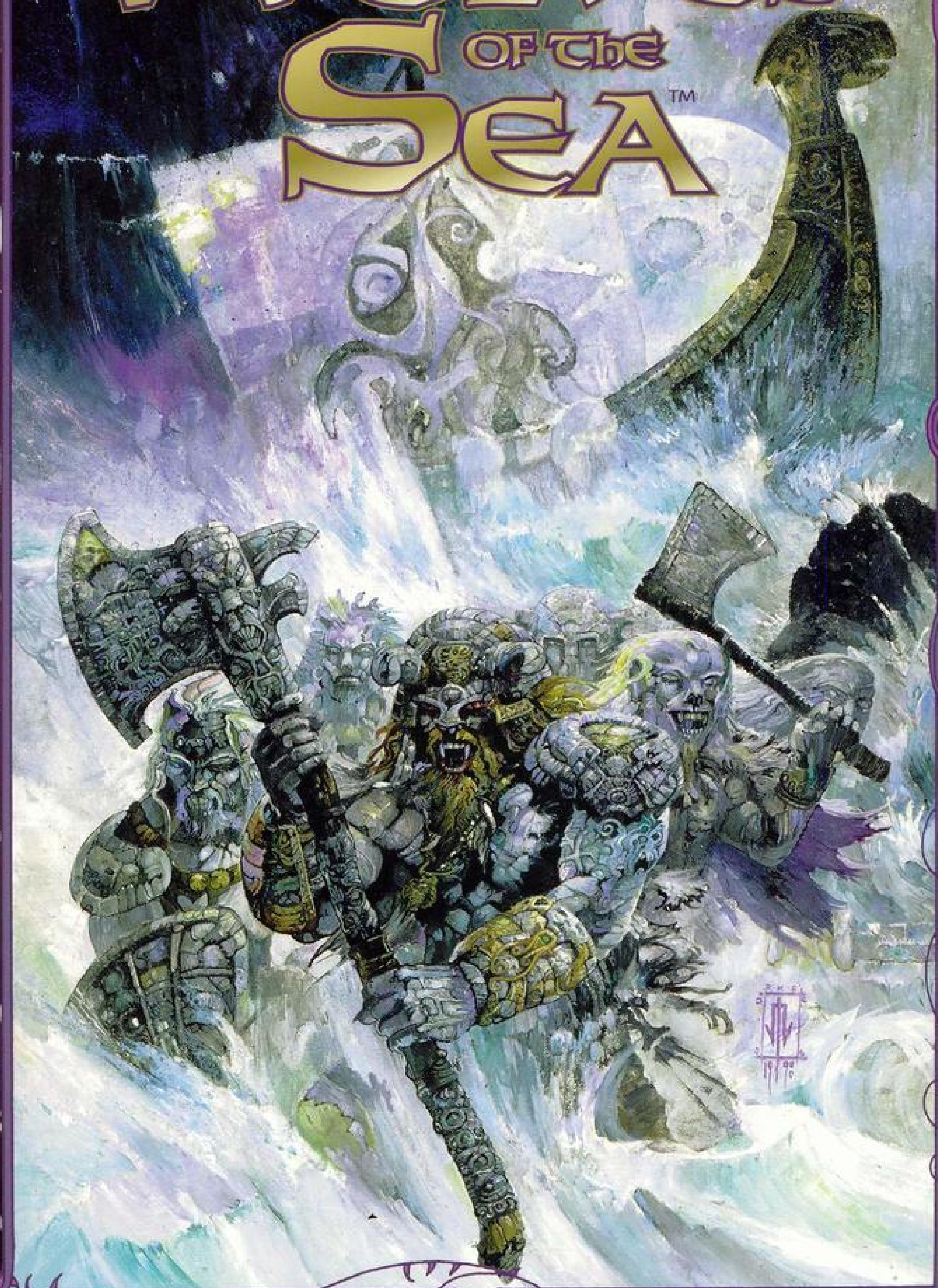


# WOLVES OF THE SEA™



A SOURCEBOOK FOR VAMPIRE: THE DARK AGES®



deeds is forever remembered. As more settlers come to the new land, your site can become the capitol and trading center for other colonists.

## CREW & WARBANDS

Each vampire has to make a decision about the nature of the crew he desires to sail with, or the type of warband with which he wishes to surround himself. There is danger in trusting mortals with the secrets of unlife, but there are certain costs inherent in creating ghouls, as well. Each option has its supporters, and some find a comfortable mix between the two.

### MORTALS

The Norse place a great deal of value on oaths, and observe them with diligence. If a vampire can gain the oaths of his nearest followers, to protect him at all costs, then the mortals make for a loyal following. The trick is to gain these oaths. Most often, these are oaths that carried over from the time before the Embrace. However, the Norse do swear to vampires that are brave warriors and leaders.

The Norse respect the luck of their leaders and if a leader can bring prosperity, whether she is alive or undead is of little importance. As long as the vampire maintains the respect of her followers by bringing wealth and happiness, she rules. This can be a tricky balancing act to maintain, but the result is a motivated warband.

The danger of employing only mortals is free will. The Norse greatly value their individual freedoms, and exercise their own discretion when they can. If a Norse warrior feels mistreated or put upon, he may decide that an oath is broken and leave. If things turn bad for more than a few seasons, he may decide the luck of the leader has turned. The usual result of this is the attempted destruction of the *jarl*.

Scandinavian *einherjar* rarely hold the Traditions of Blood in the same regard as their more ancient European contemporaries. Indeed, many vampires walk openly among the Norse, claiming prestige and power from their closeness to Oðin's blood, and like that god demanding crimson sacrifices. The Norse attitudes on courage, honor and forthrightness rarely change with death; as a result, Norse vampires feel little need to hide from mortals. Indeed, the promise of strength and eternal youth is a compelling one, and many warriors willingly enter the pact of servitude of ghoulish existence in order to enjoy the benefits. Of course, by the time that Christianity comes to Scandinavia, these tendencies change — the Church has no tolerance for the walking dead, and those who do not learn to hide their natures from their slowly converting brethren become supernatural terrors to be hunted. Indeed, even during the pagan era, the incautious or over-proud *einherjar* may find angry mortal warriors a threat, considering their lack of fear and their battle-prowess.

### WOLVES OF THE SEA

The Norse have their superstitions regarding the dead, and not all are willing to put these aside just for some success in battle. If the vampire *jarl* isn't careful, the trusted *huskarls* could decide to deal with him as they would any barrow-wight. Worse, they could call in the Christian priests to deal with the problem. However, as long as the vampire keeps his end of his bargains and obeys the laws of the community, he is little more than a warrior chosen by Oðin — at least until the Christians come with their rather deadly views on vampirism.

### GHOULS

Ghouls are the alternative to mortals. The ambitious vampire may try to ghoule an entire crew of a longship, some 35 warriors, to keep them loyal. The problem with such a plan should be obvious, however — 35 mouths to feed. A vampire maintaining such a crew would have to recruit additional vampires to help, leading to complications of Blood Bonds and conflicting loyalties.

Still, the all-ghoul crew has its advantages. All the warriors become very strong and long-lived. Ghouls are much less fragile than their mortal counterparts, and thus need less replacing. A vampire doesn't need to hide her condition, and issues like sailing at night don't need explanation.

#### DRAWING OUT THE BERSERK

One benefit of surrounding oneself with an inner circle of ghouls is only apparent with the mastery of the Animalism Discipline Drawing out the Beast. The *huskarls* provide an excellent repository for the Beast, and are often willing recipients. Once in the throes of Frenzy, the warrior often resembles a berserk, and with her increased strength and ability to shrug off wounds, can be a terrible and frightening opponent.

### MIX & MATCH

The most common solution to the problem of mortal and ghoule is to mix the two. Typically, the *huskarls* of a *jarl* are his ghouls, while the rest of his crew and people remain mortals. This has the advantage of keeping the number of ghouls that require blood manageable, while also providing a core of trusted warriors to protect the vampire in times of trouble and uncertainty.

Recruiting the *huskarls* is rarely a problem, since they receive exemptions from field work and gain the benefits of being a ghoule: strength and longevity. All a warrior has to do is ask to join. After a year or two, to judge the supplicant's worthiness, the *jarl* decides whether or not to add him to the ranks of the inner circle.

In an arrangement like this, the ghouls are respected in the community. They embody the characteristics of brave warriors and protect their master. However, not all ghouls live

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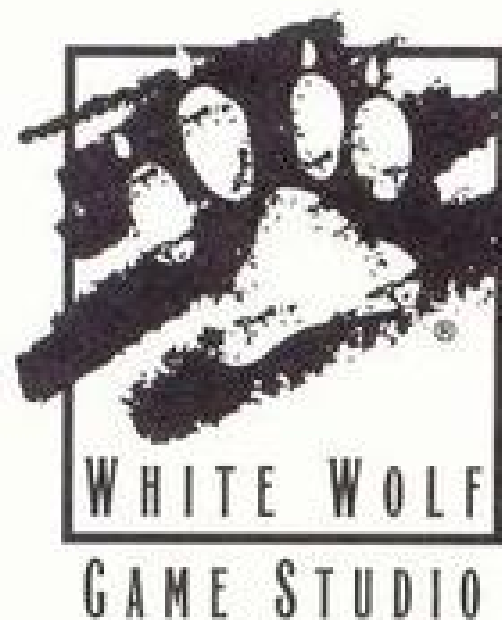
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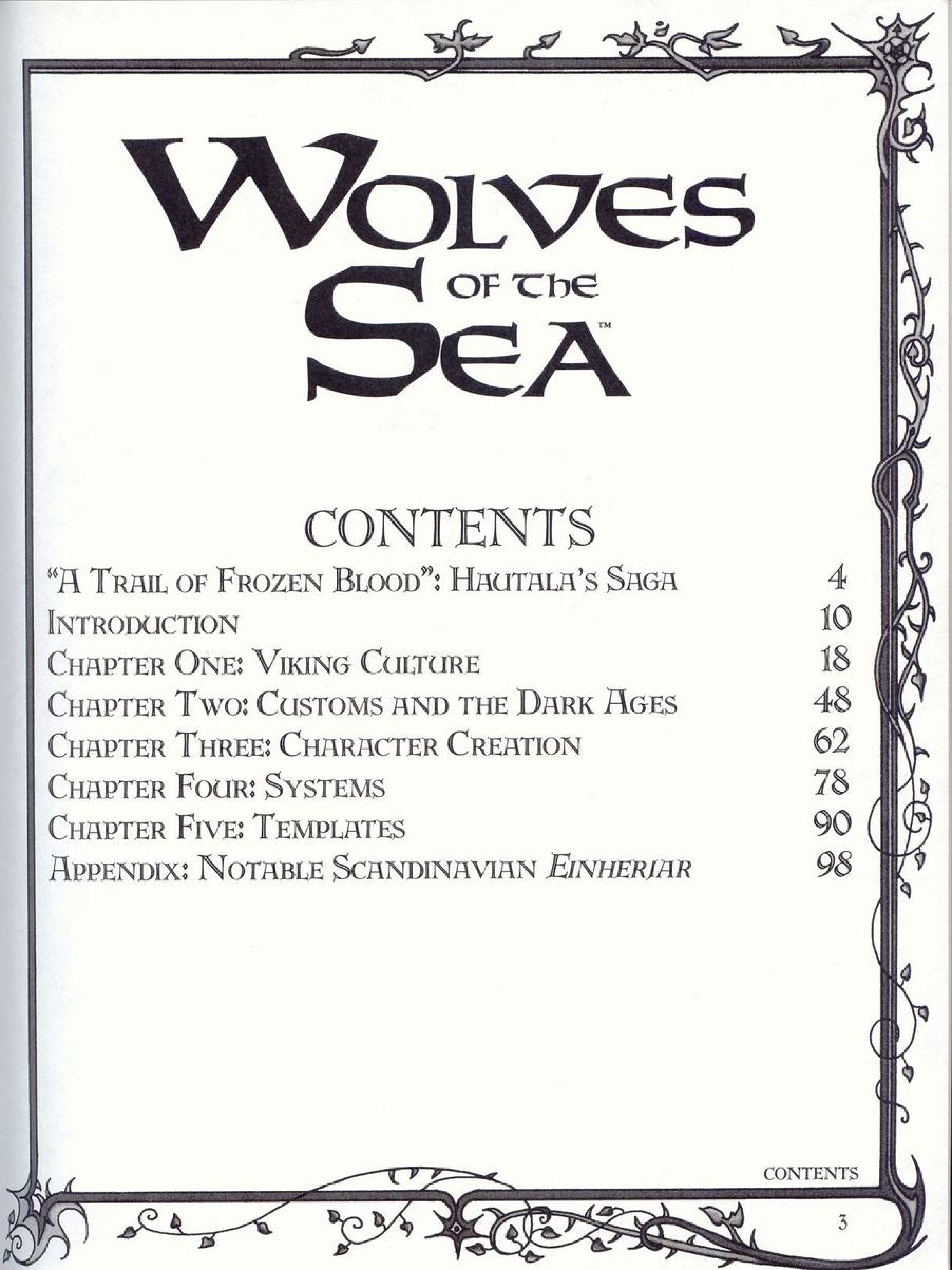
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# WOLVES OF THE SEA™

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# Trail of Frozen Blood: Gautala's Saga

BY ROMAN A. RANIERI

The wind howled with the voice of death.

Gautala pulled his cloak tighter to his chest as the long ship neared the ice-choked shore. The air was cold, freezing; but not as frigid as the intense stares he felt along the back of his neck. As a Finn, he was constantly aware of the need to prove his worth to this band of fierce Norsemen. Erik the Wolf moved easily across the icy deck to stand beside his second-in-command. The chill deepened.



"Are you sure that this is the right island?" Erik growled. Hautala flinched. "Yes, Captain. This is the only island they could have reached before this morning's sunrise."

Erik pulled open his own cloak and tossed it aside, showing his disdain for the cold as well as his second-in-command, and ignored the ice that instantly began to form on his leather vest. He was not known as *the Wolf* simply for his bloodlust in battle, but also for his temper in all other matters as well.

"But are we in time?"

Hautala hesitated, unsure of the response his truthful answer would provoke. But his honor demanded that he speak the harsh truth at any cost.

"Captain, I fear that even now it is too late. The *vargr* surely have killed your daughter or made her one of their own. I pray that she is dead."

Erik's massive hand crushed the ice from the front of Hautala's cloak as he pulled the smaller man toward him.

"Guard your tongue, Hautala, else I remove it and feed it to my dogs. My daughter is alive and well. They took her for a ransom. I am sure of it. If they have harmed her in any way, not even Odin will find enough of their bodies to feed his worms."

"Calm yourself, Captain. I spoke only to prepare you for what we *might* find. Do you not remember what happened to King Hrothgarsson's daughter?"

Erik's fingers tightened dangerously near to Hautala's windpipe. "It will not be the same now. Hrothgarsson was a weak fool. He waited too long to give chase. We Norsemen have always been the hunters, never the hunted... Hrothgarsson forgot that and his daughter paid with her life for his cowardice."

Hautala pulled back to lessen the pressure on his throat. "Captain, I fought beside you in many battles, and came with you now prepared to die to save your daughter. Why do you dishonor me in this fashion?"

Erik's features softened in the waning light of the winter's day. "Yes, Hautala," he said, barely above a whisper, "you have served me well as a warrior and as friend. But your constant whining for caution enrages me. *Warriors* care not for caution. We win our battles in blood."

"As do the *vargr*, Captain."

Erik stared at the smaller man for a moment before shoving him aside. Hautala opened his mouth, then thought better of it. Now was not the time to confront Erik.

There was too little daylight left, and the night, Hautala feared, would prove to be much too long.

The western sky was all but consumed in fire when the bow of the ship scraped against the island's rocky shore. Hautala signaled, and two men leaped into the icy water and began pulling the hull away from the seductive grip of the tide.





"Ready yourselves, men," Erik yelled as he drew his sword from its sheath, "a bounty of gold to the man whose blade kills the most *vargr*!"

The warriors roared in one voice. "To *Oðin* and to *Signe Eriksdotter*!"

"That she may still be the *living* daughter of Erik," Hautala whispered to himself.

"Then let us make quick work of our vengeance while the sunlight still gleams upon our blades."

The ferocity of the men's war cry filled the approaching darkness and scattered the few living creatures that called the island home. But even as he drew his own sword and fell into step behind his captain, Hautala knew they were rushing to a battle they had little chance of winning, unless Freyja could somehow temper The Wolf's own blind, vengeful hunger for blood.

The men crested the low hill of coarse sand that separated the shore from the island's rocky terrain when Erik stopped them.

"Where?" he asked, turning to his second-in-command.

"Look for a cave," Hautala answered, "it is the only place they could escape the sun."

"We search for a cave," Erik bellowed. "Look sharp... but let no man enter the cave before me. The first kill shall be mine."

The men surged into the silent heart of the island as if a treasure-laden vault was in their sights. Bellows and shouts filled the deepening twilight. The hunt had begun. Soon, blood, from the living or from the walking dead, would flow as water. Hautala could only hope that if his own blood was spilled this night, it would mean his death, and not the far worse fate of an eternal *vargr*.

"Here!"

At first, the call echoed from the rocks, giving no direction. Then Olaf raised his sword above his head and shouted again. "Here! Captain. I've found the cave... and this."

Hautala felt his heart shudder within his chest when the young warrior lifted a woman's shawl into the air. It was torn and bloodied, but there was no mistaking the white wool, nor the blue threads woven along the border of the cloth. All the men had been there when Erik had taken this shawl from the sacked holdings of an Irish nobleman, proclaiming that it would make a fine gift for his daughter, *Signe*.

Erik screamed in rage and ran toward Olaf. "Show me the cave!" he bellowed.

"No, Captain!" Hautala yelled, "we must have a plan. If we rush into the darkness, the *vargr* will slaughter us!"

"Enough of your cowardice, Hautala," Erik raged, the heat of his anger blazing within his cold, steel-gray eyes. "Stay behind if you must, and may your worthless soul go to *Hel's* hall for your fear!"

Erik turned toward the cave and screamed a war cry of his family. The crew echoed his shout, then leaped down the rocky slope behind him.

Hautala hesitated.

His heart and mind fought a terrible battle. His heart tried to force his body forward, stung by the insult to his bravery. His mind held his body back, certain that a berserk attack would fail.

Suddenly, just as Erik and his men reached the edge of the shadows cast by the larger rocks, a figure appeared inside the mouth of the cave.

The Norsemen stopped. It was *Signe Eriksdotter*.

"Father," she called, her voice quavering, "do you come to strike me down?"

Erik took a single step forward, lowering his sword slightly. "Signe, have they harmed you? Are you well?"

"Yes, father. I am well. Please, put your weapon away. Come to me. Hold me."

Erik's jaw dropped in disbelief as he hesitantly came forward. "But we found your shawl," he stammered, "the blood."

"I stand here before your own eyes, unharmed. Please, father. I long to be safe within your strong arms. Please embrace me."

Tears formed in Erik's eyes as his love for his daughter overcame his warrior's instinct. He pointed his sword away from *Signe*, but did not return it to its sheath.

*Signe* smiled as her father's massive arms encircled her in the treasured hug she remembered from her childhood. His harsh beard scratched against her soft cheek as she reached up to remove his helmet.

Almost too fast to see, two *vargr* rushed out from behind *Signe*, grabbing Erik's arms. Erik bellowed in rage and began to struggle. *Signe* clenched his beard in her fists and wrenched his head to the side. Long fangs glistened in the dim light as she lunged at her father's unprotected neck.

"No!" screamed Hautala. "Get back into the sunlight!"

The Norsemen glanced around, realizing suddenly that the setting sun had moved, thrusting them into the shadow of the rocks. Before they could regain the light, several *vargr* charged at them like a pack of starving wolves. Many brave warriors were pulled to the ground as they swung their weapons vainly. Their screams of frustration and agony echoed in the small canyon of tumbled rocks.

Hautala howled mightily, rushing down the rocks toward the carnage. He came to a skidding stop at the edge of the shadows. The scenes of horror froze him where he stood. *Vargr* feasted at the throats of struggling Norse warriors. Gleaming blood spurted from severed jugular veins as the vampires fed with languorous motions, sucking up the precious liquid.



A lone *vargr* rose from the dead bodies of defeated Norsemen and slunk toward Hautala. He stumbled backwards, flailing wildly as he fell. The *vargr* leaped, its fully-extended fangs glinting like sharp daggers. Hautala swung his sword with all his might, slicing through the neck of the *vargr* that was about to land on top of him. The headless body landed a few feet to Hautala's left. The carcass smoked as the waning, yet still potent sunlight seared the rotting flesh.

Hautala scrambled back further away from the deadly shadows, then got to his feet. He shuddered at the ghastly carnage as the remaining *vargr* moved away from the drained, lifeless bodies of the Norsemen. They parted as Signe moved forward.

"Hautala, my father's trusted friend and comrade, come to me. I have known your face since I was but an infant. Kiss my cheeks again as you did when I was a small child."

"You vile demon!" spat Hautala, "you are not the Signe who played at my feet as a young girl. She is dead!"

"No. Not dead. I am gloriously alive! More alive than I have ever been before. As a *walkurie*!"

Hautala turned, and began to run along the rocks, keeping well clear of the shadows. An image had leaped from his memory, and with it, a plan. He had seen a stunted scrub forest not far from the spot where he and the Norsemen had beached their long ship. If he hurried, he could gather dry wood, stand in the sunlight still shining weakly high on the rocks, set the wood aflame and hurl it down upon the vampires.

The slippery, rock-strewn terrain challenged every step as Hautala raced against the setting sun. He had to be careful. A broken ankle or dislocated knee would leave him nearly helpless as night fell. And he knew that with the darkness the *vargr* would swarm upon him like a flock of ravenous vultures. He gathered huge a armful of branches and parched shrubs, desperation allowing him to carry more than he could have under normal circumstances. Moving as quickly as he dared, Hautala dashed from the dying forest to the rocks above the accursed cave, then back again, gaining speed with each trip as his wary eye measured the descend of the sun.

The vampires called up to him, enticing him to come down among the shadows and receive the Embrace into their clan, but none dared leave the protection of the shadows. Hautala ignored them with the intensity of a man resolved upon a single goal. Soon, their entreaties turned to curses as they guessed his plan.

Finally, Hautala stopped, hoping that he had amassed enough fuel to turn the vampires' hellish cave into a cleansing inferno. The frosty air wheezed into his shivering lungs as he fumbled in his fur vest for the pouch that held his flint. His hands trembled as he struck the flint into a small pile of dried moss. On the fifth strike, the moss caught fire. Hautala carefully brought the burning moss to his mound of branches and shrubs. As the wood and leaves ignited, he heaved them down into the mouth of the cave.



The vampires screeched with rage, and with terror as many of the blazing projectiles found their marks, setting aflame the dead flesh of the *vargr*. Vampires in burning agony raced into the depths of the cave, unintentionally igniting even more of their unliving ranks.

Hautala collapsed in exhaustion after heaving down his last branch. The cave burned brightly from within as wood and dead bodies fueled the pyre. In the flickering light, he could detect no movement down below. When he had regained enough strength, Hautala rose to his feet and headed back to the waiting long ship. Only a faint glow remained on the western horizon when he eventually reached the shore. The darkness of night was nearly complete. Hautala took a few deep breaths, then set his shoulder against the bow of the ship and shoved with all his remaining strength.

The heavy wooden hull moved not an inch.

Hautala gasped, then shoved again.

He had to get off this accursed island. How deep was that cave? How many *aftergangers* had survived his fire?

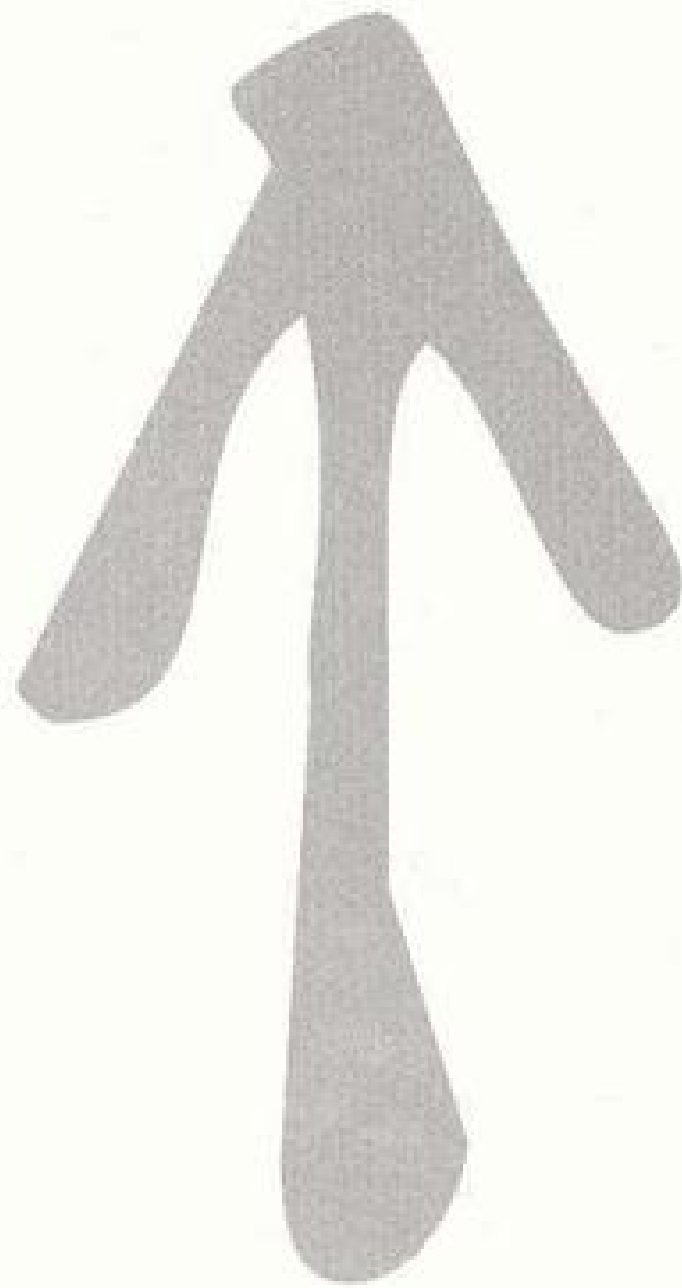
He shoved and shoved until he had nothing left. His only hope now was to wait for high tide to lift the hull enough for him to push it back into the sea.

Suddenly, a voice echoed across the barren rocks from a distance not very far away.

"Hautala!" it called.

It was the voice of Erik.

"I was wrong to think you a coward. You are the bravest, cleverest warrior I have ever known. Come. Join with me once again, old friend."









# I ntroduction

*Greetings to the host,  
The guest has arrived,  
In which seat shall he sit?  
Rash is he who at unknown doors  
Relies on his good luck  
- The Hævarnael*



There was a land north of old Europe, a land of frozen winters and endless howling nights. A land where once men of iron, free men, strong and proud, would take to the sea when the ice had left the *fjords*. They sailed south, to take riches from the churches of the weak Christ-god and the coffers of fat, dull lords. Those who faltered went down to Hel's hall, but those who found success won both riches and fame everlasting, as all of Europe learned to speak the word "Northman" with fear-trembling lips.

Now the golden days are gone. The Christ-god has swept away the worship of real men's gods and made the people fat and lazy. The old songs have been forgotten, and the blood of heroes is wasted on these piss-ant dwarves who brag themselves Nordmanni. But in the shadows and the wilderness, their eyes gleaming red fire from the ice-choked Scandinavian night, the real heroes are waiting.

And the heroes of old have not forgotten.

## WHAT IS THIS BOOK?

*Wolves of the Sea* details Scandinavian culture during the golden age of Viking, between 850 and 1050 AD. This book also details the *vargr*, the Einherjar holdouts from the days of legend. From their sea-tossed ships and from halls hidden deep in the wilderness, the slain warriors who rise through the grace of Oðin's blood carry on the Old Ways in defiance of history and the Church of the Christ-god.

Within these pages, the Storyteller and player alike will find a guide to the life and culture of the Scandinavian people from the fall of the Western Roman Empire until the era of *Dark Ages*: A culture of wolves whose lust for pride, for freedom, and for rapacious independence would not be equaled in the West until the American pioneers.

The Vikings came out of the frozen lands of the North, in Norway, Iceland, Denmark and Scandinavia, seeking wealth and conflict. Theirs was a society of rugged and enduring men and women who revered bloody-handed gods and valued courage and action above all other virtues. For two hundred years, they traded and pillaged across the coasts of England, Spain and other European countries, demanded tribute, sacked towns and monasteries, and yet also engaged in settlement and commerce. Like giants they strode across history, their ax-wielding berserks and canny explorers performing feats of bravery and prowess.

By the time of *Dark Ages*, the Scandinavians have settled down or been beaten back from the lands south of their homes, and the spread of Christianity is slowly assimilating their culture. The old days of terrible gods and sailing warriors are gone; now, merchants, farmers and even priests make up the bulk of the populace. A few still remember the old ways, but they are a dying breed, pushed out by the inexorable spread of Christ's word.





Of course, among a people so fierce and proud, there are bound to be a few who refuse to lay down their arms, whose passions burn so brightly that their fires cannot be extinguished. Among these hearty few are the true wolves of the North, and they draw the attention of those who would preserve their talents and gifts for eternity. Embraced for their courage, their skill at survival and their unrelenting ferocity, the *einherjar* of Scandinavia preserve the old ways, surrounding themselves with warriors who refuse to bow before the advance of Christendom. In frost-covered woods and isolated isles they make their homes, some even continue to travel the sea lanes as unholy terrors. When the sun sets for all of winter above the glacial North, the brood of Oðin rides the waves in darkness, hunting for glory, gold and blood.

**Chapter 1: Viking Culture** takes a look at pre-Christian Scandinavian culture, and Scandinavian culture in general. What did the Norse feel and think, how did their society work, and how did they live when they weren't engaged in pillage and rapine abroad?

**Chapter 2: Customs and the Modern Era** details the customs and practices of the *vargr* of the modern high North, with their strange democracy and their fierce loyalty to their antique religion.

**Chapter 3: Character Creation** covers making a Scandinavian character, be it a raider from the golden age of Viking to an anachronistic *vargr* to a modern Scandinavian gentleman, trading his wares in the marketplaces of a reviving western Europe.

**Chapter 4: Systems** helps Storytellers with the mechanical systems for modeling the feats of the Norse and the *vargr* of latter-day Scandinavia.

**Chapter 5: Templates** showcases some beginning-level *vargr* characters for contemporary **Dark Ages** games which can help evoke a feel for the Norse setting. They can be used as new player characters in a **Dark Ages** game, or as allies or antagonists in an existing chronicle.

**Appendix: Notable Scandinavian Einherjar** details the exploits of famous *einherjar* of the North throughout the ages. The most modern of scourges and the most ancient of heroes are detailed.

## GUIDE TO PRONUNCIATION

Old Norse and Old Icelandic use some characters which are likely to be unfamiliar to speakers of the modern English language.

Þ or þ — Thorn. Pronounced like the TH in 'thorn'.

Ð or ð — Edh. Pronounced like the TH in 'breathe'.

Æ or Ê — Ash. Pronounced like the 'A' in 'ash'.

## LEXICON

**Afterganger** — A common Scandinavian term for a vampire.

**Althing** — The Icelandic national assembly, which met each year to make important decisions concerning the Icelandic people, since they had no kings or *jarls*.

**Drakkar** — A longship smaller than a knorr, usually used for Viking and piracy.

**Einherjar** — In Norse myth, the spirits of the slain warriors in Valhal, who will fight at Ragnarök. Among Scandinavian vampires, some warriors style themselves *einherjar*.

**Einvig** — Unlimited personal combat. A duel to the death with no restrictions.

**Goði** — The closest Icelandic equivalent to a *jarl*. Goði had certain rights and responsibilities in the Icelandic democratic process, and acted as patrons to smallholders, but were not nobles as we would understand them.

**Hirð** — The boon-companions of a lord. They eat at his table, sleep in his hall, take his gifts of weapons, armor and wealth, and derive their positions from him. So long as he can feast them and gift them, they must stand beside him to the death, both on and off the field of battle.

**Holmgang** — A highly stylized ritual that can be described as either a duel or a trial by combat, depending on your point of view. Combatants exchange sword or ax blows until one is unable to continue.

**Huskarl** — A member of the *hirð*, a warrior who makes the bargain of mead and glory for loyal service to a lord.

**Jarl** — A noble of unspecified holdings, usually between those of a landed knight and a baron or earl. Unlike a *huskarl*, a *jarl* does not derive his position from his lord, but from his hereditary holdings. While there were formal differences, the mark of a *jarl* was the ability to keep a hall and men, and the line between *jarl* and freeholder was often blurry.

**Knorr** — A longship larger than a *drakkar*, usually used for trade.

**Outlaw** — Beyond the law. A punishment for certain serious crimes. An outlaw has no right to *wergild* if slain, and his killer need not announce the deed.

**Soul-Bite** — To drain another's spirit essence, the term for Diablerie among the vampires of Scandinavia.

**Thegn** — The lesser partner in the Norse equivalent of a feudal contract. A king's *jarls* are his *thegns*. Among vampires, a *thegn* is one who labors under the Blood Oath.

**Thing** — The local assembly of a district. Democratic or semi-democratic, the *thing* manages affairs of justice and various other issues of local interest.

**Vargr** — Norse for "wolf." Used to refer to outlaws, bandits and members of Clan Gangrel, as well as more mundane wolves.

**to Vike** — To vike, or to go Viking, is a verb describing the activity of traveling abroad, usually by ship, to grow rich and gain glory by sack and pillage.



**Viking** — One who vikes. A generic denizen of the High North who does not engage in acts of banditry and rapine is Norse or Scandinavian. Everyone outside of academia ignores this, however, and so the book uses Viking in both its technical sense and in the generic sense of being an alternative to Norse or Scandinavian.

## RECOMMENDED READING:

A great deal has been written about the Viking age, ranging from contemporary accounts of their depredations to modern guides purporting to reveal to the credulous reader the secrets of Scandinavian sex magic. Because this book cannot hope to cover its topic in a more than glossary fashion, the following list of books is suggested for those Storytellers who want to gain a more complete understanding of Norse culture.

### FICTION

**Hrolf Kraki's Saga.** Poul Anderson. Baen Books, 1988. ISBN 0-671-65426-8

A transliteration of the saga of the Danish national hero King Hrolf. Anderson makes the saga accessible for a reader who has only passing familiarity with Norse culture of the period.

**Rheingold.** Stephen Grundy. Bantam Spectra, 1995. ISBN 0-553-56945-7

A transliteration and combination of the *Volsungasaga* and the *Nibelungenlied*, combining the better parts of both narratives. Lengthy, but easier for a modern reader to comprehend when compared to the originals.

**Northworld.** David Drake. Ace, 1990. ISBN 0-441-84830-3

**Northworld 2: Vengeance.** David Drake. Ace, 1991. ISBN 0-441-58615-5

**Northworld 3: Justice.** David Drake. Ace, 1992.

An SF adaptation of various Norse myths and sagas. Don't laugh — the books are extremely accessible compared to the traditional versions of the stories, and worth some attention simply for the adaptation into the Sci-Fi genre.

