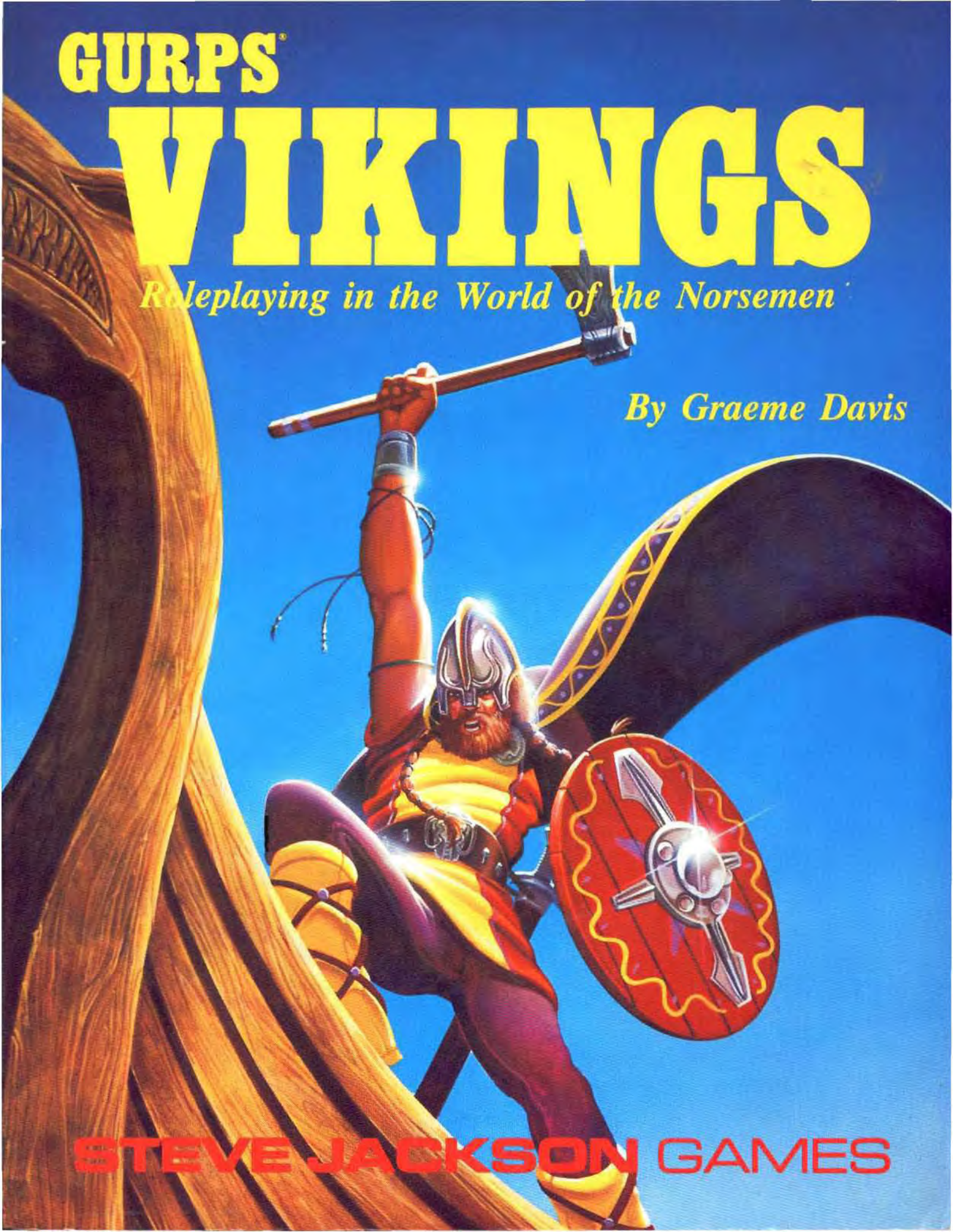
GURPS®

VIKINGS

Roleplaying in the World of the Norsemen



By Graeme Davis

STEVE JACKSON GAMES

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Roleplaying in the World of the Norsemen

By Graeme Davis

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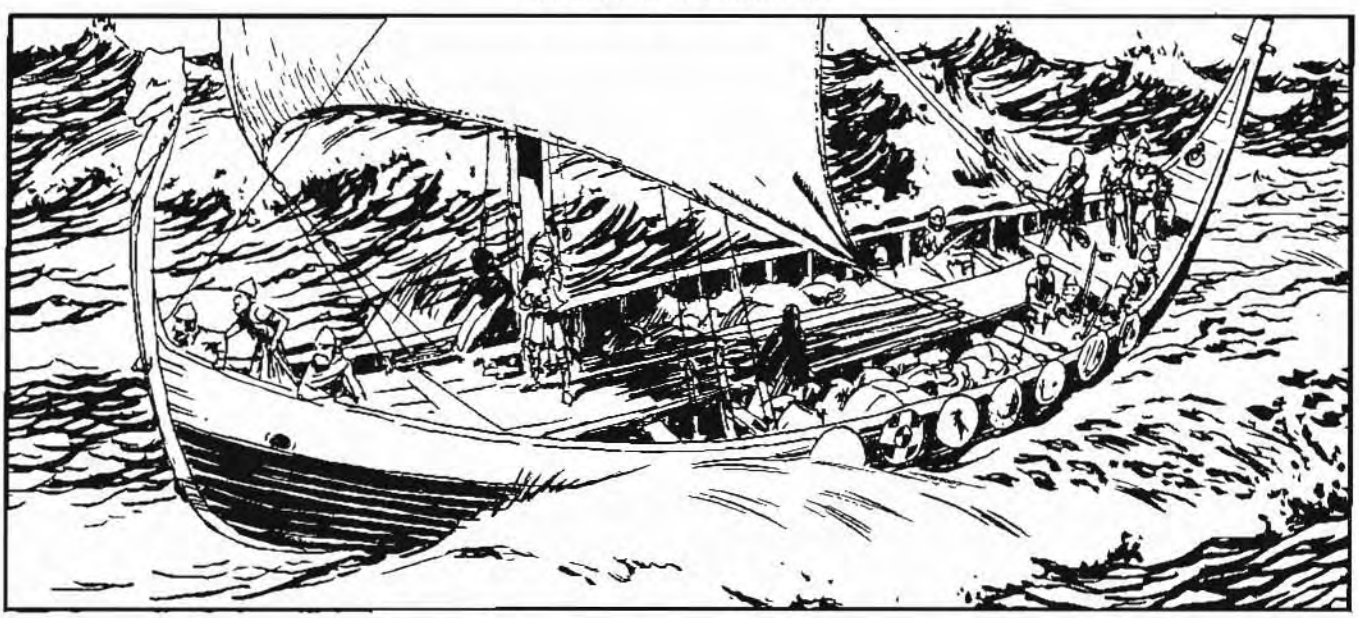

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INTRODUCTION

GURPS Vikings is about the Scandinavians of the Dark Ages and the early medieval period. It is also about the stories that were told — and are still told — about these people. In history, the Vikings span a 300-year period from the 8th century to the 11th; their mythology goes back to the beginning of the world and forward to its end. And the heroic exploits of the Norse sagas seem to occupy a time and space all of their own.

"From the fury of the Norsemen, oh Lord, deliver us!" So prayed the monks when the dragon ships were sighted. Over a thousand years later, the Vikings are still a byword for fearless, invincible barbarian warriors. Ancient chroniclers speak with horror of their savagery, modern moviemakers love them for their blood-and-thunder image, and fantasy barbarians everywhere owe them a vast unpaid debt.

All of which would amuse the average Viking immensely. In a world where even the gods were doomed to die, the only truly lasting thing a man could have was renown. To live well and die well, and have his saga told and retold till the end of the world — what more could a Viking ask?

GURPS Vikings lets roleplayers visit three Viking worlds. You can become a Viking from history, hoping to rise to the rank of Jarl, command your own ship, and raid or trade as the mood takes you. Or you can step into the world of sagas, battling trolls and witches, sailing through untold perils to new lands. Finally, you can step beyond sagas to the world of myths, where gods walk the earth in disguise and woe betide the mortal who displeases them. Beware of a stranger with a broad hat and one eye . . .

About the Author

Graeme Davis discovered Vikings and roleplaying games at about the same time, as an archaeology student at Durham University, England, in 1979. Writing for gaming magazines proved an irresistible source of beer money, and led in 1986 to a job with Games Workshop as a staff author/editor.

Now freelance, Graeme is of no fixed abode, shuttling between Nottingham, England and Denver, Colorado for reasons too complex to go into. Interests outside gaming include amateur theatre, vampires, mythology and folklore, movies by Universal, RKO and Hammer, Victorian ghost stories, Bronze Age burials, the Celts, the puppet SF TV series of Gerry Anderson, Bogart and Bacall, the writings of Robert E. Howard, Errol Flynn movies, cats, bats, spiders and whales.

About GURPS

Steve Jackson Games is committed to full support of the ***GURPS*** system. Our address is SJ Games, Box 18957, Austin, TX 78760. Please include a self-addressed, stamped envelope (SASE) any time you write us! Resources now available include:

Roleplayer. This bimonthly magazine includes new rules, variants, new races, beasts, information on upcoming releases, scenarios and more. Ask your game retailer, or write for subscription information.

New supplements and adventures. We're always working on new material, and we'll be happy to let you know what's available. A current catalog is available for an SASE.

Errata. Everyone makes mistakes, including us — but we do our best to fix our errors. Up-to-date errata sheets for all ***GURPS*** releases, including this book, are always available from SJ Games; be sure to include an SASE with your request.

Q&A. We do our best to answer any game question accompanied by an SASE.

Gamer input. We value your comments. We will consider them, not only for new products, but also when we update this book on later printings!

BBS. For those of you who have computers, SJ Games operates a BBS with discussion areas for several games, including ***GURPS***. Much of the playtest feedback for new products comes from the BBS. It's up 24 hours a day at 512-447-4449, at 300, 1200 or 2400 baud. Give us a call!

Page References

Rules and statistics in this book are specifically for the ***GURPS Basic Set***, Third Edition. Any page reference that begins with a B refers to a page in the ***Basic Set*** — e.g., p. B102 means p. 102 of the ***Basic Set***, Third Edition.

Vikings and Norsemen

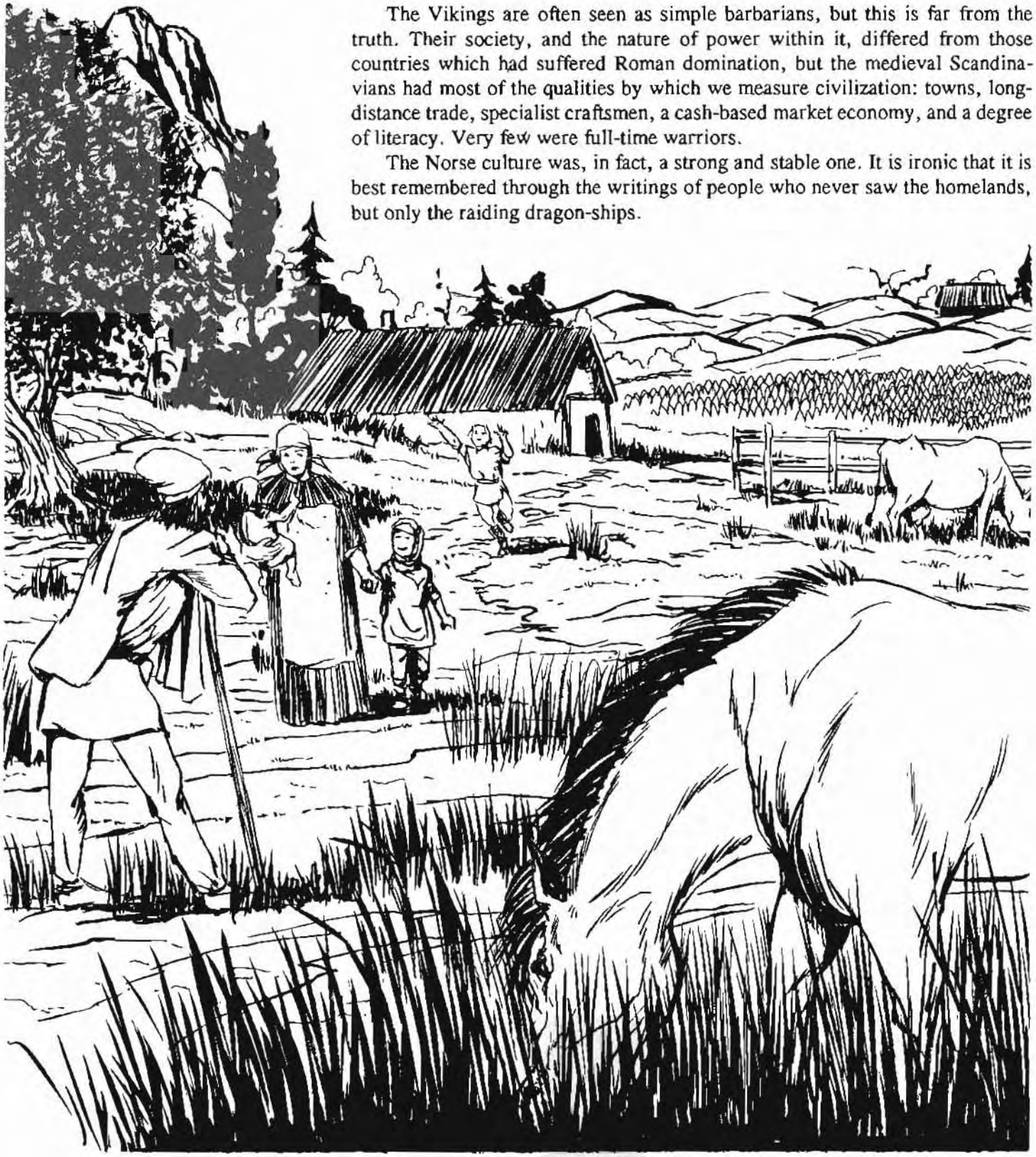
It should be pointed out from the start that the title of this worldbook perpetuates a misnomer. During the "Viking Age," the inhabitants of Scandinavia did do other things than raiding, pillaging and looting. Strictly speaking, the term "Viking" should only be applied to an early medieval Scandinavian who is involved in such pursuits. This was actually a very minor part of Norse culture, no matter what Saxon chroniclers and Hollywood moviemakers would have us believe. However, the image of the Viking raider has such power, even today, that most people apply the term to all early medieval Scandinavians.

Besides, ***GURPS Early Medieval Scandinavians*** wasn't nearly such a good title.

1 THE VIKING WORLD

The Vikings are often seen as simple barbarians, but this is far from the truth. Their society, and the nature of power within it, differed from those countries which had suffered Roman domination, but the medieval Scandinavians had most of the qualities by which we measure civilization: towns, long-distance trade, specialist craftsmen, a cash-based market economy, and a degree of literacy. Very few were full-time warriors.

The Norse culture was, in fact, a strong and stable one. It is ironic that it is best remembered through the writings of people who never saw the homelands, but only the raiding dragon-ships.



Norse Society

Norse society was not highly structured, but in many ways was a good deal more democratic than its contemporaries. To contemporary west European eyes, it must have seemed like dangerous near-anarchy.

Social Classes

There were three classes in Scandinavian society: the jarl or "earl" class, the carl or freeman class, and the thrall or serf class. The carl class was most numerous by far.

The Jarl Class

The jarl class was the nobility of Viking society, and it was from this class that the king was drawn. In many ways, the jarls were not much different from the earls and barons of Christendom — in war they formed the officer class, commanding troops drawn from the farmers, while in peacetime they saw to the smooth running of their lands. Because of the nature of power in Norse society, however, they tended not to be so autocratic as their counterparts in England, France and elsewhere.

The Carl Class

The free farmer and fisherman was the backbone of Viking society, just like the medieval yeoman of England. Tilling the fields or plying their nets in peacetime, the carls formed the rank-and-file of the Viking war machine and the crews of the feared dragon-ships. Those who found the farming life tedious could aspire to becoming *huscarls* — "house carls" — in the retinue of their jarl, acting as household servants in peace and the jarl's personal bodyguard in war.

The Thrall Class

The thrall occupied the lowest level of Viking society. Some were bond-slaves, and others were captives brought back from Britain and the Baltic, or bought in the markets of the "civilized" world. The Vikings conducted huge slave-raids among the Slavonic peoples, and some scholars believe this resulted in *sclavus* replacing *servus* in contemporary Latin as the word for a slave — ultimately finding its way into English. Killing a thrall was not a major crime; it was treated as destruction of property rather than unlawful killing.

Trades and Lifestyles

So much emphasis has been placed on the raiding and exploration of the Norsemen that other aspects of their lifestyle have been almost forgotten. The image of the raider overshadows the reality which faced most Scandinavians during this period — of making a living from the land, or the sea, or by some craft in a town.

Farmers and Fishermen

The overwhelming majority of Scandinavians during the Viking age were farmers and fishermen. They spent almost all their lives winning a living from the land and the sea, and only took up arms when commanded by their Jarl. Mainly, this was in time of war, although some Jarls had a stronger penchant for Viking adventures than others.

Townsmen

Several cities in Scandinavia boasted markets as large and services as diverse as any city in Christendom could offer. Recent archaeological excavations at Hedeby in northern Germany and York in northern England have yielded evi-

Climate

Scandinavia's weather has not changed greatly from the Viking period to the present -- it was probably a few degrees warmer and a little drier. The 12th century saw the start of a deterioration in which the climate became colder and wetter, but the change was slight. Of course, a change of a degree or two in average temperature can make a great difference in the extent of polar pack-ice, and at the northern edge of the Norse world this could decide whether a settlement lived or died.

The southernmost point of Scandinavia — the base of the Jutland peninsula — is at around 54°N, and the northernmost point — North Cape — is well inside the Arctic Circle at 71°N. On the North American continent, this corresponds to an area stretching between Edmonton, Alberta, and Point Barrow on the north edge of Alaska. However, owing to the largely coastal distribution of Viking settlements and the effects of the North Atlantic Drift — a warm current fed from the Gulf Stream — temperature variation is far less and rainfall somewhat higher. 60-70°F in summer, 20-30°F in winter and an annual rainfall of 60-70 inches is fairly typical.

The slightly warmer, drier climate may have helped the Vikings' voyages of exploration. The detail on some contemporary maps has led some scholars to suggest that the coasts of Greenland and Canada were much freer of ice than they are today. This would have made exploration and settlement in Greenland and Vinland much easier than was previously thought.

The Word "Viking"

The name *Viking* is often applied to all Scandinavian people of the "Viking Age." The word's origin and meaning have been hotly debated by scholars, and there is still no total agreement on the matter.

Some say that Viking must be a word of Scandinavian origin, since other peoples use different words for them. The Franks called them Normanin (men from the north; hence, the part of France where they settled was called Normandy), while the Germans called them Ascomanni ("ash-men," perhaps referring to the ash-trunks which they used as masts for their ships).

The Anglo-Saxons called them Dani (Danes); the vast majority of Scandinavians who visited England were from Denmark. The Irish called them Gall ("stranger") or Lochlannach ("northerner") — the latter was often qualified with "white" for Norwegians and "black" for Danes, perhaps reflecting the predominant colors of their shields, or the nature of their dealings with the Irish. The Byzantines and Arabs called them Rus — the word seems to have been borrowed from the Finns via the Slavs, as the Finnish name for Sweden was Ruotsi, perhaps meaning "the land of the oarsmen."

If "Viking" is of Nordic origin, it may have one of two derivations: from the word vig, meaning "battle," or from vik, meaning "inlet," which was also applied to fjords. Thus, it might mean "warrior," or it might mean "dweller in an inlet or bay." It was once suggested that the word originally meant people from the region of Vik, around Oslo, but the conventional term for people from this area was Vikverjar or Vestfalding and this derivation is no longer widely accepted.

An increasingly popular theory derives *viking* from an Anglo-Saxon word *wic*, which is ultimately of Latin origin, *vicus*. The Romans applied the word *vicus* to small towns and trading-posts, like those that grew up around their major forts. The Saxon word *wic* seems to have a slightly more specialized meaning, indicating a shallow-water trading port on a navigable waterway. Several English place-names have *wic* as a significant element: for example Ipswich, Norwich, and Eoforwic — the Saxon name for the city of York, which the Vikings conquered and called Jorvik.

If the *wic* theory is correct, "Viking" might mean "trader" — ironic for a name which has become synonymous with violence! Archaeology has established that the Scandinavians were great traders as well as pirates and explorers. Modern scholars agree that the historical record is biased because raids were more newsworthy than trading voyages, and tended to be mentioned in European chronicles more often.

dence of every trade and craft one would expect from a thriving medieval city. Craftsmen worked in metal, wood, bone, and leather; there were shipbuilders, cartwrights, weavers, dyers, tanners and many other crafts. Merchants traded in livestock, slaves, cloth, foodstuffs, and manufactured goods of every kind. The life of the Scandinavian townsman was a far cry from the image of the marauding pirate.

Sailors and Traders

Like most other European nations at the time, the Scandinavians did not content themselves with the home market. Goods of Scandinavian manufacture appear throughout western and central Europe, and into the Islamic world; the slave trade has left less distinct remains but documentary sources show that it was widespread and profitable. Coins from as far afield as Byzantium and Arabia have been found in treasure-hoards buried in Sweden and Denmark. Scholars are coming to the conclusion that raiding was a very occasional activity; the historical record is biased because raids were talked about far longer than peaceful trading voyages.

Social Dynamics

The Norse society functioned on more than one level, and was held together by a number of balances and compromises. To modern, non-Scandinavian eyes, it seems to be full of contradictions, but it worked most of the time.

The main balancing act was between the supremacy of the law and the freedom of the individual — something every society must deal with at some time. In Norse society, not even the king was above the law, and the law was articulated through a network of assemblies, called *Things*. These took place at various levels, from local to national, and the Althing of Iceland survives (albeit in a changed form) as the government of that island to the present day.

The idea of democratic assemblies handing down a law which bound everyone seems at first glance to be completely at odds with the image of the independent freebooter. In fact, this was the other side of the balance — there was a real need for consensus, or laws and judgements simply would not work. In theory, consensus would prevent the law being misused by would-be tyrants; in practice, lack of consensus led to problems of enforcement from time to time.

The Thing

Viking law was based upon the *Thing* (pronounced "ting.") This was the local assembly of free men, at which all disputes and legal proceedings were heard. Each district, or *herred*, had its own Thing. Denmark was divided into some 200 herreds, and Iceland had 13, split between four *herdinger* or provinces. The word herred may be derived from *haer*, meaning "army," possibly implying that this administrative unit was also used as the basis for conscription.

The law was based on a mixture of statutes and precedents, and it was the duty of the older members of the Thing to remember these and ensure that they were passed on to the next generation in an oral tradition. While a Thing could hear disputes and pass judgement, enforcement was up to the victor — in a dispute between a strong family and a weaker one, for instance, the weaker family might find it impossible to enforce a judgement in their favor.

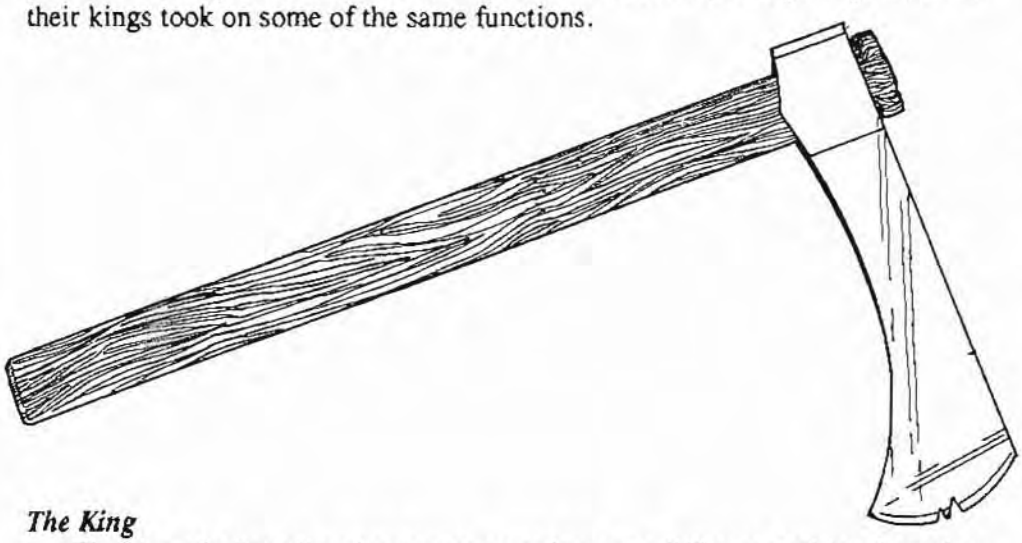
The Landthing

The *Landthing* formed the next administrative layer; each region or province held its own Landthing. This assembly made all major decisions, choosing kings, declaring wars and fixing peace terms, and debating fundamental questions of law. The Landthing also acted as a court of appeal for those who were dissatisfied with judgements given in the local things. Such appeals were not

made lightly, however, for if the Landthing found against an appellant he was automatically banished.

The Althing

In Iceland and Greenland, there was one further assembly — the *Althing*, which met for a fortnight each summer. Both these lands were sparsely settled, so the Althing helped keep society together in addition to its legal and religious functions. Norway, Sweden and Denmark did not have Althings — perhaps because their populations were too large to arrange a national assembly in this period when representative democracy was unheard of, and perhaps because their kings took on some of the same functions.



The King

The king of a Scandinavian country was in a very different position from that of his Western European counterparts. Drawn from the jarl class, he was first among equals, ruling by the consent of his peers rather than by divine right. Far from being above the law, he could not even pass laws of his own without the consent of the other jarls, and his role in legislation was mainly to ratify their decisions. Iceland and Greenland did without kings altogether.

Kinship

The extended family was of enormous importance to the Norsemen. Some proverbs count kin alongside gold, cattle and reputation as one of the truly valuable things in life.

A Norseman's kin were his refuge in times of trouble. They would side with him in a dispute, care for him if he became sick or injured, raise his children if he died, avenge him if he were murdered, and back him up in all his dealings. A man without kin — alone and far from home, or an outcast — was in a very weak position. Any man might kill him with impunity, for there were no kinsmen to avenge the murder. Because of the loose nature of Viking society and the problems of enforcing legal judgements, the family was a strong — and vital — protection for the individual.

The relationship between individual and family was two-edged. As the family supported the individual, so the individual must support the family, coming to the aid of kinsmen in need and willing to place his life on the line for his family if a feud should erupt. The honor of the family was a higher priority than the honor of the individual, and many stories feature conflicts of loyalty where family ties force an individual to turn his back on a friend, betray an ally or break an oath.

As difficult as family duties could be, none resented them, for the alternative was a life as an outcast, cut off from all support and goodwill. Even after death, ties to family were not broken. While the dead might visit Valhalla or Heaven, they also remained with their family in a very real way. The family undertook

Technology

Europe and Scandinavia during the Viking Age were Tech Level (TL) 3, although some outlying areas — like the far north — were TL2. The Skraelings (native Americans) of Vinland were TL0.

Weaponry

The Frankish and Viking longsword was the finest weapon of its day. Manufactured from bars of different grades of iron and steel using advanced techniques of pattern-welding, it had an almost perfect blend of strength, flexibility and a good edge. The longbow was the most advanced missile weapon; crossbows were unknown. Chain and scale mail were used by the wealthiest fighters.

Travel

Viking ships were capable of long island-hopping voyages, but lacked the construction and holding capacity to make a cross-ocean voyage possible; voyages to Vinland were made in stages, skirting the pack-ice from Scandinavia to Iceland to Greenland en route. Navigation seems to have been by landmarks and experience, using sun, moon and stars to establish a rough heading. Horse-drawn carts and sleds were used for land travel according to the season.

Power

The wind was used to drive ships, but muscle-power — human and animal — was used for almost all other purposes. Technologically, there is no reason why the Vikings should not have made use of wind and water mills, but they do not seem to have done so.

Medicine

Treatment of wounds seems to have been done on a fairly crude level, using hot iron to stop bleeding and infection; then it was all up to the individual patient. Some Viking burial remains show that individuals could survive quite severe wounds and live for some time afterwards. Treatment of disease was mostly in the hands of wisewomen and similar traditional practitioners.

Communications

Writing was not widespread. In the early part of the Viking Age, runes were still regarded as having magical power and their knowledge was guarded by a few. Later, as contact with literate cultures in Europe and the Mediterranean grew, writing spread into Scandinavia along with Christianity. Word of mouth was almost the only form of communication throughout the Viking world.

Social Classes

An Icelandic poem called the Rigsthula ("The Story of Rig") gives an allegorical view of Viking society. Rig (who is identified with the god Heimdal) is wandering through the countryside when he comes upon a poor cottage occupied by a ragged couple called Oldefar (great-grandfather) and Oldemor (great-grandmother). They give him what meager hospitality they can, and nine months after he leaves Oldemor bears a son, Trael (serf) — a coarse, ugly and hardworking boy. Next, she has a daughter, Tis (wench) — again, unlovely but hardworking. These two produce many children, who are given such names as Clod, Clumsy, Hunchback and Awkward, and who are given the hardest, dirtiest and most menial work.

Rig continues in his travels, and comes to a hall with its doors closed. Inside he finds a couple called Bedstefar and Bedstemor (grandfather and grandmother). Nine months after Rig leaves them, Bedstemor bears a son called Bonde (peasant) — a strong, well-favored boy, who loves his work breaking oxen, raising barns, making carts, and so on. In time, a bride appears for him, bringing a good dowry. The children of his line have names like Free, Warrior, Smith, Settler and Weaver.

Rig travels on, and comes to another hall, grander than the last. Here he finds Far and Mor (father and mother), and nine months after he leaves Mor bears a son named Jarl. He grows up into a fine youth, hunting, riding and shooting, and Rig meets him, teaches him runes, and gives him estates to look after. Jarl becomes a great warrior, and in his turn fathers a son named Kon (king), among many other children with names like Noble, Swain and Heir.

This story is probably not intended to be taken seriously as an origin-myth (these will be examined in Chapter 6), but gives a good idea of the shape of Viking society and the relative status of the three classes.

the funeral arrangements and saw to the upkeep of the grave. A failure in this duty might well lead to a visit from a vengeful ghost — something everyone wanted to avoid.

Marriage

As in many medieval societies, marriage was an area in which the family played a major role. Marriages were arranged by agreement between the families involved, and helped create friendships and alliances which helped both sides. Conflict only arose if the prospective bride or groom disagreed violently with the wishes of their family.

Although a bride went to live with her husband's family, she never effectively left her own; a man who mistreated his wife would have to deal with her outraged kinsmen.

The position of women in Scandinavian society changed during the Viking age, but generally they were better off than their western European counterparts. Inscriptions on memorial stones show that they could undertake quite large domestic projects, such as bridge-building, in their own right and using their own resources.

While women were respected, Adam of Bremen reports that the Swedes set little store by monogamous marriage; a man kept as many women as he could afford, and prided himself on the number of sons he sired.

Social Ideals

As in most societies, there was a second code of conduct, running parallel to the law. In many ways, it was more important. A man could be forgiven for breaking the law, or even for being banished, especially if his reasons were "honorable." But a man who showed himself to be lacking in character was branded for life.

This code of conduct is not to be found written down anywhere, but it can be reconstructed from the way saga-writers react to various actions and attitudes. Essentially, it breaks down into four main virtues, of variable importance: honesty, hospitality, courage, and loyalty. Cleverness and luck are also admired, although cleverness can be as much a vice as a virtue. Luck is a gift rather than a positive character trait — but none the less admirable for that!

The true Viking hero has all these virtues in abundance, in addition to being a deadly fighter, a cunning poet, an epic feaster and drinker, and sometimes a magician as well.

Honesty

A Viking's word, given under oath, was the ultimate surety. Once his word was given, he was expected to keep it to the full, even though this might cost him his life. An oath-breaker had no friends.

In practice, a lot depended on what the oath was for, and to whom it was given. Breaking one's word to an outsider — a Saxon or Frank, for instance, or to someone on the other side of a clan feud — was often all right, especially if it could be done in a witty, clever or heroic way. Breaking one's word to avoid dishonor was also permissible — if, for instance, the oath was a trick and resulted in the oath-taker being bound to do something which would bring dishonor upon himself. When breaking an oath, the main thing was to do it with style.

This was all that was expected of an honorable Viking in the way of honesty. But from time to time, a man would insist on keeping his oath no matter what it cost him. Such a man would gain great honor, and if the oath was a trick or dishonorably intended, then the dishonor would rebound on the person who took the oath, not him who gave it.

Hospitality

A Viking traveling among fellow Scandinavians would like to think that he could find food, shelter and good companionship when he needed it — for his followers as well as himself. He would entertain a guest as he would a kinsman, and expected no less in return. The stingy host is a popular butt of satirical verses, and the more spectacularly open-handed a host could be, the greater the honor his generosity bought him.

Hospitality was a two-way process, and a man of honor should be a good guest as well as a good host. Abusing hospitality was almost as unforgivable as oathbreaking.

Hospitality did not necessarily extend to outsiders, although Adam of Bremen notes that the Swedes were particularly welcoming. But then, it was an uncommonly brave Frank or Saxon who would put his house and goods at the disposal of a group of Vikings, and this lack of hospitality showed the Norsemen that their neighbors were not men of honor, and not worthy of honorable treatment.

Again, stories tell of men who stuck to the rule of hospitality despite the cost to themselves. One such story tells of a man who took in a frostbitten, exhausted traveler in the middle of winter, and nursed him back to health only to discover that the man was his enemy in a blood-feud. But having shared food and a hearth, neither man could honorably raise his hand against the other, and so the feud was forgotten until they should meet again under different circumstances.

Courage

Ferocity in battle is such a major part of the Viking legend that it seems almost fatuous to list courage among the virtues admired by the Norsemen. Certainly a coward was held in general contempt, but courage was far more than just the absence of cowardice.

There is a difference between courage and foolhardiness. It was no disgrace to withdraw from a battle that could not possibly be won, or to flee from the supernatural. Similarly, there was no credit to be gained by throwing one's life away foolishly or needlessly. A wasteful death was the death of a fool, but the death of a hero was one which made a difference. To die holding off overwhelming odds so your kinsmen could get away, or to weaken the enemy enough to give your side the advantage — that was heroic. A fool threw his life away; a hero sold his dearly.

Another aspect of courage was determination — the strength of will to see something through, no matter what may stand in the way. Once a Viking hero

The Vikings' Master

In the late tenth century, a group of Viking ships were sighted moving along the river Eure in France. A Frankish messenger hailed them and asked "What is the name of your master?" The Vikings replied "None — we are all equals!"

Self-Reliance

"When a son is born the father goes to the baby with a sword. Flinging the weapon down, he says: 'I shall leave you nothing of my property — you have only what you may provide with this blade!' "

— Ibn Rustah, 10th century AD

Viking Hospitality

"All northern people are noted for their hospitality, but the Swedes excel. They consider it shameful to deny a welcome to a traveler, and vie with each other for the honor of entertaining a stranger."

— Adam of Bremen

"They stand by each other, they do honor to their guests and they are hospitable to strangers and all who visit them. They allow no one to disturb or molest their guests, and if anyone dares injure or insult a guest they will help and defend him."

— Ibn Rustah

A Stingy Host

"He welcomes me as a guest only if I need nothing to eat, or if two hams still hang from his rafters after I have eaten one."

— the Havamal, satirizing poor hospitality.

A Good Man

"Tonne raised this stone over her husband Bram, along with his son Asgt. He was best among the landowners and the most generous in food."

— Memorial stone, Svestad, Skine, Sweden.

Swedish Women

"It is only for women that (the Swedes) show no moderation; every man, each according to his means, has two, three, or more wives at a time; the wealthy and the noble have numerous wives. The sons of all these unions are accepted as legitimate. The death penalty, however, is invoked if one has intercourse with a neighbor's wife, or rapes a virgin."

— Adam of Bremen

Viking Proverbs

Before going into a hall, look at all the doorways. You never know where you might find an enemy.

A man can carry no better load than too much good sense — and no worse than too much drink.

Praise not the day until evening has come;
Praise not a woman until she is burnt (i.e., until her funeral);
Praise not a sword until it is tried;
Praise not a maiden until she is married;
Praise not ice until it is crossed;
Praise not beer until it is drunk.

A man of note should be quiet, thoughtful, and brave in battle; everyone should keep happy and cheerful until the end.

Be a friend to your friends. Meet a gift with a gift, a smile with a smile, and a lie with a pretense of not noticing.

A man without a friend is like a naked fir tree, without bark or foliage, lonely on a barren hill.

The good of life is in life itself. Make sure you enjoy it and leave a good name behind you. The best thing is to be alive and happy.

A coward thinks he will live forever if he avoids his enemies, but no man escapes old age, even if he survives the spears.

A visitor must leave in time, and not outstay his welcome; even a friend becomes annoying if he stays too long.

Never move an inch from your weapons when out in the fields; you never know when you will need your spear.

Be a friend to your friend, and to his friend as well; but no man should be a friend to his enemy's friend.

A man should be wise in moderation, but never too wise. A man's mind is freer of care if he doesn't know his fate in advance.

A lame man can ride a horse, a man without hands can still herd sheep, and a deaf man can still kill; it is better to be blind than burned on a funeral-pyre. The dead can do nothing at all.

Cattle die, kinsfolk die, we all die. But one thing, I know, lives for ever — a dead man's reputation.

has decided on a course of action, nothing will stop him. To make a decision is to give one's word to oneself, and a man who is driven by a little hardship to break such a word as that is a man of very little honor.

Loyalty

Loyalty governed the relationship between the individual and the group. A man's loyalty belonged to his family, his jarl and his king (or Althing), in that order. This order of priority could be altered by oaths of personal loyalty — for example, a huscarl would swear personal loyalty to his jarl, who would thereafter command his first duty.

It was the duty of a follower to do whatever his jarl commanded (including dying), and to place his jarl's best interests above all things. The jarl, for his part, had a duty to his followers, and in many ways his was the more difficult role. He must behave well, and be a fit leader for men to follow. He must lead his men well, asking nothing that might divide their loyalties or risk their personal honor. He must treat them well, so that they were happy in his service and did not cast covetous eyes on other jarls and their retinues. Above all, he must be generous with both praise and gifts. In all the sagas, the highest compliment for a leader is to call him open-handed; gifts are often listed in great detail, so that readers might wonder at a jarl's generosity and long to have served such a leader.

Cleverness

This is the least straightforward of the Viking virtues, and the hardest to define. The best example is that of a jarl named Hastein, who led part of an expedition into the Mediterranean in the latter half of the 9th century. It is said that he and his men were looking for Rome, and coming to a city on the coast (Luna, halfway between Pisa and Genoa), they mistook it for their goal. Hastein looked at the defenses, and concluded that they were too strong for his force to besiege. Therefore, he came up with a cunning ruse.

The Vikings sent messengers to the town. Their leader was a Christian, they explained, and had recently died at sea. His last wish was to be given a Christian burial. Such an appeal to Christian charity could not be ignored, and the city gates were opened. Hastein's coffin was brought in, accompanied by his sorrowing troops. As it was set down in the cemetery, the lid flew open and out leaped Hastein, alive and well and fully armed. The rest was butchery.

This is a classic example of Viking cleverness. First and foremost, the deed makes a good story, that men will remember and repeat. Secondly, Hastein was considerably less than honorable — lying and abusing hospitality to make a fight easier — but the fact that his victims were non-Vikings made all the difference. The cleverness of his plan made up for any dishonor. However, things might have been different if he had tried such a trick with Scandinavians. The line between cleverness and cowardice or underhandedness is thin and ill-defined, and a reputation for cleverness can swiftly become notoriety as a liar, cheat and coward. Being clever is a risky business.

Luck

A man could be the epitome of honorable behavior — loyal to jarl and family, even of temper, moderate of speech, honest and just in all his dealings, given to princely generosity towards followers and guests, fearless and hardworking — but still not be a great man. What made the difference was luck.

Luck was a component of honor because its force could not be denied. A man might be born rich and lose everything, but a man who was born lucky would never go hungry. Whether it was explained as divine favor or accepted as happy chance, luck was as valuable as honesty, courage or generosity — its owner was someone to be reckoned with, and a good man to follow.

Viking Law

The Legal System

Norse law developed and grew in complexity throughout the Viking age. As the great trading ports grew and trade extended, so laws were required to regulate it; as Scandinavia became Christian, other laws were required. As the centuries progressed the laws began to be codified in written form, and some of these written sources survive to this day. Eventually, they became little different from the laws of neighboring nations, just as the people gradually became another part of medieval Europe.

Conducting a Dispute

Many disputes never came before the Thing. It was far more common for the two families to meet and hammer out a solution between themselves. Compensation was negotiated, at a level which did not insult either side; both sides would often take oath that, were the positions reversed, they would still find the agreed sum just and equitable. It was also possible to honor an adversary — or shame him into giving you good terms — by meeting him politely and inviting him to decide for himself what would be just compensation for the wrongs he had done you. A man who was niggardly under these circumstances would lose much honor, but he could gain much by making a generous settlement.

To put a dispute before the Thing was an admission of failure — no one wanted to parade their business before the whole of the community. Besides, the process took time, there was no guarantee of winning — and if the other side was bent on being difficult there could be problems enforcing the judgement.

At the Thing, both parties put their cases, introducing witnesses to support them (another reason why family loyalty was important!), and then judgement was given according to the law. The law was not written down until quite late in the Viking age, but was handed down in an oral tradition by the "law-speakers" who presided over the Thing.

Once the Thing had delivered judgement, the problem of enforcement remained. This was the responsibility of the victor, and if judgement was given in favor of a weak family against a strong one, problems could arise.

Anyone who was not satisfied with the judgement of a Thing had the right to appeal his case to the Landthing of his province. This was not to be done lightly, though! If the Landthing turned down his appeal he was automatically banished — and banishment was the worst punishment a Norseman could face.

For details of the legal system and how to game a dispute, see p. 119.

Penalties

Most disputes were settled by monetary compensation; the precise amount was agreed between the parties to the dispute, based upon the extent of the wrong, the status of the wronged party and various established practices. Each individual had a *mannbaetr* — "man-worth," the equivalent of the Saxon wer-

Open-Handedness

"I praise the King all through his lands, And freely sing of his open hands. So free his hand with golden spoil, Vise-like its grip on his own soil.

"Arm-rings of gold he'll cut in two, And uncontrolled heap gifts on you. The generous King loads you with treasure, And everything made for your pleasure.

— From a panegyric made by Egil Skallagrimsson to King Eric Bloodaxe

Slander

"If a slanderer is killed, it is well — a crime by words is the worst kind. The tongue killed first, now it is repaid."

— Norse saying

Disputes

"If a group of them is challenged, they band together as one man until they secure victory. If two men quarrel, their dispute is heard by their prince (i.e., Jarl). They both put their case to him, and if they agree to his decision the matter is settled — if not, he tells them to decide the matter with their swords, and may the sharpest blade win! The fight takes place before the combatants' friends who stand around with swords drawn, and the man who wins the fight also wins the case."

— Ibn Rustah, 10th century AD

gild — which reflected his standing. Causing someone's death (or, strangely, the loss of his nose) carried a fine equal to the full amount; loss of one eye was punishable by half the mannbaetr, loss of one ear by one-quarter, and so on.

Criminal offenses were few, and most cases were fought between a defendant and plaintiff — Norse law did not have any equivalent to a public or state prosecutor.

Certain crimes carried a mandatory death penalty. These included adultery — although a woman convicted of this crime could be sold into slavery — treason, and theft. The last was not because of any high moral stance, but because it was assumed that a man reduced to stealing would be too poor to afford a fine, and had only his life with which to pay for his crime.

More feared than death, in many ways, was banishment. In its original form, to be banished was to be cast out from society, from kin, and from the protection of the law. A banished man had no protection whatsoever, and anyone could do what they liked to him with complete impunity. Often the only way to survive banishment was to flee the country.

Duels

The sagas contain many stories of duels being fought to settle disputes, but in reality this was rare. Complex cases might be resolved by a duel or by *jernbyrd* — ordeal by hot iron — but these were a last resort, an admission that all other means had failed, and that the only way to resolve the case was to appeal to the gods or to trust that might was right. Judicial duels, or *holmgang*, were fought under elaborate traditional rules, but that did not stop the duel being misused by strong and malevolent individuals. Traditionally, the winner of a duel acquired all the loser's goods, and some saw this as an easy road to wealth.

The duel does seem to have been a standard means of resolving slander cases — something which must have made life easier for these professional duellists. If either party failed to appear at the appointed time and place — a place where three roads joined was a favorite — the judgement went against them. If the plaintiff was absent, he was judged a coward, and henceforth disbarred from taking oath and bearing witness. His word became worthless, a grave matter to a Viking. This was yet another lever that an ill-intentioned duellist might use to force a victim to face him.

Feuds

Like duels, feuds seem to have been more common in story than in fact, for to declare a feud is to admit that every other avenue has failed. A feud is simply an all-out war between two families, using any and all means on both sides of the law. Sometimes allied families could get sucked into a feud, and whole districts could be plunged into bloodshed.

Most feuds seem to have taken the form of an endless series of reprisals. For example, Bjarni Tryggvarsson kills Erik Mortensen. It might have been an accident, a drunken brawl, self-defense or cold-blooded murder — each side has its own story. The Mortensens demand compensation for Erik's death, but the Tryggvarssons refuse. The matter is taken to the Thing, but the Mortensens are still unable to get the compensation they feel they are due. Or perhaps one of Erik's brothers is a little hot-headed and takes matters into his own hands. Either way, one of the Mortensens kills Bjarni. Then Bjarni's brothers get together and kill one of the Mortensens — preferably Bjarni's killer, but by now, no one is too particular. And so it goes on — a death for a death, and violence erupting whenever members of either family chance to meet.

Duels may not be the ideal way of deciding disputes, but many members of the local Thing might feel that two men fighting once and for all is better than a feud lasting for generations.

A Duel

"I'll tell you our problem, Egil," said Gyda. "There's a man called Ljot, a berserker and duellist — everyone hates him. He demanded to marry my daughter, but we refused. Now, he's challenged my son Fridgeir to a duel, to be held tomorrow on the island of Valdero. I'd like you to go with him, Egil. I know that if my brother Arinbjorn were in Norway we wouldn't have to suffer men like Ljot."

"Lady," said Egil, "For Arinbjorn's sake I'm duty-bound to go with your son, if he thinks I can help."

The next day, Fridgeir and his friends — including Egil — went to Valdero. Not far from the sea was a pleasant meadow, where the duelling-ring was marked out with stones. Ljot was a huge, strong-looking man, and carried sword and shield — as he approached the field the berserk fit came upon him, and he started howling horribly and biting his shield. Fridgeir wasn't very big. He was good-looking, but slender and not very strong. He had never fought a battle in his life.

When Egil saw Ljot, he made this verse:

"Fridgeir has no chance, so, friends, let us fight,
To save the young girl from this mad shield-biter,
This violent, valkyrie-maddened, shield-eating villain;
The glaring berserker goes to his own death."

"You, big man," said Ljot, "come into the ring and fight me, if you're that keen. It'll be a better match than fighting Fridgeir; I wouldn't think better of myself just for flattening that one."

Ljot entered the duelling-area, and the two men charged each other. Ljot parried Egil's blow with his shield, but Egil pressed him with stroke upon stroke — so hard that Ljot couldn't hit back and had to give ground to make fighting-room for himself. But Egil stayed close, and chased Ljot all over the field and outside the marker-stones, and that was how the first bout ended.

In those days, it was a rule of duelling that if the challenger won he got everything that was at stake, but if he lost he had to make good the same value and if he died his killer got all his property. It was also the law that if a foreigner died without an heir in the country, all his estate went to the King.

Continued on next page . . .

Geography

The world of the Vikings stretched from Newfoundland in the west to Turkey in the east, from the Arctic pack-ice in the north to the Mediterranean in the south. At its heart lay the Scandinavian peninsula and the surrounding lands — the four homelands of Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Iceland.

Scandinavia

The Scandinavian peninsula consists of a mountain chain around 1,000 miles long, rising out of the sea between the Atlantic and the Baltic. Rotated about its southernmost point, it would reach almost to the Mediterranean coast of North Africa.

The border between Norway and Sweden runs roughly SSW-NNE along the top of the mountain range. Norway, in the west, is mostly rocky and inhospitable, with high mountains dropping almost vertically away to deep, steep-sided fjords all along the Atlantic coast. Only in the southern half of the country is extensive settlement feasible, and even there life was often hard — especially in winter.

Sweden, in the east, slopes more gently from west to east, and has more cultivable land. The most hospitable part is the southern region of Gõtland, where the ground is fairly even and there are many lakes left by the retreating glaciers of the last Ice Age. Sweden's Baltic coast is sheltered and hospitable compared to Norway's rugged Atlantic seaboard.

Denmark

Geographically speaking, Denmark belongs to the flat alluvial lands of Holland and north Germany rather than the mountainous Scandinavian peninsula. There is nowhere in the whole country over 600 feet above sea level, and the coast consists mainly of sandbars and small, low-lying islands.

Denmark consists of the Jutland peninsula, which separates the North Sea from the Baltic, and an enormous number of islands around it. Soils are sandy and thin, but many islands have better farming than Jutland. Although low-lying, Denmark is less prone to flooding and salt-logging than neighbouring Holland.

Iceland

The Vikings discovered and colonized Iceland fairly early in their travels, and it effectively became a fourth homeland.

Sitting across the Mid-Atlantic ridge where two of the Earth's great tectonic plates are pulling apart from each other, Iceland has many active volcanoes, geysers and hot springs. There are many offshore islands, most of them resulting from underwater eruptions — one of the most recent is Surtsey ("Surt's Isle," named after the mythical king of the Fire Giants) which emerged from the waters in the mid-1960s.

Iceland's fishing is exceptionally rich, and there are many places around the south coast where farming is possible. The summer climate is surprisingly warm for an island whose north edge clips the Arctic Circle, but in winter it can be as bleak as anywhere in Scandinavia.

The Wider World

Pushing westward from Iceland, the Vikings founded settlements around the coast of Greenland and went on to a more hospitable land which they called Vinland — gaining credit for the discovery of America several centuries before Columbus. Their travels along Europe's Atlantic seaboard brought them to Scotland (the Earl of Orkney was a Norwegian for most of the Middle Ages), Ireland, England (at one time ruling half the country as the Danelaw), France (Normandy

A Duel (Continued)

Egil told Ljot to get ready. "I want to settle this duel," he said. Then he ran up and struck Ljot, pressing him so hard that Ljot was forced to back off and his shield was no use to him. Then Egil hit Ljot just above the knee, cutting off his leg; Ljot fell down and died.

Few mourned Ljot's death, as he had been a great troublemaker. He was of Swedish descent, with no family in Norway. He had come there to make money from duelling, and had killed many good farmers by challenging them to duels for their farms and lands — in this way he had become very wealthy, both in land and in movable goods.

— from Egil's Saga

A Bloodless Duel: The Riddle-Game

Norsemen might also challenge one another to a contest of wits: the riddle-game. A riddle might be something like a modern riddle: "I saw a chicken that had no bone," for instance. (The answer of course, is "Egg.")

A riddle might also be a kenning (see p. 70). Skalds might compete to remember obscure kennings, or create new ones. Obviously, knowledge of the sagas would be valauble here.

Or the game could be a simple exchange of questions. Priests or skalds might quiz each other about the secrets of the universe, as Odin did when he played the riddle-game with the Giant king, Vafthrudnir. But travelers might exchange questions about far places, or craftsmen might exchange questions about their craft.

Depending on the terms set by the contestants, each person might have one guess at each riddle, or three, or even seven.

A riddle-game could be represented by Contests of Skill in Skaldic Lore (or other appropriate skill). But it would be more interesting to let the players guess!

The loser of the riddle-game must pay a forfeit. This might be something as simple as draining the mead-horn, or it might be a sum of money. In an extreme case, the loser might leave the country . . . playing at riddles, like a dare-game (p. 63), would be a way to settle a serious dispute with a relative, without the stigma of kinslaying. When Odin and Vafthrudnir played, the loser forfeit his life, but mortals wouldn't be likely to play for such stakes.

WESTERN SETTLEMENT
hides
walrus ivory
woolens furs
cables falcons
steatite
Brattahlid
EASTERN SETTLEMENT
timber
narwhal tusks
L'Anse aux Meadows
furs
tallow fats
fish woolens
ICELAND
Faeroes
Shetlands
Orkneys
Dublin
Limerick
Waterford
woolens
honey tin
wheat
London
York
Hedeby
Koupang
Birka
timber
hides
antlers
steatite
furs
falcons walrus ivory
feathers furs
walrus ivory
fish
furs
slaves
furs
Staraja Ladoga
Novgorod
Bulgar
Tashkent
Samarkand
Bokhara
Chorezm
slaves
furs
honey waxes
Gnezdovo
Volga R.
silver
Itil
Kiev
Grobin
amber
Wiskiauten
Truso
Wollin
Hamburg
Dorestad
slaves
Quentowic
Rhine R.
jewelry
wine
swordblades
querns tones
cloth glass
pottery
Noirmoutier
salt
wine
Berezany
Gurgan
Danube R.
Byzantium
brocade wine
fruit silk jewelry
spices
Baghdad
silk
silver
spices
Jerusalem
Alexandria
the viking world
0
500
Sea Routes
Inland Routes

is named after them) and the Mediterranean. Swedes travelled deep into Central Europe along the Baltic rivers, and Russia derives its name from the Rus, as they were called. They traded with Byzantines and Arabs, and the Byzantine Emperor's Varangian Guard was originally recruited from among them.

Viking Settlements

Although great trading cities grew up during the course of the Viking Age, most Scandinavians lived on fairly isolated farmsteads, and saw few people other than their kinsmen and near neighbors. A visit to the local market or Thing was a great occasion, and a time to renew old friendships.

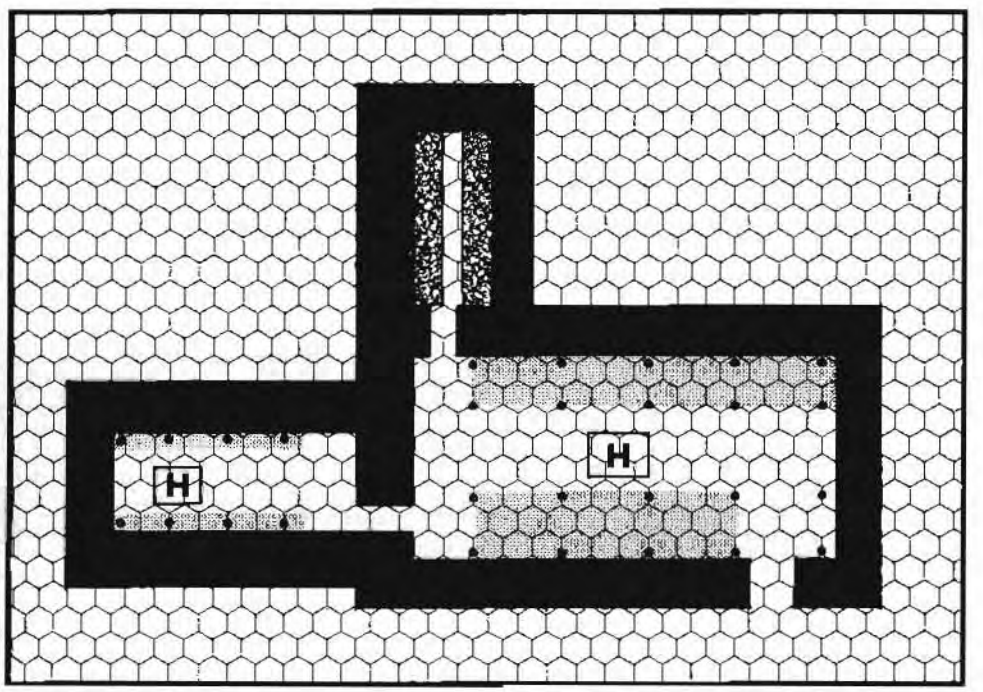
Farmsteads

The shape of a farmstead, and the construction of its buildings, depended mainly on the local landscape and the materials it offered. In forested areas, houses would be built of timber, while in bleaker, treeless regions materials such as stone, clay and turf would be used.

Houses were mainly rectangular, with the length between two and three times the width. The long sides, especially in the larger buildings, were often bowed outwards. In larger buildings, the roof would be supported by two rows of log posts; the area between the posts and the walls was sometimes raised, and used for sitting and sleeping. In some of the older farmsteads the animals overwintered in the house along with the farmers. Each room was built as a separate building (see diagram below). Many houses were simply one huge room.

A typical farmstead would consist of a farmhouse large enough to accommodate the whole family, one or more pens for the livestock, and perhaps a barn for storing crops, although crops could also be stored in the farmhouse.

Livestock depended on the country; many areas could only support pigs, sheep and goats, but cattle were kept wherever there was sufficient pasture. Oxen were used for plowing and pulling carts more than horses. In many areas the younger members of the family would take the livestock up to a *saetr* or upland pasture in summer, living in a temporary hut as the animals made the most of the lush but short-lived mountain greenery. In addition to these animals, dogs and cats were also domesticated. Rye, oats and barley were the main crops.



Feuding

"It is an evil custom of long standing in this land that, when a man is killed, his kin attack whichever of the slayer's kin is thought to be the best man — even though he may have had no part in the original killing, or may have opposed it — and they will not take vengeance on the actual killer, however easy it may be to do so."

— *Old Norwegian law-code*

A Law-Court

"The place where the court was held was a level field, and hazel poles were set up in a circle in the field, with ropes running around the outside of all of them; these were called 'the bonds of the sanctuary.' Within the circle sat the judges: twelve from Firdaflyki, twelve from Sygnafylki and twelve from Hordafylki, and these three dozen men were to pass judgement there on men's lawsuits."

— *from Egil's Saga*

A Viking Longhouse

The diagram shows the floor plan of a typical Viking longhouse. The outer walls (black) are turf on a stone foundation, more than 4 feet thick. Where lumber was available and winters were not so cold, the walls would be of normal wooden construction.

The two largest rooms have high ceilings, held up by heavy wooden pillars (black dots). Each room has its own hearth (H).

The gray shading shows high benches, built up from earth. Those in the larger room are wide, good for sleeping. Those in the middle-sized room are narrower, for sitting and working.

The smallest room is the bathroom. The stone shading indicates a gravel drain along each side of the room.

More rooms would be added as the family grew in size and prosperity. The smithy would be a separate building, in case of fire. The livestock might have their own building, or just their own room.

Scale: 1 hex = 3 feet.

Ellesmere Island
Spitzbergen
North Cape
Smith Sound
Thule
Melville Bay
GREENLAND
Baffin Island
Kingigtorssuaq
Jan Mayen
NORWAY
SWEDEN
Nidaros
Bergen
Stad
Hudson Bay
Disco
Scoresby Sound
Angmagssalik
Davis Strait
Holsteinsborg
Western Settlement
Cumberland Sound
Frobisher Bay
Snaefellsnes
ICELAND
FAEROES
SHETLANDS
DENMARK
ORKNEYS
Resolution Island
Eastern Settlement
Reykjanes
Scotland
ENGLAND
Wales
IRELAND
Eiriksfjord
Cape Farewell
LABRADOR
Nain
Hamilton Inlet
Lake Melville
Cape Porcupine
Sandwich Bay
Strait of Belle Isle
Cape Baud
White Bay
Gulf of St. Lawrence
Nova Scotia
Newfoundland
the western voyages
0
500

Farmsteads by the sea supplemented their diet by fishing, and washed-up kelp was an important part of cattle feed in these areas. Farmers also hunted and trapped for both fur and meat.

Cities

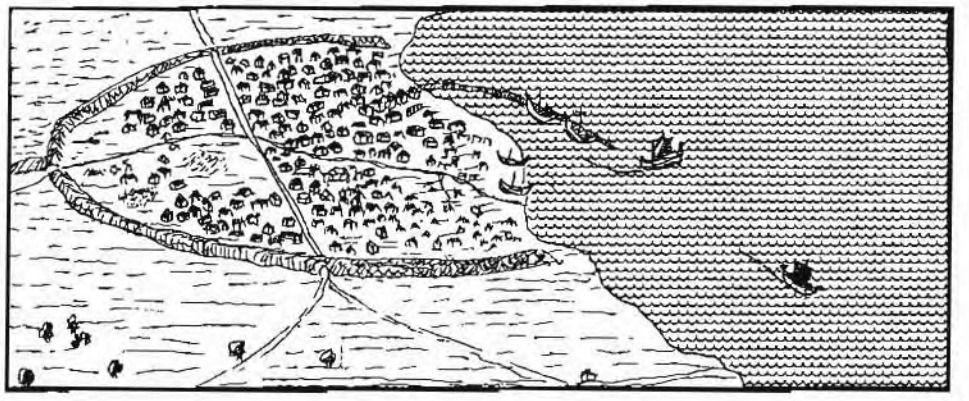
Many modern cities lie upon the remains of Viking settlements. York and Dublin were Viking capitals, although their history goes back further. The Norse towns of Hedeby, near Schleswig at the base of Jutland, and Birka, on an island in Lake Malar in eastern Sweden, ceased to be occupied after the Viking age, so that their whole structure is visible to archaeologists.

Hedeby

The town lay at the head of a narrow but navigable inlet; a semi-circular earth rampart surrounds it on three sides, with the inlet on the fourth. The town itself took up some 60 acres, making it the largest Viking town yet discovered.

The town was crowded with rectangular wooden houses. The details of their construction varied; some were stave-built of vertical boards, some were timber framed with wattle-and-daub covering walls of hurdlework, and some were log huts, with clay caulking to seal gaps and keep out drafts. Like most Viking houses, the main doorway was in one of the narrow ends, which faced onto the earth streets. The hearth was in the center of the one-room building, and outbuildings — barns, stables and the like — were to the rear.

Evidence of various crafts has been found in Hedeby: ironworking, glass-making, pottery and many more. The town even had its own mint. Very few farming implements were found, reinforcing the historical impression that the town throve mainly on trade and industry. Animal bones found in the town show a wide range of livestock: pork and beef were the most popular meats, with some mutton and goat but very little horse and poultry. Game, such as rabbit, pheasant and grouse, doesn't seem to have been eaten at all. A wooden palisade was driven into the floor of the inlet, apparently as a harbor defense; also found on the floor of the inlet was the wreck of a ship containing the skeleton of a man who apparently died violently. Pirates and raiders were an ever-present threat to a wealthy port, and so were the covetous eyes of kings; Hedeby ceased to exist around 1050, when it was plundered and burnt by King Harald Hardrada of Norway, to spite his rival King Swein Estridsson of Denmark.



The Norse trading town of Hedeby in the 10th century. (After Jones, *A History of the Vikings*.)

More Viking Proverbs

Better to be a free bird than a captive king.

Misfortune visits the rich, but it visits the poor twice.

When the sausage is too long, the cure is easy.

Everything has an end, except sausages, which have two.

Crumbs are still bread.

Ambition and revenge are always hungry.

When the sea is calm, each ship has a good captain.

A Dane's promise is a Dane's debt.

Poverty does not force one to steal, nor wealth keep one from it.

The house of the mocker frequently burns down.

In an agreement, be sure one doesn't have the sword and the other the sheath.

When eating cherries with the great, one risks getting hit in the nose by the pits.

Closer to the king, closer to the gallows.

Two can lie until a third hangs.

The land is ruled by the mouth, but the sea is ruled by the hand.

Where the law fails, honor must make good.

