father found him a job in the new office there. Reidar worked hard, following the example of his beloved father. He quickly showed a predilection for numbers and their manipulation. He could perform complex calculations in his head, keeping track of multiple exchange rates and fluctuating price indexes. He quickly took on larger and larger projects, and eventually had a working knowledge of every account the house maintained.

Professionally, Reidar advanced steadily. Personally, he remained as stunted and quiet as ever. He spoke only when spoken to, becoming animated only when discussing accounting. He grew painfully nearsighted from endless hours bent over ledgers, and was forced to wear spectacles to move about outside the counting-house. He remained short and overweight, and went prematurely bald. He remained a bachelor long after his co-workers had married.

At the age of 22, he made a startling discovery which secured his future forever. One of the senior partners, Per Fhrome, was embezzling from the company. Fhrome had hidden his skimming with expert skill, moving money through dozens of accounts before landing it in his own ledger. Only Reidar, with his knowledge of the entire office's workings, could have found the theft. He took this knowledge to his father, and his father brought Fhrome up on charges before the Usury Guildmasters. Fhrome was stripped of membership and barred from practicing accounting. Reidar's father received the chain of counting-houses as a reward, increasing his wealth exponentially. Reidar himself took over management of the Kirk house. Under his guidance, the Kirk branch of Engnestangen Accounts quickly became the most successful counting-house in all of Vendel, enriching his father greatly. In time, Reidar's father secured the Usury Chair in the Vendel League, ensuring his family's prominence forever. Unfortunately, the old man died days after officially taking his Seat, and the post fell to Reidar, then 27 years old.





Master Red

Reidar saw the League as the great opportunity to overcome his personal shortcomings, and went to great lengths to try and impress his fellows. He held parties. He hosted dinners. He changed his name to "Red," believing it sounded adventurous and flamboyant. He tried to learn to dance. For all that, however, he still didn't quite fit in. Everyone was very nice to him, but no one truly befriended him. Recognizing his continued social failure, "Red" decided instead to impress the world the only way he knew how – by being the best at what he did.

As Usury Chair, Red's duties included managing the Council's private funds. He was, in essence, in charge of managing the entire nation's wealth. He did this through his

chain of counting-houses, which has grown to include offices in every city on Oddis, a satellite office in Isafjordhur to handle the needs of the Sailing Academy, and a small branch on Eskjö to run payroll and supply reimbursement for the small communities there. He became a fantastic administrator who could arguably receive credit for the rapid rise of the guilder and the unparalleled success of the League. For almost sixty years, he sat at the head of the Usury Guild, guiding it with a sure, firm hand.

Shortly after the inception of the guilder, Red was forced into retirement. The younger Guild members had grown frustrated in his shadow, and wanted a chance to shine. He reluctantly named Gunther Soloman to replace him, and stepped down to live the remainder of his life in peace.

He was miserable. Without the responsibilities of the Guild, Red could find no purpose to his life and soon sank into bitter despair. He probably would have died were it not for a tragic happenstance: about a year ago, Master Soloman was killed by an assassin at a masquerade ball. His successors quickly proved incapable of handling the Guild's vast resources, and Val Mokka officially requested that Red be reinstated. The old man took the job gladly, and now intends to hold onto it until his death.

Red is far and away the oldest member of the Council, having sat on it since its inception. He is wizened and bent, and blind beyond ten feet. He cuts a grotesque figure on the streets of Kirk, flabby and sagging, with thick spectacles, only a few wisps of hair, and a constellation of liver spots. His mind is sharp as ever, though, and he can still perform mathematical computations with the skill of a savant. Other League members marvel at his renewed energy, and privately joke that the old accountant will bury them all.

## Master George Skard

The brewing of alcoholic beverages is an ancient art among the Vesten. Given the relative scarcity of grain, brewing beers and other liquors is a good way of multiplying food value for a larger group. Nearly every village in the archipelago has a brewer: generally farmers who grow their

own grain. Though they may not belong to the Brewers' Guild, their craft continues.

George Skard comes from a family of brewers centuries old. His ancestors dominated Vesten brewing from the time trade began, and have never lost their position at the top. When the Vendel Guilds were in their infancy, the Skaardals quickly moved to use their position and reputation to take the top offices. Through continued application of their skill and business sense, and careful application of nepotism, the Skaardals have maintained their leadership of the Vendel Brewer's Guild to this day.

Jorgan Skaardal never calls himself George Skard. He allows foreigners to address him with his shortened name, but his family name is too important to drop. Like many on the Council, he inherited his seat from his father, who inherited the seat from his father before him.

Skaardal is a keen businessman with two great loves – money and liquor. He views these two as inexorably connected – the more money you have, the more liquor you can make, which you can then sell for more money. His vast fortune has given him ownership of breweries throughout the islands. He has begun branching the Guild's operations into Eisen beer and Highland whiskey, and has recently released a vodka called Vendelov, which many connoisseurs consider equal to the fine vodkas of Ussura itself.

His knowledge of brews and liquor is as vast as his fortune. An epicure to the bone, Skaardal eats and drinks with great relish. He continues to brew his own meads, which are enjoyed as the private stock of the Council itself (several highly successful fraud rings have profited by selling liquors reputed to come from Skaarda's Council Stock – the Brewers' Guild takes a dim view of these activities). He maintains homes in Kirk and Västeras, a mammoth apartment in Isalfjordhur, and a cottage on Eskjö, all served by a top-notch staff. Invitations to dine at the Skaardal home are worth their weight in gold; no one declines invitations to his dinners or parties.

Skaardal is a good friend of Allen Trel, and the two share opinions on how to reach out to their Vestenmannavnjar



Master George Skard

brethren. Where Trel wants to build on the shared sailing heritage between the two peoples, Skaardal wants to pursue peace through liquor. He knows the Vesten have a proud brewing heritage – arguably more pervasive than sailing – and sees this as the fastest way to overcome the cultural barriers between their people. He has a hand-picked cadre of heritage-minded master brewers whom he sends out into Vesten territory on a regular basis. Sometimes he even goes himself. They usually travel to a Vesten community with several barrels of their finest personal brew. Their job is simply to give it away – organize a great feast if they can, and let the mead (or beer, or whatever) flow. So far, he has had more success than Trel, whose efforts engender too much suspicion among the Vendel elite.



Skaardal is an immensely fat man, but maintains his obesity without being repugnant. Indeed, he is always politely jovial, and though he eats vast quantities at a time, he does so with the utmost in manners and decorum. He is married to a surprisingly petite woman named Jael (whose diminutive form looks rather comical at his side), and has fathered seven children. He is popular within his guild, and has no significant enemies.

## Master Allen Trel

Arvor Troelsen was born to a grizzled old topman with few teeth and fewer inhibitions. His father spent nearly all his time at sea, but when he came home he was a maelstrom of tall tales and liquor. Little Arvor was enchanted, and went to sea at the earliest opportunity, lying about his age so he could get a position as a cabin boy.

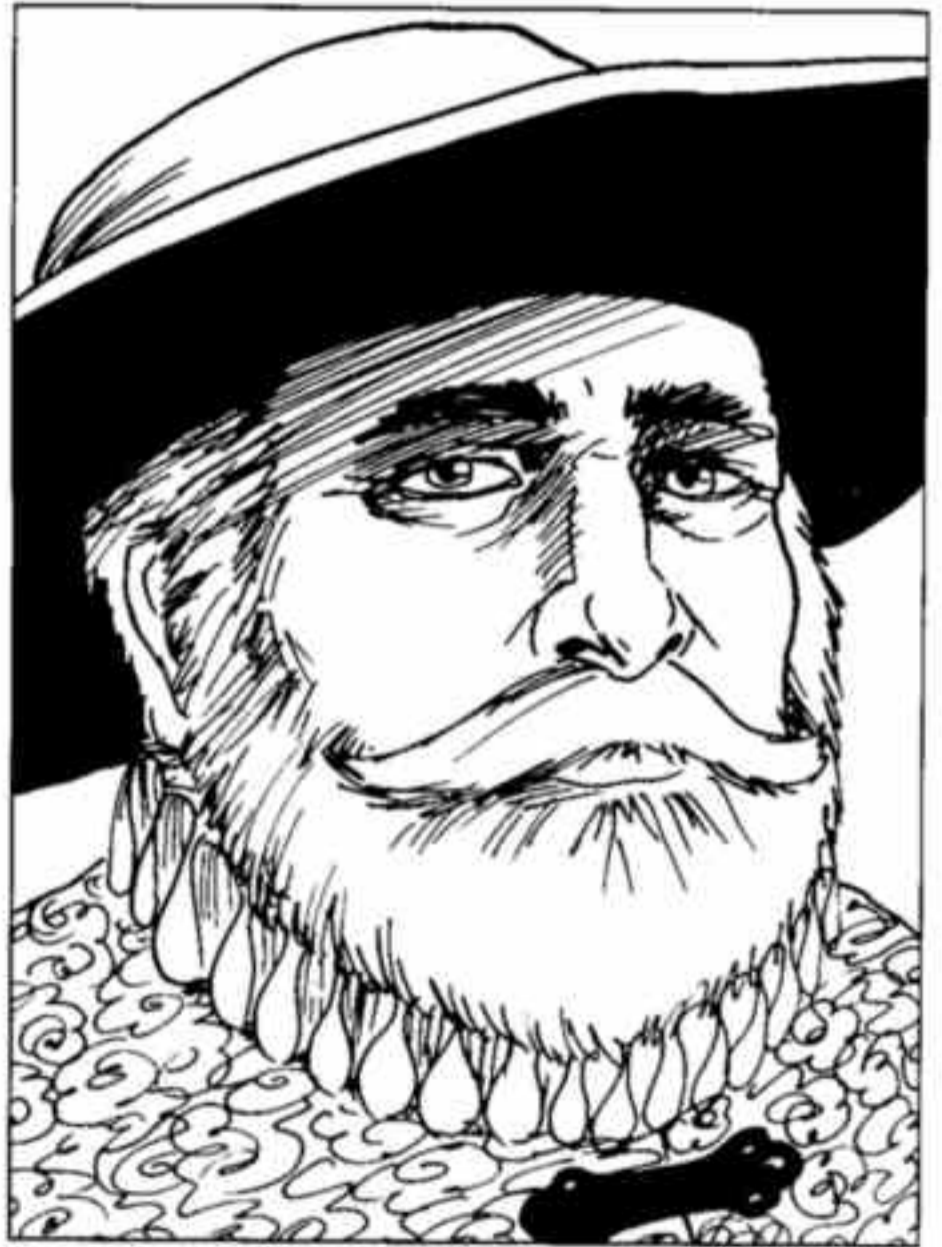
The captain soon saw the intelligence in the lad, and apprenticed him to the ship's navigator, a renegade Vesten who called himself Thorhallur af Stjernasfolk. Thorhallur could plot routes no one had considered, and brought the captain fantastic success with his abilities. Thorhallur also met with much hostility from the predominantly Vendel crew. When Arvor questioned him, Thorhallur smiled grimly and said, "They can't stomach that I'm better."

Under Thorhallur's tutelage, Arvor became a top-notch navigator. Thorhallur also taught the boy about the ways of the Vesten. Arvor dreamed some nights of prowling the sea lanes in a longship full of raiders, fighting bravely and doing great things. As he grew older he moved from ship to ship, improving his navigational skills and learning every other aspect of sailing and shipbuilding. His rank in the Sailing Guild rose (prompting him to adopt the name Allen Trel), and by the time he turned 35 he was among the top five navigators in Vendel.

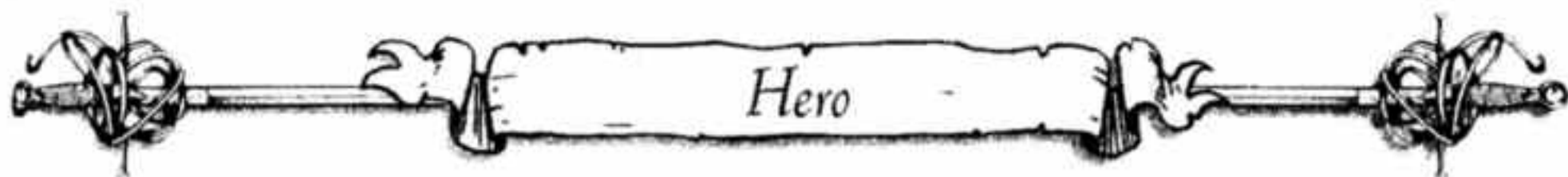
His position took up a great deal of time, but he never forgot those tales of bravado his father told, nor the tales of adventure and greatness he heard from Thorhallur. He knew the Vesten possessed navigational skills and secrets that, if applied broadly, could revolutionize Vendel sailing.

He decided that the best way to bring the Vesten into line with the Vendel future was to respect them. He resolved to treat them as one would a revered old grandfather, using their knowledge as a guide instead of an obstacle.

Trel became a leading voice within the Sailing Guild for closer ties to the Vesten sailors. He went on expeditions to find Vesten navigators who would teach others their brand of the craft. He taught symposiums on Vesten sailing techniques based on his expeditions. He made friends and enemies on both sides of the Vendel/Vesten divide (and has never been afraid to fight either one should it come to that), but remained secure in his belief that sailing — the common thread of their heritage — could bring his people together.



Master Allen Trel



Perhaps because of his skills, and perhaps because of his adopted position as sailing ambassador to the Vesten, then Guildmaster Haakon Vils named Trel as the heir to the Sailing Guild Chair. Trel assumed the Chair ten years ago.