### LITERATURE

**The Prose Edda.** Snorri Sturluson. trans. Jean I. Young. University of California Press, 1954. ISBN 0-520-01232-1

Written by Snorri Sturluson for reasons which are the subject of intense academic debate, the Snorri Edda is a guide to Norse myth and the composition of saga literature in written form. Snorri's text succeeded far beyond his expectations. Snorri single-handedly founded (and nearly single-handedly wrote) a genre of Icelandic literature that preserved for posterity many of the stories and legends that were dying out with Christian influence and the passing of time. The text of the Prose Edda can be challenging, but the degree to which it is central to our understanding of Scandinavian mythology cannot be overstated. In many cases, the Snorri Edda is the sole source of information about Norse cosmology and religious myth.

### WOLVES OF THE SEA

**Beowulf.** Penguin Classics, 1973. ISBN 0-14-044268-5  
Heavily Christianized, and not strictly a Norse saga, Beowulf is relatively accessible and widely available. If you are reluctant to read saga literature, Beowulf's popularity as an academic text means a great number of highly readable editions are available.

**Volsungasaga.** trans. Jesse L. Byock. University of California Press, 1990. ISBN 0-540-06904-8

The classic Norse saga of the Rheingold and the doom it brought to those who owned it. An excellent read and a perfect introduction to the Norse tradition of heroic narrative. Volsungasaga and the later Nibelungenlied formed the core of Wagner's Ring Cycle operas.

**Nibelungenlied.** trans. Margaret Armour. Heritage Press, 1991.

A later, German version of the Volsungasaga. Composed in the Medieval heroic tradition rather than the Norse style, the Nibelungenlied is closer to the Song of Roland or the Arthurian narratives than to the sagas from which it springs. The body count would make Chow Yun-Fat blink and the story is less coherent than that of *Volsungasaga*. On the other hand, it has the strength of well-developed characters like Hagen and Fokker the Gleeman.

### Brennu Njalssaga

Often translated into English as *The Saga of Burnt Njal* or *Njal's Saga*. Usually considered the most literary of the sagas, it is definitely a fine look at the complex legal system of the Icelandic anarchy. The complex narrative essentially culminates in Njal's voluntary martyrdom to stop a feud. This is roughly like saying that the King Arthur cycle is about a man whose wife has an affair with his best friend. Well worth reading, especially to give a feel for Icelandic litigation.

### LaxdÉlasaga

### Egilssaga

Other well-recommended sagas. LaxdÉlasaga is available online, and in translation by Penguin and no doubt from several other academic publishers. Egilssaga, also available from Penguin, is available online only in Old Icelandic.

### REFERENCE

There is a great deal of reference material written on the Vikings, detailing everything from their ability to sail across the North Atlantic to their daily life. Unfortunately, the Scandinavians began to record their history very late, and so while we have a great deal of cultural material, we have very little historical fact.

**A History of the Vikings.** Gwyn Jones. Oxford University Press, 1968. ISBN 0-19-285139-X

Jones' work provides a fine, relatively accessible overview of the topic. This text was the basic reference in common between the writers on this project.





*Everyday Life in the Viking Age.* Jaqueline Simpson. G.T. Putnam's Sons, 1967

Aimed towards a youth audience, this book has plenty of information on everything from the games Vikings played to the daily routine of their lives. A great resource for anyone trying to get a sense of the Vikings.

*Norse Gods and Giants.* Ingri and Edgar Darin d'Aulaire. Doubleday, 1967. ISBN 0-385-04908-0

A synoptic work intended for a young audience, with lots of beautiful and colorful illustrations, d'Aulaire's work is a summary of the Norse myths for a casual reader.

*Medieval Iceland: Society, Sagas and Power.* Jesse L. Byock. University of California Press, 1988. ISBN 0-520-05420-2

A highly academic work detailing the intricate structure of obligation and advocacy that was the Icelandic Free State. Almost certainly not available without special order, this book makes a superlative reference for Storytellers with a firm grounding in the sagas and Scandinavian culture, who want to set a game in Iceland. This book focuses a great deal on detail and Icelandic legal structure.

*The Penguin Atlas of Medieval History.* Colin McEvedy. Penguin Books, 1961.

The text is centered on Western Europe (so there is little writing about Vikings), but the maps are an invaluable guide to the ebb and flow of kingdoms and culture across the Medieval world. A must for any Dark Ages Storyteller.

### INTERNET RESOURCES:

For every specialized hobby, there is at least one homepage (and quite possibly more). Norse studies is no exception. Below are a few pages worthy of note, most of which have extensive Links sections.

*The Hævamæl.*

<http://asatru.org/havamal.html>

<http://members.aol.com/nkpage/nikweb.htm/highone.html>

[http://home.c2i.net/espenjo/home/edda/havamal\\_e.htm](http://home.c2i.net/espenjo/home/edda/havamal_e.htm)

"The Sayings of the High One." The Hævamæl is a collection of sayings credited to Oðin, and a part of the larger Elder Edda. Profoundly reflective of Norse culture and attitudes, as well as containing a great deal of common sense worth reading in the present day. This one text is a must-read for players or Storytellers who wish to play characters in or influenced by Viking-era Scandinavia. While the three versions are not identical, they are similar — the multiple pointers were included to allow for web rot.

*The Norse Classics Page.* <http://members.aol.com/nkpage/nikweb.htm/norse.htm>

A large collection. Contains the Elder and Snorri Eddas, *Nibelungenlied*, *Volsungasaga*, and several *Beowulfs*. Also links to Saxo Grammaticus' *History of Denmark* and Tacitus' *Germania*.

INTRODUCTION



D.L. Ashliman's Folktales. <http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/folktexts.html>

A collection of academic translations of folktales from around the world, with a very strong emphasis on Germany and Scandinavia. This site contains multiple translations, including some hard-to-find material.

University of Kansas translations FTP site. <ftp://ukanaix.cc.ukans.edu/pub/history/Europe/Medieval/translations/>

Most of the major tales of the European heroic corpus are present on this FTP site, from the *LaxdÉlasaga* and *Erybygiasaga* to El Cid. A must for any Dark Ages player or Storyteller interested in European heroic legend.

## A VIKING ERA TIMELINE

- 793: Raiders attack the monastery on the Holy Isle of Lindisfarne, between England and Scotland, on June 8. They sack the place and kill the monks, beginning the Viking era.
- 795: The Irish monastery on Iona is sacked by Vikings.
- 801: Iona is again sacked by Vikings.
- 806: Viking raiders sack the monastery at Iona for a third time, slaughtering 68 monks; the survivors finally flee the area in what becomes an all-too-familiar pattern.
- 836: A Viking settlement is established in Dublin, Ireland.
- 839: Turgeis, a Norseman, sets up in Armagh as "King of all Foreigners in the North."
- 841: Vikings arrive in Rouen and sack the monastery at St.-Wandrille de Fontenelle.
- 842: Vikings take over the Île de Noirmoutier in the Bay of Biscay, using it as a winter base.
- 845: Turgeis is captured by the Irish and drowned in Loch Owel.
- 850: Norsemen settle in England, attempting to capture and colonize London, Rochester, Canterbury and Winchester.
- 852: Vikings sack St.-Wandrille de Fontenelle again.
- 853: The brothers Olaf and Ivar establish Dublin on the bank of the Liffey in Ireland.
- 858: Vikings sack St.-Wandrille de Fontenelle yet again. This time, the monks flee with their relics, unwilling to suffer the constant attacks.
- 859: Hasteinn and Bjørn lead 62 ships from France through Spain, the Iberian coast, along North Africa, and into Italy. After sacking half a dozen cities, the ships make their way home to France in 862. Two-thirds of the fleet is lost, but Hasteinn and Bjørn return home fabulously wealthy and famous.
- 870: King Edmund of East Anglia is captured by Vikings. Refusing to renounce his faith, he is tied to a tree and shot to death with arrows.
- 874: The brothers Ingolf and Leif, based on reports from other sailors blown off course, set out for Iceland and begin colonization.
- 876: Members of the Lasombra clan set in motion a plan to Christianize the Vikings in order to mitigate their threat to Europe. This later leads to the formation of the Varangian Guard, as the Vikings become mercenaries for the Christian armies.
- 885: Danes offer to leave Paris unharmed in exchange for passage up the Seine. The French refuse, and the Danes attack Paris.
- 890: Concerned by the spread of Viking savagery, the Ventrue of England apply their influence to strengthen the local military for defense.
- 892: King Alfred the Great, of Wessex, builds a series of defenses throughout Europe. Forts and organized militia are raised to ward off the Vikings.
- 896: King Alfred designs a new fleet of ships and, for the first time, regularly defeats the Norse in sea combat.
- 898: A hasty convocation of Ventrue decides to undermine the Vikings by assimilating them. Vikings are offered the opportunity to take positions of power and responsibility, contingent upon their defense of the established order.
- 910: King Edward, son of Alfred the Great, kills the Danish king Halfdan and brings a halt to Viking power in England.
- 911: King Charles the Simple cedes the Duchy of Neustria to Hrolf the Walker, provided that Hrolf pledges fealty and converts to Christianity. Hrolf agrees one year later.
- 930: The Icelandic *Althing* is assembled, providing a central government without a king.
- 937: Vikings in Dublin ally with Celts in Scotland and invade England, but are defeated at Brunanburh by Athelstan and Edmund, sons of former King Edward.
- 976: *Brujah* manipulation in Ventrue courts assures dissension among mortal rulers, and Ethelred, heir to the English crown, becomes intractable, refusing any advisors or counselors.
- 978: Ethelred Unraed assumes kingship of England, setting up a reign of disaster later ended by the Vikings.
- 982: Erik the Red, exiled from his home, sets sail westward and discovers Greenland.
- 986: Several hundred Scandinavians set out to colonize Greenland with Erik the Red.



- 991: Olaf Tryggvason strikes England, and extracts a danegeld (ransom) from Ethelred, totaling 16,500 pounds of silver.
- 994: Olaf Tryggvason and Svein Forkbeard extract a danegeld of 12,000 pounds of silver from Ethelred.
- 996: Olaf Tryggvason is elected King of Norway, and sets about converting the populace to Christianity.
- 1002: The Danes gather 18,000 pounds of silver in danegeld from England.
- 1003: Sailing west with directions from the merchant Bjarni, Leif Eriksson (a Christianized Viking and son of Erik the Red) arrives in Vinland — the Americas — over four hundred years before Columbus.
- 1007: Danegeld in England reaches 27,000 pounds of silver.
- 1012: Ethelred pays a danegeld of 36,000 pounds of silver.
- 1013: Svein Forkbeard attacks England; Ethelred flees and Svein and his son Knut capture England. Svein falls from his horse and dies shortly thereafter, but his son carries on his work.
- 1014: Sigtyrgg Silkbeard attacks Ireland at Clontarf, near Dublin, but loses badly.
- 1016: Knut, son of Svein Forkbeard, is acknowledged as King of England.
- 1018: Canute the Great sends his Vikings home. By this time, the rise to kingship spells the end of much of the old democratic ways of the Vikings, and their culture is subsumed by the Christianized military structure of Europe. The Viking era ends.







# Chapter One: Viking Culture

*From the east came ships all eager for battle,  
With grim gaping heads carved in gold,  
The battle began, the berserkers howling  
"Wolf-coats!" and wildly casting their spears.  
- Accounted by Snorri Sturluson*



Living in an almost perpetually frozen land with limited food and metal, the Norse must rely on their own resourcefulness and unflinching courage to survive. Naturally, with their longships and fierce independence, they quickly took to raiding outside cultures for sustenance and wealth. Yet even in their hoary homes, they survive by farming and herding, spreading to colonize other lands as opportunities present themselves. Where their wanderlust intersects with other cultures, they engage in trade; when the encroachment of Europe spreads into their territories, they extract tribute. For over two hundred years they dominate the sea lanes and most of the lands of the far north.

The Viking warrior is engraved in the minds of men everywhere as a fierce sailor with ax, shield and mail armor. Quick to anger and prizing action over contemplation, they epitomize the terrifying fighters and raiders that sweep across Europe and the oceans. Yet, even with their brutal ways and bloody wars, they evolve a powerfully independent and ritualistic culture. The towns of Scandinavia develop a system of obligation and responsibility that hints at the democratic process. The legal system of Iceland flourishes and the blood-feud turns into a means of settling disputes instead of a simple tool for revenge. Skalds compose stories that resound throughout the ages with the myths and legends of a stalwart, proud

people. This dichotomy of honor and bloody-handed warfare meets to define the Vikings as a complex and compelling people. Naturally, the vampires among them are just as vicious, deadly and imposing.

## SCANDINAVIAN CIVILIZATION

The root of any culture lies in the way that its people gather their daily bread. Scandinavia is no exception. A harsh land with short, mild summers and long, dark and brutal winters, the climate and geography of the High North dictate a way of life that made the Norse a grim people, eager for new land. In the Age of Migrations, it drove the Germanic tribes south, to push against the Roman empire in an attempt (often successful) to gain new lands. In the Viking age, conditions once again sent young men against the shores of Europe in search of wealth from pillage and trade, new lands to settle, and above all the undying fame of glorious deeds. By the time of Dark Ages, such incursions have trickled off, but the vampires who still remember and practice the old ways continue to revel in the glory of past deeds.



WOLVES OF THE SEA



## AGRICULTURE AND GEOGRAPHY

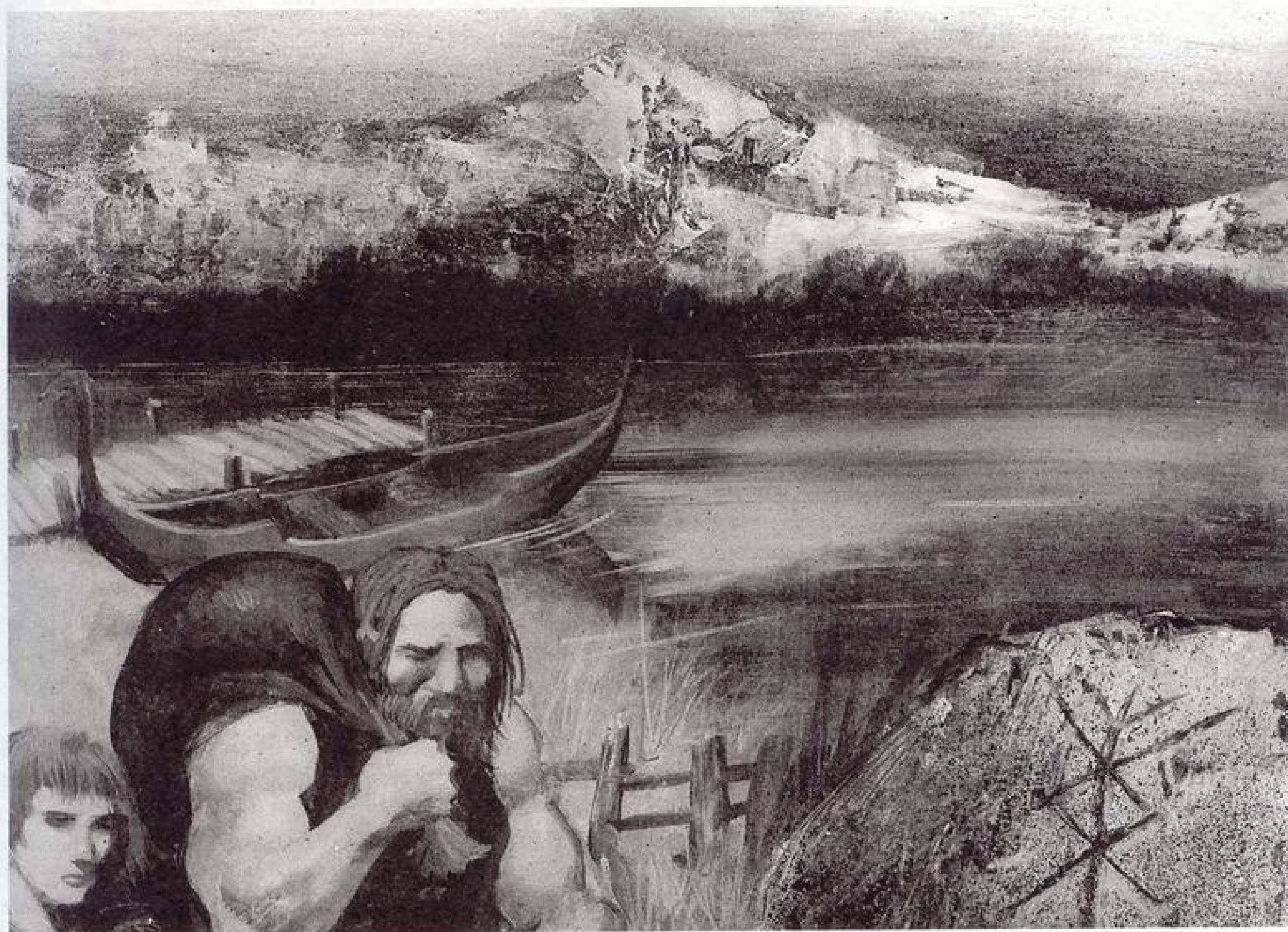
The main source of food for Scandinavia is agriculture, and a poor subsistence it is in the medieval era. The crop rotation system and wet climate make grain difficult to cultivate, and winters are in many cases so severe that in the spring the farmer must carry his livestock in his arms from his cottage out to the pasturage.

Not only are the weather conditions harsh in Scandinavia, but arable land is scarce as well. In Norway and Iceland especially, arable land is a precious commodity, passed down through a family and protected by law and tradition against tax and confiscation. With so little surplus wealth to be had at home, the Norse are driven to trade or raid abroad if they wish to secure personal wealth, or in some cases the very necessities of life. Likewise, the rugged character of the land prevents easy conquest by aspiring local empire builders, and makes the sturdy individualism and the community-oriented democracy and justice that characterizes Viking-era Scandinavia a requisite for survival rather than a freedom to be aspired to. The Norse do, however, recognize what a priceless asset their liberty is and are extremely contemptuous, like most nomads

from marginal regions, of what they see as the soft and slavish life of the more organized civilizations to the south.

Finally, while the geography and politics of Scandinavia make a quiver full of offspring (especially sons) desirable, they also encourage sending second, third, fifth and further sons out into the world to seek their fortune elsewhere after reaching adulthood. Thus are born a great mass of men who seek fortune and glory undying under the banner of some great or famous lord or hero. It is these second offspring, as well as outlaws, political refugees and other outcasts who crew vessels and expeditions headed south and east, bound for plunder and trade or seeking new lands to settle.

For *einherjar*, the settlements of the north are dangerous but thrilling places. A vampire must be clever and strong to survive, just like the people upon whom she feeds. Hunting is difficult because of the lengthy summer days, the stubborn independence of the people and the small size of communities. Conversely, the Scandinavians highly respect strength and power; in a small agrarian community, a vampire has the opportunity to use her powers to establish a small fiefdom, demanding blood-sacrifice from the farmers in exchange for protection.



CHAPTER ONE: VIKING CULTURE



## EXPOSURE

Exposure of deformed or unwanted infants is a long and hallowed tradition in the High North. In most cases, the child is brought before the father immediately after birth and he decides on the spot if the child should be left out on the midden for the dogs or not. While this is a grim practice, keep in mind just how brutal existence in Scandinavia is during the medieval period. There is no room at all for the congenitally disabled in a society where the margin of survival is narrow enough that livestock are so weak from hunger they must be *carried* out to pasture in the spring. In Iceland, the issue of exposure was a significant enough matter that protection of exposure practices from Church censure was one of the conditions of the national conversion to Christianity in 1000. Exposure no doubt seemed just as harsh and inhumane to the people involved as it does to any modern man, and these choices were just as painful for them as they would be for us.

## VIKING

From the raid in Lindisfarne in 793 until the end of the Viking age in 1070, all of Europe from Spain to Paris lives in fear of the Viking fleets. Alone and in fleets numbering as little as two to as many as 50, the ships of these reavers wreak two centuries of terror and bloodshed on the European landscape. Those places that are strongly held, they raid; those places that are divided, like Ireland and Britain, are invaded and settled.

Viking raids are not a matter of national policy, rather they are private ventures. Individuals attach themselves to a prestigious leader in search of riches and fame. The leaders then head south when the weather permits, going as far south as they dare and plundering hundreds of miles up the great rivers of Europe.

These raids for swag and glory can be epic, in their own squalid way. In 844, a fleet of 150 ships plunders as far up the Garonne river as Toulouse, possibly as part of a civil war taking place at that time in France. The fleet then sails south and, after much skirmishing and pillage, sails up the Guadalquivir to sack Seville, though the Vikings end up besieged and are lucky to slip the noose of Abd al-Rhaman II's troops.

Björn Ironside, who seems to have operated from the isle of Oscellus, plunders the Seine in 856-7 and is besieged by Charles the Bald, though the siege is lifted by the treachery of Charles' nobles. Besieged again by another Viking named Weland operating at Charles' request, Björn and his men are forced to flee, leaving Weland 11,000 pounds of silver richer both from Charles' *danegeld* and Björn's ransom. Björn then embarks on a four-year odyssey of rapine that takes his 62 ship flotilla to Spain, North Africa and Italy. The Vikings fail to

take Seville, but do manage to sack Algeciras, Narbonne, Pisa, Luna, Pamplona and most of the coastline between Norway and the harbor of Egyptian Alexandria.

The life of the Viking isn't all plunder and glory, however. Vikings who arrive in numbers too small to panic the local militia run the risk of simply being rounded up like criminals and hung out of hand. For every man who goes a-Viking and comes home rich, there is another (or two, or five) who dies without glory on a farmer's spear or the gallows, or who drowns in a capsized ship. Of Björn Ironsides' 62 ships of raiders, only 20 return, their crews thinned considerably. Of course, those who come back alive are so unfathomably rich they often have problems conceiving of *how* to spend it. The risk must seem worth it to many the third son of a fisherman-farmer whose only alternative is a life of working as a hired man, if he is lucky, or a bondsman if his luck runs sour.

## ARDENT CAPITALISM

Sooner or later, the Scandinavians go everywhere. Sometimes they go there to steal everything small enough to carry and burn the ruins, and other times they go to sell goods to anyone who stands still long enough for them to make their pitch. Not only are they the most rapacious raiders in Europe, the Norse are its most ardent capitalists. Equaled only by the Arabs (who are some of their most regular trading partners) the Scandinavian peoples are merchants extraordinaire. Whether they are selling the wool and cheese of Scandinavia or previously owned valuables from the city a few day's sail up the coast, the Scandinavian merchants are eager and willing to travel to make deals happen. In the Viking age, the trade routes of the Norse stretch by sea from North America to Spain. To the east, they stretch across the Baltic and down the great rivers of Russia to the Black Sea. And those are only the *regular* routes; the daring trade farther abroad than that: Vinland, Greenland, Iceland, Byzantium, Persia, the Maghreb, France, Iberia, Ireland, England. The list includes every nation in Europe and the Middle East with a coastline or navigable rivers.

The Vikings travel and trade and sack across a great deal of the known world, to the point of discovering a few new places in their search for wealth. During the period of their ascendancy, the Scandinavians are substantially closer to having an actual cash economy than anyone else north of Constantinople or Spain. Cash is a regular medium of exchange in the High North, and even a cotter is likely to use coinage as well as kind in his purchases. The degree to which cash economies are ingrained into Norse culture is demonstrated by the Icelanders, who maintain an economy based on legal ounces of silver on an island practically bereft of actual coinage (though other goods and jewels are sometimes used for trade).

The importance of capitalism to the Norse is hard to overstate. Perhaps because of their individualistic outlook or the highly marginal nature the Scandinavian region under





medieval agricultural practices, the Scandinavians make the exchange of goods and services central to their way of life. Both murder and marriage are business propositions, and a *huskarl* is bound to his lord through the gifts of mead and mail, table and sword that he accepts. In Iceland during the Free State, in the absence of royal authority or any form of organized executive power, this is even more pronounced. Iceland at this time is the largest chaotic state of free-trading individuals ever documented.

## THE CULT OF THE LEADER AND THE QUEST FOR GLORY

*Mead is sweet, but bitter when paid for*

— Norse aphorism

Hand in hand with Norse individualism and capitalism go the cult of personal magnetism and the quest for immortality through fame and glory.

Powerful influence is held by those who promise riches and renown to their followers. Indeed, Norse culture centers on deeds and actions, and those who act with surety draw the admiration of their fellows through tales and sagas. Most

Viking raids are led by one or two very charismatic men who attract followers to themselves through force of personality and the promise of celebrity and swag.

The men who follow these leaders and form the coteries of petty kings and heroes throughout history are of two types. The first are the simple followers, who work with a leader of their own free will in exchange for a share of the proceeds. These followers come and go as the fortunes of a leader rise and fall, no one man any more or less loyal than another.

The leader's closest followers, however, are different. Known as his *hirð* or warband, they have thrown their lot in with their leader. In return for their loyalty throughout their lives, the *hirð* receive special consideration. If the leader is a Viking or other reaver, then the *hirð* receive first choice of the spoils. If the leader is a petty king, then the *hirð* sit at the head of his table, drinking mead as well as ale, and their lord gifts them with arm rings of silver, coats of fine mail, weapons, food and lodging. So long as the leader can fulfill his side of the bargain and bring them glory and riches, the *hirð* are pledged to stand at his side, be his men in all things, and die with him in battle.



Because a position in the *hirð* is so rewarding if the leader is successful, there are always plenty of young men eager for glory and riches willing to cast their lot in with a would-be hero. This is the origin of the armies that second and third sons competing for a succession seem to be able to conjure from nowhere. Each such warband is full of men eager to win the property and privilege of a *huskarl*. This bargain, mead and riches for loyalty and service, leads many young men to lonely deaths under foreign skies. But the rewards for those who succeed are more than enough of a lure to keep youths dreaming of fame and riches despite all odds.

*Einherjar* who keep halls no doubt find the bargain of the ghoul, of boundless strength and ageless youth, easy to incorporate into the rituals of the *hirð*. Whether the vampires inform their mortal minions of their conditions or not, the cult of personal loyalty is tailor-made for the brood of Oðin. Manipulative Ventrue and Lasombra are likely to indulge in bands of followers conditioned with the Blood Oath, but even Gangrel warriors who take up the position of *jarl* can be found with ghoulish warbands. Primarily, the fact that the exchange of service and loyalty for generous gifts is a central part of Norse culture helps the whole process of creating ghouls seem much more natural. *Hirð* members may be openly promised the Blood as part of the contract between the lord and his warband. Alternately, it may be put in their mead under some false pretense during the ceremonies celebrating their joining the warband, as part of some three-night ritual of loyalty. Thus do the ritual's effects on the warrior add to and reinforce the Blood Oath.

The quest for the immortality of fame is as important to the Vikings as the quest for wealth and power. Like the ancient Greeks, the Norse know well the temporality of life. Their marginal existence leaves them no illusions about their own mortality, and the Norse view of the underworld gives them no hope for a better life after death. Thus they, like the ancient Greeks, seek the immortality of legend. The *Hævamæl*, the wisdom-sayings of Oðin, says "Cattle die, kindred die, every man is mortal: But I know one thing that never dies, the glory of the great deed." To die, even as a rich man, is to become nothing more than clay, or to go to Hel's hall and drink only dust from empty cups. To die in a great endeavor is to gain immortality through the memory of one's deed. The brave hope to live forever in saga, and to fare to Valhal to join the *einherjar* after death, to fight beside the *Æsir* against the *jotuns* and the fire-demons on the day of Ragnarök.

The almost atheistic approach towards death makes the Norse much more accepting of the *einherjar* condition than the Christians of Europe. While the *aftergangers* are often seen as unnatural and more than mildly repulsive, those who choose their state as a way to survive through the course of centuries are not considered unholy. They may be thought of as dangerous, bestial, vain and cowardly in the face of death and old age, but *einherjar* lords are still able to live openly and

## FEMALE LEADERS IN SCANDINAVIA

While the lot of Scandinavian women is often painted as a grim one, there are precious few, male or female, whose lot in the High North during the Viking period is not grim. Norse culture certainly offers far more opportunity to highborn women than any European or Mediterranean culture. Not just limited to merely being the power behind the throne, women openly hold power all over Scandinavia during the Viking age, primarily because of the cult of personal magnetism. While women rarely fare onto the battlefield or go a-Viking, wisdom is considered at least as valuable a trait in a leader as a strong arm. The Norse are an extraordinarily pragmatic people, and anyone capable of attracting men to his or her side and leading them to glory and riches can gain a hold on power, regardless of sex.

Unnr the Deep-Minded was the daughter of the Norwegian warchief Björn Buna and wife of a Viking king slain in Ireland. Unnr came to Iceland with her people and settled a large territory in the Breiðafjörð region, shared her land out among her *jarls* like any other lord, and ruled them until her death around 900. Ethelflæd was queen of Mercia after her husband Ethelred's death in 911. She and her brother Edward king of Wessex, continued their father Alfred's work in containing and subjugating the Danes in England, reconquering it for the Anglo-Saxon peoples. At the time of her death in June of 918, Ethelflæd and her brother were prepared to strike at the heart of the English Danelaw.

These two notables are only a few of the dozens of women who hold thrones in the Scandinavian region during the Viking Age. Despite Norse laws prohibiting women from speaking out at *things* or holding lands, the practicality of the Norse supports strong women. Any woman able to gather a group of freemen or wealthy enough to control several dozen farms is certainly too powerful to be challenged by the fine points of the law. Only with the coming of Christianity and the feudalization of the petty kingdoms of Scandinavia does a woman's ability to hold power decline. Even so, the region is more accepting of strong females than Continental Europe.

to send someone to the marketplace without the servant getting stoned. Respecting strength and charisma, the Norse are far more likely to consider the vampiric condition a blessing — eternal vigor, incredible powers and the ability to heal rapidly — rather than a curse.





## NORSE POLITICS AND SOCIETY

Until the end of the Viking Era, when the Scandinavian region becomes feudalized, the politics of Scandinavia are the politics of petty kingdoms and agricultural communities. From Denmark to northern Norway, history progresses for over a thousand years as petty king succeeding petty king. Each lord fights his wars, conquers or is conquered by his neighbors. When a kingdom is weak, it dissolves in civil war, succession crises, or from the predation of its neighbors. Large scale unification started somewhat before Christianization, first in Denmark, then in Norway under Harald Hardradi. Arguably, the unification of Norway (which disintegrated again after Harald's heir, Eirik Bloodaxe, proved unable to hold the kingdom together) was just a passing phenomenon, similar to King Hrolf's legendary work at unifying Denmark. However, once done, it would attract imitators and hopefuls, and the unification of Norway as a single kingdom eventually became a reality.

### THE "DISTRICT"

The basis of Scandinavian politics is the district, similar in size to a European county or set of several small holdings. While the name applied to this region varies from location to

location, its size and general purpose remain constant. At the center of each is a gathering place that serves as a marketplace, a meeting place for the local *thing* and no doubt as a muster for whatever passes as the militia during times of strife.

The foundation of Scandinavian society is its smallholders, fiercely independent householders who are usually farmers, fishermen or a combination of both. Because the smallholders are free and un beholden men, a rough democracy is the general rule. Disputes and crimes are put before a local assembly, usually under the watchful eye of one of the king's *huskarls* to assure fair play and an outcome acceptable to the powers that be. In Iceland, with its extremely chaotic colonial settlements, there are no *jarls*, and cases are instead appealed to the local *thing* or (if they are thought very important) brought before the four "Quarter Courts" of the *Althing*. Fair play in Iceland is a matter of wealth and reputation — a man must have the help of a respected local who can make sure that the *thing* or *Althing's* verdicts are upheld.

Social *einherjar* no doubt have some difficulty unless they live as full-fledged petty kings. Householders are expected to show up at the *thing*, not to send one of their hired men. While a vampire may be able to convince the local *thing* to meet at night (Presence is helpful on such occasions), he is quite likely to operate at a major disadvantage in the tangle of under and over the table deals and rapidly-shifting alliances that comprise Scandinavian local politics, simply because of his inability



to involve himself in the deals taking place during the day outside of the *thing*.

## THRALLS

Like all pre-modern agriculture, Scandinavian agriculture is based in part on forced labor. While Scandinavia uses less enforced labor than continental Europe, slavery is still commonly practiced in the Norse world. Slavery dies out quickly in Iceland due to local conditions; with large amounts of arable land and the lack of central *jarls* and lords, men are free to farm and live as they please. Slavery in Scandinavia ends with the introduction of Christianity, though many, thralls and freeman alike, are reduced to peasantry instead, so this may not be as much of a net gain as it seems.

The thralls in Norse society have grim lives ahead of them. They are property, and can be bought or sold. If killed, they have no bloodprice, though their owners are entitled to compensation. They may marry, but their children are born thralls. Manumission — freeing of slaves, or the purchase of freedom — is permitted, but there is no legally fixed price of freedom (though no doubt there were local conventions). Thralls are also used for the occasional human sacrifices demanded by the Norse religion, and to feed the appetites of ravenous *einherjar*. Indeed, a vampire with a store of silver or trade goods can simply purchase thralls from a local smallholder, much like a farmer might buy cattle — and to much the same ends....

All in all, the bondsman's life is a grim one, though it is not without some highlights. The condition of a man's thralls is as important an indicator of a man's status as that of his livestock and hall. In the materialistic Norse world, this means that even if the lord is going hungry, the thralls are likely to eat as well as he can afford, to keep up appearances. Also, there is no ethnic character to thralldom in the Norse world. Anyone can become a bondsman, and many a saga hero spends a time consigned to chains by the misfortunes of war or shipwreck. The Norse make no attempt to pretend that their thralls are subhuman, in need of their protection, or destined by Oðin or God to serve them. The thralls are just unlucky enough to be on the bottom — any man who finds himself in debt or helpless in a hostile land may well be enthralled. While this seems like a small favor in return for a large curse, it no doubt makes the lives of many thralls a good deal easier, as well as making manumission possible. After all, a thrall is less likely to revolt if there's hope for eventual salvation.

Vampiric lords, of course, keep thralls for different reasons than their human counterparts. A small stable of thralls makes for easy and excellent feeding; since thralls are property, killing the vessel is only an inconvenience. Entire generations of thralls are spawned to feed the appetites of their vampire lords, since the children of thralls are themselves thralls as well. Thralls also perform mundane tasks and upkeep, especially during the day, without need of pay. A vampire who has no desire to support a band of raucous and hungry *huskarls* may keep thralls instead, as the thralls do not require constant gifts of silver and weaponry.

Particularly sadistic and jaded *einherjar* send their thralls into competitions of battle and endurance; while a valued *huskarl* cannot be wasted on such frivolities, a thrall is easily replaceable, and the entertainment of watching humans debase themselves and fight bloodily to the death is the kind of entertainment that most intrigues old vampires.

## JARLS

A *jarl* is a landed noble whose possessions range (to provide a Continental scale) somewhere between those of a landed knight and those of a baron or earl. Large enough to keep a hall and a table for full-time hired men, the *jarl* lives on the produce of his lands, the fees of justice, the proceeds of warfare and possibly taxes on the local marketplace. In Iceland the chieftains (called *goði*) do likewise, subsisting mainly on the rents of their lands and the proceeds of arbitration. A *jarl* usually lives in a (very) loose semi-feudal relationship with a local petty ruler. The lines between successful farmer, *jarl* and king are blurry, however — Viking-age Scandinavia is a golden land of opportunity and adventure, provided that the budding social climber is prepared to engage in a certain amount of bloody-handed rapine. A farmer successful enough to keep a large table and a hall is effectively a *jarl*, and a king is little more than a highly successful *jarl*.