Birka

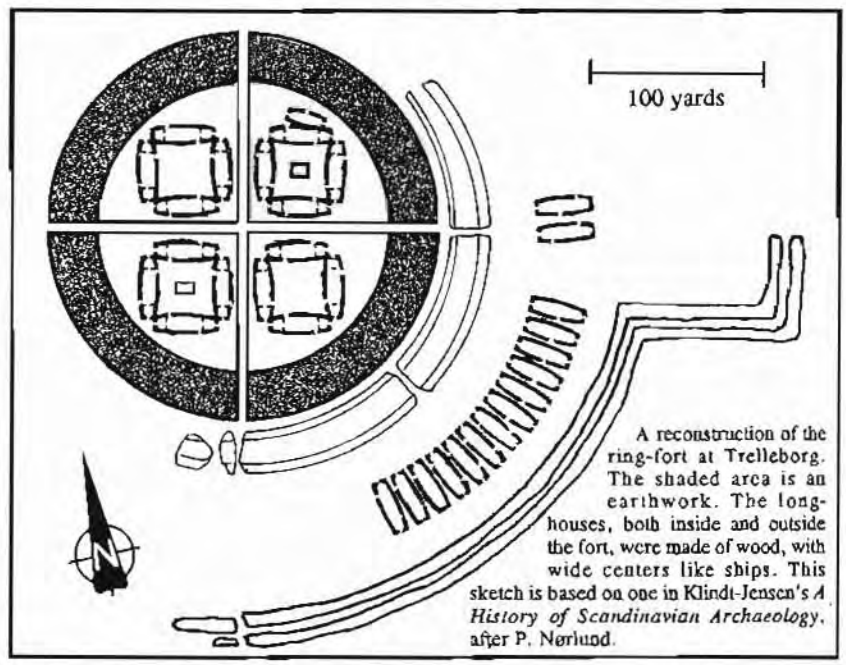
Smaller than Hedeby, Birka was one of the gateways to the interior of Sweden. It stood on an island in Lake Malar, in eastern Sweden, and was reached by river from the Baltic. As well as Swedes and other Scandinavians, it is known that many other nationalities came to trade here: Frisians from what is now Holland, Anglo-Saxons from England, Franks, Germans, Balts from across the Baltic Sea, Greeks and Arabs.

Birka's main trade was in furs, for which all of Scandinavia was famous, as well as luxuries like amber, walrus ivory and reindeer antler. Unlike Hedeby, no clear building remains have survived, but it seems that houses were mainly of two types: one built of wattle-and-daub, and the other built of timber sealed with clay.

The town occupied 30 acres, about half the size of Hedeby. South of the town, on a rocky promontory, was a citadel surrounded by an earth and stone rampart, where a defensive garrison was quartered and which could be used as a place of refuge if the town were attacked. Birka had three harbors: two on the northern shores of the island, and a third — man-made and now gone — in the west.

The busiest season seems to have been the winter — the height of the fur trade — and many citizens of Birka were buried with bone ice-skates.

Birka's end was not as dramatic as that of Hedeby; it just seems to have faded away. There are no archaeological finds later than around 975, and the town drops out of history about the same time. Some scholars believe that the town was ruined when Danish forces set out to conquer Sweden at the end of the tenth century, either by direct enemy action or by disruption to trade.



A reconstruction of the ring-fort at Trelleborg. The shaded area is an earthwork. The longhouses, both inside and outside the fort, were made of wood, with wide centers like ships. This sketch is based on one in Klindt-Jensen's *A History of Scandinavian Archaeology*, after P. Nørlund.

Ring-Forts

One further class of settlement site deserves special mention, although it has proved to be something of an enigma. This is the ring-fort — a carefully laid-out circular ramparted enclosure, containing four-square groups of longhouses laid out with geometrical precision. Four of these sites have been found in Denmark, at Trelleborg, Fyrkat, Aggersborg and Odense. They were originally thought to have been military camps, because of their strong ramparts and the regularity of their layout, but the burial-grounds at Trelleborg and Fyrkat contain remains of all ages and both sexes, indicating a much more mixed population than would be expected from a military site. They remain a mystery — perhaps they were an attempt to establish some ruler's idea of a model town.

2 CHARACTERS

Character design depends very much on the campaign. For a cinematic campaign about raid and plunder, players will want larger-than-life characters who live up to all the excesses of Hollywood, Saxon chronicles and the wilder myths and sagas. A base of 150 or even 200 points would be reasonable here, especially if the PCs will be fighting trolls and wizards as well as hordes of Irish warriors.

For historical campaigns, Norse characters may be built on the standard 100-point base, with a general limit of 40 points of disadvantages and 5 points of quirks.

In any campaign, Viking Code of Honor (pp. 8, 26) should be taken as a disadvantage by almost every male character and any female of good family. This does *not* count towards the 40-point disadvantage limit. Men who do not take Viking Code of Honor automatically take Social Stigma (at -10 points), as they are known to be lacking in honor.

Appearance

Not all Norsemen of the Viking age were corn-blond, blue-eyed, muscular giants, but most of them *were* fair-complexioned. The Scandinavian cultures were cosmopolitan. If a player wants a different physical appearance, just assume that one of his ancestors was a visitor or captive.

Height and Weight

Although Viking raiders must have seemed huge and terrifying to their Saxon and Frankish victims, they were around the same size as the average rural European — from Viking-age burials in Scandinavia, 5'8" is the average height for men, with women 2-3 inches shorter. Town-dwellers in Europe might be up to 6" shorter than country-dwellers, owing to dietary factors, and this may also have been the case in Viking towns, although the archaeological evidence has not been thoroughly analyzed. Swedes seem to have been taller than Danes and Norwegians by an inch or so; Arabian merchants marveled at the height of the Rus they encountered, and this impression is borne out by the few reliable burial remains from Sweden.

Actual scientific evidence, based on Viking burial remains and modern-day Scandinavians, is rare, but the tables in the ***Basic Set*** will produce convincing results with the following modifiers.

For town-dwellers, apply the normal -3" height modifier for pre-19th-century characters.

For other Norse folk, modify height by only -1". Rural people generally got more protein in their diet.

Hair Color

Men wore their hair to shoulder length, and women's hair often reached to the waist. Most Scandinavians had hair ranging in color from mid-brown to white-blond, with red hair not uncommon. Dark hair was rare, and regarded as ugly, unlucky and the mark of a bad character. A dark-haired person will always be considered unattractive (or worse!) Skallagrim Kveldulfsson, the father of the great warrior-poet Egil Skallagrimsson, was described as "a dark and ugly man," and Egil himself was "very ugly, like his father, and black-haired."

All men wore beards. Some appear from carvings and portraits to have been kept neatly trimmed, while others were longer — nicknames like Forkbeard imply that the beard must have been of some length for the fork to be apparent.

For random generation, roll 3 dice and consult the following table:

Die roll	*Hair Color*
3	black or dark brown
4-5	mid-brown
6-8	light brown
9-11	sandy
12-13	red
14-15	corn-blond
16-17	light blond
18	white

At age 40, gray will begin to mix with any color. As a rule of thumb, the darker the hair color, the earlier it turns gray. Characters with Albinism automatically have white hair.

Eye Color

Eye color is largely related to hair color. Most Scandinavians will have blue eyes, although some — especially those with darker hair colors — may have gray, amber or light brown eyes. Finns are famous for their green eyes. Albinos, of course, will always have pink eyes.

Beauty and Ugliness

The Norse were very conscious of physical appearance. Size and health were valued. Age was respected for wisdom, but the ideal warrior was big, strong and young enough to fight well. Honorable scars were not considered unattractive, but disfigurements were pitied. In particular, loss of a man's nose was considered to destroy his beauty. Nobles were expected to be attractive, while low-status folk were expected to be ugly.

Norse Names for Men

Aki	Asgeir	Bolli	Fid	Grim	Halldor	Holmstein
Aldis	Atli	Bork	Fridgeir	Grimolf	Halli	Hord
Alf	Audbjorn	Bragi	Frodi	Gris	Hallstein	Hoskuld
Alfgeir	Audun	Brand	Geir	Grjotgard	Hallvard	Hrafn
Ani	Bard	Brynjolf	Geitir	Grunbjorn	Harald	Hrapp
Ari	Bardi	Egil	Gellir	Gudmund	Harek	Hrifla
Arinbjorn	Baug	Eid	Gest	Gunnar	Hastein	Hroald
Armod	Beiner	Einar	Giermund	Gunnlaug	Hegg	Hroerek
Arnald	Bersi	Eirik	Gilli	Guttorm	Helgi	Hrollaug
Arnbjorn	Bjalfi	Eldgrim	Gizor	Hadd	Herjolf	Hromund
Arnfid	Bjarni	Erlend	Glum	Hakon	Herlaug	Hrut
Arngeir	Bjorg	Erling	Gorm	Halfdan ("half-Dane")	Herstein	Hunbogi
Arnvid	Bjorgolf	Eyjolf	Grani	Hall	Hildir	Hundi
Asbjorn	Bjorn	Eyvind	Greilad	Hallbjorn	Hjorleif	Hunthjof
Asgaut	Bodvar	Faravid	Grettir	Hallbjorn	Hogni	Illugi

Some lines from the *Rigsthula* show the Norse attitude toward appearance, as the lowly Thrall and Drudge are contrasted to the noble young Jarl:

"The skin on (Thrall's) hands was wrinkled, his knuckles were swollen, his nails short, his face ugly, his fingers coarse, his back bent, his heels long . . . (his sister Drudge's) legs were crooked, her feet dirty, her arms sunburnt, her nose pendulous."

"Blond was (Jarl's) hair, his cheeks bright, his eyes piercing as a young serpent's."

Clothing

Male Viking dress normally consisted of a pair of woolen or linen breeches, sometimes with feet, a knee-length woolen tunic or coat, belted at the waist, a cloak of wool or fur, and leather shoes or ankle-boots. Round or pointed caps of leather or heavy cloth were also worn, echoing the shape of the Viking helmet.

Scandinavian women wore a sleeveless floor-length dress, secured at the breast by a pair of brooches. Over the dress was worn a cape which also reached to the floor. Leather shoes were worn by those who could afford them.

The wealthy wore elaborately-decorated clothes, sometimes worked with gold thread. They could also afford the luxury of softer undershirts and chemises to keep the wool of their outer garments away from their skin. Silk ribbons were found in several graves at Birka — this material must have been imported from the east, probably via Arab trading contacts. These silk ribbons, often richly worked with gold embroidery, may have been the decoration known as *hlad*, which the Viking wore on his forehead.

The Vikings loved splendor and display in clothing and jewelry. Embroidery in gold thread, gold brocades imported from the east, and oriental silks were all popular with those who could afford them. Arab commentators say of the Rus that they wore extremely baggy breeches, the amount of cloth being an indication of the wearer's wealth and status.

The most popular item of male jewelry was the bracelet or arm-ring of gold and silver, and these items occur again and again in the sagas as gifts from leaders to followers. Women wore more jewelry, usually as a statement of their husband's wealth and position. The dress was secured by a pair of oval brooches, which could be very large — up to 4" across — and elaborate, often made of gilded bronze. A third brooch was often worn at the throat. Viking women also wore arm-rings and bracelets, often larger and more elaborate than those of their male counterparts, and neck-rings. Both sexes could wear finger-rings, but the larger, showier items seem to have been more popular.

Character Types

Although warriors will be commonest, a Viking campaign could include many other character types. This will depend to some extent on the campaign style (see Chapter 5) and the historical and geographical background. Most heroes of the sagas are warriors and explorers, but the setting offers a great many more possibilities.

When a character is first created, give thought to his origins. Even a warrior who has been a-viking for 20 years will identify himself by his nation, family and home. Unless he's an outcast, he will want to return. And even an outcast is likely to be proud of his origins, especially if he left for honorable reasons!

Warrior

Very few Norsemen were full-time professional warriors, though most could take up arms at need. The main warrior class were the huscarls, full-time retainers of a jarl who would be servants in peacetime and his bodyguard in war. The king's huscarls were known as the *fyrd*, and formed the nucleus of the national army.

All huscarls will be trained in the use of one close combat weapon — axe or sword, depending on their means, but most commonly sword — and shield; they will also be able to throw a spear and some will have trained with the longbow. All will have Brawling skill. Some may be able to ride horses, although cavalry was not a great part of the Viking war machine. Many will have Boating, along with Swimming. Quarterstaff and Throwing Axe are possible secondary weapon skills, and favored non-weapon skills include Carousing, Bard and Poetry. Typical disadvantages would be Overconfidence and Manaphobia.

Warriors with Status 1 or higher may have "noble" skills such as Falconry, Savoir-Faire, Leadership and Tactics — they will belong to the Jarl class.

Norse Names for Men (continued)

Ingjald	Kollsvein	Orm	Sigmund	Steinthor	Thorbjorg	Thorstein
Ingolf	Kori	Orn	Sigtrygg	Stigandi	Thorbjorn	Thorvald
Jon	Kotkell	Ornolf	Sigurd	Storolf	Thord	Thrand
Jorund	Kvig	Ospak	Sigvaldi	Stuf	Thorfid	Trefil
Kalf	Lambi	Osvif	Skapti	Sturla	Thorfinn	Tryggvi
Kari	Ljot	Ottar	Skeggi	Styr	Thorgeir	Ulf
Ketil	Magnus	Ozur	Skorri	Styrmir	Thorgils	Unn
Kjallak	Njal	Ragi	Skuli	Sumarlidi	Thorgrim	Valgard
Kjartan	Odd	Ragnar	Snorri	Svein	Thorhall	Vali
Kjarval	Ofeig	Raudabjorn	Sokkolf	Sverting	Thorir	Vandrad
Kjotvi	Ogmund	Reinn	Solmund	Thangbrand	Thorkel	Veleif
Knut	Olaf	Rognvald	Solvi	Thidrandi	Thorleik	Vemund
Kodran	Olvald	Runolf	Steinar	Thjodolf	Thormod	Vermund
Kolbein	Olvir	Serk	Steindor	Thorarin	Thorodd	Vestar
Koll	Onund	Sighvat	Steingrim	Thorberg	Thorolf	Vetrlidi
						Yngvar

Seaman/Merchant/Explorer

In many ways, this character is closest to most people's idea of the "classic" Viking. As well as being able to handle a sword or axe and shield, the sea-rover will have Seamanship and Navigation skills, and possibly Merchant and a second language (Anglo-Saxon, Frankish, Gaelic, Arabic, Slavonic) into the bargain. A sea-captain will need Leadership, Strategy, Tactics, Luck and a good Reputation to attract crewmen.

Berserker

The term berserker was applied to any warrior who was outside the mainstream of Viking society, as well as to warriors who had the Berserk disadvantage. Bandits, pirates and professional duellists are all referred to as berserkers.

A berserker will have considerable skill with axe or sword and shield, and possibly other close combat skills; ranged combat will not be a high priority. He may have the Berserker disadvantage, or a combination like Bully, Bloodlust and Overconfident. Professional duellists may also have Law, to help them manipulate intended victims into a situation where a duel was inevitable.

The term berserker has two possible derivations, according to scholars. One is "bare skinned," reflecting the berserker's scorning of armor, and the other is "bear skinned," implying that their ferocity might come from some mystical animal affinity. In a magical campaign, berserkers might be shapechangers, favoring bear (of course!) and wolf forms.

Farmer/Hunter/Fisherman

The rural Scandinavians — who made up the vast majority of the population — made their living from the land and/or sea, using whatever resources were available. They would take up arms at need, and formed the rank-and-file of Viking armies and raiding parties, but they were far from being full-time warriors.

Combat skills would include Brawling. Farmers might have Staff or Polearm (reflecting their use of fighting spears or agricultural implements as a main weapon), and possibly Sling. Hunters might have Bow. Almost everyone would be above default, if only by a point or so, in Axe and Shield. All rural types would have Area Knowledge extending for a few miles around their homes. Other non-combat skills might include Boating, Fishing, Naturalist, Survival (Mountains or Beach), Tracking, and so on, according to the individual's lifestyle. Many farmers supplemented their living by fishing and trapping.

Craftsman/Tradesman

The urban Scandinavian was not very different from his counterparts elsewhere in Europe. The craftsman made his living by making things, and the tradesman made his living by selling them; many people did both.

Norse Names for Women

Alof	Dalla	Gudrun	Hrodny	Moeid	Sigrun	Thorun
Åse	Geirlaug	Gunnhild	Ingibjorg	Nidbjorg	Solveig	Thorvor
Asgerd	Gjaflaug	Gyda	Ingirid	Osk	Thora	Thurid
Aslaug	Grima	Hallbera	Ingun	Ragnhild	Thordis	Ulfeid
Asny	Groa	Helga	Jofrid	Rannveig	Thorfinna	Valgerd
Aud	Gudlaug	Hildirid	Jorunn	Saeun	Thorgerd	Vigdis
Bera	Gudney	Hrafnhild	Kadlin	Salbjorg	Thorhild	Yngvild
Bergthora	Gudrid	Hrefna	Ljufa	Sigrid	Thorlaug	Yr

Appropriate craft skills for the Viking setting would be Armoury, Blacksmith, Carpentry, Jeweler, Leatherworking, Pottery, Shipbuilding and Woodworking. Trade skills might include Merchant, Fast-Talk, one or more foreign languages (Anglo-Saxon, Frankish, Gaelic, Arabic, Slavonic) and even Accounting.

Priest

The relationship between a Norseman and his gods was largely a matter for the individual, and specialist priests were rare. Some were attached to the large temples which are discussed in Chapter 6, and there were a few elsewhere in the land who would lead worship in the great festivals. The Jarls had some priestly duties in this regard. Scholars know very little of Norse priests and their activities, however, since nearly all the historical record was written down after Christianity supplanted paganism, and only mentions pagan religious belief in the most scanty manner.

The role of priests will depend on the campaign. In a historical campaign, they might be kept as NPCs, attached to temples or to Jarl's courts. As more magic and mythology enter the campaign, they might become more suitable for use as PCs, wielding powers that rival those of the enchanters. Theology (Norse or Christian, depending on the priest) and Leadership are appropriate skills; in addition a Norse priest might have Literacy and Runes while a Christian priest might have Literacy and Latin.

Magician

In Norse legends and sagas there were two kinds of magician: the evil (and often very powerful) enchanter, and the half-mad, unpredictable shamanic mystic. Others might have some magical abilities, but these two were the only full-time magicians. All magicians were feared and distrusted — the effects of this are discussed under *Advantages, Disadvantages and Skills* later in this chapter.

The enchanter is better suited to being an NPC than a PC, although in very high-magic campaigns there could be PC enchanters. The accent is firmly on magical skills, which are discussed in Chapter 6.

The mystic will be a follower of Odin, and may well have Theology in addition to magical skills. Colorful social and mental disadvantages are highly appropriate for this type of character.

Hedge-Wizard/Wise Woman

In rural areas, these people served as a blend of herbal doctor, fortune-teller and agony aunt. In addition to some or all of the normal skills of the farmer, fisherman or hunter (see above), they would have some wild-card aptitudes which would make them of greater use to the community. At best, they were trusted but feared. At worst, they were feared and disliked yet tolerated for their skills.

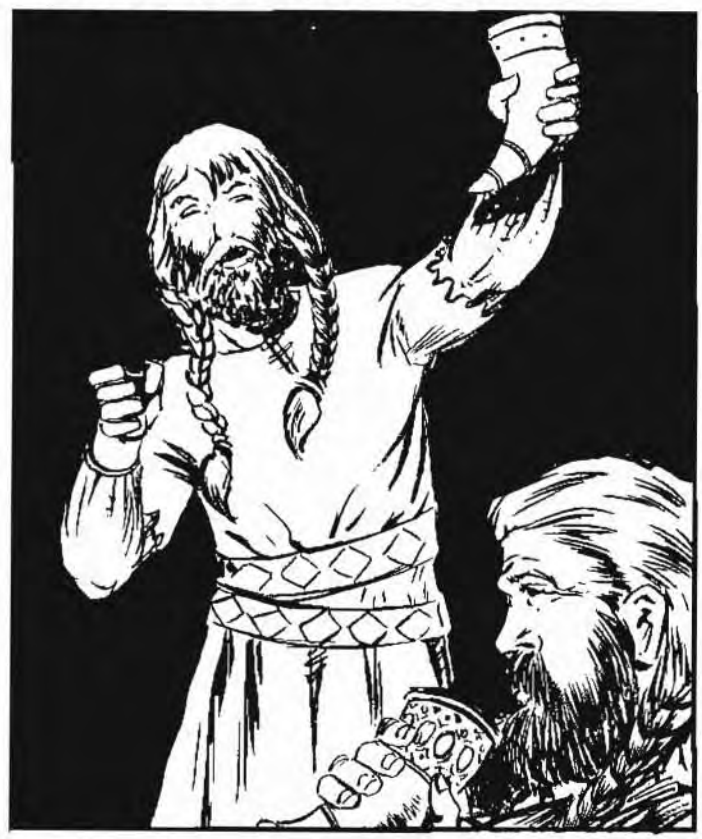
Such a person would have Area Knowledge and a few other farmer/fisherman skills, plus one or two medical skills (typically Diagnosis and First Aid), and maybe Theology. Some might actually have magical abilities, although these were rarer than local gossip would have one believe.

Regarded as slightly frightening eccentrics, characters of this type could have one or two colorful disadvantages, but not as many as the genuine mystic.

Skald

The skald was a poet and minstrel. The Vikings prized cunning verses and turns of phrase very highly, and a bard who could weave a clever and pleasing verse was always welcome in a Jarl's hall. A good skald would also compose verses praising his patron and spreading his fame through the land, as well as writing the saga of his adventures.

The most important skills for a skald are Skaldic Lore and Bard. Poetry, to make new verses, is important but secondary. Other performance skills such as Singing and Musical Instrument are also appropriate, and high-society skills like Savoir-Faire and Heraldry can help the skald around the court.



Nicknames

Appearance
Harald Bluetooth
Swein Forkbeard
Harald Finehair
Thorkel the Tall
Ragnar Lodbrok ("hairy breeches")
Hrolf Walleye
Thord the Short
Harald the Fair
Karm the Old
Atli the Slim
Bjorn the Fat
Gorm the Old
Grim the Hairy
Ulf the Squinter
Ketil Flatnose
Harald Greycloak

Personality
Harald Hardrada ("hard rule," meaning "tyrant,")
Magnus the Good
Eric Bloodaxe
Eirik the Wise
Olaf the Peacock
Thorvald the Proud
Ulf the Dauntless

Deeds and Virtues
Eric the Victorious
Sigurd Snake-in-the-eye
Ivar the Boneless
Grettir the Strong
Aki the Rich

Colors (possibly from shield color)
Illugi the Black
Olaf the Red

Non-Viking PCs

A campaign could certainly include non-Viking PCs, or have one or more major NPCs who aren't Scandinavians. There are various ways to do this, depending on the character's origin.

Outcast: This person is an outcast from his own kind, accused (justly or unjustly) of some terrible crime. Saxons, Franks, Gaels and Mediterranean Christians might join a Viking group under these circumstances — they will suffer an Outsider disadvantage, and possibly a bad Reputation until they prove themselves to their Viking companions — after all, the accusations might be true . . .

Adventurer: A young warrior from another land might run off to join the Vikings — if they'd have him. The likeliest source would be a trading-partner of the Norse, with no reason to hate them: Finns or Arabs, for instance.

Kidnapped: Someone who was kidnapped by the Vikings, probably at a tender age, and has come to be seen as one of them. A freeman with no living sons might adopt a likely captive and raise him as his own son. Not being a Scandinavian by birth is good for a -5 point Social Stigma, but reactions from the character's former countrymen will be at -3, for he is a traitor to have joined the Norsemen. Depending on how young he was when kidnapped, he might have some skills (language, literacy) relating to his native culture. Ideal kidnap victims are Saxons and Franks; some may be people of high birth in their native land, like the Tony Curtis character in the movie *The Vikings*. A woman taken as a slave could also end up married to a Viking.

Visitor: A merchant, scholar or other traveler. Again there will be a Social Stigma for not being of Scandinavian birth, but in most circumstances this will be overcome by the Viking code of hospitality and reduced to -1 on reaction rolls — provided the visitor behaves like a perfect guest. Some matters will be "local business," and outsiders will be actively discouraged from taking an interest. The traveler will have skills and belongings according to his profession and native land, and may also have picked up some equipment of local manufacture. Ideal visitors include Arab, Saxon and Frankish traders, and Skraelings or Inuit visiting with the strange blue-eyed people from the sea.

Missionary: Someone sent by the Church to convert the heathen Northmen. This can be a challenging role for a PC if well played. The churchman might be Gaelic, Saxon or Frankish, or even from a neighboring Scandinavian country that is already Christian. In all cases, there will be a Social Stigma worth -3 for an outsider, and reactions from devout followers of the Aesir cult may be lower still. Religious intolerance is not a part of the Viking character, though, and most people will be happy to listen to the stranger's stories. They will probably respond with stories of the Aesir (especially Thor), and try to start a bragging match over whose god is the stronger. Insulting the gods might bring bad luck, though, and is not the act of a good guest. Tearing down pagan shrines adds the crime of damage to property, and could result in a brawl, a lynching or a visit to the local Thing-court. The missionary may have the advantage of Clerical Investment with regard to other Christians, but it will not impress the pagans. Missionary characters will always have the skills of Theology (Christian), plus some Latin and probably (but not always) Literacy.

Buddy: A catch-all; anyone who befriended a Scandinavian PC or NPC at some time (perhaps saving his life), becoming his fast friend. This could give the character a Viking Ally or Patron, although there will still be the Social Stigma of being an outsider. The character will have all the skills and possessions of his native land and profession.

Names

Norse men and women had two names. The first was a personal name, and the second was either a patronymic or a nickname. A youngster would be known by his patronymic, possibly getting a nickname as he grew older. Some people might be called by both, at least by the skalds: "I sing the deeds of Thorkill Einarsson, called the Shipslayer!"

Patronymics

A patronymic consists of the name of one's father, with the suffix -sson for a male and -sdottir for a female. Note the difference from the European surname system: the surname changes from one generation to the next.

For example, Borgolf Einarsson is Borgolf, the son of Einar; Borgolf's son Harald will be Harald Borgolfsson, not Harald Einarsson. Harald's sister Gudrun will be Gudrun Borgolfsdottir — Gudrun, Borgolf's daughter.

A family, as a whole, might be spoken of by the name of the patriarch, or even of some famous ancestor. Swein Forkbeard's extended family might be called the Sweinssons, even though only Sven's own children actually bear his name.

Nicknames

A Norseman might select his own nickname: "Call me Brand Keeneyes." But more likely, his friends would give it to him: "Have you seen him eat? Brand Keenteeth is more like it!"

The nickname might reflect some noticeable aspect of the person's appearance, like Swein Forkbeard and Harald Bluetooth, or it might refer to some notable deed or virtue, like Eyvind the Braggart, Olaf the Quiet or Osvif the Wise. Sometimes, a nickname might be added as a prefix to a personal name, like Skalla-Grim ("bald Grim") or Kveld-Ulf ("evening-wolf," meaning "shapechanger").

See p. 23 for a list of nicknames.

Character Nicknames

Advantages and disadvantages are a good source of nicknames. Some are obvious: a Fat character might be "the Fat" or "the Stout," while a lost body part could tag someone as "One-Arm," "One-Eye," and so on. Here are a few more examples:

Absolute Direction	Lodestone, Truesteer
Acute Hearing	Cat-Ear
Acute Vision	Eagle-Eye
Alertness	the Ready
Ambidexterity	Two-Hand
Animal Empathy	Beastfriend
Attractiveness	the Fair
Combat Reflexes	the Swift
Common Sense	the Wise
Double-Jointed	Limberleg
High Pain Threshold	the Brave
Intuition	the Wise, the Lucky
Bad Sight or Blindness	Walleye
Deafness, Hard of Hearing	Wallear

Ironic Nicknames

Nicknames needn't mean what they say, and the Vikings were fond of ironic nicknames. Just as a short person today might be called Lofty or a fat person Slim, so Rolf the Short might be of huge stature, and Thorgil the Fat could be exceptionally skinny. A coward might be called "the Brave," but a brave man would never be named coward; some things are too important to joke about.

Advantages, Disadvantages and Skills

This section develops the advantages, disadvantages and skills given in the ***Basic Set,*** with notes on special applications to the Viking campaign. A new advantage/disadvantage, Wyrd, and several new skills are also presented.

Advantages

Clerical Investment ***see p. B19***

Full-time priests were rare in the Viking world (see Chapter 6). This advantage would be appropriate in a wholly Christian setting, at the end of the Viking age, but for other times it may be accompanied by a 10- or 15-point Duty to a temple.

Allies ***see p. B23***

Allies will include the extended family, as well as friends who are bonded by oath or by ties of hospitality. Frequency of appearance depends on where the character is — if he is at home or close to home, then his relatives will appear almost all the time; far from home, friends and relatives will appear less rarely.

A character could very easily use up all his points just on relatives, if the player wanted to model Viking family ties accurately. It is perhaps best to impose a maximum of two or three allies, or a maximum of 200 points total, for building allies. Alternatively, the GM can allow an extra 50 or even 100 points for relative Allies . . . and require these points to be spent on relative Dependents.

Legal Enforcement Powers ***see p. B21***

Medieval Scandinavia had no system for law enforcement, so this advantage is not appropriate to the setting.

Literacy ***see p. B21***

The written form of the Norse language was the "Futhark" rune-lettering, so called because the first six runes spell out F-U-TH-A-R-K. Literacy is uncommon; it is a 10-point advantage. The runes are not just for writing; they have awesome magical powers when their secret meanings are known. See Chapter 7.

Luck ***see p. B21***

The Norsemen valued luck a great deal, especially in war-leaders. Leif Ericsson was called "Leif the Lucky."

Military Rank ***see p. B22***

The armies of the Vikings were not highly structured, and this advantage is effectively replaced by Status.

Patron ***see p. B24***

A character's patron will normally be his Jarl; a patron costing 30 points might be the king himself.

Reputation ***see p. B17***

Reputation was the *most* important thing to a Viking warrior — or, indeed, to any Norse freeman. See p. 8 for some of the things that would go into a good reputation. Many of the disadvantages listed below would *injure* reputation, and for that reason they have higher point values, and greater reaction penalties, then in an ordinary campaign.

Disadvantages

Some of the disadvantages listed in the ***Basic Set*** need changes or clarification for a Viking campaign. These are noted below: the value of a disadvantage is not changed unless stated here.

In a broadly-drawn and battle-heavy campaign, the GM can *require* all characters to have at least one of the stereotyped Viking disadvantages: Bad Temper, Berserk, Bloodlust, Bully, Greed, Impulsiveness, Overconfidence. This also works if the campaign is to have a humorous element!

Addiction ***see p. B30***

The only addictive substance available to most Vikings is alcohol. Rare individuals who have spent some time abroad might have come into contact with hashish through Arab contacts or with tobacco through Skraelings. Those Skraelings who used tobacco generally reserved it for ritual use, and did not smoke it recreationally, so addiction to tobacco will be very rare.

Berserk ***see p. B31***

The Viking berserks gave this disadvantage its name, and it will not be rare among Norse warriors. The berserk fighter is valued for his ferocity, but few lords would want a berserker in a leadership position, and few men would want to serve under one. Note that a professional fighter might be called "berserk," even if he never lost control.

Code of Honor ***see p. B31***

All Norsemen, and most Norse women, should take this. It is a -10 point disadvantage which does not count towards the 40-point Disadvantage allowance. The GM should require any man who does not take Code of Honor to take a -10 point Social Stigma instead, which *does* count towards the 40-point allowance.

The Viking social ideals are discussed on p. 8. The ideal Viking must be courageous without being foolhardy, tenacious, cheerful, true to his word at all times, hospitable, open-handed and loyal. He must avenge a wrong or an insult, protect his friends and family, live well and die well. Men must tell and retell his saga over their ale until the end of time.

A character who takes this code and does not live up to it *strictly* will suffer injury to his Reputation!

Combat Paralysis ***-20 points; see p. B31***

This disadvantage is worth more in a Viking campaign; in addition to endangering the character's life, it also gets him a reputation for cowardice, leading to -2 on reaction rolls.

Compulsive Lying ***-30 points; see p. B32***

A liar is as bad as a coward — worse, in many ways, because he endangers others as well as himself. Known habitual liars suffer -3 on all reaction rolls, and the disadvantage is worth more to reflect this.

Cowardice ***-20 points; see p. B32***

The Vikings despised cowardice, and a known coward suffers -4 to all reaction rolls, -5 with warriors. Frightened Vikings will go to huge lengths to conceal their fear. A warrior who is secure in his reputation will sometimes *admit* fear. "Of course I'm frightened of that dragon! Only a fool would not be! Now . . . let's kill it." In such a circumstance, one shows courage by facing the danger, not by pretending to be unaware of it. But a young fighter, still building his reputation, would not admit that he even noticed the risk.

A warrior who suffers an embarrassing reaction to a Fright Check must do something heroic to prove himself, or risk being branded as a coward. A warrior who is called a coward must challenge his antagonist to a duel or — if that is impossible because the insult came from a family member or lord — prove himself by some feat. Otherwise, he *will* be considered a coward.

Dependents ***see p. B38***

Like Allies, these will normally be relatives, or characters to whom the PC is bound by oath or friendship. As with Allies, the GM may need to restrict the number of Dependents or the total points which may be used to build Dependents, especially relatives.

Duty ***see p. B39***

Almost every character will have a duty to his kin. Aside from Allies and Dependents, most characters (especially in a historical campaign) should take at least 2 points in this disadvantage.

Enemies ***see p. B39***

A single enemy might be someone you crossed or caused to lose honor. A medium-sized group might be the immediate kin of someone you killed. A large group indicates that an entire clan is after you — you're caught up in a blood-feud!

Eunuch ***-15 points; see p. B28***

The ability to sire children — especially sons — was very important to the Vikings. A man who is known to have this condition will have -3 on reaction rolls — and will be subject to some ridicule. Therefore, this disadvantage is worth more in a Viking campaign.

Gigantism ***-5 points; see p. B28***

A warrior with this disadvantage might be rumored to be half-Troll, but this is counteracted to some extent by admiration for his heroic size. The reaction penalty is reduced to -1 for a Viking campaign (still with a +1 reaction in combat situations) and the disadvantage is correspondingly cheaper.

Low Pain Threshold ***-15 points; see p. B29***

The Vikings despise any kind of lack of fortitude, and this disadvantage could easily cause someone to be branded a coward. If someone is seen to be easily hurt, others will react at a -2. Should the unlucky person actually be cowardly as well (or be considered to be a coward), the combined value is -30 and the reaction penalty is as for an ordinary coward.

Miserliness ***-20 points; see p. B34***

Although miserliness was not as bad as lying or cowardice, misers had few friends. A miser suffers -2 on all reaction rolls, and is likely to acquire an uncomplimentary nickname.

Odious Personal Habits ***see p. B26***

Some things which other nations considered odious were hardly noticed by the Norsemen. One Arab writer was left aghast by the washing habits of the Rus, for instance, and table manners were a completely unknown concept across most of

northern and western Europe at this time. (On the other hand, the Vikings did bathe regularly, which surprised and upset the Western Europeans who thought bathing was unhealthy. The Norse, for their part, thought other peoples to be dirty and smelly.)

"They are the filthiest of God's creatures. They do not wash after discharging their natural functions, neither do they wash their hands after meals. They are as stray donkeys.

". . . Every day they wash their faces and heads, all using the same water which is as filthy as can be imagined . . . Every morning a girl brings her master a large bowl of water in which he washes his face, hands and hair, combing it also over the bowl. Then he blows his nose and spits into the water. No uncleanliness is left which does not go into the water. When he has finished the girl takes the bowl to his neighbor, who does likewise, until the bowl has been to the entire household. All have blown their noses, spat, and washed their faces and hair in the same water."

— Ibn Fadlan on the personal cleanliness of the Rus

Pacifism ***-15/-50 points; see p. 35***

Pacifism is dangerously close to cowardice, to most Viking eyes. Someone who will not fight at all suffers -4 to reaction rolls, -6 with warriors, and this disadvantage is worth 50 points.

The values of the other forms of Pacifism are unchanged. A person who will only fight to defend himself and his kin might be regarded with grudging admiration for his restraint. Someone who will not kill might be regarded as foolish for leaving an enemy alive to strike again, but on the other hand he puts his enemy in his debt; a warrior, and indeed a warrior's whole family, would lose a great deal of honor by raising a hand against the man to whom he owes his life. This would be regarded as clever — defeating an enemy by using honor as well as force of arms. (This kind of behavior, accompanied by a Diplomacy or Fast-Talk roll, might help to end a feud!)

Phobias ***see p. B35***

The following phobias are not appropriate to a Viking campaign: Dirt, Machinery, Number 13. The Vikings were always distrustful of magic, so Manaphobia is worth only half the normal penalty.

A warrior who displays phobias risks harm to his reputation, of course. A true Viking fears nothing!

Primitive ***see p. B26***

Someone with this disadvantage could come from a number of backgrounds, depending on the campaign. He could be a nomadic Lapp from the far north, or a Skraeling from Vinland, who has come to visit with the Pale Canoe Warriors. He might even be an Inuit from the far north of Greenland or Vinland. Notes on all these groups will be found in Chapter 9.

Skinny ***-10 points; see p. B29***

The Vikings set great store by a man's appearance, so anyone with this disadvantage will suffer -1 to reaction rolls with others who do not know him. Buying off this disadvantage represents the character's growing renown superseding these prejudiced first impressions — it may even be turned to advantage and adopted as a nickname such as Erik the Slim.

Weak Will ***-10 points/level; see p. B37***

Strength of mind was as important to the Vikings as physical strength, and force of will was seen as a facet of courage. Anyone who is known to be weak-willed suffers -1 to reaction rolls for each level of the disadvantage.

New Advantages/Disadvantages

Shapeshifting ***Variable***

The power to change one's shape through magic is treated as an advantage, if inborn — though many people will react badly to a shapeshifter. See p. 85.

Wyrd ***Variable***

Wyrd is a word which means fate or destiny. It can also mean doom. Wyrd is an irresistible force which can pull a man's life this way and that, bringing good and bad luck by turns as it pulls him blindly along to his pre-ordained destiny. Only the Norns know what this is, and they're not telling.

Wyrd can be taken as an advantage or as a disadvantage, at a value of 15 to -15 points. When the player decides to take a Wyrd, he tells the GM the point value he wants. The GM then secretly determines the nature of the character's Wyrd, according to its value and the dictates of the campaign. The point value of a Wyrd determines the kind of impact it will have on the hero's life, while the precise details are determined by the campaign. A hero should never know the nature of his Wyrd, unless he learns of it by some supernatural agency.

A Wyrd taken as an advantage will work out to the character's good in the end — although this may not always be clear, and it may be inconvenient at times. A Wyrd taken as a disadvantage leads to something bad — perhaps not immediately, and not without the chance to gain honor by dealing with it well. A fated, tragic death can be a death worthy of a hero, and can inspire great stories — look at Sigfrid of the Volsungs, for instance.

Here are some examples:

Great advantage: 15 points. The hero is fated to reach a particular place or find a particular thing — his grandfather's treasure, or a lost settlement in Greenland, or a magical weapon — or to kill a certain enemy. Sooner or later, he will stumble across what looks like a piece of luck, but it will have been ordained by the Norns. The timing and precise details of the fortunate event are not determined, but it will happen, even if the character is on his deathbed at the time — this kind of irony makes a good end to a saga.

Major advantage: 10 points. As above, but a lesser success. Alternatively: The character is doomed to die in a particular place, or a particular fashion: at sea, by the hand of a relative, in Vinland, or whatever. Although he can be grievously wounded elsewhere and by other means, he will not die; all damage is applied normally, except he does not die. If he avoids the circumstances which would fulfill his Wyrd, consciously or otherwise, he may find that Fate stocks a few surprises: the sea may flood his home as he sleeps, his attacker may be a distant relative he thinks is dead or knows nothing about, or his ship may be driven all the way to Vinland by a prodigious storm. The GM may need to use some of these divine tricks if a PC discovers that he has a Wyrd of this kind. (The hero Arrow-Odd escaped his Wyrd for 300 years, but it caught up with him in the end.)

Minor advantage: 5 points. The character is fated to play a

small part in a larger story, but this part will reflect to his credit. For instance, he may be on hand to avenge the death of a kinsman, or to save the life of a hero who will go on to greater things. This is quite enough to satisfy the average Viking — not necessarily to have a saga written about you, but just to have your name sung in the story of a hero!

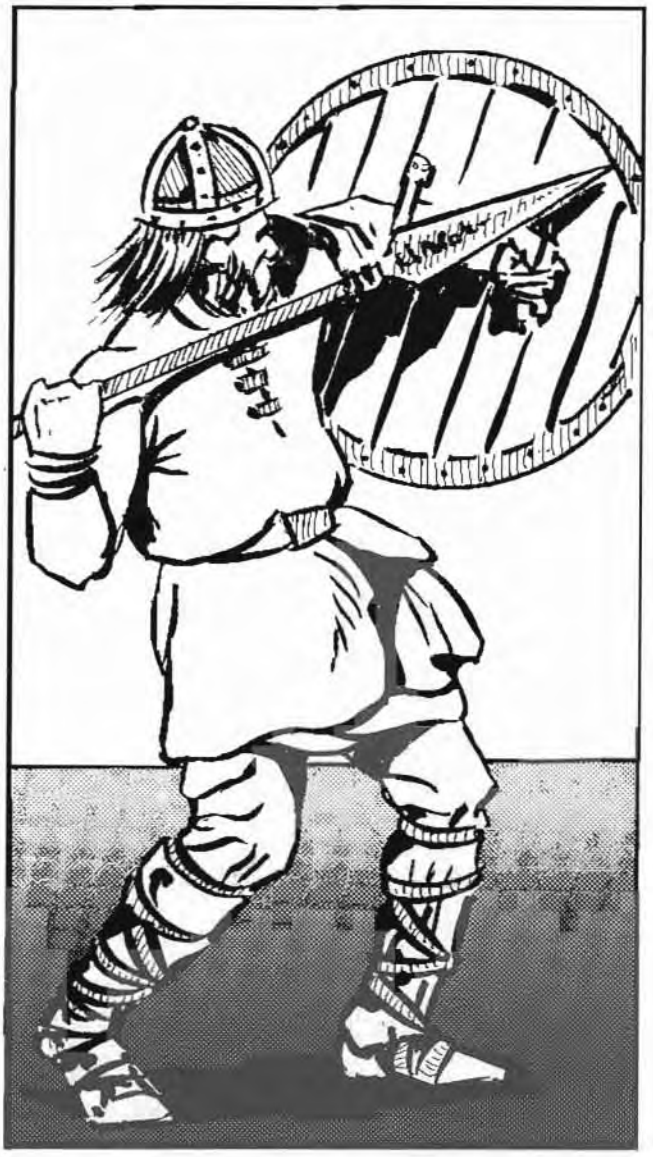
Minor disadvantage: -5 points. Again, the character is fated to play a small part in a larger story, but this time he will not come off so well. He may accidentally cause the death of a hero, or he may save a hero's life by getting in the way of the death-blow. These things might cause serious injury, but they should not cause the fated character's death except in the most desperate and heroic of circumstances.

Major disadvantage: -10 points. The character is fated to play a key role in a sorry turn of events. For example, he might be the person who accidentally serves the King of Sweden with sour mead at a key peace negotiation, leading to the king's exit in high dudgeon, the prolonging of the war, and the deaths of many valorous warriors. Or he might inadvertently destroy or lose the magical weapon which is the only thing that can destroy the terrible dragon that threatens the area.

Great disadvantage: -15 points. Death stalks the character. Something out there has his name on it, and it knows where he is, and it's getting closer all the time. His death will spark off the most terrible repercussions. For example, his ship might be fated to be driven before a storm and run aground on a rock — the rock to which the Fenris-wolf is bound. The impact of the ship smashes the rock, freeing the terrible creature, and the gods themselves will have to battle to re-chain it. (A Wyrd this serious can easily be detected by magic — or psi, in a campaign that uses psionics. It would show in the fated character's aura . . . not the details, but just the fact that the person had an evil fate.)

Working out a good Wyrd — and making sure it comes to pass — requires considerable ingenuity on the part of the GM. Before you decide on a Wyrd, be sure that it won't drag the campaign off the rails.

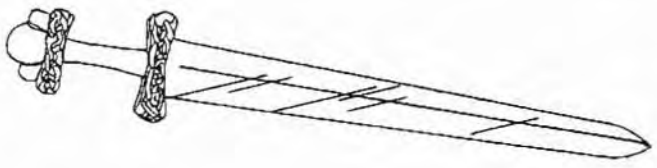
If someone fulfills his Wyrd and still lives, it is over, and has no further effect on his life — although its repercussions might haunt him for years to come. A disadvantageous Wyrd must be bought off as soon as it is fulfilled. If the character does not have enough points to buy a Wyrd off at the time it is fulfilled, he gains the disadvantage of Unluckiness, regardless of the level of the Wyrd disadvantage. The Unluckiness may then be bought off in the normal way. No character points are earned for fulfilling an advantageous Wyrd.



Quirks

As always, personality quirks can be taken as mild (1-point) disadvantages. This is especially important in a Viking campaign; Vikings are *supposed* to have interesting, emphatic personalities! Here are some examples which would fit well:

An over-fondness for a particular food ("Ne'er would Halfdan Trout sit down to sup unless boiled trout were placed before him; his carls needs must keep great kegs salted, lest he hungered through the winter.");



Spitting overboard when sighting land;

Carrying two knives in case one should break;

Taking formal and long-winded oaths over any point, however trivial;

Testing the wind with a wet finger before making any kind of decision;

Speaking in extemporized verse at moments of stress (Egil Skallagrimsson did this a lot; because he was a very skilled poet, the habit won him great renown);

Swearing by a particular deity at every opportunity.

A quirk which is played well could add to a character's renown, and might even spawn a nickname; in addition to Halfdan Trout, the examples here might give us Hrolf Land-spit, Ottar the Armourer, Asbjorn Oathfast, Magnus Wind-scry, Thorsten War-skald, and Tyr's-Grim.

Skills

Botany ***see p. B60***

This skill includes a working knowledge of herbs and their properties. Someone who also has First Aid can prepare herbal remedies for minor ailments.

History and Literature ***see p. B61***

These two skills are replaced by a single new skill, Skaldic Lore; see below.

Language Skills ***see p. B55***

The main languages encountered by Vikings were Anglo-Saxon, Frankish, Scots and Irish Gaelic, Welsh, Latin, Old German, and Arabic. Scholars debate the number and type of languages and dialects current in Dark Age Europe, but these should be enough for most purposes.

The Vikings' native tongue is called Old Norse. To a Viking, Germanic languages (German, Frisian, Anglo-Saxon, Frankish) were easy, Celtic languages (Scots and Irish Gaelic, Welsh, Manx) and Latin were average, and others (Arabic, Skraeling languages, Pictish) were hard. The Celtic languages fell into two groups — a speaker of either Scots or Irish Gaelic has a default -4 in the other, and the same applies between the Cymric tongues of Welsh and Manx. However, knowledge of a Gaelic tongue does not help with a Cymric tongue.

Musical Instrument ***see p. B47***

The main musical instruments of the Viking period were the drum, the drilled bone flute and a stringed instrument something like a lyre. Horns were used for signaling — the god Heimdal has a horn, Gjallarhorn, to raise the alarm when the Giants march on Asgard — but it does not seem to have been used for making music.

Occultism ***see p. B61***

Magic was generally accepted as real, so this skill would represent knowledge of wizards' ways by someone not himself a wizard. It would be rare! For a wizard, the relevant skill (e.g., to know what another wizard might do) would simply be the magic spell in question, or his IQ at a large bonus.

Survival ***see p. B57***

The majority of Scandinavians lived in Mountains, Woodlands or Island/Beach environments. A few hardy northerners lived in an Arctic environment, and some travelers spent enough time in this environment to acquire the relevant survival skill.

Teamster ***see p. B47***

This skill includes the ability to handle horse-drawn sleighs.

New Skills

Games (Mental/Easy) ***Defaults to IQ-5***

The Vikings were very fond of boardgames, and there have been many archaeological finds of boards and pieces. Chess reached Europe from India via Arab traders, and was very popular in the north during the Viking period. There was also the home-grown boardgame of hnefatafl ("king-board"), and a version of fox and geese which may have been the same as the Irish fidchell.

Each game must be acquired as a separate skill. Vast sums might be staked on a game, and there are tales in many European cultures where the hero had to play some game with a powerful monster or wizard, with the lives of his companions at stake. Sometimes a game might be played to settle a dispute, as a kind of bloodless duel, and an ability to play one or more games well is generally regarded as a worthwhile social accomplishment.

See p. 65 for game rules and gameboards.

Skaldic Lore (Mental/Hard) ***Defaults to IQ-6***

A skald, or storyteller, has a broad base in Norse history, sagas and mythology, which were a single body of knowledge. A skald will know many sagas and poems, long and short, memorized word for word. On a successful roll, he can perform one accurately; a failed roll means he forgot or garbled something. A separate roll, on Bard skill, is necessary to make the performance *exciting!* If one roll is made well and the other is failed, the results depend on the audience. A hall full of drunken warriors might not notice a dozen mistakes, if the skald was loud and had a good, table-pounding cadence. A fellow skald would be far more impressed by accuracy.

Of course, a character may study the history and literature of other areas and cultures if he wishes; these would count as separate skills.

A skald does not necessarily have skill in composing new poems; that is the Poetry skill.

Skating (Physical/Hard) ***Defaults to DX-6***

Viking skates were made of horse or cattle bones, lashed to the feet with leather thongs. They were broad and smooth on the underside, unlike the metal blades of today's skates. Like skiing, skating was a means of getting about rather than a sport, although races and contests were probably common.

A roll is required when starting out on the ice, and another every 30 minutes (or every hazardous situation). A failed roll means you fall. On a critical failure, take 1d-2 damage to a randomly chosen limb, and suffer through the appropriate crippling damage until you heal. If a limb takes 4 or more points of damage, the limb was actually broken.

Economics, Jobs and Wealth

Standard starting wealth for a Viking character is $1,000. This includes all possessions, possibly including land, livestock, buildings and a boat. A character who is not a true wanderer (a bandit, outcast, professional duellist, etc.) should spend no more than 20% of his wealth on movable goods (his small boat, cart, steed, farm livestock, etc., don't count as "movable" here). A wanderer may spend all his wealth on movable goods.

If a party wishes to become true Viking raiders, they may pool their wealth (or go into debt) and buy a warship, owning it in common. Someone will still have to be chosen as captain, of course!

Money

Throughout most of the Viking period, money meant silver. It didn't matter what form the metal took, so long as the weight was right. By the middle of the 9th century some coins were being minted in Viking towns, often copies of Frankish coinage. As time went, on Scandinavian mints developed their own designs. But the fact that the silver was in the form of a coin was irrelevant. *Hack silver* — pieces of the metal from various sources, cut into pieces of more or less even weight — was just as acceptable as a medium of exchange.

Gold was only rarely used as money — it was mainly made into jewelry or lavish items for personal use or gifts. When a debt was paid in gold, the weight was more important than the form the metal took.

In rural areas, particularly in the remoter parts of the Viking world, the system of barter was not entirely dead, and debts could be settled in kind rather than in cash.

As the centuries passed, coinage became more and more customary as the usual form of money, and in this area, as in many others, Scandinavia became just another part of medieval Europe.

Social Status

Social status in the Viking world was a complex business, based on birth, achievement, reputation, wealth and other factors; see Chapter 1. For game purposes, use the table below, but always take into account the reaction modifiers for a character's reputation! Unusual wealth — more than might be expected for the social position — will move a Norse character up by a notch in overall status, and lack of wealth will reduce status.

Level		*Cost of living*
7	King	15,000
6	Very powerful Jarl	8,000
5	Powerful Jarl	4,000
4	Average Jarl, renowned captain	1,000
3	Minor Jarl, very wealthy farmer/ fisherman, successful merchant, master craftsman, ship's captain, renowned warrior, skilled poet	600
2	Poor captain, average merchant	200
1	Wealthy farmer or craftsman	100
0	Farmer, craftsman, crewman, huscarl	80
-1	Professional duellist, poor farmer	50
-2	Bandit	20
-3	Thrall	15
-4	Outcast	0

Vikings regard most foreigners as unreliable and lacking in honor. Saxons and Franks are treated as one level lower than their occupation suggests; Gaelic, Pictish and Skraeling warriors are treated as level 1-2, as are Arab merchants. Slavs are level -3; a Slav who is not a thrall, ought to be.

Yearly cost of living varies with Status, and also according to the number of followers and dependents a leader has. An NPC Patron such as a Jarl counts as an employer, and will look after his warriors' living, as well as giving gifts from time to time in recognition of outstanding service. The same rules apply to a PC who has followers — if they become dissatisfied with his leadership, they may seek another patron.

Base figures for cost of living are given above. A leader must pay the total costs of living of all his followers, and provide them with gifts into the bargain. This is in addition to the cost of living shown for his status, which is purely for himself and his immediate family.

Social Stigma ***see p. B27***

There are various ways in which a Viking character can acquire a Social Stigma.

A woman's place, according to Norse society, was in the home, running the household and bearing sons. A widow could act more freely, as she had to be both husband and wife to the household. Although women were generally respected — certainly they were better off than their Saxon and Frankish counterparts — a female character of marriageable age suffers a -5 point Social Stigma. This increases to -10 if the woman makes a habit of involving herself in "men's work" (anything outside the immediate concerns of the household and family). A widow is allowed greater freedom, and has only a -5 point Stigma regardless.

An outsider, such as a Swede among Danes or a Dane among Norwegians, suffers a -5 point Stigma; in Iceland, Greenland and Vinland, though, homeland is of secondary importance and this is ignored.

A freed Thrall suffers a -10 point Stigma, as does a berserker or anyone known to have magical skills. This may increase to -15 if the character has a reputation as a troublemaker.

The greatest Social Stigma is to be a known oathbreaker or kinslayer. This is always worth -15 points.

A job was not as important as a ready supply of money, provided the money was come by honestly — and this included overseas adventures of all kinds. Of course, the vast majority of the population had to support themselves by their own labors — under Norse law the eldest son inherited everything, so the younger sons of wealthy Jarls, who had no craft or trade and who would lose honor by resorting to such means of living, were often willing to take part in risky voyages to foreign parts. This may be one reason for the sudden explosion of Viking activity at the end of the 8th century.

Most jobs are a way of life, leaving very little free time. However, since many occupations are effectively self-employed, a character could pack up and leave any time it suited him. A farmer or fisherman might spend the slack season of the year traveling, leaving his farm or boat in the hands of relatives; however, someone who did this too much might get a reputation for being unreliable and lacking in family duty. A huscarl is bound at all times by his oath of loyalty to his Jarl. He might leave the Jarl's employment if he thought he had a legitimate grievance; then he might seek out another master, or he might travel about taking whatever life offered, like the ronin of Japan or the hired gun of the Old West. Such individuals were widely distrusted, and regarded as potential bandits.

Even so, many Viking-age occupations offer some opportunities for adventure. Huscarls make particularly good PCs, since they may be sent by their Jarl to investigate and solve any problems that might arise in his domain. Farmers and fishermen would be the people who experienced such problems directly, and would take an active part in dealing with them. If the Jarl decided to outfit a voyage in the summer — to raid, trade or explore — then the crews would be drawn from these two classes of society.

The urban environment offers as many adventure opportunities in this setting as it does in any other. When great numbers of people live in close proximity to each other, all sorts of interesting things can happen. Town-based merchants can set out on trading expeditions, and even urban craftsmen can decide to sample life in the colonies or try their luck on the high seas. When they return they might find that their customers are now dealing with someone more reliable, but life's like that. And a good craftsman can quickly re-establish his reputation and win back enough trade to live on.

Finding a Job

Almost anyone can find casual work on a farm if extra workers are needed, and if they can make a reasonably good impression upon the employer. Pay generally consists of bed and board. Signing on for a voyage requires basic combat and sailor's skills as well as making a good impression; pay would normally be a share in the profits of the venture. A likely fighter might be taken on even without sea-skills, but he'd be expected to start learning as soon as he came aboard.

Getting a position as a huscarl in a Jarl's household also depends on making a good impression. It helps a great deal if you know someone who is already in the Jarl's household, and can speak on your behalf — preferably a relative, since family ties will also make him responsible to the Jarl for your good behavior.

To find work as a craftsman, it may be necessary to travel until you find a place that needs your particular skills. If a character wants to set up in a place where there is already an established worker in his craft, he might challenge the resident craftsman to a quick Contest of Skills (with the newcomer at -3 to skill owing to local favoritism) to see how your work compares. If the resident wins, the newcomer is not welcome; if the newcomer wins, the resident might offer him some inducement to go away. If the victory is particularly crushing, the resident craftsman might leave himself — although he might swear revenge for the shame he has suffered, becoming an Enemy of the newcomer.

In a city, the picture changes somewhat. There are plenty of craftsmen, and a large enough market to sustain most of them reasonably well. In the later Viking period trade and craft guilds started to form in many cities, and a newcomer might have to prove his competence to guild officials before being allowed to practice in a city. The historical evidence is far from complete, though, and often it seems that anyone who could afford to buy premises, tools and materials was allowed to compete with others of his craft. Those who did good work would prosper, while those who did poor work would not.'

Job Table

Some skills listed here are not defined elsewhere; they are professional skills with little use other than earning a living.

Job, (Required Skills), Monthly Income	*Success Roll*	*Critical Failure*
Poor Jobs		
Beggar (no qualifications), $25	11	2d
Peddler (Merchant 11+), $35	PR	-1i/-1i, 2d
Porter (ST 12+), $20	PR	-1i/1d, -2i
Thrall (no qualifications), $0 (living expenses)	11	2d/4d
Struggling Jobs		
Apprentice (Craft Skill 10+), $0 (living expenses)	PR	2d/4d or LJ
Bandit (Survival 11+, one weapon skill 10+), $35	best PR	3d
Duellist (Law 11+, one weapon skill 10+), $35	best PR	4d/4d, D
Hunter/Trapper (Survival 11+, Tracking 11+), $70	best PR	2d/3d, -1i
Hedge Wizard/Wise Woman (Magery 13+ or Fast-Talk 13+), $30	PR	-1i/-3i
Mystic (Theology 13+, Magery or Fast-Talk 13+), $30	best PR	-1i/-3i
Average Jobs		
Craftsman (Craft Skill 13+), $90	PR	-1i/-2i
Cook (Cooking 12+), $70	PR	1d/3d
Shopowner (Merchant 12+, shop), $135	PR	-1i/2, -1i
Small Farmer (Agronomy 11+), $85	PR	1d/2d, -1i/D
Fisherman (Fishing 11+), $100	PR	1d/3d, -2i/D
Crewman (Seamanship 10+, ST 12+), $95	best PR	1d/2d, -1i/D
Comfortable Jobs		
Well-off Farmer (Agronomy 11+), $220	PR	1d/2d, -1i
Merchant (Merchant 13+), $385	PR	-1i/2d, -1i
Huscarl (Savoir-Faire 12+, one weapon skill 10+, Status 0+), $250	best PR+Status	-1i, 2d/ -1i, D
Skald (Skaldic Lore 13+, Bard 13+), $400	best PR	-1i/1d, -1i
Shipowner (Seamanship 13+), $350	best PR	-1i/2d, -1i
Wealthy Jobs		
Jarl (Savoir-Faire 14+, Politics 13+), $1,000	worst PR	-2i/D
Fyrd huscarl (Savoir-Faire 13+, one weapon skill 13+, Status 1+), $550	best PR	-1i/-2i, D

Critical Failure Key

If there are two entries separated by a slash, use the second result only when a natural 18 is rolled.

"LJ" stands for Lost Job — the character is thrown out and must find alternative employment. The "d" indicates dice of damage — the character was injured in an accident, fight or whatever. The "i" indicates a month's income lost; "-2i" means that the character loses 2 months' income through being fined, having to replace broken equipment, losing working time due to injury, etc.

"D" means Disgraced. The character has lost face or honor in some way. No result from this table should result in irreparable harm, so the disgrace is something that can be "worked out" by great deeds, or — depending on the situation — just by a successful lawsuit or duel.

On some occasions, where a character risks serious injury or great loss of earnings, the GM may choose to play the episode out in order to give the character a fighting chance.

Prices

Clothing

Note: prices are for basic clothing; richly-decorated garments can be 10-200 times the cost given here.

Breeches, wool	$5
Breeches, linen	$8
Breeches, leather	$15
Boots	$80
Shoes	$40
Tunic, wool	$5
Tunic, brocade	$20+
Cloak, wool	$8
Cloak, fine cloth	$20+
Cloak, fur	$100+
Undershirt, linen	$5
Shift, linen	$7
Dress, linen	$12
Dress, cloth	$25+
Hat, wool	$2
Hat, leather	$4

Weapons and Armor

Weapons and armor were always expensive, but worth the price in an uncertain world! See the *Weapon Table*, p. 39, for weapon prices. Prices of armor follow p. B210.

Food

The Viking diet included whole meal rye bread, oat and barley porridge, fish (especially herrings), mutton, lamb, goat, horse, beef, veal, pork, bacon, goose, chicken, cheese and butter. Drink included beer, mead, and — among the wealthy — imported wine (a Viking introduced to distilled liquor would be unprepared for the experience!). Whale, seal and polar bear meat were also important in the far north, Iceland and Greenland; reindeer and European bison were hunted in northern Scandinavia. The most common vegetables were cabbage and onion; fruits included berries, apples and hazelnuts. Honey was used as a sweetener and in the brewing of mead. Game was an important secondary food source, and included elk, deer, wild boar and hare. When other food sources failed, it was sometimes necessary for people to space out their supplies with seaweed, bark and lichen.

Food could be preserved in ice or in salt — salt was generally obtained from seaweed. Boiled meat seems to have been more popular than roasted, despite later images of Viking feasts with whole oxen on the spit. There were usually two meals per day: one in the morning and one in the evening.

Snacks (pickled herring, fruit, etc.) could be bought for $1 or less. The makings of a meal might cost $1-2. Vendors of prepared food were rare; one either ate with one's family or host or prepared one's own food! Beer cost around $50 per barrel (25 gallons); mead cost $100 for a keg (4 gallons). Wine cost as much as a merchant could get for it — at least $100 for a 4-gallon keg.

Lodging

Lodging was not available as such — the Viking code of hospitality meant that there was little demand for inns and the like. Such establishments may have existed at large towns, charging perhaps $1 per night. But a man who sold his hospitality would be held in little esteem, and everyone would know that someone who had to buy a place to stay clearly had no friends in town — and was therefore vulnerable. Traders visiting foreign ports normally stayed aboard their ships at night, or — if they were part of a caravan — camped outside town, with their own guards posted.

Livestock

Like most farmers, a Viking age Scandinavian would cheerfully tell you that a head of livestock was worth whatever the seller could get for it. There are no fixed prices, since so much depends on age, sex, breeding condition, meat weight, general health and other factors. Prices below can be treated as average, but they can vary upwards by up to 10 times for fine animals of good pedigree or reputation, proven fertility and health, and so on.

Dog	$10
Heifer	$200
Milking Cow	$250
Ox or Bull	$1,500
Draft Horse	$2,000
Riding Horse	$1,200
Hawk	$100
Ewe	$100
Ram	$250
Goat	$150
Sow	$200
Boar	$400

Miscellaneous Goods

The range of odds and ends a Norseman can buy or otherwise acquire is almost endless. Here are a few examples, from which the GM should be able to improvise suitable prices for other goods. Again, high quality, gold inlays and the like can increase an item's price by up to 10 times.