Since his accession to power, Trel has continued his self-imposed mission with the guild's money. The crowning achievement of this effort is the new Isafjordhur Academy of Navigation. Trel constantly tries to recruit Vesten navigators to teach at the Academy. Though none have agreed, he is convinced his efforts are softening their stand against the Vendel. He dislikes his Council duties, and often performs his governing tasks via Porté messenger from Isafjordhur.

Now in his fifties, Trel retains much of the energy of his youth. He works tirelessly, sometimes as many as twelve hours a day. He is a regular traveler around the coast villages of Soroya and Klørbulg, searching for Vesten navigators he can speak to — this activity has also taught him much about naval combat, as many Vesten navigators choose to speak to him via attack. Still, he continues his outreach to those Vesten he feels he has the most in common with, and looks forward to the day when his efforts finally bear fruit... when Vesten and Vendel alike will come together and face the seas as one.

## Joseph Volkner

Joseph Volkner is an average man in an incredible situation. Up until a year ago, he had dedicated his life to the service of Emperor Reifensahl of Eisen, serving as the man's personal butler. The position demanded much from him, but he met the challenge with stalwart skill. Now the Emperor is dead (having killed himself after the visit of a mysterious stranger) and Joseph has become the recipient of an amazing inheritance. He received the Emperor's Chair in the Vendel League, instantly becoming one of the wealthiest men in the world.

The problem is that Joseph has accepted a life of servitude, not one of leadership. His thirty-five years have consisted of nothing but following orders. It is taking a while for him to

learn how to give them, and the other members of the Vendel League strain to keep their patience.

Even though Joseph had been Reifensahl's butler most of his life, he had little knowledge of the Emperor's dealings with the League. He never really thought it was any of his business. Once the title was his, however, he combed Reifensahl's records, searching for a clue as to what he was in for. He discovered that the position had been part of the Vendel League from its emergence (see page 26). Usually, a proxy served in the Emperor's stead; which worked out well, allowing the Emperor to stay in his own country and cast his vote by correspondence whenever needed. Joseph, however, decided not to send a proxy. He had heard many interesting things about Vendel and wanted to experience them first hand. Just four weeks after the Emperor's death, he packed his few belongings and sailed to the Norvik Isles. It turned out to be quite an adventure.

The second morning of his voyage, the winds died and a thick fog surrounded the ship. The crew began to panic as Vesten pirates, led by the infamous Slagfid Barelegs, stormed aboard and seized control. Slagfid knew the unseasoned League Chair was a passenger and threatened to torture crew members until they revealed his identity. With a lump in his throat, Joseph made himself known. He felt a sharp blow to the back of his head and when he woke up, he was bound and gagged in a smoky longhouse.

Over the next few days, Slagfid unveiled his plans to Joseph. The Eisen had become a hostage because Slagfid's brother, Njal the Snake-tongued, was being held by the Vendel authorities. Slagfid was negotiating to trade Joseph for Njal and promised his safety if things went well. They didn't.

In the middle of a snowy night, League Agents attacked. Joseph watched in stunned silence as the scene unfolded. Slagfid was killed by a sharp-shooter before he could rise from his bedroll and the rest of his crew fell in a matter of minutes. It was then that Joseph truly understood the League's stance on negotiating with pirates.

When he finally made it to Kirk, the first thing he did was make an appearance to the other Chairs. His face was





Joseph Volkner

bruised, his clothes soiled and tattered, and his wrists burned raw from the bonds. Still, he summoned the years of poise and grace that had made him an excellent butler, speaking words of gratitude in a thick and broken accent. The other members could not help but be impressed.

Joseph has since immersed himself in the matters of the Vendel League, learning everything he can so that he can make the right decisions with his vote. The other League members are acutely aware of his enthusiasm and each one tries to influence him to their way of thinking. So far, he has proven very resilient, something Val Mokka clearly respects. However, the cautious Joseph sometimes causes more harm than good. He has abstained from several key votes, locking

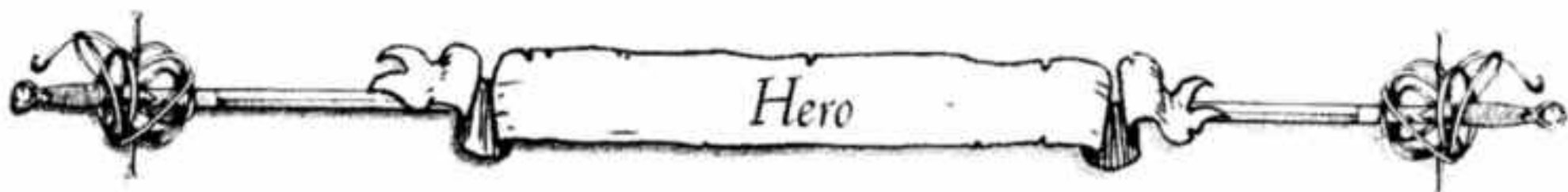
the Chairs into a four-to-four split and throwing the entire League into turmoil. This has not set well, and he has received a few not-too-subtle hints to get his act together. Unfortunately, this has only made him more nervous and mindful of what he is doing.

Because he is so absorbed in learning the ins and outs of his position, he has yet to truly enjoy his new environment. He has purchased a modest townhouse on the outskirts of Kirk and walks to the Great Hall every morning, taking in the constantly changing sights. National pride keeps him in traditional Eisen clothes, but he has begun to alter his dress with ruffled collars and the like. His sharp eye for fashion lets him accentuate his short dark hair and slender build, drawing admiring looks from almost every lady he passes. He appreciates their attention and secretly looks forward to the day he can finally act upon it.

### Madame Lorraine Weller

Lorraine was born and raised the third daughter of Avalon country gentry. Her father was mayor of her hometown, and she and her sisters were widely known and well-liked. Lorraine grew into a pretty young woman, and thought of little more than the next party her father would host, and which boys would be in attendance.

On the eve of her fifteenth birthday, while taking a shortcut home, she and a group of other youths stopped to help a group of traveling peddlers whose cart had lost a wheel. The young men set about helping the old merchant, as the young ladies looked on. Suddenly, the old man revealed his true nature. He was the leader of a group of outlaws, most of whom had hidden themselves when they heard the young group approach. The thieves fell on the group of unsuspecting teens savagely, beating boy and girl alike, and stealing necklaces, rings, handkerchiefs, and anything else of value. One of the boys fought back, and managed to stab a cutthroat in the belly. At this, the remaining members of the outlaw band grew enraged. They killed the boys, and left the young ladies wishing they had been killed as well.



The girls made their way back into town and a posse was organized. The locals caught and hanged the thieves, but the girls would never be the same. Lorraine, and the others who were there that day, were disgraced. No longer did the boys flirt with them. No longer were they asked to dance. No longer were they considered marriageable. A year after the "incident," one of Lorraine's friends stole her father's pistol and shot herself rather than live with the shame. The town's general opinion following the suicide proved even more devastating. No one seemed to care, and indeed, some even showed signs of happiness that such a disgraced girl would no longer be around to sully the town's good name.

Lorraine gathered the other two girls who had shared her fate that ghastly day. The three agreed that no one cared about them anymore, and swore eternal loyalty to one another. They ran away together to Carleon, and none of the three was surprised when no one pursued them.

In Carleon, their complete lack of vocational skill quickly led them to the world's oldest profession. Lorraine was disgusted; she hated being seen as a mindless object, and vowed to herself that she would someday be rich and powerful, able to control the actions of others without having to satisfy their intimate desires first. She applied herself, and quickly mastered not just the functional applications, but also the trade and its attendant logistic skills. In time, she became the head of Avalon's Jenny's Guild, the youngest ever at 25.

While in her position as head madam, she received a private visit from Kaatje Fanse, the sitting Council Chair of the Vendel Jenny's Guild. Madame Fanse was looking for a personal assistant, and had heard of Lorraine's organizational ability and personal drive. Lorraine leapt at the chance to expand her power, and readily accepted a position on Madame Fanse's staff.

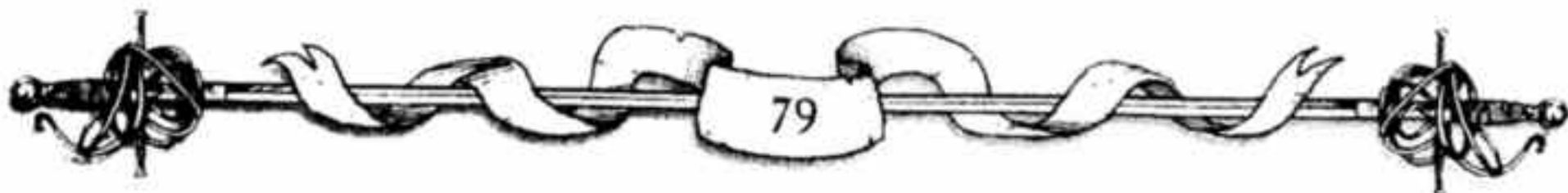
Lorraine never expected to hold a chair on Vendel's ruling Council. She was a foreigner, after all. She was just as surprised as everyone else when Madame Fanse retired, and named Madame Weller as her successor. Lorraine has not held her seat long — less than five years, in fact. Still, in that time she has forged the Jennys, once considered members

of the council solely for their entertainment ability, into a cohesive voice for gender equality and workplace safety.

Lorraine is 34 years old now and still quite attractive, though she never considered herself beautiful. She has recently discovered gray hair, and covers it with expensive dyes from Montaigne and Vodacce. She has a placid, perpetually calm facade, which surrounds her with an air of personal mystery. She has few close friends (though her two childhood companions came to Vendel with her: they are on her staff), but she entertains regularly and well. Her political skills can match anyone on the Council, and she has finally achieved the status she so dearly desired. The cost to her soul has yet to fully sink in.



Madame Lorraine Weller







# *Drama*



## The Destiny Spread

Most nations make use of the Vodacce Destiny Spread, which Fate Witches use to determine the future. Because of the current troubles with Vodacce, few Vesten or Vendel favor such techniques. The Vesten use an ancient method of rune-casting to read the future, and the Vendel have a modern "horoscope" that does much the same thing.

## Vesten Rune Drawing

The Vestenmannavnjar have a ceremony that they perform when a child is born. A Skjæren asks four questions, each time reaching into a bag that contains twenty-four stones, each of which has been inscribed with one of the lærds. The first question asked is "Who is this?" The second is "What shall be his Beginning?" The next question is "What shall be his Journey?" The final question is "What shall be his Destination?" After each question is asked, the Skjæren draws a single stone from the bag, and interprets its meaning. The Skjæren returns the stone to the bag before the next question is asked.

## The Rune Drawing in Hero Creation

Perform this ceremony right after assigning Traits and Nationality to your hero, but before assigning anything else. Rune drawing uses the table found to the right to determine which rune is drawn (alternately, you can simply photocopy the runes in the back of the book and draw them from a hat). The table makes use of percentile dice, which most experienced gamers will be familiar with, but which have not yet been used in *7th Sea*. For those unfamiliar with percentile dice, consult the following rules:

For each question, roll one die, which does not explode. If a 0 is rolled, it is considered to be a 0 and not a 10. Multiply

this die's result by ten. Then roll a second die, which does not explode either, and again, if a 0 is rolled, it counts as a 0 and not as a 10. Add this number to the value from the first roll to get your result. For example, if you roll 5 and then 3 then the result is 53, and if you roll 0 and 9 the result is 09. A roll of 00 is considered 100, a higher roll than a 99. After you have obtained your result, consult the table of runes to see which rune you have drawn. Each rune has a meaning based on the question asked.

### "Who is this?"

Before rolling for this question's rune, the player should decide whether he wants his Hero to have a Virtue or Hubris. If he has a Hubris, he gains 10 HP and rolls on the Runes Table to see what his rune is, and which Arcana he now has. If he has a Virtue, he spends 10 HP and does the same. The lærds Herje and Uvitenhet have special meanings, which are explained below.

**Herje's Hubris:** Everywhere you go, you and your friends face extra adversity. When you expend Drama Dice for any reason, it gives the Game Master an extra Drama Die, in addition to any Drama Dice he may ordinarily gain from that action. For instance, activating a Villain's Flaw gives the Game Master one Drama Die. Spending a Drama Die to enhance the result of a roll gives him 2 Drama Dice, while spending 3 Drama Dice on a roll gives him 4 Drama Dice.

**Herje's Virtue:** No one is quite sure why, but things always seem to go wrong for your enemies. At the beginning of each Act, you receive a Herje Die. The Herje Die goes away at the end of the Act if it has not been used. You may spend the Herje Die to activate a Villain's Flaw as if it was a Drama Die, or you may spend it to prevent a Villain from activating his Wile. You may instead spend the Herje Die to roll it (exploding as if it were a Drama Die) and subtract the total from any roll made by a NPC.

**Uvitenhet's Hubris:** You are a mysterious person, and it is difficult to get to know you. All of your TNs for social rolls are increased by +5.





# Drama

**Uvitenhet's Virtue:** At the beginning of each Scene, you receive an Uvitenhet Die. The Uvitenhet Die acts exactly like a Drama Die with the following exceptions: it goes away at the end of the scene if it has not already been used, it never becomes an experience point, and it does not become a Drama Die for the Game Master if used to augment a roll.