*Jarl* is the social class most suited to social *einherjar*: powerful enough to support hired men and a hall, but not so powerful as to attract the envy of other petty kings eager to exploit the *einherjar*'s daytime weakness. Even *vargr*, especially those opposed to the Christianization, may choose to keep an isolated hall to support their campaigns.

## KINGS

The Scandinavian concept of leadership is a spiritual as well as a temporal one — a chieftain, be he petty king, *jarl* or *goði*, is the leader of his people, the bringer of good harvests, and is intimately connected with the health of his community. Life in Scandinavia is meager in the extreme, and a chieftain's performance of ritual religious duties is considered an important safeguard for his people's welfare. Be warned — a leader whose luck fails him may be driven out or even sacrificed to Oðin or Þonar to bring good weather and harvests.

The benefits of leadership are many, though Viking kings, like *jarls*, are considerably poorer than their Continental cousins. While a petty king can subsist on the fees of his office and the produce of his personal holdings, those who wish to be great or glorious are most often driven to trade or plunder.

Succession in Scandinavia is irregular, to say the least. *Huskarls* of the king's *hirð*, sons, strong-willed wives and daughters all have equal chances at gaining control of the kingdom after the reigning lord's death. Sometimes the king appoints an *heir apparent* or divides the kingdom into equal portions for his offspring or loyal followers before his death. Regardless of attempts to the contrary, civil strife (if not open warfare) is the rule and not the exception. The refugees and



members of the losing sides in these civil wars add to the ranks of the raiders and migrants who lap at the edges of European civilization during the Viking era.

When exerting long-term control over large areas of territory, disputed succession is not in the best interest of hidden vampire masters. A vampire who does not take up the mantle of petty kingship himself must prepare for the problems of succession. Often, this means killing or neutralizing the opposing (uncontrolled or undesirable) parties, while maneuvering the vampire's favored (and properly groomed) candidate into position to take the throne. With the power of Disciplines like Dominate and Presence, and the ability to hunt and kill mortal adversaries with relative ease, this is not a very difficult proposition — until a rival *einherjar* becomes involved. Backed by feuding vampires, separate sides of a battle for kingship can quickly go from disorganized feuding families to irregular armies, as the unbreathing lords pull the strings of their agents to make their puppets work in tandem. Naturally, once random insults and the occasional murder are swapped for purposeful hall burning and massed slaughter, blood-feud and war are the final result. In such situations, one side or another is generally destroyed utterly before the matter is resolved. In rare instances, an *einherjar* may back down from such a challenge, abandoning his unwitting servitors and striking out for more amicable territory elsewhere (either by settling or by conquest), but *einherjar* pride more often results in a conflict to Final Death.

## FEUD AND THE NORSE CONCEPT OF HONOR

The rugged individualism of the Norse makes for a tightly-bound system of honor and retribution, that forms the basis of much of their culture. The Scandinavian region is incredibly harsh, a land of extremely limited agricultural resources, brutally frigid winters and difficult terrain. Only individuals of equally rugged disposition can survive here. The crushing burden of life in Scandinavia breeds a people far more warlike, individualistic and self-reliant than the Greco-Roman, Celtic and Germanic peoples to the south. Land of limited arability means that people must band together in order to survive, but there are not enough resources to actually empower any sort of noble class. When late frost or a poor harvest results in starvation, only those brave enough to fight for their lives will survive; they kill without hesitation and remorse, raiding other towns for food and money. In a society so tightly-knit yet violent, only rigid codes of honor and behavior keep men from killing each other outright.

This sense of self-reliance and individualism is best expressed through the Norse concept of personal honor and the feud tradition. The Norse ideal of honor is unswerving and



CHAPTER ONE: VIKING CULTURE



fatalistic; it stresses uncompromising bravery in the face of any and all danger, absolute adherence to oaths and promises, total loyalty to friends and family, grim acceptance of hardship and a personal dignity that tolerates neither mockery nor failure. The degree to which it is honored varies from individual to individual, but the Norse sense of honor is far closer to the Roman ideal than to the Japanese. There is no implicit acceptance of duplicity and subterfuge as the grease that makes society run; there is no superficial appearance of adherence to a rigid moral code, only honor or disgrace. Also unlike Japan, while the Scandinavian ethical code is a selfish one, it is ultimately practical. No self-respecting warrior considers suicide when there is something to be done, no matter how hopeless the task. To commit suicide is to admit fear, and cowardice is the only sin the Crow-glutter admits.

Central to the Scandinavian concept of honor is the tradition of feud. When an individual is wronged, restitution must be made. In some cases, particularly in Iceland, this may be nothing more than a settlement in kind, negotiated by a third party. In the case of severe offenses (especially those committed intentionally), cooler heads cannot be brought to bear on the question while still satisfying the demands of honor. The result: a feud.

Some feuds start between individuals and without bloodshed. Eventually, however, most of them come down to blood and family. The mechanism is simple: An individual who feels wronged retaliates as best he can, either against the person by whom he was wronged or against someone or something close to that person. The target of retaliation responds, and a bellicose chain ensues, as each party seeks to equal or better

### INSULTS AND THE BRAG

The Norse are masters of both the insult and the brag. The difference between an insult or brag in the North and one of a more southerly inclination is that the Norseman is probably not uttering idle words. Norse insults are verbal preludes to combat. No true warrior would face an opponent without first vilifying him, slandering him and questioning both his manhood and his lineage. Trading insults — especially screamed invectives — is the Scandinavian equivalent of throwing down the gauntlet.

Likewise, a brag is a public declaration of intent. Warriors boast before a battle of the feats that they will undertake, each attempting to outdo his peers in promised acts of heroism. After the words are uttered, however, there is no going back. A young warrior who says he will capture the opponent's banner during an upcoming battle *will* capture the banner, or he'll go to Hel's hall for trying. He has said that he will, and that's the way it is. Accordingly, most Scandinavian warriors had brief but glorious careers.

the other. As individuals are killed or request aid from their friends and relatives, the feud expands, and takes on a more encompassing character. Eventually, the main point of the feud becomes irrelevant or falls by the wayside as greater numbers of participants become involved.

Some feuds are short-lived, but others drag on for generations of bloodletting and revenge. Particularly in Iceland, where no centralized authority exists, an intricate system of feud and arbitration has developed to keep the peace. The Icelandic feud system resolves interpersonal disputes in the absence of a king or other agency of enforcement. In the rest of Scandinavia, feud is recognized and (at least until the coming of Christianity) legitimate, though local rulers in different times and places suppress or attempt to suppress certain feuds, or feuding in general.

### STARTING A FEUD

Feuds can and do begin over any number of issues. Seduction, livestock and property theft, murder, insult; anything that the offended party feels merits retaliation can mark the beginning of a feud. Depending on the nature of the disagreement, the feud might begin immediately, or it might hold off for some time and begin when calculated to bring the most discomfort to the target. A feud usually takes a public exchange of insults, followed by an equally public murder, to really light a fire. However, the root cause of the feud and the temperaments of those involved also have a great deal to do with the dispute's evolution.

It should be understood that, even outside of Iceland, feud is a socially *stabilizing* force, rather than a socially destabilizing one. While feuds, when they occur, are bloody and long-running affairs, the threat of certain retaliation prevents a great deal more violence than it encourages. Even when long-running feuds do erupt, they (like going Viking) provide an outlet for economic and social pressure in the fragile agrarian communities of Scandinavia without resorting to open, extended warfare.

### BLOOD FEUDING

Not every feud is a bloodbath. Even the most heated feud between desperate enemies has periods where the combatants engage in little more than stock theft and rumor mongering while they search for allies, file lawsuits or seek the king's justice, and attempt to renew exhausted resources. Some feuds, especially Icelandic feuds, are little more than long-running legal battles. These sorts of disagreements over boundary stones and the disposition of a stolen heifer are the primary function of the local *thing*, as well as the day to day concern of petty kings, *einherjar* or otherwise.

Frankly, however, **Vampire: The Dark Ages** characters aren't likely to be pressing suit with the next farmer down the fjord over the ownership of a couple of ewes that seem to have gone missing. Their feuds will be the stuff of saga, with surprising betrayals, desperate alliances and bloody resolutions. The material that follows is tailored accordingly.



Storytellers who want a more mundane Chronicle are probably willing to do research into period regional stock, property and agriculture law, in any case.

## VAMPIRES AND FEUD

Given the passion and tragedy of the immortal unliving, it's no wonder that vampires become caught up in feuds both long-running and terrifying in their intensity. Indeed, the mortal pawns of vampires may find themselves in the midst of generational feuds that serve the purposes of their shadowy *einherjar* manipulators. For creatures with a great deal of time, little fear of death at the hands of mortals and a taste for melodrama, the feud is a superlative form of entertainment.

Though Norse *einherjar* do not have the courts and protocols of nobility, their puppeteering struggles are no less intense. Indeed, for a northern vampire to carry out a feud against an opponent, entire families and lines of friends are called into play; often, the puppetmaster must rely upon close relatives and acquaintances, not the faceless pawns of the Europeans' games. A carefully-chosen word of discord here, a slight against someone's honor there, and suddenly a bloody feud emerges, which the vampire hopes to use to eliminate an adversary — or simply as a distraction from other plots. The aged vampire *jarls* manipulate lines of succession and marriage

in order to ensure the proper blood-ties to bring in more allies when a feud erupts, while outsiders are scrutinized for any potential disruptions that they may cause. When the minions fall and the feud is played out, circles of brothers and sons are dead, houses are burned and village leaders are ousted. Such turmoil, of course, makes it easier for the vampire to exert personal control and to avoid scrutiny. Small wonder, then, that many northern *einherjar* (especially the few women, who must work through hidden manipulation) show a skill for bloody-handed orchestration that would raise the eyebrows of European Magisters with appreciation.

The vampiric *jarls* of the north are not all shadow-players, though. Passions run hot among the Norsemen and hotter in the breasts of the undying. While an *einherjar* may arrange a feud in order to gain a particular objective (ousting a troublesome leader or destroying the pawns of a rival), a warlord is just as likely to undertake a personal vendetta against another who has slighted him. With the scope of vampiric power and the assistance of allies bound by the Blood Oath, such recriminations are often swift and brutal. Still, a determined circle of mortal warriors can stand against an *einherjar's* attentions with the proper preparations and equipment. Such events can even lead the vampire to take a personal hand in the feud, instead of merely directing aides and lackeys. Indeed, when the situ-





ation threatens to spiral out of control, the Norse lords of the night tend to step in to direct matters personally, as befits their warrior heritage. Weak is the leader who will not confront his enemy directly, steel bared and a challenge on the lips. Should a feud with an adversary — vampiric or otherwise — move beyond the reach of a vampiric *jarl*, that *einherjar* may well don his armor and gird himself for personal battle, striding directly to the heart of the matter in his enemy's home.

## BLOODPRICE

As in the Germanic and Celtic cultures, murder in Scandinavia can be little more than a business transaction. Each person's life has a certain value, based on social class and generally modified by circumstance, including the number of relatives and hired men that both the heirs and the murderer could easily call on if it came to feud. This bloodprice, called *wergild*, is usually set by the local *thing* or ruler when the case is brought to their attention. The heirs of the deceased can either take the amount, or refuse payment and demand some other restitution, usually a duel, feud or declaration of Outlawry. Likewise, the perpetrator of the crime can refuse to pay the *wergild*, though the alternative is almost certainly becoming an outlaw.

Depending on the circumstances, demands for *wergild* can arise from strange quarters indeed. *Wergild* can be and often is demanded for men slain on the battlefield or during Viking raids, if their killer can be named and sufficient witnesses to the act produced. One can even demand *wergild* from the *hirð* of a lord; such a request is valid and proper — although it is likely to be lost in laughter. A petitioner who makes such a demand had best be prepared to back up his words with force, or to be thrown out of the hall on his ear.

While *wergilds* vary from individual to individual and place to place, there are some benchmarks. A Norwegian *cottar*, or smallholder, is worth two and a half gold marks, and an Icelandic citizen is worth 48 legal ounces of silver (an Icelandic unit of worth that has little to do with silver, but

## SECRET MURDER

Murder is an accepted part of Viking culture. As long as events of the murder are made public immediately, the simple process of feud and bloodprice takes over, and there is no particular social stigma (unless you happen to meet a relative of the deceased). Secret murder, however, is an offense as terrible as or even more odious than rape. Outlawry, confiscation of property and exile are the best that can be expected by someone found to have committed murder but subsequently concealed the deed. Being hung by the neck and left for the crows is another, more likely, fate. This particular taboo is likely to be an issue for Norse *einherjar*, who may have no choice but to conceal a murder committed during Frenzy rather than present a desiccated corpse to the local *thing* for inspection.

which totals to about 178 square yards of homespun cloth). A high-ranking *jarl* might be worth ten or twenty marks, while a petty king could be worth as much as several hundred gold marks, though these would probably be paid at least partially in livestock and property rather than cash.

## HOLMGANGA AND EINVIGI

The *holmgang*, or the Norse duel, is one way in which disputes can be resolved in the Scandinavian region. Similar in many ways to an ordeal, *holmgang* is a strictly regulated form of single combat. While the specifics vary from place to place, it generally involves an exchange of blows inside a tightly delineated area, making it somewhat like Irish Knockdown with swords or axes. The wronged party has first swing, then the accused, and so on until one of them is incapacitated or dead. Sometimes the combatants wear armor, while in other traditions they wear nothing, sometimes while smeared with bear fat. In game terms, these are basically Melee attacks that the target may not dodge. Because the blows are well-aimed, successes add to damage.

*Einvig*, a related custom, is an unlimited form of single combat. Any armor and weapons the opponents wish to use may be brought into the combat, there is no tightly constrained dueling area, and there is no rigidly prescribed series of blows. Dodging, blocking and parrying are permitted. The combat is, of course, to the death.

Both *holmganga* and *einvig* are illegal in Iceland, where they exert a destabilizing influence on the social system in the absence of a local ruler. They are also restricted to varying degrees among the Scandinavian populace in general depending on the strength of the local ruler. Both *holmgang* and *einvig* are used primarily to settle disputes of honor between *jarls* and *huskarls*, whose loyalty to their *thegn* prohibits long-running feuds. As Christianity spreads to the region and the historical freedoms enjoyed by individuals begin to erode under the centralizing policies of feudalism, *holmgang* and feud alike pass out of practice. A feudal lord's subjects are not his followers or protectorate, but his chattels and property, and undue freedom to engage in fighting is a waste of the lord's resources, as well as the Lord's resources (let's not forget those valuable tithes).

## OUTLAWRY

To be named outlaw is generally the ultimate legal punishment in Norse culture. While thralldom awaits the destitute debtor, family ties and the possibility of manumission — the ability to purchase one's freedom — make thralldom both uncommon and surmountable. To be pronounced outlaw, though, is to pass beyond the law. Any man may slay an outlaw with impunity, and the outlaw deserves no *wergild* (though that doesn't stop the dead outlaw's blood-brother, father-in-law or hired man from sticking a spear through the killer's back three months later). Such is the nature of feud.

The proclamation of outlaw is a sentence of exile at least as much as one of death. Like ostracism or shunning, it leaves a man



bereft of protection in a hostile world, surrounded by enemies. Many outlaws run into the wilderness, and become bandits or servants of the dark powers of forest and winter. Others flee across the whale road, sailing to distant shores and seeking shelter at the tables of famous lords. Many of those who flee to other lands trail vengeful relatives and friends behind them.

A man pronounced outlaw can never again feel entirely comfortable, because there is always the chance that his past will catch up with him.

For a vampire, Outlawry results in *vargr* status — the *einherjar* must flee his home and find a means of sustenance elsewhere. This is not a difficulty for an already-wandering vampire, but a well-established *jarl* may find himself exceedingly discomfited should the *Althing* decide that his actions merit Outlawry. In such a case, the vampire has little choice: He must set out in search of a new community upon which to feed, or risk conflict with the entirety of his current home. While a vampire could conceivably destroy all mortal opposition, such a feat would leave the *einherjar* in the untenable position of having no herd upon which to feed — which means that the only real solution is to set out in search of newer and better fortunes elsewhere.

## ADVANCED FEUDING

The normal course of a feud is one of accusation, murder and betrayal. But some feuds, particularly those that become part of legend and saga, feature acts so heinous as to have a sort of dark grandeur to them. Because roleplaying is a dramatic medium, these acts are covered in detail here. Any one of these will either end a feud, or make it a matter of legend.

### THE BLOOD-EAGLE

The ultimate personal insult, the blood-eagle (later called the blood-angel) is a way of killing a man so as to convey a message of profound disgust for his friends and heirs. After the victim is rendered inert, several of his upper ribs are cut away from the spine. The ribs are then spread apart by main strength. The lungs are pulled out through the hole between the ribs and the spine and laid across the victim's back like bloody wings — hence the "blood-eagle." The blood-eagle is a work of butchery and cold-blooded murder, and requires not only strength of will, but also immense physical might and a not inconsiderable length of time undisturbed with the corpse.

The blood-eagle is not a popular method of killing, but in grand feuds it often figures prominently. Also, cutting the eagle is the proper way for a son to avenge his father's death. For example, story has it that in 865 the lords Ivar the Boneless, Ubbi and Halfdan led a great host from Scandinavia and Ireland to England to avenge the death of their father, Ragnar. Ragnar had been thrown into a pit of vipers by King Ella of Northumbria, and after decisively defeating the Northumbrian army, Ragnar's sons cut the blood-eagle on Ella's back.

Of course, since Cainites are both passionate and vindictive creatures, Scandinavian *einherjar* even moreso, the blood-eagle





## CUTTING THE BLOOD-EAGLE: SYSTEMS

The work requires an extended combination of Dexterity + Melee (Difficulty 6) and Strength + Athletics rolls (Difficulty 8). The *lowest* number of successes scored is counted. Each period requires four minutes, and the individual cutting the 'eagle must accumulate nine successes to finish the task. A Botch should be interpreted as the Storyteller chooses — cutting the blood-eagle is difficult and dangerous work involving lots of slippery blood and sharp knives. The difficulty should be increased if the act takes place in the dark or in silence. Hungry vampires cutting the 'eagle should make checks against the appropriate Virtue to avoid Frenzy. Vampires on most Roads except the *Via Diabolis* or *Via Einherjar* (avenging fallen fathers and Sires) will have to make Road checks, risking degeneration for such a heinous and bestial act.

A vampire who actually *suffers* the blood-eagle takes five levels of aggravated damage that may not be soaked, and loses five Blood Points (or the entirety of her Blood Pool, if she has less than five Blood Points). This may well destroy an already injured vampire, but more humiliating still is the possibility of suffering such an attack and having to regenerate the damage. Since the vampire is in considerable distress until the damage is healed, she is unable to hunt for herself or even move; getting enough blood to heal is therefore problematic at best. An *einherjar* had best have several loyal friends or retainers if she hopes to survive the blood-eagle.

is the least of the indignities inflicted upon their enemies. While the insult of the blood-eagle certainly serves to start a feud, a vampire may well exercise a reign of terror by cutting the blood-eagle on *anyone* to dispute his mastery. More telling still, an *einherjar* might actually *survive* having the blood-eagle cut upon his back; healing such wounds takes a great deal of time and blood, and any vampiric opponent may find the sun rising while she is still helpless from the injuries inflicted...

## HALL BURNING

No tradition is as hallowed in the saga and legend of feud as the burning of halls. From outside the hall, a single hero bent on revenge can fight many men by facing opponents one or two at a time as they come stumbling out the doorway. Trapped on the inside of a hall, a band of heroes can be forced to fight at a disadvantage, rather than fighting their way clear of a fray and making a break. Of course, *einherjar* in a burning hall face some unique challenges.



WOLVES OF THE SEA



## COMBAT, TURNS AND HALL BURNING

When the hall is lit on fire, timing becomes critical. Actions begin to take place in "periods," each five turns long. The first period begins as soon as the torches are placed under the eaves. Anyone sleeping in the hall must make a Wits + Alertness test (Difficulty 8) to awaken. If the character was drinking, her difficulty is increased by two. *Einherjar* substitute Perception + Auspex during the day, as per the normal awakening rules. The characters inside the hall may make one test each period. The difficulty of the test decreases by one for each period that passes, and those asleep must accumulate three successes to awaken fully enough to act (deep sleepers must accumulate five). No Willpower can be spent on the rolls until the first success is rolled. After characters awaken, they may take one action per period. Storytellers should stress the smoke and confusion and limit the actions that can be taken during a given period considerably. Fetching armor is one action, but donning it is another. Players of *einherjar* characters can roll once per turn, as normal, for wakefulness.

Players whose characters wish to fight the fires must make Stamina + Athletics rolls to do so. The difficulty of this test is equal to six plus one for every period the fire has been burning. Those fighting the fire must accumulate successes equal to three times the number of periods the fire has been burning to extinguish it. One test may be made per character each period, and a number of characters equal to the number of periods the fire has been burning may actively fight the fire caused by a given brand. If ale, water, or other liquids (unemptied chamberpots, etc.) are available to help fight the fire, subtract 2 from the difficulty of fire fighting rolls as long as the liquid lasts. *Einherjar* in a burning hall are going to be making Röttschreck rolls every period, and trying to beat out fires with their cloaks is going to raise the difficulty of those rolls significantly.

Note that the people outside the hall can continue to push brands under the eaves while characters inside fight the fires. People both inside and outside the hall can also play deadly little blind games of cat and mouse with spears and swords through the thatch while the fire-fighting process is going on. The *minimum* difficulty for such attacks is 8.

After ten periods of continuous burning, the hall will be hot and smoky enough that mortal characters must begin making Stamina checks unless they want to take deep breaths and die promptly of smoke inhalation. The base difficulty for such checks is 4, raising by one every five periods after the first. Active characters must try to soak three levels of damage if they wish to resist smoke inhalation. Characters conserving their breath must try to soak one level of damage. Characters who are extremely active (fighting fires, battering holes in the walls, meleeing in the doorway) must attempt to soak three levels every *turn*. This smoke inhalation damage heals quickly (within a day or two) but is lethally incapacitating at this crucial moment.

Attempts to batter a hole in the wall require a Strength + Athletics or Melee check, depending on whether tables and chests or axes and swords are being used. The difficulty varies from 8 to 6, depending on the suitability of the tool to the job. Five successes or more must be accumulated to bash a hole, and a botch probably means a flaming timber weighing several hundred pounds has been dislodged from the ceiling and smashed someone flat (oops). If battering is used, the hole smashed is large enough for several persons to exit through at once. If an ax or sword is used, only a single person can exit at a time.

Battering and chopping through the walls is largely futile in halls made of logs rather than timber. Cutting through the thatch requires Strength + Athletics or Melee rolls, whichever is higher, on a difficulty of between 6 and 8, depending on suitability. Three successes must be accumulated to open the hole. In the cases of both battering and roof-cutting, if the successes are not all accumulated in a single period, those outside the hall can react, and wait for the victims to exit. Storytellers should feel free to limit or prohibit such escape attempts after a certain point, as the structure is too far gone for the side walls to be approached.

If those inside attempt to fight their way out, up to three individuals (or two Crinos-form Garou) can block the door from the outside, and only one person can generally attempt to exit at a time. Those outside the hall have automatic initiative on those attempting to fight their way out for the first round of attacks, and the character attempting to fight his way out cannot dodge their attacks. At least one of those waiting at the door must be incapacitated or knocked out of the way, at which point anyone waiting behind them can join in the fight outside without running the gauntlet. The fight should be resolved via the regular Storyteller combat system from that point on, unless those from the hall retreat back inside and the door becomes blocked again.



The list of heroes who die in or face a burning hall is nearly endless. Njal, the hero of *Njalssaga*, burns to death in his hall, and his son Skarp-Hedin dies defending the doorstep. Likewise, in the *Nibelungenlied*, the doomed last stand of Guther, Hagen and Fokker the Gleeman is made more miserable by fire, though by virtue of being heroes in a Medieval romance rather than a true saga, they withstand the flames and still kill several hundred men afterward.

The standard method for burning halls is to wait until late the late hours of the night, just before dawn, when everyone inside is sure to be asleep. After a feast is best, when the hall's inhabitants are numb from the drinking and difficult to awaken, and the sentries, if any, are also likely to be drunk. After any sentries are murdered, burning brands are thrust or thrown under the eaves, where they ignite the dry underside of the hall's thatch roof. Those kindling the hall then stand outside the entrance or entrances with swords or axes, waiting for inhabitants blinded and weakened by the smoke and fire to emerge one at a time.

Unless the inhabitants awaken immediately and fight the fire, the hall is doomed. Since a hall-burning is often the work of a number of individuals working together to put several brands under the eaves at once, even immediate response may not be enough. If the fire cannot be extinguished, the butchery begins.

There is usually some time before the hall is consumed, as the wooden support beams burn slowly, and even though the inside thatch burns well, the outside is perpetually damp. If the inhabitants of the hall awaken early enough, they may even have time to don armor before fighting their way out of the hall.

Whatever the case, the inhabitants must either fight their way past the door, or attempt to make another exit. This may involve cutting through the thatch with a knife, sword or ax, or it may involve taking a table and smashing a new exit through one of the walls. Whatever the case, the attempt must be made quickly, before the victims become too weak from the smoke to have a chance at success.

Kindling halls at high noon is one of the methods Scandinavian lupines regularly use to deal with *einherjar* foes. *Einherjar* who want to live in a hall like a lord should take pains to make themselves immune to such attacks, be it through mastery of Protean or through some other, more clever solution. Hrothgar the Fairtroll, son of Ask Oddfoot, of the blood of Tzimisce, built his hall butted against a cliff, down which flowed a clear mountain stream. Not only did the cave behind the waterfall provide a safe, damp place to sleep, it also provided crystal-clear water to brew his *thegn's* ale and wash the flags clean after their cannibal feasts. Most famously, it served to fight the fires that the warband of the lupine Grim Ulfsson started in his hall until Grim's men lost their patience and entered the hall, only to be confronted not just by Hrothgar and his *szlachta huskarls*, but by the bodies of their Kinfolk as well.

## LONG-TERM PLOTTING AND BLACK MAGIC

While murder, hall-burning and the blood-eagle are the stuff of feud legend, they are all short-term — suited for the Norse

## SPAE-CRAFT

Spae-work or Spae-craft is the term usually used to describe black or hostile magic in Norse saga. While it almost always has dark connotations, this isn't always the case. Spae-woman is a generic term for a hedge witch, and many spae-wives appear as positive characters in Saga. On the other hand, witches were often feared as formidable black magicians, and were thought to consort intimately with trolls and a variety of other unpleasant creatures.

In World of Darkness terms, a few Spae-workers can be considered Verbena with Awakened Avatars. Most, however, are sorcerers. They may purchase the Conveyance, Cursing, Divination, Enchantment, Ephemera, Fascination, Healing, Shadows, Shapeshifting, Summoning, Binding and Warding (Material), Summoning, Binding and Warding (Daimonic), and Weathercraft paths. Of these, Cursing, Divination, Fascination, Healing and Shapeshifting are by far the most commonly practiced. Summoned trolls and the like can be made up by the Storyteller from the whole cloth or created with the Rego Manes Infernal Thaumaturgy path on pg. 107 of the *Dark Ages Companion*.

Sorcerers who wish to sell their souls for power may do so, consorting with trolls and evil spirits to gain magical knowledge and spiritual power. This can be done precisely as detailed on pg. 83 of *World of Darkness: Sorcerer*. The wicked creatures of the north teach magic in exchange for sexual favors, spiritual degradation or the sorcerer's soul. Both lesser and full pacts are available. While the Scandinavian sorcerer generally has more freedom to use his power than his Dark Medieval counterpart on the Continent, his master is probably significantly more brutal and less concerned with the health and welfare of her servants.

warrior with a hot temper and a strong arm. But not every participant in a feud is young and strong and willing to act in such a conspicuous fashion. Women and old or weak men, unable to carry out their feuds on their own, rival the elder *einherjar* with their ability to find proxies to carry out their bloody tasks for them. While most of these long term plots are fairly simple (as much as any political machination that takes a decade or more to come to fruition can be called simple) and no better than the work of a mere Ancilla, others are diabolical in character, both in their cleverness and their poetry. Many are the downfalls engineered by a woman patient enough to have children to avenge a fallen husband, often sired by the husband's slayer to make the irony more delicious.

Not all dark plots are limited to political affairs. The Norse are no strangers to the powers of darkness, and witches



and dark sorcerers are much feared in the snowy lands of Scandinavia. Call them Trolls, Dark Alfar, Demons, Spectres or Banes as you will, those who consort with the forces of evil are feared by all right-thinking men for the ruin they bring to the land and the aid they give to bring the day of Fimbulwinter closer with their unnatural acts.

The dark magic of witches and sorcerers can take many forms. It can take the subtle form of curses, bringing crop failure, disease among livestock, wasting illnesses and plague. Other times, it was blatant, as in the saga of King Hrolf. Powerful black magicians, as opposed to those who are only wicked or greedy and clever enough to learn some of the black craft, have formidable magics at their disposal, and many are the heroes laid low through the machinations of wicked spæwork. A true sorcerer could change his skin, conjure up trolls or call them out of the forests and mountains, call forth the unhallowed dead, converse with evil spirits, ensnare the minds of men or work a variety of other unpleasantness.

## RUNES

To the Vikings, writing — indeed, the very act of setting down wisdom that may be used later — is mystical. By understanding symbols, one gleans insight into the past and the future. With the power of writing, the properly trained may read and learn what the ignorant cannot. What could be more magical?

The runes, the symbols of writing, are more than just letters to the Vikings. Runes are portents, signs and holders of mystic power. A rune can be a sound, but the very nature of the rune as a symbol means that it can be much more as well. By marking runes, the Norseman draws a connection between the rune and the marked object; this means that the rune associates its power with the subject. Thus, naming a drinking horn or a spear gives it a legendary character, but carving runes upon such a device invests it with true power.

Of course, the Norse live in a society of sacrifices and painful existence. The runes are no exception to this formula: Discovery of the runes and their power is a taxing ordeal, not a simple learning process. Oðin himself did not learn of the runes until, according to legend, he pinned himself to a tree for nine days with his own spear, finally gleaning insight through the pain of sacrificing himself to himself. To men, the runes come in visions, whispers of godly wisdom or through harsh learning. Any man can scratch a few runes on a table with a knife, leaving a name or a scrawl; the true strength of the runes, the inward impressions that draw rune and power together are the province of the learned few who risk life and sanity for them.

Among vampires, the runes are also symbols of great power. However, the associations that the runes hold are the gift of knowledge from Oðin to men. Even the rune-wise find that the characters have little power for the unliving. To unlock the power of runes, the *einherjar* must use the power given them by Oðin: the power of their blood. By making a sacrifice of blood to Oðin, the *einherjar* who know the secrets of the runes can unlock





their powers once more, if only for a brief time. (See pg. 76 for more details on rune magic as used by vampires.)

Whether shaped by man or monster, the runes are tools to empower and to guard. Shaping a rune is not a matter of a few moments; it is a ritual of craftsmanship, which requires the entire attention and soul of the crafter. Through this careful detail the rune acquires its power. Placed on a shield, the rune protects against blows; placed on the flesh, a rune speeds healing; placed on an ale-horn, the rune wards against poison;

placed on a bone, the rune calls the dead to speak. Each rune has specific powers, and combined the runes call upon even greater magic. The shaper must be ever wary, though, lest the power of the rune go astray.

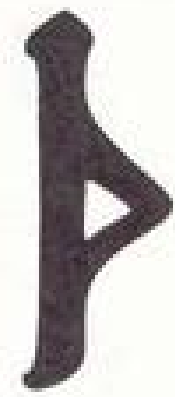
Runes are found as decoration on all manner of objects: spear-hafts, drinking horns and cairn-stones benefit from the runes. The crafty, rune-wise or second-sighted, though, can recognize runes of true power, distinguishing them from mere word-runes.



*Fehu*  
Possessions



*Uruz*  
Strength



*Thurisa*  
Gateway



*Ansuz*  
Signals



*Raido*  
Journey



*Kano*  
Opening



*Gebo*  
Partnership



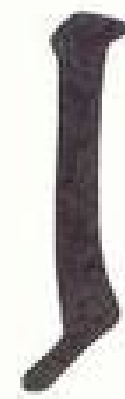
*Wunjo*  
Joy



*Hagalz*  
Disruption



*Nauthiz*  
Constraint



*Isa*  
Standstill



*Jera*  
Harvest



*Eihwaz*  
Defense



*Perth*  
Initiation



*Algiz*  
Protection



*Sowelu*  
Wholeness



*Teiwaz*  
Warrior



*Berkana*  
Growth



*Ehwaz*  
Movement



*Mannaz*  
The Self



*Laguz*  
Flow



*Inguz*  
Fertility



*Othila*  
Separation



*Dagaz*  
Breakthrough



# SEX, MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE

## MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE

Marriage in the Viking world is *theoretically* a matter arranged between the prospective husband and the woman's guardian, usually her father or her most successful brother (if her father is dead or unsuccessful). The betrothal is very much a business agreement, in which the father or brother is expected to look out for the woman's interests, both financially and socially. Since being turned down could be construed as an insult to the suitor's honor (and thus grounds for a feud), a separate party quite often represents the suitor in the negotiations. This representative is usually a male relative or close friend of high standing, who goes before the woman's protectors to make the suitor's case. In this way, the deal can be brokered without emotions becoming involved. This avoids the possibility of a jilted suitor turning to violence to make up for slights against his person.

Note the heavy stress placed on the *theoretical* nature of Scandinavian arranged marriage. Depending on social stature, the number of suitors, the woman's strength of will and the familial politics and economic situation *du jour*, women can and do turn away suitors. They do so for reasons not unfamiliar to women in our own age; suitors with the wrong combination of stupidity, ugliness, poverty and boorishness may have a hard time finding matches, though there is certainly no shortage of social climbing through marriage in Scandinavia. Also, Norse society places very little social penalty on bastardy. A woman in a comfortable social position might simply choose not to marry, bear children to one or more lovers, and raise them with the help of her brothers. It should be noted that having a lot of brothers or hired men is a big plus for this lifestyle, since relationships ending on a sour note can escalate to burned halls and blood-eagles in very little time.

Norse women also generally have a great deal of personal power. In conjunction with her brothers, lovers, or hired men, a woman can exert as much social and political power as a man of equivalent stature, though a convenient marriage to a figurehead can often help to soothe male egos. As is typical for women in societies with strongly bifurcated sex roles, Scandinavian women control the purse strings and internal affairs of their households. For a cotter's wife, this might mean keeping the cot in livable condition while their husband farms, fishes or hunts. This is no small task — even without the duties of childcare, maintaining a medieval household is a job of Herculean proportions. If the husband is of higher standing, the wife is expected (and trained) to see to the hall and manage affairs, including the hired men and thralls.

Women can own property. While it is highly unusual, there is nothing stopping a widow or unmarried woman from attending the *thing* if she can gather together enough men to

give her voice weight. Additionally, women who have won prowess through war or guile are accorded some respect, and though they are technically barred from speaking for themselves at *things*, it is a simple matter to arrange for a man to assist in elucidating goals and strategies.