Chess set	$30
Hnefatafl set	$25
Silk hlad	$10+
Silver arm-ring	$50
Gold arm-ring	$200
Brooch, etc.	$50+
Bone comb	$1 or less
Small knife	$1
Small casket (6"×4")	$5
Sea-chest (2-3 cu. ft.)	$15
Door-lock	$5
Bone skates	$2
Skis	$10
Ox-cart	$400
Horse-sleigh	$300
Faering (Boat, 20 feet)	$800
Small knarr (Cargo ship, 50 feet)	$10,000
Small drakkar (Warship, 75 feet)	$12,000
Pruning hook	$15
Pitchfork	$10
Grain flail	$20

Sample Character: Thorolf Einarsson

Thorolf Einarsson is a beginning Viking character, with ST 15, DX 10, IQ 11 and HT 13, for 100 points exactly. He stands 6'2" and weighs 180 lbs., with blue eyes and red-tinged blond hair. His father owns a smallhold farm on the Norwegian coast. As the third of four sons, he can't expect to inherit, and must find his own fortune.

Disadvantages

Collecting gulls' eggs on the cliffs as a boy, Thorolf had an eye pecked out by an angry nestowner. This gives him the nickname One-Eye (-15 points). He has a bad temper (-10), a mild fear of magic (-3), occasional family duties (-2) and a strong attachment to the Viking code of honor (-10). Unknown to Thorolf, he also has an evil wyrd — he is fated to be away from home in a year's time, when his family's ownership of their land is disputed by a rival family. Without Thorolf's testimony, the Thing will not give a strong judgment. The result will be a blood-feud, and when Thorolf returns home, he will find he has the equivalent of a 10-point Enemy: a medium-sized group, appearing on a roll of 6 or less. This disadvantage is worth -10 points.

Thorolf's disadvantages total 50 points — the normal maximum of 40, plus the Viking Code of Honor.

Quirks

The loss of his eye has left Thorolf with a dislike of gulls. He has a habit of whittling wood when he has nothing better to do with his hands, and his superstitious nature makes him distrust dark-haired people. He loves venison, and will eat it until it runs out. Finally, he has the pretentious habit of introducing himself by reciting his entire genealogy, just as the sagas list the whole ancestry of their heroes: "I am Thorolf One-Eye, son of Einar of the steading of Hamnsey, son of Bori son of Yngald who sailed to Greenland with Eric the Red, son of . . . " These quirks are worth 5 points.

Skills

Thorolf grew up sharing the farm-work with his father and brothers (Animal Handling-8, Agronomy-9, Fishing-9, Boating-10). He's familiar with his home environment in all its moods: Area Knowledge-10, Survival (Island/Beach)-10, Skiing-9, Skating-9, Swimming-13, Climbing-10 — the last saved him from a broken neck when he lost his eye. Growing up with three brothers in a society which values strength and self-reliance, he learned to handle himself in a fight and in a feast (Brawling-13, Carousing-12). His father and elder brothers have helped teach him the use of weapons (Spear Throwing-10, Shield-10). He has even had a few workouts with his father's sword (Broadsword-10). A favorite uncle took him out hunting and trapping as a youngster (Tracking-10, Stealth-10), and taught him games (Hnefatafl-11). Thorolf is fascinated by the sagas (Skaldic Lore-9). Secretly he longs to emulate their heroes, who could strike as sharply with a verse as with a blade (Poetry-10, Bard-9), and to move among noble Jarls instead of farmers and fishermen (Savoir-Faire 10). This comes to 36 points of skills, the maximum allowed by Thorolf's 18 years.

Advantages

Having spent most of his life with one eye, Thorolf has learned to try harder at spotting things (Alertness +1). He's also developed an attitude which refuses to admit defeat or let things get him down (Strong Will +2). He can call on one or other of his brothers for help from time to time, and the GM allows this as a single 100-point ally, appearing fairly often. Finally, the people of the district are beginning to talk of this one-eyed youth who lists his ancestors as if he were a king, speaks in verses and curses at seagulls — a slight, localized reputation worth 1 point. Thorolf's advantages total 19 points.

Money and Equipment

Thorolf starts with $1,000 — he had some goods and money of his own, and when he came of age his father gave him a gift to make up for not inheriting the farm.

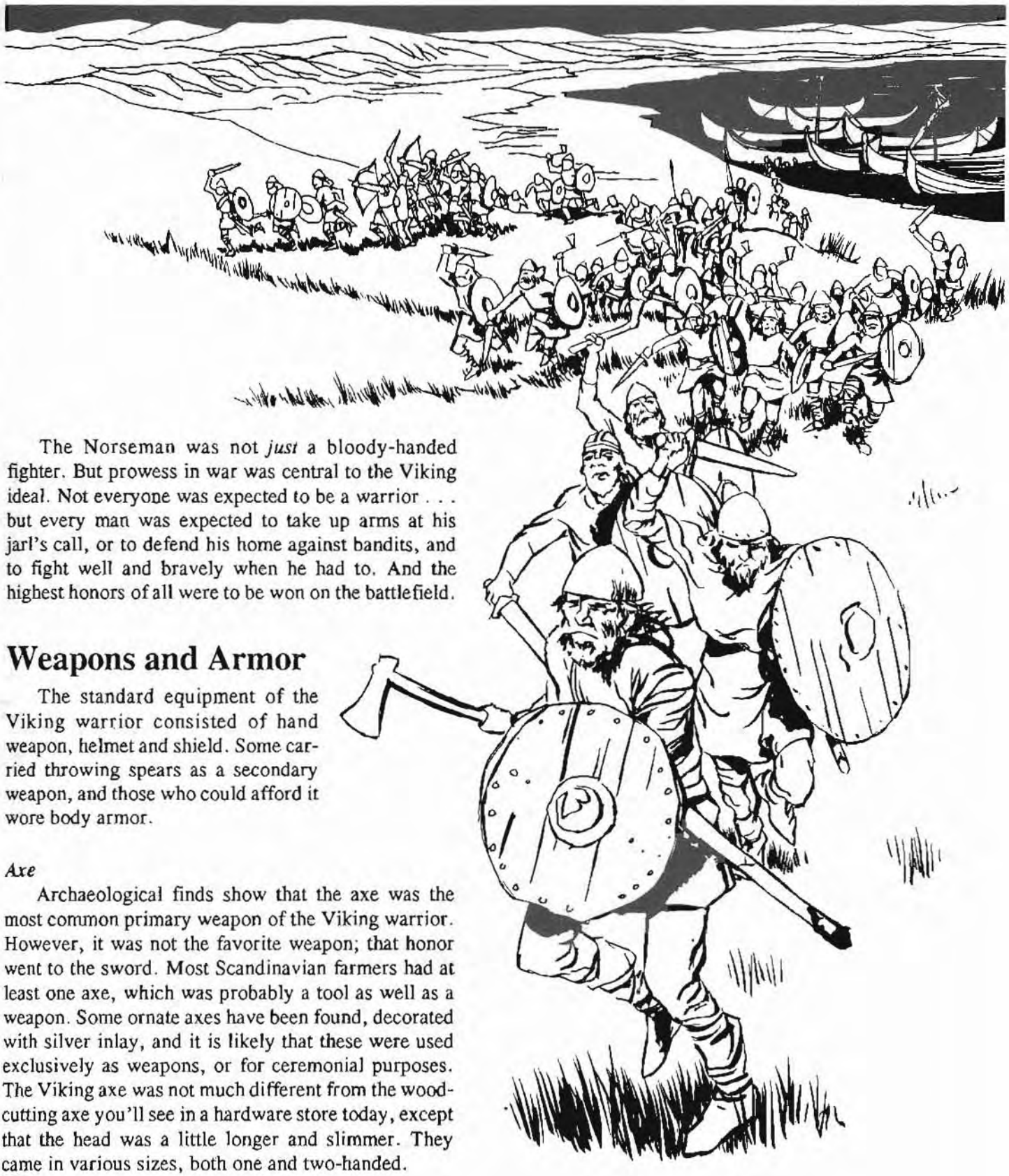
Thorolf longs to own a sword, but he'd have almost no money left for anything else. He satisfies himself with a throwing spear ($30), a small knife ($30) and a scramasax broadsword ($250). He also takes a sling ($10). Much as he would love one, Thorolf can't afford a mail coat, and settles for a steel helmet ($100), a leather jerkin ($100) and a shield ($45).

He wears a linen undershirt ($5), wool breeches ($5), a wool tunic ($10), leather boots ($80), a wool cloak ($8) secured by a silver-gilt brooch ($50) that caught his eye, and a leather hat ($4) which can be worn under his helmet. He has a silver arm-ring ($50), although he hopes he'll soon find a Jarl who will give him a gold one. Around his neck he wears a silver Thor's-hammer pendant ($50) — a wise move for a would-be seafarer.

Thorolf buys a sea-chest ($15) to hold the rest of his goods. These include two spare pairs of wool breeches ($10) and one leather pair ($15) for battle and heavy work, plus his best embroidered wool tunic ($25) and cloak ($20), and a spare linen undershirt ($5). A fine silk hlad ($15) completes his formal wear. Also in the chest is his hnefatafl set ($50) — a fancy one with pieces of amber and walrus ivory given him by his uncle — and a pair of bone skates ($2).

Thorolf's goods total $984, leaving him $16 in silver. He decides to save these to cope with expenses while he seeks his fortune — if he runs a bit short, jewelry can always be sold. But if he finds a generous lord, his expenses will be taken care of!

COMBAT 3



The Norseman was not *just* a bloody-handed fighter. But prowess in war was central to the Viking ideal. Not everyone was expected to be a warrior . . . but every man was expected to take up arms at his jarl's call, or to defend his home against bandits, and to fight well and bravely when he had to. And the highest honors of all were to be won on the battlefield.

Weapons and Armor

The standard equipment of the Viking warrior consisted of hand weapon, helmet and shield. Some carried throwing spears as a secondary weapon, and those who could afford it wore body armor.

Axe

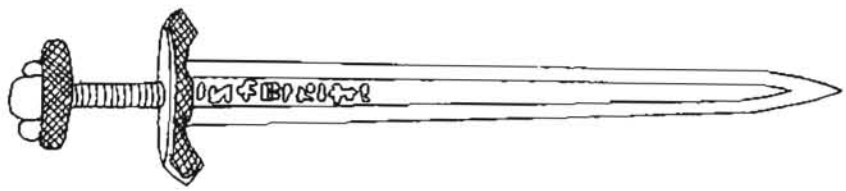
Archaeological finds show that the axe was the most common primary weapon of the Viking warrior. However, it was not the favorite weapon; that honor went to the sword. Most Scandinavian farmers had at least one axe, which was probably a tool as well as a weapon. Some ornate axes have been found, decorated with silver inlay, and it is likely that these were used exclusively as weapons, or for ceremonial purposes. The Viking axe was not much different from the wood-cutting axe you'll see in a hardware store today, except that the head was a little longer and slimmer. They came in various sizes, both one and two-handed.

except that the head was a little longer and slimmer (see the cover painting). They came in various sizes, both one- and two-handed.

Sword

Rarely will the sagas mention a hero using anything but a sword. The Frankish/Norse sword was the finest blade of its time, made using advanced techniques of pattern-welding to produce the ideal blend of strength, flexibility and a good edge. The same techniques were independently developed and refined by Japanese swordsmiths. It is possible to purchase a Fine or even Very Fine blade in the Norse home countries, though the price will be high (see p. B74). In a magical campaign, dwarf-made blades will always be Very Fine.

The sword was straight and broad, about three feet long, with a rounded end — designed for slashing rather than stabbing. The hilt was heavy, with a short guard that was straight or slightly downcurved. The pommel was large, and often triangular. The guard and pommel were favorite places for decoration, like gold and silver coatings or inlays.



Scramasax

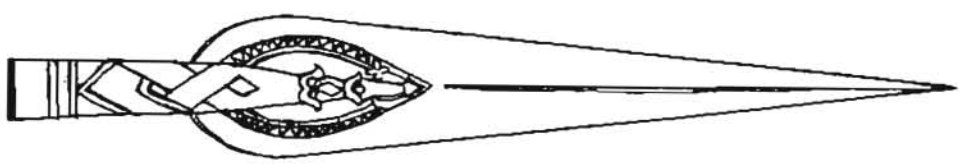
The scramasax was a type of blade rather than a class of weapon. It was made by grinding an iron bar to a single edge, and then clipping off one corner diagonally to give a point. They range from a few inches to three feet long. The shorter ones were almost certainly tools rather than weapons — the equivalent of a pocket-knife. Larger blades might be used as daggers or machetes, and the three-foot versions were almost certainly the poor man's sword.

The scramasax was a cheap, low-quality blade, made with the minimum of effort. No decorated examples have been found.

Any sword or knife from the Weapon Table (p. 39) can be a scramasax. Treat it as a "cheap" weapon (p. B74). It has a 2/3 chance of breaking when it parries a heavier weapon. Furthermore, because it's iron or *very* poor steel, it doesn't hold an edge well: -1 to all damage rolls. The price of a scramasax is *half* that of the equivalent sword or knife.

Throwing Spear

The throwing spear was the most popular secondary weapon, according to burial evidence. Many warriors seem to have carried one or two throwing spears into battle, to hurl at the enemy before closing for hand-to-hand combat. The head was long and slim — capable of forcing through the links of a chain mail coat — with a socket to take the wooden shaft and an iron peg to secure it in place.



Feats of Arms

Skill with spears was highly prized, and constantly practiced. A great spear-feat was to throw two spears at once, one from each hand. King Olaf Tryggvason of Norway was famous for this feat. Many years after his death a man named Tryggvi, claiming to be Olaf's son by a foreign marriage, tried to win the throne of Norway. His rivals refuted his claimed lineage, saying mockingly that he was only a priest's son; Tryggvi answered them in his last battle, flinging spears from both hands at once and saying, "This is how my father taught me to say Mass."

Another spear-feat was to catch a spear thrown at you and fling it back. This was done by dodging to one side, catching the spear back-handed, and using its momentum to propel the arm around in a backward circle, up to the position for throwing and pointing right back where it came from.

To game the two-spear feat, treat both throws as snap shots (-4); aiming at two targets at once is not practical. Note also that unless the thrower is Ambidextrous, then the off-handed throw will suffer a further -4 for a total of -8.

The spear-catching feat is gamed as three separate rolls. The warrior must first successfully Dodge the incoming missile. Then he must make a DX roll at -8 to catch the spear: a critical failure means that it has struck him in the hand or arm for normal damage. Having successfully caught the spear, he may throw it immediately (still in the same turn) as a snap shot, or hold it for a later return.

Viking Combat Training

Although a fine Norse sword would be very hard to break, many Viking "swords" were nothing more than a long scramasax. This is a cheap weapon, and easy to break. Thus, a Viking warrior would be trained to parry only as a last resort. Instead, he would block with his shield.

Therefore, shields were light, to make the blocking maneuver fast and easy. A light shield doesn't last long — so the Vikings considered them disposable. The small Gokstad ship (p. 108) has racks for 64 shields. It's possible that the ship could have carried that many men, but it seems just as likely that it was designed for a crew of 32, with two shields each.

To reflect this, the GM may use the following rule: Any fighter trained in the Norse style will have a +1 to his Block active defense. He will have a -1 to any one-handed Parry, whether or not he has a shield. his Parry with a two-handed weapon, and his Dodge, are normal.

Fighting Spear

A few Viking warriors used a fighting spear as a primary weapon. This was longer and heavier than the throwing spear, but not quite as long or heavy as a pike. Like the throwing spear, the head was long, comparatively narrow and socketed — the weapon was designed for piercing rather than slashing.

Although some reports of Viking armies compare the dense stands of spears to the trunks of a forest, there is no evidence that spear-carrying Vikings used any tactic like the Renaissance pike block or the Macedonian phalanx. Such close discipline would have been at odds with the individualistic Viking fighting style.

Francisca

The francisca is the Norse throwing axe. It is essentially a hatchet, with a large curved head. This was often elaborately decorated with inlays of silver wire. It can be used as a hand weapon, but only as a last resort — it's small.

Bow

Viking longbows were not much different from the classic medieval English longbow — the design remained largely unchanged from the Neolithic period, around 1400 BC, right up to the introduction of firearms.

The longbow was used for hunting as well as warfare. Arrows have been found in graves, in bundles of up to 40, with bodies of both sexes — although women warriors were practically unknown in Viking society (despite the popular image of the Nordic shield-maiden), they could have used bows for hunting or defending their homes.

Improvised Weapons

The rank-and-file of nearly all medieval armies was drawn from the land, and many, lacking weapons, made use of agricultural implements — pitchforks, grain-flails, long-handled pruning-knives and the like. Some of these implements developed into complex polearms by the Renaissance. Although there is little evidence of Scandinavians taking agricultural implements into battle — even farmers had real weapons — the Viking raiders no doubt faced many villagers armed this way.

Helmet

The typical Viking helmet (see sidebar) was a cap of leather or metal. Some were conical and others were more rounded. The main structure was a set of iron ribs from the rim to the crown; the spaces between could be filled with thinner sheet-iron or with hardened leather.

Nasals were a common addition, and could be developed into spectacle eye-guards — this was a popular place for decoration in gold or silver inlay. Cheek-guards were also added, hinged at the rim and very similar to the cheek-guards on a Roman legionary helmet. Other additions included chain-mail neck and throat-guards, and crown-spikes borrowed from Arabian and eastern European styles.

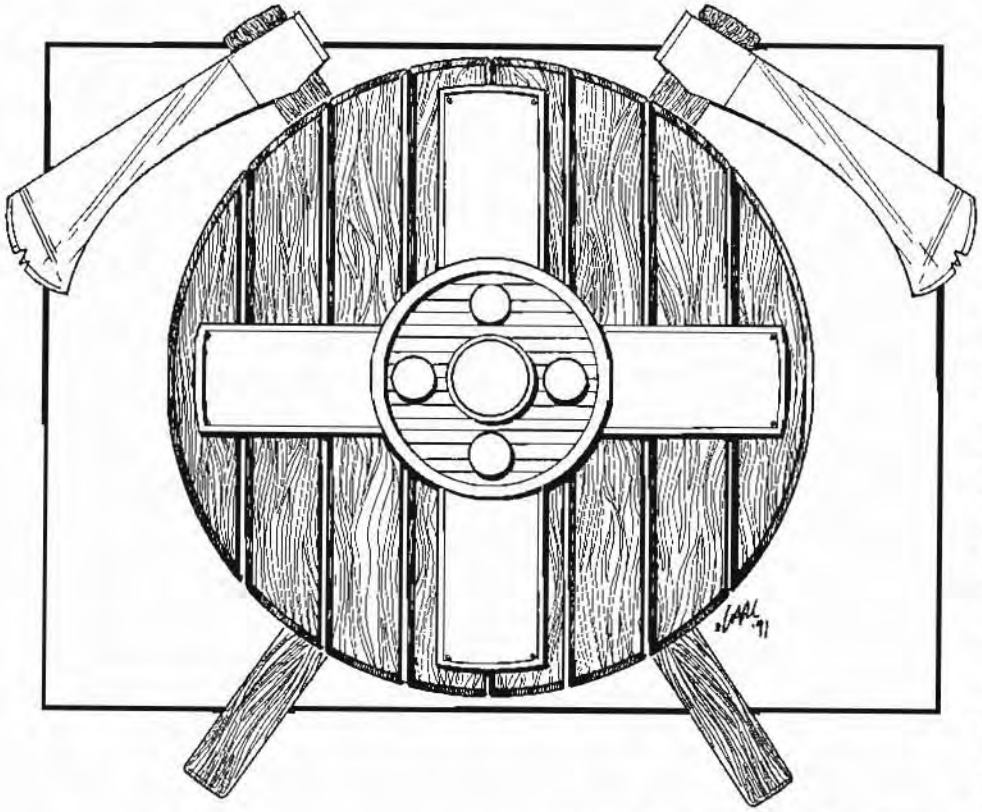
Viking Helmets

Viking helmets never had horns, wings or any other projecting decoration. This seems to have been invented by later artists and movie-makers. The Celts of Iron Age western Europe, eight centuries earlier, did use horned, winged and crested helmets. Certainly these can create a certain look of barbaric splendor, which may be why people decided that the Vikings ought to have horned helmets.

Actually, there are very good reasons not to have any projecting decoration on a helmet. For one thing, it adds to the weight, making it harder work to move your head and adding to the general encumbrance of your armor. Worse, a blow can miss the head altogether and still hit a horn or wing, twisting the helmet around with enough force to snap the wearer's neck.

The plain steel cap counts as a pot-helm (see p. B210). It costs $100, weighs 5 lbs., and has PD 3 and DR 4. It covers only the top of the head (areas 3 and 4).

A typical Viking helm adds a "nasal." This can be as simple as a plain steel bar projecting down over the bridge of the wearer's nose. It adds a great deal of protection for the face, all by itself. The nasal can be elaborated into "spectacle" eye-guards. Other pieces, like cheek-guards and aventails (chain-mail neck-guards) can be added as well. An improved Viking helm will have a PD of 4; DR remains 4. Cost becomes $200, weight 7 lbs. Area covered is now 3, 4 and 5, since the elaborations protect the face.



Armor

Most Vikings wore no armor other than their everyday clothes. Like swords, metal armor was an expensive luxury — the sagas tell of coats of bright mail, but very few fragments have been found. Chain, ring and scale mail were all known, and some individuals added bone splints to their leather jerkins for added protection. One of the nobles who took part in the revolt against St. Olaf had a dozen coats of Lapp reindeer hide for himself and his followers, which, it was said, could turn a blow as well as any mail-coat. Armor was usually worn only on the torso, leaving the arms and legs unencumbered.

Shield

The Viking shield was circular, and about 3 feet across. It was made of light wooden boards nailed to an iron handle. The user gripped this handle in the center, and his knuckles were protected by an iron boss. A good shield might be faced with hide or fitted with a metal rim, but the emphasis was on lightness, so that it could move quickly to deflect an incoming blow or missile (see sidebar). A Viking warrior was better trained at shield-blocking, and less likely to parry, than his European counterpart.

Shields were disposable, and not expected to survive a battle. Treat a Viking shield as a large shield for defense purposes, but it is light: 12 lbs. $45. Use the shield-damage rule (sidebar, p. B120), but an ordinary Viking shield's own DR is only 2, and it's easy to penetrate. Any blow of more than 5 hits will go through the shield; after it takes 40 hits, it is worthless.

There are some references to the shield-boss being used as an improvised mailed fist after the wood of the shield was hacked from around it — see the sidebar.

Even though the shield was disposable, it was usually brightly painted. The Vikings did not have any "heraldry" as such, but a warrior might adopt a personal symbol.

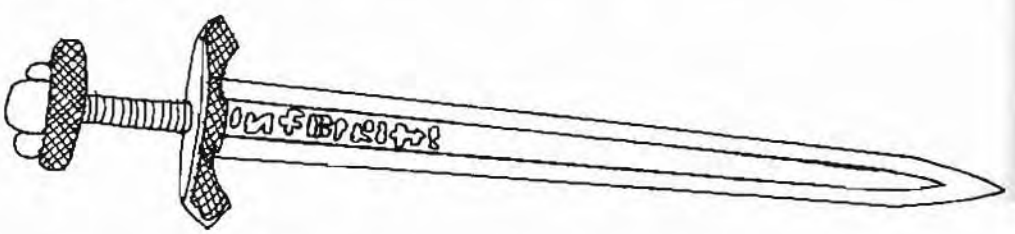
Shields

The shield was the main blocking weapon of the Vikings. They tried to avoid parrying with the sword, since — except with the best weapons — this would spoil the edge and might even risk the blade breaking. It was safest to take the force of a blow on the flat of the shield, trying to turn the blow away with a sweeping motion of the shield-arm. A riskier tactic was to take a blow on the shield-rim, if the shield had a metal rim; this might blunt or break the opponent's sword, but on the other hand it could allow him to split the shield and perhaps injure the shield-arm.

Shields suffered in Viking combats; it would be appropriate to use the optional shield damage rule (B120). In some formal duels, the combatants could break off to replace their shields three times, and in other circumstances a fight might be interrupted by agreement so that the combatants could get fresh shields.

After the wood of the shield had been hacked away from the iron shield-boss, it was possible to use the boss as a kind of mailed fist. By the 16th century, German duellists had developed this into a specialized dueling weapon which they call the Hutt ("hat"). There is an entry on the Weapon Table for the shield-boss, reflecting its use as a weapon.

Viking shields could be used to rush or bash, but there is no truth in the rumor that they were sometimes fitted with horns or pointed shield-bosses to enhance a bash or rush. Like horned helmets, this is a myth.



Weapon Table

Cost is in silvers ($1) for good quality weapons. A scramasax is worse than cheap — it costs only half the price of the equivalent knife or sword. Fine and very fine swords (p. B74) can be had, and lavish decoration on any weapon could increase the price by as much as the buyer would pay. Weight for swords and daggers includes a good scabbard.

HAND WEAPONS

Weapon	*Type*	*Amount*	*Reach*	*Cost*	*Weight*	*Min ST*	*Special Notes*
AXE/MACE (DX-5)†							
Francisca (hatchet)	cut	sw	1	$40	2 lbs.	7	Throwable. 1 turn to ready.
Axe	cut	sw+2	1	$50	4 lbs.	12	1 turn to ready.
Large throwing axe	cut	sw+2	1	$60	4 lbs.	12	Throwable. 1 turn to ready.
BROADSWORD (DX-5, Shortsword-2 or Force Sword-3)							
Broadsword	cut	sw+1	1	$500	3 lbs.	10	
	cr	thr+1	1				Standard Viking sword has *blunt* point.
Bastard sword	cut	sw+1	1, 2	$650	5 lbs.	11	1 turn to ready after swing.†
	cr	thr+1	2				Standard bastard sword has *blunt* point.
FLAIL (DX-6) *Any attempt to parry a flail weapon is at a -4. Fencing weapons* ***cannot*** *parry flails.* †							
Grain flail †	cr	sw+2	2, 3	$20	8 lbs.	12	1 turn to ready. Any attempt to parry a flail is at -4.
KNIFE (DX-4)							
Large knife	cut	sw-2	C, 1	$40	1 lb.	—	Maximum damage 1d+2.
	imp	thr	C				Throwable; Maximum damage 1d+2.
Small knife	cut	sw-3	C, 1	$30	½ lb.	—	Maximum damage 1d+1.
	imp	thr-1	C				Throwable; Maximum damage 1d+1.
Dagger	imp	thr-1	C	$20	¼ lb.	—	Throwable; Maximum damage 1d.
PUNCH (DX)							
Shield boss #	cr	sw	C	#	1 lb.	—	May parry. See p. 38.
SHORTSWORD (DX-5, Broadsword-2 or Force Sword-3)							
Shortsword	cut	sw	1	$400	2 lbs.	7	
	imp	thr	1				
SPEAR (DX-5 or Staff-2)							
Throwing	imp	thr+1	1	$30	2 lbs.	—	
Fighting	imp	thr+2	1*	$40	4 lbs.	9	Used 1-handed. Throwable.
		thr+3	1, 2*				Same spear used 2-handed.
STAFF (DX-5 or Spear-2) *Requires two hands.*							
Quarterstaff	cr	sw+2	1, 2	$10	4 lbs.	6	Parry is ⅔ Staff skill.
	cr	thr+2	1, 2				
TWO-HANDED AXE/MACE (DX-5) *Requires two hands.* †							
Great axe	cut	sw+3	1, 2*	$100	8 lbs.	13	1 turn to ready.
Scythe	cut	sw+2	1	$15	5 lbs	12	2-handed. 1 turn to ready
	imp	sw	1			6	-2 to hit when impaling.

RANGED WEAPONS

Weapon	*Type*	*Amt*	*SS*	*Acc*	*½D*	*Max*	*Cost**	*Weight†*	*Min ST*	*Notes*
AXE THROWING (DX-4)										
Francisca (hatchet)	cut	sw	11	1	ST×1½	ST 2½	$40	2 lbs.	7	
Large throwing axe	cut	sw+2	10	2	ST	ST×1½	$60	4 lbs.	11	
BOW (DX-6) *2 hands to fire. 2 turns to ready.*										
Regular bow	imp	thr+1	13	2	ST×15	ST×20	$100/$2	2 lbs.	10	Max. dam. 1d+4.
Longbow	imp	thr+2	15	3	ST×15	ST×20	$200/$2	3 lbs.	11	Max. dam. 1d+4.
Quiver								$10	½ lb.	Holds 10 arrows
KNIFE THROWING (DX-4)										
Large knife	imp	thr	12	0	ST-2	ST+5	$40	1 lb.	—	Max. dam. 1d+2.
Small knife	imp	thr-1	11	0	ST-5	ST	$30	½ lb.	—	Max dam. 1d+1.
Dagger	imp	thr-1	12	0	ST-5	ST	$20	¼ lb.	—	Max. dam. 1d.
SLING (DX-6) *2 hands to load, 1 to fire. 2 turns to ready.*										
Sling	cr	sw	12	0	ST×6	ST×10	$10	½ lb.	—	Fires rocks.
Staff sling	cr	sw+1	14	1	ST×10	ST×15	$20	2 lbs.	—	Fires rocks.
SPEAR THROWING (DX-4 or Spear Thrower-4)										
Throwing	imp	thr+1	10	3	ST×1½	ST×2½	$30	2 lbs.	7	
Fighting	imp	thr+3	11	2	ST	ST×1½	$40	4 lbs.	9	

*Cost: The number after the slash is the cost per shot (arrow or other missile) for a missile weapon.
† An arrow weighs 2 ounces, a sling-stone 1 ounce.

This is not a set of wargame rules for gaming a long battle in detail. When a mass battle takes place in a roleplaying campaign, there are only two questions to be answered: "Who won?," and "What happened to the PCs?"

Overview

Each military force contains units, each with its own type of fighter — for instance, the well-armed, well-armored huscarls and the more miscellaneous carls are two separate units. A minor Jarl might only raise a force of a few score men, while a national army might be immense. The GM has the last word on what may or may not be considered a unit.

Each unit has a Troop Strength reflecting its size, type and quality. A force's Troop Strength is recorded on a Force Roster (a blank form is on p. 41). Each force has a designated commander, who may be a PC or NPC.

In a battle, the opposing commanders roll a quick contest of their Strategy skills, modified by Troop Strength and other advantages. The contest determines who wins the battle and how many casualties there are. Meanwhile, each PC's Battle skill and choice of Risk determine his chance of Survival and Glory.

This procedure allows a GM to reduce a battle to just a few die rolls. Again, it's a roleplaying aid, not a wargame system.

Troop Strength (TS)

The Troop Strength of a unit depends on its type and quality. Multiply this value by the number of men (or other creatures) in the unit to give the unit's total TS.

Troop Types

Heavy Infantry (HI): Well-armored footmen with sword and shield, or a heavy polearm. This would be a Norse fyrd, or picked troops of an European ruler. TS value 5.

Medium Infantry (MI): Moderately well-armored footmen with sword or axe and shield. Huscarls, or good European troops. TS value 4.

Light Cavalry (LC): Troops mounting light horses, with very little armor; javelins, spears and other light weapons. The Norse did not use cavalry as such, but might have faced it occasionally. TS value 4.

Light Infantry (LI): Light-armored footmen with axe or fighting spear and shield. Regular Norse carls, or average European troops. TS value 3.

Irregular Infantry (II): Irregular footmen and untrained spear levies using any armor and weapons available. TS value 2.

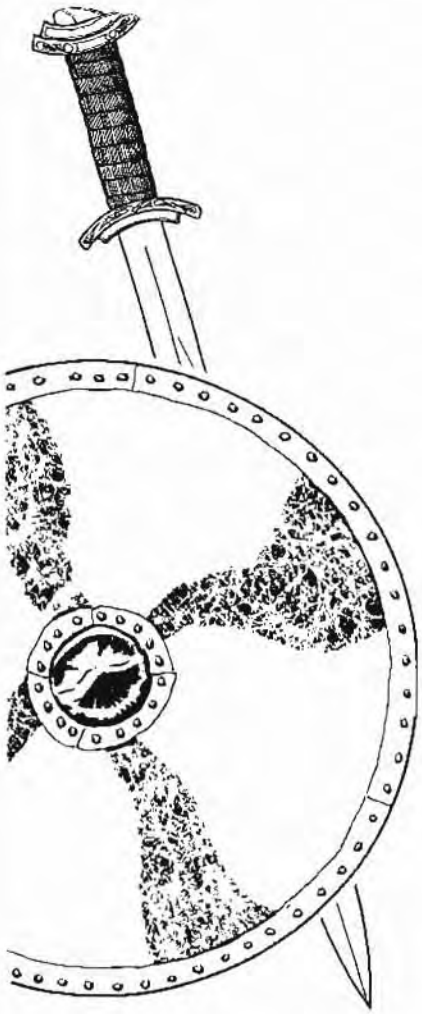
Rabble (R): Villagers and victims. TS value 1.

Although the Vikings had horses and rode them into battle, they did not fight from horseback; like the chariot in Celtic times, the Viking horse simply allowed its rider to move quickly across the battlefield before dismounting to fight on foot.

Troop Quality and Morale

Troop quality, from Elite to Raw, is determined by the average experience of the men in the unit. This also gives the unit's base morale (see table below). When new men join a unit, the new Troop Quality is the new average experience of the men.

Example: Jarl Harald Grim-Eye commands a carl unit of 30 farmers and fishermen, who have fought an average of three battles each. The unit has a base TS of 90 (30×3) but, having fought only three battles, it is Green quality, giving it an effective TS of 72 (120×0.8). In their next battle they lose five men, so their base TS becomes 75 (25×3). But this was their fourth battle, moving them up to



Mass Combat Turn Sequence

The system has seven steps for each battle (or for each day of the battle):

1. Determine each force's makeup by unit. Determine each unit's Troop Strength. Add all unit TS scores to find the force TS.
2. The GM rolls for Catastrophe for each side.
3. Determine each PC's Battle skill and Risk factor, then roll for Survival and Glory.
4. Roll a Quick Contest of the two leaders' Strategy skills, modified by:
   a. Catastrophe, if any;
   b. Relative Troop Strength;
   c. Defensive position;
   d. Glory (or death) of unit leaders;
   e. GM's appraisal of both sides' battle plans;
   f. Special circumstances;
   g. Use of diviners.
5. Each PC on the losing side makes a second Survival roll.
6. Determine casualties for each army (and, if it matters, for each unit).

Average quality, so they fight at base troop strength; the unit is actually stronger after the battle than before.

After the battle, seven more youngsters join them, fresh from the farms. The unit now has 32 men: 25 with 4 battles behind them and 7 with no battles behind them — but counted as 1 because of the Norse background. Their base TS is 32×3 = 96. Their new average battles becomes ([25×4] + [7×1])/32 = 3.34, rounded down to 3, so the unit is back down to Green quality, with a .8 multiplier. Their final Troop Strength, then, is 76.8, rounded down to 76.

Determining Troop Quality (roll 3 dice)

Die Roll	*Troop Quality*	*Battles Fought*	*Base Morale*	*Troop Strength*
3	Elite	15+	16	2×base TS
4-6	Crack	10-14	15	1.5×base TS
7-9	Seasoned	6-9	14	1.2×base TS
10-12	Average	4-5	13	base TS
13-15	Green	1-3	11	0.8×base TS
16-18	Raw	0	9	0.5×base TS

Note that Viking reinforcements are never treated as "Raw," even if they have never been in a battle. Treat no-battle troops as one-battle troops, because any Norse youth would have had experience with hunting, and most likely a good deal of informal weapon training.

During the Battle

Players whose characters are in leadership positions may attempt to give orders to their troops once the battle has started and any enemy surprises have occurred. PCs who are not leaders can control only their own fates — and then only to a limited extent — by deciding how much Risk they choose to take. But they should describe their actions anyway. A player should not just say, "I'm going for a -3 Risk on Survival to get +3 Glory," but "I'm charging straight for the enemy commander, yelling out my name and lineage as I do so."

Similarly, the GM should present all morale effects with maximum drama — during preparations for the battle, at the beginning of the battle and when troops begin to rout.

Remember that glory is one of the Norseman's main objectives. Even the gods are doomed to die when Ragnarok comes, but a man whose story is told and retold until the end of time — that man is truly immortal.

Force Roster

Troop name	*Troop type*	*Troop quality*	*Morale*	*# men*	*Basic TS*	*HT*	*Leader: Strat*	*Tact*	*Battle*

Determining Commander's Experience (roll 3 dice)

Use this if one or both force commanders are NPCs.

Die Roll	*Quality*	*Battles*	*Strategy Skill*
3	Elite	15+	1d+16
4-7	Crack	10-14	1d+14
8-11	Seasoned	6-9	14
12-15	Average	4-5	12
16-17	Green	1-3	10
18	Raw	0	9

Catastrophe

When the battle begins, the GM rolls 3 dice on the following table, once for each side, to see if something goes disastrously wrong. A PC commander (but no other PC) can use the advantage of Luck, if he has it, to re-roll a catastrophe.

Morale

Each unit starts with a Base Morale, determined by its Troop Quality. Campaign events can affect morale before the battle. Catastrophes affect morale for that battle only. Loss of established leaders affects morale until the force wins a clear victory; as long as the force is defeated, fights inconclusively, or wins only marginal victories, the morale stays low.

Morale is used to determine whether a defeated unit withdraws in good order or routs. The GM may also require a morale roll whenever a unit is asked to do something dangerous or unreasonable (fight at unreasonable odds, go without food and water, scale a castle wall despite massed defenders, dropped rocks and boiling oil).

Morale Modifiers

In a war against a sworn foe (e.g., a blood-feud), Morale is always +1.

Units defending home territory always have +2 Morale.

Atrocities always require a Morale roll. On a failed roll, Morale drops by 1. On a successful roll, Morale rises by 1 instead, in anger.

Morale before a battle is +1 if the unit has defeated the same foe this year. It is -2 if the unit has been defeated by the same foe this year.

Morale will always be at least +1 for attackers who have been assured that the loot will be good.

Vikings will have +1 morale if their leader has a reputation for luck.

3-7	No catastrophe.
8-9	Enemy manages some sort of surprise: -1 to Strategy roll.
10	Dissension among allies or top leaders weakens morale. -2 to Strategy roll, -1 to Morale of all units.
11	Enemy receives unexpected reinforcements, or is just lucky. Increase his Troop Strength by 10%. (The GM must be creative and come up with a plausible reason for this.)
12	Battle plans have been partially revealed to the enemy by spies or traitors, or he turns out to be particularly inspired in reading your moves: -2 to Strategy roll.
13	An ally or unit commander (determined by GM) defects to the enemy, revealing plans and taking his troops with him. Recalculate Troop Strengths for both sides; -2 to Strategy roll.
14	Enemy reveals a terrifying atrocity; all units must make a Morale roll. Units which make the roll get +1 morale from anger, units which fail the roll get -1 Morale through fear.
15	An important unit leader (rolled randomly or chosen by GM) is wounded early in the battle (2d damage): -1 to Morale of all units, -2 to Morale of his unit.
16	The force commander is wounded early in the battle (2d damage): -2 to Strategy roll, -3 to Morale of all units.
17	Important unit leader (rolled randomly among leaders commanding at least 20% of the side's Troop Strength) killed (or if PC, wounded and unconscious) early in battle: -2 to Morale of all units, -3 to Morale of his unit. If a PC, the character makes no further Survival or Glory rolls.
18	Force commander killed early in battle (or if PC, wounded and unconscious). Base Strategy roll cut in half (round up). -5 to morale of all units.

Consequences to PCs

The more courageous and daring a warrior is, the more likely he is to get hurt! Each PC in a battle must roll against Battle skill. Battle skill cannot be studied or taken as a beginning skill. It is the average of the PC's Tactics skill (defaulting to IQ-6) and his combat skill with his primary weapon, with a +2 bonus if he has the advantage of Combat Reflexes. If he uses both a melee and a missile weapon, base Battle skill on the melee weapon.

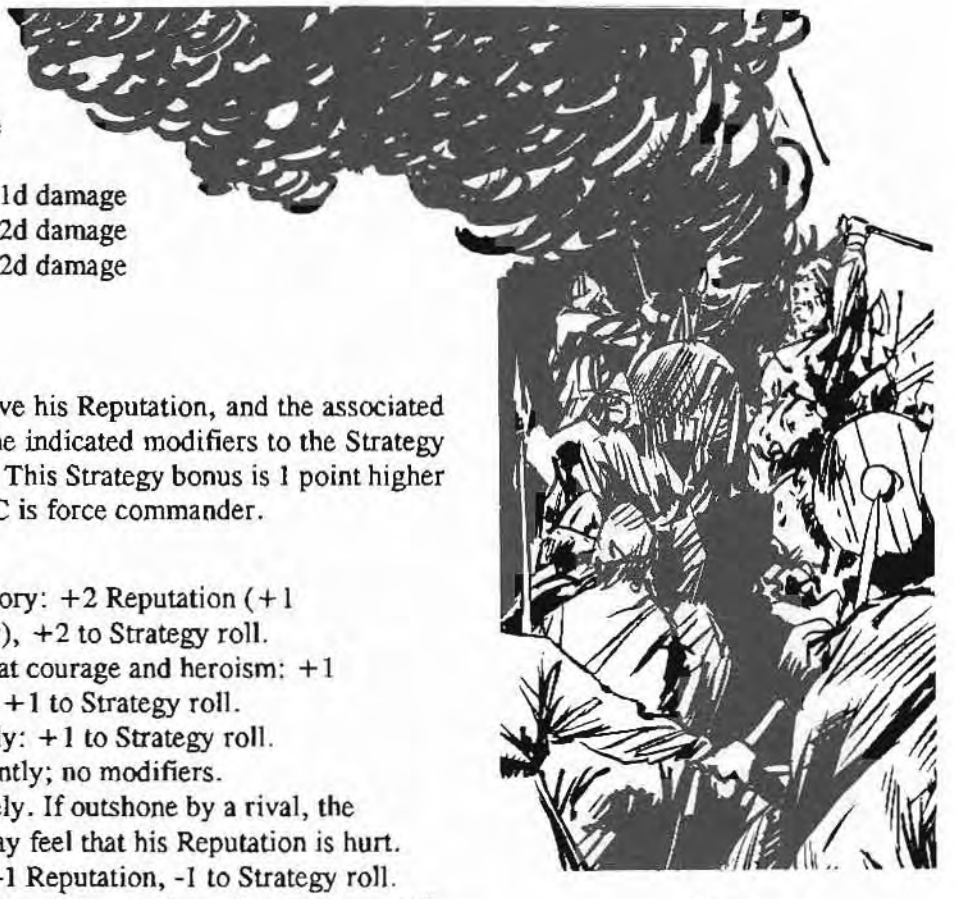
The Tactics skill covers the PC's prudence; the combat skill covers his ability to kill foes before they kill him. Note Battle skill on the PC's record sheet in pencil, since it will change if he goes into battle with different weapons or if his skills improve.

A PC can choose to take more or less risk in battle, and the player announces his choice before making the Survival Roll. He may modify the roll by any amount from +6 to -6. Note, however, that the opposite modifier applies to his Glory roll. If survival is +4, then Glory is -4. PCs with the Cowardly disadvantage should not pick a modifier of more than -1; Overconfident PCs should not take a modifier lower than +1.

Survival Roll

If the Survival roll results in damage, take injury directly from the character's HT score — subtract Toughness but not armor. Determine hit location(s) randomly. If a PC unit or army leader takes enough injury to fall unconscious, his unit's final Strategy roll suffers a -2 penalty.

Battle Skill Roll	*Result*
Made by 5 or more	Unhurt
Made by 1-4	1 hit of damage
Made exactly	2 hits of damage
Missed by 1-2	1d+1 damage
Missed by 3-4	2 wounds, each 1d damage
Missed by 5-6	2 wounds, each 2d damage
Missed by 7+ or critical failure	3 wounds, each 2d damage



Glory Roll

A warrior who gains glory will improve his Reputation, and the associated reaction bonus, for the following year. The indicated modifiers to the Strategy roll are used only if the PC is a unit leader. This Strategy bonus is 1 point higher (and any penalty is 1 point worse) if the PC is force commander.

Battle Skill Roll	*Result*
Critical success	Covered with glory: +2 Reputation (+1 permanently), +2 to Strategy roll.
Made by 7-9	Fought with great courage and heroism: +1 Reputation, +1 to Strategy roll.
Made by 4-6	Fought heroically: +1 to Strategy roll.
Made by 0-3	Fought competently; no modifiers.
Missed by 1-3	Fought adequately. If outshone by a rival, the character may feel that his Reputation is hurt.
Missed by 4-6	Fought poorly: -1 Reputation, -1 to Strategy roll.
Missed by 7+ or critical failure	Fought very badly: -2 Reputation, -3 to Strategy roll.

Check the reaction of the character's immediate leader after the battle, based on the warrior's improved Reputation. A favorable reaction will dispose this NPC to do the hero a favor: this might consist of a gift or a boon, or the opportunity to sit beside the lord at the evening meal.

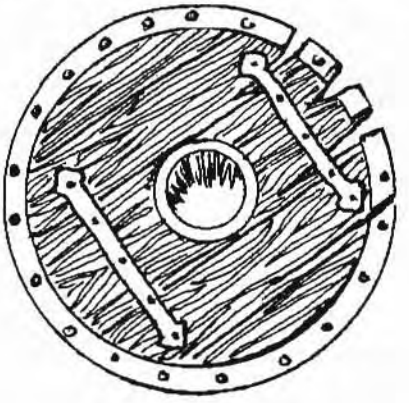
Modifiers to Commander Strategy Skill

The GM now takes into account the circumstances of the battle, which may raise or lower the effective Strategy skill of each side's commander. All these modifiers are cumulative.

Relative Troop Strengths

Compare the Troop Strengths of the two forces. Divide the greater TS by the lesser one for the "odds ratio." For example, a TS of 100 vs. a TS of 50 is an odds ratio of 2:1. The greater the odds ratio, the greater the bonus to the Strategy skill of the stronger force's commander.

Ratio	*Strategy Skill Bonus*
1.2 or less	No bonus
1.2+ to 1.4	+1
1.4+ to 1.7	+2
1.7+ to 2	+3
2+ to 3	+4
3+ to 5	+5
5+ to 7	+6
7+ to 10	+7
10+	+8



Rout

Units, or even the entire force, may rout (flee in panic) on a very bad combat result and/or a failed Morale roll. If a force routs, its casualties are increased. Whether a routed unit will ever reform as a unit is up to the GM. If the battle was in friendly territory and/or there were plenty of places to hide and/or the leader is charismatic, the survivors may be able to re-assemble.

Quick and Dirty Mass Combat

If you don't want to take the time to break each side down into its component units, just estimate the force's Troop Strength and overall base Morale (possibly by assigning an "average quality" and "average type" to each force). Apply all other modifiers as before, estimating where necessary. Roll the Quick Contest as before, taking casualties and checking Morale, when required, for the entire force.

500 raw recruits are approximately equal to 300 green troops, 250 average troops, 200 seasoned troops, 165 crack troops, or 125 elite troops.

Berserkers

Berserkers in mass combat can be treated either realistically (as tough fighters) or cinematically (as *very* tough fighters with incredibly high morale).

The simplest and most realistic way to deal with a unit of berserkers is to treat it as huscarls, with Troop Quality always Average or better. A roll of more than 10 for Troop Quality is treated as 10. This give berserkers a definite advantage, reflecting their love of fighting.

To follow the sagas more closely, add the following rules:

1. The morale of a unit of berserkers is always 2 points higher than indicated by its Troop Quality.

2. Berserkers will never rout — when a rout is rolled for a unit of berserkers, it fights to the death instead.

3. Berserkers do not use ranged weapons or armor.

4. If the Catastrophe roll for their side faces a unit of berserkers with an Atrocity, do not make a Morale Roll for them. They automatically react with anger.

5. A PC fighting with a unit of berserkers suffers a -1 modifier to his Survival Roll and a +1 modifier to his Glory Roll. These modifiers may be altered as normal by the PC's chosen level of bravery.

Defensive Position

If one side is clearly the defender, that side gets strategy modifiers based on its position. When appropriate, these modifiers are cumulative.

Attacker attacking downhill: -3 or worse
Attacker approaches under cover: -1
Attacker must climb a gradual incline: +1
Attacker must climb a steep incline: +2
Attacker must climb a steep incline on bad ground: +3
*Attacker must force a narrow passage (e.g., defile, bridge): +2 to +8
*Defender protected by palisade or unforded river: +3
*Defender occupies fortified structure or village: +4
*Defender occupies fortified town: +6
*Defender occupies castle: +8

* The starred situations will require use of a special "siege" table to resolve the battle; see *Resolving the Contest of Strategy*, below.

Special Unit Superiority

A force will receive a Strategy bonus if its Fyrd or Huscarls, regardless of troop quality, outnumbers the equivalent opposing troop type by at least 2:1.

2:1	+1 to Strategy
3:1	+2 to Strategy
5:1 or better	+3 to Strategy

Special Circumstances

Apply penalties for any of the following situations. All these circumstances are determined by the GM or by the group's roleplaying; for instance, a unit is unsupplied if the GM says it is.

New commander (regardless of experience): Drop all but Raw troops 1 Quality step.
Taken totally by surprise: -5 to Strategy
Partial surprise (less than 1 hour warning): -2 to Strategy
Force-marched into battle: -5 to Strategy
No supplies: -3 to Strategy
Short supplies in a besieged city or castle: -2 to Strategy
Supplied by foraging only: -1 to Strategy
On home ground: +2 to Strategy (not cumulative with defensive bonus for fortification).

The GM may give additional modifiers from -5 to +5 for other factors as he sees fit: for example, a heavy fog, where troops can hardly see their allies or their enemies, might be worth -3.

Battle Plans

The GM should sketch a map of the battlefield (or perhaps of several possible battlefields) for the players, especially if the PCs are unit or force leaders. He should then ask the players to give him a battle plan for any side in which a PC is present. The GM may impose a Strategy roll modifier of up to +/-3 according to how he rates the plan.

If the GM is taking the part of one side (that is, if one side has no PCs present), he should occasionally spring a tactical surprise on the players. Describe what happens realistically. If they handle it well, they get a Strategy bonus; if they react poorly, they suffer a penalty.

Diviners

A careful or superstitious commander might consult diviners before the battle. The effectiveness of divinations in general is known only to the GM — and even in a campaign where magic is real, an individual diviner may be a charlatan. A commander may consult many diviners, but he must choose which, if any, to believe. A genuine diviner who makes his skill roll adds +1 to the commander's Strategy roll — +2 on a critical success. If the diviner is a fake and the commander decides to believe him, substitute the diviner's Strategy roll for the commander's. The details of these modifiers must, of course, remain secret from the players.

Resolving the Contest of Strategy

After determining the effective Strategy scores of the two opposing commanders, a Quick Contest of Strategy is rolled to determine how well the troops are handled. For battles involving less than 200 men, Tactics may be substituted for Strategy.

The winner of the contest is the winner of the battle. The difference in the amounts by which the commanders make or miss their rolls will determine how decisive the victory is. Whether defeated troops withdraw in good order or not depends on their Morale Roll (see sidebar, p. 42). Refer to the appropriate table below to find the outcome. Use Tables B or C if any of the starred Defensive Position modifiers applied.

Example: one leader makes his roll by 4, the other by 2. The difference is 2; the battle was inconclusive. If one leader makes his roll by 4 and the other misses by 4, the difference is 8 — a much more one-sided battle.

A. Open-Field Battle

1-3: Inconclusive battle. Each unit should make a Morale Roll. Those who succeed hold position. Those who fail by 1-4 withdraw in good order. Those who fail by 5+ rout (see sidebar).

4-7: Marginal victory. Make a Morale Roll for each unit on the losing side. If the roll is made it withdraws in good order; otherwise it routs.

8-12: Definite victory. As above, but losers are at -2 to Morale.

13-16: Great victory. As above, but losers are at -4 to Morale.

18+: Overwhelming victory. Every unit on the losing side routs.

B. Siege Defender Wins

0-3: Inconclusive battle. The attacker is thrown back but holds his former position. He may attack again on the next day, at -2 morale.

4-7: Marginal victory. Attacker holds position if more than half his units can make a Morale Roll; otherwise, whole force withdraws in good order.

8-12: Definite victory. As above, attackers are at -2 to Morale.

13-16: Great victory. Make a Morale Roll for each attacking unit. If the roll is made it withdraws in good order, if the roll is failed it routs.

17+: Overwhelming victory. As above, but attackers are at -2 to Morale.

C. Siege Attacker Wins

0-3: Inconclusive battle. The attacker technically won, but the defender will suffer no morale penalty on the next day of battle.

4-7: Marginal victory. Both sides hold position. The defender suffers a -2 Morale modifier on the next day of battle.

8-12: Definite victory. Defender holds position if more than half his units can make a Morale Roll; otherwise, defending forces rout or surrender.

13+: Great victory. The attacker captures the position. The defenders rout or surrender.

Loot!

The whole reason to go a-viking, of course, is for loot. The riches to be won will depend on the place raided. A castle or monastery will yield silver, of course. But a simple village will yield livestock and slaves, which could be almost as valuable and considerably easier to get away with! And, for a seafaring people, the chance to steal a good *ship* can never be overlooked.

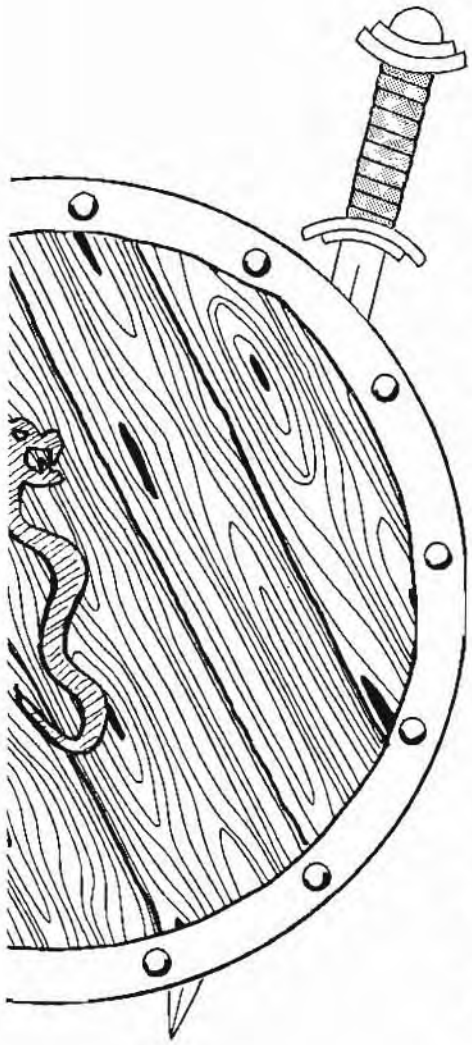
The loot from a battlefield itself is also very valuable. The force that holds the field after a fray will be able to recover the arms and armor of all its own casualties, and most, if not all, of the other side's dead. If the foe routed, both its dead and wounded — *all* its casaulties — will be left for looting.

Very roughly speaking, the average value of the gear stripped from a fallen or captured foe would equal 25% of the cost to equip that man normally. This seemingly low amount is due to lost weapons, damaged armor, and the like.

Note that great honor can be shown to a fallen foe by burning or burying his gear with him, instead of taking it as loot.

Division of Loot

Little is known about the "standard" division of loot from a raid. We can assume that in this, as in all things, the leaders were expected to be generous with their men! In general, a leader should plan to make gifts worth at least $200 a month to each fighter, or give him the opportunity to win that much in loot. For a voyage of exploration or trade rather than battle, half this much will suffice. If this is not done, the men will look for another lord or leader!



Amphibious Attacks

Saxon and Frankish chroniclers marveled at the ease and speed with which a shipload of Vikings could run in through surf, beach and disembark in fighting order. For all other nations, an army was painfully vulnerable for several hours while landing and forming up, and the Vikings can justifiably be said to have invented the amphibious assault. They could strike from the sea with very little warning, often getting in and out before any kind of defense could be organized. Even when the ships were seen approaching, the defender might expect to have more time than he truly did!

To reflect this, treat any attack by Vikings which comes from the sea as a partial surprise (-2 to defender's Strategy), unless the defenders *knew* it was coming for at least 3 hours in advance, or 2 if the defenders were also Norse.

Additional Survival Rolls

Any PCs on the losing side of the battle must make a second Survival roll, using the same Risk modifier as for the first roll. Adjust this roll down by -1 for every 3 full points of difference in the outcome of the battle (see Resolving the Contest of Strategy). If the PCs are on a defending side, also adjust the roll up by any bonus for starred Defensive Position modifiers.

If a PC's unit was routed, the second Survival roll is made at -2. Any adventuring after that will be directed, at least for a time, toward getting home alive or regrouping with other lost comrades — and after that, towards extirpating the shame of having fled the battlefield.

Casualties

After the Contest of Strategy, casualties are determined for each force. This does not affect the fate of the PCs; their fates are determined by their Survival Rolls. Even if a PC's unit is completely wiped out, the PC will get away somehow if he survived.

Find the Quick Contest of Strategy difference on the Casualty Table below. Opposite that number (a positive number for the victor, a negative number for the loser) is listed the percentage of troops that side lost in the engagement. For example, if the difference is 3, the loser consults '-3' and loses (4d+20)% of his troops, while the victor consults '3' and loses (4d)% of his troops.

If the defender was protected by his position (modifiers with a * under *Defensive Position*), add that modifier to his contest difference (but not his opponent's) before assessing casualties. For instance, if the defender lost the roll by 3, but had a +3 modifier for a palisade, he would consult '0' for casualties.

Armor can reduce casualties. Armored warriors move down 2 lines on the Casualty Table.

If a unit routs, roll a die and adjust casualties upward by that many *lines* on the Casualty Table. For example, if the defender lost the roll by 2 and a 3 is rolled for a routing unit, consult '-5' rather than '-2'.

Round all losses up. Losses are divided evenly among the units of a force unless the GM decrees (or a PC leader says) that some particular unit was leading the fray or holding back.

Casualty Table

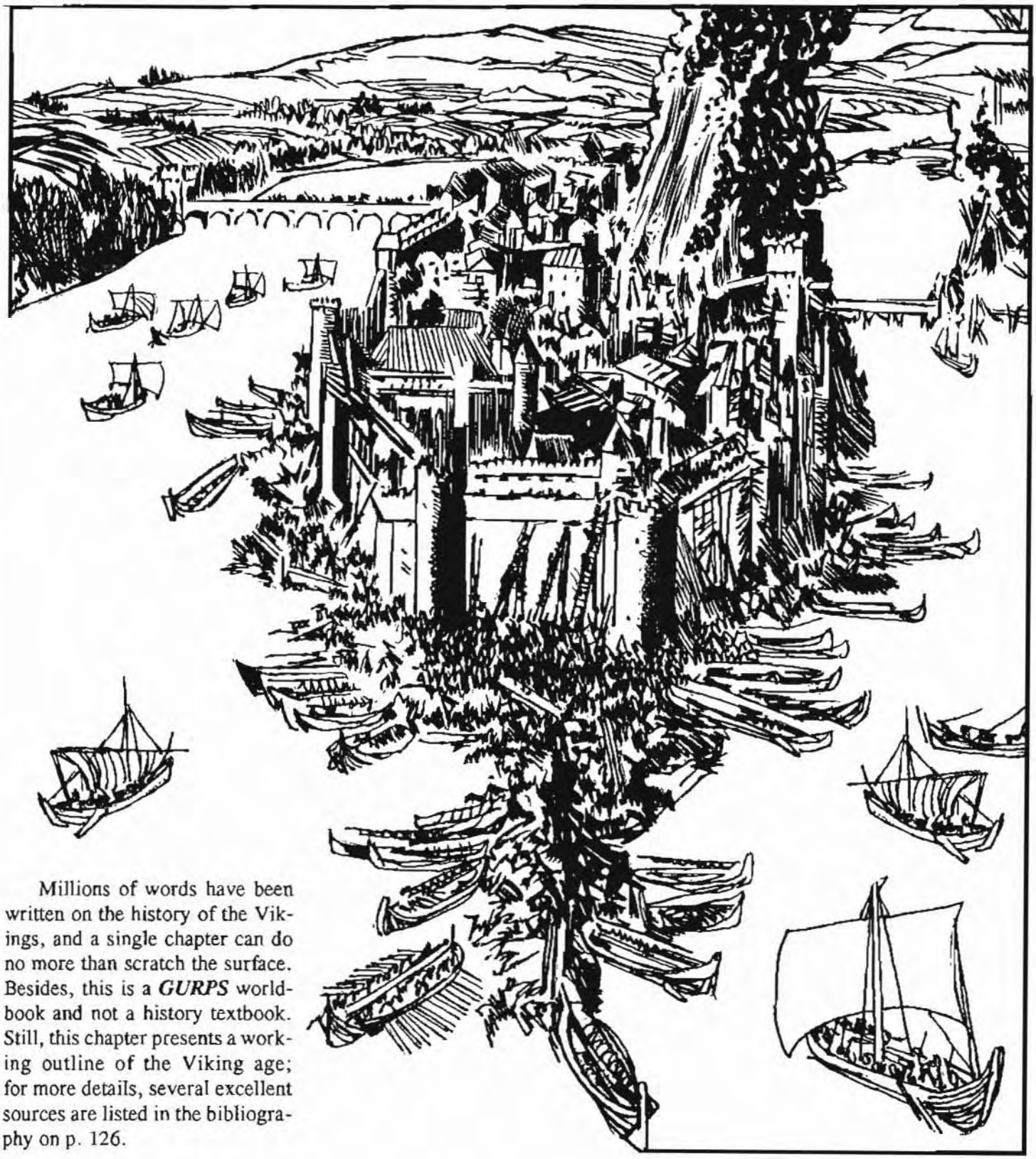
-19 or less	(12 d + 60)%	1, 2	(4d+5)%
-17, -18	(11d + 55)%	3, 4	(4d)%
-15, -16	(10 d + 50)%	5, 6	(3d)%
-13, -14	(9 d + 45)%	7, 8	(2d+2)%
-11, -12	(8d + 40)%	9, 10	(2d)%
-9, -10	(7d + 35)%	11, 12	(1d+2)%
-7, -8	(6d + 30)%	13, 14	(1d)%
-5, -6	(5d + 25)%	15, 16	2%
-3, -4	(4d + 20)%	17, 18	1%
-1, -2	(4d + 15)%	19 or more	no losses
0	(4d + 10)%		

Aftermath

Half the casualties (round down) are killed or permanently maimed. The other half recover at 5% (of the unit's original strength) per day in camp, or 2% per day on the march.

This ends the "mechanical" portion of mass combat. Dealing with the outcome in terms of the campaign is left to the GM and players.

HISTORY 4



Millions of words have been written on the history of the Vikings, and a single chapter can do no more than scratch the surface. Besides, this is a ***GURPS*** worldbook and not a history textbook. Still, this chapter presents a working outline of the Viking age; for more details, several excellent sources are listed in the bibliography on p. 126.

The Dawn of the Vikings

The Vikings exploded onto the European scene in the late 8th century AD; it must have seemed as if they came out of nowhere. Certainly several Christian commentators of the day thought their sudden appearance was miraculous, being a divine punishment for the sins of the afflicted peoples.

Few realize that the Vikings did not just raid. In the beginning, they landed, looted and left. But later they dug in and stayed, setting up their own kingdoms.

The historical phenomenon known as the Viking age had a number of causes, and with the wisdom of hindsight it can almost seem inevitable.

The Time is Right

In the 8th century, Europe was ripe for the plucking. Although the Franks were the most powerful nation, even they suffered under weak kings. Charlemagne fortified the coast after the first Viking raids, and this kept the Danes out for the duration of his reign. His son Louis the Pious let the defenses run down, so that Viking raids started in the 830s and lasted for the rest of the century.

Anglo-Saxon England consisted of a number of petty kingdoms, who spent a lot of time fighting among themselves. The most powerful leader of the time was Offa of Mercia, who called himself Rex Anglorum — "king of the English" — and built Offa's Dyke to keep out the Welsh. Some link Offa with the legendary King Arthur. Offa's rule only really affected the southern half of the island, and like so many great kings of this period his achievements didn't outlast his death. In the north of Britain, where the Vikings first made contact, neither the Scots nor the Northumbrians were strong enough or organized enough to mount a successful defense against the raiders.