## The Runes

Roll	Rune	Hubris	Virtue
01-04	Kjøtt	Righteous	Insightful
05-08	Bevegelse	Lecherous	Comforting
09-12	Varsel	Misfortunate	Fortunate
13-16	Ensomhet	Envious	Self-Controlled
17-20	Styrke	Hot-headed	Commanding
21-24	Uvitenhet	*	*
25-28	Stans	Loyal	Perspicacious
29-32	Storsæd	Proud	Friendly
33-36	Kyndighet	Judgmental	Exemplary
37-40	Sterk	Overzealous	Focused
41-44	Velstand	Indecisive	Altruistic
45-48	Fjell	Rash	Propitious
49-52	Høst	Trusting	Creative
53-56	Grenseløs	Reckless	Adaptable
57-60	Krieg	Overconfident	Victorious
61-64	Nød	Ambitious	Willful
65-68	Sinne	Cowardly	Courageous
69-72	Tungsinn	Inattentive	Perceptive
73-76	Herje	*	*
77-80	Reise	Greedy	Worldly
81-84	Fornuft	Hedonistic	Intuitive
85-88	Lidenskap	Star-crossed	Passionate
89-92	Kjølig	Arrogant	Uncanny
94-96	Villskap	Stubborn	Inspirational
97-00	Roll Again		

\*Special, see description.

## "What shall be his Beginning?"

The character's Beginning is the start of his journey through life. It represents his youth and his family. The rune drawn gives him some detail, and has some effect, on the character's past.

**Kjøtt:** You are a skilled healer. *You gain the Doctor Skill for free.*

**Bevegelse:** You were young and happily in love, until the one who captured your heart died in a confrontation with the Vendel. *You gain a 2-point Lost Love Background for free.*

**Varsel:** Your birth fulfilled an old family prophecy. *You have an odd physical feature that prevents you from taking the Appearance (Stunning) Advantage, but you gain the Foul Weather Jack Advantage without cost.*

**Ensomhet:** You have lived alone for many years, and have become extremely self-reliant. *You gain the Indomitable Will Advantage for free.*

**Styrke:** When you were still a child, you killed an enraged bear that attacked you. *You gain the Wrestling Skill for free.*

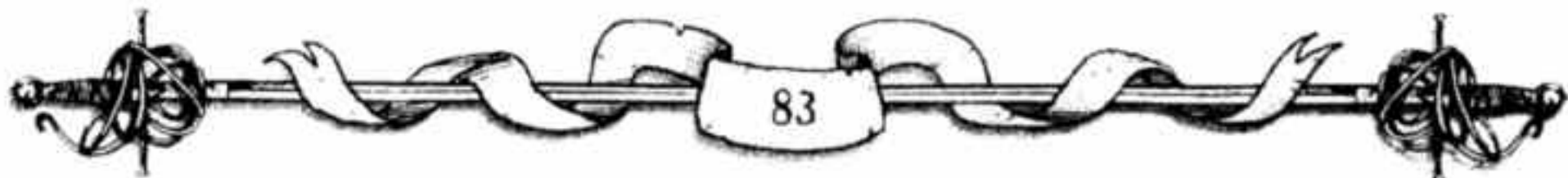
**Uvitenhet:** You were adopted, and your true parentage is unknown. *You gain a 2-point True Identity Background for free.*

**Stans:** Your youth was spent in a very quiet home in a small village on one of the smaller islands. When you left, you received an heirloom to remind you of your home. *You gain a 2-point Inheritance Advantage.*

**Storsæd:** One of your parents is a Master in one of the following Swordsman Schools: Haldansson, Leegstra, or Siggursdottir. *You gain one Skill in the Basic Curriculum of that School for free. If you choose to study at that School, you gain an extra Rank in each of the Basic Knacks of that Skill instead.*

**Kyndighet:** You have trained for war among the local jarls. *You gain the Academy Advantage for free.*

**Sterk:** You are an impressive physical specimen. *You gain the Large Advantage for free.*







**Velstand:** You found a treasure hoard from an ancient Vestenmannavnjar raider. *You begin the game with 100 G more than you otherwise would.*

**Fjell:** When you were young, you broke your arm. It healed, but now you are sensitive to atmospheric changes. *You roll two extra dice (+2k0) when using the Weather Knack.*

**Høst:** You grew up on a farm, which has since been lost to a Vendel who foreclosed on the mortgage. *You gain the Merchant Skill with Rank 2 in the Gardener Knack.*

**Grenseløs:** You have a criminal record, and were imprisoned for some time. While you served your time and are not currently wanted, your reputation has suffered. *You gain the Scoundrel Advantage for free.*

**Krieg:** When you were young, you defeated an older boy who was bullying you and your friends. *You gain the Dirty Fighting Skill for free.*

**Nød:** You were born at sea, and you keep returning to it. Most of your life has been spent aboard a ship. *You gain the Sailor Skill for free.*

**Sinne:** Your animosity with one of your Vendel cousins has escalated into a personal feud. *You gain a 2-point Hated Relative Background for free.*

**Tungsinn:** The Vendel have taken your land from you. You stood up to them, but they beat you within an inch of your life and threw you out into the cold. *You gain a 2-point Defeated Background for free.*

**Herje:** In everyone's life, there comes a point where they need to rely on the assistance of others. You reached that point, and had to accept a loan from a Vendel banker. *You gain a 2-point Debt Background for free.*

**Reise:** You traveled far and wide in your youth, and were thus exposed to many different languages and dialects. *You gain the Linguist Advantage for free.*

**Fornuft:** As you grew up, you loved the old tales of the ancient Vestenmannavnjar. You memorized all of them that you heard, and now, you are often called upon to tell them yourself. *You gain the Skald Skill for free.*

**Lidenskap:** There is something about you that attracts the opposite sex. *You gain the Dangerous Beauty Advantage for free.*

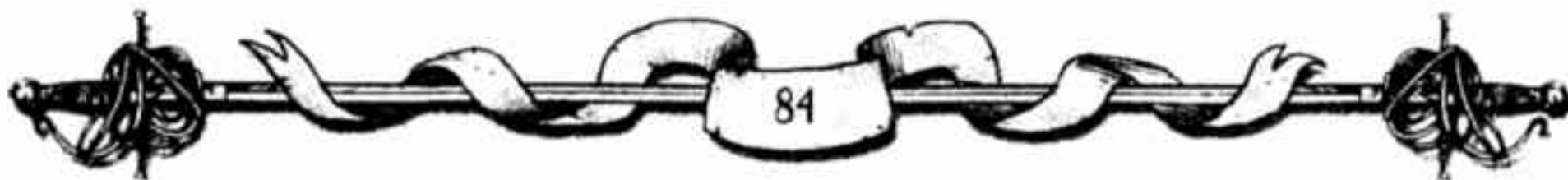
**Kjølig:** You have a natural aptitude for getting into conflicts, and have learned how to survive them. *You gain the Heavy Weapon Skill for free.*

**Villskap:** You know in your heart that the Vestenmannavnjar will defeat the Vendel and restore things to their rightful order. You know that as long as your people do not forsake their gods, their gods will not forsake them. *You gain the Faith Advantage for free.*

### "What shall be his Journey?"

The character's Journey is the route of his path through life. It represents the prime of his life. The rune drawn will give him some detail, and have some effect on his accomplishments.

**Kjøtt:** You will spend much of your Journey alone, with no one else to rely upon. You must learn how to survive. *You gain the Hunter Skill for free.*





**Bevegelse:** You are engaged to be married. *You gain a 2-point Romance Background for free.*

**Varsel:** Others believe that you can somehow sense danger. That is not quite true. The truth is that you pay more careful attention to your surroundings, so you are usually the first to notice the ship on the horizon, coming to hunt your vessel down. *You gain the Keen Senses Advantage for free.*

**Ensomhet:** You are somehow set apart from those around you. Something makes you special, though you do not quite know what it is. *You gain the Legendary Trait Advantage, for the Trait of your choice, for free.*

**Styrke:** Your strength is considerable. *You gain the Athlete Skill for free.*

**Uvitenhet:** For the last few months, you have been receiving unsigned letters in an unfamiliar hand. They tell of a journey made, an encounter with a merchant vessel, and an island where the booty was hidden. *You gain a 2-point Treasure Map Background for free.*

**Stans:** Your brother has disappeared. He is presumed lost at sea, but you believe that he is still alive somewhere. *You gain a 2-point Lost Relative Background for free.*

**Storsæd:** You are an effective leader. *You gain the Commander Skill for free.*

**Kyndighet:** You are a skilled blacksmith. *You gain the Merchant Skill for free, with 2 Ranks of the Blacksmith Knack.*

**Sterk:** You are remarkably resistant to damage. *You gain the Toughness Advantage for free.*

**Velstand:** You have recently won a large bet. *You start the game with an extra 100G.*

**Fjell:** You have just fought on the victorious side of a battle against the Vendel. *Start the game with a Dramatic Wound but gain 2k1 Reputation points for free.*

**Høst:** You have inherited a parcel of land. You have a small farm there, maintained by your sister while you are away. *The farm generates a profit of 10 G per month, which you may take as income.*

**Grenseløs:** You were taken by a press gang and made to serve on a ship, but you escaped shortly thereafter. *You gain the Sailor Skill for free.*

**Krieg:** Another Vestenmannavnjar has been threatening you lately, so you found someone to guard your back and protect you while you sleep. *You gain the Vestenmannavnjar Bought-man Advantage for free.*

**Nød:** You enjoy a good horn full of mead, and often drink those around you under the table. *You gain the Able Drinker Advantage for free.*

**Sinne:** You thought you had slain your old enemy years ago, but just last week you saw him boarding a ship in a nearby port. While he is not here right now, he is out there, somewhere, and he certainly has not forgotten that you put a sword through him and threw him to the sirens. *You gain a 2-point Nemesis Background for free.*

**Tungsinn:** You have recently lost your home, and for the near future you depend on the charity of others to keep you alive. *You gain a 2-point On the Streets Background for free.*

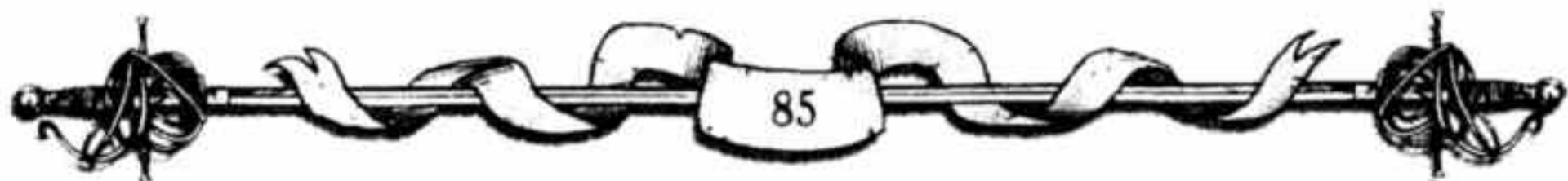
**Herje:** You have just lost a large bet, and find yourself temporarily short on cash. *You start with only one-quarter (round down) of your total starting wealth.*

**Reise:** You suffer from wanderlust. You simply are not happy unless you are on the move. You have met many interesting people in the course of your travels. *You gain 3 points worth of the Connections Advantage for free. This must be taken in the form of three confidants, each of whom lives in a different city.*

**Fornuft:** You have had a glimpse of the 7th Sea, and it has expanded the horizons of your mind. You feel you must find a way to return there. *You gain a 2-point Moment of Awe Background for free.*

**Lidenskap:** You have just gotten married. *You start the game with an extra 4k4 G from your wedding gifts.*

**Kjølig:** You have just discovered that your lover is cheating on you. The two of you have come to terms, but you will never forgive the third person. *You gain a 2-point Vendetta Background for free.*





**Villskap:** In a moment of drunkenness, you slew a friend. He was joking around with his knife, pretending to stab at you, but your reflexes were too quick and your mind too dulled to realize it before he was mortally wounded. *You gain the Combat Reflexes Advantage for free, but lose 1k1 Reputation points because of the animosity from your other acquaintances.*

## “What shall be his Destination?”

The character's Destination is the end of his journey through life. It represents his old age and perhaps his death. The rune drawn gives some indication of events that loom in your Hero's future. They may be caused by choices he has made or will make. These predictions are intentionally vague. Your Game Master will work out the specifics of how they come into play. Each has a Background associated with it that you may gain when the appropriate events occur within the course of game play.