Divorce from inadequate husbands is far from unknown. Inadequacies from impotence and mistreatment to plain old poverty are causes for divorce. Depending on the specifics of the divorce (the status of the dowry and bride price, the age of the marriage, and what particular fireworks set off the separation), the divorce can be an affair of no small weight. The woman leaves her husband and goes to the house of a relative, and either sets up shop or starts looking for new suitors. Of course, under the wrong circumstances, a divorce can result in an epic feud with relatives and friends on all sides being drawn into the welter of bloodshed over a particularly tasty dowry or bride price.

## SEX

"As often as possible" best describes the Norse attitude towards sex. Seductions, by both men and women, account for a significant percentage of saga feuds. Likewise, much of the advice Oðin gives in the *Hævamæl* relates directly to sex, seduction and adultery. The Norse are as outspoken on sex as on any other matter. The only real sexual taboo (other than the obvious ones like bestiality and incest) was against a male acting in the male social role to "play the woman." This is hardly unexpected in a society as relentlessly masculine as Norse culture in the Viking age, and forms the basis for a lot of insult. Male sorcerers were also thought, in many cases, to learn their arts from a troll in exchange for assuming a passive homosexual role. Loki assumes a female role to give birth to Sleipnir, and Oðin is said to dress like a woman to learn witchcraft.

Other than a taboo against passive homosexuality for aggressive males, anything goes. Norse men keep female thralls for sexual purposes, and Icelandic men openly kept concubines until well after Christianization. The practice is well-accepted, and children by concubines are acknowledged and have as good a chance at inheritance as any. Women's exploits are somewhat less well-recorded, but given the number of men in saga who seduce the woman of a hall, or who turn down seduction attempts, we can assume that females engage in a similarly frenetic regimen of sexual activity. Of course, a single miscalculation can result in a feud, but the good things in life are never without risk.

## RELIGION

The Norse are as intensely practical about their religion as they are about everything else that they do. While there is a great deal of opposition to Christianization from the more devout Scandinavians, the overall concept of religion and its place in the Norse world is different enough to merit some discussion.



F-RED



In Norse belief, the world was built from the bones of Ymir, a giant who was created by the interactions of Niflheim, the place of freezing cold, and Muspelheim, the place of burning fires. From the warmth and matter of Ymir's body were born the trolls and *jotuns*. From the licking of Ymir's cow were born Oðin, Hoenir and Lodur. They slew Ymir, and from him they made the world: the soil from his flesh, the mountains from his bones. Over all their creation, they placed his skull to shield it from the heat of Muspelheim. They made the sun and the moon and from Ymir's hair came the forests and glens.

Despite this somewhat picaresque beginning, Norse religion is not of a consoling character, nor are its gods omnipotent, immortal or even ageless. The *Æsir* are the advocates and guardians of the Middle-garð against a hostile cosmos of trolls and *jotuns*, but they are also almost entirely human, full of lust and angers and petty greed. Some of them, like Oðin, are almost as dangerous as the beings they protect man against. Some of them, like Loki, are worse.

While the *Æsir* are a numerous and above all prolific lot, not all of them receive a great deal of worship — many of them are simply figures in stories about the gods. These lesser gods are objects of occasional worship, if any. The gods who are most often worshipped (or paid homage to) are Oðin, Þonar, and Freyr.

## OÐIN

Oðin, the sky god we call Odin, has many kennings. He was called All-wise, All-high, Rune-winner, One-eyed God-of-Men. Yet he was also Spear-thruster, Worker of evil, Glad-of-war, Crow-glutter, Necromancer, Lord of the Slain. Oðin is the only one of the *Æsir* who covets human sacrifice. Perhaps as dark a figure as an advocate of man can be, Oðin is best described as a devil whose wickedness works in the favor of humanity. A distant force, yet often present at the downfall of great men, Oðin is a god of kings and of last resort, as well as patron of necromancers and witches.

Oðin's sacrifices are hung by their necks from trees, or inside special shrines. There they are left for the crows, Oðin's sacred animal, to pick. Thralls are usually sacrificed, though a man found guilty of secret murder or a king who has brought ruin to his people might be used instead. However, many Scandinavians disapprove of giving blood-homage to Oðin, and such a refusal in part brought about the downfall of King Hrolf of Denmark.

Scandinavian *einherjar* pay especial homage to Oðin. As the lord of the dead and the holder of blood-rites, he is seen as the source of vampirism. Indeed, many Norse vampires eschew the legends of Caine, instead referring to themselves as the "brood of Oðin." Oðin's blood rituals make for fine feasting among the vampires who attend, and many Viking vampires



even make their presence known and demand homage by styling themselves the blessed servants of Oðin.

## PONAR

Ponar, whom we call Thor, is a sky god like Oðin. The thunder-god is Oðin's regular companion in his travels through the Middle-garð, and the Æsir's mightiest warrior. One of the most popular gods, Ponar is the true protector of man against poor harvest, sickness, evil spirits and (in the abstract) trolls and jotuns. Most especially popular in Iceland, Ponar's symbol is the T-shaped Ponar's Hammer. Also, the two-finger-and-thumb ward against the Evil Eye is known in the north as Ponar's Hammer.

Ponar is quick-tempered, with thick red hair and a great shaggy red beard. He is forever on the go, traveling the skies in a cart pulled by two goats. Yet all that the Æsir need do is call out to him, and he is there like lightning, ready to fight the enemies of the gods. The sound of the thunder and the flash of lightning are his hammer, Mjölmir, striking against the enemies of man.

## FREYR

Freyr is one of the Vanir, a far more gentle race of gods than the grim and warlike Æsir who supplanted them. Freyr and his sister Freyja are the most-worshipped Vanir among the Norse gods. Like Ponar, Freyr is a god of fertility. Unlike Ponar, Freyr is far from warlike. Freyr is not the lightning and

the thunder of spring storms, smashing away the ice of winter, but the gentle sun bringing forth new growth and thawing the earth with warm caresses.

Freyr gave his golden sword in the wooing of Gerd, and has only his golden boar and antlers left to him. Weaponless, he is doomed to be slain out of hand by Surt, lord of the fire demons, on the day of Ragnarök. Like all fertility gods of his type, Freyr is enormously endowed. Farmers do homage to Freyr, and he is the god that those from continental Europe who practice the Old Religion will be able to identify most closely with.

## FATE AND THE GODS

The Norse view of the universe is a strange and confusing skein, full of contradictions and half-remembered lore, overlapping beliefs and later influences that attempt to make the religion competitive with Christianity. But the one thread that runs almost without interruption through the corpus of Scandinavian mythology is the grim, stoic Norse outlook on life and the preeminence of fate, or *weird*, in the affairs of men. Life is a toil and a travail, an existence most often marked by misery, in which the good times are brief, bright flashes in the gloom. The Hævamæl warns, "Fields and flocks had Fitiung's sons, who now carry begging bowls: wealth may vanish in the wink of an eye, gold is the falsest of friends." No fortune can protect a man against foul fate. This may seem like a dark





## TRUE FAITH AND THE NORSE

To the common Norseman, the gods are objects of fear and veneration. They are distant, conducting their own business outside of man's ken on Middle-Garð, visiting only when momentous events or boredom draw their attention to the mortal world. The Æsir and Vanir have little to do with everyday life; they are great and bloody warriors to be propitiated and emulated in battle. The pragmatic Scandinavian tries to avoid the attention of the gods, and instead seeks their fickle favor through great deeds, but only when necessary.

This is not to say that True Faith is absent from the Norse. However, their gods are not the sorts of gods to whom one typically attributes the everyday workings of the universe. To the Scandinavians, the gods are as much subject to the whims and vagaries of the universe as other men. Even the gods cannot go against fate, as decreed by the Norns; a man must accept that fate. Each man makes his own luck; to place one's trust fully in the gods is to be subject to their powerfully chaotic whims and rages. Only the most devout and foolhardy of warriors would devote his life to the will of the gods.

Still, for those who are touched by the ways of spirituality, the world is full of magic. With the second sight, a Norseman can see and speak with spirits and read the fate-lines of the Norns. Even the gods themselves must acknowledge the truths spoken by a man with the second sight. The hands of gods and spirits are evident everywhere to someone touched with insight into the workings of Middle-Garð. However, the foreknowledge of the second sight is as much a curse as a blessing; such a man sees his own doom, the death that is foretold by Fate and which cannot be averted.

When building a character with True Faith, remember also that the Norse are pantheistic. The Faithful among them revere and fear all of the deities, not just individual ones. A Viking may pay homage to a particular patron above the others, but all of the gods are considered real to the devout.

outlook, but take into consideration what life is like in medieval Scandinavia. Even the richest lord can find himself a bondsman from poor harvest, a hall-fire, bad luck in battle or misfortune while sailing abroad. While the stark Norse outlook on the world is far from cheerful, it is also a completely natural reaction to the conditions under which the Norse live.

Nor are the gods immune to the power of fate. The *Völuspæ* and the *Deluding of Gylfi* both go into great detail about the breaking of the world and the demise of the Æsir. Those things that are prophesied are not predicted, but foreordained. Because of this, oracular ability is often considered both a blessing and a curse. While a prescient might be

WOLVES OF THE SEA

wise in the ways of the future, it is not an ability that can be used at some times and not at others. Grim is the life of the seer, for she can see the eventual demise that lies behind the face of all things vital. Still, the seer is respected, for her wisdom and insight part the veil of obscurity to reveal the threads of the Norns. Even vampires among the Norse heed the words of seers. When fate decrees that a man's life end but that his body continue, the black weave in the Norns' loom continues unabated; the warp and woof of time still pulls the *afterganger* in startling ways revealed only to the gifted few.

The acceptance of a predestined doom at the end of history is a theme that will later become preeminent in the *einherjar* mythology of Gehenna. What causes this? Are the words of the All-high from his haven at Uppsala temple prophesying the doom of the Children of Caine misunderstood and taken as the words of Oðin predicting the doom of the gods? Or is it nothing more than a coincidence of mythology, yet another foreordained doomsday when the world will be unmade? Only time will tell.

Given their fatalistic outlook, it's not surprising that Scandinavians find the transition to vampirism unfazing. The men and women of Europe, terrified of damnation and fervent believers in Christianity's demons and hell, find themselves thrust into a nightmare existence of devil-service and blood frenzy upon the Embrace. Not so the Norse. Scandinavian *einherjar* heartily accept their condition, seeing the gift of unlife as a boon from Oðin. The powerful warrior drinks the blood of his foes and thereby takes their strength; eternal youth, the vigor and power to fight in Ragnarök, are boons for a life of valor and distinction. The Beast is little more than the frenzied rage of the berserk, or so many Norse *einherjar* believe. Should fate bring a man the singular honor of joining Oðin's brood, the man had best accept his glory — to turn from the paths of fate is a deadly course, even to the already deceased.

## THE AFTERLIFE

If the followers of the Norse religion see life as a grim place, then they certainly don't seek surcease in the afterlife. In many ways, the Norse belief in the afterlife is cursory at best. While mention of the dead faring to Hel's Hall or Valhal are common, in many cases they seem to be nothing more than kennings for "a natural death" or "death in battle." How much the speaker actually believes in the reality of the afterlife is open to question. Certainly, those who lay their kin to rest with all the tools they would need to carry on in the afterlife are acting out of more than an attempt to find closure. Women are laid down with their clothing and spindles and distaffs, the farmers with their hoes, merchants with their scales and wares. Reserved for warchiefs are the most glorious burials of all. Entire ships are laid down, and the chief's mail and sword and shield, his hounds, his hawks, and sometimes a thrall he fancied are buried with him.

For those who study tales of existence after death, the Viking myths paint a bleak picture. The Norse afterlife is in



many ways similar to that of the early Greeks and Romans. The lucky few die in battle and the All-high or his servants, the Walkuries, notice their bravery. For them waits Valhal, the hall in Æsirgarð where Oðin's chosen warriors feast and await the Last Day. For the rest waits only Hel's hall Sickbed, and the misery of Niflheim. Hel's hall is a cold, dark place, without comfort or surcease. It is a place of the dead, with no attempts at reward or punishment. For the truly wicked or unlucky, a descent into labyrinth at the roots of the World-ash awaits, to be devoured in the darkness where the wyrm Nidhoggr gnaws endlessly. The Norse dead, like the dead of ancient Greece and Rome, find the Shadowlands of Stygia to be just as they expected.

## METHODS OF WORSHIP

The Norse gods are worshipped at festivals, rather than at regular services, and kings and chieftains make up the bulk of their priesthood. The *jarl* or king is not only the political leader of his people, but their spiritual leader as well. On his shoulders rests the burden of the ceremonial activities needed to propitiate the unseen. There is no overarching structure or hierarchy to Norse practice. While there are shrines and temples, some even large enough to support full-time priests, most holy places are maintained at the expense of this or that *jarl* or warchief. The Norse gods expect that their followers will be neither devout nor pious, and while offerings are made in the spirit of thanks or for propitiation, there is no tradition of a tithe for the sake of piety. While many men come forward to defend their faith and their way of life against the weak, dead Christ of the south, the usual course of Norse life is not thick with what one would call spirituality.

Offerings given to the Norse gods are inevitably practical. The oldest animals are sacrificed, and if no old animals are available, an agreement is struck with the gods to postpone the sacrifice until an animal is no longer useful. The meat of the sacrifice is (of course) eaten. Thralls sacrificed to Oðin are also old or otherwise less than useful. Objects offered up in sacrifice and grave goods are quite real, however, though the ships used for burial rather than burning are often smallish replicas of real *drakkar*. Objects sacrificed to the gods are buried or cast into water, sometimes after being bent, broken or otherwise rendered without value.

Vampires make good use of the offerings and sacrifices to the Norse gods. The impious sometimes even imitate the gods themselves, demanding homage and treasure, but more commonly a local *einherjar* will partake of the sacrifice in a fashion similar to the worshippers. Thus, if the Norsemen sacrifice a goat and eat of the meat, the vampire may well drain the blood of the beast for his own consumption. Less scrupulous and pious *einherjar* steal away the treasures that are buried or thrown into the sea. The virtuous Norse vampires, though, do not interfere with the will of the gods, and instead make sacrifices of their own. Blood, silver and thralls are all accepted as usual sacrifices. Among the truly devout (some would say

insane) *einherjar*, it is even customary to Embrace young men and women of bravery, and then behead them so that they may go directly to Valhal to battle with warriors of ages past.

## VAMPIRIC LEGENDRY

Hear the words of Hasteinn Liver-Biter as he relates the Blood Saga:

*"Listen well, my brood, for these are the words handed down to each of the einherjar. From Canarl to his huskarls and so to all of the einherjar comes this tale.*

*In the beginning, in the darkness of the Void, Oðin and the Æsir were birthed from the giants and the old gods. Slaying Ymir and taking Æsirgarð as their home, the Æsir ruled over Valhal, the hall of the valiant, in the land beyond the mortal realm. Many and varied were the creatures that lived beyond Middle-garð: The alfar, the dverges, the trolls and jotuns; from time to time these beings would deal or clash with the gods, and on strange days they would come to Middle-garð itself, to become involved in the works of men.*

*Oðin One-Eye, lord of the slain and necromancer, came to Middle-garð with his Walkuries to find warriors of valor. Among the dead they would pick and choose, taking up the most skilled and courageous to stay at Valhal, there to feast and fight until Ragnarök came to claim the gods and shake the world. With spear and runes Oðin walked through fields of the dying, seeking the warriors who would stay the jotuns and forge the destiny of the new world after Middle-garð's end.*

*On the fields of one terrible battle Oðin found a warrior of great strength and tenacity. Cast out by his family for his rage, this berserk drew about him a loyal band of huskarls who shared his fortunes and fought with him in all things. But wounded by war, laid low by evil *spæwork* and telling blows, they were scattered dead across the plains of battle, where blood stained the earth like red iron. Only the lone berserk still lived, his outlaw body refusing to heed the call of Heimdall's horn.*

*For vitality and skill, Oðin marked the dying warrior; coming low upon the man, like some robber seeking goods from the battlefield, he whispered to the dying man's spirit, asking his name so that he might address the warrior in Valhal.*

*'Canarl, I am named,' gasped the outlaw, 'called the Bastard, for my family disowned me. I have fought on many fields of battle since, but by the rune-mark on my forehead I may never die.'*

*Oðin looked upon the man's head and saw there the mark and knew his words for true. Then, with seeing from his one eye did Oðin read the threads of fate, and cast the lot of Canarl.*

*'As your valor stands against death, so shall you stand against the ravages of time. Your skill is mighty, but by my hand it shall be mightier. Your blood spilled on this field makes the ground red; I shall turn my blood to you, and through it you will know my strength. Be strong the thews of your legs! Be mighty the grip about your spear! By the rune-mark you shall never be touched by age: by the arts of war shall you rule.'*

*As Oðin spoke he brought his spear down to face Canarl, and from the tip of Gungnir did run the bright red blood of the god.*



Three drops fell upon the lips of Canarl, and he was struck with the battle-seizure; his body twisted and his lungs choked, and he died yet lived.

With the mighty pronouncements of fate and the power of his blood, Oðin gave Canarl eternity, but fate demanded satiation. Oðin's eye stared again into the ways of the future and he intoned the demands of the Norns. 'With this bond in secret made you must ever hide from discovery, and so you shall shun the light of sun and fire. No meat contains the potency to sustain you, no mead can intoxicate you; only the blood of men will bring warmth to your breast. From the lifeblood of the strong is your puissance multiplied. Blood you have spilled, and more blood still shall you spill; and only by coming closer to my blood will you and your house know greatness.'

At length, Oðin spoke a final time, this time slowly and with deliberation, saying, 'But if you scorn the ways of war, if you take up the mantle of the Vanir, then you shall stand beside them in the final nights; put aside spear and ax and you will know no peace from your brethren but you will find the peace of Vanaheim. In the words of the Vanir you will survive with the gentle while the warriors know glory and death at Ragnarök.'

Oðin drew back from Canarl, and he drew up his spear and called for his ravens. Canarl rose from the ground, and to his left he placed his wounds upon the mouth of Ivar, his thegn, who then rose; and to his right he placed his wounds upon the mouth of Odindisa, his wife, who then rose; and before him he placed his wounds upon the mouth of Eyjolf, his skald, who then rose. And they gathered to them the sacraments of the dead, and built there a city raised to Oðin."

So say the einherjar of the Norse....

The Norse have an ancient creation legend handed down through oral tradition. Wildly different from the Biblical accounts of the rest of Europe, the Norse tales feature many gods and goddesses, as well as antithetical giants and monsters. The world and the outer realms — Middle-garð and Æsirgarð — form separately but host many similar features; the men of Middle-garð and the gods of Æsirgarð both live in frost-covered fields in wooden lodges.

From the perspective of the Norse vampire, though, the most telling differences in myth and legend are in the creation myth. Since the Scandinavians of the Pagan times (before about 900 AD) do not follow the worship of Christianity, they have no story of Caine, Eden or Lilith. Instead, the heritage of vampirism comes down from Oðin and the gods of the Norse. Seen as a blood-rite and blessing from the gods, vampirism is a warrior's reward for valor and duty. Without the guilt and scorn from the Christian legends, the vampires of Scandinavia claim a proud and honorable heritage as the blood-brood of Oðin. If fate and the gods decree a man destined to unending glory and eternal youth, who can naysay the Norns?

Naturally, the great dichotomy between Norse and European vampire legend leads to conflicts of ideology. At the very least, Cainites find the einherjar's acceptance of vampirism strange; at worst, charges of heresy lead to war. In particular,

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the religiously-minded Lasombra find the pagan religion of the *einherjar* distasteful, but even the vast majority of European Cainites are shocked by the blatant disregard for Noddic lore among the Vikings. For their part, the *einherjar* find the legends of Caine unmanly: The chosen of Oðin are descended from a *cursed kinslayer*? There are *traditions* that bind the blooded? The Vikings have no desire to enmesh themselves in the guilt-ridden hierarchical structure of Europe's Cainites, and live by their own rules.

## VIKING EQUIPMENT

With limited resources and an income driven by sporadic raid and trade, the Vikings have some decidedly different equipment from the rest of continental Europe. The scarcity of good steel made quality weapons and armor premium goods. Additionally, the ships of the Norse are quite different from the watercraft used elsewhere. The image of the tall dragonship and the Viking warrior with battle-ax and shield is firmly engraved in the mind of the European commoner.

### VIKING WEAPONS

Among Norse raiders, the sword and ax are the most favored weapons. Unlike the wars of Europe, there is little in the way of mounted combat, so the pole arms common among the peasantry are not often used. Massed foot combat is the rule, and the choice of weapons among the Norse reflects this.

#### Swords and Daggers

As with the people of the mainland, no Scandinavian would be seen without a dagger at the belt. The typical dagger is eight to twelve inches long, double-edged, and sees much use as a utilitarian tool as well as a close combat weapon.

Swords among the Norse are simple, practical affairs. A double-edged blade, about three feet in length, surmounts a simple bar crosspiece and a one-handed hilt. Norse swords are rarely engraved with any sort of ornamentation or gilding aside from wirework or patterns on the pommel (the bottom of the handle); blood grooves on the blade are unknown. Contrary to popular belief, swords of this sort do not have a razor-sharp edge — instead, the blade is beaten into a chisel-like edge, so that it can hack through armor (iron weapons have a tendency to lose their edge in combat anyway). Some late-period blades are made with a pointed tip for thrusting, but many are not. Indeed, a warrior in armor could very well be bludgeoned to death without suffering a cut.

Before 900 AD, Scandinavian swords were forged through pattern-welding; iron bars were heated in bricks of charcoal so as to absorb carbon and turn into good steel. The bars were then cut apart and reforged together and subjected repeatedly to the process, yielding a mixed and swirling mass of steel that gave rise to the name "pattern-weld" because of the mesmerizing, snakelike patterns of dark iron and brighter steel. After

900 AD, improvements in ore and smelting lead to the development of lighter, more sharply tapered swords of good quality steel. Either way, the sword is a single-handed light weapon used for sweeping cuts and chops, often in combination with quick jumping and dodging.

#### War Axes and Throwing Axes

Vikings are inordinately fond of war axes, probably because of the massive trauma that such weapons inflict. After all, a properly heavy ax lops off limbs with seeming ease. Furthermore, the use of the ax is a test of strength, especially if accompanied by a shield (and therefore wielded with one hand). The typical Norse ax is made of iron, often with a thin strip of steel along the edge, and has a three or four foot long haft, granting a great deal of leverage. Early axes were little more than hammer-backed farming tools, but the development of the ax into a weapon of war has led to a general increase in size, weight and efficiency. The Scandinavian war ax also has a peculiar squared-off outcropping at the bottom of the blade, which is helpful in ship-to-ship combat as a sort of hook for grappling and climbing; this particular jutting piece grants the term "bearded war ax."

Throwing axes are uncommon due to the difficulty of using them effectively. Despite their scarcity, they are very nasty and dramatic weapons. To be used properly, a throwing ax must be specially balanced, and requires a great deal of strength and skill to throw accurately. Therefore, even though such a weapon can be made of iron (since it will be thrown once and then won't be used again until the next battle), it is still relatively expensive due to the craftsmanship required in its construction. The throwing ax has a shorter haft and smaller blade than its hand-held counterpart, as it must be light enough to travel a reasonable distance — otherwise, its advantage is lost (a weapon that only travels five feet is of limited utility, since the enemy, if still able to fight after the hurled attack, will arrive in hand-to-hand combat range before the thrower can ready his close combat weapon).

#### Spears

Carried by the god Oðin and of inestimable value in ship-to-ship combat, the spear is a common weapon among the Norse, and most warriors know how to use one. Anywhere from six to eight feet in length, with an inch-thick wooden haft and a six-inch-long impaling blade at the end, the spear is excellent for keeping an enemy at a distance. The haft is often reinforced with metal spikes and bands to make it difficult to chop through the weapon. Spears can be used for hunting and fishing as well as battle, making them utilitarian and practical (always appreciated by the Norse). However, the massed spear formation is unknown to the Vikings; instead, spears are used by individual warriors to hold off and skewer opponents, then dropped in favor of swords or other weapons for close combat. Viking spears are primarily hurled weapons; indeed, the early broad-headed spears of the Scandinavians are often used solely for hurling, though late designs are built





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for close thrusting as well. Some Vikings carry a shield in addition to a spear, but more control is possible when both hands are used.

#### Hammers

The sky-god Ponar uses a mighty hammer, and so too do some of his followers. Because it does not need to keep a keen edge, a hammer requires little maintenance and can be made cheaply. Much like an ax, the war hammer has a single striking head attached to a two or three foot long haft, and the Norse value the hammer for its ability to pulverize the bones of even heavily armored opponents. A spike in the center of the head of some hammers, backed by the tremendous weight of the hammer, can easily puncture armor or shields. Unlike many other weapons, hammers often boast runes for strength or victory.

#### Bows

Vikings do not generally use crossbows (since such weapons are an unfamiliar technology), but make some use of the common hunting bow. While archery is a respected pastime, it does not garner the glory of fighting in close combat, and is generally a secondary battle skill for most Scandinavians.

The Norse bow is a hunting weapon perhaps four or five feet high, and thus it has a limited penetrating power; it cannot hold a candle to the English longbow. Furthermore, the Vikings do not rely on formation fighting in battle, and so there are rarely organized groups of archers; the use of bows is more common in ship-to-ship combat, when striking at a closing vessel.

### VIKING ARMOR

For the most part, armor is too expensive for the average Norseman. Besides, a culture that stresses bravery in combat and disregard for pain disdains the use of such protection. Still, wealthy or cautious Vikings may indulge in varying forms of armor.

#### Furs and Leather

The most common form of Scandinavian "armor" is a heavy set of furs and leathers. After all, the frozen north makes such garments a practical necessity. A good set of heavy furs can lessen the impact of some blows, and heavy leather stops arrows and even dagger slashes. Since the materials are cheap and easily available, Viking warriors most often wear this sort of armor.

#### Chain Mail

Wealthy Viking lords may wear a byrnie or hauberk of chain mail, which is essentially a short-sleeved shirt made of interlocking metal rings. Most often, these rings are thin circular links that are cut and then joined together. By 900 AD, though, the rings are hammered flat, cut, joined and then sealed with rivets, significantly reducing the loss of mail due to blows. With heavy padding behind it, this armor cushions against blows and blocks cuts, providing effective protection against swords and axes. While Europe sees the advent of soldiers armored head-to-toe in chain mail, the Norse rarely





use more than a long shirt of mail. Still, the protection offered to the torso by this expensive armor is well worth it to the *jarls* of Scandinavia.

#### Helmets

Contrary to popular belief, the Vikings do not wear horned helmets. Instead, those who can afford metal headgear wear round pot helms with eye protection and a metal slat guarding the nose. These helms often leave the cheeks and jaw unprotected but otherwise guard against telling blows to the skull.

#### Shields

Swordsmen and axemen usually carry circular wooden shields, simply referred to as round shields. These shields are built from cut lengths of wood held together by a bolted-on, circular metal rim. Sometimes, the faces of the shields are covered in heavy leather for extra protection; sometimes they are painted with bright colors or fierce symbols, especially family symbols. A round shield requires full use of the warrior's off hand, as it is heavy and unwieldy, but affords a great deal of extra protection (a skilled shieldman can make himself very hard to hit) and is relatively inexpensive. This makes shields popular with most Viking raiders of modest means.

### LONGSHIPS OF THE NORSE

The Norse are a sea-faring people, and use a variety of ships for specific purposes. Different as these tasks may be,

Norse longships share a number of common traits. They are all clinker-built, meaning the planks of the hull overlap, rather than lay side-by-side. This leads to a lighter and more flexible ship. Each longship has a single mast and low sides with a shallow draught of three to four feet. A square sail, hardened with diagonal strips of seal hide or other leathery material, is swung with a special boom that allows the ship to sail rapidly with the wind or tack against it. The rudder of a Norse ship is on the starboard side of the ship, and is steered by a single person, usually the *jarl*. Because of the side-mounted steering, the tillerman can face fore or aft for navigational purposes while still steering.

#### The Trading Ships

The *karfi* and *knorr* are the typical trading vessels of the Norse. Their design has had a major influence on trading ships of other lands. The *knorr*, in particular, is emulated by the shipwrights of the Hanseatic League. *Knorrs* and *karfi*, as trading vessels, carry a large amount of cargo at the expense of speed. These ships manage about 25-30 miles a day, in good weather.

The *karfi* is built for short trips close to the coast, with a relatively small crew of 20-30. A typical longship of this class can carry about eight tons of cargo. The *karfi* has oars, anywhere from 10-15 banks along its 70' length. Found plying the Baltic and Norwegian coast, these ships carry goods to and





from the trading ports. A *karfi*'s small size allows it to travel up the larger rivers in Europe without much problem.

A *knorr*, by compare, is the main ship used to carry goods across the open ocean and establish settlements. Not much longer than the *karfi* at 75 feet, it boasts higher bulwarks making it more seaworthy. However, it has only a token set of oars (about ten) for docking maneuvers or beaching. With fewer oars, the crew numbers only about 20, most of whom aren't warriors. The cargo capacity is an impressive 25 tons, some of which is sheltered by a removable deck. Such a vessel is obviously ideal for a traveling *einherjar*.

#### The Warships

In contrast to the slower trading ships, the *scuta* and *drakkar* are the sleek attack ships of the Norse fleet. They are shallow, to allow them to beach easily and travel up the rivers of Europe. These ships are designed to be fast and maneuverable, and to carry people to battle. Generally, they manage to cover 30-35 miles a day with good winds or a strong crew.

The *scuta* is a light coastal ship, often used as a yacht by a wealthy *jarl* or king. Anywhere from 20-30 warriors operate the oars, depending on the overall length of the *scuta* (anywhere from 40-50 feet). The cargo capacity of the ship is negligible, designed as it is for short voyages in good weather.

This is the type of ship most likely to pursue a *strandhogg* raid, or to carry a visiting *jarl* not expecting battle.

The *drakkar* is the primary warship for the Norse fleet, and reflects that position by being the longest of the Norse ships, reaching 80' or more. When fully fitted for battle, the *drakkar* carries as many as 70-80 warriors, a third of whom actually operate the oars. The rest are simply there for a fight. Under common circumstances, the *drakkar* carries 25-35 warriors. Usually, the longship has a fiercely carved prow earning it the nickname of "dragonship."

#### TOOLS OF EVERYDAY LIFE

Norsemen weren't all raiders and warriors. Quite a few Scandinavians engaged in farming and herding. As a result, they had many of the trappings of medieval Europe: plows and shears, ovens and tables. Like the peasants to the south, Scandinavians had the tools of a farming culture. However, they did use some tools and personal effects largely unknown to the rest of Europe, for quite some time before such items became more widespread.

Personal hygiene is a curiously prominent part of Norse life. The Norse use combs, and indeed some tradesmen devote themselves to the manufacture and sale of combs. Toothpicks, too, are used, and many Scandinavians have teeth in much

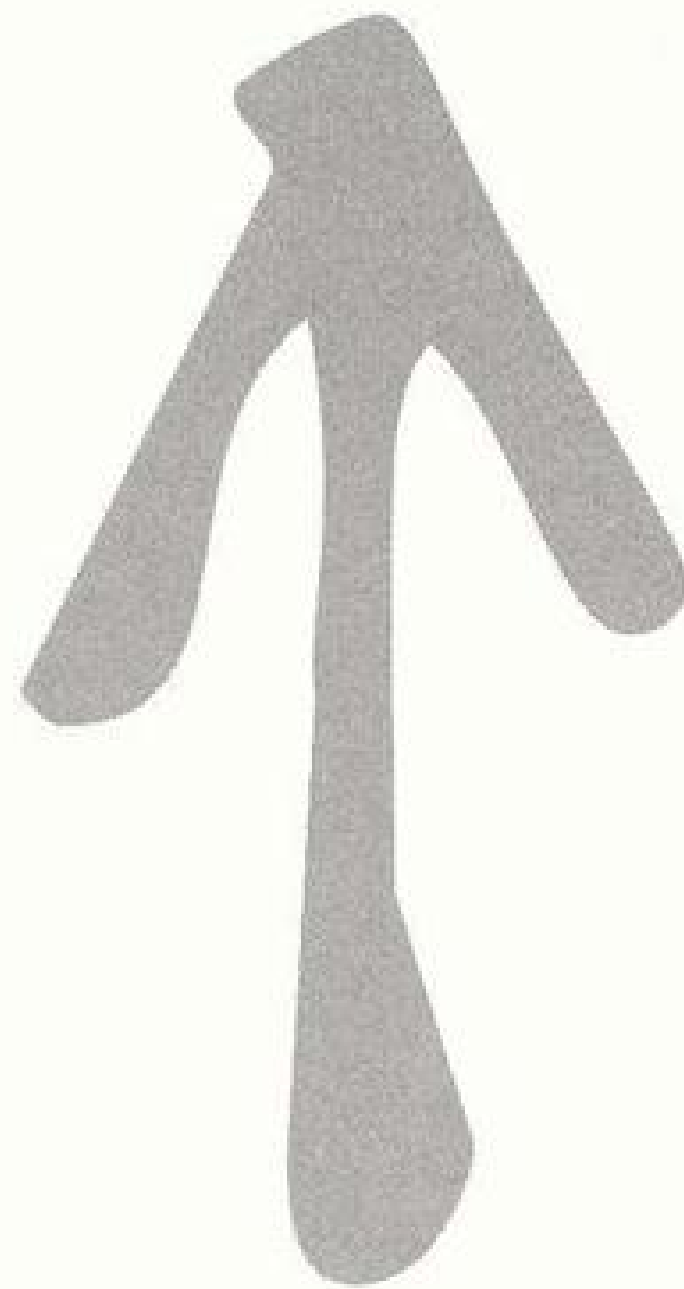


better shape than other Europeans. Without the taboos against nudity common to Christianity, the Norse also bathe regularly, perhaps once a week; accounts of Scandinavian traders even tell of Norsemen in Europe and the Levant (the contested holy lands of the Middle East) who bathe, comb their hair and beards, and put on their finest clothing to woo the local women with their superior cleanliness!

Another curiosity that shows up in Scandinavian apparel is the use of skates and snowshoes. Skates are made with blades of bone, for rapid travel over ice; doubtless they are functional

as well as entertaining. Skis are mentioned in some of the sagas, and indeed some men boast of their ability to use skis well. However, the skis that the Norse use are not long snow-running blades; rather, they are more like snowshoes, broad and flat, designed to allow the wearer to move over light snow without sinking.

In time, some of the habits and personal effects of the Norse spread throughout Europe. Even with the advent of Christianity and its curious taboos, Scandinavians are reluctant to give up their ways of cleanliness.











# Chapter Two: Customs and the Dark Ages

*In this book I have had old stories written down, as I have heard them told by intelligent people, concerning chiefs who have held dominion in the northern countries, and who spoke the Danish tongue...*

*- Prelude to the Heimskringla, by Snorri Sturluson*



# UNLIFE OF THE NORSE

An *einherjar* is one of a dying breed, who holds to old ways that are being replaced with Christianity and feudalism. Mix this with the fatalism of the average Viking warrior, and a siege mentality results. The *einherjar* see themselves as the last of Oðin's warriors on Middle-garð, preparing to fight in the impending Ragnarök. All they can do is prepare themselves for the battle, and die a hero's death.