Ireland was equally divided if not more so, and although they fought hard — as the Irish always have against invaders — the Norwegians settled there after a generation of battles. They even founded Dublin.

The other peoples affected by Viking raiding, like the Slavs and Frisians, were minor powers, little able to defend themselves.

Maritime Technology

Despite its remote location and barbaric image, Scandinavia was some way ahead of the rest of Europe in shipbuilding and navigation. Viking ships could mount true amphibious assaults, running in through the surf, beaching and deploying their troops with a speed that made Christian historians marvel. Ever since Roman times, a force had always been at its most vulnerable while disembarking; this fact had been drilled into the European military consciousness for centuries. The standard tactic was to find a quiet landing-place and hope your force was in good fighting order by the time defenders arrived to give battle. Viking landings broke all the rules, and no one knew how to cope with them.

Apart from Charlemagne's short-lived fortification of the Frankish coast, no one in Europe had anything that could honestly be called a navy or a coastal defense system. Alfred the Great organized an English fleet in response to Scandinavian attacks, but the last serious attempt at defending the coast had been the Roman Litus Saxonicum ("Saxon Shore Defenses") four centuries earlier, designed to keep the Saxons out. No one could challenge the Vikings at sea, and they had generally looted and departed — or secured the area and dug in — by the time the alarm could be raised.

Population Expansion

To many historians, population growth is the main reason for the start of the Viking age. Chroniclers marvel at the huge size of Viking armies and the num-

The Viking Expansion: Non-Causes

As historians have striven to understand the beginning of the Viking age, many theories have been put forward. Some have lasted for decades before being found wanting and discarded. Here are a few non-causes of Viking expansion, which the reader might still find in history books.

Enforced Emigration

Some historians and chroniclers claim that young men were forced to leave their homelands if they had nothing to inherit, for fear that they might turn to banditry and cause trouble. There is no evidence to support this theory, and it is probably a misinterpretation of younger sons leaving voluntarily to seek their fortunes abroad.

Foreign Pressure

Western European peoples have undertaken mass migrations in various periods because expanding neighbors have forced them out of their homelands. Caesar's conquest of Gaul started when Gaulish tribes displaced by expanding Germans crossed the Alps in search of a place to live. The Saxons, Angles, Jutes and Goths may have assaulted the northern frontiers of the Roman Empire four centuries later because they were forced from their homelands by expanding Germanic-Nordic tribes. Some historians, especially those devoted to a cyclical view of history, clung to this theory in the case of Viking expansion — but there was no one to force them from their homelands, and few invaders would even have wanted to conquer such bleak and infertile terrain.

Climate Change and/or Crop Failure

This is another common cause of mass migrations in earlier periods of history; it has been strongly linked with the Hunnish invasion of Europe. While the climate of Scandinavia did deteriorate between the Bronze Age and the Viking period, none of the scientific evidence — of which there is now a great deal — indicates any change at the time the Viking age got started. A few centuries earlier, and the theory would have fitted perfectly, but not at this time.

Then, too, the first Viking movements were not actual migrations. They were smash-and-grab raids, for plunder and slaves rather than for a place to live. Later, the Vikings did indeed start conquering and settling, but not at first — which means that they were under no pressure to leave their homelands *en masse*.

bers of their losses — often enough to cripple any other nation. Commentators like Adam of Bremen draw attention to the Scandinavian practice of polygamy, and coupled with the limited amount of habitable land in the Viking homelands, it is quite possible that overpopulation played a part in the Viking expansion.

The Viking laws of inheritance may also have helped encourage young men to go abroad. Inheritance was based on primogeniture — that is, the eldest son inherited everything and the others got nothing. Since Scandinavian men prided themselves on the number of sons they could sire, there would have been no shortage of young men willing to seek their fortune in overseas adventures.

Internal Strife

Scandinavian rules of succession were such that a new king or jarl would have at least a couple of disappointed rivals to deal with. They would often leave the country to build up alliances and wealth, planning to come back stronger and perhaps take over by force.

One of the most severe penalties under Viking law was banishment. While this did not actually force the banished individual to leave the country, going abroad definitely improved the chance of surviving the sentence. Iceland, at one time, was a favorite destination for men who had just lost serious arguments with their king.

Trade

During the Roman period, the European trade network was centered in the south, well away from Scandinavia. While Mediterranean trade goods did reach Scandinavia at this time, the Norsemen were very much on the fringe of things. Arab expansion cut off southern trade routes, and the European market shifted north, with its hub in the Frankish Empire. The Rhine became an artery and trade expanded along the coasts of the North Sea. When Charles Martel acquired Friesland for the Franks in 734, Frankish trade picked up considerably. When Charlemagne conquered the Saxons, the Frankish Empire gained a border with Denmark.

Scandinavia was suddenly involved in European trade, dealing with merchants from all over the continent. The expansion of North Sea trade and the continuing exploration of the Swedes into central Europe brought goods, merchants, and wealth. And wherever these things are found, there also will be pirates.

The Raiders

The first reports of the Viking expansion are reports of raids; although trade and other peaceful contact may have taken place earlier, it is certain the raiding preceded the period of conquest and colonization which characterized the later Viking period.

Lindisfarne and Early Raiding

The first recorded Viking raid was against the island monastery of Lindisfarne, off the Northumbrian coast, in AD 793. One of the holiest shrines in England, it was completely undefended and held religious relics and other objects of considerable monetary value. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle tells of terrifying omens — lightning, flying dragons and famine — preceding the raid. Alcuin, a famous Northumbrian priest and scholar who was employed by Charlemagne in France at the time, wrote to King Ethelred of Northumbria that this horror was God's punishment for the sins of the people.

The raiding continued through the early part of the ninth century — first by

Denmark Storms the Market

King Godfred of Denmark watched Frankish and Swedish expansion with covetous eyes. His country sat between two great trade networks and he was excluded from both. The Elbe — the nearest of the Baltic rivers — was out of reach and the Franks were threatening, rather than trading, in the south of Jutland. Denmark had no sizable harbors, especially in the west — so traders from the south preferred the straight run to Norway rather than the time-consuming and hazardous trek through the Skagerrak and around the Danish islands.

Godfred burned the Slav trading town of Reric and — apparently at sword-point — moved its merchants to a new location at Hedeby, thus founding one of the greatest Viking towns. Then, he built a huge earthwork called the Danevirke ("Dane's Rampart") across the base of Jutland; this had the dual purpose of providing a fortification against the Franks and of protecting a trade road which cut out the long and risky Skagerrak sea-route. In effect, Denmark had seized control of a trade-route and linked the two markets. The next phase of Godfred's plan was to conquer Friesland from the Franks and take over their great port of Dorestad, thus making Denmark a major player in both markets and the only link between the two . . . but he was murdered in 810, before this could be accomplished.

Danegeld

"Once you pay Danegeld, you never get rid of the Dane."
— old English saying

Danegeld was the tribute paid to Norse raiders to induce them not to raid. Sometimes the Vikings took it and left; sometimes they settled in as rulers. Collecting tribute was certainly easier than fighting!

Timeline

This timeline can't hope to cover the entire history of the Viking age and every noteworthy event that took place in over 300 years; for more information, refer to the bibliography.

793: First recorded Viking raid; Lindisfarne, Northumbrian coast.

794: Raid on monastery at Monkwearmouth, near modern Sunderland. Storm kills many raiders.

795: Raid on island monastery of Iona, west Scottish coast. Iona was the motherhouse of Lindisfarne. Raid on Irish island of Lambay. Raids on Welsh coast.

797: Raid on Kintyre, Scotland. Raid on Patrick's Isle, Isle of Man.

c. 800: Norwegians invade Ireland and colonize Faeroes; Orkney and Shetland follow.

802: Second raid on Iona.

806: Third raid on Iona.

807: First recorded raid on Ireland.

810: King Godfred of Denmark attacks Friesland with 200 ships; he dies later this year. Charlemagne fortifies Frisian coast.

814: Death of Charlemagne. Louis the Pious succeeds, allows defenses to run down.

820: Skirmishes in Flanders and mouth of Seine.

834: Danes attack Friesland, capture and loot Dorestad. They do this regularly for the next 30 years.

835: Danes establish winter bases in Thames estuary, raiding England and France.

839: Swedes send ambassadors to Byzantine court. Large Norwegian force under Turgeis arrives in north of Ireland; Turgeis declares himself "King of all the foreigners in Erin."

c. 840: Norwegians found Dublin.

840: Death of Frankish king Louis the Pious. Frankish Empire begins to decline. Danes and Norwegians begin to sweep across France.

843: Frankish Empire divided between Louis' three sons.

844: Irish capture Turgeis and drown him in Lough Owel. Danes begin to appear in Ireland, Irish side with them against Norwegians. Norwegians from France mount expedition to Iberian peninsula, capturing Lisbon, Seville and Cadiz; they are later defeated and exchange prisoners for food and clothing before leaving.

845: Danish fleet of several hundred vessels ravages Hamburg. Smaller Danish fleet under Ragnar Lodbrok captures Paris.

851: Irish and Danes defeat Norwegians early in year; later Olaf the White arrives from Norway, reconquers Dublin and restores Norwegian supremacy in Ireland.

859: Norwegians from France mount expedition into Mediterranean lasting until 862. Hastein takes Luna by feigning death.

Continued on next page . . .

Norwegians, with Swedes and Danes following suit. Despite their impact in the chronicles, these raids were minor, usually undertaken by lesser Jarls with no motive other than money. Later, larger-scale acts of aggression were still called raids, but often involved kings and senior Jarls, and had deeper political and economic motives. Eventually these gave way to settlement and conquest.

Target Areas

Geography played a great part in where Vikings went. The Klen (Keel) mountains which form the spine of the Scandinavian peninsula effectively divide the Viking homelands into east-looking (Sweden) and west-looking (Norway).

The Norwegians went west and southwest, through the Faeroes, Orkneys and Shetland to Scotland and the Irish Sea. It was mainly Norwegians, too, who went northwest to Iceland, Greenland and Vinland.

The Swedes went east and southeast, establishing domination over most of the Baltic and pressing inland down the rivers that led to central Europe.

The Danes occupied the center, dominating the North Sea as the Norwegians ruled the Irish Sea and raiding Friesland, France and eastern England — and sometimes pressing on down the Atlantic seaboard to the Mediterranean. Despite the Frankish presence at the base of Jutland, the barren heathlands of Sleswig effectively separated the Danes from their land neighbors, the Saxons in the southwest and the Slavs in the southeast.

Of course, there were exceptions. The Scandinavians who settled in France and founded Normandy were Norwegians, and some Danes went east into the Baltic, challenging the Swedish sphere of influence.

The High Seas

Viking pirates haunted the sea-lanes of the Atlantic trade routes, attacking ships at sea as well as easy targets on land. There are only a few mentions of specific events, such as St. Anskar's encounter with pirates off the Swedish coast in about 820, but just about every historian and geographer who deals with the sea-trade of northern Europe at this time mentions pirates in the waters of Scandinavia. As with the early raids, these pirates were private individuals, often defying their kings. St. Anskar's pirates were almost certainly Danes or Swedes, although he was traveling from Denmark to Sweden with the blessing of both monarchs.

The Traders

Literary sources speak of Vikings as raiders . . . but the archaeological evidence points overwhelmingly to trade. It now seems that trade was by far the more important activity, even though raids were more newsworthy.

Alfred the Great was the king of Wessex who would later stop the Scandinavian advance into England by ceding them the territory of the Danelaw. He wrote of a Norwegian trader called Ottar, who told the king a few things about the geography of his homeland. Ottar was a wealthy man, who farmed, bred reindeer, hunted whales and walrus, and took tribute from the Lapps in addition to trading. He traded in live reindeer, skins, walrus ivory and ropes made of seal and walrus hides — made by a single spiral cut which brought the hide off the carcass in a single thin strip, these ropes were very strong and much in demand.

Ottar lists the great trading-ports along his route — Skiringssal and Hedeby — and a Saxon trader called Wulfstan describes a voyage into the Baltic and up to the mouth of the Vistula.

Around 950, Hedeby was visited by an Arab merchant named Al-Tartushi from Cordova in Arab Spain. He writes little of trade, but describes the town and

its inhabitants well enough to leave no doubt that he was actually there. — and he can only have been there to trade. Other Arab traders are quoted in Chapters 1 and 2 on the appearance and character of the Rus — their principal wares at these meetings seem to have been slaves and furs. Again around 950, the Byzantine Emperor, Constantine Porphyrogenitus, writes about the long and difficult journeys undertaken by the Rus; he does not specifically mention trade, but his writings support archaeological evidence of the Rus trading along the great rivers from the Baltic to the Black and Caspian Seas.

Archaeological Evidence

Archaeological evidence for trade is considerable, and growing all the time. Excavations at the two great trading towns of Hedeby and Birka — each, by a stroke of fate, left undisturbed since the Viking age — have yielded goods from all over the known world, as well as merchants' "tools" such as scales. Near Roskilde in Denmark, a trading-ship was found at the bottom of an inlet.

Arabian coins are common finds in Swedish burials and coin hoards. A count made in the first half of this century of coins found on the island of Gøtland yielded 25,000 Arabic coins, 18,000 Anglo-Saxon, 30,000 German and various lesser amounts from elsewhere. Irish metalwork is also to be found, although this and at least some coins may represent plunder and Danegeld rather than the profits of honest trade. Perhaps the most spectacular illustration of long-distance contact is a bronze Buddha statuette found on the island of Helgø in Lake Mälar, which probably came from India via Arab intermediaries.

The extent of Viking trade, and the commodities involved, are shown on the maps on pp. 14 and 16.

The Conquerors

The earlier raids were largely the work of individuals out for loot. Later, expeditions became larger, with a view to conquest and settlement.

England — The Danelaw

Around 835, the Danes established winter bases on the islands of Sheppey and Thanet in the Thames estuary, from which they raided both England and France. After sacking Canterbury and London and fighting hard but inconclusive battles against Ethelwulf of Wessex, they turned north to East Anglia and Northumbria, taking York in 866 and overrunning Mercia until the Mercians paid Danegeld. Only Wessex still stood when Alfred came to its throne; he paid Danegeld to buy time while the Vikings wintered in London in 871-2. Part of their army returned to Northumbria, using York as a base for colonization. The rest attacked Wessex, supported by amphibious attacks on the Channel coast. Alfred was forced into hiding (when the famous cake-burning incident supposedly occurred), but raised fresh forces and won a decisive victory at Edgington in 878. The Danes retreated to East Anglia and turned to colonization. Alfred liberated London in 886. At Alfred's death in 889 the Vikings — Danes in the east, Norwegians in the west — held an area north and east of a line from the Thames estuary to Chester: the Danelaw. It later became part of Norman England, but retains many Scandinavian influences in local dialects and customs.

Ireland

The Norwegians invaded Ireland shortly after 800. Dublin, founded sometime between 839 and 844, became the Viking capital of Ireland and the Irish Sea. In the 840s, Danes appeared in Ireland, and the Irish joined with them against the Norwegians, but after some early successes, the Danes were ousted.

Timeline (Continued)

866: Danes take York and begin colonizing northern England.

867: Danes attack Mercia. Mercia pays Danegeld.

860s: Norwegians discover Iceland.

871: Alfred the Great ascends throne of Wessex. Pays Danegeld to buy time. Danes winter in London.

876: Danes attack Wessex from Cambridge. Alfred forced into hiding.

878: Battle of Edgington. Alfred defeats Danes, who retreat to East Anglia and commence colonization. England/Danelaw border more or less secure from now on.

886: Alfred liberates London from the Danes.

889: Death of Alfred the Great.

900: Norwegian Gunnbjørn sights Greenland. Sweden takes Danish throne and gains control of Hedeby.

901: Irish capture Dublin from Norwegians.

911: Rollo created first Duke of Normandy by Charles the Simple; acknowledgement of permanent Norwegian settlement in France. The Rus sign treaties with Byzantium; this goes on for 30 years.

916: Norwegians attack Ireland from bases in England. Irish defeated at Confey.

919: Norwegians massacre Irish at Climashogue. Ireland is more or less subdued for the next few decades.

930s: Harald Finehair resigns Danish throne to Erik Bloodaxe. Migration to Iceland slows and stops in this decade.

930: Althing set up in Iceland.

936: Denmark re-takes Hedeby from Sweden.

c. 960: Harald Bluetooth "makes the Danes Christians." Norwegians mount sporadic raids on Iberian peninsula throughout the decade.

975: Death of King Edgar of England breaks 25 years of peace.

979: Edgar's son and successor Edward is murdered; Ethelred the Unready (a better translation is "Ethelred with No Idea," or "the Clueless") comes to the English throne.

c. 980: Renewed Viking raids on England, continuing throughout the decade.

981: Saxon missionaries go to Iceland. There is trouble, and they are banished.

982-5: Eric the Red explores Greenland.

978: Missionaries sent from Norway to Iceland. They are chased off the island.

986: Bjarni Herjolffson sights Vinland.

991: England pays Danegeld.

992: Leif Ericsson investigates report of land west of Greenland; explores Vinland.

994: Norwegian chief Olaf Tryggvason and Danish king Swein Forkbeard attack London with a hundred ships; they are beaten off but plunder southeast England and are paid 16,000 pounds of silver to leave. Raids on English coast continue.

Continued on next page . . .

Timeline (Continued)

997: Norway sends missionaries to Iceland. Initial progress is marred by killing and banishment.

1000: After violent disputes, Iceland votes to become Christian. Leif Ericsson introduces Christianity to Greenland about the same year.

1002: Ethelred orders the massacre of all Danes in England.

1003: Swein Forkbeard launches attacks on England in reprisal for the massacre of Danes by Saxons.

1009: Olaf the Stout raids London, and pulls down London Bridge with his dragonships.

1012: War breaks out in Ireland between Brian Boru, the supreme monarch, and the king of Leinster, who turns to Sigtrygg Silkybeard, the Norwegian ruler of Dublin, for help.

1013: Swein Forkbeard invades England; London holds out, but Wessex is overrun. Ethelred flees to Duke Richard II of Normandy, his brother-in-law.

1014: Swein Forkbeard dies suddenly in England. At the battle of Clontarf, Brian Boru is killed, but his forces beat the Vikings.

1015: Edmund Ironside seizes power in the Danelaw. In the resulting wars Ethelred dies, and Cnut the Great, Swein Forkbeard's son, becomes king of all England. He tries to keep a hold on Norway and Denmark as well, coming closer than anyone else to unifying the Viking world.

1035: Cnut dies and his realm begins to disintegrate.

1037: After much wrangling Cnut's son Harald Harefoot becomes king of England.

1040: Harald Harefoot dies before the Danish king Hardacnut can attack. Hardacnut becomes king of England.

1042: Hardacnut dies. Edward the Confessor becomes king of England.

c. 1045: Harald Hardrada returns from Byzantium where he had served in the Varangian Guard, and claims a share of the Norwegian throne from his brother Magnus. A shaky deal is arranged.

1047: Magnus falls from his horse and dies; Harald Hardrada becomes king of Norway, and attacks Denmark repeatedly into the 1050s.

1064: Norway and Denmark make peace; Harald Hardrada turns his attention to England.

1066: Harald Hardrada attacks England and is killed by Harald Godwinson at the battle of Stamford Bridge. Harald Godwinson force-marches across the country, to die at the battle of Hastings as Duke William the Bastard of Normandy conquers England.

1170-1250: Most of the sagas are written in Iceland.

1261: Norwegians take over Greenland.

1347: Last recorded voyage to Markland.

It was not until 901 that the Irish captured Dublin from the Norwegians. Norwegian influence spread from Ireland to western Scotland, the Isle of Man, Cumbria and parts of Wales. Historians speak of the "Irish Sea province"; the water was more of a road than a barrier.

France — Normandy

The Danes had pressed the Franks ever since the death of Charlemagne in 814. They forced their way up the Seine and Loire, despite occasional defeats. So much Danish manpower went to England and France that Denmark was conquered by the Swedes around 900, and the throne remained in Swedish hands for a generation. In 911, the Viking leader Rollo (Hrolf?) — scholars argue over whether he was Danish or Norwegian — was created first Duke of Normandy by the Frankish king Charles the Simple. Rollo swore loyalty to Charles, was granted lands in what is now Normandy, and spent the rest of his career keeping fellow Scandinavians out. A century and a half later in 1066, the Normans would conquer England — something their ancestors had failed to achieve.

The Islands

More easily conquered, and less often reported, were the islands which dot the sea between Norway and Scotland. Shortly after 800, Irish hermits — who up to now had had these remote, bleak islands largely to themselves — abandoned the Faeroes "because of robber Northmen." Viking graves and farmsteads have been excavated in the Orkney and Shetland islands. The Earl of Orkney was a Norwegian up until Tudor times.

The Explorers

The Viking expansion westward pushed back the boundaries of the known world, adding Iceland, Greenland and part of North America to the map. The Swedish expansion into central Europe is also seen as exploration rather than conquest, but the Slavs and Balts who were there at the time might not have agreed.

Iceland

Iceland was the first new land to be discovered and settled by the Vikings, and it came to be almost a fourth homeland.

Literary sources name three different people as the first to reach Iceland: a Norwegian called Nadd-Odd who was blown off-course while travelling from Norway to France and called the new land "Snowland"; a Swede named Gardar who was blown off-course from northern Scotland and called the place "Gardarsholm," and a second Norwegian named Floki who went to check out Nadd-Odd's story and came up with the name Iceland. Be that as it may, it seems that the island was discovered around 860-870.

Iceland was almost uninhabited, although one 12th-century history refers to a group of Irish Christians leaving Iceland "because they would not live alongside heathens." Irish hermits seem to have been well spread out across the North Atlantic at this time, perhaps strengthening the claim of St. Brendan to have discovered America before the Vikings.

Settlement was rapid, perhaps spurred on by the forceful reign of King Harald Finehair in Norway. Most settlers were from western Norway, although some Norwegians came from the Scottish Isles and Ireland. Only a few came from eastern Norway and Sweden, and none at all from Denmark. By the year 1000, thousands of settlers had come to Iceland. It retained the Norwegian

culture, but before long the Icelanders came to consider themselves a separate and independent nation.

Greenland

Greenland was discovered around 900 by a Norwegian called Gunnbjørn, who was blown off-course while sailing from Norway to Iceland. He wasn't inclined to stay and explore, but reported his find when he finally reached Iceland, and called the new land Gunnbjørn's Skerry. Nothing was done about Greenland for almost a century; in 982 a man named Eric the Red, banished from Iceland for three years for murder. He decided to head west and look for Gunnbjørn's land, which people still talked about.

The east coast of Greenland — the only part, we can assume, that Gunnbjørn saw — was icebound and inhospitable, and Eric and his companions worked their way south to Cape Farewell and found the more sheltered and hospitable southwest coast. They wintered somewhere here, and in summer they made camp at a fjord which Eric named after himself. They went further west towards the modern town of Godshaab, "giving names to many places."

After two more winters, Eric returned to Iceland to tell his story. He named the place Greenland to encourage as many settlers as possible — the more people went there, the greater his prestige — and next summer a fleet of 25 ships set out to found a colony. They reached the new land in 985 or 986 after a hazardous journey which claimed around half their number. Eric himself built a farm at Brattahlid, whose remains were found in 1932.

The main area of settlement was around Brattahlid, and the Thing-place at Gardar (near modern Julienhaab); this was called the Eastern Settlement. The Western Settlement was further north, just south of modern Godthaab. Remains of around 200 farms have been found in the Eastern Settlement and 100 in the Western; not all of these date from Eric's time. Agriculture was never very successful in Greenland, and the farmers lived off their livestock as well as hunting and fishing.

Vinland

Eric the Red had a son called Leif Ericsson, who was as much a pioneer as his father; as well as introducing Christianity to Greenland around 1000, he discovered America at about the same time.

The first sighting of the North American coast was made by one Bjarni Herjolfsson, who was blown off-course while sailing from Iceland to Greenland. He and his companions sighted land three times, but did not go ashore; when he returned, he was criticized for his "lack of curiosity," which is about as close as one may safely come to calling a sea-captain cowardly.

Around 992, Leif Ericsson bought Bjarni's boat and set out with 35 men to find and explore the land Bjarni saw. He found a glacier island, which he called Helluland ("Stone-land," for there was only rock between the ice and the sea), and went on to a flat, forested land which he called Markland ("Forest Land"). Two days later he came to an island with lush grass; between this island sand a headland he entered a strait and grounded his ship on a sandbank at low tide. He and his followers decided to winter here, and found good maple timber for building and the biggest salmon they had ever seen in the rivers and sea. Day and night were more equal than in Iceland, and there was no frost in midwinter — clearly they were some way south.

Exploring further, one of Leif's men — a German named Tyrki — found grapes, and so the land was called Vinland ("Wineland"). Leif went back to Greenland in the spring, and among those who came to Vinland afterward was his brother Thorvald, who borrowed Eric's boat and came to Vinland with 30

A Viking's Life

"At this time it was Swein's custom to overwinter at home in Gairsay, where he always kept 80 men at his own cost. He had a drinking-hall so large that no other in the Orkneys could match it. Swein would work hard in the spring and have a lot of seed sown, taking a great share in the work himself. When this work was done, he would go viking each spring, raiding the Scottish Isles and Ireland and coming home at midsummer. He called this 'Spring Viking.' Then he would stay at home until the cornfields had been reaped and the grain was dealt with. Then he would go viking again, and not come back until one month of winter was over, and he called this 'Autumn Viking.' "

— from the Orkneyinga Saga

Brutal Raiders

"Were there a hundred tough iron heads on one neck, and in each head a hundred sharp, bright, brazen tongues, and from each tongue a hundred eloquent, loud, unceasing voices, they could not recount, or tell, or number what all the Gaedhil (i.e., the Irish) suffered in common, both men and women, laity and clergy, young and old, base and noble, of hardship, and of injury, and of oppression, in every house, from these valiant, wrathful, foreign, pagan people."

— from The War of the Gaedhil with the Gaill (The War of the Irish with the Vikings), 12th century

Pirates

"Halfway (from Denmark to Sweden) they came upon pirates. Although the merchants who were with them defended themselves manfully and were victorious at first, they were beaten in a second onslaught and the pirates overwhelmed them, robbing them of their ship and all they possessed. It was with great difficulty that they got to land with their lives. They had to leave behind kingly gifts (from Frankish Emperor Louis the Pious) which they had meant to bring to Sweden; they saved only a few petty objects that they could take with them as they jumped overboard. Among other things they lost forty books for the Holy Service, which fell into the robbers' hands."

— from The Life of St. Anskar, written c. 870 of events c. 820

men. While looking for a place to settle, Thorvald encountered three skin boats with nine men, and a fight developed in which eight of the nine were killed. Soon afterwards they were attacked by more skin boats, and these Skraelingar shot at them but finally fled. Thorvald was mortally wounded by one of their arrows, and buried on a nearby promontory with crosses at his head and feet; they called the place Krossanes ("Cross Headland").

A few years later, an Icelander named Thorfinn Karlsefni, with three ships and 160 men, set out to found a colony . . . the farthest reach of the Viking Age. A Canadian archaeological site, L'Anse aux Meadows, clearly represents a Norse colony, and it may indeed be all that remains of Leif's Vinland.

Central Europe

The Swedes established Baltic colonies well before the Norwegians started moving west. A large city has been excavated at the south end of Lake Ladoga; originally Finnish, it was taken over by the Swedes and called Aldeigjuborg. From here, it was possible to follow the river Volhkov south to a colony called Holmgard (now Novgorod), and on to the Volga. By 839, the Rus, as these Swedes were called, were sending ambassadors to the Byzantine Emperor in Constantinople (now Istanbul), and less than a century later they were trading with Arab merchants on the Volga. Routes extended to the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea, and even as far as Baghdad, but there was constant danger from marauding local tribes, and in many places the boats had to be manhandled through rapids or dragged from one river to another. Ultimately, the two Rus Khaganates of Novgorod and Kiev were amalgamated into a single Christian West Russian Empire.

The End of the Viking Age

The days of the Vikings, and of Norse expansion, did not end suddenly. The Battle of Stamford Bridge, at which Harald Hardrada fell, is often cited as the "end of the era." In fact, there were occasional Viking-style raids for the next two centuries . . . but there would never again be a great Scandinavian conquest.

The Vinland colony lasted only a few years. The colonists could not get along with the Skraelings; Thorfinn Karlsefni gave up after three winters. There may have been other voyages, but Vinland was certainly abandoned by 1020.

The Greenland colonies lasted much longer, and fell as much to the hand of nature as to man. By 1200 the weather began to grow colder — much colder — and sea-ice made trips to Greenland dangerous. The colony's growing season was shortened. The colder weather hurt the colonists, but favored the Eskimos, who began to move south. The Western Settlement was gone by 1350. The Eastern Settlement survived until about 1500, an isolated outpost, increasingly forgotten and desolate. In the end, it simply vanished. Perhaps the last families died of plague, cold or Skraeling attack. Perhaps the "last ship out" was caught in the ice. Norse Greenland was no more.

The Norse kingdoms in Europe fell or adapted. The most successful was Normandy, in France; the Normans did what their forebears could never do, and conquered England. But their culture changed; they were still warriors, but they were no longer Scandinavian, and their loyalty was to their closer brethern and their new lands.

As for the home countries, and the successful Iceland colony — they remained strong and independent, but they were no longer major players at the games of war and trade. Improved ship technology, and changing patterns of commerce, had passed them by. By the beginning of the 12th century, the Vikings ruled only in the sagas being written by the Icelandic poets . . . where they still reign today.

Founding a Settlement

The traditional way of choosing a settlement site in a new land was for the head of the family to throw his "high-seat pillars" (the wooden beams which framed the master's chair) overboard. Where the gods cast them ashore was where he would build his house and take land for himself and his followers. One of the earliest arrivals in Iceland was Ingolf Arnason, whose "high-seat pillars" came ashore on the southwest coast in a bay full of steaming warm springs. He settled there, and named the place Reykjavik — "the bay of smoke." Today it is Iceland's capital.

It was one of the duties of a leader to apportion land to his followers, and this could be a tricky business indeed. Each follower had to feel that he had received land in true proportion to his rank and service, and not be jealous of any other follower who might have been given more or better land. Generosity with land, as with gold, could inspire loyalty and praise, but the giver had to be even-handed or trouble was sure to follow.

Halfdan . . .

The only legible remnant of a runic inscription on a marble rail in the church of St. Sofia in Istanbul: "Halfdan was here"?

THE VIKING CAMPAIGN 5

The Viking campaign should have a different mood from the average medieval-style fantasy campaign. Honor is of as much importance as success, and there are obligations to family and to patrons which must be met at all times.

There are many different ways to play this campaign, ranging from mundane to highly magical and from bloodless to all-action. Norse life and tradition embraced stories of all kinds. Their history was occasionally heroic but often mundane; their sagas were majestic and often fantastic; their mythology was breathtaking in its scope, from the beginning of the world to its end, with gods walking the earth alongside mortals and all doomed to die.

The various campaign styles may seem very different, but in fact all may be defined by two variables. The amount of magic in a campaign governs whether it is historical, fantastic or mythic. The amount of violence in

Crossover Campaigns

The Vikings have served as the role-model for many fantasy races and nations, including a few which have already been covered by ***GURPS*** worldbooks. Here are some notes on combining Vikings with other settings.

In ***GURPS Fantasy*** there are the Nomad Lands of Yrth, and only a few changes to geography and place-names are necessary to use ***GURPS Vikings*** as a "culture pack" for that area.

The Aesir and Vanir of the Hyborian Age are just as Viking-based, and between this volume and ***GURPS Conan***, a GM should be able to produce a detailed campaign setting in their lands. Robert E. Howard used the names of the two tribes of Norse gods quite deliberately for these peoples — the "real" Viking age will follow some centuries after the Hyborian Age, and the names of the Aesir and Vanir in Norse mythology are explained as folk-memories of the older peoples. So Conan could quite legitimately meet Thor and Odin — or a least, two mortal heroes on whose exploits the characters of the Norse gods were later based.

GURPS Cliffhangers is a less obvious crossover with Vikings, but just as legitimate. Many pulp heroes discovered lost cities peopled by remnants of ancient cultures, and the Vikings certainly traveled widely enough to qualify. Their journeys across Europe towards the steppes could have landed them on the shores of an undiscovered lake at the fringes of the Gobi Desert, while their westward voyages could lead to isolated Viking settlements being discovered in the frozen north of Canada and even Alaska. And in some unexplored corner of the Anatolian mountains, who knows, some evil Turkish genius might have a private army consisting entirely of descendants of the Varangian Guard.

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the plots the GM chooses will set the balance between thoughtful, bloodless roleplaying and all-out, blood-and-thunder action.

Magic Level

The Viking campaign can be conducted with varying amounts of magic.

With no magic at all the campaign becomes more or less historical. Monsters are absent or reveal themselves to have non-magical explanations. Everything is mundane and rational, even if it may not appear so to the superstitious. Of course, a "historical" campaign need not follow history as written; if the PCs are great heroes, they can make a difference!

With a moderate amount of magic, the campaign becomes *fantastic*. There are monsters, enchanters and other supernatural creatures, but interaction between deities and mortals is infrequent and low-key.

Increasing the amount of magic further creates a *mythic* campaign, where deities actually do walk the earth (in disguise for the most part) and PCs can interact with beings of awesome power, affecting the fate of gods and men as they do so. Chapter 6 has more information on divine activity, in campaigns of all types.

This chapter treats campaigns in these three categories, although the divisions are not rigid; by fine-tuning the magic level — or by varying it from time to time and place to place — it is possible to produce a campaign which blends aspects of more than one style.

Violence Level

Like magic level, this is a sliding scale. A campaign with less violence can be described as a thoughtful campaign, while a campaign with more can be described as an action campaign. A thoughtful campaign places more emphasis on peaceful interaction, roleplaying and using the law and social conventions to achieve the PCs' goals; an action campaign stresses combat skills and solving problems by main strength and force of arms.

Campaign Styles

With these two variables, the GM can fine-tune the campaign. There are three levels of magic and two levels of violence, giving six distinct campaign styles, described below.

Thoughtful Historic

This can be one of the most challenging campaign styles, especially if the players like social interaction, problem solving, and using skills like Fast-Talk. A thoughtful historical campaign will face the PCs with things like social dilemmas, malicious lawsuits, dirty politics and bad weather. They will have to solve problems using their wits, their skills and their knowledge of the social system. The campaign can also include voyages of trade and exploration, putting the players in the shoes of the Norsemen as they encounter many strange peoples and places.

Prizes in this kind of campaign include powerful allies, personal prestige and influence, promotion up the social ladder, and perhaps even the crown. Sources of ideas include the historical sagas (especially the later ones, like the Laxdale Saga, the Vinland Saga and King Harald's Saga) and some of the more colorful anecdotes from Viking history. The bibliography at the end of this book gives some good starting-points.

Thoughtful Fantastic

This campaign will involve similar themes to the thoughtful historic style, but problems will be complicated by magical and supernatural factors. Monsters and nonhuman races (described in Chapter 8) come on the scene, with their own abilities and motivations; magic appears as the third force alongside the law and force of arms.

The thoughtful fantastic campaign can contain elements of supernatural horror as well as high fantasy. The rarer magic is, the more inexplicable and horrifying a supernatural creature becomes, and the rarer and more precious becomes the knowledge of how to deal with it. Players' imaginations (and nerves) can be stretched to the limit if they must face a supernatural foe with no magical knowledge or assistance.

Inspiration for this kind of campaign can come from a number of sources. Some of the sagas (the saga of Grettir the Strong, for instance) feature encounters with supernatural creatures, and so do related sources like the Anglo-Saxon heroic poem *Beowulf*. Post-Viking Scandinavian folklore is also a worthwhile source. Dealing with ordinary folks rather than great heroes, the problems in folk tales are pitched at an everyday level and their solutions can be both simple and complex at the same time. Folklore makes an ideal inspiration for a campaign where the PCs are young, inexperienced and lacking in combat skills. Finally, modern horror novels can be plundered for ideas, especially in the plotting and presentation of encounters between supernatural foes and magic-light PCs. Some genre horror pot-boilers visit Scandinavian and other European folklore regularly for fresh monsters, and a couple of examples are listed in the bibliography.

Thoughtful Mythic

This campaign style is one of the most challenging for both GM and players. The stakes have risen significantly, and the problems are more exacting. PCs must face world-shaking problems and solve them without upsetting cosmic balances or sparking off large-scale conflicts which might lead to Ragnarok breaking out.

While the gods are active — and can make the lives of poor mortals a complete misery — they too are limited in their actions by the fear of precipitating Ragnarok. Sometimes, mortals can go places and do things that gods can't, and PCs may find themselves asked, bribed, threatened or manipulated into some very delicate situations, with the continued existence of the whole universe at stake.

Crossover Campaigns (Continued)

There are plenty of other potential crossovers. In the ***Riverworld***, everyone who has ever lived is reincarnated. That includes all the Vikings, including Erik Bloodaxe, Leif Ericsson, Cnut the Great and quite a few other worthies. ***Horror*** can let the creatures of Norse legend — especially the undead — stalk as powerfully in this century as they did in former times. Viking mound-looters like Grettir the Strong sometimes had to deal with the outraged — and all-too-solid — ghosts of those they robbed, and why should 20th-century archaeologists get off so easily? More than one horror novelist has found a ripe source of ideas in Scandinavian traditions. And one Norse character has done very well for himself in the ***Supers*** business . . .

Ten Things You Thought You Knew About Vikings

1. They wore horned helmets.

No, they didn't. Ever. Gauls, yes; Vikings, no. Blame 19th-century artists and 20th-century movie-makers. Deities are sometimes pictured in Norse art dating from the Bronze Age to the Viking period wearing horned helmets, but there is no evidence at all that mortals ever did. Not a single horned Viking helmet has ever been found.

2. They were professional pirates and raiders, like seaborne medieval biker gangs.

No, they weren't. The vast majority of their wealth came from trading — peacefully — with people from Scotland to Turkey. Raiding just made the chronicles more often because it was news. At some times, and in some places, it has to be admitted, Scandinavians were regarded with the same mixture of fear and distrust that some people today reserve for bikers. And with about the same amount of justification.

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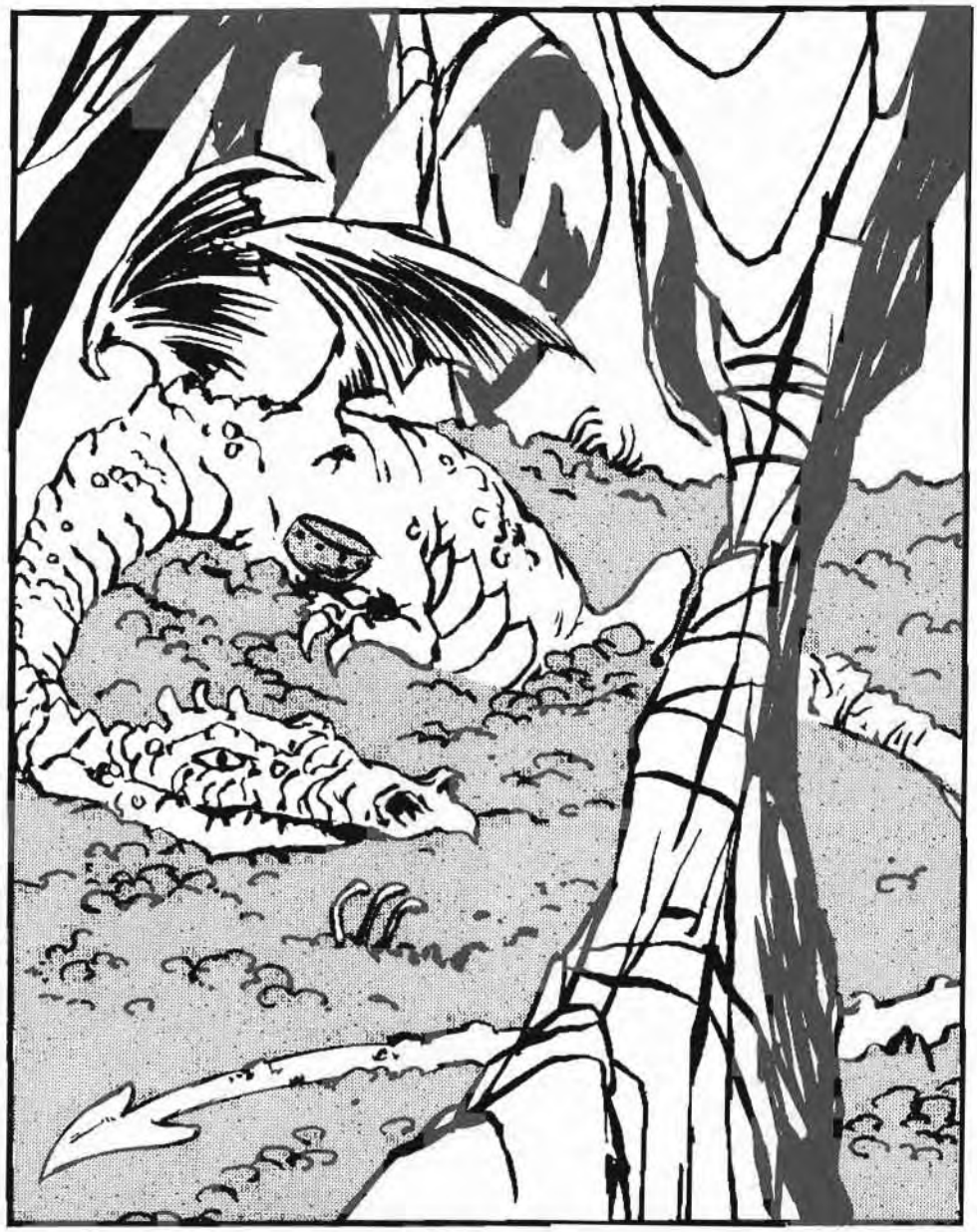

Inspiration for this style of campaign is best taken from the myths and legends themselves. A great many of them are less than thoughtful in their resolution (and action mythic campaigns will be discussed below), but some of the situations and dilemmas that arise are crafted with great cunning. The GM can stretch intelligent and imaginative players to the limit by putting their characters into similar situations and letting them know that they also have to preserve cosmic balances while solving the problem.

Action Historical

This campaign style features Vikings doing the sorts of things that Vikings are best remembered for — raiding, looting, pillaging, burning, and generally being thoroughly unpleasant to the rest of early medieval Europe. Other activities — such as lawsuits and voyages of exploration — can be "up-actioned" with duels, hostile natives and the like. As well as mountains of plunder and a fearsome reputation, the goal of this kind of campaign might be to carve out a new domain (as Vikings did in England, France and Russia) or to seize the throne of your homeland.

Ideas for an action historical campaign can come from a number of sources. Anglo-Saxon historians and chroniclers are only too happy to tell the world what horrible people the Vikings were, and Hollywood — as well as some novelists — maintains the image quite cheerfully, without worrying about historical authenticity. Robert E. Howard, best known as the creator of Conan the Barbarian, wrote several action historic stories set in the Dark Ages, and many featured Viking characters. Archaeological knowledge of the Vikings and their world has moved on a little since Howard was writing in the 20s and 30s, but his stories remain the best example of historical blood-and-thunder available today. Some sagas contain descriptions of raids and other combats, which can be drawn upon for situations and details. Egil's Saga has some particularly good fight sequences.

Action Fantastic

This campaign style is the closest in tone to the "standard" fantasy roleplaying campaign. There are places of mystery to be explored, monsters to be overcome, princesses to be rescued, enchanters to be defeated, gold, silver and magical treasures to be acquired, and a saga to be built.

This might be an appropriate campaign style to start with, especially if the players are only familiar with generic-fantasy roleplaying settings. The Viking setting can be introduced by degrees, and as the campaign progresses and the players become more familiar with the game-world, the GM can gradually change the emphasis. But the action fantastic campaign is perfectly appropriate by itself — it's not far removed from the events of many sagas, and it certainly can be fun!

The sources for an action fantastic campaign are the same as those for an action historic campaign — simply increase the ratio of violent to nonviolent events. Robert E. Howard's short story "The Grey God Passes" is an excellent example of a supernatural touch adding an entirely new dimension to a sequence of events.

Action Mythic

This campaign style can see the PCs taking part in titanic conflicts where the fate of gods and men hangs in the balance. They can fight gods and Giants, sack the halls of Jotunheim, capture the troublemaking Loki, or even fight at Ragnarok itself, going out in a blaze of glory as the Viking universe dies.

As with the thoughtful mythic campaign, the best source is the myths themselves. The more titanic the conflict, the grander the scale, the greater the challenge.

Campaign Themes

So far, this chapter has discussed campaign styles in a fairly abstract way, dealing with ratios of magic to violence and other generalized concepts. The rest is devoted to a series of example campaign outlines, to show what sort of themes can be accommodated within the six campaign styles already discussed.

The Vinland Settlement

This is a thoughtful historical campaign, but some fighting will be necessary. The PCs are members of an expedition to Vinland, where they must found a new settlement and try to thrive.

Source Material

A little research here can be enormously useful. Chapter 4 includes a summary of Norse exploration and settlement, but a summary is all it really can be. A trip to the local library should turn up a couple of books on Norse settlement

Ten Things You Thought You Knew About Vikings (Continued)

3. They were hugely muscled, thought with their swords, and were halting of speech.

Hardly. They might have spoken haltingly in Frankish, Latin or Anglo-Saxon, but how many people did they meet who had bothered to learn Old Norse? Judging by the remains found in excavated Viking-age burials, they were pretty much the same size and build as other rural Europeans. And their craftsmanship, strategy and political dealings are every bit as skilled, well-designed and intricate as those of any contemporary nation you care to name.

4. They dressed in furs and chainmail at all times.

Furs were good at keeping out the cold of the Scandinavian winter, but it was a rare and wealthy man who could afford chainmail. A mail coat could be worth as much as a working farm, depending on time and location; and no one walked about in armor unless he was expecting trouble — or inviting it. Many 20th-century Americans own guns — a greater proportion than the number of Vikings who owned mail coats, in fact — but only a few carry them all the time.

5. When they weren't killing people, they held huge and riotous feasts, roasting whole oxen and drinking mead and wine by the barrel.

Well, there is a fair amount of feasting and drinking in the sagas, so maybe that is how the Norsemen would have liked to have spent their time. Everyone likes to party once in a while. But most Scandinavians spent far more time growing food than consuming it. The literary evidence suggests, too, that they preferred their meat stewed rather than roasted — no ox-sized spits and fire-irons have yet been found.

6. They were very fierce and insanely brave, and would never retreat whatever the circumstances.

They were very practical, and although no one liked a coward, only a fool fought on if death was certain and nothing would be gained by it. They would retreat from overwhelming odds and withdraw from impossible situations, and even the heroes of the sagas were allowed to run away from supernatural foes sometimes. And they could be very sneaky — downright underhanded at times — in finding ways to narrow the odds. See *Cleverness*, p. 10.

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Ten Things You Thought You Knew About Vikings (Continued)

7. Their women were almost as strong as the men, and could fight alongside them.

Romantic nonsense. Ever since the Romans encountered the Nordic peoples of northern Germany in the first couple of centuries AD, the "civilized" world has been obsessed with the idea of women warriors — counting the Amazons, the obsession goes back four or five more centuries. What would Freud have made of it? There were no women warriors in medieval Scandinavian society, ever. Women stayed at home, ran the household, and bore and raised the children. Sexist? Well, these *are* the Dark Ages. Socially, though, Scandinavian women were a lot freer and a lot more respected than their Christian counterparts. For instance, they were never considered to be their husbands' property, and could divorce themselves from their husbands at will. One of the things that seems to have sparked the idea of Norse shield-maidens is the mythological band of minor goddesses, the Valkyries. 19th- and 20th-century artists have always portrayed these beings as clean-limbed, nubile armored maidens, whereas to the Vikings they were death-goddesses, and had no erotic connotations at all. Wagner has a lot to answer for, as well — he was very free with the plot of the Volsung Saga when he set it to music as the Ring Cycle.

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in North America with maps and farmstead plans. The Vinland Saga is another useful source, since it gives one version of what could happen. And since at least the opening of the campaign will involve sea travel, have a look at the material in Chapter 10. The adventure outlines *A Voyage of Exploration* and *Vinland* in Chapter 11 contain ideas which can be developed in this campaign.

Finally, some basic research on the Inuit and Native Americans of the East Coast could provide valuable information for handling encounters and interaction.

Preparation

The campaign starts with the PCs in one of the four homelands (Norway and Iceland are the most likely ones historically). Ideally, they should all be in the same place — a Jarl's court, a village or Thing. They will probably have known each other for some time, perhaps since childhood, so work out with the players how they relate to one another.

The GM will also need enough NPCs to fill one or more ships, although this shouldn't be too daunting a task. Important personalities, like a Jarl or a ship's captain, can be drawn up in full, but neighbors and spear-carriers can be based on a single generic set of stats, with just a few notes on personality and appearance.

Starting the Campaign

There needs to be a reason for the PCs to go to Vinland. Here are a few possibilities.

Their local area has become too crowded to support everyone, and they're setting off in search of a better life elsewhere. In this case the expedition will consist mainly of young people, or of one or more entire families.

The PCs all belong to the same extended family, which has been dispossessed of its lands in a lawsuit. The opposing family is too powerful to take on in a blood-feud, so the losers are gathering up their movable goods and trying for a fresh start.

The area has been devastated by Danish raiders (yes, Vikings preyed on fellow-Scandinavians at least as much as they did on other nations; Adam of Bremen tells us that Danish Vikings in the 11th century paid their king for the privilege of raiding the neighboring coasts of Norway and Sweden). The whole community has decided to move on, taking what little they have left.

Packing

The one or two boats that the travelers have will not be able to hold everything. They must decide what to take and what to leave — see Chapter 10 ship capacities. People, tools, a few sacks of seed and a couple of head of livestock are the main priorities, but let the players decide for themselves, only dropping hints through NPCs if it's absolutely necessary — otherwise the GM will end up doing all the work and the players will just follow blindly.

Setting Out

The first phase of the journey takes place within sight of land, as the travelers make their way northward along the coast in preparation for the first stage of the ocean crossing. This is a good time for PCs and NPCs to shake down together, to get the hang of shipboard life and to encounter a few of the things that will make their journey uncomfortable and dangerous. Chapter 10 has plenty of ideas in this line.

Sea hazards become more dangerous as the ships turn west into the open ocean, and the navigators have to rely on the stars alone as landmarks disappear from view.

First Landfall

Depending on where they started from (and how good their navigation was), the travelers will make landfall on the shores of Iceland and/or Greenland during their Atlantic crossing. There is the chance to pick up fresh water and supplies, and to encounter other settlers. The travelers might be able to trade goods, labor and/or news from home for supplies, help with repairs and information on the route west.

Interaction can be harmonious or hostile depending on how the travelers behave and what the locals' initial attitude is. They might be noble Norsemen ready with friendship and hospitality, or they might be suspicious and unwelcoming, or they might be brigands, exiled from Scandinavia and willing to rob anyone they meet.

Second Crossing

The next ocean crossing will be similar to the first, so don't use up all the tricks and encounters on the first sea-voyage. (Allowing an occasional *quiet* voyage can make the PCs very apprehensive.)

Second Landfall

If the travelers started from Norway, their first landfall will have been at Iceland, and the second will be Greenland. There are the same possibilities for restocking food and water and for meeting settlers, although their character may be different from the Icelanders.

If the travelers started from Iceland, this landfall will be Vinland.

Vinland

The travelers' first sight of Vinland will be as they travel west from Greenland to the top of Hudson's Bay. There are numerous inlets and islands of various sizes, and they can land immediately or keep on heading south in the hope of finding somewhere warmer and more hospitable. After picking a place to land, the travelers can unpack, decide where to build, collect materials and take stock of what and who has survived the journey.

Settlement Life

Getting to Vinland was only the first part of the campaign; the fun starts in earnest as the settlers try to survive there. Chapter 11 includes some more detailed notes on a Vinland settlement adventure.

Goals for this stage of the campaign should be to build shelter, fish, forage, trap and hunt enough food to get them through the winter, make the most of what livestock and seedstock has survived the journey, and set up a working, self-sufficient farmstead. Problems can be many.

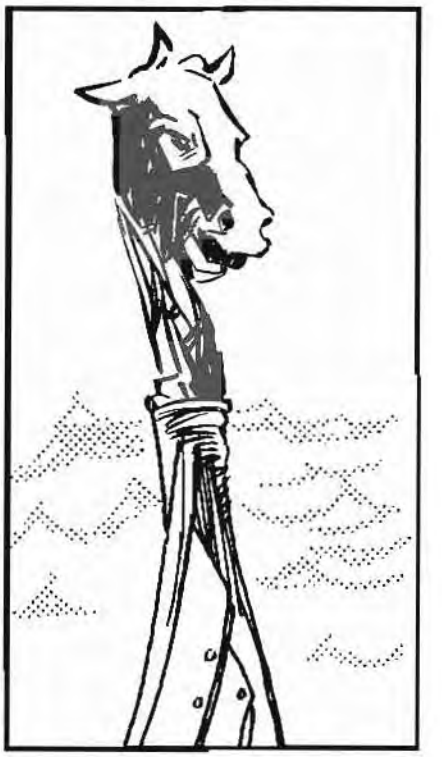
Grain might have got soaked on the journey, and will now be mildewed and useless. Livestock might have died on the journey, leaving the settlers dependent on hunting, trapping and fishing for their meat. Plants will be unfamiliar on this new continent; there might be some uncomfortable experiences as the settlers find out the hard way which plants are edible and which are not. And poison ivy will be a new experience . . .

As winter deepens and food becomes scarce, the settlers might well face starvation. And the possibilities for encounters with Skraelings are almost endless.

Ending the Campaign

This is the kind of campaign that can go on forever, as the settlement (hopefully!) grows and thrives. In time, the PCs might decide to return to the homeland, leaving the settlement behind them. If the campaign goes on for a long

Ten Things You Thought You Knew About Vikings (Continued)



8. All their ships had dragon-heads on the stem-posts.

Some did. Not very many, actually. Only a handful of ships have been found with dragon-heads, and at least one of these — the Oseberg ship from Norway — was the lavishly-decorated royal barge of a princess, and not a warship at all. Even in pictures of the time, less than one ship in ten had a carved stem-post.

9. They loved big, brutal weapons, like huge axes and warhammers.

Given the choice, the average Viking would have preferred a sword — it's just that a good-quality sword could cost as much as a house. Two-handed axes were rare, since the Vikings liked to have a shield in the left hand, but one-handed axes — which might have doubled as farm tools — were a very common weapon. There is no evidence that Vikings used maces or warhammers — although if there were no other weapon handy, a Viking would probably fight with a sledgehammer quite cheerfully.

10. The only law they knew was "might is right."

The Viking system of law, as described in Chapter 1, was sophisticated and reasonably just, even if enforcement was sometimes a problem. It was the Vikings of the Danelaw who introduced the idea of adversarial trial and trial by jury into English law, and thus into the legal systems of most of the English-speaking world.

The Cliché Campaign

Following on from Ten Things You Thought You Knew About Vikings, it is possible to take all these clichés and build a campaign around them. (Those uninterested in purely *silly* campaigns need read no further!)

Hollywood has made a fair few cliché Viking movies, which can be plundered for bad ideas, and more cringeworthy inspiration may be found in the seemingly unstoppable flood of z-grade Italian barbarian movies. Your local video rental store cannot have escaped all of them.

In the cliché campaign, everyone can walk about in a fur jockstrap or a chainmail bikini, and all the helmets have *big* horns! Everyone carries huge weapons, berserks all day and drinks all night.

The objective of the campaign, of course, is renown, battle and plunder. If they loot London, they will surely pull London Bridge down; remembering the right song to sing will be worth bonus character points.

And, for those who can manage it, a Monty Python accent will put the finishing touch on the Silly Viking campaign. Yah, shoor. My sister had a møøse once. O-Dio! O-Din!

time, the players could even take over the roles of their original characters' children, motivated by curiosity and adventure to visit a homeland they might never have seen.

Historically, the Vinland settlement did not last long. But with strong leadership, it could have survived and grown, giving rise to an alternate world in which North America held a strong Scandinavian culture!

Home Fires

This is a thoughtful historic campaign which can be enhanced by the addition of occasional fantastic elements. It is set in and around the PCs' home area, as they try to advance themselves and their friends, and to stay afloat in a sea of dirty politics.

Research

The material in Chapter 1 should provide just about everything needed for this campaign. For further ideas, the sagas and histories are full of tales of legal and political wrangling and the other dirty tricks which invariably surrounded the throne and other positions of power. Intriguing and wrangling was as popular a pastime as seafaring.

Preparation

For this campaign, the GM will need to have a good idea of the PCs' location and its immediate surroundings. He should map out the local area, know the location and rough layouts of farms and villages, the location of the Jarl's court and the area's position in regard to the rest of the country. The adventure outlines *A Winter at Home*, *Trouble Brewing* and *Witch Hunt* in Chapter 11 contain ideas which might be developed in this campaign

The GM should also develop the principal personalities at the Jarl's court and any prominent villagers and farmers. Only major NPCs will need full descriptions; the rest can be handled by generic stats and brief notes on appearance and personality.

The PCs should all be native to this area; precisely where they come from and how they relate to one another is a matter for the GM to work out with the players.

Starting the Campaign

The campaign starts with the PCs leading their normal, mundane lives in farm and village, and deciding that there must be more to life. One by one, they decide to make their way to the Jarl's court and try to become huscarls.

It doesn't matter, at this stage, whether or not the PCs are actually together. They will meet at the court; the GM can easily cover this stage of the campaign individually with each player as they generate their characters.

Each PC should have, according to his/her personality and circumstance, a set of reasons for wanting to leave the bosom of the family and become a huscarl whose first loyalty is to the Jarl. Possible reasons might include ambition, the knowledge that the PC is not the first son and will therefore inherit nothing, a falling-out with the family, a humiliation which prompts the PC to prove him/herself as a huscarl, and so on. Work these reasons out in advance with the players, and make sure that the real reasons start out being known only to each character's player. They can confide in each other as they like (truthfully or otherwise) once they meet up at the court.

The Journey

Each character must make his way to the Jarl's court. According to their home locations and the geography of the area, some of them might meet others along the way.

The goal of this stage is simply to reach the court. Problems might include getting lost, being attacked by bandits or wild animals, deep snow, thin ice and so on.

Arrival

This phase of the campaign sees the PCs arrived at the Jarl's court, more or less at the same time. Their newness to the place throws them into a loose camaraderie, and they can deal with any necessary introductions.

The goal of this phase is for all the PCs to obtain employment with the Jarl. Each will have to demonstrate reasonable competence in one or more skills which can be of use to the Jarl's steading, and will have to make a good impression upon the steward — not the Jarl himself — who is responsible for hiring and firing in the household. They may be surprised to discover that no one is very interested in their skill at arms, and that ability to cook and clean, fetch and carry, and tend land and flocks are more important — the very tasks they may have left home to escape. PCs who make a good impression may be able to speak up for their newfound friends, so that most or all of the PCs can gain some position or other in the Jarl's household.

The PCs also have the opportunity to make enemies or bad impressions. Those who go about bragging of their fighting ability could find themselves challenged by one or more seasoned warriors, or put in some other embarrassing situation to take them down a peg or two. Even the most polite and inoffensive PC could make an enemy: a lazy worker who was fired to give him a job, for instance, or an established huscarl who was trying to get a younger brother or nephew into the household in just such a position as the PC has now filled.

The Daily Round

Life in the Jarl's household is not much different from life in any other household; it's just writ a little larger. There are more people to feed, more cleaning to do, more jobs of every kind. There is also far more scope for getting into trouble. As well as accidents and skill roll failures, there are also social faux pas to worry about; PCs who don't have Savoir-Faire skill would be well advised to obtain it. Minor scrapes and problems can be interspersed with opportunities to train in the various craft and combat skills which would be available among the huscarls.

The goals of this phase of the campaign are to rise to the Jarl's notice and to advance as far as possible within the household. As newcomers the PCs will have to work hard to make an impression, and there will be others, who have been there longer, competing with them for the Jarl's notice and approval. Sponsors

Dare-Games

Sagas and movies are full of wild dare-games, where Vikings impress each other with their courage and physical prowess by performing dangerous feats. These are good ways for Viking PCs to gain renown, and even better ways for them to get hurt. Here are a few examples:

Oar-Walking

Walking along the oars of a ship while it is being rowed. Those without Acrobatics skill use DX-6 in the normal way. Roll once for each 10 seconds of oar-walking; a failure means that the walker slips and falls into the water. Treat this as a fall of 2 yards — any injury will be due to hitting the oars on the way down. A similarly difficult feat: walk along the ship's gunwales, blindfolded! (A blindfolded oar-walk would be almost impossible; roll at Acrobatics-4 or DX-10.)

Missile Feats

There are many variations on this theme: throwing a spear as close as possible to a man without actually hitting him, throwing axes to cut the braids of a woman's hair without hurting her, firing an arrow to snuff out a candle without touching it, and so on. These feats normally fall into two categories: the near miss and the difficult hit.

Near Miss: Roll normally for the weapon. There is ample time to Aim. A critical success is necessary for a really near miss; if there is a contest, then the winner is the thrower who makes his roll by the greatest margin and gets a critical success. A normal success is a moderately near miss, but nothing impressive; treat it as a failure. A failed roll is a miss by a mile, and may endanger bystanders (check for anyone within 1 hex of the line of fire), while a critical failure *hits* the target! Apply damage as normal.

The target in a near-miss feat has more to worry about than being hit. To avoid losing face, he must remain completely still, without flinching. He must make a Will roll; if the roll is failed, he automatically attempts to Dodge the incoming missile. This is acceptable only if the missile would have hit him otherwise. If the Will roll is a critical failure, the target might have to make a Fright Check.

Difficult Hit: This is straightforward, using the advanced combat rules and the Size and Speed/Range Table (pp. B114-119 and B201).

A Rus Expedition

"At Kiev they destroy their old dugout canoes and buy fresh ones from the Slavs, who have made them during the winter. They strip the gear out of the old boats and use it to fit out the new. In June the expedition sets out for Greece. For a few days the merchant fleet assembles at Vytechev, a fortress of the Rus just below Kiev. When the fleet is complete they all set off downstream, to face the hardships of the journey together.

"In the middle of (the Dnieper gorge near Dnjepropetrovsk) there are high, sheer rocks, which look like islands; the water dashing against them causes a loud and terrifying cacophony. Therefore the Rus do not dare to sail between them, but pull to the bank and make the people go on shore — although they leave the cargo aboard. Then they walk naked into the water, testing the bottom with their feet to avoid stumbling; at the same time they push the boat forward with poles, at the bows, midships and stern. With these precautions they wade through the edge of the rapids, close to the bank; when they have passed them, they take the rest of the crew back on board and go on their way.

"At the fourth great rapids they put into the bank, and the guards disembark. These guards are necessary because of the Patzniaks, who are always lurking in ambush. The rest of them take their goods out of their canoes and lead their slaves in chains for six miles overland, until they are past the rapids. After this they transport their boats, sometimes dragging them and sometimes carrying them on their shoulders. They put them back in the river, load the baggage, embark, and go on their way."

— *Constantine Prophyrogenitus, c. 950*

Note: it is interesting that the Rus used dugout canoes of Slav manufacture rather than Scandinavian-style ships. Perhaps these vessels were better suited to river conditions.

among the more established huscarls could be very useful, and wise PCs will have assessed by this time who is influential and whose friendship can usefully be cultivated. If one or more of the PCs are noticed by the Jarl, they may start to receive assignments.