**Kjøtt:** Your life will include a great quest for knowledge of your own self. (Amnesia 2)

**Bevegelse:** Marriage will have a great impact upon you. (Betrothed 2)

**Varsel:** A great change in you shall come to pass. (Moment of Awe 2)

**Ensomhet:** You will not die among friends. (Exiled 2)

**Styrke:** There shall always be one more enemy to face. (Hunted 2)

**Uvitenhet:** The greatest truth shall always lie just beyond your reach. (Crisis of Faith 2)

**Stans:** Cowardice is the greatest source of sorrow. (Fear 2)

**Storsæd:** A Vestenmannavnjar's oath is not to be taken lightly. (Vow 2)

**Kyndighet:** The veterans must teach the warriors of the next generation. (Obligation 2)

**Sterk:** While your honor remains intact, so does your soul. (Code of Honor 2)

**Velstand:** Unfortunately, mistakes are often the greatest teachers you will have. (Ridiculed 2)

**Fjell:** You will find that your family is more important to you than you are to them. (Dispossessed 2)

**Høst:** Be careful whom you offend, lest you reap a bitter harvest. (Nemesis 2)

**Grenseløs:** Do not think that you live outside of your own society. Its laws apply to you as well. (Wanted 2)

**Krieg:** Even the mightiest warrior can fall. The measure of greatness is to stand again afterward. (Defeated 2)

**Nød:** Finding the one you are looking for may be the last thing you do. (Hunting 2)

**Sinne:** Anger shall dominate your story. (Bloodsworn 2)

**Tungsinn:** Your fate shall not be a kind one. (Cursed 2)

**Herje:** Desperate times call for desperate measures, but some actions are unforgivable. (Traitor 2)

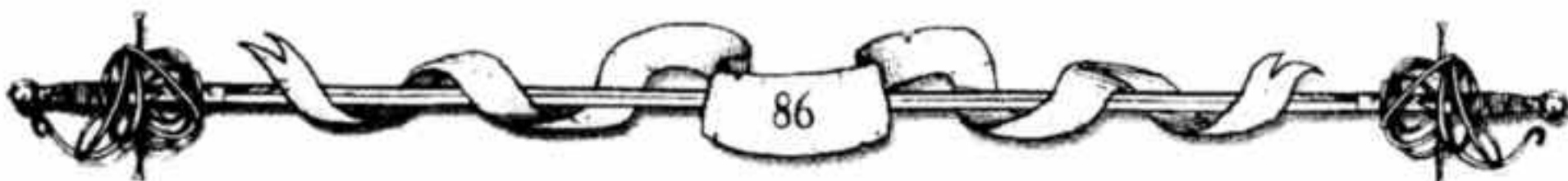
**Reise:** Involuntary servitude is not a fate suited to a Vestenmannavnjar. (Pressed Into Service 2)

**Fornuft:** Love will open your eyes to new horizons. (Romance 2)

**Lidenskap:** True love will not end with death. (Lost Love 2)

**Kjølig:** A cunning ruse will keep you safe when you are unable to defend yourself. (True Identity 2)

**Villskap:** Someone must do that which must be done. (Assassin 2)





# The Vendel Horoscope

The Vendel have developed a system of horoscopes – based on their advanced astronomical skills – to determine the destiny of a person. Vendel horoscopes answer the most important questions in a given person's life by examining the arrangement of the celestial bodies on the day of the person's birth. The most important factors are the person's Sun Sign, his Birth House, and his Moon Sign. These are used to give information about the person, the general course of his life, and his future.

## The Horoscope in Hero Creation

The player should create his or her Hero's Horoscope immediately after assigning Traits and a Nationality to the Hero. Roll and consult the Astrological Signs Table for each of the three Signs that influence his life. This is a percentile roll, made using two dice in exactly the same way as the Rune Drawing rolls. (Alternatively, many hobby stores sell twelve-sided dice. One of these may be used to generate

Signs; simply assign each of the twelve possible Signs a number.) Before rolling to determine the Sun Sign, announce whether your Hero is going to have a Virtue or a Hubris. If you get a Hubris, you gain 10 HP. If you get a Virtue, spend 10 HP.

Vendel's astrological signs are based on Vesten constellations, which differ somewhat from the rest of Théah's (whose constellations are based on classical Numan mythology).

## Sun Sign

The Sun Sign is the constellation of the zodiac that the sun rises in on the day you were born. This forms the basis for the personality of your Hero. Each Sign gives a benefit to your Hero and is also associated with two Virtues and two Hubrises. You must pick one of your Sign's two Arcana of the type (Virtue or Hubris) that you announced before you rolled.

## Astrological Signs of Vendel and Their Heavenly Bodies

Roll	Sign	Icon	Dates	Celestial Body
01-08	Oryx	Goat	20 Tertius - 20 Quartus	Guer
09-16	Ursus	Bear	21 Quartus - 21 Quintus	Amora
17-24	Lupi	Wolves	22 Quintus - 22 Sextus	Velme
25-32	Apis	Bee	23 Sextus - 24 Julius	Luna*
33-40	Drachen	Drachen	25 Julius - 25 Corantine	Solas**
41-48	Columba	Dove	26 Corantine - 26 Septimus	Velme
49-56	Felis	Cat	27 Septimus - 26 Octavus	Amora
57-64	Vipera	Snake	27 Octavus - 26 Nonus	Guer
65-72	Nauta	Sailor	27 Nonus - 26 Decimus	Re
73-80	Equus	Horse	27 Decimus - 20 Primus	Volta
81-88	Boca	Boca	21 Primus - 20 Secundus	Volta
89-96	Anguilla	Eel	21 Secundus - 19 Tertius	Re
97-00	Roll Again			

\*Guer determines Apis' Birth House instead of Luna.

\*\* Re determines Drachen's Birth House instead of Solas.





### **Oryx**

Those born under the sign of Oryx are reckless, competitive, energetic, impatient, and hot-tempered.

*Benefit:* You are quick and energetic. On the first Round of any combat, you may lower each of your Action Dice by 1, to a minimum of 1.

*Hubrises:* Hot-headed, Reckless

*Virtues:* Focused, Adaptable

### **Ursus**

Those born under the sign of Ursus are solid, reliable, persevering, and strong, but stubborn.

*Benefit:* It is very hard to manipulate your emotions. You gain a Free Raise to any resist any attempt to seduce, charm, taunt, or intimidate you.

*Hubrises:* Loyal, Stubborn

*Virtues:* Self-controlled, Willful

### **Lupi**

Those born under the sign of Lupi are generous, social people who work well with others in a team.

*Benefit:* You function well by yourself, but when you work with a team, you are excellent. When you belong to a group and act with other members of that group present, you gain a bonus to one of your rolls per Round equal to the highest Rank that other people in the group have in the applicable Knack. For example, if you and your swordsman friend were fighting a Brute Squad, you would reduce the TN to hit the Brutes by his Attack (Fencing) Rank when attacking with a Fencing Weapon.

*Hubrises:* Misfortunate, Trusting

*Virtues:* Altruistic, Friendly

### **Apis**

Those born under the sign of Apis are secretive, insecure, covetous people, who tend to collect material things and work very industriously.

*Benefit:* You collect material things in order to make yourself more comfortable. You start the game with a collection of mementos, trinkets and other small luxury items that would be worth twice your monthly income, if you could find a buyer. You may invest in this collection

during the course of play. At the end of each Story, the value of the collection grows by five percent.

*Hubrises:* Envious, Greedy

*Virtues:* Exemplary, Perceptive

### **Drachen**

Those born under the sign of Drachen are mighty people who grow easily bored. Their principal concern is maintaining their own dignity.

*Benefit:* Your prowess has made you famous. Gain 1 die (which does not explode) of Reputation for some deed you have accomplished if you are a Hero. If you buy the Scoundrel Advantage, subtract the roll instead of adding it, making you more infamous.

*Hubrises:* Arrogant, Overconfident

*Virtues:* Courageous, Victorious

### **Columba**

Those born under the sign of Columba are inquisitive perfectionists. They like things clean, neat, tidy, and peaceful.

*Benefit:* Your penchant for cleanliness and organization has led you to keep careful track of your money. You get one free Rank in the Accounting Knack.

*Hubrises:* Overzealous, Rash

*Virtues:* Comforting, Propitious

### **Felis**

Those born under the sign of Felis are selfish, emotionally impulsive, passionate, and somewhat lazy.

*Benefit:* You simply cannot help but be romantic. You get a Free Raise to all Seduction attempts.

*Hubrises:* Cowardly, Inattentive

*Virtues:* Fortunate, Passionate

### **Vipera**

Those born under the sign of Vipera are jealous, vengeful, perceptive, and dangerous.

*Benefit:* Whenever someone slights you (i.e. beats you in a contested Social Roll or uses the Repartee System against you) or injures you (i.e. inflicts Flesh or Dramatic Wounds), you gain a Free Raise to your next Attack or Social roll





against that person. Each incident is cumulative, but the number of Free Raises you gain in this manner may not exceed your Resolve.

*Hubrises:* Judgmental, Righteous  
*Virtues:* Perceptive, Perspicacious

### **Nauta**

Those born under the sign of Nauta are fun loving, generous, friendly, clever, and love to travel.

*Benefit:* Your love of adventure and travel leads you to the sea. You gain the Sailor Skill for free.

*Hubrises:* Hedonistic, Lecherous  
*Virtues:* Insightful, Worldly

### **Equus**

Those born under the sign of Equus are neat, trustworthy, hard-working, and responsible.

*Benefit:* You have an uncanny affinity for your astrological icon. Gain the Rider Skill for Free, with an additional free Rank of the Ride Knack.

*Hubrises:* Proud, Loyal  
*Virtues:* Exemplary, Inspirational

### **Boca**

Those born under the sign of Boca are clever, messy, charismatic people. It is rare for a Boca to have a good sense of time.

*Benefit:* Your agile mind is your greatest asset. You gain a Free Raise to all Wits rolls, except for Active Defenses.

*Hubrises:* Ambitious, Lecherous  
*Virtues:* Commanding, Intuitive

### **Anguilla**

Those born under the sign of Anguilla are idealistic, musically talented dreamers. They are often impractical and love quiet places.

*Benefit:* You have a noticeable musical talent. You get a Free Raise for all rolls involving music.

*Hubrises:* Indecisive, Star-crossed  
*Virtues:* Creative, Uncanny

### **Birth House**

Your Birth House is the zodiacal constellation that your Sign's celestial body was in on the day you were born. Vendel astrologers say that it determines much of the course of your life. Each Birth House gives a benefit that your Hero gains during the course of his or her life.

**Oryx:** You have captured some of Oryx's energy. *You gain the Athlete Skill for free.*

**Ursus:** You have gained some of Ursus' strength. *You gain the Pugilism Skill for free.*

**Lupi:** You have been influenced by Lupi's social influences. *You gain the Courtier Skill for free.*

**Apis:** You embody Apis' industriousness. *You gain a Knack in the Merchant Skill at Rank 2 for free.*

**Drachen:** You are an example of the might of the Drachen. *You gain the Commander Skill for free.*

**Columba:** Columba's penchant for cleanliness has made its mark upon you. *You gain the Servant Skill for free.*

**Felis:** You have fallen into Felis' selfishness. *You gain the Criminal Skill for free.*

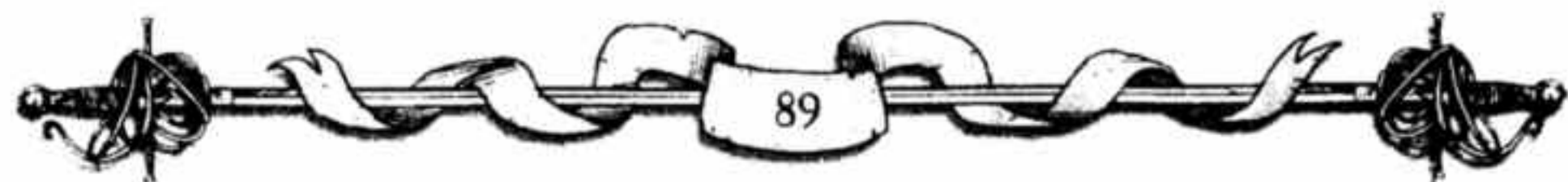
**Vipera:** Like Vipera, you are a coiled serpent, waiting to bite. *You gain the Knife Skill for free.*

**Nauta:** Nauta's love of seeing new places and people lives within you. *You gain the Guide Skill for free.*

**Equus:** Your neatness and honesty are mirrors of those of Equus. *You gain the Doctor Skill for free.*

**Boca:** Your clever mind and Boca's roguish influence leads you to take certain risks for more information. *You gain the Spy Skill for free.*

**Anguilla:** Anguilla's pull has lured you into a life on stage. *You gain the Performer Knack for free.*



## Moon Sign

Your Moon Sign is the zodiacal constellation that the moon rose in on the day you were born. The Vendel astrologers say that it determines your future. Each Moon Sign has a Background associated with it, that you may gain when the appropriate events occur within the course of game play. The warnings given for each Moon Sign are intentionally vague to allow your Game Master to fit them into his own campaign.

**Oryx:** Your impatience will cause you great trouble, if left unchecked. (Rivalry 2)

**Ursus:** If you do not act on your emotions when you have the chance, someday you will find that it is too late. (Lost Love 2)

**Lupi:** You must make sure that your generosity is not misplaced. (Loan 2)

**Apis:** Hard work is fine, but be sure to stop and see what else life has to offer while you can. (Obligation 2)

**Drachen:** Respect other people's own dignity as you would want them to respect yours. (Nemesis 2)

**Columba:** Pacifism is fine, but do not let it prevent you from defending yourself. (Defeated 2)

**Felis:** You never know when, how, or with whom you will fall in love. (Romance 2)

**Vipera:** Avoid letting your thirst for vengeance dominate your life. (Vendetta 2)

**Nauta:** You may travel, but never forget your home. (Exiled 2)

**Equus:** Do not borrow what you cannot repay. (Debt 2)

**Boca:** Your mind is a great asset. Take care to ensure that nothing happens to it. (Amnesia 2)

**Anguilla:** Beware of those who are jealous of your talents. (Cursed 2)

## New Backgrounds

### Bloodsworn (Vesten Only)

You have sworn a sacred oath to do something. You must now either succeed or die trying. The number of HP spent on this Background indicates how difficult it will be to accomplish your task. Consult with the Game Master to determine what you have sworn to do.

### Hated Relative (Vendel or Vesten only)

You have a cousin who stands on the opposite side of the Vendel/Vestenmannavnjar schism. The two of you have long since given up trying to make each other see the light, and now feud with each other. The number of points spent on this Background indicates how powerful and dangerous he or she is.

### Loan

You have made a loan to someone, and they have not only defaulted, they have disappeared with the money. You need to get your money back, with interest. The number of points you spend on this Background indicates how much money you lent and how dangerous it will be to get it back.