Not all the *aftergangers* share the apocalyptic beliefs of their brethren, however. Some travel to Iceland and the Faroes to try to preserve their way of unlife a little while longer. Others abandon the communities of which they were once a part, and retreat into the wilderness to watch and wait for the old days to return. The vampires that remain, however, attempt to restore the old glories with sword and fire.

## HEARTH, HOME AND AWAY

For the vampire *jarl*, the year begins with the long night of Midwinter's Solstice. Among both the Cainite and mortal members of the community, feasting marks the start of the new year. When the feasting is done, the mortal Vikings are occupied with preparations for the coming summer; clothing is made and repaired, weapons forged and cleaned, and the longships made ready to sail. Meanwhile, the *jarl* takes an active role in the community; raids and expeditions are planned, *things* are held to air grievances, new *huskarls* are initiated, and marriages are performed.

With the approach of summer, the increasing daylight forces the vampire *jarl* to spend less time among her community. *Einherjar* with Fortitude wrap themselves in protective garb, to move about during the weak twilight or on darkly cloudy days, but most vampires spend the daylight hours resting as the inexorable need for slumber overtakes them. While the *jarl* is less involved in the activity of the hall or village, she maintains control through her *huskarls* and allies.

Summer's Eve (the Spring Equinox) is celebrated with more feasting. A vampire *jarl* blesses the fields with his blood, and promises a good year to the people. In the month following these ceremonies, crops are planted and the livestock turned out to hillside pastures. Warriors gather in the hall, ready to go south and begin the raiding season.

As Midsummer approaches, the vampire *jarl* and her crew set sail to spend the months of summer raiding south and avoiding the endless sunlit days of the North. The expedition proceeds down the coast, seeking villages and unsuspecting merchant vessels to pillage. A raid may reach as far as the Mediterranean and the Middle East before turning back. While the raiders are away, those who remain behind celebrate the Midsummer with more feasting, and tend to the livestock in the hills.

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Upon the Vikings' return, the mortals turn to the business of haymaking and the harvest while the vampires divide the spoils. The Fall Solstice heralds the end of summer, and the livestock are collected from the hills. If the raids and harvest are good, a strong horse and young *thrall* are chosen for sacrifice at a ceremonial feast; otherwise, only an old horse is used. After the celebration and feasting, the vampire *jarl* leaves to attend the *Althing* (if one has been called) or, every nine years, a sacrificial celebration.

## A YEAR OF UNLIVING DANGEROUSLY

The year is not all feasting and celebration, but a time of struggle and danger for the *vargr*. The wilderness of Scandinavia is home to more than just outlaw vampires and bandits — Lupines and the *alfar* (faeries) prowl the woodlands and mountains. In winter or summer, the *vargr* must always be careful.

For the wild *vargr*, the year begins with the Spring Equinox and the first hints of summer. As the wildlife returns to normal activity, hunting is good and a vampire can easily get his fill of blood. The *vargr* roams towards the east and south during this time, trying to stay ahead of the long daylight hours. By the time Midsummer arrives, a *vargr* is likely to be in Russia or Kiev. The nomadic journey reverses itself as winter approaches, with the *vargr* returning to the North and its long nights.

Those with the Protean Discipline: Interred in the Earth have an advantage as *vargr*, since they hide in the ground during the daylight hours. Those without have to make do with caves, makeshift tents and barns for their daytime rest.

## CURRENT CUSTOMS

As much as feasible, *einherjar* hold to the old ways, seeking to recreate the glory days of their past. However, the dwindling numbers of people willing to follow these paths make some customs difficult to hold on to. At the same time, the reduced numbers force some changes in the customs that remain.

### THE HALL HIERARCHY

Inside the hall, the elder vampire is always the *jarl*. Ghouls make up the *huskarls*, the elder's personal guard, and are second in importance after her. The keyholder, in earlier times the wife of the *jarl*, ranks after these. In an *einherjar* hall the most responsible mortal woman or a Childe of the elder often fills the position. After this, the hierarchy descends to *karls*, the free warriors who follow the *jarl*, and the *thralls*, who are less slaves than sources of blood for the *jarl*.



## POLITICS & LAWS

For the most part, the *einherjar* communities cannot really participate in the *things* of the rest of Scandinavia. The vampire *jarl* may have difficulty participating in the judging during the daylight hours, for one, and the presence of Christians makes the pagan beliefs of the Vikings dangerous. Consequently, the *thing* of a vampire-led community is a local affair.

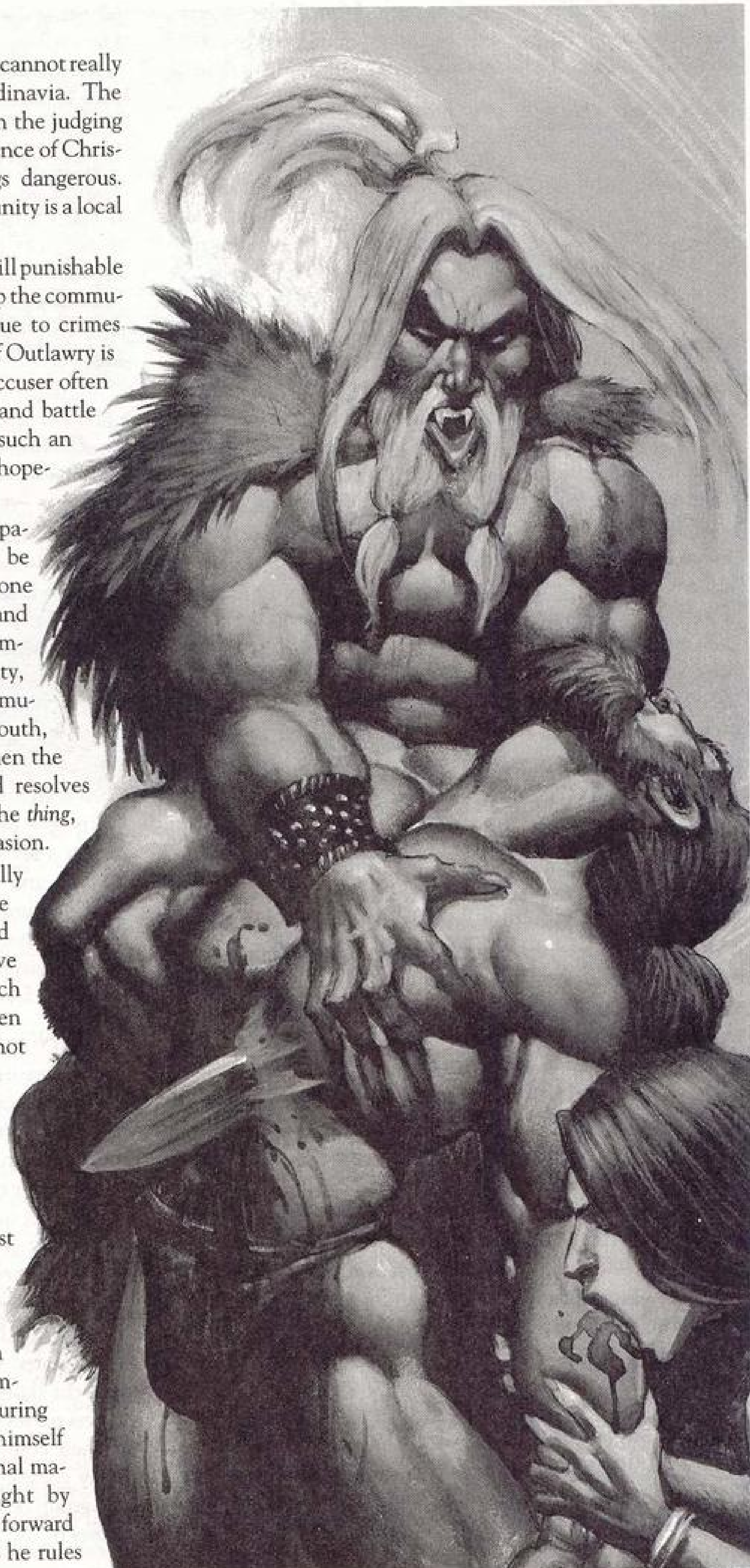
Crimes such as theft and secret murder are still punishable by death, but since many of the people making up the communities of vampiric holds are already outlaws due to crimes committed while living or dead, the sentence of Outlawry is rarely delivered. In its place, the accused and accuser often perform an ordeal of arms such as *holmganga*, and battle each other during the local *thing*. Only when such an ordeal is impossible, and any other resolution hopeless, is Outlawry declared.

The importance of an unliving *jarl's* participation in making and enforcing laws cannot be overstressed. In many cases, she may be the only one in the community who remembers the old laws and how things should proceed. Furthermore, the vampire must maintain a show of strength and equity, or risk losing the respect and support of the community. Since summers are often spent in the south, sailing and raiding, winter is the usual time when the *afterganger* leads her people in the *thing* and resolves problems. This reinforces the local nature of the *thing*, and makes the *Althing* an exceedingly rare occasion.

When an *Althing* does occur, it is usually because of conflict brewing between vampire communities. The *Althing* is used as a way to head off a potentially devastating war that could leave the remaining *einherjar* too weak to survive. Such an *Althing* is held during the Spring or Fall, when the night is long enough and travel by sea not impossible. This *Althing* is a gathering of all the Scandinavian vampires, who decide on the dispute.

### VARGR-KINGS AND EINHERJAR BANDS

Since no vampire bows to mortal rule, most *einherjar* of the High North develop and rule their own petty fiefdoms, much like the Cainites of Europe. With the acceptance of blood-cults and supernatural prowess, though, vampires in Scandinavia enjoy a much-elevated status compared to their fellows in more southerly lands. During the Viking Age, a vampire may announce himself publicly in a town as a blood-drinking nocturnal marauder, and instead of being killed outright by God-fearing priests and peasantry he can look forward to veneration and a place of honor so long as he rules





with unswerving diligence and strength. After all, the *einherjar*, Oðin's brood of blooded slain warriors, are the most honored of the dead, as they have been chosen specially to fight at Ragnarök.

Organization among Scandinavian vampires falls into three distinct groups. The *aftergangers* of the north often style themselves petty kings, ruling openly over feudal districts. Some warriors take up wandering in search of battle and blood; these bands of roving *einherjar* are, as often as not, heroes to the common people despite their fury and monstrous appetites. A few vampires even rule over cults and holy places, becoming objects of worship.

With the Christianization of Scandinavia, Norse vampires find themselves increasingly at odds with the native population. The exhortations of Christian priests paint them as monsters and predators who are in league with the Devil. Dwindling pagan cults result in fewer opportunities to secure blood from fanatical worshippers. Even the end of Viking raids is a death-knell, as the Scandinavian vampires can no longer travel south on voyages with a handful of loyal ghoulish *huskarls*. Those *einherjar* who enjoyed existence as rulers and objects of veneration during the Viking Era suddenly find their world a claustrophobic nightmare of hiding from converted farmers and angry priests. A few refuse to bow to the changing ways, raging at those who would have the gall to hunt or attack them, but their numbers dwindle with each passing night.

## UNLIVING WOLF-KINGS

Since kingship in the Viking Era was a matter of rule by strength and charisma, *vargr* had little difficulty in establishing their own protectorates and territories. Indeed, many small settlements dotted across the land boasted the residence of a local *einherjar* who demanded blood tithes in exchange for his guidance and sword-arm. A few such communities, hidden away from prying eyes, still exist under the shackles of vampire masters. There, outside the passage of time, tiny enclaves uphold the old ways as long as they can, resisting the incursion of the outside world.

*Aftergangers* who do not adjust with the times can find themselves in serious danger. A single missionary can precipitate the conversion of much of a town; once so converted, the townspeople may well decide to do away with their Devil-spawned ruler. Young, upstart vampires created after the Conversion — and calling themselves Cainites instead of *einherjar* — are also a nuisance; many a crusading Cainite takes it upon himself to rid the north of the Pagan devils who openly flaunt God's will. The wolf-kings are increasingly rare; their days have passed.

## PAGAN CULTS AND VAMPIRE BROODS

The influence of the old gods dies slowly as belief in them fades. However, in some isolated places, the gods live on Middle-garð — or so believe their worshippers. When the

Christ-god's agents must contend not with simple believers, but with beings who style themselves after the Æsir themselves, the old ways become difficult to destroy. It is through such cults that many of the old and powerful *einherjar* maintain their influence.

Instead of simply proclaiming themselves the brood of Oðin, some of the slain actually take up the mantle of godhood, declaring themselves the Æsir incarnate. In such places, the worship of Christ finds little hold. Bolstered by the presence of bloody-handed gods, the people rebel against southern missionaries. Existing openly among the people, using their powers to garner influence and wealth, drawing tribute and blood-sacrifice, such vampires head entire towns of devoted followers.

Still, the spread of the Christian faith touches off discord and destruction among the cults of divinely dissembling vampires. Those with True Faith can repel the powers of the *einherjar* and drive them out; crusaders with sword and flame hunt down the vampires by day or with the protection of their crosses. With no real defense against the Christian faithful, the *einherjar* who style themselves deities must take to wandering from town to town and exacting their tribute briefly before moving on, or else must secure their homes from the outside world so that the Christians of Europe never unearth them.

Indeed, the most powerful Viking to form a cult, calling himself the All-High, could not stand against the Christian faith. The All-High settled in Uppsala, there directing worship with his powerful *Walkurie* brood and ghouled *huskarls*. Even with his guiding strength, the persistent influence of the Christ-god converted his herd among the Swedes, leading at last to a revolution by the humans. The All-High's temple burned, and *einherjar* everywhere, who once looked to the ancient vampire for guidance, trembled at the destruction of the old ways. The dying embers of the All-High's temple at Uppsala signaled, in a very real way, the end of the old gods' influence for vampires in Scandinavia.

## ROVING EINHERJAR

Increasingly threatened by Christian influence and changing times, more and more Norse vampires become wanderers, traveling from town to town and earning gold and blood as hired mercenaries or bandits. In older times, vampires only wandered by choice or if forced away by a rival *einherjar*, but in these times mortals grow dangerous and unruly. It is exceedingly difficult to find followers of the old religion by the time of **Dark Ages**; as a result, the brood of Oðin garner little respect any more.

During the heyday of the Vikings, the bands of *einherjar* were treated with the deference due to the warriors chosen from the slain. Hunting monsters and fighting against outsiders was par for the course; in exchange, the *einherjar* held places in their communities, until they moved on. Now, though, many communities fear their former protectors. More than one group of Viking vampires has been driven from their old homes by torch-wielding villagers. As a result, more and more





*aftergangers* take to wandering the wilds, surviving on game and preying on the occasional traveler or outlaw. Others move south in search of more verdant pastures, but often find themselves caught up in the foul snares of Cainite politics. Only the strongest and hardiest of the *einherjar* survive the Inquisition and beyond.

### THE VAMPIRE *ALTHING*

The *Althing* is attended by all Norse vampires able to attend, regardless of clan. It begins with the selection of the first judge when at least nine *einherjar* are present. For every nine vampires attending, another judge is selected, up to a maximum of nine judges. Their role is to act as arbiter and legislator for the vampires of the North. Their rulings are binding for all attending, theoretically even above clan politics. The judges also formulate the law based on the perceived consensus of those attending.

Each night, during the *Althing*, the judges ask if any attending have dispute to be settled. Each issue is then discussed by all attending, with each side presenting its solution. When the matter has been discussed to the judges' satisfaction, they make a ruling on the issue.

An *Althing* has a number of means to decide a dispute. The council can declare a vampire outlaw, and have her killed. It can order the payment of *wergild* (usually in the form of *thralls*) for crimes committed. Territory and property can be

redistributed at the judges' discretion. Even war or peace can be declared, if the dispute warrants such a thing.

Obviously, the councils of vampires called in an *Althing* are highly partisan, and when an *Althing* is declared, the nearest *einherjar* often rush to the scene so as to present favorable candidates as judges. Furthermore, it is not unknown (and, indeed, it is quite common) for judges to make rulings that are based upon clan or local politics, especially if one or more aggrieved parties are absent. In such cases, the adversely affected *einherjar* may protest the ruling of the council, which invariably leads to feud or war. If the council feels that it has sufficient support, it may declare such an argumentative subject outlaw, rendering him vulnerable to destruction in a fashion similar to the Blood Hunts of the European continent. If, however, the target is too powerful or too well-supported for the council to pass such judgment, then little recourse remains but hidden war.

### VAMPIRE RELIGION

The surviving old Viking vampires remain pagan, worshipping *Oðin* (Odin), *Þonar* (Thor) and *Freyr* (Frey) as they did in better times. While away on their raiding, the *einherjar* give worship from aboard ship. At home during the winter, they worship from the warmth of their halls or temples. The people they lead still worship in groves and woods surrounding their





homes, where they can. If a community is isolated enough, such worship occurs in the open. If, the community is in the south or has visitors, the worship proceeds in secret. After all, in the era of expanding Christianity, the vampires have no desire to draw unnecessary and undesired attention to the old ways.

Lesser worship consists of rituals performed at the spring planting or before the harvest. Other rituals are held during births, deaths, when ships are launched and when a warband leaves. These are mostly burnt offerings, a few words offered to the gods or chants and invocations, accompanied by appropriate music and gestures (clanging hammers for Ponar, clapping and bells for Freyr). The spring, fall and Yule feasts are also considered offerings to the gods.

Every nine years the *einherjar* in an area gather to give sacrifice to the gods. This major festival lasts nine nights and is held in a secluded grove. Sacrificial victims, usually *thralls* and livestock, are brought. A night's festivities begin with songs and chants, offering thanks to Oðin and Freyr. A man and animal are then hung upside down from the branches of a nearby tree, and their throats are cut. As the blood drains, the worshipping *aftergangers* drink and mark themselves with the crimson fluid. Often, this leads to frenzy and fighting, which is considered part of the occasion. The *vargr* test one another in battle, drawing strength from the blood of the

sacrifices and trading blows in ecstatic fury. When the last of the sacrifices has been made, the vampires return home.

## THE *EINHERJAR* WAY

Vampires of the north aren't simply Vikings with clans. The particulars of their Norse heritage give *einherjar* an outlook upon the world that's far different from many of their southern cousins. The differences in religion, society and lifestyle don't just show in the mortal populace — habits and traits carry over into eternity.

Most noticeably, *einherjar* rarely have compunctions about functioning openly and in public. The idea of the Silence of the Blood is a foreign one — hide from mortal sight? The chosen warriors of Oðin? In latter days, the Camarilla's Masquerade is seen as a weak and pathetic excuse for power-plays and intrigues among *aftergangers* who cannot stand and fight like men.

The creation myths of the *einherjar*, as different as they are from the Christian vampires of Europe, foster different duties. There is no sense of filial responsibility. To be chosen as an *einherjar* is to be blessed as one of the warriors who will fight and die at Ragnarök. Sire and Childe are not positions; rather, the Embrace — the Choosing, as some *einherjar* call it — is recognition for one's valor and cunning. All of Oðin's brood are equal; all will fight and die in the End Times. The eldest do



not demand respect. Respect is earned through strength; to win respect, one must fight. Courage and battle-prowess speak louder than age among the *einherjar*.

Like their cousins to the south, the *einherjar* abhor the practice of Diablerie, though for different reasons than many Elders. The Soul-Bite is a foul practice, committed only by those who side with the enemy, the jotuns and trolls. A true warrior gains strength through trials and through personal growth, not by stealing the vigor of others with black arts. The *einherjar* are all the chosen dead, and must fight as one against the giants and with the gods. To slay another *einherjar* through magic or the Soul-Bite — to visit the Final Death, from which one does not rise the next day — is abhorrent and sacrilegious. Vampires who engage in such practices are hunted and killed by any *einherjar* who hear of them.

Indeed, to the *aftergangers* of the North, the Cainites living in Europe are evil spirits, twisted counterparts who deserve destruction. Those warriors who earn respect through the honor of valiant deeds are fellows to be treated with dignity; some may even survive to fight as allies in the last days. Those vampires who use cunning and guile, though, who bend words and work the trickery of Loki, are adversaries to be struck down. Little wonder, then, that the vampires of Europe fear and fight the *einherjar* just as much as Europe's mortals battle the living Vikings.

## MODERN GEOGRAPHY

During the height of the Viking Age, the Norse traveled all over Europe and settled in Ireland, England, France and Russia. They established themselves on the remote islands of the Atlantic: the Faroes, Iceland and Greenland. There was even a brief colony in North America. The descendants of the Norse are now everywhere, from Scotland to Sicily, Constantinople to Iceland. With them come the *einherjar*; vampires survive and thrive in communities on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean.

However, generations later, the Norse who settle in Europe assimilate into the local culture and, while some words or traditions survive, the settlers of England and Normandy are no longer truly Norse. It is only in Scandinavia, Iceland and Greenland that the Norse culture survives in a recognizable form. Despite the slow decline of Scandinavian culture, though, many *einherjar* cling to the old ways, fervently trying to promote the valor and violence of their heyday.

## NORWAY

Norway stretches along the mountainous west coast of the Scandinavian peninsula. Rocks and small islands protect its deep fjords from the Atlantic, and the Gulf Stream keeps the harbors open year round. The climate is mild, with cool summers and warm winters. The land around Oslo, Jaeren and Trondheim is suitable for farming and has the greatest concen-

tration of people. Each of the fjords and river valleys have strips of fertile land and support villages and towns.

The major resources of Norway are iron and wood, both available in almost limitless quantities. The country also teems with wildlife; reindeer, elk, wolf, bear, fox, wolverine and marten are hunted in the south for their meat and fur, while in the North it is seal, whale and walrus. Fish is also plentiful, teeming in the coastal waters and open sea.

A land of mountains and woods, Norway remains a place of mystery and isolation, even in the 12th century. Hidden in the fjords are lonely communities, each one isolated from the influence of the rest of the country. In the Halogaland and fjords of Norway the old ways are still practiced in lonely villages, away from the reach of the king.

## VAMPIRES OF NORWAY

In Norway, the *afterganger* is found living in the wilds of the mountains as a *vargr*, hiding among the Christian populace in the major towns, or ruling as a *jarl* in one of the small communities in the North. A *vargr* in Norway survives primarily on the wildlife found in the forests, supplemented by the occasional outlaw, traveler or villager. Vampires who settle in communities have more options.

The typical *einherjar*-ruled community consists of a large main hall, where the vampire *jarl* and his *huskarls* reside. Surrounding this are the farmsteads of the locals, each with a barn, paddock and house. A community dock is close by, with the longships and fishing craft of the village moored there. Christian communities have a stone church in their center. All told, no more than a hundred people make their home in each such place.

Towns in Norway are religious, administrative or trading centers and the population makes its living with trade and crafts, rather than agriculture or hunting. For a vampire, these large settlements provide a good chance of anonymity. The major towns in Norway are Oslo, Trondheim and Skien, each with a population in the thousands.

## SWEDEN

Long and narrow, Sweden shares a mountainous border with Norway and faces onto the Gulf of Bothnia and the Baltic Sea. The highest parts of the mountainous north are permanently snowbound and feed the many rivers that flow east into the coastal plains. The lowlands surrounding the Mälaren, Vänern, and Vättern lakes dominate Central Sweden. With its many bogs and wetlands, the area is difficult to travel, save on marked paths and trails.

As with Norway, Sweden enjoys a mild climate in the south. However, in the north, temperatures are much colder and the population is sparser. The natural resources of Sweden are also similar to Norway, with iron and timber being nearly unlimited and the hunting and fishing excellent. Unlike Norway, though, Sweden looks eastwards, to the Germanic and Slavic lands along the Baltic.



## EINHERJAR OF SWEDEN

The vampires of Sweden are found in isolated bands in the wooded mountains of the north, in enclaves on the islands of the Baltic, or hiding in the bogs of the central lakes. Rarely are they found in towns or ruling a village like their Norwegian kin.

A *vargr* band in Sweden numbers anywhere from one to a handful of vampires, with another handful of mortal or ghoulish followers. The farther north one goes, the smaller the size of the bands. A typical band roams from north to south and back, as the weather and sun allow, feeding on wildlife and villagers as required. If hunting is poor, the band crosses into Russia, through Finland, and seeks blood among the Slavs.

The islands in the Baltic provide a home to pirates — some led by *einherjar*. A typical pirate crew consists of a *drakkar* or *scutta* with the appropriate number of warriors, based out of a small settlement on one of the islands. These pirates raid the merchant trade between the large trading towns along the Baltic and the rest of Europe, coming away with many treasures and goods.

## DENMARK

Denmark is a small country, especially compared to Norway and Sweden. The difference isn't just in size — Denmark is very flat, is attached directly to Europe, and is half islands. The constant contact with the Saxons, Frisians and Slavs to the south exerts a profound cultural influence. This proximity leads to its conversion to Christianity first among the Scandinavian lands, and to the establishment of a feudal state.

Denmark is a gateway for the Baltic and the North Sea and gathers a portion of the trade that passes between them with tariffs and fees. Unlike Norway and Sweden, Denmark does not have an endless supply of timber or iron. Instead, it relies its strategic position along a trade route, and on agriculture and crafts, for its wealth.

## THE ROT IN DENMARK

Viking vampires in Denmark exist either in the anonymity of the trading towns or as lone *vargr* in the limited woodlands available. A Viking community would quickly be noticed and dealt with harshly by the king or his agents. Further complicating matters, Denmark is home to a number of non-Viking Cainites who compete for the limited resources. A *vargr* or Viking vampire is either forced to go it alone, surviving on what can be plundered from the villages and towns, or to find a place among the European Cainites in her land.

## ICELAND, THE FAROES AND GREENLAND

Settled during the peak of the Viking age, these colonies remain part of Scandinavia in 1197 AD. The Vikings have

turned these once uninhabited islands into stable communities with ties to Scandinavia. The old ways, with some changes, survived Christianization and these settlements retain the flavor of the Norse.

Iceland is the oldest of the settlements, with a number of villages and a growing population thanks to a mild climate provided by the Gulf Stream. The strangeness of the volcanoes and earthquakes is offset by the familiarity of the rocky coasts and barren mountain areas, which resemble those of Norway. Iceland has good pastureland, fish in the sea and rivers, easy access to whales and seal and wood for building homes.

The Faroes, a string of islands and islets south of Iceland, also have a moderate climate and excellent pastures. Despite their proximity to Scotland and Ireland, the Faroes have more contact with Norway than anyplace else. The population here is a scattered and small, with villages only on the largest of the islands.

Greenland is a land of snow and ice everywhere except for a small coastal area in the south-west which is suited for settlement. Here, not far from the inland ice fields, are found Norse farmers making a living from the pasture and soil. Essential imports of iron, wood and grain from Norway are paid for with the pelts of polar bears and arctic fox, walrus tusks, narwhal horn, and whalebone. The settlements in Greenland are fragile, however, and a bad couple of years or plague could destroy them.

## ATLANTIC KINDRED

The *vargr* in Iceland and Greenland are very rare and very careful. While the people hold to the old ways, they are also isolated and not very numerous. The islands cannot support large vampire populations, and the *vargr* who are present take great care to police themselves and any vampires arriving from outside.

A vampire could be found leading a community similar to one in Norway, but less isolated. The vampiric nature of a *jarl* could be kept a secret, but the location of the community couldn't. Furthermore, the Icelandic vampire can count on more support for her raids and adventures, and support a larger warband than her isolated Norwegian counterparts.

## THE REST OF EUROPE

Vampires and mortals in the rest of Europe feel that the Viking age is over, and already many scholars are writing of the Viking Era in the past tense. The increase in fortifications and the quick, armed response to Viking attacks have made raids riskier, while the conversion to Christianity has made them morally improper. A prime incentive for raiding, slaves, is out of favor in the new feudal arrangements. The only groups that continue to raid are the vampire *jarls*, and their numbers are small.



# THE CLANS

## ASSAMITES

The Assamites are very selective about their membership, almost exclusively recruiting from the Ismalis. However, the Norse warriors made expeditions into the Middle East as early as the 700s, and a select few of these warriors may have been Embraced. Additionally, a number of Norse served in the Varangian Guard, a mercenary bodyguard of the Byzantine Emperor in Constantinople during the 11th Century. It's not inconceivable that some of these may have been Embraced, to extend Saracen influence into the Emperor's palace.

A Norse Assamite is dedicated, brave and a fearsome warrior. He is found living in the wilderness of Scandinavia, hunting the *vargr* and *jarls* of the North. Indeed, his indoctrination into the clan forever makes a Scandinavian Assamite the enemy of his own kind, hunting other vampires of the North for their blood. The particular traits of Assamites (dark skin, religion and secret murder) mark a Norse Assamite as an outsider and make it difficult to fit in with the rest of the northern Kindred.

Because the children of Haquim (the Assamites) feel that it is their duty to fight against the children of Khayyin (Caine), there's obviously a bit of religious tension going on between any Norsemen and the beliefs of the Assamite clan. Without a legend including Caine or Haquim, after all, the Norse have no reason to zealously promote the clan's agenda of assassination. As a result, those Scandinavians who do not convert directly to the clan's belief structure instead consider Khayyin one of the *jotuns*, or giants, who tricked Haquim and stole the power they make false *einherjar*. The fact that Haquim was supposedly a descendant of Khayyin, and not vice versa, is dismissed as fallacy in such cases.

## BRUJAH

After the Gangrel, the Brujah are probably the most numerous of the Norse vampires. The Norse have looted or traded along the coast of Portugal and Africa for centuries, and have had much contact with the Zealots. The relationship between the Norse people and the *einherjar* is a fascinating one for the Brujah. The tenuous ties of duty between vampiric *jarls* and mortal *huskarls* remind the Brujah of lost Carthage, and they share in it by Embracing some of the Norse.

The Brujah Norse are to be found mostly in the new trading cities of Scandinavia, such as Bergen and Schleswig. There, they try to find a balance between the old pagan and the new Christian ways. There are elements of the Norse society that have great appeal to the Brujah: the value of the individual, the admiration of the brave, the loyalty of family and the respect given to *einherjar*. These values are what the Zealots wish to preserve.

Of course, Scandinavian vampires have their own uniquely Viking views on the vampire place among mortals. While many Brujah profess to seek equality between Kin and Kine,

the *einherjar* rule and fight as chosen warriors. Older Brujah work from the common points of vampires coexisting openly with mortals, and attempt to smooth over the difficulties that inevitably result when already fierce Viking warriors succumb to the incredible rage of the Zealots'.

## CAPPADOCIANS

While the Norse have roamed over all of Europe, the odds of any of them being Embraced by this secretive and hidden clan are next to nil. There is little that the Norse have to offer this Clan, and less that it has to offer any Viking.

## FOLLOWERS OF SET

Another rarity is the Norse Setite. The religious aspects of the Followers of Set make it unlikely that they would Embrace a Viking. However, not all Norse are immune to the corruption of civilized life, and it is possible that one far away from home could be turned to the service of the clan. This convert would then be sent into the midst of the Norse, to sow corruption in his homeland.

As with other vampiric legends, the tales of Set are often incorporated into *einherjar* myth in different forms than the European versions. Vikings see Set as *Jormungandr*, the world-serpent, a vicious enemy of the *Æsir* and offspring of Loki and the giants. As a result, any true *einherjar* warrior sees it as his solemn duty to fight against the diabolical forces of the Setites.

## GANGREL

The most numerous of Norse Kindred are Gangrel. Even before the Norse began their expansion, the Gangrel dwelt among them — sometimes as allies, other times as monsters. The lands of Scandinavia are perfectly suited to the Gangrel temperament, with their isolated fjords, mountains and wilderness. However, Norse Gangrel are hardly restricted to the North. On the longships of the Vikings, the Gangrel spread into the rest of the Europe. They can be found throughout the continent, anywhere that Viking raids may have carried them.

Some Norse Gangrel surround themselves with other warriors, attempting to hold on to the old pagan ways. These *jarls* strive to be paragons of Viking virtue and to instill this in the mortals in their care. Other Norse Gangrel are outlaws living in the wilderness as *vargr*. These *vargr* can be found all over Europe, preying on the civilized world around them.

Norse Gangrel care little for legends and tales of old vampires and their history. Instead, they concern themselves with sagas of great deeds and courage. It is a rare *vargr* who is not also an accomplished tale-teller; the *vargr* while their hours away swapping stories when they meet in the deep woods. Whether Caine or Oðin brought down the curse or blessing of eternal unlife is irrelevant; what matters is survival in the here and now. Pragmatic to the core, these vampires are those among the Scandinavians most likely to survive the harsh nights of the Conversion and the Inquisition, and to avoid the politics and theology that tear apart the Cainites of Europe.





## LASOMBRA

Only recently have the Lasombra turned their attentions towards the Norse, and then only because of the recent civilizing of the area. What few Lasombra do exist in the North are always sent there from the south, though a rare few Vikings from Denmark have been Embraced to help extend Lasombra influence into the politics of that emerging kingdom.

The Lasombra have to be extremely careful in their dealings in the North, given the hostile attitudes of nearly every other vampire they are likely to meet. The clan's ties to darkness and shadow are too reminiscent of Norse myths regarding Nidhogg and other dark powers; the Lasombra tend to make Vikings acutely uncomfortable. Dealing with the Scandinavians is therefore a touchy matter for the Magisters. Of course, the Lasombra make sure they are up to the challenge, Embracing only the most charismatic to carry their word.

## LAIBON

The fiery lands of Africa are anathema to the Vikings, who dub the land home to giants and worse. In the entire history of the World of Darkness, it is unlikely that any *einherjar* has even met one of the reclusive Laibon.

## LAMIA

The death-priestesses of Lilith are almost unknown in Scandinavia. The dark predilections of the Cappadocians hold little interest for the pragmatic Norse, and so the sister bloodline of Cappadocius has limited contact with the *einherjar*. Perhaps the only Lamia of the Vikings are the rare *walkuries* who are Embraced to fulfill their role as warrior-women and choosers of the slain among the ranks of Europe's Cainites.

Among those Viking vampires who cling to the old legends, some call the Lamia the servants of Hel, marking them as special *einherjar* who guard the realms of the dead to prevent the escape of lost souls. Given the Lamia predilection for studying death and war, this comes as no great surprise.

## LHIANNAN

Relations between the Celts and the Vikings are respectful but strained — each sees the other as valiant warriors but dangerous foes. The relations between Lhiannan and *einherjar* of other clans are similar — the vampires of Scandinavia are deadly enemies. The dying Lhiannan receive little surcease from the Vikings; their communities are raided and pillaged just as much as any Christian's. No Vikings are Embraced into this bloodline.



## MALKAVIANS

The Malkavians are infrequent members of the Norse, but those that are Embraced are treated with a mixture of fear and respect. No matter what the actual occupation of the Malkavian, he is treated like a skald and given the hospitality one of that order deserves. Many of the Norse view Malkavians as personifications of Loki (with all the mixture of admiration and fear that entails).

## NOSFERATU

Rarely found in the North, the Nosferatu are more likely to make a ghoul of a Viking than to Embrace one. What few do make it into the North are usually labeled monsters and hunted when found. The small size of the towns and settlements in the North makes discovery too easy for a Nosferatu to feel comfortable.

## RAVNOS

The Ravnos rarely cross paths with the Norse, so Ravnos Vikings are non-existent. When the paths of a Ravnos and a *vargr* do cross, violence is usually the result. Indeed, so few Gypsies (and accompanying *shilmulo*) have left India that it is unlikely that a Norseman would ever run across a member of the Ravnos clan.