Assignments

This phase of the campaign sees the PCs, as junior but promising huscarls, being given various small jobs by the Jarl. If they do them well, further advancement may follow; if they foul up, they may spend the rest of their lives supervising the thrall who tends the pigs. They may have some friends, and they will definitely have some enemies. All of this will affect the outcome of this phase, as much as the PCs' abilities and actions themselves.

Chapter 11 contains various adventure outlines which will be suitable for use in this phase of the campaign.

Higher Stakes

As the PCs (hopefully!) gain in skill and stature, the tasks given them will be more exacting, and the price of failure higher.

Also, they will become privy to more of what is going on. They could become involved in lawsuits and political wrangles. The Jarl may be plotting to increase his influence among his peers, and he may even have his eye on the throne. Even if he is unassuming and content with his position, he will still have rivals and enemies who want to cause trouble for him. As the PCs get closer to the heart of domestic affairs, their problems will become more complex and their enemies more powerful. They might have to stand behind their leader in a serious dispute at the local Landthing, facing banishment alongside him if he loses. They might suffer legal action in their own right, with rivals trying to trap them into breaches of protocol or superior fighters trying to force them into one-sided duels.

Away From Home

The course of events at the Jarl's household will be interrupted by various things. The PCs could find themselves going exploring, raiding or trading, or even into battle, as the Jarl conducts his business and seeks to advance his position. Those who do well will be rewarded, and will gain in stature; they may also encounter people who are jealous of their success, and eager to do them down.

Fantastic Elements

As described here, this campaign is more or less historical. It would be quite possible, though, to add supernatural and fantastic elements. For example, villagers might complain of wolves ravaging their flocks or they might complain of attacks by Trolls; a rival Jarl might use dirty politics to bring the PCs' patron down, or he might use sorcery; the old woman accused of being a witch might be a cantankerous old woman, or she might be a genuine witch with real powers.

Changing Direction

This campaign can go on for any length of time, as the PCs continue to serve their Jarl. If he makes it to the throne, those PCs who have survived the inevitable battles will be members of the fyrd — a prestigious but often risky position. Or he might lose out in a revolt or a Landthing case and be banished, in which case the PCs might go along with him to Iceland or Greenland (or even Vinland, as in the previous campaign outline). Or they might leave his service, stay at home, and try to find another leader — or even sell out and try to take over his position.

Within the overall structure of this campaign it is possible to accommodate other themes, like raiding, trading and exploration — these can form campaigns within a campaign, according to how they are developed.

Troll Wars

This is an action fantastic campaign, which can involve some knotty problems or can be run as straight blood and thunder. A remote area of isolated farmsteads and fishing villages is being overrun by Trolls (or some other sort of monster), and the PCs must help defend it.

Research

This book has everything needed for this sort of campaign. The GM might study some folklore or genre horror for ideas on how to set up and present monster attacks, or for ideas to create "special" leader-type monsters which aren't restricted to the characteristics and abilities given in Chapter 8.

Preparation

This campaign requires a detailed map of a remote area in Scandinavia or Iceland, noting the location of all human habitation, such as farms and villages, and also the location and nature of monster strongholds. This should include full stats for major NPCs and generic stats for minor NPC classes like farmers, fishermen and spear-carriers.

The PCs should all be native to this area or have a good reason for being there at the start of the campaign. Good reasons might include visiting relatives, being banished from somewhere else, or trading for skins or some other local produce. At the start of the campaign, all PCs should be in or near the location where the first attack takes place.

Starting the Campaign

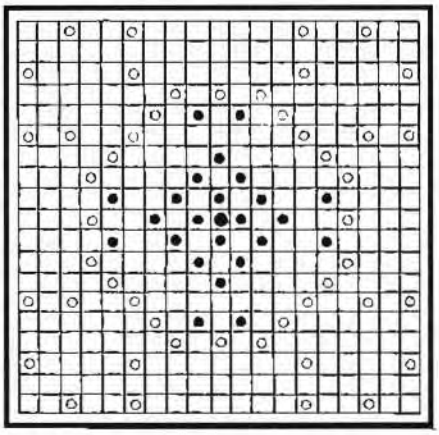
The campaign starts when the first attack takes place. Where and how this happens is up to the GM: it might be the unexplained disappearance of a trapper, or it might be an all-out assault on a farmstead. The PCs might witness this (and have to survive it!) or they might hear rumors and decide to investigate. Either way, they will be able to ascertain that nonhumans are attacking the human population of the area.

False Security

Early in the campaign, the PCs can discover and wipe out a small nest of monsters, and think that they have solved the problem. Give them a couple of days to congratulate themselves (and tell everyone that they are saved!) and then renew the attacks. What the PCs discovered was no more than an advance base, and reinforcements have come from the main lair. Alternatively, the monsters the PCs discovered might have nothing at all to do with the attacks; maybe they were just passing through, or maybe they themselves were fleeing the *real* threat!

Hnefatafl

A duel might be settled, or a dare won or lost with a rival or a god, by a boardgame. The most honorable Norse boardgame was hnefatafl ("king-board"). The skill is described on p. 29; the rules are given below. One side represents a king and his retainers, who must conduct a fighting withdrawal from a besieged castle. The attackers win by capturing the king.



In hnefatafl, one player is the attacker and one the defender. Pieces are set up on the marked squares on the board; the king — an extra-large piece on the defender's side — starts on the center square surrounded by his retainers, while attackers are ranged around the outside of the board.

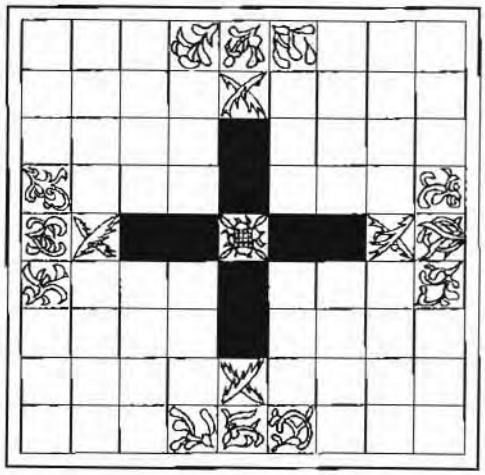
The defender's objective is to move the king to an edge square, whence he can escape from the board; the attacker wins by capturing the king.

The defending side moves first, then players take turns to move one piece. All pieces move like a rook in chess: any number of unoccupied squares in a straight line. An ordinary piece is captured by trapping it between two enemy pieces; the king may only be captured by being surrounded on all four sides. A piece may move through a square between two enemy pieces without being captured. Surrounding a piece on the diagonal is not a capture.

A later version of the game, which survived in Sweden until this century, was called Tablut, and it is this game which is sold as hnefatafl by several museums and similar groups. The rules are the same, but the board is smaller and there are fewer pieces to a side.

Fidchell

This game seems to have been one of the Fox and Geese family; although fidchell is Irish, the same game may have been played in Scandinavia under the name of Halatafl ("Fox Board").



The fox and the geese start off in the marked positions. They can move one space at a time to an empty point. The fox can take a goose by jumping over it into an empty space — any number of jumps can be made in a single move by the fox, but always along the lines, and never diagonally. The fox wins by taking all the geese. The geese win by crowding the fox into a corner where he cannot move.

Building the Pressure

The frequency and severity of monster attacks increase steadily. Some people abandon their farms and crowd into the villages, where supplies are insufficient to sustain them for long and there is a real danger of added problems like disease and outbreaks of hysteria. A massed monster attack gives the PCs the opportunity to organize a *Seven Samurai* style defense of one or more villages..

Counterattacks

The PCs might learn, from captured monsters or by trailing returning war bands, the location of one or more monster lairs, and may decide to raid them, giving the opportunity for the occasional session of good old-fashioned dungeon-bashing. They might also discover an enormous armed camp, where the enemy's main strength is concentrated. The monsters will be too numerous for a single group of PCs to deal with, but they might be able to cause confusion and damage with a well-planned commando-style raid, getting in and out before the monsters have time to organize and surround them.

Negotiations

There is also a bloodless dimension to this campaign, if the GM chooses to exploit it, and more thoughtful players might start coming up with solutions to the problem which do not involve the complete annihilation of one side or the other.

The PCs might be able to take prisoners and learn who the nonhumans are and why they are attacking. There could be various reasons for this: a crazed Troll shaman might have declared a holy war on humans; a chieftain might be seeking revenge for the loss of a son, killed by hunters; resources in the nonhumans' normal home range might have failed, forcing them to look elsewhere. They might even have been forced out of their homeland by a more powerful monster, and if the PCs can deal with this the nonhumans will return home and stop troubling the human lands. Of course, there is no guarantee that the prisoner will tell the truth. However, once the PCs start thinking about the attackers' reasons, the way is open for more thoughtful interludes between the action sequences.

If the PCs capture an important nonhuman leader, it might be possible to ransom him back to his people under a flag of truce (whether Trolls honor flags of truce is questionable, and should add some spice to the proceedings). This might open the way for negotiations, and introduce the PCs to nonhuman society and etiquette. If a solution can be found without enormous loss of life and without compromising either side, the PCs could gain great honor with both sides. They might also pick up a couple of powerful enemies for later on, as both sides will include individuals who would sooner die than conclude terms with the other race.

Concluding the Campaign

The campaign ends when the problem is solved. This might be by the annihilation of the nonhumans, or it might be by the signing of a treaty between the PCs' Jarl and the nonhuman leader, or it might be when the PCs solve whatever problem has driven the nonhumans from their homeland.

Of course, one never knows if the problem is completely solved. If the nonhumans have been wiped out, occasional survivors might appear, or bereaved kinsmen bent on revenge. If a treaty has been concluded, there is no guarantee that both sides will keep it. If a problem in the nonhumans homeland has been solved, it might recur. And the nonhumans themselves might have decided that they like the human lands better than their own, and embark on a campaign of conquest. At any time, the campaign could double back on itself and start all over again for a different reason. Lulls in the action can be filled with

unrelated adventures set in and around the home area (the adventure outlines A Winter at Home, Trouble Brewing and Witch Hunt from Chapter 11 would be suitable here) before the Troll trouble flares up again. And again.

And perhaps the humans won't win. *Something* wiped out the Vinland settlements. Centuries later, *something* finished off the Greenland colony. Perhaps the best the PCs can hope for is to be on the last ship out — or to earn their places in Valhalla, fighting on the shoreline to buy a few more minutes for the women and children, as the red-eyed hordes swarm down from the hills in the final assault . . .

The Curse

This is a thoughtful fantastic campaign, with the opportunity for some stiff fights but the main accent on clue-gathering and problem-solving. The home area is withering under a powerful curse; the PCs must find out who laid the curse and why, and how to lift it.

Research

All the information required for this campaign can be found in this book. The GM might want to take a brief look at some mythology and folklore, to see the tone in which stories of this type are normally presented.

Preparation

Again, the GM should map out the campaign area and produce stats for major PCs and minor NPC types. He will also need to decide what has actually happened and produce the necessary stats and locations to support the main plot line.

So what has happened? Basically, someone is upset with someone else, and has cursed them. There are four questions:

1. Who is upset?
2. With whom?
3. Why?
4. What have they done about it?

The aggrieved party could be almost anyone, but the less obvious the better. They would have to have sufficient magical power to inflict a curse, but this power need not be generally known.

The victim of the curse, again, could be anyone, but if it were a powerful individual — like the PCs' Jarl — or a whole community of farms and villages, then the PCs have a real incentive to keep on investigating.

The reason for the curse depends on the answers to the previous two questions. It might be spite, revenge for some long-forgotten slight or wrong, or even a mistake — but again, the less obvious the better.

Finally, there is the curse itself. It should be something sufficiently impressive to catch and hold the PCs' interest. If the curse is on an individual it could take the form of a wasting disease or a spectacular run of bad luck; if it is on a whole community it could result in a plague or a crop failure. Of course, these phenomena could all have perfectly mundane explanations, and the whole campaign could be based on a huge red herring that's your privilege. Be prepared, though — when the players find out they might turn violent. This campaign could be an ideal one to run in a thoughtful historic campaign with a high level of superstition — there's no magic, but the players and their characters might not be so sure.

The answers to the four basic questions will give the basic premise of the campaign. For example, the Jarl as a young man might have spurned the attentions of a crazy woman living in the woods; unknown to him, she is a sorceress and has cursed him with a horribly disfiguring illness so that no woman will ever

The Naming of Things

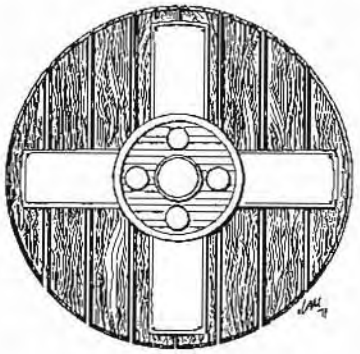
A quirk shared by the whole Norse race was to name useful or important objects. Europeans name places, ships and the best weapons, but the Vikings named *everything* that seemed to them to have a personality. A Norse warrior would name each of his weapons, his helm, and his byrnie, or coat of ring-mail, and he would be able to tell its story — especially if he had it from his father or his lord. Of course, a bow would be named, and even an exceptional *arrow* would be given a name.

And it was not just war-gear that had names. In myth we find the chains Laeding, Dromi, Gleipnir and Gelgja, the cauldron Odrorir, and even the jars Son and Bodn. Important items of jewelry were all named, as well, like the necklace Brisengamen. Metal was expensive, and smithcraft hard; anything made by a smith was worth naming.

Of course, almost any magical item would have a name, like the magical augur Rati, which could drill right through a mountain, and the drinking-horn Grim the Good.

Even important natural objects were named, such as the boulders Thviti and Gjoll, which anchor the Fenris-wolf underground.

PCs should be sure to name their property, lest others think their goods and weapons have no worth! And when, like any good Vikings, they brag about their possessions, they should brag about them by name.



Dying Well

"Fearlessness is better than a faint heart for any man who puts his nose out of doors. The length of my life and the day of my death were fated long ago."
—from For Scirnis

For the Norse warrior, the most important thing in life was a good death. Death in battle was best, earning a place in Valhalla. Best of all, of course, was to "feed the eagles," sending many foes to Valhalla, before you made the trip yourself!

Therefore, it was vital to meet death with a smile, accepting it as simply the last episode in your saga. In the story of Arrow-Odd, the hero's party is challenged by a group of berserks led by the mighty Angantyr. Odd's friend Hjalmar insists on fighting Angantyr himself, despite Odd's warnings. Hjalmar wins but is mortally wounded. The grieving Odd says, in effect, "I told you so!" Hjalmar replies, "That's neither here nor there. Everybody has to die."

Then Hjalmar sits back and composes a poem of 15 verses, his death-song, ending "Eagle, I offer you / every hospitality / a last bowl / of my life-blood" — and dies. But his poem pales beside that of Odd himself, who, with his doom on him from the bite of a viper, composed a poem of 71 verses, with his warriors as witness to memorize it and repeat it at home. Of course, Odd had lived for 300 years, and had many deeds to brag of. And it *was* stated that he was feeling weak by the time he was through . . .

With no time to sing a death-song, a man could still die with a joke. In *Njal's Saga*, the story is told of a group of men who, during a feud, went to the house of a man named Gunnar. Their leaders were honorable and would not consider burning the house; they meant simply to force their way in and kill Gunnar! One climbed up to see if he could see Gunnar inside . . . and fell back, mortally wounded. "Is Gunnar home?" asked the leader. "You'll have to see for yourself," said the man. "But I can tell you, his war-spear is home . . ." and he died.

find him pleasing again. Or someone in a village might have offended local nature-spirits so that the year's crop has withered in the ground and the village faces starvation.

Starting the Campaign

The PCs should all come from the campaign area, or at least have a good reason for being there at the start of the campaign. Some possible reasons were discussed in the previous outline.

The campaign starts when the first effects of the curse become known — the Jarl falls ill, the crop fails to sprout, or whatever. The PCs are encouraged to investigate, and at this stage there is no sign that the problem is the result of a curse or even supernatural in origin.

Investigation

The effects of the curse grow worse, and the PCs start to find out about it. This can involve using investigative and knowledge skills of their own, as well as finding and consulting NPCs. They might hear a rumor about a crazy mystic living in the mountains, for example, and undertake a hazardous journey to his remote cave in order to get his advice.

This phase of the campaign can take several distinct forms, depending on the details of the curse. If the curse is quick-acting and potentially lethal, it becomes a race against time, and side-adventures might involve trying to slow the curse down — looking for rare herbs, for instance, which if properly prepared will buy the victim enough time for the PCs to carry on investigating. If the curse is malicious or politically motivated, this phase becomes something like a murder mystery — the murderer is right here in this room, but who and why? Side-adventures might include attempts on the PCs' lives as they get closer to the truth, or carefully-manufactured red herrings as the guilty party tries to throw them off the track.

Sources of information and help will also depend on the nature of the curse. A diviner or hedge-wizard could confirm that the problem is indeed being caused by a curse, and might offer some general advice and observations about the nature of curses and magical self-defense. A servant might have found a dried toad impaled upon a thorn under the Jarl's bed, and this might be a valuable clue or a red herring. Members of the household will be eager to point the finger at each other, and tell of suspicious movements or overheard arguments. An idiot shepherd-boy might tell of seeing and speaking with the Alvar — but do the PCs believe him? It is a good idea to set up a few informants in the preparation phase.

Resolution

Towards the end of the campaign (more than once, if things are set up well) the PCs will convince themselves that they know who the culprit is. The question is, what next?

Can they come right out and accuse someone? After all, if their suspicions are correct, they are about to take on a fairly powerful wizard. This problem can lead to a very entertaining sequence of wheels within wheels as the PCs try to maneuver themselves into a position to deal with the suspect, all the while desperately trying to look as if they're not interested in him/her at all.

Can they approach the suspect directly and try to negotiate a settlement? This may be the only way to deal with a crop failure, for instance, but nature spirits — especially offended ones — can be difficult to get hold of, capricious, often downright unreasonable, and possessed of a short attention span. There may well be a rigid protocol to dealing with these beings, and the PCs daren't leave it to trial and error. A local hedge-wizard might be able to advise them, or even help, but the process is fraught with risks.

Can they research some kind of countermeasure? Again, they will need magical skills or the advice of a skilled NPC — and who's to say that their adviser isn't really the culprit, having put their suspect neatly in the frame?

Concluding the Campaign

The campaign ends when the problem is solved. It can be extended past this point if the PCs have been messy in their investigations and created further problems which need to be resolved.

The Fugitive

This is a mythic campaign, with more or less equal doses of thought and action. Loki has escaped his confinement beneath the earth, and the end of the world seems certain unless he can be recaptured. Relations between gods and giants are strained — so much so that the Aesir cannot act too openly in Midgard in case the giants take this as a threat and march on Bifrost. It is up to a group of mortals to find and recapture Loki, as the Aesir concentrate on keeping the peace with the giants.

This whole thing is an example of intelligent dealing with a Wyrd. Odin knows — all the gods know — that Ragnarok will come someday. But no one knows *when*, and anything that can be done to delay that day is a victory.

Research

A little background reading on Norse mythology is recommended before plotting out the details of this campaign. The bibliography at the back of this book gives several recommended sources. Concentrate on the stories which feature Loki, to get an idea of his character and methods; also review the foretold sequence of events which will lead to Ragnarok.

Preparation

For this campaign, the GM needs to map out various key locations in Asgard, Jotunheim, Midgard and elsewhere in the Nine Worlds. He will also need NPC stats for various giants and other main characters. Defining the gods only limits them; their interactions with the mortal PCs will nearly always be such that statistics and die rolls will be unnecessary in any case.

The PCs are mortals, but will have to be very clever and very highly skilled if they are to survive in the company of gods and giants. For this campaign, a point base of more than the normal 100 is appropriate.

Starting the Campaign

The campaign really starts when the PCs are recruited as agents of the Aesir. This could be postponed for a session or two, however, running fantastic rather than mythic adventures to let the players get used to their characters and to lull them into a false sense of security before plunging them into the campaign proper.

There are various ways to get the PCs involved in the main thread of the campaign. Meeting up with a gaunt one-eyed stranger in a broad hat (one of Odin's favorite guises for dealing with mortals) is one; the PCs might lose a wager to him and be obliged to take the job. He is particularly fond of challenging mortals and giants to horse-races, first making sure that Sleipnir's four extra legs are invisible. Alternatively, the PCs might become involved in the campaign when one of Loki's dirty deeds affects them or their families directly — they set out to investigate something that looks like no more than a troublesome wizard or monster, and find themselves caught up in the business of the gods.

House-Burning

Although almost any sort of murder or destruction might take place during a blood-feud, one tactic was considered truly cowardly: burning a foe's house down to get him out of it. A man in his home would have a chance to defend himself, even against many attackers — but if the house were set afire, he would have to come out or die horribly.

In *Njal's Saga*, Njal's foes surrounded his home and dishonorably set fire to it. Njal defied them by remaining within the house, to be burned within it, forcing them to go through with their cowardly deed. Njal's wife was offered a safe-conduct, but refused it to die beside her husband, shaming her attackers even further.

Even to suggest a house-burning would mark a man as without honor.

Writing a Saga

Whatever type of campaign is played, the adventures should form the stuff of a heroic tale — a saga. So . . . write it!

If any of the PCs are skalds, it would be natural for them to create the saga themselves. If there are no skalds in the party, it would be quite in character for the greatest hero, or highest-ranking lord, to commission a skald to do the job. In fact, any great lord would have a skald in his retinue as a matter of course.

The GM should allow a significant bonus in earned character points — at least one per session — for any player who writes up the adventures as a heroic saga. Best of all would be to follow the real saga form, with its broken lines, internal rhymes and alliteration, like these lines from the tale of Sigurd:

High upon Hindfell
the shield-hall stands;
Without, all around it
wings red flame aloft.
Therein bideth Brynhild
bound by the sleep-brier
The loveliest lady
the land ever saw.
If Sigurd should seek her
sleep shall be sundered;
By Odin ordained
shall be over for him.

But if this is beyond the poetic ambition of the players or the GM, a good "prose" saga will be sufficient . . . for the heroes to muse over in their old age, and for the players to keep and remember their Norse glory!

Kennings

A "kenning" is a metaphor — a reference, often mythological. The sagas are full of kennings; this gives them much of their style. Many of the kennings are mythological references. A written saga should use kennings — and a GM or player who can speak in kennings will add to the game's atmosphere!

Some kennings:

Dvalin's Delight: the sun. (This is an ironic name: Dvalin was a dwarf-king, and the dwarves were said to be turned to stone by the sun.)

Freyja's tears: gold. (Freyja's tears turned to gold when shed.)

Kvasir's blood: mead. (Kvasir was the wisest of the gods. He was killed by greedy dwarves and his blood used to make mead that gave the gift of poetry. Since mead makes men sing, any mead might be called "Kvasir's blood," even if it had no magic.)

Odin's horse: the gallows-tree.

ravens' meat: corpses.

shoulder-stone: head.

Sif's hair: gold. (When Loki cropped Sif's golden hair as a cruel joke, the dwarves made new hair for her out of real gold.)

whale-road: ocean.

Finding Loki

Finding out where Loki is — or rather, where he's been — shouldn't be any trouble at all. All the PCs have to do is follow the trail of chaos. And of course, not every single piece of trouble will be of Loki's making. The PCs will have to avoid being led up side-alleys into confrontations with lesser — but still dangerous — foes like enchanters and Trolls. The adventure outline *Stop the War* in Chapter 11 is typical of the kind of escapade that the PCs could become involved in.

Smart characters might try to use a diviner and/or pump Odin for information about the predicted course of events leading up to Ragnarok, especially if some of the players know a bit about Norse mythology and want to pass that knowledge on to their characters. (Anyone with Skaldic Lore will know these answers, of course.) The GM can let events follow their mythological course down to the last detail, or he could vary things. After all, having a party of mortal adventurers wandering about in the middle of events does change the course of events. Things will turn out as prophesied, because they must, but some of the details may be surprising!

This phase of the campaign will be a kind of paper chase — the PCs will learn that some atrocity or disaster has taken place, and rush there to pick up Loki's trail. They may need to help set things straight before carrying on after Loki, and they may actually meet him a number of times, in various guises. This is a great way to make characters paranoically suspicious of every NPC they meet, and Loki would thoroughly enjoy setting them against innocent farmers, woodcutters and the like.

Stopping Loki

Finding Loki is one thing; stopping him will be quite another. After all, he's a fairly major deity, and mere mortals — even if they do happen to have been built on a 150-point base — aren't going to overcome him easily.

There are various options during this phase of the campaign. The PCs could get into a superhero-style slugfest with Loki, where surrounding structures take appalling punishment but no one really gets hurt. Loki will get away, in all probability, and the PCs will wonder how they are still alive. Perhaps they will learn that Odin (or, more likely, the sympathetic Thor or Tyr) is looking after them. Perhaps not.

The PCs could drive Loki into a trap manned by Thor, Heimdal and a couple of other Aesir, and end the campaign there. Or they could just spend forever chasing the renegade god through the Nine Worlds amid ever more bizarre and surreal circumstances. The GM could spring a number of false endings on the PCs, too — Loki is a master of illusion, and could quite easily convince mortals — and a few Aesir too — that he was captured when really he wasn't.

In a long-running campaign, there could be a few more sessions of relatively low-power fantastic or mythic adventures, and then up pops Loki again, large as life and bent on revenge. A deity is a really special kind of arch-enemy for PCs to have; make the most of him.

Ending the Campaign

The campaign ends when Loki is recaptured and bound once and for all. There can be a few sessions of "mopping up," with the PCs trying to sort out the aftermath of Loki's rampage through the nine worlds. They might be sent to Jotunheim as emissaries of the Aesir, for instance — relations with the giants are still far too delicate for an Aes to risk the journey, but mortal intermediaries might be able to smooth things over a little and open some kind of dialogue. And if the PCs do well here, they may find that Odin has another little job . . .

RELIGION 6

The Norsemen were a religious people, though they went about their worship in ways strange to their Western European neighbors. Many Vikings were, in fact, Christian! Viking characters in any campaign will pray to the Norse gods, or Christ, or both . . . whether they get any response is up to the GM.

The "magic level" of a Viking campaign will dictate how active the gods are and how frequently they have dealings with mortals. The historical campaign has

inactive deities; while the characters believe in them, the gods and their supernatural servants do not take an active hand in the doings of Midgard-folk.

The fantastic campaign has unobtrusive deities; the gods themselves do not show their hands clearly, but there will sometimes be events and situations which can only be explained by divine action.

The mythic campaign has active deities; gods walk the earth alongside mortals, albeit mainly in disguise, and take a hand in all kinds of affairs.

While magic level determines the frequency and extent of divine activity, the GM can also use the campaign's level of violence to indicate the nature of divine activity. In a thoughtful campaign the gods will do subtle things for subtle reasons, often setting the PCs mind-numbing puzzles or tricking them into impossible situations. They are likely to be in disguise when encountered, and often PCs will not even realize that they have met a god until much later. In an action campaign, the gods will show their hands more clearly and the challenges they set will be more physical than mental in nature.

On those occasions where PCs meet the Norse gods — or encounter their machinations — the GM should take care to roleplay the deities properly. Even when they are in mortal disguise, the gods will display some trace of their normal personalities. Odin will have one eye and a quirky, unpredictable personality. Thor will be bluff, hearty and short-tempered; Loki will be jovial, charming on the surface, sly and malicious underneath.

Days of the Week

Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday are named after Tyr (Germanic form Tiw or Tiwas), Odin (Woden), Thor and Frey respectively. This may or may not indicate that each god had a day of the week which was dedicated to him, but it does show that they were the most important gods to the Norsemen.

The Norse Deities

The Norse gods were divided into two tribes: the Aesir and the Vanir. The Aesir were the more prominent group, while the bulk of the Vanir are less well-defined; most of them seem to be fertility and nature gods, and they may be the last remnants of an older, stone-age religion.

Our source material for the Norse gods comes almost exclusively from stories which were written down a century or more after Scandinavia had become completely Christian. Because of this, the gods lose much of their divine, awe-inspiring character and behave much like comic-book superheroes. Their personalities are often all too human, with weaknesses that lead to sometimes comical situations. The pagan Norseman probably saw his gods in a different light from the 12th-century storyteller! Bear this in mind when presenting Norse deities to PCs in fantastic and mythic campaigns.

Thor

Thor was one of the favorite Norse gods, and his symbol — the hammer — has been found more often on pendants and other amulets than the mark of any other Norse deity. The Thor's-hammer rivals the Christian cross in popularity even among the later Vikings, and molds for making both have been found cut into the same block.

Thor was a weather-god, making thunder with his great hammer Mjolnir and the wheels of his goat-drawn chariot. Since weather (and particularly storms) were of great interest to this race of farmers, fisherman and seafarers, it is not surprising that Thor was popular.

In all the stories where Thor appears, he is almost a caricature of the Viking image: unbelievably strong, totally fearless, naive at times, straightforward, bluff, hearty and violent. To the pagan Viking, he was probably a role-model; the ideal warrior, possessing strength, courage and resoluteness in abundance. Certainly his worshippers took Thor seriously, and his cult is the most widely recorded both in literary evidence and in archaeological remains.

Thor normally appears as a huge, muscular warrior with a bristling red beard. He is armed and armored like a wealthy Jarl, but uses his great hammer

instead of a sword. Besides Mjolnir he has a magical iron glove (or a pair, depending on the story) called Iarn Greiper, which enables him to catch the hammer after throwing it; Mjolnir travels so fast that air friction makes it red-hot by the time it magically returns to Thor's hand. He also has a magical girdle called Megingiürd, which gives him great strength, and a chariot drawn by a pair of goats, Tanngniostr and Tanngrisnr. These magical animals can be killed and eaten each night, and come morning they are alive and well and ready to pull the chariot again.

Thor performs incredible feats of strength and feasting in the stories, and kills many giants, with and without good cause. He has no time for subtle plans and complex machinations — when offended or angered he simply smashes the miscreant's head with his hammer. At Ragnarok, only Thor will have the strength to slay the Midgard Serpent, but he will die in a torrent of venom from the creature's mouth.

Tyr

At first glance it seems unlikely that a deity of law should be one of the most popular Norse gods, but in the social ideals of the Vikings the law was held in high esteem. Every meeting of a Thing took place under Tyr's protection, and while he is less clearly defined in the later stories than either Thor or Odin, he seems to have been a prominent deity nonetheless.

Tyr sacrificed his hand in order to bind the wolf Fenris. This involved a false oath on the part of the Aesir — they swore that they meant the wolf no harm and it demanded that one of them put his hand in its mouth as a hostage. Perhaps it is fitting that the god of law should pay the price for oathbreaking. Unlike Thor, Odin and Frey, Tyr had no magical equipment.

He was also a god who could give victory in battle, although several of the Aesir shared this property. At any rate, there are literary reference to men carving Tyr's name in runes to bring victory, and a couple of pieces of war-gear have been found bearing Tyr's name or initial in runes.

Tyr fights among the Aesir at Ragnarok, and is killed by Garm, the hound of Hel.

Odin

While Odin is the chief of the Aesir and the father of many of them, he is not the head of a pantheon in the way that the Greek Zeus is. His position is more like that of a Norse king — the first among equals, but not an absolute ruler.

Nor is he the most popular deity in the pantheon, like Zeus and later Jupiter. He was powerful, to be sure, and the Norsemen feared and respected him, but Thor was more predictable and more popular.

The stories of Odin tell how he searched for wisdom and eventually learned the prophecy of the doom of the gods at Ragnarok; he exchanged an eye for his wisdom, and spent some time hanging on Yggdrasil the world-tree in what seems to have been a shamanic ordeal or initiation rite. Odin is the god who has most dealings with mortals, but he is seldom recognized and only rarely does his intervention bring anything but doom and misery. While Thor stood for the strength of the warrior and Tyr for the strength of the law, Odin represented cruel, fickle Unreason — the random factor which makes life unpredictable and often unjust.

In many ways, Odin stood for everything that the Norsemen couldn't understand or come to terms with. He was the patron of seers and shamans; he gave the berserkers their madness and the diviners their visions.

Odin is almost always in disguise when he walks among mortals, but he usually appears as a tall, gaunt old man with one eye, wearing a rough cloak and either a hood or a broad-brimmed hat. He has some aspects of a war-god, and

"Odin Has You!"

Not long after (having made many sacrifices, Eric, the king of Sweden) saw a tall man with a hood over his face. He gave Eric a thin stick, and told him to shoot it over the host of Styrbjorn and to say "Odin has you all."

When he shot it, it looked like a javelin in the air, and it flew over Styrbjorn's host. They were blinded, and so was Styrbjorn himself. Then a miracle happened — an avalanche broke loose on the mountain and fell on Styrbjorn's army, and all his men were killed.

— from the Flateyarbok

may appear on the eve of battle to give advice to a commander. But whatever he does, he does for his own reasons — no amount of worship or sacrifice can guarantee a favorable or even rational reaction from him. Odin was a figure of awe, of fear, but hardly ever of genuine affection; the Norsemen preferred his more straightforward son Thor, who was much easier to understand.

Odin has the magical spear Gungnir and the magical ring Draupnir; he rides the eight-legged horse Sleipnir. The wolves Freki and Geri guard his throne, and the ravens Hugin and Munin bring him news of everything that happens throughout the Nine Worlds. At Ragnarok, he will be killed by the wolf Fenris.

Lesser Aesir

The rest of the Aesir are of lesser stature, and seem, at least from our vantage point, to be supporting characters in the stories.

Heimdal

Heimdal is the watchman of Asgard. He carries the horn Gjallarhorn, whose blast can be heard throughout the Nine Worlds. When the giants storm the rainbow bridge of Bifrost which leads to Asgard, Heimdal will sound the alarm. In the battle to come, he will kill Loki and be killed by him.

Baldur

The most beautiful of the Aesir, Baldur was protected by an oath from everything in the Nine Worlds that it would never harm him. Loki, who was jealous of Baldur's popularity, found one thing that had been overlooked when the oath was given — mistletoe. The Aesir were amusing themselves by throwing darts and other missiles at Baldur, who could not be harmed by them; Loki pulled up some mistletoe and persuaded Hoder, the blind god, to throw it at Baldur — not mentioning, of course, that this could have fatal consequences. Baldur died as a result, and Frigga, his mother, went to Hel to try to bring him back to life. Hel agreed to release him from her kingdom provided that everything in the Nine Worlds wished it; one old woman (Loki in disguise) refused to wish him alive again, and so he remained dead.

Vidar

The son of Odin and a giantess, Vidar will slay Fenris after Odin's death.

Uller

A stepson of Thor, Uller is the god of winter, hunting, archery, skiing and — as a part of his association with winter — a minor god of death. His power as god of winter was recognized, but winter was a misery to be endured, and Uller never became very popular.

Sif

Thor's wife, whose hair was cut off by mischievous Loki. In a resulting wager which nearly cost Loki his head, the Dwarves Brokk and Sindri made Sif a new head of golden hair, along with most of the Aesir's magical equipment.

Bragi

The god of music, poetry and eloquence. Odin carved runes on his tongue and made him the skald of Valhalla.

Mimir

The wisest of the Aesir, decapitated by the giants (or, in some tales, by the Vanir). Odin kept his head by a spring at the base of Yggdrasil, and consulted it for advice.

The Vanir

Norse myths concentrate on the Aesir, and the second tribe of gods, the Vanir, are left pretty much in the shade. They are generally on good terms with the Aesir, but there is occasional friction. From what we can find out about the Vanir, they all seem to have had some connection with nature and/or fertility; perhaps, say some scholars, they are the last remnants of an earlier religion which had been largely replaced by the cult of the Aesir. There is some evidence that the cult of the Vanir survived quite late in rural areas, and they were actively worshipped to bring peace and plenty.

Frey

Frey is by far the best-known of the Vanir, because he lived among the Aesir. According to some sources, the Aesir won a war with the Vanir, and Frey, Freya and Njord were sent to Asgard as hostages to assure future peace.

The Nine Worlds

When the universe came into being, there was an endless empty space called Ginnungagap. In this space came to be Yggdrasil, the World Tree, a great ash-tree larger than the world, with three roots. The Nine Worlds of Norse creation were arranged around Yggdrasil in three layers: at the top were Asgard, Vanaheim and Alfheim; in the middle Midgard, Jotunheim, Svartalfheim and Nidavellir; and at the bottom Niflheim and Muspellsheim.

Under one root, to the south, was Muspellsheim, which was so hot that no one born outside it could live there. Here lived the Fire Giants, ruled by their king Surt whose sword-blade burned.

Under another root, to the north, was Niflheim, a land of mist and darkness. Ruled by Loki's daughter Hel, it was a land of the dead, inhabited by men who died of disease or old age. Beneath the root the led to Niflheim was a seething cauldron, Hvergelmir, which supplied the waters for twelve huge rivers. In the cauldron lived the dragon Nidhug; it gnawed at the roots of Yggdrasil, and one day it and its wormlike allies would succeed in killing the tree, and the universe would come to an end.

Midgard, the land of mortals, was separated from Jotunheim, the land of the Frost Giants, by a huge mountain-wall made from the eyebrows of the ancestral giant Ymir. Midgard was encircled by a deep ocean, and at the bottom of the ocean lay Jormungand the Midgard Serpent, encircling the world with its tail in its mouth. Beyond or connected to Midgard were Svartalfheim, the land of the dark elves, and Nidavellir, the land of the dwarves.

Asgard was the home of the Aesir. It floated far above the earth on a plain called Idavoll. A river called Ifing separated Idavoll from the rest of the world; its waters were unusual in that they never froze. Between Asgard and Midgard stretched Bifrost, the rainbow bridge, guarded by Heimdal against the day when the giants would invade and Ragnarok would begin. In Asgard there were many halls belonging to the gods. Below that part of Yggdrasil that passed through Asgard was the Well of Urd, a sacred spring near which the Norns dwelt and where the Aesir gathered for their divine Thing.

Beyond Asgard — or in a remote part of it — was Alfheim, the homeland of the light elves. Frey may have had a hall there, or he may have owned a hall called Alfheim which was situated in Asgard — the myths are unclear. Also in or near Asgard was Vanaheim, the home of the Vanir.

The Beginning

The hot land of Muspellsheim lay to the south and a land of snow and ice to the north. As heat and cold met in the middle, a living thing appeared in the melting ice: a giant called Ymir. From under his arm grew the first man and woman, and from his feet grew the first Frost Giants. There was a cow, Audhumla, who licked the salty ice and freed a new being, a man called Buri. Ymir fed on the milk of this cow. Buri had a son called Bor, and Bor had three sons called Odin, Vili, and Ve. These three slew Ymir, and all the Frost Giants but one, Bergelmir, were drowned in his blood.

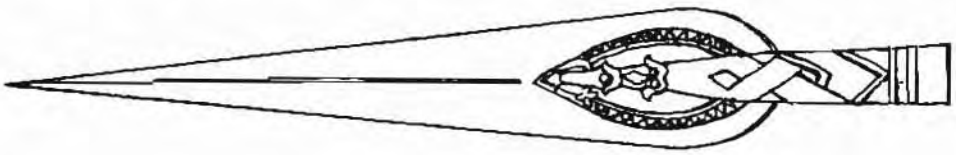
Ymir's skull made the vault of the sky, with a Dwarf to support it at each corner. His eyebrows made a mountain-wall dividing the lands of men and giants; his blood made the oceans and lakes. Two trees on the sea-shore became the first inhabitants of Midgard — we are not told what happened to the human couple born of Ymir's arm. The three gods also made the dwarfs, and the sun and the moon. The sun and moon were each chased across the sky by a wolf, so that they kept moving; the wolves caught them at eclipses, but the mortals of Midgard could make enough noise to scare the wolves into letting them go.

Odin, in time, became the leader of the Aesir and the father of many of them; his brothers Vili and Ve remained in his shadow, although in one story Odin spends so long traveling in the mortal world that they take over the throne of Asgard.

They do not seem to have been prisoners, however, but were treated as the equals of their Aesir hosts. Frey was a god of fertility, plenty and prosperity, and marriages took place under his protection.

Frey was also associated with horses and boars, and the Dwarfs made him a magical boar called Gullinbursti ("Golden Bristles") which could outrun any steed. He also has a magical ship called Skidbladnir, which was large enough to hold all the gods, but could be folded and kept in a belt-pouch. It could travel in any direction, because it always had a favorable wind.

Frey seems to have been quite actively worshipped, according to literary records; there are almost as many references to Frey's worship as the worship of Thor. However, no symbol comparable to the ubiquitous Thor's-hammer pendant has ever been found.



The Other Vanir

Frey's sister, Freya, lived with him in Asgard; a lesser deity with much the same interests as Frey, she seems to have been an original fertility-goddess who was supplanted by a male counterpart and reduced to secondary status; this happens a lot in Indo-European mythology. Apart from being beautiful and spectacularly promiscuous, she figures little in the myths.

Apart from Frey and Freya, only a handful of names survive to tell of the Vanir. Njord, a god of ships and the sea, went to Asgard along with Frey and Freya, and other names like Ing, Scyld and Frodi crop up without much explanation. Possibly they were local fertility gods and nature-spirits, who in time were unified in the person of Frey.

Loki

Loki is the great nemesis of all the gods, and will finally bring about the end of the universe. He is the trickster of the Norse pantheon, and in his personality it is possible to see traces of the Greek Hermes and the Native American Coyote. But unlike Hermes or Coyote, Loki is often murderously wicked.

Loki's malicious tricks and schemes are the root of nearly all the trouble that besets the Aesir, and it seems very unlikely that he was ever actually worshipped — he merely supplied the need for a devil to oppose the gods. One of the Aesir himself, he always seems to have been forgiven and taken back into Asgard, perhaps demonstrating the strength of family ties.

Like many trickster-gods, Loki is a consummate shapechanger, and can take almost any human or animal form. He is quick-witted and can be charming; but he is jealous, malicious and vicious as well. On occasion, he has saved the Aesir from difficult situations and given them gifts — through a particularly cunning piece of shapechanging, he seems to be the mother of Odin's steed Sleipnir. But he also begat the wolf Fenris which will slay Odin, and the world-serpent Jormungand which will kill and be killed by Thor.

Eventually, the Aesir confined Loki under the earth to stop his troublemaking, but it is foretold that he will escape and set in motion the events which will lead to Ragnarok, the destruction of the Nine Worlds.

As well as being a trickster-god and effective devil, Loki was a god of fire; his name is similar to the word *logi*, meaning fire, but it is uncertain whether this is the cause or the effect of his association with fire. Certainly fire does not seem important to him in any of the stories that survive.

Hel

Hel is either a goddess or a monster. She is the daughter of Loki and the giantess Angrboda, and the full sister of Fenris and Jormungand. She rules Niflheim, the land of the dead. Not actively worshipped, Hel seems to have been purely a mythological figure. She rules all the mortal souls not taken to Valhalla, and will fight in support of the Aesir at Ragnarok, against her father Loki and her siblings Fenris and Jormungand.

Hel is never willing to let a soul return to the world of the living once she has it; when Baldur was killed she played into Loki's hands by setting a condition for his release.

The Norns

The Norns are neither Aesir nor Vanir, and stand apart from (and above) the gods. They are three sisters who personify Fate, to whose power even the gods must bow.

Their names were Skuld ("Being"), Urd ("Fate") and Verdandi ("Necessity"). Urd was incredibly ancient, Verdandi was young and attractive in an unyielding way, and Skuld is not described. The Norns watered Yggdrasil with magical water every day, and wove vast, intricate webs — the skeins of fate. Skuld was very short-tempered and prone to take offense at the deeds of mortals, but the other two Norns were patient, detached and implacable. Neither gods nor mortals could sway their course, although occasionally Odin could obtain prophecies from them.

Worship

Our evidence for Viking religion comes mainly from accounts of Christian travelers and geographers, and is very patchy. By the time the Scandinavians came to write down their myths for themselves, they had become Christian and the stories were purged of any religious content. Accounts of worship nearly always refer to specific times and places, and may not reflect the overall picture.

Temples

Adam of Bremen describes a temple at the Swedish capital of Uppsala around 1070, when much of Scandinavia was Christian but a few pagan strongholds still held out. The temple was covered with gold (Adam or his informant may be exaggerating here!), and housed idols of Thor, Odin and Frey. Thor's image had pride of place in the middle, with Odin and Frey flanking. Sacrificial victims — human and animal — were hung on trees in a nearby grove. A spring in the grove was used for human sacrifice by drowning — " A living man is plunged into it," writes Adam, "and if he does not reappear it is a sign that the people's wishes will be fulfilled." Brian Boru burned a grove in Dublin which was dedicated to Thor.

One man who went to settle in Iceland packed up a shrine to Thor and took it with him, using the god's seat-pillars rather than his own to pick a landing-site (see Chapter 4). He rebuilt the temple alongside his own house; it was a pillared

The End

Norse mythology gives us a detailed description of the end of the world, as well as its beginning. The first sign of Ragnarok will be Fimbulvetr (Fumbul-winter), a harsh winter that will last for years. The wolves chasing the sun and moon will finally catch them and devour them. Loki will break free of his bonds, as will Fenris and Hel's hound Garm. Nidhug, the dragon of Niflheim, will sever the root of Yggdrasil on which it has spent eternity gnawing.

The giants will march on Asgard; Heimdal will sound his horn, and the Aesir and the Einherjar (human heroes, the chosen dead of Valhalla) will hurry to Vigrid, the site of the final battle. The sea will be stirred up into a frenzy; Jormungand will rise from the depths of the ocean, spewing venom across the world.

The writhings of the Midgard Serpent will create huge waves; one of these will launch a ship called Naglfari, made — grotesquely — from the nails of the dead whose kin have failed to cut their nails. (Therefore, the dead should be laid out properly, with their nails cut and their limbs straightened, that Naglfari may be longer in the building.) Aboard this ship will be Loki, at the head of a horde of Fire Giants from Muspellsheim.

The Frost Giants of Jotunheim will also set sail to Vigrid, led by the giant Hrym. Hel, with her hound Garm and the dragon Nidhug, will join the giants against the Aesir. As the attacking horde crosses Bifrost, its sheer weight will shatter the rainbow bridge.

Odin will consult the Norns and Mimir one last time, and then join the rest of the Aesir. He will die fighting Fenris; then his son Vidar will tear the wolf apart. Thor will slay the Midgard Serpent, the greatest deed of all, but take only nine steps away before succumbing to its venom. Surt, king of the Fire Giants, will kill Frey. The treacherous Loki will challenge his old foe Heimdal, and the two will slay each other. Likewise, Garm and one-handed Tyr will kill each other. At the height of the battle, Surt will set fire to Yggdrasi. The fire of that burning will consume the Nine Worlds. The stars will go out and the earth will sink into the sea.

Yet all is not lost. A new, green world will rise from the ocean, and a surviving couple, Lif and Lifthrasir, will repopulate it. Odin's brother Vali will survive, as will Vidar, the slayer of Fenris. Magni and Moder, the two sons of Thor and Sif, will also survive, as will Hoenir, a younger brother of Odin. Baldur and Hoder will be returned to life. A daughter of the sun will take over, and perform her task better than her mother. And — some Christian-influenced legends tell — after Ragnarok will come a new god, too great to be named.

building, with images of Thor and other gods, a holy ring, and a bowl for catching the blood of sacrificed animals.

Idols of Thor and other gods are mentioned in several of the later sagas and histories, when Christian kings and missionaries destroy them. Some, at least, were human-size; they seem to have been mostly of wood, although those at Uppsala were gilded. The Rus took idols on their journeys — wooden stakes with human-like faces, which could be set in the ground — and prayed for success in their business, repaying divine favors with animal sacrifices. An image of Thor in a temple at Thrandheim, Norway, sat in a chariot drawn by two model goats; the whole construction was covered in gold and silver and mounted on wheels.

Frey also had a sanctuary at Thrandheim, where sacred horses were raised for sacrifice. It was forbidden to take weapons into one temple of Frey in Iceland; its priest took a sword from a Norwegian visitor who unknowingly wore the weapon when entering. Other passing mentions in the sagas suggest that it was sacrilege to shed blood on ground consecrated to Frey, or for an outlaw to enter one of his temples.

An Icelandic Temple to Thor

"It was a mighty building. There was a door in the side wall, nearer to one end of it; inside this door stood the posts of the high-seat, and in them were nails that were called the Divine Nails. The inside was a very sacred place. Right inside, at the far end, was a chamber, the same shape as a church chancel these days. In the middle of the floor was a stand like an altar, and on this lay an arm-ring, weighing twenty ounces, and all in one piece; men swore all their oaths on this. Also on the stand was the bowl for the blood of the sacrifice, and in it the blood-twig — like a holy-water sprinkler — which was used to sprinkle the blood of sacrificed beasts. And all around the stand the gods (i.e., idols) were set out in that holy place."

— *from the Eyrbyggja Saga*

Rus Priests

"They have their wizards, who have as much authority over their goods as if they were their masters, for they order them to make offerings of women, men and cattle, just as they choose. When these wizards have chosen what they want, it is impossible to deny them; the wizard takes the human being or animal away, ties a rope around its neck, and hangs it from a pole until it expires, saying 'this is an offering to God.' "

— *Ibn Rustah*

Sacrifices in Hedeby

"Any man who slaughters a sacrificial animal — be it ox, ram, goat or pig — hangs it on poles outside his door to show that he has made his sacrifice to honor the gods."

— *Al-Tartushi, c. 950*

Horse-Fights

Horse-fights may have formed part of the worship of Frey. Two stallions were introduced to a fertile mare, and then to each other, so that they would fight over her. Treat both animals as saddle horses (p. B144) and conduct the combat as normal, with kicking and biting. It may be that the winner was sacrificed to Frey, or put out to stud with the temple's sacred horses.

Festivals and Services

Christian writers tell of human and animal sacrifice with horror, and it seems to have been a major part of worship; however, it may be that, like Viking raiding, the picture has been biased because sacrifices are more sensational and newsworthy than other forms of worship.

Worship of Odin

Sacrifices made to Odin were customarily hung from a tree and pierced with a spear, reflecting the god's ordeal in his search for wisdom. Human and animal sacrifices were hung from the trees of a sacred grove near the temple at Uppsala.

The spear was also used to mark out sacrifices in battle. A warrior would throw a spear over the heads of his enemies, shouting that all those beneath the spear's flight belonged to Odin; Odin might then grant the warrior some extra strength or protection (or the mixed blessing of berserker-rage) in exchange for the souls of those under the spear. He might also take offense if the warrior failed to kill each and every soul over whom the spear passed! Prisoners-of-war were also favored sacrifices.

Worship of Thor

Images of Thor were often given sacrifices of food and drink, and may have been dressed in rich robes. Some of his temples also housed an oath-ring: a great gold or silver ring — perhaps an arm-ring — on which oaths were sworn. In one saga a priest wore such a ring on his arm, and it saved him from a sword-blow. When the Danish leaders made peace with Alfred the Great of England in 876, they swore oaths on their sacred ring.

Worship of Frey

Horses were sacrificed to Frey, and possibly boars as well. When the Christian king Olaf Tryggvason arrived at Frey's sanctuary at Thrandheim, he found a horse being taken for sacrifice; he rode it to the temple, which apparently defiled the horse so it was spared. Other literary sources mention horses being kept near Frey's temples in Iceland. Horse-fights may have been associated with the worship of Frey.

The boar may have been a charm of Frey's; boar designs have been found on swords and helmets from pagan Saxon as well as Norse contexts, and in the Anglo-Saxon epic *Beowulf* a boar device is put on a helmet to protect its wearer. This evidence is indirect and may be misleading, but the gods of the pagan

Saxons were close relatives of the Norse gods and the practice may have carried across to the Vikings. One worshipper of Frey, coming to Iceland, threw a boar and a sow overboard to guide him to land. He seems to have hedged his bets, though, for he also prayed to Thor and Christ!

Fragmentary reports of services to Frey at Uppsala refer to men dressed as women, "clapping of mimes upon the stage" and an "unmanly clatter of bells" — possibly some kind of ritual drama like a mystery play — but there are no further details.

Feasts and Sacrifices

Animal sacrifice was often accompanied by feasting, with the god getting a portion of the sacrificed animals. At one temple in Trondheim, Norway, the local farmers gathered with enough food to see them through the holiday, bringing cattle and horses for sacrifice. The blood of the sacrificed animals was caught in bowls and sprinkled around the building, both outside and in, and over the worshippers; then the meat was boiled and the feasting began. Drinking-horns were ceremoniously passed to and fro over the fires, and toasts were drunk to Odin, for the victory and success of the king; to Njord and Frey, for peace and a good harvest; and to the memory of dead kinsmen.

A major festival was held at Uppsala every nine years. It lasted nine days, and was accompanied by the sacrifice of nine men and nine males of every type of animal. Attendance was compulsory, although Christians could buy themselves off with a fine. The bodies were hung on a tree in the sacred grove.

Burials

Viking burials seem to have varied widely from time to time and place to place. Despite popular images of burning boats set adrift on the fjords, there is no one burial rite which can be considered the definitive "Viking burial."

Boat Burials

The Arab writer Ibn Fadlan witnessed a Rus funeral on the river Volga in 922. The deceased was put in a temporary grave while arrangements were made, and then burnt in his ship — which was hauled ashore and packed around with firewood — along with a slave-girl who was simultaneously stabbed and garotted (like a sacrifice to Odin — see above). After the fire burnt down, a birch-post marker was raised on the site bearing the name of the deceased. For poorer burials, Ibn Fadlan was informed, a model ship was used.

The two best-known and most complete Viking ships were found in burial-mounds, where they had been laid along with their dead masters and various goods. The Oseberg ship accompanied the burials of two women, thought to be princesses — so boat-burial was not a male preserve.

Rus Burials

"When a great man among them dies, they make a grave like a large house and place him in it. With him they lay his clothes, the arm-rings he wore, and also much food, and bowls of drink, and coins. They also lay his favorite wife in the grave with him, while she is still alive. Then the door of the grave is blocked up, and she dies there."

—Ibn Fadlan

Cremations

"Odin made it a law that all dead men should be burnt, and their belongings laid with them on the pyre, and the ashes cast into the sea or buried under the ground. He said that in this way every man would come to Valhalla with whatever riches were laid with him on the pyre. . . . Outstanding men should have a mound raised in their memory, and all others famous for manly deeds should have a memorial stone. . . . It was their belief that the higher the smoke rose in the air, the higher would be raised the man whose pyre it was, and the more goods were burnt with him, the richer he would be."

— Snorri Sturlasson, 12th century

Indifferent Christians

"As long as things go well, the Swedes seem willing to acknowledge Christ and honor him, but only as a formality. When things go wrong — bad harvests, droughts, storms and bad weather, enemy attacks or fires — they persecute the religion which they pretend to honor, with action as well as words. They seek to revenge themselves on the Christians and drive them out of the land."

— Aelnoth of Canterbury, 12th century.

One More God . . .

"If I must believe in a god, it is no worse to believe in the White Christ than any other."

— Gaukathori to St. Olaf.

"He was very mixed in his faith; he believed in Christ, but invoked Thor in matters of seafaring and dire necessity."

— the Landnamabok, about Gaukathori.

How Iceland Became Christian

After two previous groups of missionaries had been banished from Iceland for involvement in killings, two Iceland-born Christians, Hjalti Skeggjason and Gizur the White, arrived from Norway. In true missionary style they started off by pulling down a shrine to the Aesir, and then they went with a crowd of followers (and, more than likely, a mob of angry pagans) to the Thing, where they proclaimed a message from Norwegian king Olaf Tryggvason calling upon the Icelanders to become Christian. Just at that moment a volcanic eruption occurred, which was interpreted as the wrath of the gods. A riot broke out, and the law-speaker, Thorgeir, was given the case to sort out. On the third day, he called the people together and warned them that if they could not agree, the dissension would destroy them. Finally, they decided by vote to become Christian.

One Step at a Time . . .

"It was agreed by law that all should become Christians, and all who were not baptized must seek baptism. But certain ancient laws were retained. . . . Sacrifice in secret to the old gods was permitted, but if witnessed by others it was punished by three years' banishment. A few years later this relic of heathen practice was abolished."

— contemporary Icelandic text

Mound Burials

Other Viking burials are covered by mounds, which cannot easily be distinguished from the barrows of the Bronze Age some 2,500 years before. The deceased — with or without goods — is laid in a wooden or stone chamber, which is covered by a circular mound of earth and stones. Sometimes these mounds can be quite immense, like those on either side of the church at Jelling, Denmark, which are said to contain the parents of king Harald Bluetooth.

Flat-Grave Burials

Flat-grave burials were the norm in Christian Europe, and were common in Scandinavia even before Christianity. The towns of Hedeby and Birka both have a flat-grave cemetery. The "ring-forts" at Fyrkat and Trelleborg, Denmark, both have associated flat-grave cemeteries, with all ages and both sexes represented and a selection of grave-goods which suggest anything but a military function for these sites. The extensive flat-grave cemetery at Lindholm Hje, Denmark, includes many graves marked by low stone settings, shaped like the deck-plan of a Viking ship; these "ship-settings," which occur elsewhere, are reminiscent of the few reported boat-burials.

Grave Goods

In pagan times, it was common for an individual to be buried with a range of possessions which indicated his or her station in life and which might be used in the afterlife. Although the bulk of a person's goods would be passed to the heirs, enough were buried with the deceased, one assumes, to ensure that a deprived ghost would not rise to trouble the family. Christian burials show fewer grave goods, although personal items like favorite pieces of jewelery still went to the grave with their owners.

Christianity

Paganism is as much a part of the Viking image as the horned helmet — and the impression is about as accurate. It is easy to suppose that Christianity tamed the Vikings, and made them settle down into respectable citizens of medieval Europe. Christian Vikings existed through most of the Viking period, and were no less vigorous than their pagan kinsmen.

The Spread of Christianity

When the Viking age began, the whole of Scandinavia was pagan. The first missionaries were sent to Denmark in 823. Christianity spread slowly, and it was over three centuries before it had supplanted the Aesir cult entirely. The Church sent missionaries to the Vikings regularly and with great determination, drawing on the comparatively recent experience it had had in converting the pagan Saxons, Franks and Germans.

The main strategy was to aim for the top layers of society; convert the king and the nobles follow, convert the nobles and the commoners follow. This worked to an extent, but the nature of power in Scandinavian society was different from that elsewhere in Europe, and kings were not in a position to compel the conversion of their subjects. When King Harald Bluetooth claimed on a runestone to have "made the Danes Christian," one wonders how much force he used and how long the conversions lasted.

Another problem was the easygoing, broadminded Viking attitude towards religion. Many Scandinavians agreed happily to worship the White Christ, but didn't let this new god compromise their devotions to the Aesir. After all, they reasoned, one more god can't hurt, but to turn your back on the gods that you and your ancestors have dealt with since time began — well, that would be

inviting trouble. Many people are recorded as praying to Christ, Thor, Odin and Frey all at once, or picking the one or two they thought would hear their prayers most willingly.

And, of course, the rural population stuck to their fertility-cults with dogged determination. The Vanir may well have been worshipped in the countryside before the Aesir, and no farmer wants to risk a bad harvest or a hard winter just because a foreign priest tells him that the gods who have looked after his family for generations are false. In the end, many of the Vanir cult fertility-rites survived, turned into thinly disguised Christianized folk holidays; this was the pattern over most of Celtic and Nordic Europe, and the Church accepted it.

Churches

The Christian churches of Scandinavia were much the same as those of neighboring nations — rectangular halls of wooden construction, large enough to hold all the worshippers. Stone churches and cruciform ground-plans were a later development throughout Europe.

Some churches were built on the sites of pagan sanctuaries, as at Jelling where Harald Bluetooth's church nestles between the two immense burial mounds of his pagan parents. Some churches, like that at Urnes in Norway, are exquisitely carved, both inside and out.

Burials

The approved form for Christian burial was a flat-grave inhumation, with the head to the east. Grave-goods were more or less restricted to clothing and personal jewelery; Christ would look after the deceased in heaven, instead of the deceased having to take his own wealth and equipment with him to Valhalla. This concept took some time to sink in, though — more than one bishop had to issue a decree forbidding people to bury swords with dead warriors. At least one burial tradition required cremation — the Arab Ibn Fadlan witnessed a Rus chieftain's cremation in his boat, and was told that the flames would waft the deceased and his goods to the afterlife in an instant, instead of leaving him to rot in the ground. Cremation was forbidden by the Church at the time Scandinavia became Christian, and there are records of several churchmen having a hard time convincing their flock that burials were a good thing.

Pagan burials, described above, were variable in the extreme. The deceased's social status, the wealth and standing of his family, the circumstances of his death and local customs seem to have affected the way someone was buried. Among the types of pagan Viking burial found in Scandinavia are flat-grave inhumations with the head to the east and very few grave goods; these may be unexpectedly early Christians, but scholars think the correspondence is purely a chance one.

Rune-Stones

Erecting a rune-carved stone to the memory of a dead person was not uncommon, and many examples have been found. After the advent of Christianity, rune-stones often included a prayer for the soul of the deceased. Some landowners erected rune-stones to themselves, pointing out their good deeds and asking the prayers of all who saw them. Here are a few examples:

King Swein raised this stone in memory of his huscarl Skardi, who had roamed the west but now has met his death in Hedeby.

Ragnhild, Ulf's sister, raised this stone and constructed this mound, placing stones in the outline of a ship, in memory of her husband Gunnulf, a baying man (i.e., a pagan priest), the son of Narfi. Few men nowadays are better than he. Cursed be any who destroy this stone or drag it from here.

Jarlabanki raised these stones while he was still alive, and made this bridge for the good of his soul. He was the sole owner of Taby. May God help his soul.

Austmann, son of Gudfast, had this stone raised and this bridge made, and he made Jamtuland Christian. Asbjorn made the bridge, Trion and Stein carved the runes.

Askel the son of Sulki had this stone raised in his own honor. While stone lasts, thus memorial which Askel made will always stand. May Christ and St. Michael help his soul.

Ketil and Bjorn raised this stone in memory of Thorstein, their father, and Ønund in memory of his brother, and the huscarls in memory of their equal, and Ketillaug in memory of her husband. These brothers were the best of men both at home and away at the wars. They looked after their huscarls. He fell fighting in the east, in Russia. He was in the forefront of the battle, the best of countrymen.

7 MAGIC

There are three ways to run magic in a ***GURPS Vikings*** campaign: omit it completely (a historic campaign), allow monsters, limited magic and some divine action (a fantastic campaign), or allow unlimited magic and free divine action (a mythic campaign).

For a historic campaign, magic isn't needed at all — superstitious Norsemen might still believe in magic, but it doesn't really exist.

For fantastic and mythic campaigns, the GM has several options — for instance, whether to allow the full range of magic from ***GURPS Magic***, or fine-tune the available magic to fit the setting. And if magic is being adapted to fit

the setting, it would be possible to use only spells and items of the types that are actually documented in myths and sagas, or to include other magics provided they are in the Viking spirit. And with a fantastic campaign, the GM should decide just how fantastic it will be — wizards and monsters are in the game world, right enough, but how often will the heroes encounter them? What will the mana level be? How common will magical equipment be, and how easy will it be to find magical training?

Spellcasters

Spellcasters were feared and distrusted in Norse society. Certainly the Vikings were a race who prized the simple virtues of strength, persistence and integrity over cunning and scholarship. Odin, in many ways, was the archetypal spellcaster, and the Vikings feared him for his unpredictable and apparently irrational nature. Magic, likewise, was powerful, unpredictable and irrational, and it was similarly feared. It might get the job done, and it might be able to achieve things that scores of mighty warriors could not, but it wasn't a "clean" way of doing things; it left a bad taste behind.

The green-eyed Finns (called Lapps, because the Norsemen did not distinguish between the races) were considered to be a whole race of wizards. Perhaps it is no accident that the Vikings left the Finns alone!