## New Skills

### Skald (Civil)

A skald is a storyteller and a keeper of history. The skalds keep the Vestenmannavnjar traditions alive. They pass their wisdom on to the others by singing or telling epic poems. They ask riddles, the keys to which are found in the old legends. They also make new legends, by writing poems and singing songs about the great deeds of their



contemporaries. Normally, only Vestenmannavnjar may take the Skald Skill. Heroes from other nations should have a very good reason for doing so, such as spending time with a Vestenmannavnjar tribe.

### Basic Knacks

*History:* More than just knowing what has come before, history has a great many lessons for those willing to listen. Tragic military defeats have been transformed into glorious victories by a schooled historian, and more than a few of them have learned from failed political maneuvers as well. You know the ways of the past and how to learn from them today.

*Oratory:* Sweet words of praise flow as easily from your lips as whispered words of poison. Oratory allows you to persuade your listeners more easily of any argument.

*Singing:* A voice as clear as crystal is only part of your secret. Breath control and enunciation count for just as much. This Knack gives you the training to use your voice to the fullest.

*Writing:* Your quill flies across the page with the gift of prose, setting down words that can entertain the reader, outrage the nobility, or call the people to arms. Your words can make beggars into kings or topple the most entrenched tyrants. This Knack encompasses poetry, plays, and other written works.

### Advanced Knacks

*Diplomacy:* The art of diplomacy is the art of peace; words have prevented more wars than guns ever caused. Your soothing reassurances can calm all but the most enraged duelist, and keep your blood where it belongs – in your veins.

*Incitation:* You can inspire men to victory. They listen to your words before and during the battle, and they know that they cannot be defeated. They know that you will make the right decisions, and that they won't lay down their lives for nothing. This Knack is used (mostly) with the mass-combat rules, which your GM has access to in his Guide.

*Riddles:* You understand the nature of riddling and the secret wisdom which riddles impart. This is more than just being able to answer them; it is realizing the message behind the words and applying it to your own life.

*Rune Lore:* You have a deep understanding of the mythology of the Vestenmannavnjar, and know the stories behind each of the runes. Whenever you need to know the mythological story of a specific rune, you may use this Knack.

*Storytelling:* Seated around a flickering fire, all attention is on you. Your voice and mannerisms are calculated to enthrall your audience completely. Storytellers can, in addition, sometimes collect small sums of money for telling their tales.

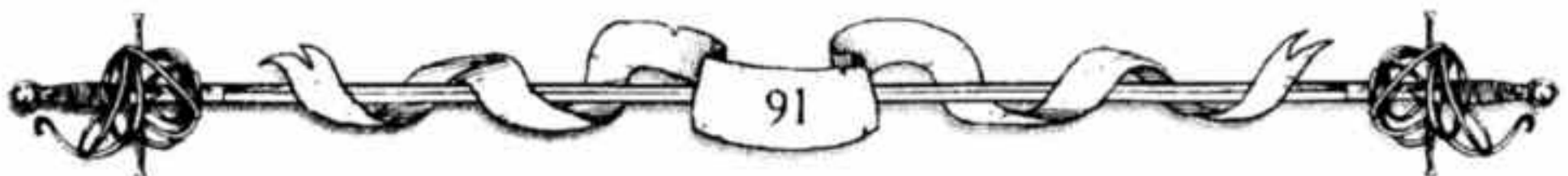
*Theology:* Divine will is a difficult subject – everyone feels that he's right. You, however, have studied all the faiths dispassionately, looking for correlations and unseen connections, regardless of your own beliefs. You know who they all pray to, how they worship, and how their daily lives have changed because of it.

## Whaler

(This Skill was originally published in the *Pirate Nations* sourcebook; it is reprinted here for your convenience.) On Théah, whalers have a much more difficult time plying their trade. The whales are guarded by the fearsome leviathans, who attack not only anyone they sense harming a whale, but any ship that smells of whale's blood. Whalers are usually fearsomely strong, completely unafraid of anything, and expert swimmers.

### Basic Knacks

*Balance:* When the ship tosses in stormy seas and the Captain tells you to climb the rigging and secure a mast, the Balance Knack will save your life. Quite simply, it's the Knack of not falling down, even under adverse conditions. This is used as the Defense Knack for those fighting aboard a ship at sea, or in situations where the footing is uncertain. The GM will give you the TNs for performing certain actions on board a sailing vessel, or with other circumstances.







*Knotwork:* With this Knack you can tie all the essential knots a sailor needs to know, and can tell the difference between a sheepshank and a two-half-hitches knot.

*Throw (Harpoon):* When you throw (or attack with) this weapon, you must use this Knack. The range on a Harpoon is 5, plus two times your Brawn.

### **Advanced Knacks**

*Leaping:* You can jump higher and farther than most people. This often comes in handy when exploring dusty tombs or fleeing across rooftops. In addition, you use this Knack as your Defense Knack while leaping.

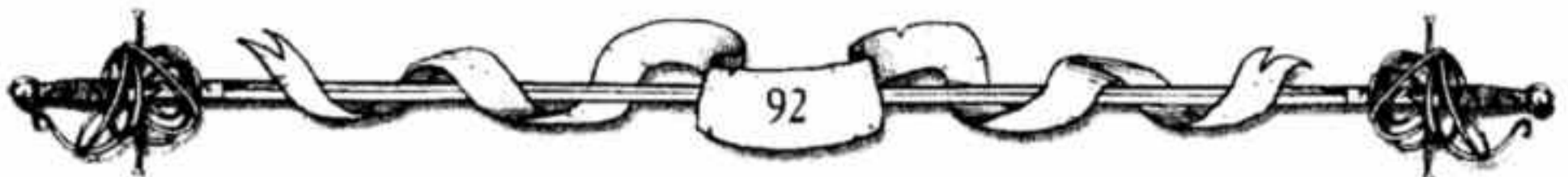
*Poison:* Whalers out on the hunt use poison-tipped harpoons to fend off leviathans. This Knack lets you know what poison to use and how much to administer, as well as how

to handle it safely. Your GM has rules for using this Knack in the *GMs' Guide*.

*Sea Lore:* You know the legends and stories that sailors tell among themselves. If a particular island is reputed to be haunted, you might know the tale connected to it.

*Swimming:* Provided you aren't too heavily weighed down, you do a nice job of not sinking (stormy seas and sharks notwithstanding). The GM has rules for swimming (and drowning) in his *Guide*.

*Weather:* Whether it's because your corns start to hurt, your joints begin to ache, or you've learned to identify the signs, you know when a storm is coming, and you can quickly get an idea just how bad the storm is going to be. Rules for weather can be found in the *GMs' Guide*.





## New Knacks

### Merchant Skill (Civil)

The following Knacks are considered a part of the Merchant Skill, and may be purchased as normal. Kind GMs may allow previously established Heroes to add them for free, or exchange them for existing Knacks if the Hero has a logical reason to have acquired them.

#### Basic Knacks

*Apothecary:* This Knack is used to make mixtures of ingredients for medicinal purposes.

*Baker:* This Knack is used for making baked goods such as bread and cakes.

*Brewer:* This Knack is used for making beer and ale.

*Carpenter:* This Knack is useful when constructing wooden furniture and other structures. The Shipwright Knack must be used when building or modifying ships.

*Cobbler:* This Knack is used for making or repairing shoes and boots.

*Confectioner:* This Knack is used for making candies and snacks.

*Distiller:* This Knack is used when distilling spirits, such as brandy, whisky, and vodka.

*Florist:* This Knack is used to grow flowers and make floral arrangements.

*Gunsmith:* This Knack is used to make or repair firearms.

*Hatter:* This Knack is used to make or repair hats.

*Mason:* This Knack is useful when constructing structures from stone, brick, concrete or cement.

*Perfumer:* This Knack is used in the creation of pleasing scents and perfumes.

*Printer:* This Knack is used to operate a printing press, allowing you to make things such as books and leaflets.

*Shipwright:* This Knack is used to build and modify ships.

*Wigmaker:* This Knack is used to make and repair wigs.

#### Advanced Knacks

*Tinker:* This Knack indicates a practical knowledge of repairing or constructing mechanical objects. It can be used to fix or improve small items such as clocks or musical boxes, and when constructing new objects from abstract designs.

*Architecture:* You understand the structure of buildings, from the barest mud huts to the grandest Vaticine cathedrals. A successful check allows you to locate foundations, stress points, and other vital parts of a given building. It may even allow you to determine if there is a hidden room or passage in the building, though it cannot tell you how to access it.

## New Swordsman Schools

### Halfdansson Harpoon School

**Country of Origin:** Vestenmannavnjar

**Description:** The Vestenmannavnjar use harpoons to hunt at sea. They are useful for dealing with sea serpents and sirens, as well fighting against people when one ship attempts to board another. The students of the Halfdansson style of fighting use harpoons in a vicious manner. They thrust their weapons deeply into their victims and then grab another harpoon. It is difficult for an enemy to fight effectively while impaled upon a long, barbed object. Halfdansson's students seek to anchor a harpoon within an enemy's body and then slay him at their leisure. The weakness of this school is that its students focus too much on making the perfect first attack, allowing a clever opponent to take advantage of their preoccupation.

**Basic Curriculum:** Polearm, Whaler





**Swordsman Knacks:** Disarm (Polearm), Exploit Weakness (Halldansson), Lunge (Polearm), Pommel Strike (Polearm)

**Apprentice:** Students of Halldansson style of fighting learn that the best way to use a harpoon is to pierce deeply and let the target tire itself out. Apprentices get a Free Raise when using a harpoon against aquatic creatures such as sirens, leviathans, whales, sea serpents and so forth. Also, when making a strike against a target, you may call a Raise to try to impale your target. Should you inflict a Dramatic Wound with an impaling attack, you have impaled your target. Impaled victims have +5 to all their TNs and have their TN to be hit reduced by 5. Furthermore, any substantial disturbance of the harpoon impaling them causes 2k1 wounds. If a Dramatic Wound is taken in this manner, the harpoon has come loose and is no longer impaled in the victim.

Halldansson is not recognized by the Swordsman's Guild, so its members do not gain membership in the Guild for free. Instead, they start with a free Rank in one of their Swordsman Knacks.



**Journeyman:** Journeymen have learned to strike forcefully and accurately. They roll an extra die (+1k0) for damage with a harpoon (4k2 or 4k3). This does not affect the damage done by an impaled harpoon. You no longer need to declare a Raise when attempting to impale a target.

**Master:** Masters of the Halldansson School instinctively know where to strike for the maximum effect, and they anchor their harpoons deeply in the bodies of their targets. You keep an extra die (+0k1) of damage with a harpoon (4k3 or 4k4). You gain an extra Rank of Throw (Harpoon). This may increase your Rank to a 6. If it does not, you may later increase your Rank from 5 to 6 by spending 25 experience points. When you impale your target with a harpoon, it must inflict 2 Dramatic Wounds before it comes out.

## Larsen Swordsman School

**Country of Origin:** Vendel

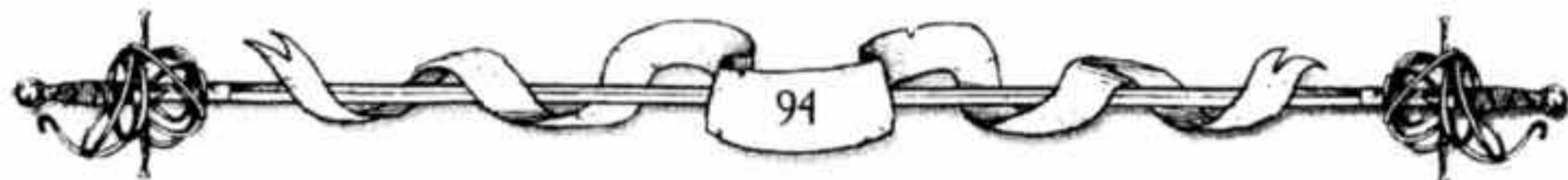
**Description:** The Larsen School is a common fencing style used by night watchmen in Kirk, as well as a few criminals and muggers in that city. The school teaches its students to use the darkness as their friend, and to confuse their enemies by opening and closing a mask on a bright lantern (they often use a fighting lantern for this purpose; see page 103). The sudden, dancing beam of light distracts an opponent, allowing the student to penetrate his or her defenses. The weakness of the Larsen style is that its students tend to strike where the light from their lantern shines, making them somewhat predictable.

**Basic Curriculum:** Fencing, Streetwise

**Swordsman Knacks:** Ambush, Exploit Weakness (Larsen), Feint (Fencing), Parry (Lantern)

### New Knacks

**Ambush:** You have learned how to spot likely places for an ambush to occur and to watch for signs that people have concealed themselves there. Naturally, this Knack cuts both ways, allowing you to set up an ambush of your own. Rules for the use of this Knack are located in the "Drama" section





defend the School and your fellow students from the Swordsman's Guild.

**Journeyman:** Journeymen of the Rasmussen School learn how to fire a pistol reflexively in response to a threat. You may use an Interrupt Action to make an attack with ready pistol (you may spend 3 actions instead of the usual 2 to draw and fire as an Interrupt Action). Also, add ten yards to your effective range with a pistol.

**Master:** Masters of the Rasmussen School have learned that speed is fine, but accuracy is final. They may spend actions to aim their pistol shot at a particular target. Each consecutive action spent aiming a pistol gives a Free Raise to damage. You may add up to 3 unkept dice in this fashion. When you are firing two pistols, the usual +1k1 bonus will apply, making the damage 6k4, 7k4 or 8k4 depending on the number of actions spent aiming. You get a free Rank of Attack (Firearms). This may increase your Rank to a 6. If it does not, then you may later increase your Rank from a 5 to a 6 by spending 25 experience points. Add another ten yards to your effective range with a pistol (+20 total).