## SALUBRI

The healers among the Salubri are mistrusted as magicians, but the warriors of the Salubri earn great respect for their valor and ferocity. Although the Salubri do not Embrace the Scandinavians — their violent and pagan temperaments are seen as undesirable — many *einherjar* have crossed blades with the followers of Saulot, and speak highly of the skills of the doomed prophets.

## TOREADOR

There is a certain beauty to the crafts of the Norse, and the Toreador have made an effort to preserve such products. Along with salutary skalds, the Toreador have Embraced various artisans responsible for creating some of the finest metal and woodwork in the North. These are brave and bold Toreador, risking much in their quest to preserve beauty. After all, the Norse have little use for effete foppery; a Viking Toreador creates objects of art as a testament to skill and dedication.

## TREMERE

The Tremere first appeared during the end of the Viking age, and as such have had little contact with the Norse. In the time since, their infamy has reached the Northern *einherjar* and marked the Usurpers as enemies. What attempts have been made by the Tremere to extend their power into Scandinavia (and these have been few and far between) have been met with quick and violent action. Far from their

strongholds, the Tremere have little chance in the North, for the moment.

With the Tremere abduction of several Gangrel in Europe, relations between the two clans are hostile in the extreme. Since the majority of Norse *einherjar* are Gangrel, the Usurpers have little or no real hope of any sort of meaningful contact among the Vikings. Indeed, even the few rune-wise or mystically inclined Scandinavians shun the Tremere as practitioners of an unnatural and demonic art. Conversely, the Tremere covet the power of the runes, and often send Finnish or Lappish students to insinuate themselves among the Scandinavian vampires. These spies rarely last more than a single winter before they are destroyed for their treacherous ways and black magical works.

## TZIMISCE

Almost from the beginning, the Tzimisce have had dealings with the Norse, and almost always they have been for the worse. The Norse traditions of freedom, individuality and unbending resistance put them at odds with the autocratic Tzimisce and their ghoul servants. Add in the frequent Viking raids into Tzimisce strongholds for slaves, and tensions are at a boiling point. However, this doesn't mean that the Fiends haven't been able to make a few unwilling converts amongst captured Vikings. The Tzimisce Vikings return to the North as monsters, seeking to destroy what remains of the old Norse culture with violence.

In recent years, the Tzimisce and the Gangrel have been forced into an uneasy alliance of convenience to battle the Tremere, and a Norse vampire caught in Europe may stay his claws simply due to this truce. Then again, a *vargr* who finds himself balked by a Fiend's domineering nature is likely to deal with matters bluntly and finally.

## VENTRUE

A strong Ventrue presence in Europe, along with the increasing feudalism of Scandinavia, has led to an increase in the number of Norse Kindred hailing from this clan. The Ventrue see the North as another place to extend their influence and to head off the expansionist efforts of the Brujah and Lasombra. The fact that the Gangrel are already in place is of little concern, since they are seen as simple beasts to be tamed by the arriving conquerors.

## CAITIFF

There are a few Caitiff in Scandinavia. Seeking to survive without guidance in the wilderness and towns is perilous indeed for a vampire, given the scarcity of prey and the other problems of living in the far north. The few Norse Caitiff are abandoned by irresponsible *vargr* in the wild, or *jarls* who overestimate a village's blood supply. Few survive the first winter or their first encounter with the Get of Fenris.



# STORYTELLING THE HIGH NORTH

Any Storyteller with some reference material and an outline of Scandinavian *einherjar* can build a story with some Viking vampires. Building a truly memorable Chronicle, though, takes effort and no small amount of thought. The *einherjar* of Scandinavia aren't simply vampires with axes and longboats. Focus on the differences in culture and mentality to play up the tensions between *einherjar* and Cainites.

## LASOMBRA, THE CHURCH, AND VIKING RAIDS

During the era of looting and pillaging, many of the targets of Viking raids are the monasteries of the Lasombra. Remote bastions of Christianity, the monasteries are looted of treasures, burned, and their vampire and mortal inhabitants slain. The Lasombra have a long memory and do not forget assaults on their strongholds. Their method of gaining revenge is, of course, subtle, as befits the manipulative Magisters.

The Lasombra attack the problem of the Vikings with religion. Through their agents in the Church, they encourage the existing efforts to convert Scandinavia to Christianity. While not every missionary into the North is a Lasombra spy, some are, and they do their best to undermine the culture that produces the Norse raids. Were it not for the continued presence of the vampire *jarls* and *vargr*, the Viking presence in Europe would be eliminated — something the Lasombra would very much like to see.

- The characters are vampire raiders, sacking coastal monasteries for loot. A few unpleasant run-ins with priests with True Faith force the characters back. When they return, they find the area under Lasombra control. How do they remove the Magisters, when the continental Cainites can unleash the force of True Faith? The characters must outmanipulate the manipulators to remove the priests so that the vampires may be confronted directly.

- The characters are converts, but find the idea of vampires controlling the church appalling. They seek to remove the Lasombra, but must grapple with questions of their own place in the Christian world. How do they justify killing a Lasombra who is also a priest?

- Controlling a community in the high North, the characters are faced with the incursion of Christianity. Missionary priests bring the word and start converting the locals, causing trouble and suspicion. Killing the missionaries merely guarantees irate converted villagers and more zealous crusaders who seek to finish the tasks of the martyred. How do the characters eliminate the puppets of the Magisters?

## VENTRUE CONVERSION

In contrast with the subtle moves of the Lasombra, the Ventrue have always been very overt in their attempts to deal with the Norse threat. From offering bribes to outright conquest, the Ventrue have made a strong effort to eliminate the threat of the Viking raids. The spread of fortifications and armed response in Ventrue held lands was no accident.

With its conversion to Christianity, and its proximity to Ventrue domains, Denmark has proven very receptive to the Ventrue. The Ventrue have begun establishing feudal relationships with the King of Denmark and, at the same time, are pursuing an aggressive military campaign to drive the *vargr* from the country. How long it will be before they take their forces into Norway and Sweden is unknown.

- For several years, Ventrue agents have paid Danegeld to keep the Vikings from raiding particular areas of the coastline. Now, the towns are being fortified and military forces are being trained. If the situation continues, the Vikings will be forced out of the area, and once raiding fails, there will be no more Danegeld, either. The characters seek to reassert their physical dominance over the area, to guarantee future riches for the taking.

- A Ventrue ambassador takes control of the local *jarl* or king, either through use of Dominate, the Blood Oath, or the covert aid of a Tremere. Now, the characters find themselves scorned as the local leader attempts to strike a peaceful bargain with the Ventrue. The Cainites manipulate matters to remove the characters from political power; worst of all, if the characters leave to do something about the Ventrue, they may find themselves outlaws when they return home. The Vikings must learn the political game and either control the leader or stage a bloody coup.

- Skirmishing between borders heats up, and the characters are thrust into war. They lead their forces into battle, but the superior tactics and weapons of the Ventrue armies start crushing them. The characters can ghoulish their armies, but risk depopulating the countryside in their search for blood. Reaching an accord means accepting unfavorable terms. The characters must strike hard and fast, taking the enemy capital — and defeating the enemy Ventrue and his retinue — in order to end the conflict quickly and decisively.

## BRUJAH RECRUITING

As far as the Brujah are concerned, the relationship enjoyed by many of the vampire *jarls* with mortals is something to be emulated. The schism in the Brujah ranks between those who support mortal kings, and those who oppose them, has also made the Norse warrior a valuable addition to the clan. Emissaries of both viewpoints have traveled north, to try to establish relations with the isolated vampire *jarls* of the fjords





and the *vargr* of the wilds. Thus far, the Brujah have been unable to reestablish the ways of their beloved Carthage, but that does not keep them from constantly trying.

- Iconoclasts from Constantinople see the Viking warriors, brutal and berserk, as the perfect tools to destroy a flawed society. The characters find themselves manipulated by powerful Brujah who are potent warriors in their own right. An uneasy truce must be struck with other European Cainites while the *einherjar* deal with the upstarts who would try to control the Vikings.

- A peaceful Brujah scholar arrives in the North, seeking to watch the *things* of Scandinavia. She takes notes about the open interactions between vampire *jarls* and mortal *huskarls*,

trying to find the means of peaceful coexistence, and finally asks for permission to create a *Childe*—or perhaps even makes one secretly. Is she an idealistic visionary or a dangerous emissary?

- A small circle of Brujah warriors seeks out the characters to do battle, having heard legends of the characters' prowess. After the fight, the Brujah swap tales, absorbing the Scandinavian stories of Ragnarök eagerly. The Brujah ask to become *einherjar*, joining the troupe of the characters and seeking out valiant conflicts, but their excesses prove too much even for the Vikings. Do the characters destroy them, disavow them and turn them into enemies, or join them in depravity?









# Chapter Three: Character Creation

*There are nine skills known to me -  
At tables I play ably;  
Rarely I run out of runes;  
Reading, smith-craft, both come ready;  
I can skim the ground on skis,  
Wield a bow, do well in rowing;  
To both arts I can bend my mind:  
Poet's lay and harper's playing.  
- Boast attributed to Earl Rognvald  
of the Orkneys*



The following section deals with character generation for a chronicle set in Scandinavia, or building a Scandinavian character for play in a more conventional *Vampire: the Dark Ages* game.

## SETTING CONSIDERATIONS PERIOD

Viking characters will be heavily affected by the era in which they live and die; the profound changes in religion and belief near the turn of the millennium change the faiths and practices of Scandinavia and its inhabitants. First is the pagan era, which includes the Viking age and the time before it, when Scandinavia is entirely pagan. Second is the period of the Conversion, as the High North accepts Christianity in fits and starts; this period lasts for several decades. Third is the post-Conversion era, after the Christian faith is well-established and pagan practices have died out or become thoroughly Christianized. Storytellers running a Scandinavian game should decide in which period the game is set, as these cultural influences will certainly have a great impact upon play.

Conventional *Dark Ages* games will of course take place in the post-Conversion era. This shouldn't particularly limit the players, however. The Conversion is a historically recent event, happening (roughly) between 900 and 1000, depending on the location. All but the youngest Norse *einherjar* will have been born and raised in the Old Ways, and may or may not have converted depending on personal choice.

## GROUP CONCEPTS FOR SCANDINAVIAN GAMES

Groups for Scandinavian games, particularly those set in the Viking age, need a compelling reason to be together. Unlike Continental Europe, the High North has a low population density. Large groups of vampires stretch the available blood. Conversely, vampires do tend to seek out the company of others of their own kind, if only for camaraderie that lasts longer than the brief lives of the mortals around them. With these factors in mind, the Storyteller must arrange matters so that the players have a plausible reason for association, but at the same time have a viable means of survival. Existence in Scandinavia should be difficult but not impossible.

Feeding is probably the largest problem for vampires in Scandinavia. Multiple *einherjar* in one location will have a difficult time not exhausting (or at least alienating) their food supplies, even if they supplement their diet with livestock. Groups might survive on Animalism-influenced herds of large animals like reindeer, by hunting as wolves via Protean, or simply by living as bandits and vagabonds, changing location frequently and drinking from travelers and the inhabitants of halls where they guest.

### WOLVES OF THE SEA

As with period, the Storyteller should probably either prepare the concept for a Scandinavian game ahead of time, or else be willing to mediate between the players and help them find a compromise everyone in the group will enjoy. All in all, preparing the concept ahead of time is likely to be the most rewarding. Four or five *einherjar* in one place without something to do are rapidly going to run into trouble, for reasons of character as well as economics. There aren't many vampire-friendly places in Scandinavia. With most civilization centered around isolated halls, there just isn't much to do during a five month long night spent in a large one-room house except annoy one another. Given the Scandinavian predilection for violence, some serious work should be done to make the characters mesh well.

## VIKINGS

This Chronicle is possible over the entire spectrum of pre- and (as *vargr*) post-Conversion Scandinavia. The characters are leaders of a Viking band, taking to the sea to bring glory and riches to themselves and their hearty band of freebooters. Every summer night is a new piece of coastline and a new raid for provisions. This is not necessarily a short-term saga. Many Viking expeditions spent years away from home, wintering on islands in estuaries up and down the coast of Europe.

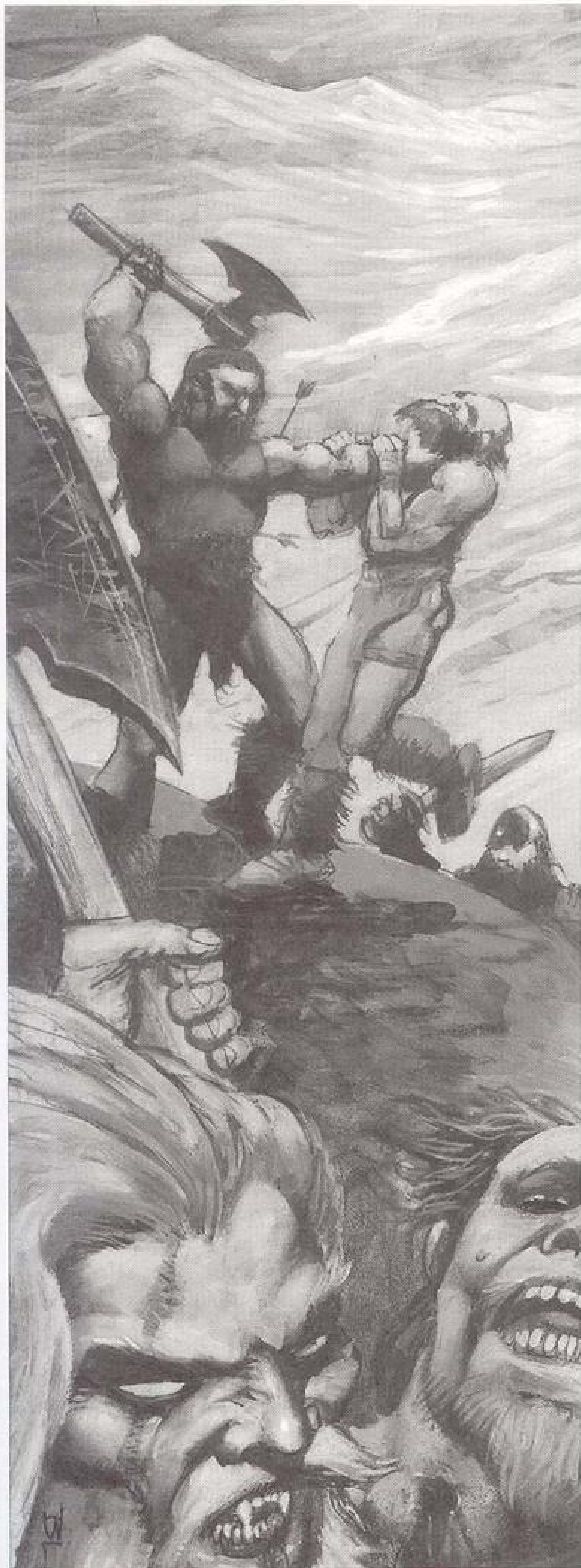
The Storyteller needs to work hard to give this sort of Chronicle purpose. A Chronicle that is nothing more than a series of coastal raids quickly loses its luster. Instead, the Chronicle needs to focus upon the development of the characters, their interactions on the long sea voyages, and the means by which they conduct their raids. Successful raiders may well settle and spend their hard-earned wealth on construction of a new settlement. Similarly, long-running enemies (especially Cainites of the continent, who have lost riches and prestige to the depredations of the characters) help to keep the players on their toes.

## LOYAL HUSKARLS

For a chronicle featuring intrigue worthy of the sagas, build the characters as *huskarls* to a powerful *jarl* (whether the *jarl* is also portrayed by a player is up to the Storyteller). The characters undertake business for the *jarl*, constantly vying for gifts (potent blood? favors?) while making sure that rivals don't gain the upper hand. As a group, the characters might be pitted one against the other, each trying to earn a place of honor with the *jarl*, or even replace him; alternately, they may form a circle of warriors fighting to support the *jarl* against an outside threat. Either way, expect a lot *holmgang*, murder, betrayal and open warfare.

Perfect for showcasing Viking society in its entirety, a chronicle of this sort deals with the customs and beliefs of the Scandinavians in depth. Together, the characters must face down outside threats from other *jarls* as well as more supernatural enemies like trolls and werewolves, while still watching their own backs for treachery in their midst. While most stories will take place in or near the hall of the *jarl*, loyal *huskarls* may





be called upon to travel to distant lands in order to secure rare treasures or artifacts for their lord, or to cement alliances.

For a twist on the usual *Dark Ages* game, make a chronicle of *huskarls* whose members (the players' characters) are all ghouls. Watch the treachery increase as each ghoul vies for favor with the *jarl* in hopes of gaining the Embrace. Such a modification also affords the characters the opportunity to act during the day, but if they undertake long missions, they must be wary of the possibility of reverting to weak mortality.

## TRADERS

Even more than Vikings, Scandinavian merchants are a constant throughout history. If there is business to be done, there will be Norsemen there, buying and selling. This lifestyle allows the Scandinavian vampire to feed with near-impunity on the alien populace, and provides a perfect reason for a Norse character in a conventional *Dark Ages* game set in practically any location in Europe. Of course, most markets are closed during the evening, so a ghoul with a firm knowledge of mercantile principles is a must. Alternately, vampires can deal in materials that will bring a buyer out at any time of day: amber, fine fur or the considerably discounted jewelry previously owned by the people several hundred miles up the coast.

This sort of campaign is ideal for groups that may move or stay at a whim. As merchants, the characters can easily pack up and travel to new markets, but a wealthy trade provides a good incentive to stay in one place. Thus, a wide range of stories is possible, as the characters will doubtless meet many people and involve themselves in wide-ranging schemes while traveling, buying and selling.

## CONQUERERS ABROAD

Not every voyage by Scandinavians was for the purposes of raiding and trading. Colonization, with its attendant ousting of the local population through pillage, rapine and simple crowding out, was a staple of Norse culture. Greenland, Iceland and the Orkney, Shetland and Faroe Islands were all colonized by Scandinavians. Less successful colonies were started in Vinland, England and Ireland. While the Norse settlements in Ireland and the Danelaw in England were eventually abolished, they had long lives, and seemed like unstoppable juggernauts at the times of their founding. *Einherjar* seeking greener pastures and more abundant sustenance might find participation in such settlements-cum-invasions alluring. Open and covert warfare with the local mortal and supernatural populations, political infighting among the settlers, and the challenge of adapting to a new environment all provide obstacles to be overcome. The population being displaced is definitely fair game for feeding, and provides sufficient sustenance for several *einherjar* to exist in close proximity.

Colonization provides the opportunity for empire building. For players with a taste for intrigue, there's no substitute for building a kingdom from scratch. Even if the colony itself fails, the *einherjar* can insinuate themselves into local societies.



The clash of cultures, and especially of settled vampires versus the upstart Scandinavians, forms the basis for a great deal of conniving and conflict.

## MISSIONARIES

The major impetus behind the Conversion was from Scandinavians who had traveled to Continental Europe, converted and brought the faith back with them. There's no reason that a Scandinavian supernatural might not undergo the same experience as a mortal. Because of their superhuman strength, Cainites will have a significant advantage in attempting to convert mortals, even if the vampire doesn't use social disciplines — it's damnably difficult for a mortal to beat a Cainite in a *holmgang*. However, Cainites have the opportunity to proselytize to the supernatural denizens of Scandinavia in addition to the human population. Missionary Cainites face the same problems as normal missionaries, namely being mocked, tortured, enslaved, murdered in their beds or killed during *holmganga* by champions of the native faith.

Those Cainites attempting to preach to supernaturals face additional risks. Few Get of Fenris see vampires exhorting them to the Christian Faith as anything but ragdolls to be rent asunder with greater-than-usual enthusiasm. Those missionaries who attempt to minister to their fellow Cainites must fear Amaranth as well as religious hatred — who would notice or care if a troublesome band of missionaries went to a *vargr* hall and failed to emerge?

## IMITATION GODS

According to Norse belief, the Æsir often walked among the halls of men. Vampires with the right appearance could imitate the gods with fair accuracy. For pre-Conversion vampires, this is a simple way to gain sustenance. It can also be a way for Conversion-era Cainites to oppose the spread of Christianity, by providing physical evidence of the gods to their believers. If properly executed, divine imitations can gain the vampire herds of blood-slaves and help fight the spread of the Christian faith. However, it's a dangerous masquerade, one that any hedge-witch can ruin. Regardless of the beliefs of those so defrauded, the victims are likely to be most displeased by the actions of the "gods."

A small group of *einherjar* could reasonably conceal themselves as a band of the gods adventuring together; the Norse deities were notable for their small group forays into strange realms. In this fashion, *einherjar* of different clans can each take a role appropriate to a particular divinity, demanding tribute or hospitality from their mortal fellows. However, it must be remembered that the Scandinavians gave respect through strength, and gods who do not demonstrate their prowess or test and succor their followers will be questioned and eventually discovered for what they are.

## WOLVES OF THE SEA

## WE'RE ON A MISSION FROM GOD

An excellent possibility for a crossover campaign is the missionary band. There's no reason that various supernaturals who have received the calling might not work together to spread the faith. Lupines and vampires make a potent though highly unlikely group (since werewolves, as a rule don't follow any human religion), combining the battle-prowess of the Garou with the oratory abilities of the Kindred. Risen witnesses to the need for salvation can provide combat power and daylight protection for a vampiric missionary group, as can ghouls or sorcerers. As always, crossovers are run at the Storyteller's risk; there is no guarantee that such a group will have a balanced selection of powers and abilities.

## CHARACTER CONCEPT

Character concept really varies depending on the nature of the game. Whatever the case, remember that there's a great deal of variety within even the most stereotypical of Scandinavian roles. A straightforward warrior can be crass or cultured, thoughtful or brash, eager or retiring, cheerful or glum. Just as all priests, merchants, monks and nobles aren't the same, neither are all Norse warriors. To use an example from Greek myth, Akhilleus, Odysseus and Nestor Horse-breaker would have very similar capabilities, but they are very, very different people. Think about the conditions in which your character grew up, what his life experiences were like, and what his attitude towards societal expectations is, and you'll soon find him differentiated from the rest of the group. Did your character hope to go a-Viking with his older brothers, or was he an only child who took up saga to fill his time? Was your character a fledgling *walkurie*, or did she always plan on marrying for position? Any given Norseman is likely to have spent some time as a farmer, herder or dairyman; did your character take up the sword and ax for money, for fame, from societal pressure, or out of desperation?

Also, take some time to think of less stereotypical characters. The High North wasn't populated entirely with burly, ale-swilling refugees from the ranks of *Alexsandr Nevsky's* Teutonic Knights. There were just as many scholars, mystics, peddlers, monks, missionaries, farmers, minstrels, widows, horse-breeders and fishermen as anywhere else in Europe.

## PERSONALITY AND GOALS

Much has already been said of Scandinavians and their culture in general, but each character needs a unique impression. Certainly, the image of the tall and blond-bearded Viking warrior is a compelling one; still, the Norse are as eclectic as any other people. Even Scandinavian names and epics give insight into the individualism of the Norse.



A typical Scandinavian's surname shows a great deal about his personal characteristics. While many Norsemen simply took the names of their fathers ("Eriksson," "Haraldsdatter,"), others gained names through their personalities, deeds or physical appearance. Surnames like Runewise, Trollbane and Forkbeard set apart the many Hrolfs and Gunnars. Indeed, the acquisition of a surname may have something to do with a character's particular Abilities, Merits, Flaws or deeds in a prelude.

Remember, too, that Norsemen are not all pillaging, ravaging bestial raiders. Certainly, the desire for glory and wealth drove many a Viking, but just as many Scandinavians are explorers, settlers or merchants. An *einherjar* has even more motivations to travel: Uncovering one's Sire or more information about one's capabilities is a staple of vampiric questing, and valorous Norse vampires may take it upon themselves to raid and pillage among their unliving fellows in search of the potent blood that cannot be matched by mere gold and silver. Conversely, with the powers of the Disciplines, a Norseman can easily set himself (or herself!) up as a *jarl*, a powerful leader of a community that in turn supports other *einherjar* with blood and protection. For a Viking with all of eternity ahead, the potential long-term goals are numerous and varied.

Of course, the picture of Viking warriors emerges precisely because of the preeminence of the stereotype. No Viking chronicle is complete without at least a few blood-thirsty and competitive ax-swinging madmen. Regardless of their other traits, the Norse are passionate creatures, full of conviction and action. Where other cultures may prize scholarship and contemplation, the Norse value learning through experience. Scandinavian characters are always in motion; to die in battle or in a mighty quest is the epitome of the legendary hero. A Scandinavian vampire is even more terrifying because of the powerful urges of frenzy and the Beast, but the berserks of mortal Vikings can even stand beside the rages of the *einherjar*. This unequalled lust for life should be reflected in all characters, even the most insightful and passive; a true Norseman's blood always runs hot, despite the cold winter.

## NAMES

The Norse have many and varied names. "Joe the Viking" doesn't make any sense for a Scandinavian character, especially given the importance of names to the Vikings. While one's personal name is a mark of individuality, one's family or deed name is a recollection of an important heritage or past.

Not only do the Norse use personal names, but they keep names for families ("Gunnarsson" for the son of Gunnar), and they also adopt place-names and deed-names ("Aud of Uppsala" or "Eirik the Kinslayer"). In addition, the Norse use fanciful names for their tools and trades: "Steel-bite" could refer to a sword, while "mead of Oðin" refers to poetry. Viking characters should have carefully chosen names, and any sagaman worth his salt certainly indulges in poetic expression.





## NORSE GIVEN NAMES

### Men's Names

Agnar  
Asmund  
Atli  
Björn  
Brand  
Egil  
Eirik  
Eyolf  
Frakki  
Frodi  
Grim  
Gunnar  
Gyrd  
Hafgrim  
Halfdan  
Harald  
Hasting  
Hedin  
Hogni  
Hrani  
Ingvi  
Ivar  
Jarnskeggi  
Jetmund  
Ketil

### Women's Names

Asa  
Aud  
Bera  
Bergthora  
Brynhild  
Edda  
Freydis  
Gudrid  
Hallgärd  
Hild  
Hildirid  
Ingeborg  
Ingegerd  
Isgerd  
Kara  
Kostbera  
Nauma  
Ragnhild  
Sigrid  
Svanvit  
Thorborg  
Thorgerd  
Thorhilda  
Unn  
Vætild

# ABILITIES, BACKGROUNDS, DISCIPLINES AND ROADS

## NEW SKILLS

### SAGAMAN

This skill covers the ability to compose and recite epic poetry in the traditional Norse style. It also covers knowledge of Scandinavian historical legend, religious practices, kennings and aphorisms. A skilled *skald* (bard) commands much respect and can find a seat in any hall, either reciting saga or composing the story of the hall's lord.

## WOLVES OF THE SEA

- Novice: You know how that story goes. It starts, um Ö....
- Practiced: You know the plots of the major sagas. You rarely forget or stumble during recitations.
- Competent: You know all the major sagas, and your storytelling is good enough to earn you a living.
- Expert: You know all the major sagas and some of the minor ones as well. You're skilled enough to tailor the story to the audience during recitations, and you never stumble over words. You have authored or composed sagas that entered general use.
- Master: Know Hrolf's Saga Kraka? You should think so, you *wrote* it!
- Legend: You taught Snorri everything he knew.

Possessed by: skalds, Toreadors, lords retired to a life of leisure, men eager for women's attention

Specialties: heroic sagas, family sagas, sagas of a region, improvisation, composition, recitation, spoken, written

## SHIPWRIGHT

At its heart, the shipwright skill is the ability to repair and build ships. It also governs the ability to assess a ship's capability and value. Shipwrights can select the proper timber, cut and lay out frames and keels, use ax and adz to shape the wood to the proper thickness, caulk, patch and otherwise repair damage to ships.

Regardless of the shipwright's skill, ships made from inferior materials or repaired with inadequate tools are inferior to those made with the proper materials and tools.

- Novice: You can caulk and use an adz.
- Practiced: You know how to graduate the width of the timbers and shape the keel.
- Competent: You can build a ship from the ground up.
- Expert: Your ships are durable and swift. Your work is highly sought after.
- Master: The greatest warchiefs give you silver from their arms and feast you just to ask you to work for them.
- Legend: They've been buying your ships since you made them out of reeds.

Possessed by: shipwrights, merchants, sailors, Vikings

Specialties: *drakkars*, *knorrs*, new construction, repairs in the field, repairs in a slipway

## NEW KNOWLEDGES

### LAW

Law is an extremely important skill in the Norse world. The character knows the intricacies of litigation, including how to press suits, name witnesses, how to evaluate and press for damages, when to sue and how to find an advocate and retain his services for a reasonable fee. Law also covers the character's understanding of *thing* procedures, how to gather a good following, and how best to speak before the *thing*.





- Dabbling: You've watched a suit pressed.
- Student: You know the proper procedures for naming witnesses and pressing suits. You're the equal of an Icelandic farmer.
- Learned: You know what the proper form really means. People seek legal advice from you all the time. You could match an Icelandic goði.
- Scholar: People come from near and far to seek your aid.
- Savant: You used to talk to Njal about legal matters all the time.
- Visionary: Now when the All-father handed down the law to you, he was quite specific on its meaning.

Possessed by: goði, lords, jarls, karls, everyone in Iceland over the age of 12

Specialties: manslaughter, seeking damages, procuring advocacy, arbitrating disputes, avoiding Outlawry

## RUNE-LORE

The runes are a secret language and a hidden power. Many men can shape a few crude letters, but true understanding of the runes brings wisdom. For a simple warrior, the runes are a means of communication and of leaving a name. To the rune-wise, the characters bespeak magic, art and control.

- Dabbling: You can recognize and read a couple of runes.
- Student: You can carve a couple of runes, and read haltingly.
- Learned: You know how to carve your name in the runes, and you can read others' rune-work.
- Scholar: Embossing and detail are your handiwork. Your rune-shaping is clear and precise.
- Savant: Rune-shaping is an art in your hands, the runes tools for mystery and beauty. You carve epics with ease and embellish any surface with the gentle grace of your work.
- Visionary: Nine days you hung, impaled, before you grasped the secret of the runes...

Possessed by: Sorcerers, madmen, gods

Specialties: embossing, reading, rune-shaping, enchantments, clarity, speed

## SEAMANSHIP

Seamanship covers ship-handling and sea lore. Seamanship is the ability to navigate a ship on both open sea and waterways. Seamanship also governs the character's ability to find the ship's latitude and his knowledge of sea-routes, which are primarily navigated by landmark. This ability also covers



incidental skills related to ships like rope handling, load-balancing, portaging and the like.

- Dabblers: If you're lost, you sail east. That's the direction where the sun comes up.
- Student: You're not a regular navigator, but you have some sea lore.
- Learned: You can navigate the major routes of the Baltic and the North Atlantic.
- Scholar: You know the sea routes from Greenland to Gibraltar.
- Savant: You've been sailing for longer than most people have been alive, and you know the Atlantic, Baltic and Mediterranean like the back of your hand.
- Visionary: You've sailed the seaways from Vinland to Cathay.

Possessed by: Vikings, merchants, shipwrights, fishermen, missionaries, Saint Brendan

Specialties: the Baltic, the North Atlantic, rivers, the open ocean, coastal navigation, portages

## NEW BACKGROUNDS

### FAME

This background reflects the degree to which your character's reputation has spread among the halls of men and across the great whale road. For good or ill, characters who have great fame are more likely to have their actions

marked than those who are unknown. Also, famous characters have an easier time guesting, finding positions at tables and in ships, and getting the attentions of the opposite sex. Fame is also the measure by which most Scandinavians measure personal success, and a famous adventurer with nothing more than the shirt on his back will be given precedence over a rich man with a great hall who has done no deeds of note.

- You have a certain degree of local fame in your district.
- You are famous locally, and some men from far away know your deeds.
- You are famous regionally, and those who travel often have probably heard of you, though the tales they hear may be grossly distorted.
- You are famous throughout Scandinavia, and most skalds know of your doings.
- You are a legend in your own (un)lifetime. Every man from Vinland to Uppsala knows who you are.

## NEW DISCIPLINES

### BEAR'S SKIN

Animalism 2, Protean 4

According to legend, some berserks take on the fearsome aspect of bears while in the midst of battle-rage. Though not all *einherjar* are truly berserks, those with this capability have mastered the means to simulate the bear's skin, granting additional toughness and a fearsome visage.



WOLVES OF THE SEA





**System:** The *einherjar* must be in a frenzy before using this power. The player expends one Blood Point. Over the next few seconds, the vampire's muscles twist and bulge, and heavy fur sprouts everywhere that he normally has hair. The vampire's maw widens, becoming capable of biting through limbs, while his skin becomes thick and unfeeling. While in this state, the *einherjar* gains two additional dice on all Strength and Stamina rolls, including soaking damage; the thick fur even protects against sunlight (the Stamina bonus applies to soak rolls against sunlight). Once invoked, the Bear's Skin remains as long as the character is in frenzy.

This power costs 18 experience points to learn.

## FENRIR'S TALONS

Fortitude 2, Protean 2

Many of the *vargr* of the frozen north rely upon their superlative hunting skills, combined with the natural weaponry provided by the Talons of the Beast power, in order to hunt. After all, the innate claws furnished by the Protean Discipline cannot be lost or stolen. Some particularly ferocious vampires, however, augment their natural armament with talons more befitting Fenris Wolf, the great lupine adversary of the gods. Talons half a foot long, nearly unbreakable and almost metallic in color are the weapons of these *einherjar*.

**System:** Whenever the *einherjar* activates the Talons of the Beast Discipline, he sprouts dark grayish claws a full six inches long, instead of the typical inch-long nails of the Discipline.

These rending weapons inflict Strength + 3 aggravated damage in close combat, and as long as they remain attached to the vampire in question, they are nearly indestructible; with sufficient strength (or Potence), the vampire can cleave through steel armor, wooden walls and stonework (anything that could be broken with up to ten Strength successes can be broken with these claws, without damaging them). On the down side, the vampire suffers a two-dice penalty to all Dexterity tasks requiring fine manipulation as long as the talons are manifest.

Developing Fenrir's Talons costs 12 experience points.

## WINTERING

Animalism 4, Fortitude 2

In the deep winters of Scandinavia, many animals conserve their food supplies and sleep through much of the cold and hungry night. Norse vampires can sometimes emulate this feat, sleeping during the long periods when game is scarce but awakening later. By "wintering" (although the ability can actually be used at any time), the *einherjar* preserves her stores of blood, so that she is still able to survive for several days upon waking before needing to hunt again.

**System:** A vampire voluntarily entering torpor may use this ability to conserve stores of blood for later use upon awakening. The vampire must roll Stamina + Survival (difficulty 8). Each success allows the vampire to retain one Blood Point, despite remaining in torpor, up to the limit of her current Blood Pool. Thus, if an *einherjar* with this power enters

CHAPTER THREE: CHARACTER CREATION



torpor voluntarily with three Blood Points and rolls one success, then she awakens with one Blood Point saved; if she had rolled four successes, she would have awakened with three Blood Points saved. The use of this power does not mean that the blood cannot be stolen by Thaumaturgy or attack while the vampire sleeps; it simply allows the vampire to store blood that would normally be consumed during torpor.

Learning this power requires 18 experience points.