The more fantastic a campaign is, the more commonplace spellcasters will be, and the better accepted — albeit grudgingly — will be their powers.

Training

Obtaining magical training will always be difficult. Just how difficult will depend on a number of factors, even after the campaign's magic level is taken into account.

In a rural area, for instance, it might be possible to find a local hedge-wizard or wise woman, but the spells they can teach might not be of much use to a Viking adventurer. More powerful magics will be known by enchanters, but they are rare, secretive and often evil. In very remote areas, PCs might encounter spellcasting nonhumans, but a student will have to overcome a lot of racial distrust in order to get help. Some ancient Trollwives are powerful enchanters, but who in his right mind would trust such a creature to teach him and not eat him? In a town, it might be possible to learn some magic from a priest or from a skilled townsman. A wizard who is living in a town will probably be secretive, though — neighbors would not like to learn that they live next to a wizard, and would probably blame him for every trifling mishap in the neighborhood.

Spells

Most of the spells in the ***Basic Set*** are appropriate to a ***GURPS Vikings*** campaign; the only real exceptions are Elemental Spirit spells, since elemental spirits are not part of the Norse mythos. Perhaps more important is the question of which types of spellcaster use which types of spells. Unrestricted use of magic by all spellcasters will erode the flavor of the setting, but tailoring spell use to character type can capture the "feel" of magic in the Viking world.

Rural Spellcasters

The hedge-wizard and wise woman will know basic spells from a wide range of categories, and their spell use will reflect their social function — a little bit of healing, a little bit of fertility magic, and a little bit of animal magic as well as some lesser spells of other types. Communication and Empathy spells like Sense Emotion and Persuasion can help them impress the locals and solve some of the

Adding More Spells

Spells from ***GURPS Magic*** can be used in a ***GURPS Vikings*** campaign alongside those from BSIII, following the guidelines given in the main text to decide which spells can be used by which types of spellcaster. Here are some notes on the new spell categories introduced in ***GURPS Magic***:

Body Control spells might be used by priests of Odin and Tyr — Odin for the bad ones, Tyr for the good ones. Some monstrous spellcasters — hags and Trollwives, for instance — might use some of the attacking spells in this category as well. Enchanters, of course, can use any sort of spells.

Food Spells will be very popular among rural spellcasters, and those dealing with goodness and purity might also be available to priests of Frey. Spells which spoil or poison food might be used by witches and similar types.

Illusion and Creation spells will be great favorites with enchanters; the Giant king Utgard-loki (no relation to the god Loki) wove a series of illusions so powerful that they left Thor and even the cunning Loki completely taken in.

Meta-Spells will also be popular with enchanters, and some of them might also be used by mystics.

Movement spells will also be mainly the preserve of enchanters and a few powerful monstrous spellcasters; teleport spells are not really in keeping with the spirit of Norse mythology, where even the gods had to make great journeys in order to get from one world or region to another.

Necromantic spells are rare in the Viking world. Death Vision is the sort of thing that Odin would do to someone, so it might be available to his followers on rare occasions. Sense Spirit might be used by rural spellcasters and mystics — the classes of spellcaster most often approached by those who are troubled by ghosts and the like. Steal spells, Age, Pestilence and the like are all usable by witches and similar types. Norse undead are different from those of in generic fantasy, and cannot be artificially made, summoned or banished. They come into being for their own reasons, and can't be switched on and off by spells. If the PCs are far from home, though, they might encounter this kind of necromantic magic at the command of an Arabian enchanter — a terrifying novelty.

Plant spells are a counterpart to animal spells in most ways, and will be used mainly by rural spellcasters and priests of Frey.

Continued on next page . . .

Adding More Spells (Continued)

Protection and Warning spells are very suitable for enchanters and mystics, although mystics will not generally use the more powerful Dome spells. Teleport Shield is only relevant if there is Teleport magic in the campaign; see the notes on Movement spells above.

Sound spells are all quite usable in a Viking campaign, although Sound Jet might require a magical item like a horn, or it might be restricted to foreign enchanters. Scribe will be of limited use in Viking circles; yes, it might be used to inscribe runes from a distance, but woe be to him who fails a roll!

problems that are taken to them; lesser Elemental spells of the Find, Shape and Purify type are appropriate, as are weather-related spells. Some hedge-wizards also use Making and Breaking spells. When choosing spells for a hedge-wizard or wise woman, bear in mind the needs of their community.

Mystics

The speciality of the mystic is knowledge and information. Like rural spellcasters, mystics seldom use very powerful magic, although they may use lesser spells to impress and frighten the superstitious. Many mystics thoroughly enjoy the unease which others feel in their presence, and exploit it to the full. Knowledge and Communication/Empathy spells are popular, along with Knowledge and some Healing spells. They may also have some low-power elemental spells, which they use in a dramatic and showy way to impress and frighten. Powerful Mystics may have a few Mind Control spells. Odin is the patron of mystics, whether they actively worship him or not!

Priests and Devout Followers

Although the Norse world did not feature the priest-wizards beloved of many generic fantasy settings, priests and devout followers of the Norse gods may sometimes be wizards as well. In such cases, their magical repertoires will probably reflect the nature and interests of their patron.

Thor

Priests of Thor will use spells which affect the weather; these will probably be a mix of Air and Water spells. Thor was the deity who protected seafarers, and there are some mentions of him calling up storms and gales to confound his followers' enemies. The god himself could certainly use something like the Lightning spell — in a highly magical campaign, his priests might also know it!

Odin

Odin was a patron of seers and mystics, and his followers will have much the same magical repertoire as the mystic above. There might be a greater emphasis on Mind Control spells to confound one's enemies, with some Making and Breaking spells to weaken or shatter their weapons. As a general rule, Odin did not grant magical gifts to his followers, but he would — sometimes — make trouble for their foes. He could also see and hear everything that happened everywhere in the Nine Worlds, so Communication/Empathy and Knowledge spells are also appropriate.

Frey

Frey was a rural deity who made the land, crops and livestock fertile; as such, his priests would have a range of spells similar to those of the rural spellcasters above. Elemental Purify spells are highly appropriate, as are Healing spells and those which protect against harmful things like fire and flood.

Tyr

As patron of the Thing and guardian of the law, Tyr would sponsor magic which had to do with truth and knowledge. As a god of war, he would also have an interest in spells relating to strength and bravery. Tyr generally made things go right for his followers while Odin made things go wrong for the other side.

Enchanters

Enchanters are the most powerful mortal spellcasters in Norse myth, and can have free access to just about any spell which is in keeping with the setting. They are nearly always evil, and their main function in the myths and sagas is to

present a showy, terrifying enemy who decimates minor characters in various spectacular ways before being overcome by the old-fashioned strength and courage of the hero. Showy elemental magic is a favorite, as well as powerful illusions and Mind Control magic.

Monstrous Spellcasters

Some older, wiser monsters can also use magic; ancient Trollwives are often powerful wizards. When dealing with monstrous spellcasters, bear in mind their racial character and inclinations (see Chapter 8) as well as individual personality and motivations. A Trollwife might behave like a malicious witch, souring milk, spoiling crops and visiting sickness upon small children, or she might be a terrifying war-leader backing up her less gifted relatives with impressively destructive Elemental spells.

Enchantment Spells

Magical items are rare in Norse mythology; almost all are created by the dwarves. Even the mighty Aesir are forced to rely on the dwarves for their magical equipment. Restricting Enchantment magic to just a few NPC dwarves (whom the PCs will probably never get to meet!) is a good way of controlling any tendency to magical weapons proliferation in the campaign.

Scrolls are not appropriate to the setting, but may be replaced by runestones — see p. 87.

Rural spellcasters and mystics might have a limited range of Enchantment spells: they might be able to use Enchant and Staff, for instance, and rural spellcasters might be able to make low-power charms — bundles of herbs in a bag, with a couple of animal teeth and other odd objects — to protect against disease, hostile spells and so on.

Create Charm ***Enchantment***

Lets the caster make a charm against a specific magical or nonmagical attack form or affliction. Possible protections might be against disease, curses, lightning, arrows and the like. The charm is always on when worn by or in physical contact with the character for whom it was made; otherwise it will be off. The charm lasts until the thing it protects against happens; then it becomes permanently inactive. Each protection is a different spell, to be learned separately.

The charm adds to the resistance roll or passive defense roll against its specific attack or affliction. The amount it adds depends on the energy invested in it.

Cost: 20 each for the first and second points of protection, 50 for the third and fourth.

Prerequisite: Enchant; Magic Resistance for charms against spells.

Shapeshifting

Shapechanging is one of the most common forms of magic in Norse legend and folklore. The ability can be gained in two ways. It can be learned as a magic spell (see sidebar), or can be an inherent power, bought as an advantage.

Thus, a player character can be a shapeshifter. A "natural" shapeshifter is also called a "were-creature" or "were." The power works everywhere but in no-mana areas (a were in a no-mana area reverts automatically to human form).

Shapeshifting in itself is neither good nor evil. Some individual were-creatures are very evil; some are good; most simply hide their abilities to avoid persecution. Most people react to any known "were" at -4! In a highly magical campaign, a were-warrior would be respected.

Loki is a shapechanger, and might be a good patron god for a were.

Shapeshifting ***Special***

Lets the caster change to the form of an animal. Each animal form is a different spell, to be learned separately. The caster may only learn animals with which he is familiar. The common forms in the Viking world are bear and wolf, but raven, otter, salmon and others are known. The caster becomes a full-sized beast of the species. Clothing, armor and jewelry vanish in the beast-form and reappear when human form is resumed; magical items cannot be detected while "vanished." Backpacks, carried items, etc., simply fall to the ground.

The caster retains his own IQ, but gains all the physical attributes of the new form. No spells may be cast unless the caster knows them so well that they can be performed without gestures! Fatigue is not increased for spellcasting purposes.

Each hour that the spell continues, roll vs. IQ; a failed roll means that the caster loses a point of IQ, continuing until the normal IQ of the beast is reached! Should the caster's IQ drop to 7, he is trapped in the beast form forever unless the spell is removed by Remove Curse (other spells won't counter it). Lost IQ is regained when human form is reassumed.

Duration: 1 hour.

Cost: 6 to cast, 2 to maintain.

Time to cast: 3 seconds.

Prerequisite: Magery, and at least 6 other spells of any type.

Item: (a) Jewelry. Must bear the likeness of the shape to be taken. Usable only by a mage, or by someone descended from a natural were! Remains with the caster when spell is cast — therefore, it is most convenient if it is a collar or necklace. There is no cost to maintain the spell, but the caster cannot change back unless he still has the item; otherwise, a Remove Curse spell must be used if he is to regain normal form. Energy cost to create: 1,500. (b) Skin of the shape to be taken. As above, but merges into the subject and so cannot be lost! Energy cost to create: 3,000.

Shapeshift Others ***Special; Resisted by IQ***

As above, but usable on others. The subject cannot end the spell; only the caster or a Remove Curse spell can do that. If the spell continues until the subject's IQ drops to 7, he is trapped in beast form!

Duration: 1 hour.

Cost: 6 to cast, 2 to maintain.

Time to cast: 30 seconds.

Prerequisite: Magery 2, Shapeshifting for that form.

Item: (a) Staff or wand. Usable only by a mage; must touch the subject. Energy cost to create: 3,000. (b) Skin of the shape to be taken. Always on. Placed on subject, it puts the spell on him permanently (soon causing IQ loss as above) until it is taken off by Remove Curse; the item may then be reused. Energy cost to create: 3,000.

Shapeshifting Forms

Werewolf ***15 points***

The most common type of were. A werewolf has his natural ST and IQ; DX 14; HT+2. He gains a PD of 1 and DR of 3. Speed is 9. He attacks by biting (close combat for biting damage as per p. B140). Weight does not change. Size: 1 hex.

Werebear ***15 points***

A werebear has double his normal ST; normal IQ; DX 13; HT +2. He gains a PD of 1 and DR of 4. Speed becomes 8. He attacks by biting (close combat) for biting damage as per p. B140, or strike with claws (reach 1 hex) for 1d+2 crushing damage. His weight is quadrupled! Size: 2 hexes normally, 1 when he stands to fight.

Any werebear automatically has the Berserk disadvantage (see p. B31) and gets no bonus points for it; it's the reason this powerful form is so cheap. A werebear who berserks will immediately change to bear-form.

Wereboar ***25 points***

A wereboar has double his normal ST; normal IQ; DX 14; HT +2. He gains a PD of 1 and DR of 3. Speed becomes 8. He attacks by slashing with tusks (1d+1 cutting) or trampling (1d-1 crushing). His weight triples! Size: 2 hexes.

Were-eagle ***20 points***

A *very large* eagle — wingspread of 12 feet. He has normal ST and IQ; DX 13; normal HT. He gains a DR of 3. Speed becomes 20! He attacks by slashing with talons in close combat, doing 1d-1 impaling. Weight is halved. Size: 1 hex.

Contagious Shapeshifting

Legend has it that "natural" were-dom is contagious — so if you are bitten by a were, you will become a were yourself! It is entirely up to the GM whether this is true — and, if it is true, whether the players know. If it *is* true, a roll on HT is necessary to avoid becoming were after a bite. If you become were, you *will* change shape at the next full moon. To be cured, you must find powerful magical help — e.g., Great Wish, Remove Curse.

Since were-dom is considered an "advantage" overall, a PC who wants to remain were must immediately take extra disadvantages, or commit unearned character points, to pay for it.

Magical vs. Natural Shapeshifters

Magical shapeshifters may be accidentally trapped in the altered form (see spell descriptions); natural shapeshifters may not.

A magic Shapeshifting spell requires energy, while use of an "inherent" shapeshifting power does not.

"Natural" weres have powers of regeneration but are vulnerable to silver. Magic shapeshifters have no special ability to regenerate and are no more hurt by silver than any other metal.

A natural were must spend one night in beast-shape, every full moon. A "good" person will simply run around and bay at the moon. An "evil" one must make an IQ-5 roll if he wants to avoid committing atrocities, and may be penalized for bad roleplaying if he *tries* to be good. The GM is the final arbiter, based on actual behavior, of who is good or evil!

The Change

In a Viking campaign, there are four main types of were-creature, described in the sidebar. GMs may create other types as the campaign may require. A character's scores change when he takes were-form. Note in particular that if your DX is 14 or better, you get a +1 to the listed DX in were-form. If your DX is 9 or less, you get a -1.

The change from human to beast form, or vice versa, can be made at will and takes three seconds. During this time, the shapeshifter defends at -2 and can take no other actions. Clothing and armor vanish when the beast-form is taken, and reappear when the human form is resumed. A shapeshifter's intelligence is unaffected by the change. ST, DX and HT may all change, as described below. Shapeshifter PCs should mark both sets of stats on the record sheet (*Suggestion:* use red for the beast-form).

A were in beast shape can use its DX only for fighting and other "animal" functions — not to open locks, write letters, etc. It remembers human speech, but cannot speak. Were-forms are true beast forms, not the hairy-faced humanoid "wolfman" of the movies. A wizard in beast-form *cannot* cast spells which require speech or gesture!

Injury and Regeneration

All were-creatures have better-than-normal DR. Natural shapeshifters also have the power of *regeneration.* An injured shapeshifter (in any form) regains HT lost to injury at the rate of 1 extra hit per 12 hours, *in addition to* any "normal" healing or medical aid. Crippled limbs regenerate; *lost* limbs do not.

However, natural were-creatures are vulnerable to silver. They can handle silver coins, etc., without injury — but their powers of regeneration won't work if they have so much as a single silver coin in a pocket. Any hit with a solid silver weapon — sword, bullet, etc. — does double damage. (Contrary to myth, other weapons *will* affect shapeshifters.) Silver hand weapons (swords, etc.) cost 5× the price of steel ones, but break as though they were "cheap" — see p. B74. Silver-headed arrows cost 5 × normal price. Silver bullets cost 10 × ordinary price. Neither can be bought in ordinary shops, unless the area has suffered a plague of weres!

All wounds taken in were-form carry over into human form. If your human HT is much lower than your were HT, you could transform from a wounded were to a *badly* wounded, or even dying, person! Dead or unconscious weres resume human form.

Rune Magic

Rune magic was known to the Vikings, and seems to have been more acceptable than other forms of magic. Some heroes are mentioned as having learned the runes as though this was a great and noble achievement — a stark contrast to the Norsemen's general distrust of magic.

Rune magic is covered in detail in ***GURPS Magic***. The GM who does not have access to that volume may either omit rune magic from the campaign or use the following simplified rune magic system.

Casting Rune Magic

This system is a highly cut-down version of that in ***GURPS Magic***, but should suffice for most purposes. First, add a Rune Lore skill (Mental/Very Hard) which allows a wizard to cast spells using runes. Each spell consists of two runes, a verb and a noun (the GM decides, referring to the meanings in the sidebar). Each rune must be learned as an individual skill; all are Mental/Hard. A character may not have a score in a rune which is higher than his score in Rune Lore. Two skill rolls are required for casting, one for each rune — the spell is cast successfully if both rolls are made; feel free to improvise entertaining results for partial success.

Some spells may require the use of more than two runes; in such cases proceed as normal, but a roll is required for each rune used in the spell.

Runestones

Runestones are magical runes permanently inscribed on a piece of stone, wood, bone or some other durable substance. Again, detailed rules are given in ***GURPS Magic***. The following is a simplified version.

A runestone is a magic item with a creation cost of 400; it may be used in a rune spell, and acts just like a rune drawn during casting, except that it is good for a number of uses. No skill roll is needed for a runestone — it automatically succeeds — unless the caster has not learned the rune. In this case, the roll is against Rune Lore -4.

Magic Items

In a supernatural or mythic campaign, the PCs may occasionally encounter items of great power. Here are some of the most important and interesting; more can be found in the sagas.

Divine Possessions

Most of the Aesir's magical treasures were made in a single story. Loki, in a fit of mischief, cut off the beautiful golden hair of Thor's wife Sif. To stop Thor from killing him, Loki offered Sif a new head of hair, made from real gold.

He persuaded a dwarf called Dvalin to make the hair. Dvalin also made Frey's ship Skidbladnir and Odin's spear Gungnir. Loki showed these to two more dwarfs, Brokk and Sindri, and challenged them to match Dvalin's feat, offering his own head for the wager. They made Frey's boar Gullinbursti, Odin's ring Draupnir and Thor's hammer Mjolnir — despite Loki's attempts at sabotage.

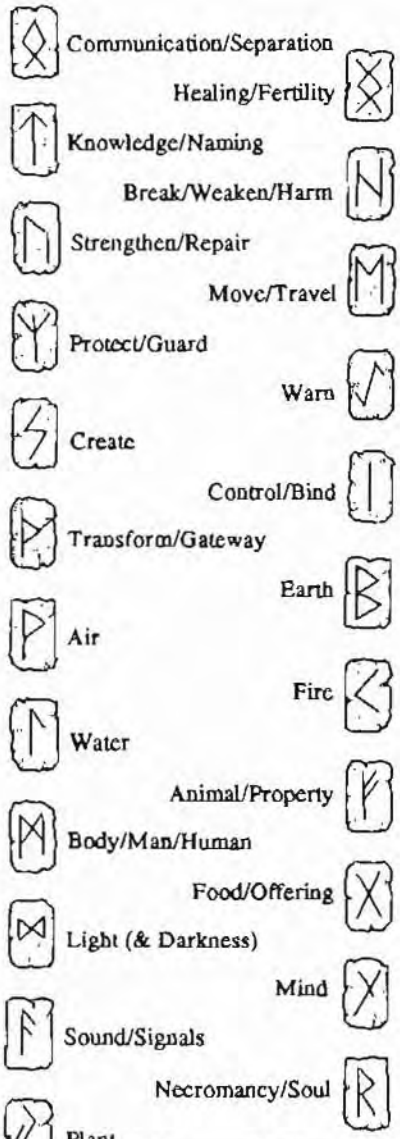
The dwarfs then demanded Loki's head according to the wager. The Aesir were happy to agree, but Loki pointed out they couldn't cut off his head without harming his neck, which wasn't in the wager. The dwarves contented themselves with sewing up his lips.

It seems from this story that even the gods themselves couldn't make magic

The Futhark Runes

These are the 25 runes of the Futhark (Viking) rune-language, each with its appropriate meaning for the ***GURPS*** system. Alternate translations or meanings of the Futhark runes are shown as well.

Note that the rune which we use here for Magic (Futhark 25, called "Unknowable," or "Destiny,") is always represented as an empty space! However, tracing or carving it takes as long as for any other Hard rune.



Source: *The Book o*
Blum.

Rune Magic

You'll find runes and signs to read,
Signs most mighty, signs most strong,
Which the soothsayer colored, the high gods made,
And Hroptr of the gods had carved.
Do you know how they should be carved?
Do you know how they should be read?
Do you know how they should be colored?
Do you know how they should be tried?
— *from the Poetic Edda*

The youthful Kon knew all the runes,
Runes long-lasting, runes life-giving,
Knew too how to save men's lives,
Dull the sword-blades, calm the breakers,
Knew the language of wild bird-cries,
Quenched the fires and calmed men's sorrows.
— *from the Rigsthula*

items. In a Viking campaign, it would be reasonable to bar PCs from learning the more powerful enchantments, restricting this knowledge to the dwarves.

Using Divine Possessions

Occasionally, one of the Aesir would lend one of his magic items for some reason, and Mjolnir was stolen from Thor more than once. In a mythic campaign, PCs might come into possession of one of these items at some point. This can be a mixed blessing. On the one hand, they have a powerful magical item (but probably not as powerful as they think!). On the other hand, they will be in deep trouble if they damage or lose it — which Loki and/or any number of avaricious giants would be happy to arrange!

Thor's Magic Items

Thor had three magic items: the hammer Mjolnir, the glove (or gloves) Iarn Greiper, and the belt Megingiørd. Mjolnir was an awesome weapon in Thor's hands, capable of flattening mountains. When he threw it, it returned to his hand, red-hot; Iarn Greiper allowed him to catch it without injury. Megingiørd gave Thor immense strength, allowing him to wield Mjolnir more effectively.

Mjolnir is best treated as a maul, which can be thrown using Axe Throwing skill with no penalties for its size. It has Puissance and Accuracy enchantments; the levels are up to the GM, but +3 in each is reasonable. Mortals won't be able to level mountains with it! The hammer returns to the thrower's hand at the end of the round in which it is thrown, automatically ready for the next round. It is red-hot, and anyone catching it takes 1d damage to the hand, reduced as normal by gloves or gauntlets. Remember that armored gauntlets weren't developed until a couple of centuries after the end of the Viking age! Optionally, a roll against DX might be needed to catch Mjolnir (or use the spear-catching rules in Chapter 3) — otherwise it hits for half normal damage. This can be fun in a mythic campaign with a humorous tone, or if the mortals are getting above themselves and need taking down a peg or two.

Iarn Greiper protects the right hand (or both if it's a pair). Treat as gauntlets (PD3, DR4, 2 lbs., area 7), with an enchantment that negates all heat and fire damage to the hand.

Megingiørd is an always-on item which increases the wearer's ST by 5, affecting damage, encumbrance, and possibly readying times for weapons. If the wearer's Fatigue is higher than his (original) ST when he takes the belt off, he immediately loses consciousness.

Odin's Magic Items

Odin has two magic items: the spear Gungnir and the ring Draupnir. He sometimes lends one or other to a mortal, to serve his own ends.

Gungnir has an Accuracy enchantment of at least +3; in Odin's hands, it never misses. Also, no oath sworn on it can ever be broken. (If ***GURPS Magic*** is being used, treat this as a Great Geas which cannot be removed by anything.) Gungnir also has a Fortify enchantment of +5, making it very difficult to damage — in the Volsung Saga, Odin shatters a magical sword with it!

Draupnir is an arm-ring of finest gold. Every ninth night it creates eight identical copies of itself — except that the copies cannot make more copies! This can be a very useful source of cash or gifts, but PCs should be very careful to give away the copies, and keep the original!

Frey's Magic Items

Frey's magic ship, Skidbladnir, could be folded small enough to fit in a belt-pouch, and yet it is large and strong enough to hold all the gods and all their

possessions. It can fly, and it always has a favorable wind, so it can travel in any direction.

Frey's golden boar, Gullenbursti, is faster than any horse, and its golden bristles shine in the dark. Apart from these qualities, Gullinbursti seems to be a normal boar.

Frey's sword is a Dancing Weapon (***GURPS Magic***, p. 40), fighting by itself with skill 18, speed 6 and ST 16. Any attack on the weapon is at -5. If it takes a critical hit or scores a critical miss, it is "stunned" and out of the fight.

The Blood of Kvasir

Kvasir was a divine being, created by the Aesir out of their own spittle and the Vanir's as a sign of friendship. He was killed by a pair of greedy dwarves, and his blood was used to make a wondrous mead which gave the gift of poetry to all who drank it. Odin eventually recovered the mead. Most of it is now in Asgard, but a little bit was lost outside the walls of the city, and now it might be anywhere . . .

A single sip of the Blood of Kvasir will grant a 1d-1 bonus (minimum 1) in each of the following skills: Skaldic Lore, Bard and Poetry. A full quaff — as much as any mortal could stand — would grant a 2d bonus in each of those skills! Anyone greedy enough to drink more of the mead, if it is available, will have a 3d bonus in each skill — and acquire 30 points worth of insanity-type disadvantages chosen by the GM.

Other Items from the Sagas

The sagas and tales mention many other magical items, some quite unusual. Most of these would be in the possession of the gods, dwarves, or giants, but might fall into a hero's hands during a quest. These included:

Rati, a magical augur which could drill right through a mountain.

A "crooked stick," the property of some mound-Alvar, which could be ridden like a horse and would take the rider to Alfheim.

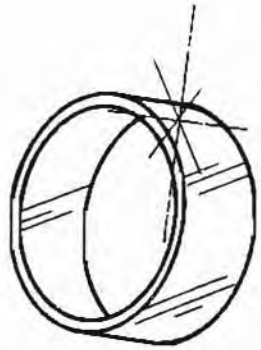
Grim the Good, a magnificent drinking-horn. Grim was ornamented with the design of a man's head, and could talk and tell the future. Grim was the property of Giants, and was huge; if a man could drain him in one draught (HT-5 or Carousing-2 roll), Grim was pleased and might tell something of value.

Gusir's Gifts, three gold-fletched arrows made by the Dwarves for the king of the Lapps (himself a great wizard). They would fly from the bowstring by themselves (treat as an automatic Fast-Draw and firing action taking one turn) and hit what they were told to (treat as Thorstein's marble, described in the sidebar). Then they would return to the quiver.

Brynhild's Carpet — a flying carpet, big enough to carry two giants or a dozen men! Unlike most of the magical items in the Norse sagas, this one was made by a giant — a royal princess, in fact.

Possessions of Heroes

The GM can use this option to introduce low-power magic items. The sagas and legends respect personal prowess rather than magic, so Norse heroes don't generally have a vast array of magical equipment. However, an item — especially a sword — which belonged to a great hero might become a treasure in its own right, and may have absorbed some of the hero's qualities. Several people in the Middle Ages claimed to have Charlemagne's sword, and such weapons were often thought to be of almost supernatural quality. Adder and Dragvendil, the two swords of Egil Skallagrimsson, wrought appalling carnage in his hands — might they not add something of Egil to the might of another warrior?



Thorstein's Gifts

Thorstein Mansion-Might saved the son of a Dwarf, shooting the eagle that was carrying the child away. The grateful Dwarf gave him several gifts.

The first gift was a woolen shirt. While worn, it would protect the wearer from wounds, and he would never tire while swimming — a wonderful gift for a sea-raider!

The second gift was a small silver ring. With this in his pocket, Thorstein would never want for money.

The third gift was a black flint, which would make him invisible while held in the hand.

The final gift was a piece of marble, along with a steel point. If the white part of the marble was pricked with the steel point, a fierce hailstorm would come. If the yellow part was pricked, the sun would shine and melt the snow. If the red part was pricked, flame and sparks would shoot out. And if either was thrown at a foe, it would hit, and return to the thrower's hand when called!

Treat the hail effect as one minute of the heavy-damage Hail spell (***GURPS Magic***, p. 37), with no fatigue cost and no effect on the caster. The sunshine is usable only in daytime, and only to melt the magically-created hail. The fire is a 2-die Flame Jet (***GURPS Magic***, p. 34), usable once per second at no fatigue cost. All these effects take both hands to use — one for the marble, one for the steel point.

If the marble is thrown, treat it as an ordinary rock. If the steel point is thrown, treat it as a dagger. No roll is necessary to hit, and no active defense is possible; the magic weapons *will* hit anything the thrower can see when he throws them.

(When Thorstein visited the land of the Giants, they laughed at his name — given because he was so big — and said he should be called Mansion-Midget. Thorstein just smiled and said "Give me a naming-gift, then!" The Giant lord was impressed at his bravery and gave Thorstein a gold ring, and Thorstein loyally served the Giant for a time, helping him with his magical treasures.)

8 NORSE BESTIARY

Like magic, monsters are a comparative rarity in Norse myth and legend. The intelligent races will all speak Old Norse, the same language as the PCs.

It is up to the GM to decide whether to allow nonhuman PCs — players who are used to generic fantasy campaigns may insist on elven and dwarven PCs, but these are completely unknown in Norse literature. Trolls are possible as a PC race, but a Troll PC will carry a massive Social Stigma.

While an exceptionally strong and ugly man (like Egil Skallagrimsson) was sometimes described as a Troll or half-Troll, this was an insult rather than a statement of fact. PC Giants might be permissible in a very high-powered mythic campaign, but beware — they can completely wreck game balance.

Nonhuman Races

Alvar

Alvar or Alfar is the Norse name for the Elves. They live mainly in the world of Alfheim, but are also associated with burial mounds and the cult of the Vanir. Frey maintains a hall in Alfheim, and some sources hint that he may actually rule that whole world.

The Alvar are rarely seen by mortals, and in Midgard they are nature-spirits, more like the kami of Japan than the Elves of Tolkien or most generic fantasy settings. At certain times, offerings of food and drink were left out for them, and their goodwill helped ensure the fertility of crops and livestock and the well-being of the household.

The Alvar are creatures of folklore rather than myth, and very little information survives on how the Vikings saw them. It seems that they were much like the faeries of British folklore. Therefore, no firm rules will be given here; the individual GM can design them to fit his or her own vision. They are humanoid in shape, but may vary in appearance; some may be slender and exceptionally beautiful, while others may be misshapen and ugly. Height can be anywhere between 2 feet and 6 feet.

The "mythological" Alvar of Alfheim tend to be taller and fairer than the "folkloric" mound-dwelling Alvar. The GM could use fantasy Elf stats for the dwellers in Alfheim, and base the mound-dwellers on Gnomes or Kobolds. The mound Alvar commonly have advantages which enhance their senses, like Alertness and Night Vision. Disadvantages might include Impulsiveness and Kleptomania and — later in the Viking age — a Phobia against the trappings of Christianity. Nearly all mound-dwelling Alvar will have some magical ability: the bulk of their magic affects plants and animals, and they may also have some Mind Control magic as well.

A Sacrifice to the Alvar

"Take a sacrificed bull to a mound in which dwell Alvar . . . and redden the outsides of the mound with the bull's blood, and make the Alvar a feast with the flesh; and you will be healed of your wounds."

— *Kormak's Saga*

Dwarves

The Dwarves of Nidavellir hardly ever interact with mortals. They sometimes have dealings with the Aesir, but contact with humans is almost unknown. Confusingly, some inhabitants of Svartalfheim are also described as Dwarves, and Dwarves are sometimes called svartalfar — "dark Elves." Again, like the

Details about Nonhuman Races

Readers who have access to ***GURPS Fantasy Folk*** can use it to create more detailed nonhumans for a ***GURPS Vikings*** campaign.

Alvar

The Alvar of Alfheim can be based on ***Fantasy Folk*** elves, although Sense of Duty to Nature is replaced by Sense of Duty to Alfheim. In terms of culture, they are most similar to Mountain Elves.

The mound Alvar are more like the faeries of British folklore. Ellyllyon and Kobolds represent two views of such creatures — noble but faerie folk and troublesome (but seldom dangerous) Goblins. They can either become invisible at will or they are highly skilled in stealth and camouflage. When dealing with mound Alvar the GM should remember two things above all — their ties to the land and their capricious, easily-offended nature.

Dwarves

Dwarves in Norse myth are different from dwarves in most other fantasy settings, ***Fantasy Folk*** included. Relations with Elves are generally neutral or good; in fact Dwarves are sometimes called svartalfar (dark Elves) in Norse myths. They are very different from dark Elves in most fantasy games, though.

The Norse Dwarves are best known for their craftsmanship, and every Dwarf character should have at least one craft skill at 15 or better. Since they rarely leave their homes and forges in Svartalfheim and/or Nidavellir, they make better NPCs than PCs.

Trolls

Trolls can be based on ***Fantasy Folk*** Ogres. For more variety in this race of monsters, use the following rules.

When creating a Troll, take a total of 4 points from final DX and IQ (in the case of a PC Troll, the player decides how much comes off which attributes), and add 2 each to ST and HT. A Troll weighs 20 lbs. more than a human, on the average. All Trolls get High Pain Threshold, Toughness, Primitive (TL1) and Bad Temper.

Beside these basics, pretty much anything is allowed. Some Trolls (especially old females) can use magic, some can breathe underwater, most can see in the dark, and some even ape human accomplishments like playing chess — even if they do tend to eat their opponents. Some sea Trolls are pretty much like Fishmen (but a little more mammalian in their appearance), but their psychology is distinctly Trollish, lacking the fanaticism and emotionlessness of the Fishmen as described.

For some adventures, the GM may need smaller, weaker Trolls as spear-fodder for the PCs to destroy on their way to fighting the really big, mean Trolls. These younger or lesser Trolls can be based on Orcs or even Kobolds from ***Fantasy Folk***. Although they belong to a distinctly later tradition, the Trolls in Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* come in every shape and size, and little foes attacking in overwhelming numbers can be just as deadly as one or two huge, mean ones.

Giants

Norse Giants are always of the Colossal variety. Other than that, they are remarkably similar to Norsemen — except that the Fire Giants of Muspellsheim are immune to fire and heat. True Giants (as opposed to Trolls) are always very human in appearance, and do not have extra heads or cyclops-style single eyes.

Alvar, the Dwarves are not the same as the common fantasy stereotype.

Dwarfs have the same stats as humans, but height is 12" less than normal for ST; weight will be the same. Racial disadvantages could include agoraphobia. Some Dwarves are extremely skilled artificers, and theirs seems to be the only race which has access to the most powerful Enchantment magic.

In many tales it was said that the Dwarves could not abide sunlight, and would turn to stone if touched by the sun. In some stories, Giants and Trolls had the same weakness.

Trolls

ST: 20-30 **Move/Dodge:** 5/5 **Size:** 1
DX: 13 **PD/DR:** 1/1 **Weight:** 250-300 lbs.
IQ: 10 **Damage:** as weapon.
HT: 12/20-14/30 **Reach:** 1

Of all the nonhuman races, Trolls interact with humans the most. This interaction is normally violent, but it means that they are better defined than the elusive Elves and Dwarves of Norse tradition. Saga-writers are less particular in their use of names than game designers, and the words "Troll," "Ogre" and "Giant" are sometimes used in rapid succession to describe the same creature. Ogres can be treated as a separate race of large Trolls; Giants are covered in the next section.

Trolls are big (7-9 feet tall), strong, and very ugly. Many are very stupid and clumsy as well. Their skin varies from yellow-brown to black, and is thick and tough. Trolls may use weapons, and some — always old and usually female — may use magic; some Trollwives are terrifying witches. Norse Trolls do not usually regenerate.

Trolls live in remote areas, usually in caves under the mountains. The main social unit seems to be the extended family, but there are also tales of Troll kingdoms numbering into the hundreds. Their normal TL is 1, and they can make crude weapons like stone axes and tree-limb clubs. However, they will quite happily use metal weapons if they can get them. They can handle close combat and throwing weapons well enough, but do not use bows. They live by hunting and foraging, and will raid human settlements for food — usually under cover of darkness, relying on surprise and retreating if they encounter determined resistance. They will eat humans, and human children are a special delicacy to them.

At the end of the Viking age, Trolls began to diminish in stature until they were little more than goblins; ST and HT both shrunk by 50% or more, and they developed an aversion to daylight and to the trappings of Christianity.

Giants

ST: 40-50 **Move/Dodge:** 20/5 **Size:** 4
DX: 11 **PD/DR:** 3/6 **Weight:** 2,400 to 3,200 lbs.
IQ: 10-15 **Damage:** as weapon
HT: 16/28 **Reach:** 3

Norse Giants are colossal humanoids, 30 feet tall or more. Apart from their size and a certain clumsiness that goes with it, they are essentially idealized Norse humans. They use immense versions of human weapons; a Giant's sword will be around 15 feet long. The Giants of Muspellsheim, the world of fire, are immune to the effects of heat and fire.

Natural Creatures

Domestic Animals

Cattle

ST: 40-80 **Move/Dodge:** 8/4 **Size:** 3
DX: 8-9 **PD/DR:** 1/1 **Weight:** ½ to 1 ton
IQ: 4 **Damage:** 1+1 imp
HT: 14-17 **Reach:** C

Cattle were kept mainly for milk and as draft animals. Occasionally one would be slaughtered, and boiled veal seems to have been a delicacy of the Vikings. The number of a farmer's cattle was the main index of his wealth; they reflected the quality of his land as well, for not everywhere in Scandinavia could support cattle, and much of the land was only fit for sheep or goats. Bandits would steal cattle from their neighbors, and Viking raiders might occasionally try to drive good cattle on board their ships!

Dog

See p. B142.

Dogs were used for hunting and herding, and for guarding farms against wolves and foxes. Most Viking dogs will have been mongrels of about the same size as the Australian dingo, with larger dogs reaching the size of a German Shepherd; the Great Dane only emerged as a breed after the end of the Viking age.

Horse

See p. B144.

Horses were riding and draft animals, although cavalry as such did not develop over much of the Viking world; the Rus picked up some cavalry tactics from the people of central Europe, but elsewhere cavalry rode into position and then dismounted to fight on foot. A horse was a good sacrifice to Frey, and sacred horses were associated with some of his temples.

The Norse didn't have any really big horses. One large man was known as Ganga-Hrolf, or Hrolf the Walker, because no horse could carry him!

Pig

ST: 10-20 **Move/Dodge:** 7/5 **Size:** 1-2
DX: 11 **PD/DR:** 1/1 **Weight:** 100-250
IQ: 6 **Damage:** 1d cut
HT: 15/10-13 **Reach:** C

Pigs were an important species for Norse farmers, and after sheep and goats they were the most important meat source. Viking pigs were different from modern-day farm pigs: sleeker and longer-legged, with a coat like a wild boar and looking like a blend of boar and modern pig.

Reindeer

ST: 20-25 **Move/Dodge:** 12/7 **Size:** 3
DX: 15 **PD/DR:** 1/2 **Weight:** 500-700 lbs.
IQ: 4 **Damage:** 1d+1 imp. (horns)
HT: 14/13-16 **Reach:** C

Reindeer were the staple of the nomadic Lapps who lived (and still live) in the far north of Scandinavia beyond the Viking world. They were traded for their hides and antlers (bone and antler were widely used in the Viking world to make combs, buttons, gaming pieces and many other things that are made of plastic today) as well as for their meat. "Decoy deer," tame deer used to capture wild ones, were especially valuable.

Sheep and Goat

ST: 8-12	**Move/Dodge:** 9/6	**Size:** 1
DX: 13	**PD/DR:** 1/0	**Weight:** 50-150 lbs.
IQ: 4	**Damage:** butt 1d-2 cr	
HT: 156-10	**Reach:** C	

Sheep and goats were the main livestock of Viking farmers — kept for their milk and meat as well as for sheep's wool. In most of the Viking world, sheep and goats were the only livestock that the land would support. These stats are for a small sheep or goat — there were no big, modern breeds.

Wild Animals

Brown Bear

See p. B141.

The brown bear was still to be found in the forests of Europe during the Viking age; it was hunted for its fur, and for its meat in remote areas with poor farming. Some berserkers were said to be were-bears (see p. 86).

Polar Bear

See p. B141.

The polar bear is the main terrestrial predator north of the arctic circle, and is largely carnivorous, preying mostly on seals. Being primarily carnivorous, it is more aggressive than the European brown bear, and reacts at -3. In close combat, it may grapple (bear hug) and bite at the same time.

Deer

See p. B142.

Several species of deer were hunted in the Viking world, for their skins and antlers as well as their meat. The largest represented by the stats on p. B142 is the elk (ST 14), and the smallest the red deer (ST 5).

Eagle

ST: 4-5	**Move/Dodge:** 18/9 in flight	**Size:** <1
DX: 12	**PD/DR:** 0	**Weight:** 4-12 lbs.
IQ: 4	**Damage:** 1 cut	
HT: 13/4-5	**Reach:** C	

The golden eagle is the largest bird of prey in the Viking world, capable of taking prey as large as a lamb. It is a powerful flyer rather than an agile one, and will defend its nest fiercely.

Falcon

See p. B142.

Falcons preyed on other birds and small game along the cliffs and mountains of the Viking world, and were domesticated for hunting. As elsewhere in Europe, hawking was largely the preserve of the well-born, practiced for sport rather than food. A trained falcon could command a good price in lands further south.

Fox

ST: 3-4	**Move/Dodge:** 10/7	**Size:** 1
DX: 14	**PD/DR:** 0	**Weight:** 5-10 lbs.
IQ: 5	**Damage:** 1d-4 cut	
HT: 12/5-7	**Reach:** C	

The fox lives by scavenging and hunting small prey like mice and lemmings. It will also raid farms for chickens and other small prey. In arctic regions, the fox has a thick white coat; elsewhere it is red-brown with a white tail-tip.

In a supernatural game, a fox might turn out to be that other trickster, Loki!

Musk Ox

ST: 60	**Move/Dodge:** 8/4	**Size:** 2
DX: 9	**PD/DR:** 1/3	**Weight:** 750-1,500 lbs
IQ: 4	**Damage:** 2d cr	
HT: 17	**Reach:** C	

Found only in the arctic tundra, the musk ox is a smaller, shaggier version of the domestic ox, and is the main prey of the arctic wolf. They generally travel in small groups comprising a bull, a cow and 1-3 young. They will flee from any apparent threat, but can turn and butt with surprising agility. If surrounded, the adults will form a ring around the young, horns outward.

Vinland Animals

Some of the animals that we take for granted in North America were introduced by European settlers, and were not found in the Vinland that the Vikings encountered.

The ubiquitous rat was a European colonist, arriving on Spanish and English ships. Its adaptability and breeding rate soon gave it a firm hold on the New World, as it displaced other small mammals.

The first horses in America are generally thought to have arrived with the Spanish, and spread out from their settlements in Mexico and the southwestern USA. Although they were a vital part of the Plains culture by the time Europeans encountered it, they are not native to the North American continent. Some wild horses did enter North America from Asia during the Ice Age, when the Bering Strait was dry land, but they do not seem to have spread far or lasted long.

Domestic animals were nearly all European imports. Wild dogs are the feral remains of species introduced by the Spanish or by later arrivals; wolves, coyotes and some foxes appear to be the only truly native canines. Cattle, sheep and goats were all introduced, although in the Rockies and other mountainous areas there are native wild sheep and mountain goats. These are very different from the European domestic species, however.

Surprises

Of course, Vinland had several native species which were different from European fauna. Some of these should come as exciting (if not fatal) surprises to Norse visitors.

The grizzly is bigger, stronger and meaner than the European brown bear; see p. B141. Its size and its ferocity (roll reactions at -3) will amaze Norse visitors. Of course, its fur is a magnificent trophy.

The cougar (puma, panther, mountain lion, catamount . . .) has a smaller range nowadays, but it is thought that at one time it could have ranged throughout the continent except on the plains. It's much bigger than any wildcat a Viking will have seen! It is a solitary hunter, although mated pairs may hunt together in the season and a mother and near-mature offspring may hunt together sometimes. Its favorite prey is deer, but it may attack an unattended horse. It has ST 8-22, DX 14, IQ 5, HT 15/13-19, Move 10 in short bursts, Dodge 7. Hide has PD1, DR 1. Weight 80-250 lbs., size 2 hexes. Attacks by biting and clawing (close combat) for damage based on ST.

Snakes are more varied and more likely to be poisonous in Vinland; see p. B143 for guidelines and examples. The Vikings knew of poisonous snakes, of course — the hero Arrow-Odd died from a viper's bite — but none grow nearly as big as the rattlesnake. A huge adder that gives honorable warning before it attacks would impress a Viking!

Rat

ST: 1 **Move/Dodge:** 6/6 **Size:** <1
DX: 13 **PD/DR:** 0 **Weight:** 1 lb. or less
IQ: 4 **Damage:** 1d-5 cr
HT: 17/2 **Reach:** C

The Norway brown rat (*Rattus norvegicus*) is one of the most successful rodents in the world, and arguably one of the most successful mammals. It has adapted to exploit human presence superbly, and can be found anywhere there are people. While it normally flees from any threat, it will fight to the death if cornered. Rats often carry diseases, and 300 years after the end of the Viking age they were responsible for the outbreak of the Black Death. Roll vs. HT+2 to avoid infection from a rat bite. If the rat does not actually carry disease (GM's decision), this simply means an extra hit of damage.

Large numbers of rats will attack in swarms; see p. B143.

Seal

ST: 8-16 **Move/Dodge:** 12/8* **Size:** 2-3
swimming, 4/4 on land
DX: 12 **PD/DR:** 0 **Weight:** 150-2,000 lbs.
IQ: 5 **Damage:** —
HT: 12-16 **Reach:** C

Seals are common around the north Atlantic shores, and were an important food source for settlers in the bleak north. Their hides were valuable for trade, and if removed from the carcass in one strip with a spiral cut, they made ropes of very good quality.

Small Game and Fur-Bearers

ST: 1-4 **Move/Dodge:** 4/10 **Size:** <1
DX: 11-14 **PD/DR:** 0 **Weight:** 0.5-5 lbs.
IQ: 4 **Damage:** 1d-5 or 1d-4
HT: 12/2-5 **Reach:** c

A wide range of small mammals were hunted by the Vikings for meat and fur; skins were one of Scandinavia's main exports at this time. The range of stats here should cover most game mammals: beaver, stoat (ermine), otter, rabbit and hare were all hunted and trapped for meat or fur.

Viper

ST: 2-3 **Move/Dodge:** 4 **Size:** <1
DX: 13 **PD/DR:** 0 **Weight:** 2 lbs. or less
IQ: 3 **Damage:** special
HT: 15/4-5 **Reach:** C

The adder or viper is one of the few poisonous snakes in northern Europe. It is very shy, and will flee from anything larger than its normal diet of mice, frogs and small birds. Only if cornered or panicked will it attack anything the size of a man, and its venom is usually not powerful enough to cause serious damage — a swelling around the affected area (-1 DX if a limb) for 4-6 hours is usual result. However, anyone bitten must make a HT roll, and on a critical failure there has been an unusual reaction: take 4d damage!

Whales

ST: 15-1,200 **Move/Dodge:** 12-16/7 **Size:** 2-50
swimming
DX: 12-14 **PD/DR:** 0-5/5 **Weight:** 250 lbs. to
100+ tons
IQ: 7-8 **Damage:** bite 1d-1 — 6d cut,
tail smash 1d-15d cr
HT: 14-20/15-200 **Reach:** C

Whales and dolphins were an important part of the Norse diet, especially in areas with poor farming. The larger whales could also become hazards to navigation (see Chapter 10). The stat ranges given here should cover everything from a common porpoise (6-8 feet long) to a blue whale (100+ feet long). With the exception of the 50-60-foot sperm whale, any whale over about 25 feet long will be a baleen whale, filtering krill from the waters in spring and summer; others are toothed whales, living on fish and — in the case of the orca or killer whale — on incautious seals as well. Stories of killer whales attacking swimmers or small boats are exaggerated, but make good plot elements.

Wild Boar

See p. B144.

Wild boars were still to be found in most of the forests of northern Europe during the Viking age. They generally travel in small family groups consisting of a boar, a sow (use the lower end of the stats range) and 2-5 piglets (halve ST and HT). The adults will defend their young, and will attack on their own if they feel threatened. They will try to knock men down with a slam attack (which includes a tusk-slash), and gore them while they are helpless.

Wildcat

ST: 4-5 **Move/Dodge:** 10/7 **Size:** <1
DX: 14 **PD/DR:** 0 **Weight:** 5-15 lbs.
IQ: 5 **Damage:** 1d-3 cut
HT: 13/2-3 **Reach:** C

The European wildcat is a reclusive animal which lives in forested mountain areas on rodents and small birds. It is about half the size of a bobcat, and looks like a large, long-haired tabby with an unusually bushy tail. Capable of frightening violence when cornered, it generally avoids humanity, although it might raid a remote farm for chickens in a harsh winter. Domestic cats were also known to the Vikings; stats the same, but ST 2-4, damage 1d-4 cut.

Wolf

See p. B144.

The wolf is the largest land predator in the Viking world, preying on young, old and infirm deer, small game and whatever opportunity affords. In winter a wolf-pack might raid a remote farm, and they are always a threat to sheep and goats. In a harsh winter, they might attack humans, horses or anything else they find. Arctic wolves are all-white but otherwise the same.

The mound Alvar described above were only one of a range of spirits that surrounded the Norse farmer and his family. So little information on these beings has survived that no attempt is made to present stats or rules for them; instead, the GM is encouraged to read these descriptions, form his or her own impressions, and design creatures on that basis. For the most part, the spirits are either naturally invisible or little-seen; PCs will nearly always encounter them through their deeds rather than by sight.

Vaettir

The vaettir were invisible spirits who haunted human dwellings; they may have been similar to the English hobgoblin and brownie, and the Slavonic bannik and domovoy. Details are very sketchy, but they seem to have behaved in much the same way as mound-dwelling Alvar (see p. 91), making sure that all was well with the house and its inhabitants, provided that they were given regular offerings of food. Offending the vaettir might lead to sickness in the house or the roof leaking; in extreme cases children might be born dead or deformed, or the house might fall down without warning.

Disir

The disir were similar in some ways to the vaettir, but seem to have been more powerful and more feared. Again, there is very little hard information on them, but they were female spirits, and may have been related to the Valkyries (see p. 96). Some scholars suggest that they were originally lesser Vanir deities, in the service of Freya. One of their functions was to foretell death in the family, and they could also protect the house like the vaettir and the crops like the mound Alvar. It may be that they took the souls of those who died in their beds and conducted them to Niflheim, just as the Valkyries took the souls of those who died in battle to Valhalla. Like the other domestic spirits, they were feared and respected, and honored with sacrifices of food. At the pagan Swedish capital of Uppsala they were worshiped with a large winter feast, held in February at the full moon.

Grendel and his Mother

Ironically, the best literary description of Trolls comes from the Anglo-Saxon epic poem *Beowulf*, and not from any Scandinavian source. Parts of the poem are set in Denmark, and it is there that Grendel and his mother brought death and suffering to a royal hall.

Grendel lived in the barren marshes around the king's hall, and was apparently drawn by the sound of feasting and the happy shouts and songs of the king's warriors. Waiting until the dead of night when all was quiet, he entered the hall and found the warriors sleeping there. He killed 30 men and ran out with their bodies, dripping blood behind him.

The next morning, the rest of the court (who apparently weren't awakened by Grendel's raid) saw the carnage. The next night Grendel came again, and no one could stand before him. Only those who fled the king's hall, it seemed, had any chance of escaping the monster. The hall stood deserted for 12 years, and the king grieved bitterly, for he had built it to be the finest in the world.

Grendel continued to stalk the area, killing everyone he encountered. He set up his lair in the deserted hall, but a divine blessing on the king's throne prevented him from touching it.

Tales of the monster reached the ears of Beowulf, who set sail for Denmark with his followers and announced his intention of dealing with Grendel. His father had been welcomed and well-treated at the Danish court, and he undertook to slay the monster as an act of friendship.

Beowulf and his followers entered the hall. Finding nothing, they went to sleep. In the night, Grendel fell on them, killing several men. But Beowulf woke as Grendel laid hands on him, and grappled the monster so that he couldn't get away. The noise of the struggle woke Beowulf's remaining followers, who tried to hack and slash at Grendel but found that their swords were magically blunted, and could not penetrate the monster's hide. Beowulf had seized Grendel's hands so that he could not use his terrible claws, which were capable of tearing a man in two. The fight was between Beowulf and Grendel.

The two grappled until Grendel was exhausted; the sinews in his shoulder snapped, muscle tore and bone broke — and Beowulf tore the monster's arm off. Grendel escaped, fleeing wounded into the marshes where he died.

Beowulf hung Grendel's severed arm from the rafters, and people came flooding back to the hall to restore it to its former glory.

But the danger was not over. Grendel's mother, who was bigger, stronger and uglier than her son, came to take revenge for his death. She killed one of the sleeping Danes, but the rest awoke and snatched up their weapons and she fled, taking her son's severed arm with her.

When Beowulf heard of this, he went to the lake where Grendel's mother lived. Fully armed and armored, he dove to the bottom and fought her, fending off hordes of lesser monsters — her pets, apparently — who were attracted by the fighting. They fought until they reached her hall at the bottom of the lake, where there was air to breathe and the aquatic lake-monsters could not follow. Beowulf's sword could not cut the hide of Grendel's mother, and he threw it aside in impatience and grappled her to the floor.

Grendel's mother threw him off, and pinned him by sitting on his chest as she drew a filthy dagger and prepared to stab him. The dagger turned on the hero's mail-shirt, and he was able to throw his assailant off. Leaping to his feet, he saw a huge sword hanging on the wall — made by Giants, it was so massive that no ordinary man could wield it. But Beowulf's strength was superhuman, and he drew the sword and cut off the she-monster's head with a mighty blow. He took back the severed head and the hilt of the sword — the monster's blood had dissolved the fine steel blade — and swam back to the surface of the lake to announce his victory.

Divine creatures might figure in a mythic campaign, or in a highly fantastic campaign. From the stories that are told of them, they are truly incredible beings, and it would be difficult to come up with game stats that would do justice to their mythical presence while at the same time being meaningful in terms of a roleplaying game. Besides — as other game supplements dealing with divine creatures have demonstrated — assigning firm game stats to a divine creature can only diminish its stature, reducing it to just another monster to be dealt with. When a deity or divine creature appears in a game session, it will be there for a definite reason. The GM should assign its stats according to the role it is to play. Only on rare occasions should PCs be able to slay a divine creature — especially a unique one — and there is never a guarantee that it will stay dead, especially if its wyrd is otherwise. Remember that most of the divine beings have roles to play at Ragnarok!

Valkyries

The Valkyries are probably the best-known of the supernatural races of Norse mythology. They were death-goddesses, the daughters of Odin, whose task it was to collect the souls of those who died in battle and conduct them to Valhalla. There they became the Einherjar, the chosen ones, who would spend the rest of time fighting by day and feasting by night, until they were needed to defend Asgard at Ragnarok. The Valkyries also served the feasts at Valhalla.

The Valkyries were female spirits, and more than anything else they may have given rise to the popular misconception about Norse shield-maidens and other female warriors. They are depicted by 19th- and 20th-century artists as lissome, clean-limbed maidens in figure-hugging chainmail, but in Norse lore they were invisible to the living, and the newly-dead might not have found their appearance quite so appealing. When out gathering the slain, they rode horses descended from Sleipnir; these magical steeds could run on the wind, bringing their riders swiftly to Asgard.

Normally, the Valkyries were only encountered by mortals at the time of death; the story in the Volsung Saga of Valkyries falling in love with mortals is an exception. If a Valkyrie took visible, mortal form — as seems to have been the case in this story — she effectively became mortal; on her death she might have returned to Valhalla.

Sleipnir

Sleipnir is the divine, eight-legged steed of Odin. The offspring of Loki and a miraculous horse belonging to a Giant, Sleipnir is the fastest steed in the Nine Worlds. While traveling in mortal guise, Odin would delight in hiding Sleipnir's extra legs and challenging those he met to horse-races — often with high stakes, like the life of the loser. Sleipnir counts as a normal horse in all respects, except that his Speed score is effectively unlimited.

Jormungand

The offspring of Loki and a Giantess, Jormungand is the Midgard Serpent, an immense snake or dragon who lies at the bottom of the ocean with its tail in its mouth, encircling the world. When he stirs, earthquakes and tidal waves are the result. At Ragnarok, Jormungand will rise up from the sea-bed, inundating the world with tidal waves, and join the Giants in their assault on Asgard.

If the PCs in a high-powered mythic campaign should encounter Jormungand, its ST and HT should be treated as effectively infinite; Thor will slay the serpent at Ragnarok, and die of its venom. This venom is terrible indeed: anyone who is bitten (1d cut) must make a HT roll at -10 or die instantly. Even if the roll is successful, the venom still causes 4d damage. The venom loses its efficacy within minutes of leaving the serpent's body.

Fenris

Another of Loki's monstrous offspring, Fenris is a wolf of immense size; according to some stories, his gaping jaws can fill the gap between earth and sky. He is now bound by a magical chain, Gleipnir, forged by the Dwarves from mysterious and intangible ingredients — the footstep of a cat, the breath of a fish, the roots of a mountain, and others — and will break forth at Ragnarok to slay Odin. Fenris was a normal-sized wolf when he first came to Asgard, but he *grew* — so the GM can make him any size desired.

If PCs encounter Fenris, treat him as a wolf of at least normal size, with ST and HT increased accordingly. His bite will do damage according to his ST — at least 5d of cutting damage. Fenris can talk and has an IQ of 10.

Pets of the Aesir

Odin's Wolves and Ravens

Beside Odin's throne in Valhalla crouch two pet wolves, Freki and Geri. They do not seem to have any supernatural qualities. They might have enhanced ST and HT — but not to the same extent as Fenris and Garm.

Odin also has two tame ravens, Hugin and Munin, whose names translate roughly as "thought" and "memory." These birds fly from Valhalla each morning and return each evening, bringing news of everything that has happened during the day throughout the Nine Worlds. They often perch on his shoulders.

Frey's Boar

Frey's golden boar Gullenbursti is discussed on p. 89. Having been made by Dwarves, he seems to be a magic item rather than a divine creature, but the distinction is arbitrary in some myths. Apart from being able to outrun any steed (although it does not seem to have raced Sleipnir, who could also outrun any steed) and the fact that his bristles glow in the dark, Gullenbursti seems to be a normal boar.

Thor's Goats

Thor had a pair of goats, Tanngniostr and Tanngrisnr, pulling his chariot. Every night he could kill and eat them, and the next morning he could reconstruct them from their skins and bones, to pull his chariot for another day. It is not clear whether this was some property of the goats themselves, or whether Thor resurrected them through the power of his magic hammer Mjolnir.

If the goats had some power of regeneration, they might be related to the animals of Valhalla (see below); if the magic of Mjolnir was involved, this is the only instance of the hammer being able to give life as well as take it. Apart from this (and being strong enough to pull a chariot), the goats seem to be unremarkable representatives of their species.

The Boar and Goat of Valhalla

The Einherjar of Valhalla, as we have seen, live a life of fighting and feasting. Their food is supplied by a boar,

Saehrimnir, and a goat, Heidrun. Saehrimnir is slaughtered and cooked every night, miraculously providing enough meat for all; come morning, it is reborn in time to provide the next meal. Heidrun, for her part, gives mead from her udders instead of milk; the flow is unending, and there is more than enough for all. Like the other pets of the Aesir, these two seem otherwise to be normal members of their respective species.

The Inhabitants of Yggdrasil

The World-Tree Yggdrasil grows throughout the Nine Worlds, and can be used as a pathway between them. In addition to such world-travelers, the tree supports a healthy population of its own. None — apart from the dragon Nidhug — is said to have any special qualities; they seem to be no more than details which grew up as tales were told and retold. The GM can elaborate them as he wishes!

At the base of the tree, in the root that reaches down to Niflheim, is the dragon Nidhug. This creature is covered under *Minions of Hel*, below.

On its topmost branch sits an eagle; its name is not recorded, but on the eagle sits a falcon called Vedfoldnir. A goat called Heidrun — which may or may not be the same Heidrun that gave mead to the inhabitants of Valhalla — wanders in its branches, as do four stags, called Dain, Duneyr, Durathor and Dvalin. A squirrel called Ratatosk runs continually up and down the trunk, telling lies about what the eagle and the dragon say about each other. As a troublemaker, Ratatosk is no doubt an ally of Loki!

Minions of Hel

In her gloomy kingdom of Niflheim, Hel has three monstrous cohorts — the dragon Nidhug, a great hound named Garm, and a skeletal woman, Modgud.

Nidhug

Nidhug sits under the root of Yggdrasil that reaches into Niflheim, in a seething cauldron which supplies the waters for twelve great rivers. It gnaws continually at the root, and when it gnaws through, Yggdrasil will die and Ragnarok will begin. Nidhug will then rise up with its mistress Hel and join the assault on Asgard. It also chews on the corpses of evil-doers.

Nothing more is said of Nidhug; if PCs encounter the beast, refer to the section on dragons (below).

Garm

Garm seems to be a Norse counterpart of the Graeco-Roman Cerberus — a monstrous watchdog chained at the gates of the underworld to prevent unauthorized access. Unlike Cerberus, though, Garm only had one head. At Ragnarok, Garm will join the battle against the Aesir, and will die in killing Tyr.

Like the wolf Fenris, Garm seems to be a fairly normal dog, with massively enhanced size and stats. Treat him as a dog with ST and HT multiplied by 10 or more, and a hide thick enough to give him a PD and DR of 5.

Modgud

At the boundary of Niflheim lies the river Gioll, something like the Styx in classical myth. Instead of a ferry, though, it is crossed by a bridge, which is guarded by a grim, skeletal woman called Modgud.

While she presents a terrifying appearance, Modgud does not seem to be unreasonable. When Hermod rode to Niflheim to plead for Baldur's release, she stopped him to complain about the clattering of his horse's hooves, commented that he clearly wasn't dead, and asked his business. When he told her, she obligingly gave him directions to the gates of Hel's hall. He seems to have made his way back to Asgard unimpeded.

If PCs encounter Modgud, her imposing appearance and the obvious power of her mistress should prevent them from doing anything too impetuous. If necessary, though, give her the stats of a Giant or a Troll. Remember that any disturbance on the bridge will draw reinforcements — possibly Nidhug or Garm, or even Hel herself.

Dragons

Dragons are few in Norse myth, but generally spectacular. Jormungand the Midgard Serpent and Nidhug the dragon of Hel are described under *Divine Creatures*.

All the dragons in Norse and related mythologies were extremely powerful individuals, and all had a story. Jormungand was the monstrous offspring of Loki and a Giantess, as were several other monsters. Fafnir, the dragon in the Volsung Saga, started life as a Dwarf and was transformed into a dragon after driving his family off from a hoard of gold paid by the Aesir as wergild for the accidental death of his brother. (Not every dragon will have a golden hoard, but most will — Norse mythology is the origin of the "dragon on a heap of gold" idea.)

Creating a story for a dragon in a mythic or fantastic campaign can give the GM a good idea of its strengths, weaknesses and personality, and will help in designing the beast itself. A dragon might be another, previously unrecorded, monstrous offspring of Loki, or of Jormungand or Nidhug; it might be a man, Giant or Dwarf transformed as part of a curse, to guard a hoard of treasure; or it might be a sorcerer who Shapeshifted into dragon form, kept the form too long, and is now permanently stuck that way. A little imagination can raise a dragon above the status of just another monster to kill, and as the most powerful of the Norse monsters, they deserve special treatment.