## Siggursdottir Axeman School

**Country of Origin:** Vestenmannavnjar

**Description:** The Siggursdottir School is a lightning-quick paired axe style. Its students initially learn to throw an axe, then quickly draw a spare. When combat comes in close, the student launches a deadly volley of attacks, screaming battle cries all the while. The main weakness of the style is its devotion to emotion and speed rather than reason and caution.

**Basic Curriculum:** Athlete, Hand Axe

**Swordsman Knacks:** Double Attack (Hand Axes), Exploit Weakness (Siggursdottir), Throw (Hand Axe), Whirl (Hand Axe)

### New Knacks

**Double Attack (Hand Axes):** When you use this Knack, you make two quick Axe attacks against your opponent, one

right after the other. You must declare that you are Double Attacking before you attack, and then roll the two attacks using this Knack. The TN to hit your opponent is raised by 10 when you are using Double Attack.

**Throw (Hand Axe):** When you throw this weapon as an attack, you must use this Knack instead of your Attack Knack. This is considered a Basic Knack for students of the Siggursdottir School.

**Whirl (Hand Axe):** Whirl is a spinning attack designed to take out multiple unskilled enemies at once. For each Rank in this Knack, you may add 2 to your Attack Roll when attacking Brutes. Thus, a Hero with a Rank 3 in Whirl would increase a roll of 19 to a 25 when attacking Brutes.

**Apprentice:** The Apprentice learns to carry at least three axes. The first one will be thrown, and then the third drawn to allow him to wield an axe in each hand. You have no penalty for using a hand axe with your off-hand. You get a Free Raise when throwing an axe.

The Siggursdottir School does not give its students free membership in the Swordsman's Guild. Instead, its Apprentices get a free Rank in one of their Swordsman Knacks.

**Journeyman:** Journeyman of the Siggursdottir School learn to make a lethal double strike, in which both of their axes strike an opponent simultaneously. To make a double strike, use the Double Attack knack, but both axes strike as one. Roll to hit and do 3k3 damage instead of 2k2. The TN to use an Active Defense against a double strike is increased by 10. You gain a free Rank of Throw (Hand Axe). If your Rank is already 5, it becomes a 6. If it is not, then you may later increase your Rank to 6 from 5 by spending 25 experience points.

**Master:** Masters of the Siggursdottir School are savage warriors who launch brutal flurries of blows with their axes. Whenever you successfully hit your target with a normal Attack (Hand Axe) roll, your next Action Die is considered equal to the current phase.



## New Rules for Lærdom

### Permanent Rune Items

Masters of Lærdom may inscribe an item with runes in such a way that the enchantment is permanent instead of lasting only one year. The only restriction is that the Skjæren may not permanently inscribe a Lærd that he has not Become.

The process is similar to inscribing a rune, except that you roll Resolve + Rune Knack versus the rune's Become TN rather than its Inscribe TN and it takes ten actions, not five. During the process, the Skjæren must charge the rune with his own blood (which is the blood of the Lærd he has Become), taking 2k2 wounds. He then names the object. If he succeeds, the rune cannot be destroyed unless the object itself is destroyed. If the ceremony fails, then the Skjæren still takes the wounds, and the object is ruined.

When using a permanently enchanted object with a rune that adds dice, the effect is activated and deactivated by speaking the object's name while holding it. The rune does count against the normal limit of runes affecting you, but does not count against the number of runes you maintain.

When using a permanently enchanted object with a weather rune, speaking the object's name while holding it activates the effect. The person activating it immediately takes 2k1 wounds to power the rune. No roll is made while using the permanently inscribed rune, only when inscribing it. These runes do not count towards a sorcerer's limit of maintained runes, and they can only be used outdoors. The object's enchantment can be used again in a number of Phases that is equal to ten minus the number of Raises made when inscribing the rune (minimum 1). For example, if you made 4 Raises when inscribing a rune, and used the enchantment on Phase 7 of the current Round, you would be able to use it again in 6 Phases ( $10 - 4 = 6$ ), so you could use the enchantment again on Phase 3 of the next Round.



### Lærdom and the Vendel

The ancient gods of the Vestenmannavnjar grant the magic of Lærdom. As discussed in Chapter One, the Vendel have forsaken those gods, and in so doing have weakened their ability to use this sorcery. Reaching the status of Master of Lærdom requires absolute faith, and the Vendel do not have it. No Vendel may ever become a Master in Lærdom, no matter what his Ranks may be in the individual Sorcerous Knacks. The only Mastery Levels available to the Vendel are Apprentice and Adept. Vestenmannavnjar have no such restriction.

Alternately, a Vendel Hero may be capable of reaching the Mastery rank, but he must have an extraordinary reason for doing so — something which forms a fundamental part of the Hero's *raison d'être*. The GM has the final say on the matter, and players who wish to portray a potential Vendel Lærdom Master should consult him before Hero creation.



## New Advantages

### Astrologer (10 Points, Vendel Only)

You have an innate ability in observing the stars and planets and interpreting their arrangements to predict the future and understand the present. By rolling Wits + Astronomy against a TN of 15, you may use your gift to aid or hinder someone.

If you hinder someone, you find some astrological factor acting against him. Any rolls the target makes on the Mass Combat Chart are reduced by 2 (minimum 1) for the duration of a battle, and the Target Numbers of all of his rolls are increased by 3 for the remainder of the Scene. For two Raises, you can make the penalty last for the Act.

If you aid someone, you find an astrological factor that is acting for him. Any rolls he makes on the Mass Combat Chart are increased by 2 for the duration of a battle, and the Target Numbers of all of his rolls are reduced by 3 for the remainder of the Scene. For two Raises, you can make this bonus last for the Act.

Only one Astrologer's effect can influence someone at a time. When one Astrologer tries to influence someone already affected by another Astrologer, he rolls as normal, and if he makes more Raises than the previous Astrologer

did, his effect takes precedence. Raises made to extend the duration of an Astrologer's effect do not count for this purpose.

### Bearsark (15 Points, Vesten Only)

You have climbed to the top of the world, where you spoke with the North Wind and became a fearless berserker. Now, when you call upon your gift, it sends you into a bloody rage that no mortal man can stop. It also ages you whenever you use it.

You are immune to Fear at all times. Prior to a battle, you may spend a Drama Die to go berserk. When you do so, you become overwhelmed by a mindless rage which lasts as long as you have enemies remaining active on the field. Your mouth starts to froth, and you feel no pain. While you are berserk, you are immune to the effects of being crippled, but not to being Knocked Out. Your Wits Rank is reduced to 0. You receive a +5 bonus to all Brawn rolls (including Wound Checks) and damage rolls. Furthermore, you gain an increase to your Fear Rating (if any) equal to one-third of your Panache, rounding up. When in mass combat, an enraged berserker is always considered Heavily Engaged. While berserk, it is hard to tell friend from foe. It requires a Wits roll against a TN of 5 (remembering the rules for Traits of 0) to recognize that someone is a friend in combat. While berserk, you will attack anyone that you do not recognize as a friend. Upon going berserk, you age by a week for every Round of combat until the battle stops.

Once the battle stops, your Wits returns to its normal Rank, you lose the bonuses you received to Brawn and damage rolls, and your Fear Rating goes back to its normal level. The effects of being crippled also affect you, if you have taken enough damage to have them apply to you.

### Bodyguard (7 Points, 6 for Vendel)

You have hired a skilled soldier to act as a bodyguard. He will remain loyal to you so long as you do nothing to seriously upset him and he isn't offered a significantly better wage to work for someone else. The Bodyguard is





considered a Henchman and is built as other Henchmen are. The Bodyguard receives one Swordsman School of your choice in addition to the normal 75 HP a Henchman comes with.

### Bought Weapon (Varies, Vendel only)

The Vendel do not have any special weapons that they employ. Instead, they buy, barter, or steal from the other nations. Sidhe weapons from Avalon, puzzle swords from Montaigne, Castillian blades, twisted blades from Vodacce and even rune weapons from the Vestenmannavnjar are all available to the Vendel. Dracheneisen is not available, nor have the Vendel had success in getting anything special from Ussura. Vendel may obtain any of these weapons by spending 2 points more than the Advantage would cost a Hero from its native country. For example, a Vendel Hero who has a Soldano Blade must pay 8 points for it.

### Drago (6 Points, 5 for Vendel)

You have a Vendel Drago (a paid guide and secretary) in your employ at the start of the game. Besides his normal duties, he is skilled at carrying messages at your request. The Drago is considered a Henchman and is built as other Henchmen are. He receives a 3 in all Guide Knacks in addition to the normal 75 HP a Henchman comes with.

### Jarl (8 Points, Vesten Only)

This Advantage costs 4 points if you have already purchased Sorcery.

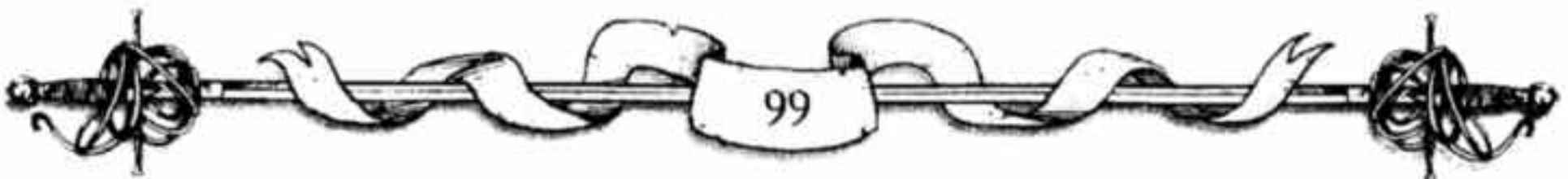
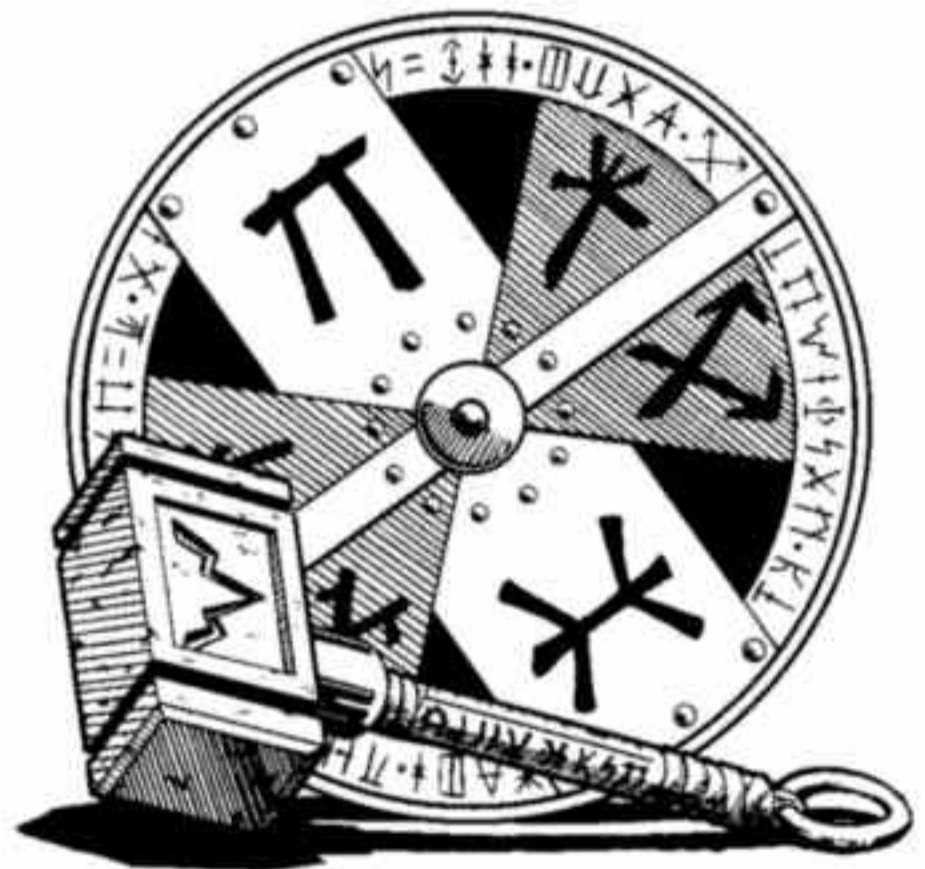
You are a jarl, a member of the warrior caste of the Vestenmannavnjar. You are an unlanded, untitled member of this caste, and must live as a supporter of other jarls. You essentially act as a minor officer in the army of another jarl, but with higher pay. You start the game with 500 G and have a monthly income of 100 G. Also, you hold a rank equivalent to lieutenant, but do not receive any extra income from it. You cannot take the Thrall Advantage.

### Merchant Patron (Varies, 1 less if Vendel, minimum 1)

You act as a patron to a merchant, and are thus entitled to a share of his profits. Of course, it takes money to make money, so the profits generated by a merchant depends on the amount and frequency of your own investment. The more frequently you invest, the more frequently you get money back. The total cost of this Advantage is equal to the sum of the points spent on the amount of the Profits and the Frequency of the investment.

Points	Investment	Profits
1	10 G	5 G
2	20 G	8 G
3	40 G	10 G

Points	Frequency
0	Once a month
1	Twice a month
2	Once a week





### Old Name (2 Points, Vesten Only)

Your name is an old and honored one among the Vestenmannavnjar. If you take the Scoundrel Advantage, your Reputation is reduced to -16. Otherwise, you gain 6 points of Reputation.