## NEW ROADS

### THE VIA *EINHERJAR*

The *Via Einherjar*, the Road of the Slain, teaches strict adherence to the Norse ethic of personal responsibility, courage in the face of adversity and individual initiative. This road is usually followed by Scandinavian warriors who choose to cling to the trappings of their civilization, rather than becoming *vargr* like so many others.

The followers of the Road of the *Einherjar* believe that by following the codes of behavior hallowed by the All-Father and the Norse tradition, they can master the Beast through courage and iron self-discipline. Many are the followers of the *Einherjar's* Road who have died at the doors to their halls, forcing themselves to watch the sun rise without fear.

The followers of the Road of the *Einherjar* are neither "virtuous" nor "good" in the sense of the more humane or honorable vampires of certain other Roads. They are brutal, direct, crass, self-serving, and often intolerable except to those they respect. To their true friends, they are loyal to the death and would willingly give their last possessions. Those who are not their friends are objects to be beaten, scorned, cheated, robbed, raped or challenged until they prove their worth.

The Road of the *Einherjar* teaches the Virtues of Self-Control and Conviction.

#### ROAD OF THE *EINHERJAR* HIERARCHY OF SINS

Road Rating	Minimum Wrongdoing for Conviction Roll
10	Stealing or cheating.
9	Not challenging a weak leader.
8	Begging or otherwise asking for help.
7	Failing to kill for reasons of conscience.
6	Failing to boast and spread tales of your actions.
5	Hoarding or otherwise miserly actions.
4	Performing an "unmanly" act, such as making a brag and failing to fulfill it.
3	Showing fear or hesitation in the face of peril.
2	Running away from danger. Breaking a sworn oath.
1	Backing down from a challenge.



*How's your art 94*



## THE VIA ÆSIRGARÐ

Those truly touched by the gods, to whom the natural world is constantly filled with spirits and portents, abide by the codes handed down from the oldest sagas and lays. The gods must be appeased, and the proper forms obeyed, if men are to live in harmony with the natural world. Of course, for vampires, matters are somewhat different — the “natural world” is no longer their place. Still, the old ways and traditions must be upheld, and supernatural strength and longevity are no ward against the Norns; even the gods are subject to fate.

The Via Æsirgarð is similar to the Road of Heaven, in that it is religious in focus. However, the Viking concepts of “holiness” and “sin” are far different from those of their Christian counterparts. A Viking reviles cowardice or lying, but has little compunctions about rape, robbery or killing in war or challenges. Conversely, a “pious” man is not necessarily a weak follower of the pale Christ-god, but rather a devout student of the ways of the gods and a master of runes and sagas.

To properly follow the Via Æsirgarð, a Norseman must embrace the power of runes, the workings of the Norns and the hidden machinations of the gods. The virtues espoused by the Viking warriors are necessary and proper in a harsh land, and only the valorous shall survive to fight in Ragnarök. The wise man seeks to spread the sagas so that truth may be known, and encourages others to acts of bravery and honor so that more

warriors might stand in Valhal in the end-times. Always, the followers of Via Æsirgarð seek to best the enemies of men and gods: the *jotuns*, the trolls and giants of legend, who seek to corrupt and overtake Middle-Garð.

The Via Æsirgarð teaches the virtues of Self-Control and Conviction.

## MERITS AND FLAWS APTITUDES

Recommended — Jack-Of-All-Trades, Uneducated

Prohibited — None

## AWARENESS

Recommended — One Eye

Prohibited — None

## VAMPIRE TIES

Recommended — Boon, Special Gift, Reputation, Infamous Sire

Prohibited — None

## MENTAL

Recommended — Iron Will, Self-Confidence

Prohibited — Confused, Absent-minded

## MORTAL SOCIETY

Recommended — Manse [for a Hall], Noble, Known to be Dead

Prohibited — Church Rank [only before the Christianization], Institutional Control

## KENNING-WISE (2 PT MERIT)

You are educated in the traditional wisdom-sayings, kennings and stock phrases of Norse poetry. Your difficulty is lowered by one when you are attempting to appear wise to those who respect the old traditions, and when reciting or composing saga. You may try to use common folk wisdom for advice; roll Intelligence + Sagaman, difficulty 7, to remember an aphorism that’s particularly appropriate to the situation, although such information is neither prophetic nor necessarily useful.

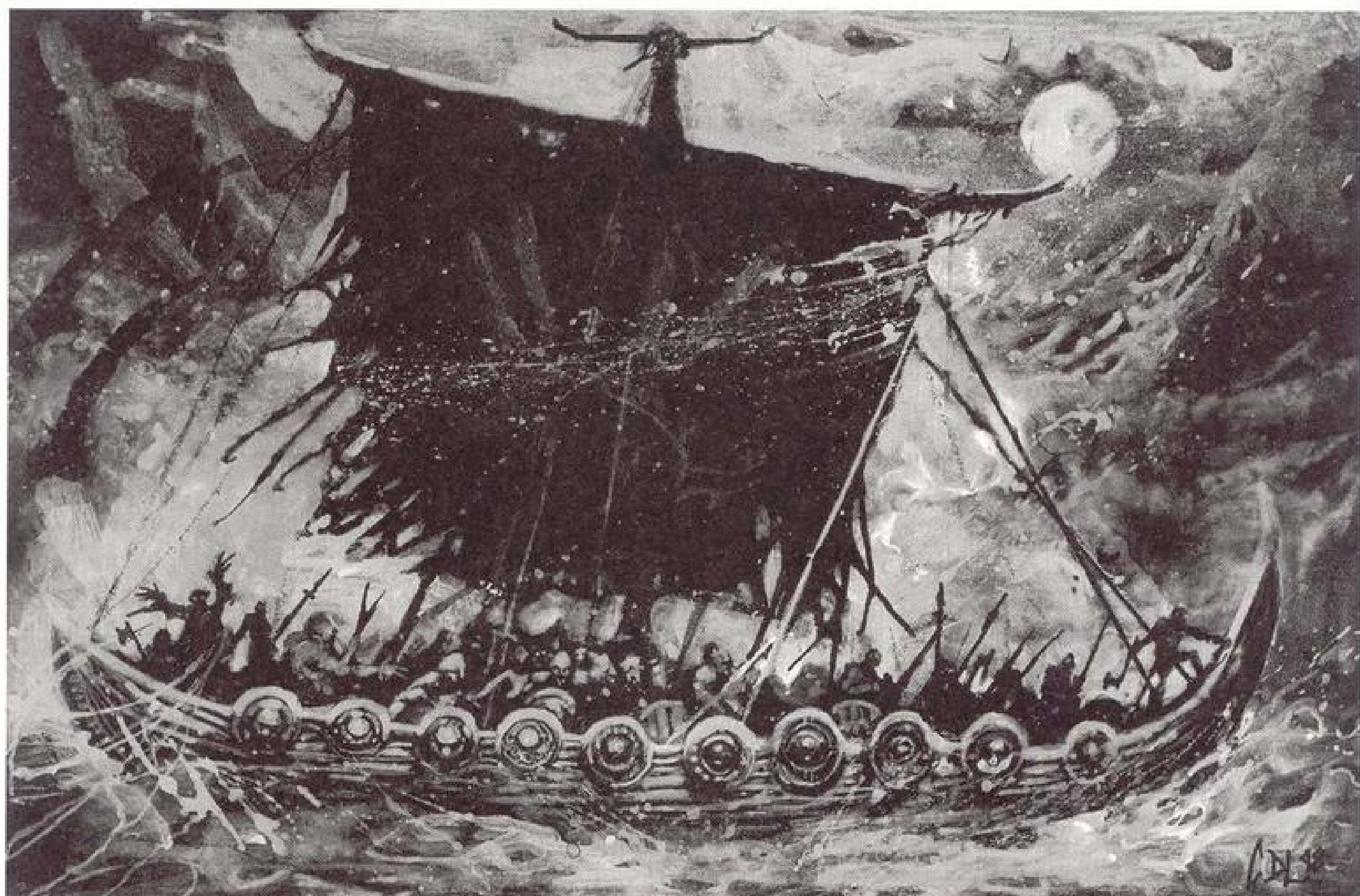
## DRAKKAR (2 PT MERIT)

You own a *drakkar*, a longship suitable for carrying men a-Viking. It isn’t what you’d call comfortable, and it can’t carry much more than ten or fifteen tons of cargo, but it’s fast, durable, seaworthy and perfect for swift raiding. *Drakkars* have full length keels for good handling, but are very shallow (most are less than 6 feet from the bottom of the keel to the top of the

### ROAD OF ÆSIRGARÐ HIERARCHY OF SINS

Road Rating	Minimum Wrongdoing for Conviction Roll
10	Failing to show respect to the gods or to men of devout wisdom.
9	Failing to speak out against cowardice, treachery, dishonor, etc.
8	Being motivated by compassion, gluttony (as for blood) or fear.
7	Stealing from, lying to or cheating friends or allies.
6	Causing harm to a devout and virtuous person (by Viking standards).
5	Feeding from a devout person without permission.
4	Blasphemous or heretical acts (desecrating an image of Ponar or Oðin, supporting the worship of the Christ-god).
3	Allowing a crime or major act of treachery or dishonor to go unpunished.
2	Committing hidden murder or betraying allies.
1	Aiding a demon, troll, <i>jotun</i> or other supernatural servant of evil.





gunwale). They can thus traverse almost any river navigable to flatboats. Longships are normally propelled by the sail, with the oars reserved for emergencies or river travel. The ship is steered by a large rudder on the side (not the stern), and is surprisingly maneuverable — the Scandinavians used a tacking boom that lets the ship sail across or even close to the wind. The crew varies between 24 and 48, and the ship can be tented for sleeping on the open ocean. *Drakkars* tend to ship water a lot, so the more men the better.

### KNORR (3 POINT MERIT)

You own a *knorr*, a larger form of longship than the *drakkar*, and better for mercantile ventures than raiding. A *knorr* can carry between 20 and 40 tons, and has a crew of between 12 and 24. *Knorrs* draw slightly more water than the *drakkar*, and tend to take less over the gunwale. They are also wider in the beam, making them slightly less seaworthy and a bit slower. Finally, they have substantially fewer oars and less seating for auxiliary oarsmen, making them less suitable for traveling hundred of miles upstream to pillage, burn and trade than the *drakkar*. You can still sack seaside communities or engage in piracy with a *knorr* of course, the ship just isn't designed specifically for it.

### VENGEFUL FAMILY (3 PT MERIT)

You have an awful lot of brothers, cousins and uncles, and your family has a reputation for sticking together through

thick and thin. Whenever you interact with Scandinavians, you have an extra die on social interactions involving intimidation or intervention in violent situations. If enthralled or captured, your family is likely to buy your freedom. Also, if you are killed (or put to the Final Death), your relatives are likely to pursue a feud with your murderer, though that may be of small consolation to you. Note that this Merit doesn't protect you from your own kin. You might all stick together against the outside world, but internal family politics are a different matter entirely!

### OUTSPOKEN PAGAN/CHRISTIAN (4 PT FLAW)

You are an outspoken believer in the Norse pantheon or, if before the conversion of Scandinavia, the Christian god. This flaw can and often should be taken with True Faith. This causes you all sorts of social problems, not the least of which are murder attempts by those who have beliefs in opposition to your own. Note that outspoken Christians are still outspoken Norse Christians. You *are* expected to *holmgang* for Jesus if you believe in him so much. Don't laugh, it happened in the real world.

### PHYSICAL

Recommended — Huge Size, Lame, One Arm, Permanent Wound

Prohibited — Deformity



## PERSONALITY

Recommended — Code of Honor (Norse Warrior Ethic), Berserker, Prey Exclusion (Women) [if male], Overconfident, Territorial, Vengeance

Prohibited — None

### FEARLESS FEROCITY (2 PT MERIT)

When you are confronted with fear or terror, you bulwark yourself with anger. Instead of entering Röttschreck, you may choose to enter a rage frenzy when confronted with fire, sunlight or other challenges to your courage. However, if you choose to enter frenzy in this fashion, you may not use Willpower to control your madness.

### WALKURIE (2 PT MERIT)

This Merit is permitted for female characters only. You chose to assume the traditionally male role of warrior in Scandinavian society. More importantly, you've already killed several notable men in *holmganga* over it, and your status is thus accepted. You have more trouble with men and women trying to woo you to their bed than with young warriors trying to prove their masculinity by killing you. Add one to all social dice pools in Scandinavian cultures; men and women alike respect your prowess.

## SUPERNATURAL

Recommended — Luck, Dark Fate

Prohibited — Repulsed by Garlic

### LUPINE KINSHIP (3/5/7 PT MERIT)

You have a cordial relationship with one or more Lupines (probably Get of Fenris). This may be because you helped them in a feud, sheltered them during Outlawry, are considered a heroic warrior, or simply because you made friends with them. Whatever the case, while they won't necessarily show up to help you in a fight (that level of trust is a function of role-playing), they won't come tear you limb from limb some morning when they're bored.

For three points, you know of one particular Lupine, who considers you tolerable company. You may occasionally swap stories or help each other out with minor favors, but neither of your respective sides appreciates such a relationship, so you must act in secret. You don't necessarily see eye-to-eye, but you at least have a mutual understanding.

For five points, you have one Lupine ally, and the rest of his pack (a small sort of family of werewolves) know of your relationship. Although your existence and friendship is not always condoned, you won't necessarily be killed on sight by one of your friends' packmates. Very likely, your relationship is tolerated only as long as you are useful, so although you can get favors from your primary ally, you'd best give the same in return. You should also have a Fame rating of at least •• to show that you are known and respected for your deeds —

otherwise, you'd never have done anything noteworthy enough to allay the suspicions of the Lupines.

For seven points, you have a bit of a reputation among the Lupines of the High North. Perhaps you are considered a powerful and righteous warrior, or maybe you helped an entire pack in a time of need. Whatever the case, you can call upon the aid of a particular Lupine ally (as with the lower levels of this Merit), and his pack tolerates your company. Among other Lupines, you may be granted safe passage (or you may not) — the difficulty of all Social rolls with the Lupines in the High North is lowered by one, as long as they recognize who you are. Such a luminous standing among the Lupines is exceptional for an *afterganger*, and you and your Storyteller should certainly work out the details of the momentous historical event that brought about this partnership — your character must certainly have skills and powers that are able to justify his participation in a disaster where he was able to aid an entire group of werewolves. You should have a Fame rating of at least ••• to represent your participation in such heroic events.

Conversely, a good reputation with the Get of Fenris in Scandinavia doesn't necessarily help you out with the Fianna of Ireland. In general, this Merit simply indicates that the usual rampant hatred of vampires is allayed somewhat by the actions of your character on behalf of a certain individual or group. Obviously, such meritorious behavior is beyond the pale for most *einherjar*, and Storytellers certainly are under no obligation to allow this Merit to disrupt their chronicles, or to allow it at all. Needless to say, this Merit cannot be taken with the Lupine Enmity Flaw.

### SECOND SIGHT (3 PT MERIT)

You see beyond the shroud of Middle-garð, to perceive the creatures that work beyond the ken of normal men. Perhaps you had this sight while alive; maybe your new condition brought it about. Either way, you know the wiles of the hulderfolk, and you can spot the dverge and the troll, even when they hide from the eyes of other men. The sounds in the rushes are the pukje giggling, and the waves on the beach are caused by the stirrings of the ocean's great linnorm.

In game terms, you are unaffected by the illusions used by many of the creatures that live on the edge of man's world. You see the true forms of elves, dwarves and other strange beings, and you can sometimes even perceive the shapes of powerful spirits (with a Perception + Occult roll, difficulty 8). This power always functions, and costs you nothing — except perhaps your sanity, as you realize that the trusted advisor of the *jarl* is really a wily dark alfar, or that the gigantic armored foe of your friends is a disguised troll. If you use **Changeling: The Dreaming**, your character automatically sees all Chimera and Seemings, although they do not necessarily affect him unless he is enchanted (though that won't stop him from reacting as if they're real!).



## FORESIGHTED (4 PT MERIT)

You are prescient, meaning that you are minutely aware of the workings of fate and have a disturbingly accurate ability to predict the future. Unfortunately, there is no way to control this gift. When you pick this Merit, you must immediately choose the Difficulty for the roll to experience your prescient flashes, from 4 to 8. Whenever you want, you may spend a temporary Willpower and roll your Intelligence, with a difficulty equal to the one you chose when you picked the merit. If you succeed, you can pester the Storyteller for information about which course to take next. Because this Merit is in many ways quite detrimental to the character, the Storyteller should try to give you a pretty good answer in compensation. The more successes you achieve, the more complete your awareness of the future. If you botch the roll to see the future, you see something terrible and (like all future events) impossible to avert.

On the downside, whenever you would gain back one or more Willpower points, you must roll your Intelligence with the difficulty you chose when you bought this Merit. If you score any successes, you *fail* to gain back one Willpower point. If you fail the roll, there is no penalty, but if you botch the check, you gain no Willpower and in fact lose a point of temporary Willpower.

## RUNE-WISE (5 PT MERIT)

You grasped the secret of the runes during your mortal life. As a result, you have the ability to perform magic by carving the runes and enchanting them with sacrifices of your blood and power. You may buy hedge magic paths from *World of Darkness: Sorcerer* both during character generation (with freebie points only) or after character generation (with experience, as normal) at the cost listed in *Sorcerer*. You may learn any hedge magic path up to your level of ability in Rune-Lore (see the new Knowledges, above). You must spend time to activate these paths just as if you were a normal sorcerer, but instead of expending Willpower, you must use Blood Points to complete your spells. You carve the runes in delicate rituals to call your magic; a rune-shaper cannot simply “cast a spell,” but must rather painstakingly craft the effect. You know only Scandinavian magic, and may not buy the Alchemy, Conjunction, Conveyance, Hellfire, or Summoning, Binding and Warding (Material) paths, nor may you learn Thaumaturgy paths or rituals without learning Thaumaturgy as a discipline in the regular fashion, including the need for a tutor. Face it, you’re (probably) not a Tremere.

Note specifically that your magic is not the same as mortal sorcery. Instead, you call upon the power inherent in the runes and invoke it through your own supernatural blood. Because you must unlock the secrets of this strange power yourself, you cannot learn other forms of mortal magic — the spawork of the living no longer functions for you, and you must instead use your unliving energy. Conversely, your methods of rune-





casting do not function when used by mortals, who do not have the power of your blood.

A mortal character may possess this Merit; in such a case, the individual casts the appropriate rituals using the normal rules from *World of Darkness: Sorcerer*. The cost of this Merit simply emphasizes the rarity of Norse rune-casters.

### TRUE BERSERK (5 PT MERIT)

*They advanced without mail-coats, and were as frenzied as dogs or wolves; they bit their shields; they were as strong as bears or boars; they struck men down, but neither fire nor steel could mark them. This was called the Berserk Rage.*

— Accounted by Snorri Sturluson

You are a true Berserk, and the battle-fury that is Oðin's gift to brave men runs thick in you. Even with the Beast within you, you must take some time to make the wod rise and give yourself over to the war-joy. You may do this by gashing yourself with a knife, burning yourself, or gnawing on the edge of your shield, the scabbard of your sword, or the haft of your ax. When you are berserk, you add two dice to your strength, add one die to your stamina, and gain three Bruised health levels. Also, while berserk, your wound penalties are reduced by two dice, so you suffer no hindrance from injury until you reach the Crippled health level. Berserk lasts for the duration of the scene, or until you spend three turns calming down away from combat or other strenuous physical activity.

Berserks may not wear armor while they are berserk (and will shed such armor if entering a berserk), nor may they enter a berserk when not in human form, or stay there if they lose

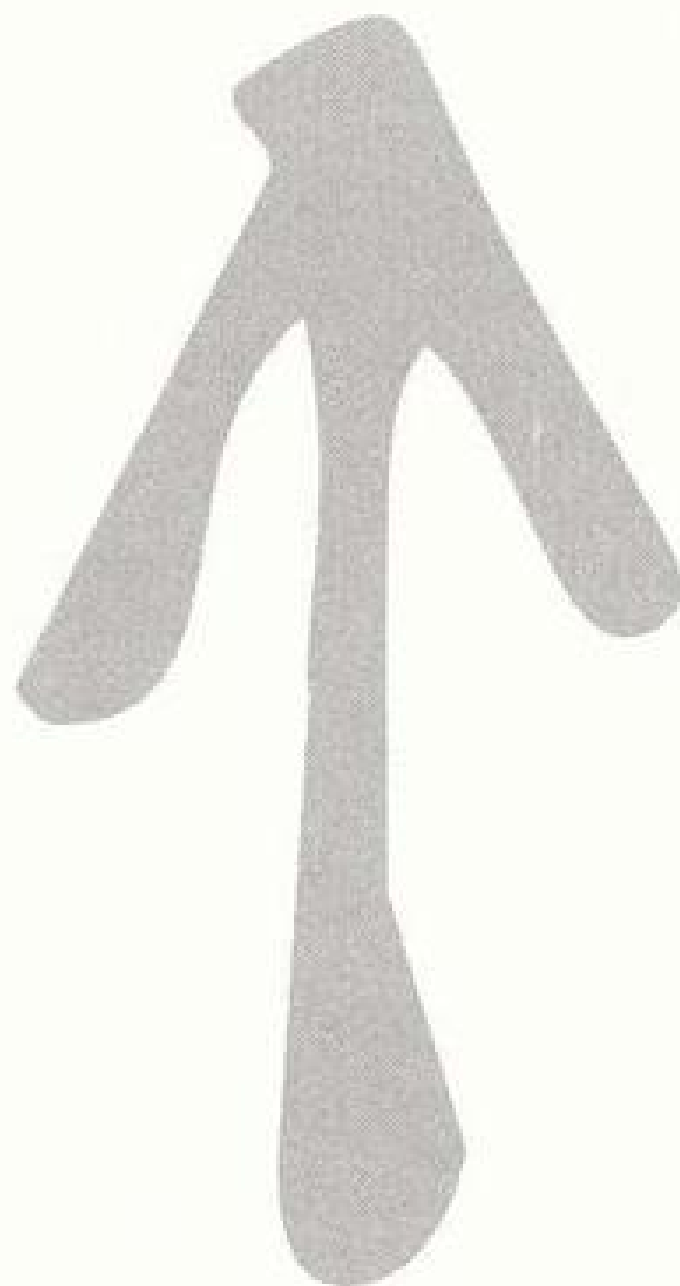
their human form — they instead immediately fall into a Frenzy. Berserks are generally fairly controlled, though anyone interposing himself between a berserk warrior and the warrior's chosen target will be casually struck aside. Berserks cannot Frenzy or enter Röttschreck while berserk, and conversely cannot enter their berserk state if in Frenzy or Röttschreck. Those catching a glimpse of a berserk out of the corner of their eyes during battle often mistake the fierce warriors for bears.

### LAW-BOUND (2 PT FLAW)

Despite your supernatural existence, you are bound by the strictures of the law, and you can be sued for your unnatural acts. If called before a court, even an informal tribunal, you can be sentenced to Outlawry, banished, or possibly even forced into torpor in your grave. You may choose to flee the area instead of submitting yourself to judgment, but you cannot return to the area for at least several years. This flaw is common among Icelandic vampires.

### LUPINE ENMITY (4 PT FLAW)

For some reason, the Get of Fenris are hungry for you. Perhaps you've made your presence too obvious or killed a Lupine in a duel. Maybe the skinchangers just don't like you (moreso than their usual dislike for vampires). Whatever the case, there is at least one pack looking for you. You cannot travel abroad without fear for your safety, and werewolf Kinfolk are a constant menace to your ghouls. If you have a hall, invest in fire protection. This Flaw cannot be taken with the Lupine Kinship Merit.











# Chapter Four: Systems

*Much have we told you, we will tell  
you more,  
it's important that you know it, do  
you want to know more?  
- The Short Valuspa*



Unlife in the far North brings unique difficulties due to the odd seasons and aggressive activities of mortals. Without strict adherence to the Silence of Blood, and with a proud heritage, Norse *einherjar* often live amongst their more human fellows as lords and warriors, eschewing the delicate manipulations of Europe. Balancing tradition and duty with the wildly long or short nights of the region and the hunt for blood takes a skilled and willful vampire. All together, these differences from the southern lands mean that Scandinavian vampires have some unusual activities and habits, which in turn require explanation if the Storyteller is to exploit them as story elements.

Of course, Viking vampires still use the same clans and Disciplines as other Children of Caine. However, they have very different sorts of followers, and the tools of their culture — the ships, customs and practices of Scandinavia — are quite different from anything else in Dark Ages, and as such merit detail.

## THE WINTER

For the Norse vampire, winter is a time of freedom and celebration. The sun remains hidden and the vampire has many hours free of sunlight to enjoy. As long as the sun remains below the horizon, a vampire doesn't feel the need to rest and can remain active. In the far reaches of the North, this means that some *vargr* never sleep during the winter.

Winter lasts from around mid-September to about mid-April and the sun spends a steadily decreasing amount of time in the sky. During the Spring and Fall Equinoxes, the day has a 12 hour day/night split; but, by Midwinter, the night lasts 16 hours. The farther north one goes, the longer the night lasts, until at the northern edge of Norway the only sign of day is a few hours of twilight.

Month-long nights herald unparalleled freedom for many *aftergangers*, but as with many novelties among the unliving, the advantages of constant activity often wear thin. While a Scandinavian vampire is more than capable of staying awake for the entirety of the near-endless nights, actually remaining awake and active for several months on end may prove trying. Ennui and lassitude invariably set in, as the changelessness of the night continues. Vampires who seek entertainment and diversion turn to ever more grisly and outrageous pursuits, fashioning elaborate games and manipulations to keep their interest. Those who take the time to relax and rest soon succumb to common vampiric paranoia, fearing that others of their kind make use of the time in their schemes. For the weak-willed vampire, or one without companionship and constant activity, madness often results, even after only a few months of darkness.

A cunning vampire makes good use of the uninterrupted time in the far North's winter nights. By remaining active, a vampire avoids the pall of boredom. Since vampires in unending night have no need of sleep, they can easily work around





## LONG NIGHTS

Remaining awake for long hours during the winter is hardly a strain for a vampire. A vampire feels no need to rest; even activity for long periods causes no ill effects. In the farthest reaches of the North, where the winter night never ends, a *vargr* may well do without sleep for “days” on end. In such cases, the vampire still suffers the draining of blood, losing one Blood Point for every full rotation of the earth (24 hours) since the last setting of the sun.

their mortal foes or puppets, putting the extra eight to twelve hours per day to good use. Extra hunting time means that the search for blood can be more leisurely and drawn out, if the vampire has a reliable source. Plots against enemies can now be executed over the long course of many evenings strung together, instead of in small nightly increments. Best of all, for the vampire who strives to learn, study and experiment, research and reading are conducted in uninterrupted contemplation.

Winter isn't all good, however, since sources of blood become scarce, particularly for the outlaws in the woods and mountains. Additionally, the temperature drops and the vampire risks suffering the effects of exposure, especially since clothing provides little protection for the unliving. A vampire caught out of doors and without some kind of heat or shelter begins to suffer the effects of extreme cold (see *Vampire: The Dark Ages* pg. 201) within an hour. The more powerful *vargr* choose torpor during the cold months, waiting for the warmth and better hunting of spring.

## WINTER FEEDING

For the vampire, the first concern of the winter must be blood supply. At the festival marking the arrival of winter, held on the Fall Equinox, there is a butchering of beasts too weak to survive the coming months. Typically, a vampire makes every effort to fill up during this celebration. However, since the next festival celebration isn't until Midwinter, it is unlikely for this festival alone to suffice.

In a community where the vampire is the *jarl* the people keep a few of the weaker beasts alive. These help keep the *jarl* fed during the early months of the winter and tide her over until the Yule festival of Midwinter. From the Yule festival until the arrival of Spring, the vampire *jarl* must rely on *thralls* or her people for food until the snows melt and the crops are planted.

Where a vampire hides in the community, feeding becomes difficult with the onset of the snowy nights. During the cold winter, the halls are full of fire and people. The livestock are in barns, typically attached to the homes of the owners. With easy prey hard to find, a vampire trying to sneak a meal

must take extra care. Should the Storyteller simply choose to use rolls to resolve hunts, the vampire suffers a one-point increase in difficulty for hunting under these conditions.

For the *vargr* in the wild, survival is a desperate matter. The large game animals and such that typically make up the *vargr*'s diet are in hiding or have migrated away. The weaker *vargr* sustain themselves with rabbits and other outlaws. Some find a remote community and plague it during the winter months, using its blood to survive the inhospitable snows. Many others migrate south with the herds, coming into conflict with other vampires who do the same (or who make their homes in the southerly lands).

## HUNTING IN THE WINTER WILDS

A *vargr* in the wild has few options for blood during the winter months. Those with Animalism can use Noah's Call to summon potential meals, generally creatures of two to four Blood Points. A Perception + Survival roll against a difficulty of 9 allows a *vargr* to find enough small animals to restore one Blood Point for each success. Lastly, a *vargr* can restore one die roll's worth of Blood Points by hunting in villages and hamlets after making a successful hunting roll against a difficulty of 10 (rolling one die for each hour spent hunting). Obviously, an *afterganger* with no compunctions about being caught can easily drain one or two mortals and flee (or even stay and fight), but since there's no guarantee of finding another meal anytime soon, this is a risky proposition.

## THE SUMMER

For a vampire, summer in the North is a time of discomfort. While the night is long in winter, in summer night can disappear entirely. It is little wonder, then, that the Norse vampires set sail for southern climes during the summer, to raid the shores of a dark Europe, rather than risk the endless days of the northern summer.

The summer is the reverse of winter, with fewer available hours of activity for the *einherjar*. By midsummer, the night is barely 3 hours long, and part of that is twilight. A vampire wishing to remain active for any length of time either risks the sun's burning touch, or travels southwards.

## BRIEF SUMMER EVES

The primary difficulty a vampire faces when hunting in summer is the lack of time. With only a couple of hours available to hunt, and the dearth of large human populations in the North, finding blood becomes a race against time. When using the hunting rules, remember to reduce the number of dice available to the players, since most characters will only have three hours in which to hunt. Unless the characters are in a major trading city, the hunting difficulty should be 8 or 9.

However, for the *vargr*, things become a bit easier during the summer. Game is plentiful, even with the shorter hours. Those *vargr* with Animalism can use Noah's Call to summon



creatures with four to six Blood Points for meals. The Perception + Survival roll to hunt animals in the woods is now against a difficulty of 7, with each success restoring a Blood Point.

Everything runs under the pressure of time once the summer sets in. Norse vampires have only a few hours in which to complete their tasks, and hunting takes up much of that time. Some vampires attempt to remain active on cloudy days, but as long as the sun is up, drowsiness strikes — only those *einherjar* far advanced along their Roads, or possessed of great will, can remain active. Worse still, mortals now have the opportunity to construct their own schemes unhindered by vampires for three quarters of the day. An *afterganger* exposed to hunters now risks attack a full twenty-one hours per day. Vampires in the northern summers must make the best possible use of their time, evading notice while hunting carefully and still trying to make time to advance their own schemes. Those *einherjar* who attempt study or long-term planning are forced to break up their activities; Storytellers may penalize attempts at learning or extended craftwork — improving a Discipline, building a ship, managing a community — due to the lack of time.

## MIGRATION

During the approach of summer *vargr* tend to migrate southwards into Finland and Russia. By doing so, they keep ahead of the sun and avoid the short nights of summer. The

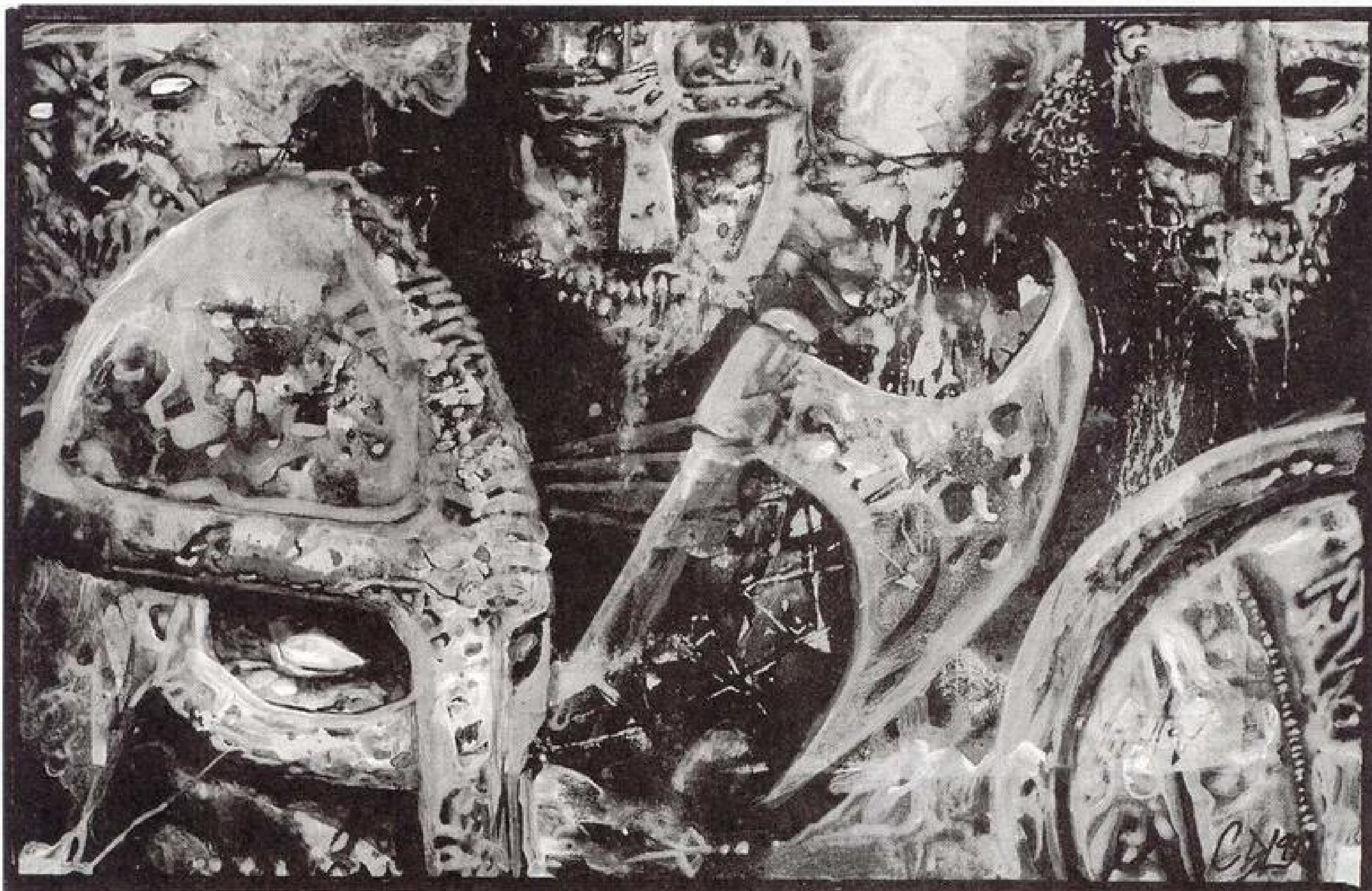
process reverses with the approach of winter, as the *vargr* follow the night north. However, this migration is not without danger as the *vargr* must travel through the wilderness typically claimed by Lupines.