Dragon Stats

Dragons should be designed with great care and tailored to the role they are to play. If the GM has access to the ***GURPS Fantasy Bestiary***, use the rules on pp. 83-85; a cut-down version is presented below:

ST: 20-100	**Move/Dodge:** 1-4/2-6 (5-6 on ground)	**Size:** 2-14
DX: 10-14	**PD/DR:** 1-4/1-7	**Weight:** 150-3,000 lbs
IQ: 10-20	**Damage:** 1d-3d+1*	
HT: 15/15-100	**Reach:** R, C, up to 2	

* damage is cut for smaller dragons, imp for larger

Older and wiser dragons may be able to speak, and may know several languages. Some exceptional individuals may be able to use magic. The range of a dragon's breath is equal to its size in hexes; each breath costs 2 Fatigue points. Damage is one point less than the dragon's biting damage, as reckoned from its ST score. Dragon breath hits automatically, and the only defense is to Block, or Dodge and Retreat (see *Flame*, p. B129).

Sea-Monsters

Sea serpents and other monsters can menace Viking ships. These might be anything from a nuisance to the culmination of

the adventure. Monster stats can be based on dragons, but without the intelligence or the treasure. Their motivation will be simple hunger, or anger at the intrusion on their territory — perhaps they, too, hunt whales!

Undead

Norse undead are known by a number of names, the commonest of which is *draugr*, but they are all pretty much alike. They are solid, corporeal beings, and are often stronger and heavier than they were in life. They are created by circumstances rather than necromantic magic, and have no special powers other than their great strength and the fear they inspire in the living. Once a dead man has arisen, the only course is to kill him a second time. This second death seems to be permanent, although many people took no chances, beheading and burning the corpse for good measure. The need to stop the body coming back as undead may have lay behind the use of cremation in some Viking burials.

Howe-dwellers

The Vikings imagined the dead in their mounds carrying on life much as the living did in their halls. The line between the mound dead and the mound Alvar is a thin one, and the dead may have played a part in the early Vanir/Alvar cult that was replaced by the cult of the Aesir.

Looting howes, or burial mounds, was a fairly common Viking pastime, as runic graffiti in some Scottish Neolithic chambered tombs attests. Sometimes, as in the saga of Grettir the Strong, the mound-dweller defended his home and possessions against burglars, and could prove a deadlier opponent in death than in life.

Revenants

Sometimes a mound-dweller would leave his home and trouble the living. This was most often because the living had troubled him in some way — by farming or felling trees too close and disturbing his rest, for instance, or if his relatives had not kept up the mound properly and treated his memory with due respect. Some even came back to complain that they didn't like the location of their mounds — a panoramic view was apparently an asset, so that the deceased could still look over the lands that were his in life.

These undead were not often violent — more often they would walk noisily across the ridge-pole of a house, shaking the roof and frightening those inside, or simply appear and complain to the offenders. One story tells of a dead Christian hermit rising to scold a young girl, telling her to keep her muddy feet off his roof (the surface of his mound)!

This type of undead might be laid to rest by mending one's ways, but in some circumstances the only course was to kill the deceased a second time. They were seldom cooperative in this, though, and if they survived the first attempt, it was war!

Evil Dead

Some dead men needed no provocation to leave their graves and trouble the living. These individuals would play noisy and destructive pranks on the living like the disgruntled revenants, and most would not scruple at killing — even their own relatives. Berserkers, sorcerers and the like were thought most likely to be unquiet and troublesome dead. Some Viking graves have been found with all the goods in them destroyed — swords bent double or broken, shields riven in two, and so on. Archaeologists suppose that this was to prevent their being any use to their owner if he should rise as a troublesome undead creature.

Unburied Dead

Undead may also arise as a result of death without the opportunity for burial. Men who drown at sea are one example of this, and this is one interpretation of the Norse word *draugr*. Other examples might be murder victims, waylaid by enemies or bandits on the road and hurriedly dumped or hidden by the roadside. The unburied dead become vengeful, and may seek to kill others in the way they themselves were killed. This obsession is all-consuming, and they lose the ability to distinguish friends and even relatives.

Gaming the Undead

Like dragons, Norse undead are best kept for special occasions, and tailored to their circumstances. Each will be an individual, and they will almost always be encountered alone — no sorcerers with hordes of undead servants!

Basic undead stats are as follows:

ST: 15-20 **Move/Dodge:** 12+ **Size:** 1
DX: 10-16 **PD/DR:** 2/2 **Weight:** 150-350 lbs.
IQ: 4-16 **Damage:** brawling or weapon
HT: 15+ **Reach:** as weapon

Undead are not stunned and suffer no DX penalty after being wounded — even with a head or critical hit. They seem to feel no pain at all, and make Will rolls and spell resistance rolls at +3. The figures for PD and DR are exclusive of armor and equipment.

To create an undead version of a living character, add 5 points each to ST and HT, add +50% to weight, and add the advantages High Pain Threshold (including head and critical hits), Night Vision, 2 levels of Toughness, and 3 levels of Strong Will. Depending on the circumstances and the role the undead is to play, there might be some loss of personality after death: reduce IQ by up to 6 points for purposes other than Will rolls, and remove a few skills, starting with the most sophisticated. Combat skills will be the last to go. (And remember that the *soul* of a dead hero is in Valhalla, and a dead witch goes to Hel. This does not keep the *body* from rising as an undead if the grave is not treated with proper respect!)

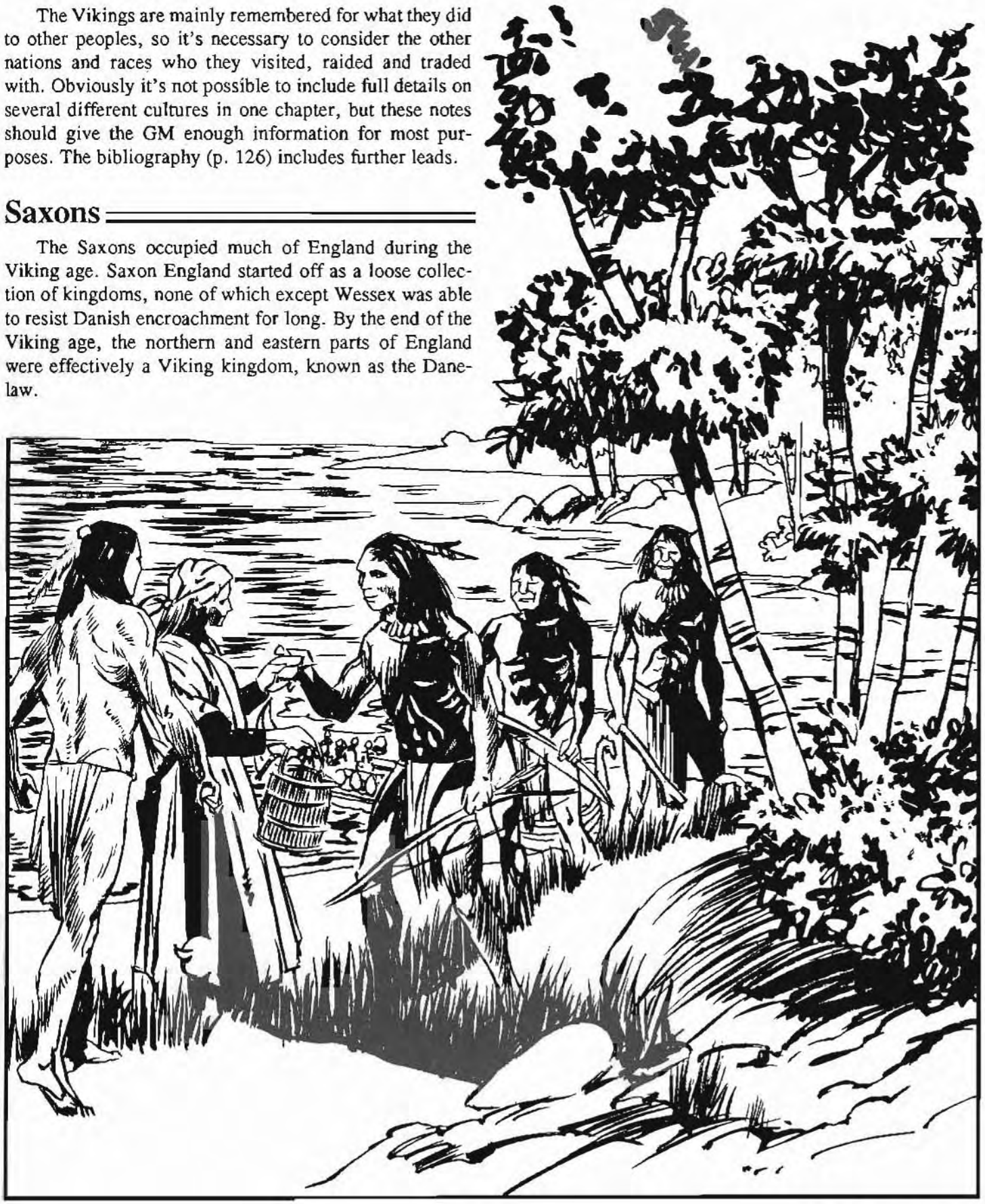
Few if any undead retain the use of magical skills after death, although an exceptional individual might have some spellcasting ability. This is the point where undead begin to shade into mound Alvar.

9 FRIENDS AND FOES

The Vikings are mainly remembered for what they did to other peoples, so it's necessary to consider the other nations and races who they visited, raided and traded with. Obviously it's not possible to include full details on several different cultures in one chapter, but these notes should give the GM enough information for most purposes. The bibliography (p. 126) includes further leads.

Saxons

The Saxons occupied much of England during the Viking age. Saxon England started off as a loose collection of kingdoms, none of which except Wessex was able to resist Danish encroachment for long. By the end of the Viking age, the northern and eastern parts of England were effectively a Viking kingdom, known as the Danelaw.

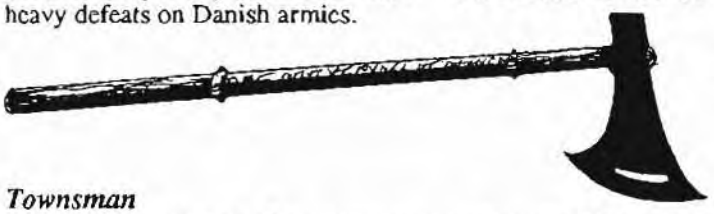


Typical Saxons

Warrior

The warriors of Saxon England were not much different in appearance and armament from their Viking counterparts. The sword was the preferred weapon, and the axe most common. Shields and spears were practically identical to those of the Vikings. The earls and thanes of England maintained bodies of fighting-men in much the same way as the Jarls of Scandinavia — not too surprising, since the Angles, Saxons and Jutes had moved to England from southern Denmark and the surrounding areas a few centuries before the start of the Viking period.

At the Battle of Hastings in 1066, right at the end of the Viking age, the English army of King Harold Godwinson employed a shield-wall formation, but earlier in the period they used much the same tactics as the Vikings. Viking victories in England were largely won through weight of numbers, and the Saxons — especially those of Wessex — did inflict a number of heavy defeats on Danish armies.



Townsman

Like the warrior, the Saxon townsman was essentially similar to his Scandinavian counterpart. The same range of trades and crafts were practiced by both, but the Saxon tended to be more in awe of authority.

Monk

Christian monks were among the first Saxons to experience the Viking age. They were peaceful and unarmed, a weak target for Viking raiders. All would have the advantage of Clerical Investment (reaction bonuses to Christians only) and most would have the disadvantage of Pacifism in some degree. Skills will include Theology, Latin and Literacy, with few if any combat skills — although some of the younger brethren might well snatch up a piece of furniture in defense of an older monk or a sacred relic.

Society

At the top of Anglo-Saxon society was the king. Unlike his Scandinavian counterparts he was an absolute ruler, although pressure could be brought to bear on a bad or weak king by the nobles and their troops. The nobles were broadly similar to the Jarls of Scandinavia, each ruling an area and maintaining a body of men. The Church was also a great power in the land, with some bishops having the status and some of the powers of nobles themselves. Ecclesiastical and secular powers reinforced each other's position continually; social mobility was almost unknown, and dissenters and troublemakers were crushed ruthlessly. Officers of the Church or the king commanded great respect and absolute obedience.

In earlier years, the Saxons had been much like the Vikings, but a few centuries of settled life in England had made them more peaceful, and their society more highly-structured. Their full-time troops were a match for the Vikings, but the rest of the Saxons were softer and more peaceful.

Franks

At its height, the Frankish Empire occupied most of modern-day France and Germany, extending into the Low Countries and up to the southern fringes of Scandinavia. After the mid-9th century it began to decline, with increasing Norwegian inroads into France and the division of the Empire into an eastern and a western part, roughly equivalent to Germany and France respectively. In 911 the Norwegian presence was legitimized and turned into a defense against other Scandinavians by the creation of Rollo as first Duke of Normandy.

Typical Franks

Like most of Christian Europe, the Franks were much the same as the Saxons in terms of technology, weapons and social structure. Language was different — Old French rather than Old English — but Latin served as the common language of educated men throughout Christendom. The notes given above on Saxons apply to Franks as well.

Society

Frankish society was similar to that of the Saxons, but even more rigid. The Frankish Empire had reached its height under Charlemagne, who lived at the beginning of the Viking age, and had been firmly fused into a single entity — with the result that individual nobles were less inclined than their Saxon counterparts to take action independent of their king. As elsewhere in Europe, Church and state cooperated to make sure that everyone knew his place, and stuck to it.

Gaels and Scots

The Gaels and Scots occupied Ireland and Scotland respectively. Like the Saxons and the Franks, they were Christian, but unlike them, their culture had no Roman influence and remained Celtic. This gave them several important differences from the rest of Christendom. The Vikings established several strongholds in Scotland, Ireland and the Isles, but they were apparently less successful — or less interested — in the other Celtic lands of Wales and the southwest.

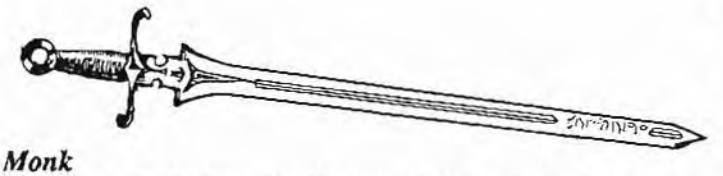
Typical Gaels

Warrior

Professional warriors were rare among the Gaels, although people were generally more used to taking up arms and most adult and adolescent males had some basic fighting skill. The axe was not a widely-used weapon in pre-Viking times — the heavy fighting spear took its place — but otherwise equipment was similar. However, fewer individuals could afford armor than among the Vikings.

Farmer/Fisherman

The bulk of the population were subsistence farmers and fishermen, winning a living from land and sea in much the same way as their Scandinavian counterparts. Much of Ireland has very fertile growing and grazing, and cattle were much more numerous than in the bleaker farmlands of Scandinavia. Sheep and goats grazed rougher country.



Monk

Irish monks had previously converted Scotland and most of England to Christianity after the post-Roman lapse into paganism. They were similar to the monks of Saxon England, but better able to look after themselves in a harsh environment. Many were hermits living on remote and inhospitable islands when they were discovered by the Scandinavians. The Irish, in particular, were able seamen, having reached Iceland and several other places before the Norwegians; most were monks seeking ever more remote hermitages, and an Irish tradition credits St. Brendan with the discovery of America even before Leif Ericsson.

Society

Irish and Scots society was less structured than that of the Saxons and Franks. Ireland was divided into a number of warring kingdoms that occasionally would be united under a strong ruler who would take the title of High King. Scotland was split into many small territories, but conflict was a little less frequent.

As in Scandinavia, kinship was of great importance, and feuds were common. The Church worked less in collusion with the state, as there was less of a state to work with, and the Gaels and Scots generally respected a man more for his abilities than his position. Old enmities ran deep, and although these peoples would sometimes unite against a common foe, it was just as likely that they would remain divided and be defeated piecemeal. However, they were less easily conquered than the Saxons and the Franks; the Norwegians had to fight almost continually to keep their presence in Ireland.

Picts

The Picts are something of an enigma. Frequently referred to in documents from the later Roman period onward, they are seldom described and what information there is on them seems to be fanciful — a southern scribe's idea of northern "wild men." Little of the Pictish tradition survives, either in writing or in the form of oral tales — just some place-names with the element "Pit-" and a few pieces of silver and carved stone, some quite beautiful. Some Pictish dwellings are known — mostly from foundations buried under the rubble left by their Viking conquerors.

They may have been the original inhabitants of Scotland (the Scots arrived from Ireland at the end of the Roman period, around AD 400), and in the Viking period they seem to have occupied the eastern part of lowland Scotland, with a slight northward spread into the highlands. They are thought to have been small, dark and dark-haired; the Vikings would have found them quite ugly.

Typical Picts

From what can be made of the scattered historical and archaeological evidence, the Picts were mostly subsistence farmers, working small fields and keeping livestock much like their Scandinavian counterparts. Roman and Saxon writers describe their warriors as fearsome, tattooed, half-naked savages, without going into much more detail. The Picts are widely believed to have painted or dyed themselves blue before battle, with woad (a vegetable dye) or mud. It seems likely that the spear was the main weapon, with swords used by the few individuals who could afford them.

Society

Pictish society is as much of a mystery as anything else about this people. They seem to have been reclusive or unwelcoming, for there are no travelers' accounts of their lands and character, as there are for other northern peoples including the Vikings. It seems likely that their farms were banded together into some kind of clan structure, but even that is guesswork.

Skraelings

Skraelingar is the name that Norwegian explorers gave to the people they found in Vinland — the northeastern coastal tribes of Native Americans. It is largely a matter of conjecture how the Skraelings relate to the tribes encountered by European settlers 500 or more years later.

Typical Skraelings

Most Skraelings seem to have been hunters, trappers and fishermen, but this may simply reflect the types of people with whom the Vikings traded or fought. Certainly there does not seem to have been a distinct warrior class, although most adolescent and adult males could use stone-tipped spears and arrows. As in later centuries, some would be shamans, although Viking sources hardly mention them. Hunting, trapping and survival skills will be common to most Skraelings, and shamans may have magical skills as well.

Society

Again, much is conjecture, but the bulk of Skraelings seem to have lived by a combination of farming, hunting, trapping and fishing much like the people of remoter areas of Scandinavia. Their technological level was 0, with limited agriculture in some places. Society was probably based on the clan, with each clan exploiting a set territory — often moving from season to season as some resources became scarce and others plentiful — and within the clan the extended family was the basic unit. Society was more-or-less egalitarian, although the old were accorded great respect, as were shamans.

Slavs

Details are very imprecise, but the term "Slav" seems to have been used to refer to all the peoples of central Europe during the Viking period, occupying the area covered by the modern-day Baltic states, part of Russia, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania. Some Byzantines, looking at the direction from which they had come, concluded that the Rus must also be a kind of Slav.

Typical Slavs

The typical Slav will probably be a subsistence farmer, relying more on the land than on livestock for his food. There seem to have been groups of bandits further into Slav territory, since the Rus are said to have to keep careful guard as they maneuver their ships through the rapids on the river Dnieper, but through most of the Viking period most Slavs seem to have been farmers.

Society

After centuries of Swedish slave-raids against the Slavs, the Rus established themselves as the ruling aristocracy of largely Slav towns at Novgorod and Kiev. In earlier times, the Slavs seem to have been a collection of tribes (the names of two tribes, Obotrites and Wends, survive) separated by dense forests and vast distances, and lacking any kind of unity. Within Swedish society, the Slavs formed the bulk of the thrall class and were traded in many parts of Europe as well as to the Arab world.

Arabs

Although the Arab heartland lay in the Middle East around the lands of the Persian Gulf, the first few centuries of Islam saw an almost unbelievable expansion. Mohammed died in 632 AD, and the early growth of Islam continued throughout Viking times.

In Viking days, Arabs took control of North Africa and part of Spain, as well as spreading north through the lands of the eastern Mediterranean. Their traders could be found as far north as the Volga (and at least one, from Cordova in Spain, visited the Danish town of Hedeby), and as far east as India and the islands beyond. One Arab, Ibn Fadlan, left extensive notes about his meetings with Norse traders.

Typical Arabs

Trader

The kind of Arab with whom most PC Vikings will come into contact is the trader. Arab traders traveled far and wide, dealing in silks, spices and other exotic goods and buying slaves, furs and similar northern produce from the Rus. Like nearly every Arab, most traders will have some Theology skill relating to the teachings of Islam, and many will be Fanatical. They will have trading skills, of course, and literacy in Arabic. Many will speak two or more languages, and others will hire interpreters. A trading expedition will be accompanied by a number of guards (see below), as well as either boatmen or animal-drivers, depending on whether the expedition travels by water or land.

Warrior

Warriors will be armed with swords (not quite the scimitars of later years, but certainly curved), spears and shields — shields are generally small and made of metal. Specialized troops, such as dervishes and assassins, developed later in Islamic history.

Dignitary

Arab dignitaries were individuals of enormous power, although it is probable that few were as capricious or murderous as the *Arabian Nights* might have us believe. All would have been shrewd, cunning and ruthless with competitors or incompetent underlings, however. Most had a blend of mercantile and political skills.

Priest (Imam)

Islamic priests commanded enormous respect, and were highly educated, especially in the teachings of their religion. All were literate in their own language, and all had a very high degree of Theology skill. Many were Fanatical in their devotion to Islam — indeed, this was expected of all the Faithful. Some, more highly-placed in the hierarchy, would have had political skills in addition to their religious ones.

Society

Arab society at this time was very rigidly structured, and the only law was the religious law of Islam. While there were various Caliphs and other potentates, each with their own spheres of influence, every man was the slave of Allah, and the duties of religion weighed equally on high and low alike. Arab expansion has as much — arguably more — to do with a missionary zeal to spread the Islamic faith as it has to do with the desire for trade, conquest and riches. Strangely to Christian eyes, non-Muslims were regarded with tolerance and mild contempt rather than the outright hatred that the Church held for heathens and heretics — provided the greater good of Islam and Allah were served, there was no shame in dealing with infidels.

Byzantines

Byzantium — formerly Constantinople (a name it would regain) and later Istanbul — was situated on the eastern side of the narrow strait where the Black Sea flowed into the Mediterranean. Originally the eastern capital when the Roman Empire divided into two, it became the sole survivor of Roman civilization when the Goths overran Italy and took Rome. Byzantium thereafter regarded itself as the sole heir to classical civilization, and during the Viking age it found itself assailed by a new enemy — the expanding Muslims. They poured north along the Mediterranean coast and rapidly stripped the Eastern Empire of its provinces. The city was besieged more than once. Soon the Crusades would begin as Christians set out to reconquer the Holy Land from the forces of Islam — or at least, to try.

Typical Byzantines

The Varangian Guard

The Rus traded with Byzantium just as they did with the Arabs, but by far their best-known association with the city is in the form of the Varangian Guard — an elite corps of Scandinavians who formed the Emperor's bodyguard. The Varangians were armed and armored like the other Rus, although body armor was far more common than elsewhere. They seem to have been a mercenary unit. Harald Hardrada returned from the Varangian Guard around 1045 to claim the throne of Denmark.

Military

Other Byzantine forces included heavily-armored cavalrymen called cataphracts; armed with sword, shield, lance (sometimes more than one) and plate-covered leather armor and mounted on heavy horses with ground-length plate-covered leather coats, they were the most heavily-armored troops seen in Europe before the advent of the medieval knight in the 14th century. Well-protected, they lacked mobility and had to be used wisely by their general. Byzantium also had an efficient fleet, some of whose ships were equipped with Greek Fire — a napalm-like substance which could be pumped through nozzles at enemy vessels.

Churchman

Byzantine churchmen were very different from those the Vikings had encountered in western Europe. The wealth and power of the church was manifested in gorgeous robes and accoutrements, and the Byzantine churchman was often a wily politician as well as (or instead of) a devoted priest.

Society

On the outside, Byzantium was a city fighting for its life against the Arabs as they conquered its empire, assaulted its walls and shipping and tried to strangle its trade. Inside, it was the gilded and stately capital of a great and ancient empire, one of the two great strongholds of Christianity and the hub of a civilization that God would never allow to fall. So far, the fleet and the walls had defeated the Arabs, and many Byzantines believed that their city was invincible. Safe inside the walls, they carried on much the same life of social climbing and political skullduggery that their Roman ancestors had enjoyed.

Inuits

Scandinavians may have encountered Inuit, or "Eskimo," peoples around the north of Greenland and in the areas north of the Skraeling lands, though there is no documented proof. Most Inuit peoples live on fish, seals and whales at the northern extremes of the North American continent. Their culture equips them to survive in these cold, seemingly barren areas; all will have a high degree of Arctic Survival skill, as well as Fishing and Boating — both the one-man kayak and the larger, open umiak. Like the Skraelings, the Inuit have shamans, and society is based on families and clans, with great respect for elders.

Mediterranean Christians

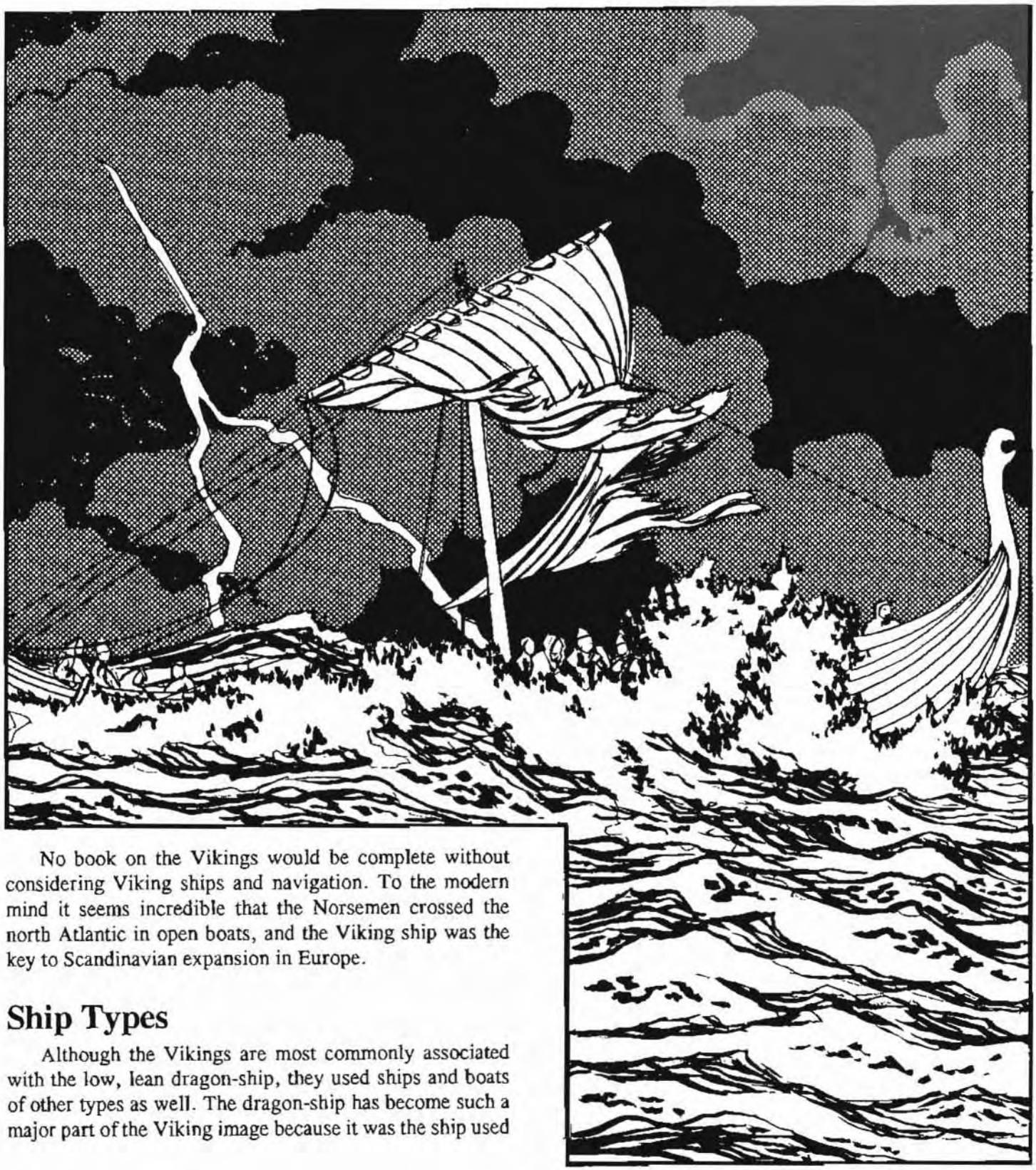
A few Viking expeditions met these people in Italy and elsewhere. They were little different from the Franks and Saxons in most respects, except for language; they would have spoken an archaic form of Greek Spanish or Italian, or some local island tongue. Educated men everywhere would know Latin, and possibly some classical Greek as well. As a rule of thumb, Latin was more common in the west and classical Greek was more common in the east. Society is based on city-states and leagues of cities, with nationhood still some way off — the prince and his court might be compared to the Jarl and his retinue, but there are great differences. Although this area was largely overrun by the fierce Germanic Goths (who may even have originated in Götland in Sweden), the people here regard themselves as civilized and all others as barbarians. Trades and crafts are much like those practiced in Scandinavia, but tastes and styles are very different.

Lapps and Finns

Closer to home were the nomadic Lapps, and Norwegians are known to have traded with them. Inhabiting the very remotest north of Scandinavia, the Lapps are a nomadic culture tied to the annual migration of the semi-wild reindeer which is their main resource. They rely on the reindeer for food, hides, antlers and trade with the Vikings. Like the Inuit, the Lapps have Arctic Survival skills, and their society is based on family bonds. Most will also have skills relating to hunting and trapping; some Lapps were said to be skilled with the bow.

The Finns were a distinct people, fair-haired and green-eyed, though the Norse records also call them "Lapps." A tough, stubborn people, the Finns were usually warlike only when attacked. They were skilled boat-builders; many Viking ships were built by the Finns. They also had a reputation as powerful wizards, with special powers over the weather. The Vikings seem to have left the Finns unmolested for the most part, out of respect for their services as shipwrights, or fear of their magic powers, or just because there were far easier targets elsewhere.

10 THE WHALE-ROAD



No book on the Vikings would be complete without considering Viking ships and navigation. To the modern mind it seems incredible that the Norsemen crossed the north Atlantic in open boats, and the Viking ship was the key to Scandinavian expansion in Europe.

Ship Types

Although the Vikings are most commonly associated with the low, lean dragon-ship, they used ships and boats of other types as well. The dragon-ship has become such a major part of the Viking image because it was the ship used

for raiding and war; the appearance of a slow, broad-beamed Scandinavian trader caused little terror.

The Drakkar

This is the classic dragon-ship. Long, slim and low in the water, it drew little water under the keel and was constructed to be flexible, moving with the waves rather than fighting them. Because of its shallow draft the drakkar could be beached in shallow water very easily, and a favorite Viking tactic was to run their ships in through the surf at high speed, disembarking and forming up almost as soon as the ship had stopped moving. In many ways, they invented the amphibious assault.

Construction

The drakkar was powered by wind and muscle. It had a tall ash-trunk mast holding a square-rigged sail, which was used for most of a voyage. The mast could be taken down, and some ships feature a high T-shaped mast-rack for storing the unstepped mast and sail. Steering was by means of a flat wooden rudder lashed to the aft starboard ("steer-board") side of the ship. In battle, adverse winds and other special circumstances, the drakkar was oar-powered. Almost every man in the crew had his rowing position, using his sea-chest as a seat. The oars normally rested against thorn-shaped wooden rowlocks, making them easy to ship and unship as no threading or fastening was involved. Some ships had holes in the top gunwale for the oars, which would have made it easier to row them smoothly but more difficult to change from oars to sail or to ship oars on beaching or grappling. Oars were long — typically 16-20 feet — and narrow-bladed, made of pine or ash. When not in use they would be stored on the mast-rack.

Most drakkars had a deck of loose planking, laid on the ribs of the ship's frame — this made it easy to lift a plank for baling or to retrieve anything stored in the under-deck space.

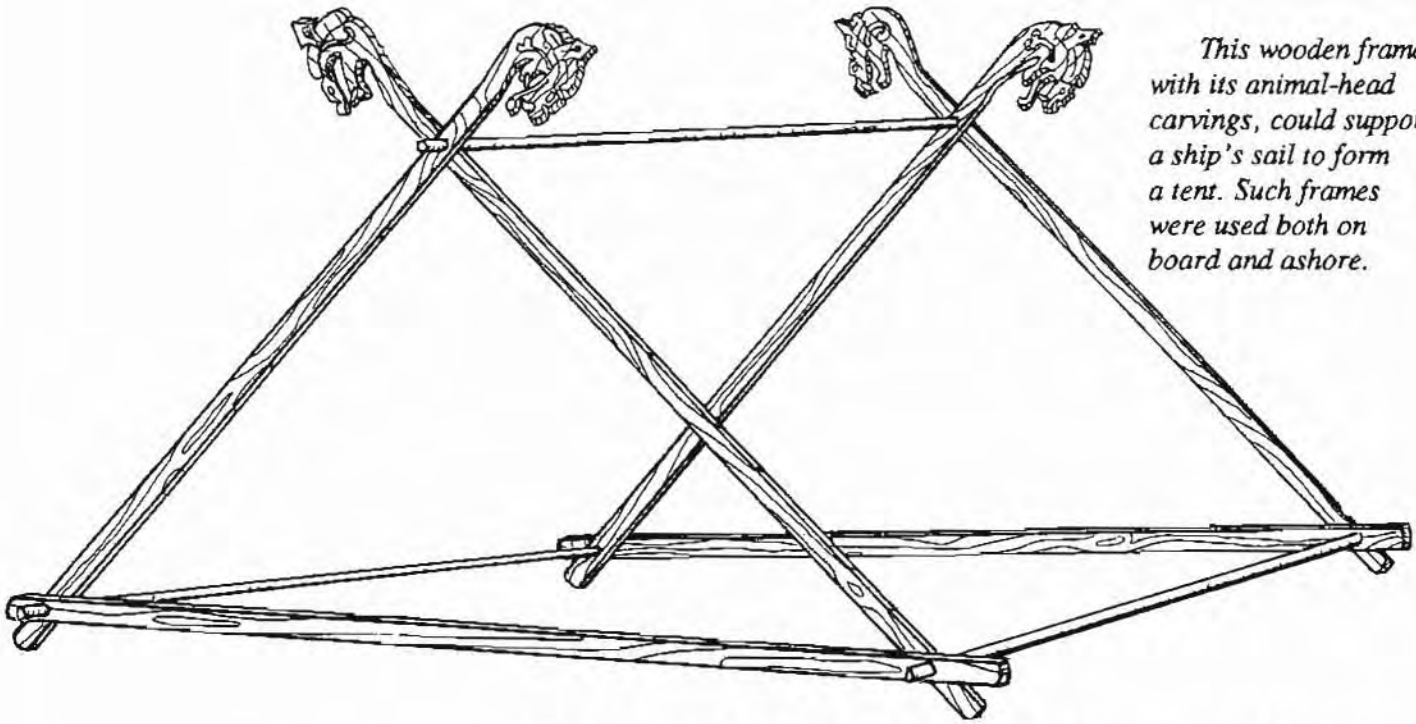
The ship was clinker-built, by fixing overlapping horizontal planks either side of a strong keel. These were supported by internal wooden ribs, and were fixed by lashing rather than nailing, with wooden pegs used for rigid joints. This construction gave the drakkar its flexibility, allowing it to move with the buffets of the waves rather than taking their full force. Stem and stern rose high out of the water, and apart from the mast they were the highest parts of the ship. In some cases they were lavishly carved, but dragon-head stem-posts are not as common as Hollywood would like.

Drakkars are often depicted with rows of shields along each gunwale; examples have been found with what appears to be a shield-ledge, but shields would only have been hung there in battle, to protect the rowers from arrows, and when entering port, for display. At other times they would have been stored elsewhere, so they wouldn't be lost overboard or ruined by salt water.

A Viking Fleet

"So great was the decoration of the ships that the eyes of the onlookers were dazzled, and to those at a distance the ships seemed to be of flame rather than wood. For when the sun cast his rays upon them, their flashing weapons shone in one place, and their hung shields in another. Gold shone on the prows, and silver on the ships also. So magnificent was the fleet that if its master desired to conquer a people, the sight of the ships would have reduced them to terror before the warriors they carried ever got into battle. For who could look upon the lions of the foe, terrible with bright gold; who could look upon the men of metal, the bulls threatening death with shining, gilded horns, and yet feel no fear for the lord of such a force?"

— A (probably exaggerated) description of the fleet brought to England by Cnut the Great in 1015. Dragons seem to be in the minority among stem-post ornaments.



This wooden frame, with its animal-head carvings, could support a ship's sail to form a tent. Such frames were used both on board and ashore.

The drakkar had no hard superstructure, but the crew could be protected from the elements by leather tents or tarpaulins, hung over X-shaped folding frames which could be taken down and stored easily when the ship was cleared for action. These shelters could also be pitched on land when the ship put in for the night; they were as wide as the ship, often 15-20 feet long, and 7-12 feet high at the ridge. Some were wonderfully carved.

Drakkar Size

Drakkars are divided into three classes: large, medium and small. This is calculated by number of oars: a large drakkar has 30 or more pairs of oars, a medium drakkar has 20-29 pairs, and a small drakkar has less than 20 pairs. If a ship is called "30-oared," this means it has 30 *pairs* of oars, or 60 all told.

A 30-oared ship would belong to a powerful individual; most of those recorded in the histories and sagas belong to kings, and are fleet flagships. Medium drakkars are by far the most numerous, and form the main strength of the fleet. Small drakkars are a minority, and may have been use as second rate ships-of-the-line, transports or auxiliaries.

There is a fairly constant relationship between the length and number of oars; this can be seen best from the sagas, and is borne out by archaeological finds. Calculate a drakkar's length as 15 feet plus 4 feet for each pair of oars.

The maximum width of a small or medium drakkar was about 20% of its actual body length (ignoring the bow and stern extensions). The height from the keel to the gunwale was normally around ⅓ the width amidships. Really big drakkars did not get much wider — just longer.

The carrying capacity of Viking ships is discussed in the maintext, on p. 108.

Size and Crew

A drakkar could be more than 100 feet long, and the ratio of length to breadth was normally 7:1 or more. The longest drakkar yet found was 88 feet from stem to stern, but the *Long Serpent*, built for King Olaf Tryggvason in 999-1000, was said to be over 110 feet long in the flat part of the keel, not counting the stem and stern.

The average drakkar — if there is such a thing — had 30-40 oars; that is, 15-20 oars on a side. Some 11th-century chronicles mention larger ships, with up to 35 pairs of oars. The *Long Serpent* is said to have had 34 pairs of oars with eight men on each and another 30 standing in the prow; this gives a crew of 574, which must be an exaggeration. One or two men on an oar was typical, with extra men to shield the rowers and to do the actual fighting.

Performance

Several replicas of drakkars and grave-ships have been made and sailed. One of the first was in 1893, when Captain Magnus Andersen sailed from Norway to Newfoundland in a replica of the Gokstad grave-ship. She weathered several Atlantic storms without serious damage, and could reach 11 knots under sail. Rowing speeds could be higher — perhaps 15-16 knots for short periods on flat water.

Naval Warfare

The Vikings' use of amphibious attacks has already been mentioned. Sea battles were simple affairs, consisting of arrow-fire while approaching, and a grapple followed by boarding and shipboard fighting. Viking ships were not constructed for ramming, and did not mount the catapults and other naval weapons of the Greeks and later Mediterranean peoples.

Viking fleets varied in size. A raiding-party could be as small as two or three ships, while a full-scale war-fleet could be as many as 200. King Harald Hardrada of the Danes invaded Britain with 200 ships in 1066, and Swedish King Olaf Tryggvason had attacked the Slavs with 60 half a century earlier.

The Knarr

The knarr is almost the opposite of the drakkar; it is a cargo ship, almost wholly dependent on sail-power, deeper in the keel, shorter and broader. This was the ship used by Scandinavian traders in western Europe.

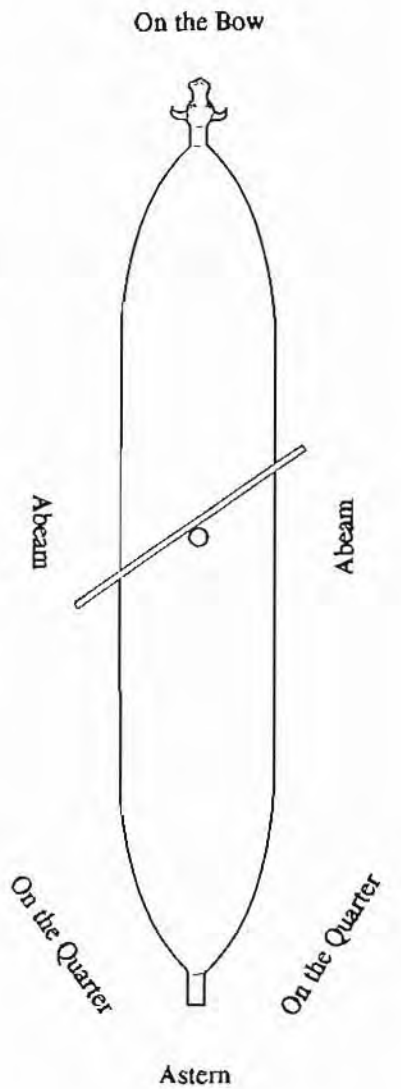
Construction, Crew and Performance

The knarr uses the same basic techniques of construction as the drakkar — clinker-built around a solid keel, with rising stem and stern — but it is a more solid, rounder craft. On average it is half as long as a drakkar, and its length/breadth ratio is normally 4:1 or less. The middle of the craft, around the fixed mast, is occupied by a cargo well which can be up to 4 feet deep; at stem and stern there are raised decks for the crew.

A knarr is equipped with two pairs of oars for maneuvering in port, but in open water it is entirely reliant upon its sail for propulsion. It was probably handled by a crew of 4-6 people. The knarr has not been rebuilt and tested like the drakkar, but it seems likely that it could achieve 6-8 knots under sail — perhaps more in a strong wind.

Knarr Size

The midships width of a knarr is about one-quarter its overall length, and its depth from keel to gunwale is about one-third its width. The cargo hold is about half the ship's length, its full width, and around 3 to 4 feet deep (use ship depth minus 1 foot, with a maximum of 4 feet). Goods can also be stowed on the decking fore and aft of the cargo well, although the crew need these areas reasonably clear in order to work the ship.



The Faering

The faering was a rowing-boat, used for fishing, ferrying and possibly as a tender to larger vessels if need be. Some were pure rowing-boats, and some had light masts and small sails. They are very similar to small boats still used in Scandinavia and the Scottish Isles.

Again clinker-built, the faering looked like a scaled-down drakkar. 20 feet long and 4 feet in the beam would be a typical size, but they varied widely. They were open boats, with no deck, powered by 3-4 pairs of oars and perhaps a sail as well.

Ship Handling

Skills

Boating skill is required to handle a faering, and Seamanship to handle a larger vessel. Navigation is required to steer properly, though this roll is at +4 on routes where the ship never leaves sight of land.

Performance

The following table gives the speed and maneuverability of Viking ship types under sail. The figures are necessarily generalized, and contain a certain amount of guesswork, for reliable information simply is not available. However, they should suffice for most gaming purposes.

Type	*Avg. Speed*	*Max. Speed*	*Maneuv. Number*	*Cost*
125' drakkar	9	13	-2 to -4	$30,000
100' drakkar	9	12	-2 to -3	$20,000
75' drakkar	8	12	-1 to -3	$12,000
75' knarr	6	8	-2 to -4	$15,000
50' knarr	6	8	-2 to -3	$10,000
Faering	7	9	-1 to -3	$800

Grave-Ships

Ship-burials are discussed on p. 79. Grave-ships deserve separate coverage because they are the best-preserved examples of Viking ships. For almost a century they were thought to be typical drakkars, but in the light of more recent finds they have been found to have significant differences. At least some of them may have been "royal barges" rather than warships.

The Gokstad Ship

This ship was found in Norway in 1880, embedded in a thick blue clay that preserved its timbers almost perfectly. It was buried with a strongly-built man in middle age, and seem to date from around 900.

The Gokstad ship is 76' 6" from stem to stern; the stem and stern posts unfortunately rotted away and it is not known whether they were carved. The hull is formed of 16 strakes, or horizontal planks, around a heavy, one-piece oak keel. It is 17'6" in the beam and 6'5" from gunwale to keel amidships. The planks are riveted rather than lashed, making the ship rigid and less suitable for ocean travel. It has a mast-rack and a loose deck, and apart from its rigid construction and broad beam it is very much like a drakkar. For many years, it was the model for all reconstructions of Viking ships, both for scientific research and for the movies.

The Oseberg Ship

This ship-burial includes some of the finest pieces of Viking age woodcarving ever found. It seems to date from around 850. The ship is broad and low in the water, and its keel is very thin. The deck is nailed down, so that baling would be almost impossible. It seems more suited to calm inland waters, and any lingering ideas that it was a warship are dispelled by the fact that it accompanied the burial of two women. Much of the ship's fittings were missing — there were only three oars, for instance — but the burial was accompanied by a lavishly-carved cart and a sleigh and other rich goods. It is thought that one or both of the women buried with the ship were either princesses or priestesses.

The Tune Ship

This ship was found in Tune (pronounced TOON-uh) in Norway in 1867. It seems to be about the same age as the Gokstad ship. It was about 65' long, 14'6" in the beam and 4'5" deep amidships; it has more of the proportions of a drakkar than the other two grave-ships, and is flatter-bottomed than the Gokstad ship. It may have had 10-11 pairs of oars.

Speeds are given in mph rather than knots, as mph converts to yards per second more easily. 12 knots equals 14 mph, equals a ***GURPS*** move of 7.

The maneuverability number reflects how well the ship handles. It may be assigned by the GM or determined randomly. The number is used as a penalty to skill rolls when attempting difficult or complex maneuvers, and also comes into play in ship-to-ship combat.

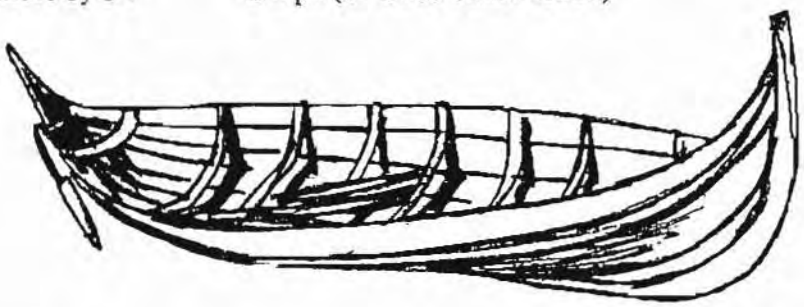
Wind

Wind direction also plays a part in a ship's speed and handling characteristics when it is under sail. Experiments at reconstructing Viking rigging have shown that Viking ships could tack to within 5 points of the wind, making them extremely responsive under most conditions. Wind direction (see sidebar illustration, p. 107) affects a ship's speed as shown on the following chart:

Full Astern	*On the Quarter*	*Abeam*	*On the Bow*
-2 mph	100%	-2 mph	20% normal

These are rough figures, and individual ships will vary considerably. The GM may allow for minor variations in ship quality by consulting the following chart when the ship is built.

Shipbuilding Roll	*Variation*
Critical Success	+2 mph
Success by 3+	+1 mph
Success	No variation
Failure	-1 mph
Failure by 3+	-2 mph (or failed construction)



Tonnage

Exact figures on the capacity of Viking ships is not available, but it is possible to make reasonable estimates.

Drakkar and Faering

Capacity of a drakkar or faering can be computed within reasonable limits of accuracy for game purposes. The result may not be completely accurate — scholars are still experimenting with replicas — but it gives the GM a good idea of a ship's carrying capacity, based on its dimensions.

For a faering, or a drakkar of 25 oars or less, take the cube of its length (see pp. 106-107). Divide the result by 450. If the initial measurements were in yards or meters, do no more; if they were in feet, divide the result again by 29. The resulting number is the ship's fully loaded displacement in tons.

To allow for the ship's structure, rigging and other normal equipment, allow 1 ton per 15 feet of length in the case of a drakkar or a masted faering, or 1 ton per 20 feet in the case of an unmasted faering. Subtract this from the fully loaded displacement to get the carrying capacity. Finally, allow 250 lbs. for each crewman and his sea-chest, personal equipment and combat gear. For a normal expedition, figure 2 men per oar . Allow 3 men per oar for a raid!

Thus, for example, a 15-oar drakkar 75 feet long would be around 15' amidships and 5' from keel to gunwale. 75 cubed is 421,875. Divided by 450, this is 937.5. This is further divided by 29 since measurements were in feet. 937.5/29 = 32.3 — a fully loaded displacement of around 32.3 tons. The structure and rigging would weigh around 5 tons, giving 27.3 tons for crew and cargo. On an expedition, the crew would be around two men to each of the 30 oars (remember, a 15-oar ship has 15 *pairs* of oars). These 60 people and their personal effects would weigh another 7.5 tons or so, leaving 19.8 tons of spare capacity for extra weapons, cargo, supplies and so on.

Also extra are consumable supplies: food, water, firewood and so on. This would be about 12 pounds per man per day for comfortable (by sailor's standards) living. Viking ships seldom carry more than a few days' supplies; they prefer to go ashore often for fresh provisions.

If the same drakkar were going into battle, its crew would be around 3 men to an oar — at least 90 people. Allowing 11.25 tons for the crew reduces the spare capacity to just over 16 tons.

A drakkar of more than 25 oars adds length without adding much width or depth. Calculate its tonnage as for a drakkar of 25 oars, and multiply by the difference in size. A 25-oar drakkar has a length of 115 feet and a capacity, as figured above, of 98.9 tons on a regular expedition. So a 27-oar drakkar would have 27/25 that capacity, or 106.8 tons.

Knarr

A similar formula can be applied to a knarr, but take the cube of the length and divide by 288. Divide again by 29 if measurements were in feet. The structure of the trading ship was relatively heavier — allow 2 tons per 15' of length.

For example, a 55' knarr would be around 13.75' wide and 4.5' deep amidships, with a hold capacity of around 28×13.75×3.5 = 1,347.5 cu. ft. Its fully loaded displacement is 55 cubed (166,375) divided by 288, divided by 29 = 20 tons. The ship's structure and rigging weighs around 7 tons, giving 13 tons for crew and cargo. The crew of 4-8 will account for another ½ to 1 ton, giving the knarr around 12 tons for cargo.

Loading

A ship's performance will be affected by the weight it is carrying. The more heavily laden it is, the lower it will sit in the water; the drag on the hull will be greater, affecting both speed and maneuverability. A lighter ship will be faster and more maneuverable up to a point — but a ship which is too light, bobbing on the sea like a cork, will be as uncontrollable as one floundering in water up to its gunwales.

Overloading

In a game situation, the likeliest cause of overloading will be greed on the part of a raider captain! A ship can be overloaded at the risk of reducing its performance. Each 5% of overcapacity (e.g. each extra ton on a ship with a fully laden displacement of 20 tons) reduces maximum and average speeds by 1 mph and adds -1 to the maneuver number. A ship cannot be overloaded beyond the point where its maneuver number is doubled.

For instance, a knarr with a fully laden displacement of 30 tons and a maneuver number of -4 can be overloaded by a maximum of 20%, or 6 tons — this gives it an absolute maximum capacity of 36 tons (including crew and gear), which doubles its maneuver number to -8 and reduces its average speed to 3 and its maximum speed to 5. The ship's master had better hope for fair winds and calm seas!

Shares in a Voyage

A Norsemen who signed on for a sea-voyage, whether to raid or to trade, might do so in one of three ways. First, he might be his lord's man, doing his lord's bidding. He would not be an employee, but his lord would provide his whole support and generous gifts.

Second, he might be an ordinary employee of the boat's captain or owner. In that case, he'd be paid an ordinary wage from the Job Table, depending on the job he was hired for. If the voyage was successful, the employer would probably be generous. Certainly on a raiding trip, even the hirelings would be allowed the chance to do a bit of looting on their own! (And a Norseman might wind up on someone else's ship. A whole campaign could be built around the adventures of a group of adventurers, perhaps outcasts, who signed on as guards or mercenaries on a European or Arab ship.)

Finally, the adventurer could buy a share in a voyage, helping to pay the trip's costs in exchange for a share of the profits. The ship's captain will start the voyage by buying goods to sell in a far port; with the money from that, he will buy foreign goods to bring home. If he doesn't have enough money to buy the goods he needs — or if he just wants his crew to be motivated — he'll let them buy in, for specified shares. Assume that profits are determined after the ship returns to port and the trade-goods (or loot) are sold. All costs of the voyage, and all employees, must be paid first. The shipowner will take a healthy sum — determined by furious haggling before the trip starts — as an allowance for wear and tear on his boat. Any remaining profit will be divided among the investors as per the original agreement.

Note that a trading expedition would often have no unified command. Several ships could sail together for company and protection. But each one would have its own captain and perhaps its own investors, carry its own trade goods, and make its own deals. A raiding expedition would have a commander, but the captains might still be independent, free to sail away of the commander gave orders they didn't like.

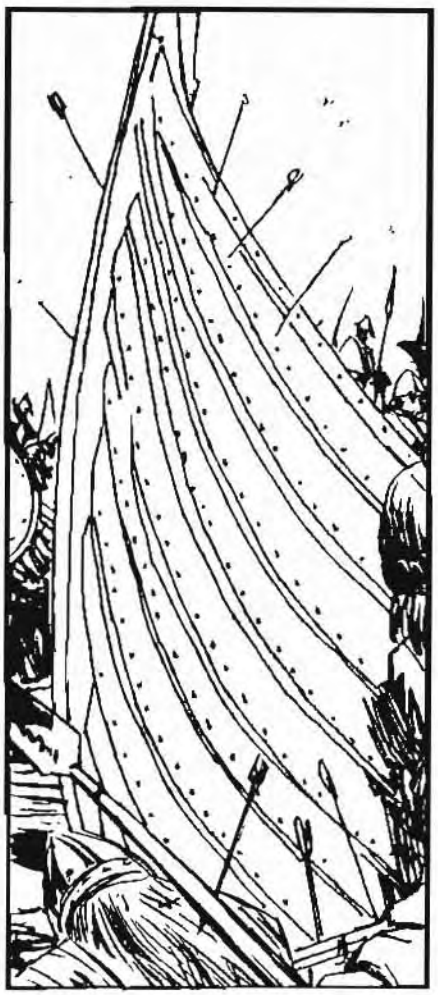
Missile Fire in Sea Battles

Ship-to-ship missile fire is conducted as normal. Anyone on a ship is automatically in light cover, and -2 to be hit. Fighters who are actively shielded (either by themselves or by a separate shield-man) get -4 protection, as do fighters who are crouching on the deck behind the gunwales.

A ship is an unsteady firing platform, and missile fire from a ship is made with a penalty, as shown on the following table:

Dead calm	0
Light Breeze	-1
Moderate Breeze	-2
Light Gale	-3
Heavy Gale	-4

A successful Seamanship roll will reduce the penalty by 2, as the shooter calls on his nautical experience to counter the rolling of the ship, but it can never take the penalty lower than 0 — for example, it cannot turn a -1 penalty into a +1 bonus! A roll is required for each missile fired or thrown. Once the Seamanship roll is attempted, the missile must be fired or thrown, regardless of the results of the Seamanship roll.



Underloading

The performance figures given above are for ships carrying their maximum capacity. For every 20% underloaded, a ship's average speed increases by 1 mph, its maximum speed by 2 mph, and its maneuver number by +1.

Once a ship's maneuver number is halved by underloading, the ship's light weight begins to affect its performance adversely. Each further 10% of underloading (or part of 10%) reduces its maneuver number by -1, and speed does not increase further.

Thus, if the knarr in the previous example makes it to port and offloads all its cargo, its total weight becomes around 8 tons — 7 for the ship and a ton or so for the crew. 8 tons is about 27% of the ship's fully loaded displacement, which means that it is 73% underloaded. Its maneuver number is -4 fully loaded, so the first 40% of underload reduces that to -2; the average speed increases by 2 mph and the maximum speed by 4 mph. There is still a 33% underload, each 10% of which adds -1 to the maneuver number; 33% rounds up to 40, so the maneuver number goes down to -4 to -6. The ship is so high in the water that it is in danger of capsizing, and the master had better take on some other cargo or at least some ballast before leaving port!

Handling Under Oars

Viking ships were generally rowed when maneuvering in port, or, in the case of the drakkar, in battle. In neither case is it necessary to know the exact speed, and the questions that do need answering can be handled very simply.

In Port

When a ship is maneuvering in a port, and inlet, or any other stretch of calm water, time will seldom be of the essence. Instead, the main question will be "Does anything go wrong?"

Settle this by a roll against Seamanship skill for the ship's steersman, modified by the ship's maneuver number and by the following additional factors:

Each oar unmanned	drakkar -1, knarr/faering -4
Night	-2
Unfamiliar waters	-1 to -4
Bad weather	-1 (crosswinds) to -4 (storm)
Busy waters	-1 (crowded) to -3 (jammed)

Success means that the ship has been berthed, or whatever, successfully. Failure demands that the test be repeated at a -1 penalty, and critical failure indicates that something unfortunate has happened. The precise nature of the mishap will depend upon the circumstances; here are a few possibilities:

The ship has grounded on a sandbank. Wait for high tide, or lose 2d tons of weight to free it.

The ship has struck a shoal of rocks. There are one or more holes below the waterline, and she's shipping water fast — lose 1 mph and -1 maneuver now, and every 30 minutes until the ship can be dragged out and patched.

The ship has struck another ship. One or both may have suffered minor damage, but worse is the prospect of a dispute — possibly involving the law — over whose fault it was and who must pay damages to whom.

Races and Pursuits

These situations are straightforward contests, involving the speed of the ships, the strengths of their crews, and the Seamanship of their masters.

To resolve a race or pursuit, roll a Quick Contest of Seamanship, based on the skill score of the ship's master. Modify each roll by the ship's maneuver number, and give the ship with the larger crew a bonus equal to the number of

pairs of oars it has more than its opponent — for example, a 25-oar ship racing a 20-oar ship has 5 more pairs = +5.

Sea Battles

Viking sea battles take place in three phases. First, the fleets approach each other, with arrow fire as they close. Then, ships try to grapple other ships and boarding takes place. Finally, there is shipboard fighting.

Sea battles can use a modified version of the mass combat system in Chapter 3. Treat each ship as a unit, and calculate troop quality and morale as normal. Roll for Catastrophes, and make PC Survival and Glory rolls as normal.

There is no defensive position modifier, but a side which is in waters it knows gets a +1 Strategy bonus. All other modifiers apply as appropriate.

The Quick Contest is then rolled against the average of each commander's Strategy and Seamanship. If less than 10 ships are involved in a battle, use Tactics instead of Strategy. Results are read from the Open-Field Battle table.

When a unit is routed, casualties are twice normal; the only place to go is overboard, and that's even more dangerous than routing off a battlefield. If a crew routs, the ship will be captured unless circumstances are very unusual or the attacker has too few men left to man it — no Viking weapon would hurt a ship except fire, which was fairly easy to deal with on a small, low-slung ship.

There is no modifier for armor when calculating casualties — it may protect its wearer from blows, but it can also drag him under the water to his death.

75% of the casualties in a sea battle are killed or permanently maimed, instead of the 50% for a land battle.

Sea Voyages

Sea voyages — whether to raid, trade, explore or invade — played a great part in Viking history and will probably play at least as great a part in a ***GURPS Vikings*** campaign. Depending on how central the voyage is to the campaign plot, a sea trip can be handled in one of two ways.

The quickest way to over a sea voyage is to make a Seamanship roll for the whole voyage or for each part of it. Modify the roll by the ship's maneuver number. Read the results off the following chart:

Seamanship roll	*Result*
Critical Success	Journey made at ship's max. speed
Made by 3+	Journey made at ship's avg. speed +2 mph
Made by 0-2	Journey made at ship's avg. speed
Failed by 1-2	Journey made at ship's avg. speed -2 mph
Failed by 3+	Minor mishap
Critical Failure	Major mishap

Refer to the *Hazards* section for details of mishaps.

If the voyage forms a more critical part of the campaign plot, it may be played out in more detail. The following sections contain information on the common sea-routes and ideas for hazards and incidents. The adventure plot can include one or more mandatory events and encounters which take place at sea.

Routes

There were two long-distance routes open to Viking seafarers: south, along the North Sea coast to the Irish Sea and/or the Atlantic seaboard, and west, island-hopping to Iceland, Greenland and Vinland. See the map on p. 14.

The Atlantic Seaboard

From the coasts of Norway and Denmark, it is fairly easy to follow the coasts of the North Sea, English Channel and Atlantic Ocean right down to the

Boarding

Boarding is an essential part of Viking naval warfare — the standard tactic is for ships to close through arrow-fire, grapple and board. If one ship wishes to avoid boarding, roll a Contest of Seamanship after each round of missile combat, with the following modifiers:

+1 — if your ship's average speed is 2+ mph faster

+1 — if your ship is on the windward side

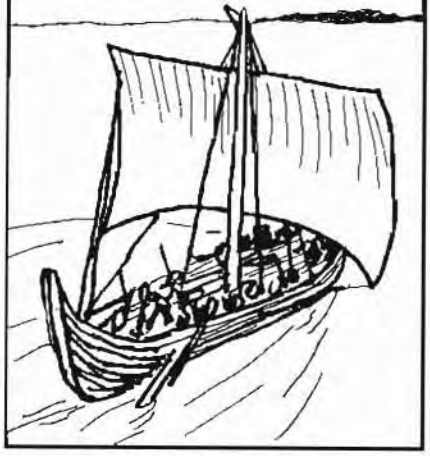
+1 — for a crack crew (average seamanship 13)

-1 — for a green crew (average Seamanship 10 or less)

If your ship is more maneuverable, add the difference in maneuver numbers.

If the ship which wishes to board wins the roll or if the roll is tied, boarding takes place. Otherwise, proceed to another round of missile fire.

Viking ships lack the handy ratlines and other ropes on which pirates and other swashbucklers can swing to board a ship, so Vikings have to jump. This may involve a certain amount of oar-walking (see p. 63), and the first people aboard a ship will certainly spend their first round fighting at some kind of penalty until they can win a foothold and reinforcements can arrive.



Storms

The quickest way to deal with storms is to assign an intensity number, from 1 to 10. 1 will be a mild squall and 10 will be the worst hurricane the world has ever known. The intensity number is used as a penalty to Seamanship (so a 1-point storm will give a -1 modifier). Results of the Seamanship roll are as follows:

Seamanship Roll	*Result*
Critical Success	Ship intact and on course
Made by 3+	Ship intact; make Navigation roll at +3
Made by 0-2	Ship intact; make Navigation roll
Failed by 1-2	Ship lightly damaged (-2 mph, maneuver -1); make Navigation roll at -1
Failed by 3+	Ship moderately damaged (-4 mph, maneuver -3); make Navigation roll at -3
Critical Failure	Make Seamanship roll at -3 or ship sinks. Ship severely damaged (-6 mph, maneuver -6); make Navigation roll at -6

If a ship survives a storm, it is necessary to find out how far off course it has gone. Make a Navigation roll, with the modifier dictated by the result of the Seamanship roll.

Navigation Roll	*Result*
Critical Success	1d miles
Made by 3+	2d miles
Made by 0-2	4d miles
Failed by 1-2	8d miles
Failed by 3+	8d×5 miles
Critical Failure	8d×10 miles

The direction in which the ship has deviated from its course is the direction in which the prevailing wind was blowing during the storm.

Continued on next page . . .