### Rune Weapon (Varies, Vesten Only)

You have a weapon or other object that has a rune inscribed upon it. It may be any of the twenty-four runes listed in the *Players' Guide*. You must name the weapon. The cost of this Advantage depends on the kind of rune inscribed on it. Weather runes cost 1 HP, plus 1 HP per Raise that they have on them, up to three Raises. Runes that add dice cost 4 HP. A permanent rune costs twice as much as an ordinary rune of its type.

### Sympathetic Healer (20 Points, Vesten only)

Certain Vestenmannavnjar have the ability to heal other people by taking their wounds and illnesses into their own bodies. By touching someone and spending a Drama Die as an action, you may attempt to take their wounds from them. Roll Resolve against a TN of 10. If successful, you absorb all of that person's Flesh Wounds, plus one Dramatic Wound per Raise you made on your roll. You must immediately roll your Brawn to see whether the sudden absorption of Flesh Wounds gives you any Dramatic Wounds.

Sympathetic healers may also take illnesses or poisons from someone else's body and into their own. No roll is necessary to do this. The healer merely touches his patient and spends one Drama Die, and one dose of poison or one illness transfers from the patient to the healer, who immediately suffers its effects.

In times of desperation, a sympathetic healer may try to transfer injuries, poison, or disease to another person. To do this, he must touch that person and spend a Drama Die. If he wishes to transfer a poison or a disease, then he must roll



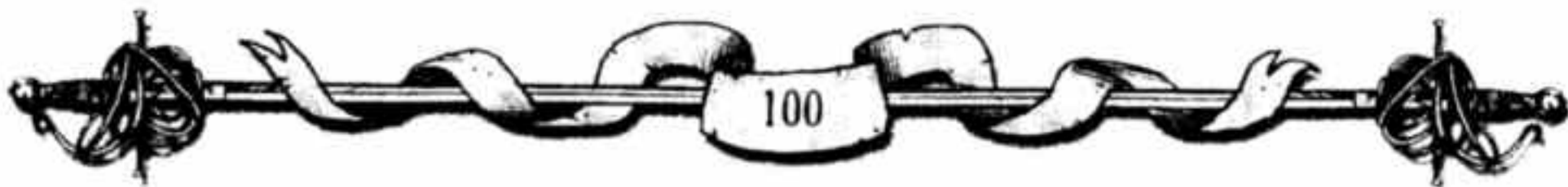
his Resolve against a TN of 20. If he succeeds, one illness or dose of poison transfers to him from his patient. If he wishes to inflict injuries upon someone, he must roll his Resolve against a TN of 15. If he succeeds, he loses one Dramatic Wound and inflicts a 2k2 attack that acts as if it had been fired from a Firearm for purposes of inflicting wounds.

### Thrall (1 Point, Vesten only)

You were a Thrall, a member of the servile class of the Vestenmannavnjar society. Your jarl lost all of his land and money to the Vendel, and his life ended shortly thereafter. You had nowhere else to turn, and have thus become a free man. You gain the Servant Skill for free, and you start the game with 5 G that you have scrounged up along the way. You cannot take the Jarl Advantage.

### Vendel League Seat (8 Points, 5 if Vendel)

Every year, the Vendel League auctions off some of its League Seats. These carry a high price, but they bring great wealth to the people who hold them. You were able to secure one this year. Your Reputation increases by 10 points and you gain an income of 100 G per week. The income and Reputation gained from having a Vendel League Seat is lost when your seat goes up for auction again in three years, but both can be regained by winning a seat at that year's auction. While you have your Seat, you may cast a vote at the meetings of the League.







## Vendel or Vesten Accent (0 Points, Vendel or Vesten only)

An accent is an identifying characteristic in the way a person speaks that indicates he's from a particular tribe. Only a Hero fully proficient in a given language can identify accents; Language Acquaintance and Pidgins are no help, and those who are not Vestenmannavnjar or Vendel may never have either accent. There are nine primary accents available to Vestenmannavnjar or Vendel characters: Aarensfolk, Bodilsfolk, Enhedsfolk, Handelsfolk, Jordfolk, Larsfolk, Stjernasfolk, Tillitsfolk, and Vendel. Heroes with one of these accents pay slightly different costs to learn foreign languages. An explanation of each accent follows the language chart, below.

*Aarensfolk:* Aarensfolk's accent is noticeable by the way they pronounce the letter f as if it were v.

*Bodilsfolk:* The primary characteristics of the Bodilsfolk accent are the rapid pace of the speech and the tendency to slur their vowels.

*Enhedsfolk:* Enhedsfolk shorten their vowels and tend not to pronounce the letter g when it appears at the end of a word. Many of them travel to Eisen (especially Freiburg) in the hopes of finding allies against the Vendel.

*Handelsfolk:* Somehow, Handelsfolk seem to be growling softly as they speak. They emphasize the letters h, m, n, r, s, and v in their pronunciation.

*Jordfolk:* The Jordfolk accent owes much to the Inish who have aided the Vestenmannavnjar in their attacks on Vendel ships. Many members of the Jordfolk tribe now speak at least a few phrases of Avalon.

*Larsfolk:* Members of the Larsfolk tribe speak with a nasal intonation, raising the pitch of their voices and lengthening their vowels.

*Stjernasfolk:* The accent of the Stjernasfolk people is typified by their pronouncing th as if it were a d or a dh. For example, instead of saying, "I'm thirty," they would say, "I'm dirty."

*Tillitsfolk:* The people of Tillitsfolk have preserved the ancient pronunciation of the language. They do not soften their vowels and emphasize the letters g, k, p, and t when they speak.

*Vendel:* The Vendel have softened the Vestenmannavnjar language, making it sound more like Eisen than it had in the past. This is the Vendel accent described in the *Players' Guide*.

## Vendel/Vestenmannavnjar Accent

	Aarens	Bodils	Enheds	Handels	Jords	Lars	Stjernas	Tillits	Vendel
<b>Avalon</b>	2	1	1	1	0	1	2	1	1
<b>Castille</b>	3	2	3	2	3	2	3	3	2
<b>Crescent</b>	3	3	3	4	3	4	3	3	3
<b>High Eisen</b>	2	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	2
<b>Eisen</b>	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	2	1
<b>Montaigne</b>	2	1	3	2	2	1	2	2	2
<b>Théan</b>	3	2	4	3	3	2	3	2	3
<b>Teodoran</b>	2	4	2	3	3	3	3	2	3
<b>Ussura</b>	1	3	1	2	1	3	1	2	2
<b>Vendel</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Vodacce</b>	2	2	3	1	3	2	1	2	2





## Vestenmannavnjar Bought-Man (7 Points, 6 for Vestenmannavnjar)

You have hired a skilled Vestenmannavnjar warrior to guard you. He will remain loyal to you as long as you do nothing to seriously upset him. His loyalty has been bought and his loyalty sworn, so he will not betray you no matter how much money he is offered. The Bought-man is considered a Henchman and should be built as other Henchmen. The Bought-man receives a Vestenmannavnjar Swordsman School (Halfdansson, Leegstra, or Siggursdottir) in addition to the usual 75 HP a Henchman is built with.

## New Equipment

### Harpoon

Whaling is a primitive operation on Théah, thanks to the extreme danger surrounding the endeavor. Typically, whalers attempt to kill any leviathans in the area with cannon volleys and envenomed harpoons, not caring whether or not the animal's body is destroyed. Then they use thrown harpoons to harvest the less dangerous beasts. Harpoons are a 3k2 weapon normally, but against large creatures (such as whales and leviathans) whose flesh they can dig deeply into, they are considered a 3k3 weapon. Like other thrown weapons, their range is  $5 + (2 \times \text{Brawn})$  yards.

### Shield

A shield is similar to a buckler, but much larger and heavier. The wielder relies on its size for protection, while a buckler is moved to deflect incoming blows. Due to the size of a shield, the TN to be hit by non-firearm ranged attacks (e.g. bows or crossbows) is increased by 10 when using one. If a character bashes another with a shield, it inflicts 1k1 damage.

## Swordcane

A swordcane is a light fencing blade hidden in a cane. The sword's grip forms the cane's handle, and the remainder of the cane forms the sheath for the sword. There is usually some sort of locking mechanism to prevent the sword from coming out accidentally. It takes a Wits roll against a TN of 30 to notice that a sword cane is not an ordinary cane. Treat the swordcane as a fencing weapon when wielded, with one exception: its lack of a guard gives a penalty to its user of +5 to all TNs for using Parry (Fencing) as an Active Defense.

## Throwing Axe

A throwing axe is a small, one-handed axe balanced for throwing. When used as a melee weapon, it inflicts 2k2 damage. When thrown, it has a range of 5 + twice the thrower's Brawn in yards, with no modifier for Short Range and a -5 penalty for Long Range.

## Fighting Lantern

A fighting lantern is a masked, bull's-eye lantern, most often used by the students of the Larsen School. Very little light escapes it when its mask is down, and when the mask is up, light can be directed in one direction only. The handle of the lantern is attached to its back, and a thumb-activated lever allows its user to raise and lower the mask.

# New Rules

## Hero Creation Rules

The rules presented in the 7th Sea *Players' Guide* for the creation of Vestenmannavnjar and Vendel Heroes do not reflect the differences that have arisen between these two peoples despite their common origins. If you wish, you may use the following rule as an alternative: instead of receiving a bonus of +1 to Wits, Vestenmannavnjar characters get +1

to Resolve and Vendel characters get +1 to any Trait of the player's choice. Also, only Vestenmannavnjar characters may purchase the Large Advantage for 3 HP instead of 5 HP. Vendel characters do not get this discount. Instead, they may purchase the Linguist Advantage for 1 HP instead of 2 HP. These rules are optional.

## Buying Reputation

A Vendel may temporarily increase his Reputation by spreading money around. By giving away 250G, he may gain a Reputation die that may only be used in the local area for the next week. Spending more money will increase the length of time, up to a maximum of one month (4 weeks according to Théah's calendar). Each week costs 250G. Buying Reputation only works within the first two months of the Vendel's arrival in an area, and may not affect more than four of those eight weeks. Only Vendel may make use of this ability.

## Skalds and Reputation

If a group has a Skald in it, whenever they receive or lose Reputation points, the magnitude of the change is increased by 1, plus 1 for every Raise the Skald makes on a Wits + Oratory or Wits + Singing roll with a TN equal to 5 times the number of Reputation points initially gained or lost. Avalon bards have a similar effect on Reputation points.

## Merchant Status

The Vendel Merchant Guilds have three basic ranks: apprentice, journeyman, and master. Heroes who belong to a Guild are assumed to be journeymen (apprentices must stay close to their masters and have little time for adventure). In addition to the benefits outlined in the *Players' Guide* (page 136), members know the secret code of signs and passwords for their particular Guild, and can use them to discreetly communicate with fellow members if they wish.

A Hero reaches Master status when he or she attains a Rank of 5 in the appropriate Knack (naturally, he or she must



have the Membership: Merchant Guild Advantage to begin with). His Reputation increases by 10, and he also gains the ability to take on an apprentice should he wish. Other members of the Guild will look upon him with respect, and he may be called upon to solve intra-guild political disputes if necessary. Other benefits, such as increased wealth, are up to the GM.

## Advanced Weather Rules

The *Game Masters' Guide* suggests that weather can do more than inflict damage, but it leaves specific weather effects up to the individual GM. There are many things that the weather can do in addition to causing direct harm.

### Penalties to Ranged Attacks

Many kinds of weather can potentially cause penalties to Ranged Attacks. Winds will cause a penalty of +5 to the TN to hit with a Ranged Attack for each row above the bottom of the Weather Chart. This penalty can be overcome with the Trick Shooting Knack.

### Treacherous Footing

Ice and slippery footing can make walking difficult. Characters moving further on the map than their Panache in inches in a Round must make Finesse + Balance rolls against a TN of 10 for wet surfaces or 20 for ice. Failing to do so means that the character has fallen and now lies prone. Rules for falling damage may apply at the GM's discretion.

### Impeded Movement

Snow and mud slow you down. All attempts to use the Sprinting Knack keep fewer dice, depending on the depth of the snow or mud. If it is ankle-deep, the penalty is -1k1; if it comes to the middle of your calf, your penalty is -2k2. Knee-deep muck has a penalty of -3k3, and mid-thigh a penalty of -4k4. Waist deep or deeper gives a penalty of -5k5.

### Poor Visibility

Fog, dust storms, and precipitation will cause problems with visibility. The maximum range of vision may be reduced to

as little as a few feet, limiting the effectiveness of Ranged Attacks and introducing the possibility of becoming lost.

### Problems with Gunpowder and Bowstrings

Wet conditions ruin gunpowder and cause bowstrings to swell, interfering with an arrow's release. When attempting to discharge a firearm or fire a bow (including crossbows) in rainy weather, roll a die. If the result is even, the shot is made normally. If the roll is odd, the powder has become wet and is useless. The gun must be reloaded before making another attempt to fire. If using a bow or a crossbow in the rain, the TN is increased by 10. The Trick Shooting Knack may not reduce this penalty.

### Touching Freezing Metal

Bare flesh making contact with very cold metal has a chance of freezing to it, especially if the skin is wet. If such a contact is made, the Game Master may expend a Drama Die to have the flesh stick to the metal. When this happens, the two may be safely separated by raising their temperatures (warm water works well), causing no damage. If, however, anyone attempts to separate the metal from the body by force, damage will result. Such an act will inflict 2k2 wounds (less if the contact is relatively small; GM's discretion).