Straits of Gibraltar and into the Mediterranean. Navigation is easy, since the route never goes out of sight of land and landmarks like towns and river-mouths are readily available. Ever since prehistoric times, this has been Europe's main sea-route — there is evidence that traders from the eastern Mediterranean followed it to Brittany and Britain in search of tin around 1,500 BC, and it was probably a well-established route even by then.

The main dangers of this route (apart from Viking pirates!) are sudden storms, which are most common in late autumn and early spring. They can be surprisingly violent, especially in the comparatively shallow water of the Channel. Shifting sandbars can be a problem in some parts, but are seldom near enough to the surface to trouble a shallow-drafted Viking ship.

The Isles and the Irish Sea

From the south-western coast of Norway, it was possible to strike out due west and reach the Faeroes and Shetland Isles. This involved a day or two out of sight of land, and it was possible to be blown off course by north Atlantic gales — which played a great part in Viking exploration and discovery. Heading southwest from here, a ship would reach the Orkneys and the west coast of Scotland, and follow the coast to northeast Ireland and the Irish Sea.

This was a more hazardous route than hugging the coast through the Channel to France and Spain, although the Irish Sea was comparatively sheltered. Gales and navigational errors were the two main problems; the Scottish coast is rocky and sometimes treacherous, but no more so than the western coast of Norway.

The North Atlantic

It was Atlantic gales which apparently led to nearly all the Norwegian discoveries in the west, although once a new land was reported others were generally quick to investigate and settle. From a point about halfway up the Norwegian coast, it was possible to strike out due west and reach Iceland in four to six days, given favorable winds and good steering. Some intrepid travelers

may have held their course by skirting the Arctic pack-ice, although it is easy enough for an experienced sailor who knows the stars to keep heading westward.

Hugging the southern coast of Iceland as far as Reykjavik, it is another four or five days westward until Greenland is sighted, followed by a three- or four-day journey around the southern tip to the milder settled areas. The route then follows the western coast of Greenland north, makes a one- or two-day hop across to Baffin Island and northern Newfoundland, and follows the east coast of North America southward.

Severe storms — such as those which led to the first sightings of Greenland and Vinland — are a constant hazard in the North Atlantic, as are icebergs, especially in spring when the pack-ice begins to break up. Mariners traveling too far north also face frostbite and severe icing.

The Baltic

Much of the Baltic trading network was an extension of the Atlantic/North Sea coast route; around the Skagerrak by sea or across the Danevirke land-route, then on to the trading ports of the Slavs and Swedes. Many of these led on to river routes, which are discussed below.

By far the greatest danger in the Baltic seems to have been piracy. The Danes are reported to have offered to pay their king for piracy rights along the Norwegian coast, and wherever there is a profitable sea route, pirates are sure to be found. Larger military forces may also be a problem. Hedeby changed hands between Denmark and Sweden a number of times, and the Swedes mounted numerous raids for slaves and conquest along the Baltic coast of what is now Latvia and Estonia.

Sea Hazards

Pirates

Shipping in the seas around Scandinavia was almost permanently threatened by piracy, and although pirates preferred traders carrying valuable cargoes, they would often try their luck with almost any quarry. A captured ship could be used or sold, and its crew sold as slaves. By land or sea, travelers had to be able to defend themselves in medieval Europe. A sea chase might end in a battle as the pirates try to board, or it might stretch out into a game of cat and mouse lasting all the way to Iceland or Greenland.

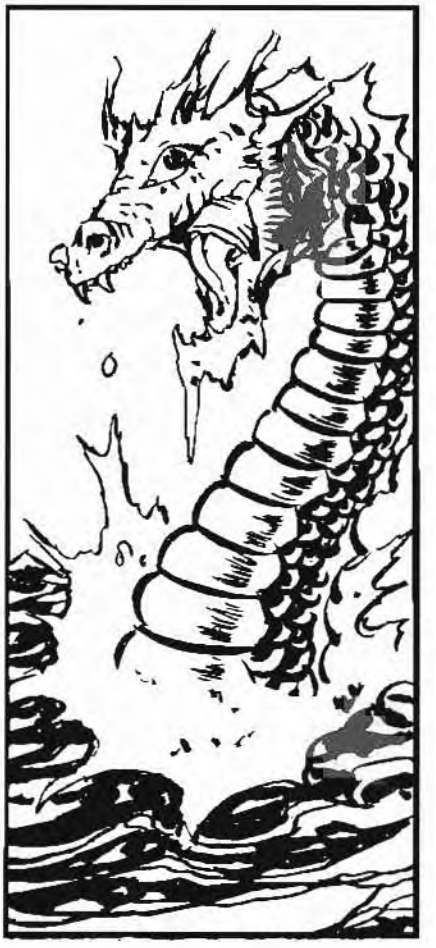
Weather

Viking ships were open, and an oiled-hide tarpaulin was the most shelter a seafarer could expect against the elements. Depending on the time of year and the whim of the GM, a storm might force the ships dangerously close to the rocky shore, or blow them out to sea where the navigators will have to rely on the stars to find their course. A north Atlantic storm which blows up 20-foot waves could easily swamp an open ship with only two or three feet of freeboard between the gunwales and the waterline.

Ice

As a northward journey continues, it will get colder — unless it is the height of summer, the travelers might encounter icebergs or even pack-ice. Given good visibility, it will generally be possible to avoid any problems with icebergs, but combined with thick fog they can be a deadly menace.

Pack-ice can be more insidious — after sailing through scattered floes for several hours, a crew might suddenly realize that they are trapped in a shifting maze. Several channels present themselves, but which — if any — offers a way out to clear water? The ice closes in, threatening to lock the ship in for the duration of the Arctic winter.



Storms (Continued)

To see if those on board survive the storm, make a Seamanship roll (default to DX-4) for each character, modified by the storm's intensity number. Results are as follows:

Seamanship Roll	*Result*
Critical Success	Unwounded; lost 1d Fatigue
Made by 3+	Unwounded; lost 2d Fatigue
Made by 0-2	Light wound; lost 2d Fatigue
Failed by 1-2	Moderate wound; lost 2d+1 Fatigue
Failed by 3+	Serious wound; lost 2d+2 Fatigue
Critical Failure	Severe wound; lost 3d Fatigue

A light wound is 1d-2 crushing damage, moderate is 1d, serious is 1d+2, and severe is 2d. Use the hit location table for falling (p. B131).

Characters who fall unconscious during a storm, from injury or fatigue loss, are in serious trouble. If no one sees them, they may be washed overboard and lost. Each unconscious person must roll over the storm's intensity number on 2d to avoid this.

Frostbite and Exposure

In Arctic waters, the air temperature is almost always below freezing and wind chill factors can be unbelievably savage. The air can be cold enough to freeze a man's lungs as he breathes, and frostbite will quickly attack any exposed area. Viking travelers were normally well-equipped for cold weather, and those who habitually traveled north often had cold-weather clothing traded from the Lapps.

Anyone on the deck of a ship in Arctic latitudes (or otherwise exposed to the savage elements) must make a HT (or Arctic Survival) roll every 30 minutes. In severe weather, this might be increased to every 20 or 15 minutes. A failed roll costs a point of Fatigue; when ST reaches 3, start losing HT instead.

For the purposes of this roll, HT is modified by the following factors:

Each 10 degrees below zero Fahrenheit (including wind chill)	-1
Light clothing	-5
Wet clothing	-5
Normal winter clothing	+/-0
Arctic (e.g., Lapp, Inuit) clothing	+5

Wind chill is discounted if shelter is available from the wind.

Viking ships had flat hulls, and would be squeezed onto the surface of the ice rather than having their hulls crushed by it. It might be possible for a few score strong men to drag the ship to the edge of the pack-ice and re-launch it — if the ice doesn't give way under their feet, if fog and snowstorms don't disorient them so they head the wrong way, if they don't die of exposure and frostbite first . . . See the sidebars for rules on survival.

Icing

As well as ice in the water, there is ice in the air at Arctic latitudes. Freezing water vapor can condense as ice-crystals onto any surface, and even today fishing-boats can pick up so much ice on their masts and rigging that they become top-heavy and capsize.

Whales

There are a great many exaggerated stories about whales attacking and overturning ships in order to eat the men inside. In practice most of the whales which are large enough to do this are filter-feeders and don't have the equipment to eat something as large as a man. They might accidentally bump or scrape a ship, but seldom with enough force to cause any noticeable damage. In a fantastic campaign, though, hostile whales and other sea monsters would add to the hazards faced by Viking seafarers.

Fantastic Hazards

In a fantastic campaign, the range of possible hazards expands enormously. There are sea monsters (Thor once accidentally hooked the Midgard Serpent while fishing from a ship), magical storms, strange islands peopled by monsters or where natural laws don't work quite as expected, malevolent icebergs which maneuver to trap ships between them, and so on. Several early seafaring stories tell of mariners who come to an uncharted island, land and make a fire — only to discover that the island is in fact the back of a sleeping whale, which is awakenedwoken by the heat and dives, leaving the mariners in the water.

River Travel

The Vikings did not only travel by sea, and the great rivers gave them a number of highways into Europe. As with a sea voyage, a river journey can be played out in detail if it forms a major part of the campaign plot, or it can be glossed over to save time, with only significant incidents being played out in detail. Seamanship is still used to handle the ship, even though it is not at sea; the roll can be made for the whole journey — or for every significant stage of it — to determine speed and safety, as for a sea voyage.

Routes

The best-known river routes are those used by the Swedes to penetrate into central Europe, but it should also be remembered that the rivers of France and Germany played a great part in Viking movement into the interior of western Europe. One group even captured Paris.

The Baltic Rivers

Starting at the Baltic, it was possible to go upriver for several hundred miles; a few miles of portage overland led to the headwaters of the Volga and the Dnieper, and it was downriver to the Black and Caspian Seas.

Although the Swedes found them a ready supply of slaves, the Slav peoples were not entirely defenseless, and Byzantine sources record that Rus travelers on

the Dneiper had to keep a constant guard against local bandits. Treacherous rapids were another hazard, especially in some parts of the Dnieper.

It is also worth noting that the Rus do not seem to have used the characteristic Viking longship for these river journeys; instead, they bought large dugout canoes from the local Slavs for each journey, stripping out the gear from the old ones and apparently abandoning them. These vessels were apparently more suitable for the conditions on the Dnieper, with fast currents, occasional rapids and narrow gorges where, perhaps, a Viking ship would not be able to deploy its oars properly. See sidebar, p. 64.

The Western Rivers

The Danes forced their way up the Seine and the Loire in the early 9th century, as did the Norwegians later in the century; others seem to have penetrated the Rhine and Moselle valleys as well. The great rivers of western Europe provided the Vikings with a highway into the heart of Frankish territory.

The hazards on these journeys were more likely to come from defending Franks and Germans than from natural dangers; Vikings on these rivers were always invaders.

Hazards

Attack from Shore

Although river-traveling Vikings encountered no one who could seriously challenge them on the water, attack from shore was one of the main hazards of their travels. Those traveling the Baltic rivers could be attacked by Slav bandits, and those on the western rivers faced defending Franks.

In practice, the danger seems to have been slight, but an encounter with hostile natives can become a challenging — and ongoing — problem for PCs. Missile fire from the banks is an annoyance rather than a danger, and on wider rivers it can be avoided simply by staying out of range. More of a problem is the fact that a ship will need to put in for the night, or for fresh supplies, somewhere at some time — and when it does, its crew can be ambushed by superior numbers if the news of its coming has traveled along the river faster than the ship itself.

Ice

This problem affects the Baltic rivers in severe winters, causing their mouths to ice over and blocking access. It was not a common practice to travel in winter in any case, but thick ice could turn protecting water around a Viking base into a highway for disgruntled natives, while at the same time denying them retreat by boat.

Sandbars

Some rivers become so slow-flowing as they approach the sea that they can be almost choked by continually-shifting sandbars. Viking ships were normally of shallow draft, and stood little risk of grounding except in the very shallowest of water. But in some parts of the lower Rhine, for instance, it might be appropriate to make Seamanship rolls when a ship leaves a main channel for any reason. Grounding in port is covered above, and grounding on a river will be much the same.

Fantastic Hazards

In a fantastic campaign, great rivers can become home to huge water-serpents and other aquatic monsters; wizards can turn the normally friendly water environment against Viking trespassers with elemental magic; gorge sides can clash together to crush an unlucky ship, and so on.

Icy Waters

Death in the icy waters of the north Atlantic and Arctic is by thermal shock rather than freezing; the main difference is that shock is a lot quicker. In water that is well below freezing and only kept liquid by its salt content, a strong man might live for four minutes; if he can be pulled out in that time, given dry clothing and a hot drink, he might avoid death by hypothermia. Maybe.

For each minute a victim spends in the water, he must make a HT roll: the roll is not modified by clothing, as the icy water gets in everywhere. If the roll is made, he loses 1 point of Fatigue; if the roll is failed, he loses a number of points equal to the amount by which the roll was failed. When ST reaches 3, start losing HT instead.

While rolling for thermal shock, don't forget to check for drowning as well. The two make a deadly combination.

11 ADVENTURES

There are several different ways to play the Viking campaign. It can be strictly historical, played either for straight adventure or for "social" roleplaying with feuds and lawsuits. It can be fantastic, with magic and monsters. Or it can be mythic, as the PCs become involved with the doings of the gods themselves. Here are adventures for all three types of campaign.

A Winter at Home

This is a low-powered adventure, allowing PCs to get a feel for the Viking homelands. It is especially suitable for beginning characters and players new to the setting. There is no single plot; this is an environment, with a range of possibilities which PCs can become involved in or not.

It is winter in the PCs' home area — traditionally a time when people stay at home and take care of business. Severe weather hampers travel and cuts off communities. The seas are stormy and may be frozen if the adventure is set in the north of Norway, northern Iceland or Greenland. Hunger may drive wolves and bears out of the mountains, adding to the hazards of sub-zero temperatures, drifting snow, blocked tracks and thin ice on rivers and lakes. It is still possible to get about by sleigh, on horseback or on foot, but it's hard work.

At the Thing

The PCs' district Thing hears a case — the Jarl is one of the judges, and others are drawn from the elders of the community. All free men in the district are expected to attend, and there's not too much else to do in this bad weather. Besides, it's a good chance to meet old friends from other farms and villages, swap gossip, court a sweetheart, have a few drinks, and do all the other things that hold a community together.

The case before the Thing is between Yngvar Thorkelsson and Ketil Bjarnisson, and concerns a piece of land that both of them claim to own. Each of them brings forward a batch of witnesses — mostly their own kin — to swear that they are in the right. If the PCs want to get involved in the action, see *A Case for the Thing*, p. 119; otherwise, the decision goes to the Thorkelssons. Hot words are exchanged, and a brawl might break out unless onlookers step in quickly to calm things down. The Bjarnissons leave, muttering darkly.

The Witch

Another case might concern an old woman who is accused of witchcraft. See *Witch Hunt*, p. 122, if the PCs become involved in this.

Wolf Hunt

One item of gossip at the Thing is how bold the wolves are this year. Even the oldest men can't remember a winter when they troubled so many of the remoter farms. Some people are planning a wolf hunt, and anyone who wants to go along will be able to get food and lodging at one of the farms for the couple of days that the hunt takes.

Usually, wolves will try to avoid human contact wherever possible, although a group of them might attack a single human who appears weak, sick or injured. This time the wolves will be more aggressive, and after the hunt, there will be speculations that magic was somehow involved.

There's honor to be won in this hunt, especially for an untried young man.

Bad Neighbors

A few days after the Thing, Yngvar Thorkelsson comes to the Jarl asking help and advice. Although judgement was given in his favor over the land-dispute, the Bjarnissons will not get off the land. There have been beatings and a few brawls, and it may develop into a feud if something is not done — a feud which the more numerous and more aggressive Bjarnissons will probably win. Since Yngvar's grandfather was given the land by the Jarl's grandfather when the region was first settled, can the Jarl help? PCs who are in the Jarl's service might be sent to deal with the matter.

Continuing the Adventure

The GM can add more plots, sub-plots and distractions to keep it going for as long as the players are interested. When the spring thaw comes, there will be work to do on the land, and after that ships might put out for foreign parts . . .

A Trading Voyage

This is essentially a non-violent adventure, although some fighting may be necessary. It might be used to let PCs explore a part of the Viking world.

In spring, ships are overhauled and the Jarl begins to plan a trading voyage. The exact destination is up to the GM. A good stock of furs has been built up over the winter's trapping, and they might be sold at any of the great trading-ports of Europe.

The first phase of the adventure will involve repairing and crewing the ships, loading the cargo, and saying goodbyes to family and friends. There are more would-be captains than there are ships; the Jarl will have to make some decisions, and PCs with influence can get political here!

The second phase of the adventure will be the voyage itself. Chapter 10 covers possible routes, and the hazards that might be encountered.

In Port

On arrival at the chosen port, the Norsemen must come to terms with foreign customs and values (some of which may well run counter to the Viking Code of Honor), and the problems of visiting a strange country. The Jarl will certainly have sent along a few people who know the territory, but for most of the crew, it will all be very strange. They must find a buyer, sell their furs, trade for goods to be resold or used at home, and set out on the return journey.

Possible problems in the foreign port are many. Language barriers, dishonest merchants, corrupt officials and bar-room bigots can all give the Norsemen a chance to get into trouble. Couple this with a few hot-headed NPCs in the crew, and PCs could have their hands full trying to keep the peace without seeming weak and cowardly.

Homeward Bound

The voyage home offers the same problems and hazards as the outward voyage. If all goes well, the PCs will return home with a healthy profit (and more to be made if they buy European goods to trade at home). They will have a stock of stories and gifts to impress friends, relatives and sweethearts, and perhaps some useful contacts abroad.

A Raid

What do Vikings do? They raid, of course!

A good raid breaks down into four phases: planning, journey, attack and return. In the planning phase, the leader of the party (the ship's owner, the PCs' Jarl or some other suitable character) will consult with respected advisors, select the target, and devise a basic strategy. People who know the location (including well-traveled PCs) will be consulted on the state of the waters, local defenses, the amount and probable location of valuables, and so

on. Of course, a raid *might* be conducted on impulse. If a trading voyage hasn't gone too well, the captain may decide to change his luck with a little plunder . . . from the people who cheated him, or just from the next target of opportunity.

A Higher Purpose

A raid might also be conducted for more than just plunder, and some GMs might prefer a more positive goal so that the PCs are not so much the bad guys. They might have to find and free a captured comrade, or knock out some Saxon or Frankish warships before a greater landing by their king's forces, or even retake their home town. Hedeby changed hands more than once, and the PCs might be Danes trying to evict Swedish conquerors.

En Route

The voyages offer the same possibilities as the trading voyage described above, although the ship(s) will be better-armed and better able to cope with pirates and the like. Vikings certainly did not refrain from robbing other Vikings, especially of different nationalities, if they thought they could get away with it.

Action!

The main phase of the adventure — the raid itself — starts the moment the raiders are spotted from the shore. Then, before serious resistance can be organized, the raiders have to pick a landing site, get ashore (Seamanship rolls might be required for high-speed beaching without damaging the ship) and strike.

The amount of resistance depends largely on the target. A monastery will be comparatively defenseless (although the raiders might get a nasty surprise if a local noble is visiting with a body of his troops). A village will be defended by peasants armed mainly with improvised weapons, but will have little of value except the people themselves. A port will have some defenses against pirates, but promises greater booty if the raiders can get in and out.

Fighting Back

Remember that, although the Viking raiders certainly struck fear into their victims, the Dark Ages were harsh times, and those victims were far from helpless. Many would fight to defend their homes and families, and they would use intelligent tactics once the initial shock was over.

Raiders who don't leave anyone behind to guard the ships could find them taken or burned, with no means of escape as the countryside gradually mobilizes against them and the local earl approaches with a strong force of fyrdmen to destroy them. Of course, ship-guard is the position of least honor in a raid; nobody will want to stay behind and miss the fun.

Quick-thinking merchants might try to bottle raiders up in a port by using their own ships to block the entrance; the Vikings will have to fight a naval action to escape. And Saxons could be as vicious as anyone else — it was once the custom in northern England to hang Danehide (the skin of captured Vikings) on the side of one's house . . .

A Voyage of Exploration

Word has reached the PCs' home area of a new land to the west, sighted by a mariner who was blown off-course by a storm. They might be interested for many reasons: population pressure, trouble at home, the desire for renown and even straightforward curiosity. Someone (PC or NPC) is outfitting one or more ships, and those who want to go along are welcome if they can pull their own weight. There might even be several competing expeditions.

Destination

The exact destination depends on the year: it might be the Faeroes, Iceland, Greenland, Vinland, or even one of the islands north of Hudson's Bay. Preparations are made with great care. Ships are overhauled and checked, to make sure that they can withstand several days of bad North Atlantic weather. Supplies are loaded, along with fresh skins for the tent-shelters and other necessities. A route is planned, allowing as much time as possible within sight of land and island-hopping so that fresh supplies and water are never too far away. The seafarer who first saw the strange land will be recruited if possible, or bombarded with questions if he won't join the trip.

Getting There

The ships set off, and the voyage can be as easy or difficult as the GM wishes. On arrival, supplies will be low and winter might be setting in. The explorers will have to establish a self-sufficient base camp from which to forage the surrounding area, and take stock of the available resources. Then they must survive the winter and be ready either to return home in the spring or establish a permanent settlement.

Problems

Problems in the new land can include hostile natives (Skraelings or Inuit) who might trade one minute and attack the next, acting very strangely to Viking eyes and taking offense at the most trivial things, a harsh climate, a lack of edible plants and game to see the explorers through the winter, and so on. Even in a lush, welcoming, uninhabited land, explorers will have to learn which plants are edible and which poisonous.

Rewards

From most exploring voyages, the most that one can hope for is adventure, good reputation and perhaps a hold full of furs. Of course, some adventures, like Vinland, work out better.

Vinland

This adventure might follow on from the last, as explorers try to last out a winter before returning home or settlers try to establish themselves in the new land. The expedition is visiting Vinland (pp. 53, 59), possibly a few years after Thorfinn Karlsefni gave up his attempt to colonize.

Home, Sweet Home

The first problem is to pick a place for the settlement site. Ideally it should be sheltered, with good water access, at least

one spring or stream for fresh water, plentiful timber for building, abundant wildlife to hunt and trap, a good supply of edible plants, fertile soil for farming, good fishing, and no dangerous wildlife or hostile natives. The GM should make sure that at least half these conditions are not met in any place that the PCs see.

Having selected the site, the first task is to land and build shelter. According to the resources of the area, Viking settlers built in timber, sod, unmortared stone and various combinations of these materials. At the same time, supplies can be replenished by fishing and foraging, and parties can be sent out to explore the surrounding area.

Problems

Winter is the great enemy in this adventure — precisely when it comes will be a function of the latitude, the PCs' arrival date and the whim of the GM. Other problems on arrival can include hostile Skraelings, soaked and rotten seedstock, lamed or drowned livestock, lack of food or fresh water around the landing-site, and so on.

The year's events can become adventures in their own right. The settlers might make friendly contact with Skraelings and trade with them; the local savages have never seen milk or metal before, and are excellent hunters and trappers with detailed local knowledge. Or the settlers might antagonize the Skraelings — or meet the same ones who fought with Thorfinn — and have to endure a number of raids and ambushes. One can turn into the other with amazing suddenness, and for no reason the Norsemen can discern; not knowing the Skraeling culture it will be easy to give deadly offense, but if the Sky-Eyes fight well and bravely the Skraelings might decide to accept them and open friendly relations.

Aside from natives, there might be dangerous wildlife to contend with. Wolves and cougars will never have encountered domesticated animals before, and will be no respecters of ownership; neither, for that matter, will be bears, who are used to being at the very top of the tree in these parts.

Other problems can include crop failures, disease, internal dissension, and sudden and/or suspicious deaths. Reaching Vinland is only half the battle; surviving there presents challenges all of its own.

A Case for the Thing

Chapter 1 discusses the Scandinavian legal system and procedures. A legal dispute can make a very challenging — though hopefully bloodless — home-based adventure.

The Problem

The precise nature of the dispute, and the means by which the PCs become involved, are up to the GM. Many disputes were over ownership of land; many others involved compensation for people killed in brawls or damage to property. The easiest way to drag PCs into a case is to have it involve one of their close relatives; unrelated PCs will be able to watch and support their friends, since all free men in the district attended the Thing. Of course, if one of the PCs is a brawler, *he* may find himself sued for compensation!

Since the case has come to the Thing, the two parties involved have clearly failed to resolve the matter between themselves. This failure will have a great effect on the relations between the two sides. Younger men will probably be hostile and antagonistic, while older family members will shake their heads and quietly despair of a peaceful solution. Each side will accuse the other of being unreasonable.

Witnesses and Influence

Presiding over the Thing are a number of judges — usually older men from the district and respected individuals like the local Jarl. Some, related to one side or the other, might step down because they don't feel they can deliver impartial judgement; others might fight to stay, so they can help their side out. If the opponents are out-and-out villains, they may try to put pressure on the judges, and PCs might become involved in exposing this and/or preventing it.

As well as bribery and threats, Politics, Fast-Talk or Diplomacy skill can be used to put more subtle pressure on a judge. A Quick Contest of the contestant's skill vs the judge's Will can decide how these approaches work out. Once approached, a judge is either for you or against you — he can no longer be neutral.

Often, a case will be won by sheer weight of witnesses. A man who can get 30 people to swear to the justice of his cause will do much better than a man who can only get three, and the work involved in assembling witnesses can pay dividends.

One's kin should be a good source of support, but note that this is not automatic. Each kinsman is an individual NPC with his own personality and opinions, and if your cause is unjust or dishonorable, a kinsman would bring dishonor upon himself by witnessing for you — as you would by asking him to. Friends will generally support each other, subject to the same conditions.

Other witnesses may be people friendly to your family or people hostile to your opponent's family, or people who know exactly what happened and want to see justice done. A major part of the adventure might revolve around assembling witnesses and trying to prevent the opposition from getting to them.

At Court

When the case gets under way, each side presents its own story. There are no professional lawyers — though some men are famed for their canny advice about such matters, and can help if approached properly. Witnesses speak for themselves. They are on sacred ground within the court-enclosure, and are under oath to tell the truth; this can create a dilemma if an honorable man is called upon to speak, and to tell the truth would harm the family or a sworn friend.

To game this part of the proceedings, roll a Contest of Skills between the two main parties to the dispute. This roll is modified as follows:

Each witness on your side:	+1*
Each witness on the other side:	-1*
Individual's status	Status score
Performance of PC witnesses	See below
Individual's reputation	Reputation score
Family's reputation	Half Reputation score
Each judge on your side	+2
Each judge on the other side	-2

* +/-2 for each witness who makes a successful skill roll in Bard or Law.

The skill used for the contest is the average of Bard and Law. Other skills might help, as follows:

Someone who can use Poetry to improvise an appropriate and witty verse about the situation gains a +2 modifier, and quite possibly some status as well.

Savoir-Faire might gain some advantage (+1 or +2, depending on the degree of success), but a critical failure might get him and his case thrown out for some unforgiveable breach of protocol — the Norse equivalent of contempt of court.

Successful use of Skaldic Lore earns a +2 modifier, as the individual has been able to call upon a prior example or some other relevant piece of lore.

Fast-Talk is only marginally useful in this situation, since the judges have ample time to reflect, question, consult and decide, which means that their better judgement will usually win out. However, a critical Fast-Talk success will gain a +1 modifier; a failure will incur a -1 penalty, since the judges realize that someone is trying to pull the wool over their eyes.

A critical failure in one of these secondary skill rolls indicates that the character has fallen flat on his face; unless otherwise noted, this will result in a -2 modifier reflecting the contempt he has inspired.

Finally, a modifier is given to each side by the GM, reflecting his opinion of each side's case and they way they go about presenting it. It can be great fun roleplaying submissions to the court, interjections, objections, spontaneous arguments and so on.

PC Witnesses

If PCs are involved on the periphery of a case as witnesses, thir role can be expanded to make things more interesting. Having them roleplay their part in the case will add to the interest and enjoyment of the proceedings; let each player choose his own character's approach in dealing with the judges, and make the necessary skill rolls. Because PCs are exceptional people, apply the following modifiers for the efforts of PC witnesses:

Skill Roll	*Modifier*
Critical Success	+3
Made by 3+	+2
Made by 0-2	+1
Failed by 1-2	-1
Failed by 3+	-2
Critical Failure	-3

Critical success and failure may also affect the PC's Reputation and Status.

The range of skills is the same as those listed for the person conducting the case, but only one roll is allowed per PC. The player must choose a skill to reflect his basic approach, or come up with a combination and roll against the average score.

Who Wins?

Whoever wins the contest of skills wins the case; the majority of judges has voted in his favor. The degree of success indicates how narrowly the case was won, which may affect the amount of compensation ordered, the effect of the case on the reputation and status of both sides, and other things which the GM may need to decide.

Accept or Appeal

Once judgement has been given, there is a choice; you can accept it, reject it and try to ignore it, or appeal to the Landthing.

Accepting judgement means that the losing side makes reparation as ordered and the matter is settled. Rejecting it means

that the judgement is ignored; the loser refuses to pay the ordered compensation, or to desist from causing trouble, or whatever. It is up to the winner of the case to enforce judgement, and if the winner is too weak or the loser too strong to make this possible, the judgement can safely be ignored.

Appealing to the Landthing was rare, and only done by people who were absolutely convinced that they were in the right — or that they had an excellent chance of winning. The procedures are the same as for the Thing, but if the appellant loses the case he is banished. Banishment can be for life or for a number of years; Leif Ericsson was banished from Iceland for killing when he set out to Vinland, but his banishment was for the fixed term of three years.

The Last Resort

Duels and feuds occurred when every other means had been exhausted. A duel was preferable to a feud, since it would be over quickly and would involve only one death or maiming (unless it was a very close fight or the winner was unlucky). Feuds were outside the law, and very difficult to stop once they got started.

A duel can be run as a single combat, and is fairly straightforward; under some codes the contestants were allowed three shields each, and could stop by mutual agreement to pick up fresh ones. A feud was a series of individual events — fights, killings, revenges, ambushes — which could go on until one side was wiped out or so weakened that it surrendered, or until all the active participants had been brought before the Thing and banished for killing.

Trouble Brewing

This is a court adventure, and requires that most or all of the PCs are huscarls, in service with the same Jarl. An important ally — or perhaps the king himself — arrives at the Jarl's steading, and preparations are made to entertain the guest in lavish style. But things start going wrong. Someone, somewhere is trying to make trouble — but who, and why? This is what the PCs have to find out, before things go too far and the trouble gets out of hand.

Arrival

The important visitor arrives, and the PCs are among the huscarls detailed to see the visitors to their lodgings and make sure that they are comfortable. Interaction with the visiting party at this stage can make allies or enemies for later on in the adventure.

The Feast

On the first evening, a great feast is laid on for the visitors, and the first problems arise. Chests are given to the visitor as gifts, full of gold and silver — except that when he opens them all they contain is horse manure. The visitors' food looks fine, but is deliberately ruined with vinegar or worse substances. The feast is a disaster, and it will take a lot of fast talking to prevent several of the visitor's retainers from challenging their hosts to duels. The visitors retire to their quarters in high dudgeon.

Find the Culprit

The Jarl is beside himself with embarrassment and worry, and the PCs are detailed to find out who is responsible for these outrages.

There are many possibilities. It might be someone with a grudge against the Jarl, or someone with a grudge against the visitor. Enemies can have a number of reasons, both obvious and otherwise: someone who lost a case because of one judge's vote, an unknown illegitimate son whose abandoned mother died in childbirth, a feud-enemy from the next district, or even a Loki-style troublemaker who delights in confusion.

Ideally, there should be at least six prime suspects, each with their own motives and personalities, and the true culprit should be someone else entirely. The culprit is unlikely to stand still while the investigation goes on, and may react to the PCs' efforts by sowing red herrings and even trying to frame one or more of them. Further outrages will take place when the PCs' backs are turned, and they may become dangerous or even fatal.

Detective work might be hampered by certain aspects of the Viking code and helped by others, but a social faux pas here could ruin the PCs' chances of solving the case and might even get them thrown out of their Jarl's retinue.

Not only must the PCs find the troublemaker, but they must also assemble a convincing case against him (or her). There is an excellent chance that they will be accusing one of their social betters — probably someone close to their Jarl or his visitor — and the solving of the case could be as much of an embarrassment as the events of the feast. The PCs had better be sure of their suspect and have a watertight case, or they could end up in more trouble then they ever thought possible.

Note that there are two ways to present this adventure! The GM can actually invent clues and present a mystery for the players to solve. Or — if the PCs are all hearty brawlers, and the players don't want to solve puzzles — the mystery and detection can go on in the background, over the heads of the simple warriors, who are just trying to serve their Jarl as best they can by hitting whoever he points to.

Fantastic Adventures

Fantastic elements can be added to the historical adventures outlined above quite easily — magic can complicate some matters and make others easier, and monsters can take the place of human or animal hazards and opponents. Magic can also be a "red herring" in an adventure; PCs may suspect that the horse-manure in the gift chests was the work of a wizard, and waste time hunting for evil magic-users. But sometimes the magic is very real indeed . . .

Grim's Mound

This adventure is similar to mainstream fantasy adventures; it involves finding and entering a place of mystery with supernatural associations, dealing with dangerous inhabitants, and recovering treasure. It might be used with a group of players who are used to mainstream fantasy, to ease them into the Viking setting.

The Story

Grim Walleye, so it is said, was a great and terrible pirate. He brought back vast quantities of gold and silver from his voyages to England, Ireland and France, and although he lived riotously and spent freely, no man could have spent that much money in a single lifetime. Nowadays — a generation after his death — his family are as poor as their neighbors, and people have whispered for years about Grim's treasure and what happened to it.

Some of the older people remember Grim's death; the family built him a mound at the edge of their lands overlooking the sea,

it is said — partly so he could look out upon the water, and partly because the site was far from their farm so he'd have a long walk to come back and cause them trouble. The tale of Grim's treasure may have grown in the telling, but it had to start somewhere; saga heroes like Grettir the Strong break into mounds in search of treasure, so there can't be any harm in it; and just think of the fame you'd gain in the village if you came back with all Grim's gold . . .

Finding the Mound

The first phase of the adventure will be the search for the mound itself. Grim's family won't help — none of them is old enough to remember his burial, and in any case they would see this adventure as trespassing and theft. (As indeed it is!) And if Grim were to be disturbed, it's his descendants who'd have to deal with the ghost . . .

So the PCs will have to scout the land belonging to Grim's family secretly. The mention of the coast and the distance from the farm gives a couple of clues, but they should still have a fair area to search. They might find a few things they weren't looking for along the way — small monsters, capricious spirits, and so on. And there's no guarantee that the first mound they find will be Grim's.

Breaking In

Once the PCs have found a mound which they believe is Grim's burial-place, they have to find a way in. Viking burial mounds weren't built with entrances, so this will involve shifting some soil and stone.

What happens next will depend on how the GM wants to handle things. Some mound-dwellers were sensitive enough that the sound of someone walking on their mound would bring them out to complain, so Grim might well take violent exception to a group of striplings attacking his roof. Alternatively, the old haunt could wait until they are inside the mound and pick them off one by one in true horror-movie style. Or he might just let them come to him . . .

Meeting Grim

Grim is a terrifying sight. Twenty years dead, his flesh is shrunken, blackened, and hard as iron. His one eye has shrivelled in its socket and regards the intruders balefully. He seems alive when first seen, stretched out on a decaying slab of wood. Make Fright Checks for the intruders; then let them realize his movement was just a trick of the flickering lantern.

Then Grim snatches up his sword . . . Fright Checks again!

Grim's mound can be as simple or as complex as the GM desires. It might be a dark, cramped area with next to no fighting-room, or it might be several times bigger on the inside than it is on the outside, with dark, dangerous passages or even an entire hall inside. Grim's treasure can be equally big or small. Either way, the PCs will have to deal with Grim before they can loot his mound. See p. 98 for "undead" rules.

Aftermath

If the PCs escape without burning old Grim, he'll probably trouble the neighborhood for some time as he searches for his stolen treasure. This can lead to a monster-hunt, and a case for the Thing — the more so since his family will claim a share of the treasure, if not the whole thing. If Grim harms any innocents before he's finally put to rest, they will demand some of the treasure as compensation. Thus, if the players enjoy social and political roleplaying, a whole campaign's worth of interaction can come out of a simple dungeon-crawl.

Witch Hunt

This is a bloodless adventure, and may also be used in a historical campaign. The PCs can be huscarls in service with a Jarl, or simply responding to rumors and accusations made at a local thing.

A Complaint

The adventure starts with a complaint. Depending on the circumstances, this might come in the form of a visit to the Jarl, or a complaint made at the local thing.

A farmer says that an old woman who lives near him is a witch. His milk has been sour all year, his lambs sickly and his barley hardly got out of the ground. He chased her off his land once when he found her at the edge of a coppice collecting herbs. She has been summoned before the Thing before, but failed to appear.

The PCs are either detailed by the Jarl to investigate, or decide to do so on their own account.

Travel

The heroes journey to the farmstead where the complaint originated. This can be as simple or as difficult as the GM wishes. In winter, there will be hazards like deep snow, thin ice and hungry wolves, and bandits and monsters are always hazards of a remote area. The PCs may conclude that the "witch" knows they are coming and is trying to slow them down. A horse inexplicably goes lame; another is frightened by a snake at the roadside and bolts; wolves can be heard in the trees, following the party at a distance — are these coincidences, or the result of hostile magic?

Arrival

The Vikings finally arrive at a remote farmstead or village, and try to get some basic information on the old woman. Opin-

ion is divided, sometimes angrily. Some respect the old woman's knowledge and are unwelcoming to the PCs — they might upset the wise-woman and cause all sorts of trouble. Others fall on the PCs as deliverers; the witch has been causing trouble for years, they claim, and it's high time something was done. She is distantly related to almost everyone in town, but has no living descendants or close relatives, so at least there are no family complications!

The two factions argue ceaselessly, and the PCs may have to prevent brawls breaking out — and they have to at least act as though they believe everybody, since it is very bad etiquette to imply that your host may be a liar. Any information they collect will be fantastic and wildly contradictory, and it becomes clear that they will have to visit the old woman for themselves.

Before setting out to visit the old woman, the PCs might investigate specific claims of witchcraft, rounding up those who think they have suffered at her hands, hearing their stories and looking for clues. Whether they find any — and whether they are red herrings — is up to the GM.

Visiting

The old woman lives by herself in a tumbledown shack some way from the village or farmstead. The journey there might be punctuated by more incidents and difficulties — the PCs may believe some or all of these to be the result of hostile magic, but some might be due to the "wise-woman" faction in the village or farmstead, who will try to prevent the PCs from seeing the woman because they're afraid of trouble.

The PCs will find a cantankerous, eccentric and probably half-crazed old woman. Collecting evidence of witchcraft may be difficult, as the key point is intent — a witch and a wise-woman are very similar, except that a witch is malicious and a wisewoman benefits the community. They might try to persuade her to visit the Jarl or the Thing to answer the things that are said about her, but she will be reluctant. She is too old for long journeys, she says, and she's used to gossips saying bad things about her.

The Truth?

The true story is up to the GM, of course. Perhaps the old woman is a witch, and is guilty of all the charges levelled against her. Or there might be another malicious spellcaster in the neighborhood; no one knows that this individual has any magical ability and so suspicion naturally falls upon the old woman. Or perhaps the mishaps are due to someone who has accidentally offended the local spirits. Or the whole thing might be a collection of coincidences, with no magical content at all.

The PCs must find out the truth, and decide what to do next. They could simply go home and report to their Jarl or Thing, or they might try to resolve matters on the spot. Presenting proof to the locals will have mixed results, since both sides on the dispute have already decided what they want to believe, and good rolls on persuasion-type skills will be needed to satisfy everyone. The PCs will have better results if they can catch *someone* in the act, and take him/her back to the Jarl or Thing to be dealt with; if the problems cease after this, the locals will be satisfied.

Kidnapped

This is a fantastic adventure with more than one approach. With a few simple changes, it can be an all-action monster hunt, or a delicate and nerve-wracking series of negotiations.

Trolls have kidnapped a local child, possibly leaving a changeling in its place. The truth has been discovered, and people look to the PCs to resolve the matter.

Approaches

There are several ways to handle this situation.

The PCs might track the trolls to their lair, and wade in with sword and offensive magic in a commando-style raid to get the child back. They might kill many trolls, but they also risk the child's life.

Alternatively, they might try sneaking into the trolls' lair and stealing the child back. This is risky, but not quite as dangerous as a blood-and-thunder raid, especially if there are a lot of trolls in the lair.

A third option might be to approach the trolls peacefully and try to make a deal for the safe return of the child. This could be nerve-wracking and may well be ultimately useless, but a group of players that enjoys complex negotiations and NPC interaction might be able to achieve something — at the very least, a deeper understanding of trollish society and psychology. The trolls might be happy to return the child in exchange for something else — at first they will probably demand another child, of equal or superior tenderness and sweetness, as though they are talking about a cut of meat. But they might be persuaded to accept something else, especially if negotiations are backed up with veiled threats and proof of superior strength on the human side.

Mythic Adventures

Mythic elements can be added to historical or fantastic adventures fairly easily, provided the GM is careful to keep divine action low-key and avoid overbalancing the adventure. If the gods appear in person, they will probably be disguised — ideally, the heroes should not realize that they have met a deity until some time later. Here are a couple of ideas for mythic adventures; reading mythology will provide many more.

Stop the War!

Loki has stolen Mjolnir and framed Thor for the murder of a prominent giant, slaying the giant himself and leaving the hammer beside the body. Everyone knows of Thor's fondness for killing giants, and trouble is brewing. The giants are preparing to march on Asgard to demand reparation, Thor is threatening dire things to the giants who (he thinks) stole his hammer, and the whole situation could boil up into Ragnarok very easily.

A Little Job

The adventure starts when the PCs get a visit from Odin. He is in disguise, and seems to be a one-eyed old man riding a fleabitten and broken-down nag. He meets the PCs on the road, and challenges them to a horse-race, producing a gorgeous gold arm-ring as a stake and promising them one each if he is beaten. The PCs seem to stand no chance of losing, but if they try to name a stake of their own the old man will demand a single service of them, and accept nothing else.

Odin wins the race, naturally, since his nag is actually Sleipnir in disguise. The PCs now owe Odin a service, and should experience a distinct sinking feeling as they realize how they have been tricked. Odin explains the situation; Mjolnir must be recovered and Loki captured before war breaks out, and mortals will be better able to move around in Jotunheim than any of the Aesir could, given the present situation.

Jotunheim

The first thing the PCs must do is find their way to Jotunheim. Odin can't use Aesir magic to help them, since this would help tip the balance towards war. So they must sail far to the north, beyond the Arctic Circle, find the highest range of mountains (the remains of Ymir's eyebrow), and cross them into Jotunheim.

Jotunheim is not too much different from Midgard, except that everything is six or seven times larger than normal. Humans might be able to escape notice because of their small size, but the giants will be suspicious of outsiders and some may want to kill the intruders just because they are humans. Jotunheim may well have other hazards such as giant cats and dogs, giant rats, giant spiders and other harmless animals which can become deadly monsters when enlarged.

Detective Work

The PCs' task — apart from staying alive — is to find evidence to exonerate Thor and implicate Loki, and present this to the giants convincingly so that war can be averted. Loki will interfere at all stages, in a number of forms; he can take any shape he likes, including that of any giant, and will cause the PCs endless trouble. The adventure might be extended by having the PCs try to capture Loki — see *The Fugitive*, p. 69.

Head of Wisdom

At the base of Yggdrasil is the severed head of Mimir, the wisest Aesir. Odin consults Mimir frequently, and paid an eye for the privilege of doing so. The PCs must consult Mimir on behalf of their king, and get vital advice that will affect the destiny of their nation.

Yggdrasil

First, the PCs must find the root of Yggdrasil which passes through Midgard. This could involve a long and hazardous journey, and detailed consultations with diviners. Since Odin is the patron of seers and mystics, however, he may keep this knowledge hidden from most of them; Mimir is his private oracle, and not for the use of mortals!

Having found the Midgard root, the PCs must follow it to the main trunk of Yggdrasil and find the root which goes to Niflheim. They will encounter several of the magical inhabitants of the world-tree on this journey (see Chapter 8), and may have to escape the notice of Aesir and others using the tree as a route between the worlds.

Niflheim

Niflheim is a dark and gloomy place, and PCs could get trapped here. They will have to get around the corpse-eating dragon Nidhug in his cauldron of seething water, and may have to negotiate with the monstrous woman Modgud who guards the bridge by which Niflheim is entered. The problem is, where exactly is the head of Mimir? Legend puts it somewhere under the root which leads to Niflheim, but does that mean actually in Niflheim? Or is it hidden somewhere beneath the root, close to the Norns' well between the trunk and Nidhug's cauldron? There are many places to look, and most of them are dangerous.

The Oracle

Having discovered the head's location, the PCs have to negotiate various magical anti-trespasser measures placed around the head by Odin. These can include magical traps and guardian monsters. The next task is to persuade it to speak. Can the PCs convince Mimir, the wisest of the Aesir, that one of them is Odin? Or will they have to strike a separate deal? *Can* they strike a separate deal, or is Mimir completely loyal to Odin?

Assuming that the PCs can convince Mimir to grant a single consultation, there remains the matter of the price. Odin paid an eye — as well as several days spent hanging in Yggdrasil, pierced by a spear — and Mimir might demand a similar ordeal from other questioners. Or it might be something much simpler — Mimir has been stuck here for centuries now, with nothing to eat, and although his head is magically sustained he does miss the taste of a really good pickled herring. It all depends on the tone the GM wants to set for the adventure. It's possible that Mimir will send the party all the way back to Midgard — or worse — to run some errand for him . . . "And when that is done, mortals, come back and ask thy boon."

Finally, the question itself must be asked. This should be done with extreme care, since oracles are well-known to talk in riddles and misinterpret questions to give useless answers. Even if they ask the question perfectly and receive an invaluably useful answer, the odds are that the heroes won't be able to make head or tail of it. These things are for seers to interpret, and their duty is simply to get back to their king with the answer and put it before his diviners.

GLOSSARY

This book contains many words from Old Norse or other sources which will be unfamiliar to most readers.

Aesir — One of two tribes of Norse deities, to which Thor, Tyr, Odin and many others belonged. The other tribe was the Vanir (qv).

Alfheim — The world of the elves (alfar).

Althing — The national assembly of Iceland or Greenland.

Asgard — The home of the Aesir (q.v.).

Audhumla — A cow whose milk nourished Ymir.

Baldur — The beautiful god; slain by a plot of Loki.

Berserker — An exceptionally violent warrior, said to be possessed by Odin; the term was also applied to violent bandits.

Bifrost — The rainbow bridge leading to Asgard.

Birka — A major Viking city in Sweden.

Bragi — God of poetry and eloquence, skald of Valhalla.

Carl — The middle class of Viking society, composed almost entirely of free farmers and fishermen. The vast majority of the population were carls.

Dagverdr — The morning meal.

Dain, Duneyr, Durathor & Dvalin — Four stags grazing in the branches of Yggdrasil.

Danegeld — Monetary tribute paid, mainly by the Saxons to the Danes, as a bribe to refrain from attacking.

Danelaw — The Saxon name for the Viking kingdom in England; the capital was Jorvik, now York.

Disir — Female spirits haunting farms and countryside; possibly remnants of an early Vanir cult.

Drakkar — The Viking warship, or "dragon-ship."

Draupnir — Odin's magical ring.

Einherjar — The dead in Valhalla, who fought by day and feasted by night until Ragnarok.

Faering — A small sailing and/or rowing boat, used for fishing and ferrying in inshore waters.

Fafnir — A dwarf who became a dragon, slain by the hero Sigurd.

Fenris — A monstrous wolf, child of Loki and the giantess Angrboda. Will kill Odin at Ragnarok.

Fidchell — An Irish boardgame, similar to Fox and Geese.

Francesca — A throwing axe with a long, narrow, curving head.

Freki — One of Odin's wolves.

Frey — Fertility god, the best-known of the Vanir.

Freya — Fertility goddess, Frey's sister.

Fyrd — The king's huscarls (q.v.) and the core of the national army.

Garm — A monstrous hound belonging to Hel.

Geri — One of Odin's wolves.

Gjallarhorn — Heimdal's horn which will sound the alarm at Ragnarok.

Gullinbursti — A magical boar made for Frey by the Dwarves.

Gungnir — Odin's magical spear.

Hávamál — "The Sayings of the High One," a collection of proverbs and homilies illustrating Viking social ideals. Also called the *Poetic Edda*.

Hedeby — A major Viking port at the base of Jutland, near the modern German city of Schleswig.

Heidrun — A magical goat in Valhalla; a goat (maybe the same one) grazing in the branches of Yggdrasil.

Heimdal — The god who guards Bifrost.

Hel — Monster or goddess, child of Loki and Angrboda. Rules Niflheim.

Herding — A province, comprising many herred (q.v.).

Herred — An administrative district.

Hlad — An item of clothing or jewelery; possibly a headband made of silk or another expensive material and richly embroidered.

Hnefatafl — A Viking boardgame, similar to the more modern Scandinavian game of tablut.

Hofud — Heimdal's sword.

Holmgang — A duel fought to settle a legal dispute.

Hugin — One of Odin's ravens.

Huscarl — "house carl"; one of a Jarl's full-time retainers — a servant in peace, a bodyguard in war.

Iarn Grieper — Thor's iron glove(s).

Jarl — The nobility of Viking society. The Saxon equivalent is Eorl, the ancestor of the British title of Earl.

Jernbyrd — Ordeal by hot iron.

Jormungand — The Midgard Serpent, child of Loki and the giantess Angrboda. Lies at the bottom of the sea, coiled around Midgard; its stirring causes earthquakes. Will kill and be killed by Thor at Ragnarok.

Jorvik — The Viking name for the city of York (Saxon Eoforwic), the capital of their English kingdom.

Jotunheim — The world of the Frost Giants.

Knarr — A trading ship, broad and deep with a fixed mast and a central cargo well.

Landnamabok — "The Book of Land-Taking," a history of early settlers in Iceland.

Landthing — A regional assembly. See Thing below.

Loki — The trickster-god.

Mannbaetr — The monetary value of an individual, used as a basis for compensation; equivalent to the Saxon wergild.

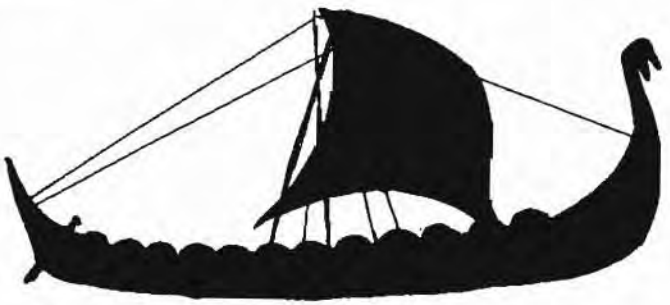
Megingiörd — Thor's girdle of strength.

Midgard — The world of mortals.

Mimir — The wisest of the Aesir. Odin keeps his severed head as an oracle.

Mjolnir — Thor's magical hammer.

Modgud — A skeletal woman, guarding the entrance to Niflheim.



Munin — One of Odin's ravens.

Muspellsheim — The land of the Fire Giants.

Náttverdr — The evening meal.

Nidhug — The dragon of Hel.

Niflheim — The land of the dead.

Njord — A lesser Vanir, sent to Asgard with Frey and Freya.

Nidavellir — The world of the Dwarfs.

Nine Worlds, the — Asgard, Vanaheim, Midgard, Jotunheim, Muspellsheim, Niflheim, Nidavellir, Svartalfheim and Alfheim; the universe according to Norse mythology.

Odin — Leader of the Aesir; god of magic and the unpredictable.

Ragnarok — The battle at the end of the world, in which most of the gods and mortals will be destroyed.

Ratatosk — A troublemaking squirrel living in the branches of Yggdrasil.

Rigsthula — "The Story of Rig," an allegorical poem explaining the structure of Viking society.

Rus — Swedes who traveled into Central Europe by river, trading with the Arab world and founding settlements in what is now Russia.

Saehrimnir — A magical boar in Valhalla, eaten each night and whole again next day.

Saetr — Upland summer pasture.

Scramasax — A type of blade made by grinding a bar of iron to a single edge and then clipping one end diagonally to make a point.

Skald — A class of poet and minstrel, sometimes compared to the Celtic bard.

Skidbladnir — Frey's magical ship.

Skraeling — Native American.

Sleipnir — Odin's eight-legged horse.

Svartalfheim — The world of the dark Elves.

Tanngniostr and Tanngrisnr — The magical goats which pulled Thor's chariot.

Thing — A local assembly of all free men, where law was made and disputes were heard.

Thor — God of thunder and warrior role-model, one of the most popular Norse deities.

Thrall — The lowest class of Viking society; virtual slaves.

Tyr — God of the law and battle.

Vaettir — Domestic and farm spirits; possibly remnants of an early Vanir cult.

Valhalla — Odin's hall in Asgard.

Valkyrie — A daughter of Odin, whose task was to watch warriors die in battle and conduct the worthy to Valhalla.

Vanaheim — The home of the Vanir (q.v.).

Vanir — One tribe of Norse gods, to which Frey and his sister Freya belonged.

Varangian Guard — An elite unit of troops, all ethnic Scandinavians, forming part of the Byzantine Emperor's bodyguard.

Vedfoldnir — A falcon living in the top of Yggdrasil.

Vinland — The Viking name for North America.

Wyrd — A Saxon word, often used to denote the Viking concept of Fate.

Ymir — The ancestral giant, the first living being.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Literally millions of words have been written about the Vikings, and an extensive bibliography would take seven or eight pages. This list is intended to give the interested reader a start; most of the books listed here are easy to get hold of, and have bibliographies of their own. The researcher can go as far as he likes.

History

Bremensis, Adam. *Gesta Hammaburgensis Ecclesiae Pontificum*, edited by H.V. Schmeidler, Hanover-Leipzig, 1917. A reprint of original source material — Adam of Bremen met the Vikings.

Brogger, A.W., and Shetelig, Haakon. *The Viking Ships: Their Ancestry and Evolution*, Hurst, 1971 — Everything you ever wanted to know about Viking ships. Translated from Danish; parts of it read a little strangely, but it's still regarded as one of the key sources by scholars.

Brondsted, Johannes. *The Vikings*, Pelican, 1965 — If you only read one book on the Vikings, make it this one. It's a little out-of date on ships, but everything else is authoritative and well presented for the lay reader. Extensive quotes from original sources like Adam of Bremen and Ibn Fadlan.

Froneck, Thomas. *The Emergence of Man: The Northmen*, Time-Life Books, 1974 — This book concentrates on pre-Viking Scandinavia, but is an excellent source on what happened there before the Viking Age.

Jones, Gwyn. *A History of the Vikings*, Oxford 1968 — A little dry and scholarly, but crammed with facts. For more pure history than Brondsted offers, this is a good source.

la Fay, Howard. *The Vikings*, National Geographic Society, 1972 — As you'd expect from the National Geographic Society, this book has excellent illustrations — particularly reconstructions — but it is marred by a couple of glitches. The Gokstad grave-ship is still treated as a typical drakkar, and the "ring-forts" are still treated as military camps. Overall, though, it is excellent.

Simons, Gerald. *Great Ages of Man: Barbarian Europe*, Time-Life Books, 1968 — An overview of the whole continent during the Viking Age, this book is recommended as an easy source on the rest of the world. For fast information on Franks, Arabs, Slavs or whoever, look here.

Simpson, Jacqueline. *Everyday Life in the Viking Age*, Dorset, 1967 — Probably the best book for absorbing the "feel" of the Viking age as a GM. Plenty of illustrations and floor plans, and lots of quotes and anecdotal material, all presented in a very easy-to-digest form.

TimeFrame AD 800-1000: Fury of the Northmen, Time-Life Books, 1988 — Looking at the selected parts of the world over this period, this book has one chapter on Vikings, but it's interesting to see what was happening elsewhere at the same time. There are excellent ship reconstructions, and a good aerial view of Dublin c. 840 AD — easily made into a GM's map!

Mythology

Davidson, H. R. Ellis. *Gods and Myths of Northern Europe*, Pelican, 1964 — A good overview of Norse mythology and the earlier Germanic mythology from which it sprang. Sets the myths in perspective well.

Grant, John. *An Introduction to Viking Mythology*, Chartwell, 1990 — There are plenty of coffee-table mythology books about, and this is one of the most recent. It has invaluable directory listings of gods and other mythological figures, and the illustrations are superb. Selected myths are retold entertainingly, for those who like the author's sense of humor.

The Larousse Encyclopaedia of Mythology, Larousse, various editions — Quite simply the best source for most Old World mythology.

Sagas

Many sagas are in print, although they tend to come and go from publishers' listings. Penguin Classics and Everyman are probably the best-known publishers. All sagas are useful to some degree — some are wild tales of high adventure, while others are plain histories of particular communities. Of the adventures, *Egil's Saga* and the *Saga of Grettir the Strong* are highly recommended. *Njal's Saga* is also useful, especially for a campaign involving lawsuits (Njal was famed for his cleverness in law). The *Vinland Sagas* tell of early settlement in that country and contact with Skraelings, and would be useful if the PCs are going to visit the New World; the *Laxdale Saga* tells the history of an Icelandic settlement through the 10th and 11th centuries, covering births, deaths, marriages, feuds, deals, and all facets of everyday life.

Fiction

There is a fair amount of Viking pulp fiction in the second-hand bookstores, but much of it is merely an excuse for sex, violence and very questionable history.

Unreservedly recommended are the Dark Age stories of Robert E. Howard, which can generally be found alongside Conan in the SF/Fantasy section. Heroes like Cormac Mac Airt, Turlogh O'Brien and, to a lesser extent, Bran Mak Morn are set in a world which blends pulp values with the very best of 1930s academic archaeology in a believable and exciting way.

Harry Harrison's *The Technicolor Time Machine*, also known as *The Time-Machined Saga*, is based on an archeological find of a whiskey bottle in an apparently sealed Viking context in one of the Vinland settlements. From this, Harrison weaves a very entertaining tale about a film crew from the future time-traveling back to the Viking age to make a movie using real Vikings as extras, and paying them in whiskey. As one might imagine, the shooting is not without its complications.

Movies

Movies have not treated the Vikings well, but a few might be used as a source of ideas for an action campaign. The most recent is *Erik the Viking*, by ex-Python Terry Jones; it's a good source of silly ideas for a cliché campaign, but that's as far as it goes.

Prince Valiant is best ignored. The Vikings are as embarrassing as young Robert Wagner's wig.

Also embarrassing is Hammer's *Viking Princess*, a swords-and-sauciness outing for scantily-clad shield-maidens in the worst traditions of bad movies. To think the same company made the Christopher Lee Dracula series . . .

The Norseman stars a clean-shaven Lee Majors as an unlikely Viking leader, and features the best portrayal ever of a Norse mystic.

The Vikings, an early '60s effort featuring Kirk Douglas and Tony Curtis, has its moments, and can be plundered (pun intended) for action-adventure ideas. It falls into the common trap of having 10th-century Saxons dressed and armed in 14th-century style, but that was always a Hollywood weakness.

There are other Viking movies about, whose historical accuracy, budgets, scripts and cast are of extremely various quality.

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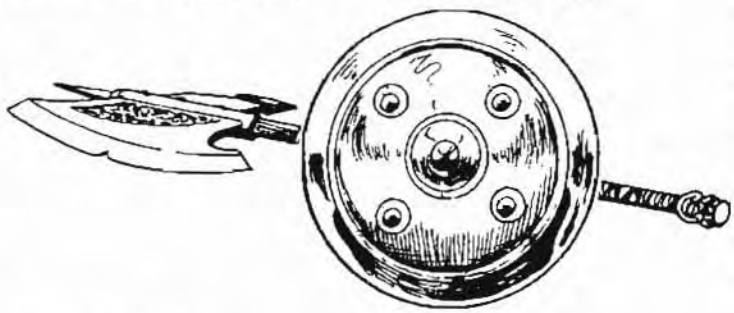

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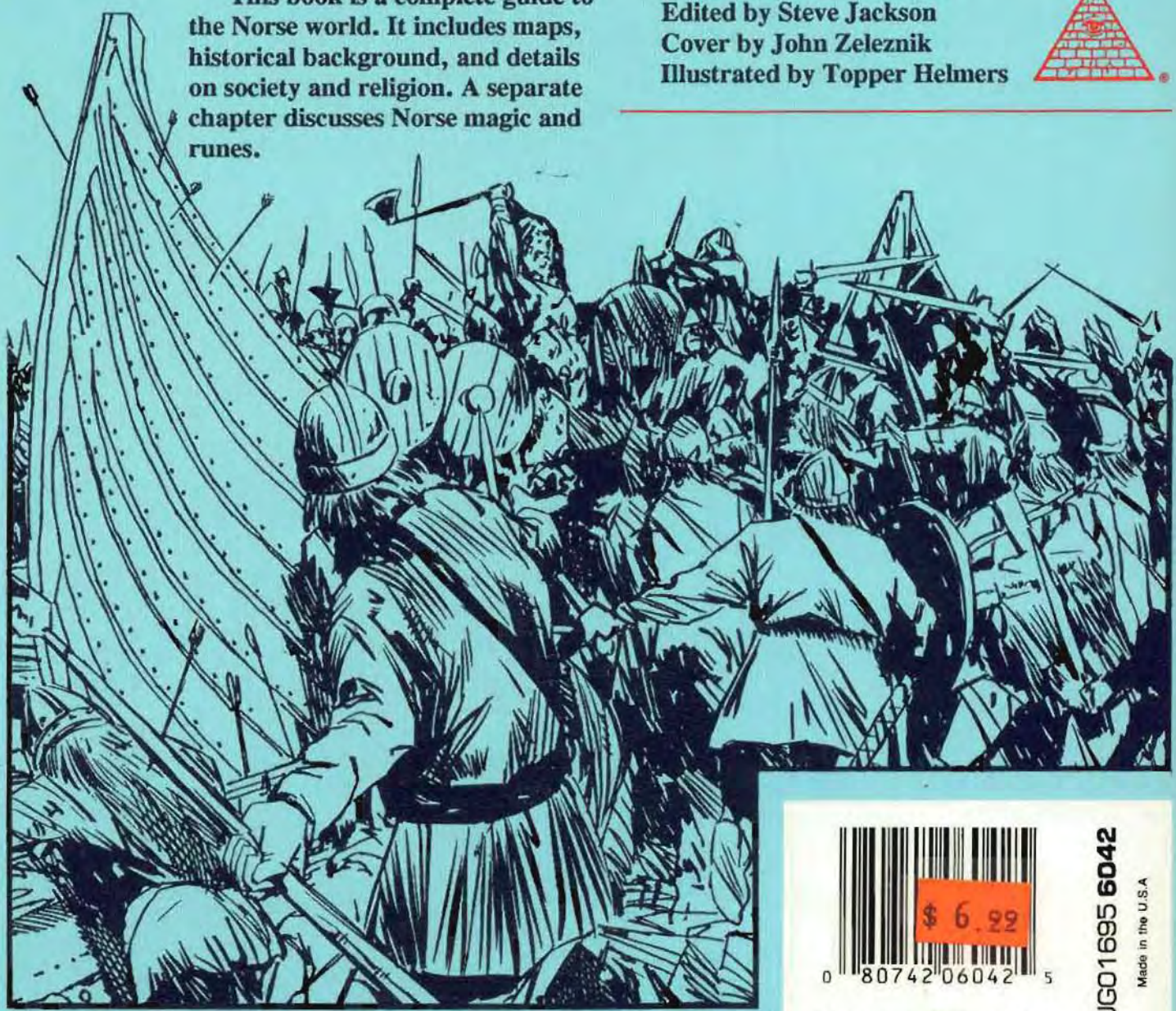

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