## Investment

The Vendel know that it takes money to make money. They regularly invest in companies and expeditions to turn a profit. They obtain real estate and develop it to improve its value. The Vendel also know that high risks can yield higher returns.

At the beginning of a Story, a PC can invest any amount of money that he has on hand into an enterprise. If you choose to do so, you specify the amount invested, and the degree of risk (low, moderate, or high) involved. You may want to specify the nature of the investment — a store, a merchant ship, a piece of land, etc. — as well (clear details with the GM). Roll a single die (which explodes) and add your Wits + Accounting to the roll. Vendel Heroes add 1 to their





result. Then consult the Investment Table to see what that investment is worth at the end of the Story.

At the end of a Story, you may cash in some or all of your investment or keep your money invested. If you keep the money, you start the next Story with an investment equal to whatever the investment would have been worth had you cashed it in. You can also invest in a new enterprise at the start of that Story. If you cash in, you get guilders equal to the current value of the investment. Your investment in that enterprise is reduced to the amount you leave invested in it, and carries over to the next Story as described previously. You are allowed to put more money in an existing investment at the start of a new Story. Roll individual results for each investment.

*Example:* You invest 100G in a high-risk venture. At the end of the Story, your roll result is a 5, which indicates that the investment has lost 25% of its value and is now worth 75G. You decide to take 25G out of that investment. You begin the next Story with 25G to invest and an existing investment

of 50G in a high-risk venture. You decide to put the 25G into another high-risk enterprise, giving you a total of 75G invested in 2 businesses. At the end of this Story, you will roll once for each investment.

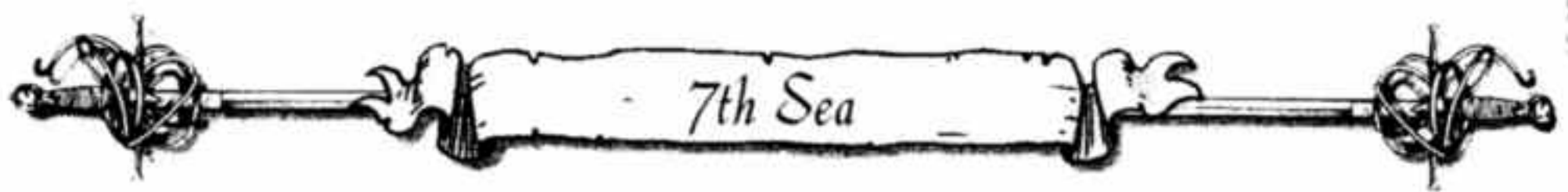
### Investment Table

Roll	Low Risk	Moderate Risk	High Risk
1-2	-10%	-50%	-100%
3-4	-5%	-25%	-50%
5-6	No change	-10%	-25%
7-8	No change	No change	-10%
9-10	No change	No change	-5%
11-12	+5%	+5%	No change
13-14	+5%	+5%	+5%
15-16	+5%	+10%	+10%
17-18	+10%	+10%	+15%
19-20	+10%	+15%	+20%
21+	+10%	+15%	+25%





*Riven*



A healthy work ethic holds equal importance in their shared culture as well. That doesn't necessarily mean manual labor, but the Vestenmannavnjar have no room for slackers, and neither do the Vendel. Most Heroes dedicate themselves wholeheartedly to whatever it is they do, but Vendel and Vesten alike believe that if something is worth doing, then it's worth working relentlessly at to make sure it's done right. Whether that means being the best-stocked weapons dealer in the Trade Sea, the most courageous warrior on an island, or the most versatile jack-of-all-trades in an Explorer's Society team, the same dedication shines through.

Unfortunately, dedication can take many forms. Hopefully, your Heroes know better than to dedicate themselves to hating people who are different from them.

## Two Worlds, One People

Why is this one book? After all, to look at what the Vendel have become, and what the Vestenmannavnjar still are, they're practically two different nations. What can Vendel and Vesten Heroes possibly have in common any more?

They all live by their wits.

Certainly, the stereotype of the Vesten warrior is a screaming, half-naked killing machine armed with an axe and utter fearlessness. But that exists more to scare their enemies than as a viable way of life. Anyone who lives in a cold, barren land had better be pretty quick on the uptake. Vesten know that there are things out there in the cold and the dark, things that no amount of screaming and axe-wielding can frighten. Vesten who forget that die. There are no truly stupid Vestenmannavnjar — at least, none that live very long.

Of course, the Vendel have taken (most of) the blood out of the battle of wits. They use gunpowder and gold as their weapons, and wield them with a skill equal to that of the deadliest Vesten warriors. The Vendel who fail to learn these lessons may not fall to a bear's claws or become meals for monsters under the ice, but they fall by the wayside all the same. Savvy Vendel become rich and powerful; their less clever countrymen become servants.

## Vestenmannavnjar: Spirit, Savvy and Steel

What does it mean to be a Vestenmannavnjar? It doesn't mean being seven feet tall and half-naked, with an axe the size of a barrel head, though some Vesten fit that description. It doesn't mean transforming into a raging storm more element than man, though that's possible too. It doesn't mean being drunk half the time, it doesn't mean being soured by hate and jealousy, and it definitely doesn't mean being stupid. There are Vesten who fit those descriptions, too, but they're not Heroes. A few might try, but they won't last long.

Like Heroes from other nations, Vesten Heroes come in every shape, size, and methodology. There are sneaky Vesten thieves, idealistic Vesten crusaders, thoughtful Vesten sorcerers, and witty Vesten spies. Even the Vesten warriors who fit the archetype of the fearless, amazingly strong warrior tend to be more resourceful than bull-headed. The so-called "barbarians" can plot deadly ambushes and come up with some very clever tricks to play on those who dismiss the Vestenmannavnjar as berserk monsters.

What unites the Vestenmannavnjar is their spirituality. If you don't believe in the gods, or at least consider their







power, you're not really a Vesten — you're a Vendel in furs. A Vesten values his own reputation as a link to those ancestors. To a Vesten Hero, fame literally translates into immortality. Performing great deeds, protecting the innocent, and casting down the villainous is certainly Heroic in itself. But when the skalds tell stories to the children of the people you saved, you'll earn a place with the ancestors whose names you fought to preserve. To the Vesten Hero, religion isn't something to cling to. It's a companion that stays with you always, like a trusted friend. Vesten Heroes fight and die for that friend as they would for any other, and it repays that trust with strength, courage, and even power over the elements. The spirits aren't a matter of faith to the Vestenmannavnjar. They are living truths and the undeniable manifestations of their heritage.

Still, it doesn't hurt to back up even the most devout (and undeniably powerful) faith with a blade. Though not every single Vesten has the martial prowess of an angry bear, most of them at least know how to put steel into another man's body. The remainder are either valued enough that others protect them, or have powerful enough magic that no one wants to try attacking them with steel. Life among the Vestenmannavnjar is harsh, and there's no telling when raiders will attack from the next village over, or a monster left over from the Worst Days is going to visit. Vesten warriors, naturally, have a legendary reputation for fearlessness. While no one expects a Hero to charge a wall of muskets with a sword or fight a giant Ruin Monster with his bare hands, no Vesten Hero would leave comrades behind or allow a Villain to escape with a dangerous artifact.

The same attitude applies in the Vesten's relation to their more sophisticated cousins. While Vesten Heroes aren't likely to be as... single-minded... as some of their countrymen on the Vendel issue, no Vesten Hero would stand by while a League Villain murders innocent farmers and destroys the names so vital to the spirits. Since rich Vendel tend to strike from behind the scenes, Vesten Heroes trying to stop the slow death of their world have to fight back intelligently. Los Vagos would recognize the tactics of these Vesten. Strike from the shadows. Never let

your enemies know who they're really dealing with. When the opportunity arises, live up to their worst fears and become an instrument of destruction. By the time the soldiers arrive, make sure you're long gone, mission accomplished. That's not cowardice — that's efficiency.

On the other hand, Vesten Heroes need not spend their lives fighting evil Vendel. Théah is a big place, with plenty of wrongs to right for an enterprising Vesten Hero looking for adventure. Legends come in all shapes and sizes, and names can be earned in a great many ways. Ultimately, any Vesten who becomes a famous Hero serves the Vesten people, and all of Théah, by adding to the power of the ancestors and becoming an inspiration to others. Whatever their occupation, Vesten adventurers take their roles as Heroes seriously.

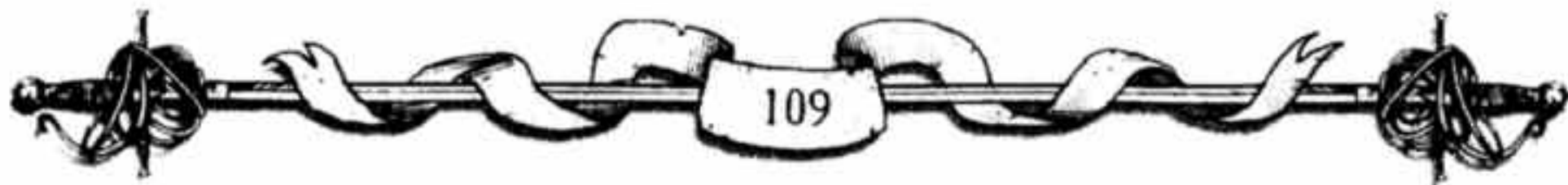
## Vendel: Wits, Will and Wonder

You are free.

The Avalon Parliament is the closest thing to a commoner's voice in government, and it's no secret that they're firmly under Elaine's thumb. As for the rest, Montaigne squirms in the merciless grip of *l'Empereur*, Castille holds the heart of a black and ruthless Inquisition, Vodacce and Eisen are divided by squabbling overlords with delusions of empire, and Ussura lies in the absolute power of an inhuman spirit and a literally "terrible" despot. But despite kings built like bears and sorcerers who could control storms and souls, the people now known as the Vendel fought for — and won — the right to control their own destiny. True, Vendel consider themselves more of a meritocracy than a true democracy — the real power lies with the League — but the nation of Vendel is the first place since the fall of the Old Empire that anyone can legally reach any heights of fame, fortune and power.

Is it any wonder that the Vendel are so confident?

Like their more tradition-minded counterparts, Vendel Heroes travel nearly anywhere, doing just about anything. Certainly, there are clever merchant Heroes plying the Trade Sea, helping the less fortunate and raking in the





guilders. But there are also Vendel scientists at the forefront of knowledge (especially with Verdugo running rampant in Castille), Vendel swashbucklers swinging from chandeliers all across Théah, Vendel sailors fighting for freedom with the Brotherhood, Vendel sorcerers rescuing endangered ships, Vendel explorers delving into Surneth ruins... if someone is pushing the limits of human potential or knowledge, you can count on a Vendel leading the charge, or at least taking notes.

Vendel Heroes, more than any others, believe in human possibility. While others, mostly "nobles," preserve or restore their supposedly glorious past, the Vendel drive towards a wondrous future. Though Vendel strongly believe in working hard and earning their keep, many Vendel Heroes are as brash and impulsive as the most reckless Musketeer. They temper this with a keen understanding of the risks they take, a powerful determination to do well, and

full knowledge of why they're fighting a monster ten feet tall on some island no one's ever heard of. They don't act out of loyalty to a selfish king, or a hidebound religion, or even the money (though guilders make a nice bonus). Vendel Heroes have seen the wonders tomorrow can bring, and they fight to bring that better world to the Théah of today.

Vendel are also perhaps the most cosmopolitan Heroes in the game. While Vesten Heroes often travel to other lands, it's almost *de rigeur* for a Vendel Hero. Pride in their freedom and potential means that they don't feel bound to their native soil. The Vendel League isn't perfect, after all — far from it. New knowledge can come from anywhere, and the Vendel intend to find it. Vendel swordsmen will happily mix Aldana and Valroux styles in a duel, a Vendel tinkerer might use Castillian scholarship to complete a device developed by an Avalon colleague, and Vendel explorers will likely have knowledge of anything from Eisen barbarian



relics to the Vodacce Surneth ruins. Though the seven Princes might make a Vendel feel unwelcome in Vodacce, Vendel Heroes can go most anywhere else and be found doing nearly anything.

## Just Getting Along

So you just designed this great character you really like, a crusading Vendel scientist with a gift for saving the day with nothing but two strings, a lantern, and a pulley. Unfortunately, another player has created a deeply devout Vesten skjæren that she's just as fond of. Now what?

Despite the many rivalries and challenges between nations in modern Théah, there is probably no greater animosity than that between the Vestenmannavnjar and the Vendel. If any two "nations" have an excuse to hate people from the other on sight, it is these two, and many Vesten and Vendel do.

Many, but not all.

Heroes, as a rule, shouldn't be inclined to hate others for their religious or political beliefs. They can certainly disapprove, and have their own convictions – a Hero without convictions doesn't deserve the name. But Vesten and Vendel Heroes are under no obligation to hate each other. In fact, if the Heroes travel to other lands, they may find that they have more in common than they ever suspected.

As their adventures continue, they may even come to realize that their ways aren't as different as they first thought. If both share a disgust for *l'Empereur's* excess and the Inquisition's fanaticism, for example, they may find the common ground worth noting. They may even learn that their methods have uncanny similarities. From there it isn't much of a leap to realizing what a united nation could accomplish. All they have to do is convince others to see what they've seen – that while the Vendel and the Vestenmannavnjar may be two nations, they are still one people.

Could there be a more Heroic goal?



**Is only available  
in the master guide.**