The *vargr* aren't the only vampires to take up travel during the summer months. Vampire *jarls* lead their crews on raids to the South, keeping ahead of the sun and seeking new sources of blood. When winter begins to approach, these crews return home with *thralls* and treasures to help them through the winter nights.

Other vampires, without access to the crews of the *jarls* or the skills of the *vargr*, have options, too. Joining the crew of a raiding *drakkar* or slipping aboard a trading *knorr* is risky, but can take the *afterganger* to the better hunting grounds of Europe. Unfortunately, traveling in Europe risks the wrath of established Cainites who make their homes there, but it's possible to lose oneself in the many small towns dotting the countryside.

## TRAVEL BY SEA

With their isolated settlements in the fjords and along the coasts, the Norse use the sea as their primary route of travel. Unlike the rest of Europe, travel between villages and towns is quite common for the people of the North. Traveling a thousand miles by sea is normal, even to a distant place like Iceland or Greenland.



WOLVES OF THE SEA



## STOWAWAYS

Norse ships provide few hiding places for a vampire trying to stow away, making discovery a very real danger. The *knorr* is probably the safest ship for a vampire to hide aboard, with a deck and cargo to provide cover. The *scutta* and *drakkar* are much more open, and a vampire hiding aboard had best hide in “plain view” using excuses, Dominate and ghouls to remain safe.

A crew discovering a vampire aboard acts swiftly. Given the Norse penchant for (foolish) courage, Viking warriors are unlikely to surrender or plead with a vampire for mercy; instead, they have a disturbing tendency to throw themselves against the threat, to the last man. If they discover the vampire during the day, they will attempt to bind him with ropes and throw him overboard. If discovered at night, torches and weapons are used in an attempt to drive the vampire off the ship and into the sea. While drowning isn't much of a threat, the sun can destroy the vampire if he cannot reach shore.

While the sea avoids the dangers of highway robbers and mud, it provides its own obstacles. Storms, shallows, rocks, pirates and ice all make traveling by sea something only attempted by the brave and skilled... or by fools.

An ocean voyage provides even more challenges for a vampire. Protection from the sun is hard to come by, particularly on the open Norse longships; vampires must make allowances to bring tents, blankets or other cover necessary to avoid the sun. Easy sources of blood are also difficult to find, especially on the long ocean trips, since the *einherjar* cannot risk feeding from the men too often without weakening the sailors. Then there are the risks of falling overboard, exposure to the elements, and constant contact with a mortal crew. One loss of self-control can precipitate disaster.

## NAVIGATION

The Norse navigate their ships using the landmarks of the coasts of Europe, and through oral tradition have passed down a verbal chart from father to son. To successfully set a course to a destination in Europe or along the coast of Africa thus requires an Intelligence + Seamanship roll against a difficulty of 7. When sailing the open ocean to a destination such as Iceland or Greenland, the Norse use the sun's height to judge latitude and the proper course. Accomplishing this requires a Perception + Seamanship roll against a difficulty of 8, though such a task is obviously difficult for a vampire.

*Einherjar* may wish to use the stars at night for navigation, and the Norse use the North Star as a guide. By checking against the apparent rise or fall of the North Star (since it seems to rise as one heads north, and to drop as one heads

south), a sailor can determine rough latitude within about 200 miles. Using simple navigational tools, such as a wooden stick with half-inch markings to check the movement of the star against its home position, it's possible to get a latitude within 15 miles. Either way, a navigator rolls Intelligence + Seamanship (or Astrology) to determine position, with a difficulty of 6 by eye and 4 with navigational aids. Determination of latitude allows a navigator to determine whether a ship has traveled too far north or south to reach its proper destination point.

With a sufficient lookout, it's possible to see fairly high land from a distance of over a hundred miles, and the Scandinavians made good use of this. During the day under good conditions, observers can see great distances, making out the peaks of mountains on the horizon. Indeed, it is even possible for the Norse to sail from Norway to Vinland (North America) without ever leaving sight of land for more than a day and a half, by passing Iceland, Greenland and various north Atlantic islands. Combining a rough map with a good navigator's sense for latitude and direction, it's quite possible for the Norse to make extended ocean voyages with great accuracy. Of course, *einherjar* may not have the option of keeping watch by day, and at night visibility is sharply limited even for those with the Protean Discipline Witness of Darkness, but a simple ghoul lookout can fill such roles adequately, especially with the Auspex Discipline.

Norse sailors also use wind currents and sea-marks to determine position. Since ocean winds and currents are fairly constant, the Vikings can discern rough location simply by feeling for the direction of the wind. Pods of whales, certain types of fish and the presence of particular ocean kelps also mark specific waters, and can be used as sea-markings to aid navigation. A Viking navigator uses Perception + Seamanship (difficulty 8) to recognize such signs and use them to determine location.

## PROVISIONING

For a vampire at sea, there are a number of steps that ensure a safe voyage. Protection from the sun is a priority, as is a safe supply of blood. Luckily, taking care of these concerns is part of the normal procedure for a Norse crew.

To protect themselves from the elements, Norse crews typically include a tent, blankets and furs with the stores aboard the ship. Normally used only at night to provide cover on a long voyage, the tent sees much more use as protection from the sun on a ship with a vampire *jarl*. The vampire aboard still has to wrap herself in blankets and furs before taking her rest, though, since a simple tent still lets in filtered but dangerous sunlight, and unfortunate interruptions — such as a sudden squall or a maritime attacker — may pitch the vampire out into the blazing sunlight. On the larger trading ships, though, there is the added protection of a deck.



Along with tents and blankets, any stores for a long voyage include livestock such as sheep and goats. When the Hunger strikes, the vampire passenger can feed on these creatures, rather than the crew. A hungry vampire may also feed on the fish caught by the crew, although ichthyoid vitae is particularly repellent and lacking in nourishment. Feeding on the crew is usually a last resort for a vampire, since without the crew there is no chance of safely reaching the destination.

Preparations for a trip only go so far, however. Eventually, the vampire and crew will want more than the supplies aboard can provide. Given the ease of navigation along a coastline and the dangers of sailing at night, it is no surprise that the Norse have a solution for their supply problems: *strandhogg*.

As night approaches, or as the Hunger calls, the Norse crew beaches the longship at a likely place on the shore to go raiding. The odds are always good during the summer that such a raid will find a source of food for both mortal and vampire alike. In practice, the *strandhogg* often allows a longship to set sail without any provisions at all.

Of course, such a raid is not without its own dangers, particularly if it is against a Norse village. Once roused, the raided village sends its warriors after the raiders. If necessary, the village launches longships of its own and may pursue for days in an attempt to gain revenge. A skilled captain can avoid this pursuit by hiding along the coast with a contested Wits + Seamanship roll. Failing this roll results in a pursuit (see pg. 85).

## DANGERS OF THE SEA

Storms are one of the most common dangers of travel by sea. When a storm approaches, a Norse crew takes shelter somewhere along the coastline to wait for it to pass. Storms obviously include heavy rain, winds and high seas that threaten to swamp a longship; in particularly nasty weather, snow can accumulate and burden the sails, or hurricane winds can literally tear apart the ship's structure. If no shelter is available, or if the storm comes upon the ship too quickly, there is little choice but to attempt to ride it out.

During the course of the storm, the crew must bail the ship with whatever is at hand. If they can't keep up with the water intake, the ship sinks, so this is a vital task (Dexterity + Seamanship). As well, the captain of the ship has to control the rudder to keep the vessel from foundering on the waves (Strength + Seamanship). The difficulty of both of these tasks depends of the severity of the storm.

In a particularly fierce storm, the ship may suffer damage; any full storm can easily break apart a *drakkar* and cause some stress on a *knorr*. Such damage is largely beyond the capabilities of the crew to prevent, and so the Storyteller should simply roll three dice against a difficulty of the storm's severity (with a -2 bonus to difficulty for *knorrir*, which bend and flex better

### STRANDHOGG AND HUNTING

For a vampire, the *strandhogg* provides an excellent opportunity to feed. Tearing open the victims of the raid and wallowing in their blood is par for the course for a berserker, so the *einherjar* has no trouble feeding in battle. Certain unscrupulous *einherjar* may even take prisoners to devour later.

in storms); failure indicates that the ship is heavily damaged and must be repaired before traveling more than another day, while a botch indicates that the ship breaks up and sinks.

Storm Severity	Difficulty
Mild Squall	5
Rough seas & rain	6
Heavy winds, high seas	7
Full summer storm (heavy rain and wind, choppy ocean)	8
Full winter storm (heavy sleet or snow, hurricane winds)	9

Other potential dangers, particularly when sailing at night along the coast, include shallow water and rocks covered by the tide. During the day, seeing these hazards is fairly easy. However, seeing these hazards at night is more difficult (Perception + Seamanship with a difficulty of 7). Using the Protean Discipline Witness of Darkness can make it a lot easier to sail at night by eliminating the need to make a roll.

Failing to make the roll to avoid shallows or rocks results in the ship running aground. Unless the roll is a botch, the damage to the ship will be repairable come morning, but further sailing will be impossible. Of course, repairing a ship in such conditions requires that the crew move the ship from the obstacle and acquire sufficient supplies with which to patch the damage. With a botched roll, the ship sinks and must be abandoned.

### VAMPIRES AND DROWNING

While a vampire isn't going to drown in the normal sense of the word, falling into the North Sea is not a pleasant experience for anyone. The waters of the sea are extremely cold, and it is very possible for an immersed vampire to suffer the effects of exposure. For more, see page 201 of the *Vampire: The Dark Ages* rules.

Additionally, vampires tend to sink unless they make an effort to swim. As a vampire sinks to the ocean bottom, the effects of increased pressure begin to crush the unfortunate *afterganger*. Any vampire more than a few hundred feet below the surface of the water suffers from the punishing pressure of the ocean, and even Fortitude only slightly extends the vampire's ability to survive great depths. Vampires crushed into a pulp in the ocean depths suffer Final Death.





Being at sea also invites the attention of other Norse crews, who may attempt to board and seize a longship. One ship is the pursuer, the other the prey. These encounters begin as a contest of the captains' skill. If both ships are under sail at the time, then make a contested roll against Perception + Seamanship. If either or both ships use oars, matters become slightly more complicated. Average the Strength of the rowers (usually 2 or 3 for mortal crews), and roll the average Strength + the captain's Seamanship for the contest. The number of successes needed to escape or to catch a ship depends on its type. The contest continues until one ship accumulates enough successes to catch or to escape, or until some outside event interferes with the chase.

Ship Type	Successes Needed
Merchant Ship	2
<i>Karfi, Knorr</i>	3
<i>Scutta, Drakkar</i>	5

Example: If the pursuer is a *scutta* and the prey a *knorr*, the pursuer needs three successes to catch the prey. The prey, however, needs five successes to escape.

## FIGHTING AT SEA

The danger of fighting at sea is primarily a matter of balance (well, and weapons). Once two crews engage, they must worry about the ocean as much as they worry about the opposition. Lost footing can send a warrior tumbling into the sea's icy embrace (permanently, if he is wearing heavy armor). The easiest way to handle this is to wait until someone rolls a botch during the fight, whereupon he goes overboard. It's also possible to knock someone overboard deliberately; a slam or throw can be used to send an adversary over the side of a ship, if the victim is within a few paces of the edge. Of course, a character flung over the side like this should get a Dexterity + Athletics roll (difficulty 8) to attempt to grab the railing or the side of the ship before going overboard.

## SPREADING OUT

Throughout the Viking Age, mixed in with the raiding and trading, the Norse emigrated throughout Europe. Almost as popular as sailing off to raid was sailing off to start a village or settlement in a remote location. The greatest example of this is probably Iceland (which was so named specifically to discourage new settlers, due to its fertile land and reasonably pleasant climate), but there are many remote places in Europe and elsewhere that a Norse expedition could settle.

## RECRUITMENT

The first thing any colonization attempt needs is a group of people willing to leave their homes and gamble everything on the dream of starting anew in a better place. Among the Norse, this translated into following a leader with charisma, good luck and a reputation for bravery. For a vampire, the



## FANTASTIC DANGERS

Depending on how fantastic your campaign is, another potential danger is the Sea Serpent or Dragon — especially if the ship is traveling the uncharted open sea. These creatures are typically unfriendly towards visiting ships, and try to make a snack out of any crews that they come upon. They range in size from small (the size of a longship) to the mythical (the Midgard Serpent said to circle the world). See *The Bygone Bestiary* for more details.

Vikings use the term “Linnorm” to refer to dragons, although the Viking version of these creatures is typically serpentine, slimy and not particularly cunning or intelligent. If using fantastic creatures of this ilk, be sure to look to some of the references in the Introduction. Remember, though, that fantastic and magical creatures aren't always appropriate to a Vampire setting — which is why they aren't all described in this book.

Discipline of Presence is quick method of recruitment, though the less heavy-handed means of speeches and spreading the word can be just as effective.

Once a group of people is willing to leave to create a new settlement, the colonists must arrange a means of transport. This requires at least one *knorr* for the livestock, gear and settlers, and probably a *drakkar* to protect it and the settlement. An *einherjar* organizer may call upon his Resources, Influence or Allies to provide himself with crews and materials; less wealthy individuals must make do with recruitment or theft. With supplies acquired, the voyage begins.

## FINDING THE PERFECT SPOT

There is an art to finding a good spot for a settlement, and as the saying goes, it's all in the location. While concerns such as water and wood are pretty obvious, determining a site's suitability is not easy. A crew of would-be settlers cannot simply sail up the coast and pick a random spot; areas must be surveyed for fresh water, game, available edible plants and natural resources. Finding a good location takes a Perception + Survival roll against a difficulty of 8, usually made by the Storyteller. Surveying a site in this fashion requires at least a few days (three or so) as the scouts and warriors check for necessary resources; the difficulty of the roll drops to 7 if the group spends at least a week surveying. The success or failure of this roll determines the viability of the settlement for the first winter.





Successes	Survivability
Botch	The settlement looks viable, but fails during the winter.
Failure	Suitable location not found, make another check after a week of sailing.
1	Barely survives the winter, with half the population dying from disease and starvation.
2	Does well, only a third of the population dies this winter.
3	The entire population survives the winter.
4+	Thriving, the settlement has one automatic success on subsequent survival checks (see Surviving, below).

## THE SETTLEMENT

The best places for a settlement are ones with flat, arable land and a protected place to beach the ships. A nearby source of fresh water and wood are also vital. Upon finding a suitable location, the ships beach and work on the settlement begins. Work starts on a rampart (a dirt and wood wall) to protect the settlers during the initial days. During this period, warriors explore the nearby area for food and water.

After the rampart is complete, a watchtower and hall are built. If there is a pressing need for more protection, the rampart is upgraded to a log palisade (a reinforced wooden wall). The construction of a pier and boathouse for the ships must be completed before winter, as well. Crops are planted, depending on the time of year, and livestock are fattened up on available foliage. The first winter is a test of the settlement, but it is the second and third winters that determine whether or not it survives.

## SURVIVING

Ultimately, the survival of the settlement past the first winter has as much to do with the luck of the leader as with its placement and preparation. If the gods are not with the settlement, no amount of planning can help. Of course, the gods help those who help themselves. This translates into a roll of Wits + Seneschal after the first winter. A botch means the settlement likely perishes during the next winter, while failure means the settlers want to leave come summer. The difficulty of this roll is 8 for the second winter, and 7 for the third. Gaining 4+ successes on this roll generates an automatic success for the next check. If the settlement can survive three winters, it becomes established and no further rolls are needed.

Of course, there are plenty of opportunities for stories in the building of a settlement. An enterprising or desperate *einherjar* may set out to discover and take the supplies necessary to insure the settlement's success. After all, a vampire who chafes under the rule of the elders may decide to start a new home in order to become a Prince himself. Likewise, an outlaw or adventurer may leave familiar lands, taking loyal followers

with him. And, of course, some *einherjar* undertake settling for strategic purposes, in order to control resources or territory that may be useful in the constant Jyhad. Depending upon the outcome of such expeditions, the Storyteller may alter the settlement's survival rolls or remove them completely, basing the settlement's fortunes on the actions of the players.

## ADDRESSING VAMPIRIC ISSUES

A settlement headed by a vampire has special needs that must be met if the colony is to be successful. A vampire must have a large enough herd to feed without injuring or killing the mortal populace, and requires secure shelter from sunlight. As a result, setting up a new colony is a more labor-intensive project for a group with a vampire than for a purely mortal expedition.

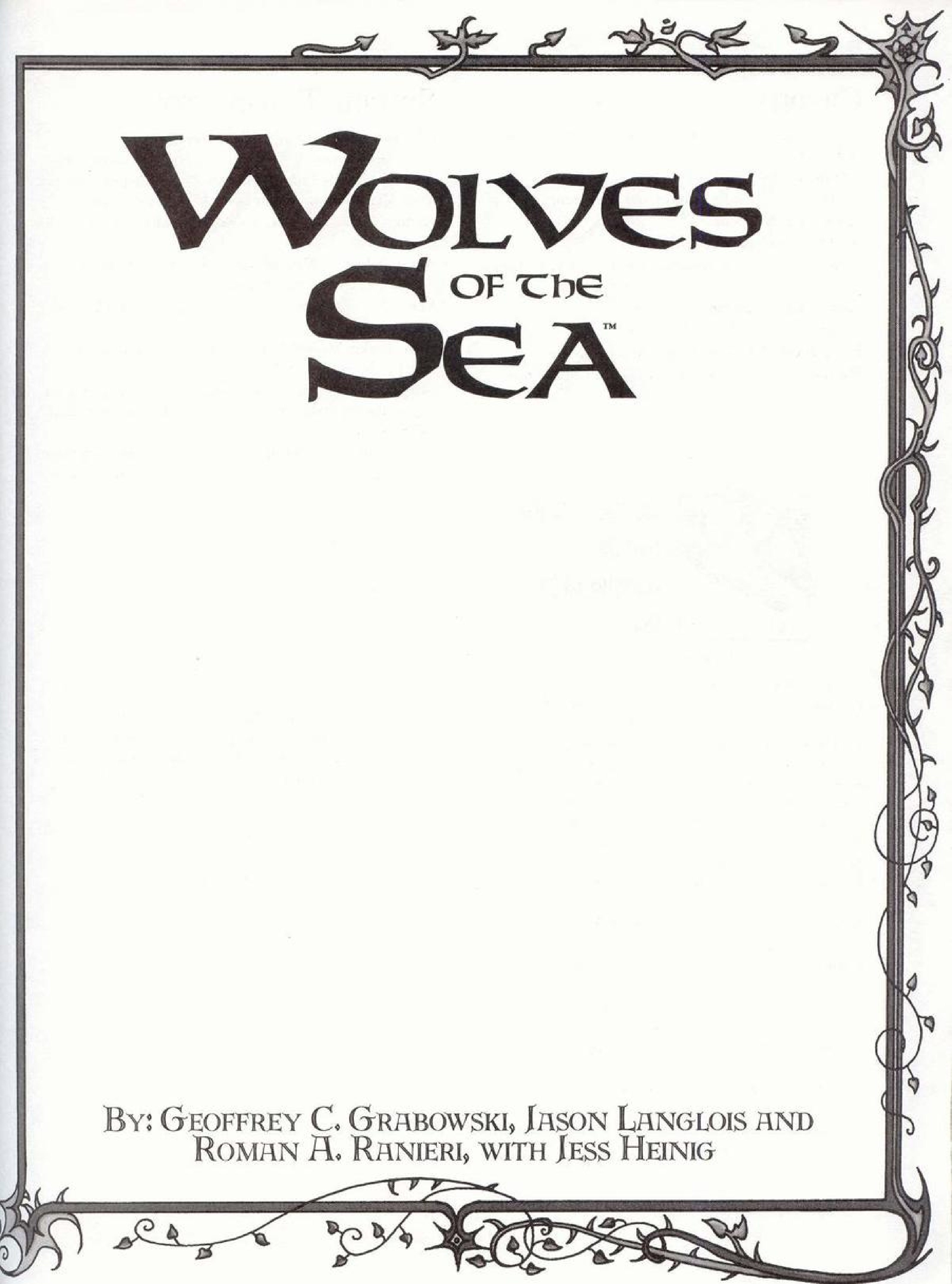
Shelter is probably the most pressing concern for an unliving settler. After all, just a few minutes of sunlight will destroy all but the hardiest *aftergangers*. Since the vampire obviously had some means of surviving the trip to the settlement, though, she can simply wait in seclusion for the construction of a suitable site — a vampire sleeping below decks or in a tent during the day need not abandon such reasonable safety. However, a leader who doesn't lead from the front is unlikely to remain in power long among the Vikings. An *einherjar* settler is well-advised to use her special talents to perform scouting and settling at night. Indeed, by searching out the terrain while other colonists sleep, and by using supernatural strength and speed to hasten construction of important buildings and defenses, an *einherjar* can considerably cut down the time needed to establish a settlement.

The constant call of the Hunger mandates the need for a reasonable blood supply in any settlement with a vampire. Again, the vampire probably brought some supplies on the journey so as not to overtax the sailors with blood loss, but a colony must expect to lose some livestock and people during the winter. While hunters stalk the native animal population and discover what creatures are edible, the vampire must likewise learn what sorts of beasts provide nourishing and obtainable blood to supplement the colony's supply. Failing that, many *einherjar* enter torpor after the settlement has been established, awakening after winter to avail themselves of the survivors' prosperity — though more than one vampire has awakened to an abandoned village in such circumstances. A slumbering *einherjar* needs to leave competent ghouls or *huskarls* in charge or risk loss of control over the settlement.

## REWARD OF SUCCESS

Arriving in a strange land and transplanting customs and way of life is fraught with dangers and risks. A settlement faces the possibility of a hostile native population, strange plants and beasts, unusual weather patterns and simple bad luck. These very risks and challenges make settling a popular pastime among the reckless Norse. If you succeed, the glory of your





# WOLVES OF THE SEA™

BY: GEOFFREY C. GRABOWSKI, JASON LANGLOIS AND  
ROMAN A. RANIERI, WITH JESS HEINIG





up to this ideal. Some take their newfound power and use it to bully and abuse the people of the village. Mortals tend to avoid these *huskarls*.

## VAMPIRES

An all-vampire crew may seem advantageous at first. All members of the crew are possessed of unliving resilience and Disciplines, and no cumbersome explanations are necessary. However, such a crew can only sail at night; a ship put in to the coast for the day makes an easy target for raiders and pirates. Additionally, with so many hungry *aftergangars* aboard, the need for blood becomes a pressing problem. Even with the tradition of *strandhogg*, feeding may be difficult; if the vampires

only raid a village every week or so, hunger (especially among the weaker generations, who cannot hold as much blood) becomes a problem. Even bringing aboard animals is not enough, since these animals must in turn be fed and cared for if they are to provide nourishment.

However, a small group of vampires does make for a frighteningly effective raiding force for small, short missions. When travels of only a week or so are planned, a group of vampires bring a high concentration of skill and supernatural power together. The short duration of a quick trip limits the problems of feeding. The vampiric crew can thus undertake a brief sail to raid a particular village or to capture a certain ship, and still return in time to feed and rest.

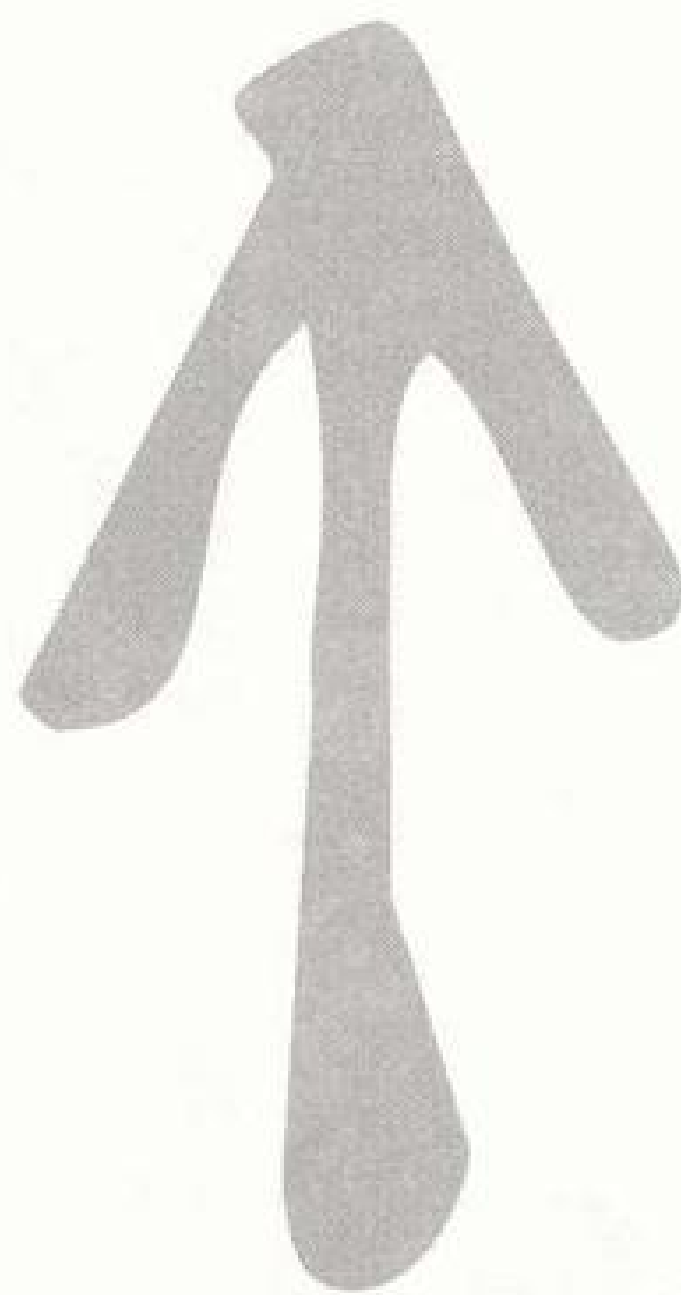








# Chapter Five: Templates





## THE SEA WOLF

**Quote:** *I swam in my byrnie from ship to shore to storm the walls of a castle. If you think me a mere braggart, step outside to settle the matter.*

**Prelude:** While you grew up working the fields and tending cattle, each summer your father headed to the sea to raid. When he returned, it was with treasures and stories of brave deeds. Soon enough, you picked up a sword and spent every spare moment practicing with it. In your mind, you were a hero like Harald Fairhair or Eirik Bloodaxe. Your youth passed quickly, and when you came of age, you traveled to the sea with your father and never looked back.

You proved a natural sailor and, more importantly, a bold warrior. You caught the attention of your *jarl* on your first voyage with your skill and bravery in a handful of battles. When the *jarl* offered rewards, you surprised everyone by boldly asking to join his *huskarls*. It was an unusual request for one so young, but the *jarl* allowed it. Never again would you work in the fields. Instead you spent your days in constant competition, proving your strength and skill against the other *huskarls*. Within only a few years, you surpassed all but your *jarl*. Word of your bravery and ferocity spread to the rest of Scandinavia.

It wasn't long until you sailed north to establish your own hall and clan. Your reputation for luck and skill meant that many followed you on this quest. You found an isolated hall, and in a short but bloody battle, overwhelmed its *jarl* and defenses to claim it as yours. Your luck held, and the new settlement thrived, along with your legend.

However, the previous settlement was not without its secrets. On a winter night, after you had lain down to bed, an uninvited guest paid you a secret call. She claimed to be a protector of the previous *jarl* and a daughter of Oðin charged with selecting the best warriors. Sitting astride your chest, her claws at your throat and sharp teeth bared, the *walkurie* made you an offer: join Oðin's army on Middle-garð or find yourself in the legions of Hel.

You tried to overpower the woman physically, but she proved impossible to defeat. Clawed and bleeding, you could see that her threat was real and something you couldn't laugh away. Again, the *walkurie* made you the offer, licking your blood from her fingers. This time, you made the only choice that you could.

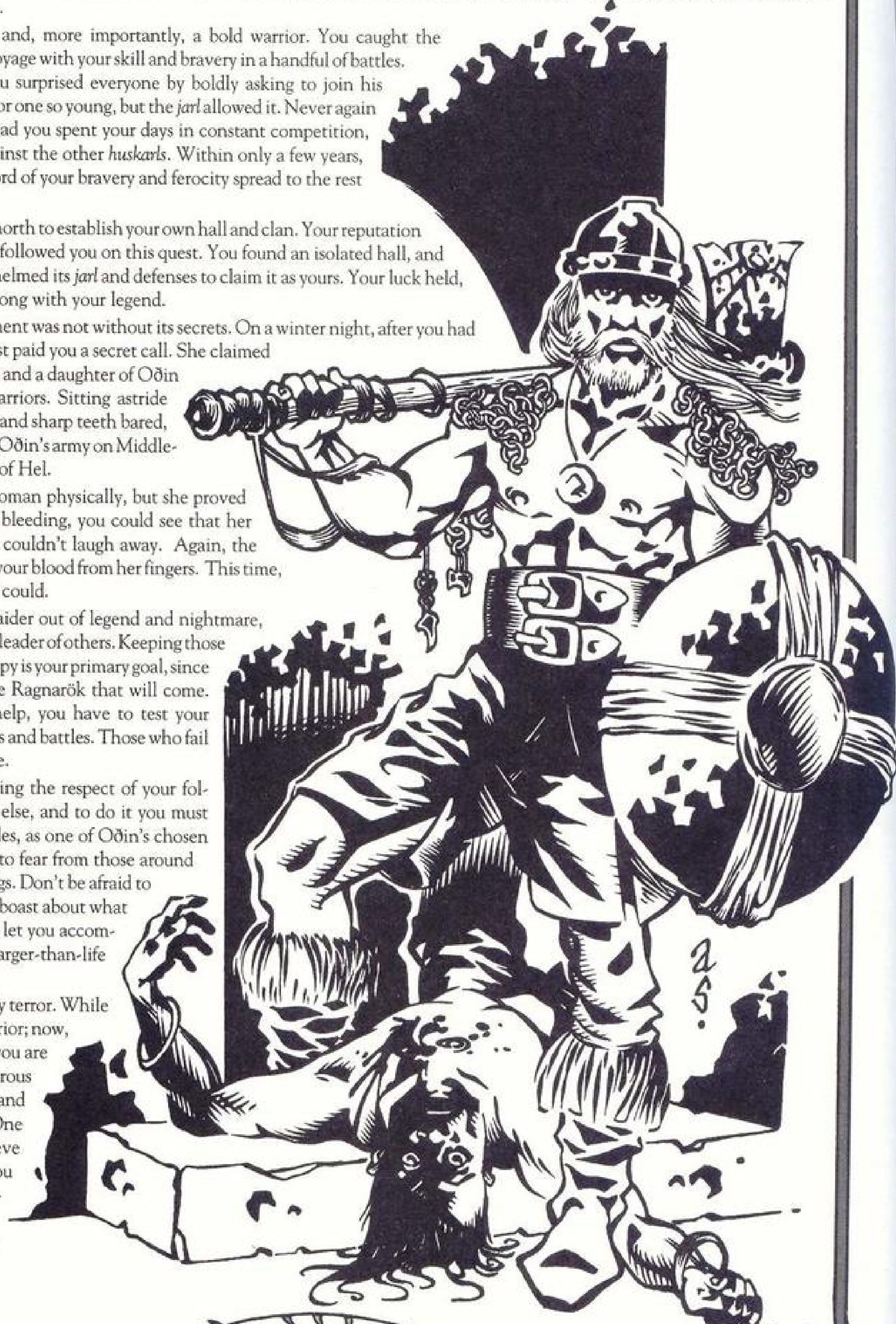
**Concept:** The classic Norse raider out of legend and nightmare, you are a powerful warrior and brave leader of others. Keeping those who follow you healthy, safe and happy is your primary goal, since they will stand with you during the Ragnarök that will come. Since only the strong will be of help, you have to test your followers with long sea voyages, raids and battles. Those who fail your tests don't get a second chance.

**Roleplaying Hints:** Maintaining the respect of your followers and equals comes before all else, and to do it you must never show fear or hesitation. Besides, as one of Oðin's chosen on Middle-garð, you have nothing to fear from those around you unless Oðin removes his blessings. Don't be afraid to brag about what you have done and boast about what you can do; your newfound abilities let you accomplish the impossible. Strive to be the larger-than-life figure everyone expects.

As a vampire, you are an unholy terror. While you were alive you were a potent warrior; now, with the powers afforded by unlife, you are unstoppable. Though fair and generous to your followers, you are ruthless and bloodthirsty to your many victims. One of Oðin's chosen, you firmly believe that you will stand at Ragnarök, so you cultivate a devastating frenzy and constantly seek out war and conflict.

**Equipment:** Longship, warrior band, heavy armor, sword, shield

WOLVES OF THE SEA





# WOLVES OF THE SEA

FOR VAMPIRE THE DARK AGES®

NAME:  
PLAYER:  
CHRONICLE:

NATURE:  
DEMEANOR:  
CLAN: *Gangrel*

GENERATION: *10th*  
HAVEN:  
CONCEPT: *Sea Wolf*

## ATTRIBUTES

PHYSICAL	SOCIAL	MENTAL
Strength <small><i>Broad Shoulders</i></small> ●●●●○○○○○	Charisma ●●●○○○○○○○	Perception ●●○○○○○○○○○
Dexterity ●●●○○○○○○○	Manipulation ●●○○○○○○○○○	Intelligence ●●○○○○○○○○○
Stamina ●●●○○○○○○○	Appearance ●●●○○○○○○○	Wits ●●○○○○○○○○○

## ABILITIES

TALENTS	SKILLS	KNOWLEDGES
Acting ○○○○○○○○○○	Animal Ken ●○○○○○○○○○	Academics ○○○○○○○○○○
Alertness ●●○○○○○○○○○	Archery ○○○○○○○○○○	Hearth Wisdom ○○○○○○○○○○
Athletics ●●○○○○○○○○○	Crafts ●●○○○○○○○○○	Investigation ○○○○○○○○○○
Brawl ●●○○○○○○○○○	Etiquette ○○○○○○○○○○	Law ●○○○○○○○○○○○
Dodge ●●○○○○○○○○○	Herbalism ○○○○○○○○○○	Linguistics ○○○○○○○○○○
Empathy ○○○○○○○○○○	Melee <small><i>Axes</i></small> ●●●●○○○○○	Medicine ○○○○○○○○○○
Intimidation ●●○○○○○○○○○	Music ○○○○○○○○○○	Occult ○○○○○○○○○○
Larceny ○○○○○○○○○○	Ride ○○○○○○○○○○	Politics ○○○○○○○○○○
Leadership ●●●○○○○○○○	Stealth ○○○○○○○○○○	Science ○○○○○○○○○○
Subterfuge ○○○○○○○○○○	Survival ●●○○○○○○○○○	Seneschal ○○○○○○○○○○

## ADVANTAGES

DISCIPLINES	BACKGROUNDS	VIRTUES
<i>Animalism</i> ●○○○○○○○○○	<i>Allies</i> ●●●○○○○○○○	<i>Conscience/Conviction</i> ●●●○○○
<i>Fortitude</i> ●○○○○○○○○○	<i>Fame</i> ●○○○○○○○○○	<i>Self-Control/Instinct</i> ●●○○○
<i>Protean</i> ●●○○○○○○○○○	<i>Generation</i> ●●○○○○○○○○○	<i>Courage</i> ●●●●●●●
<i>Potence</i> ●○○○○○○○○○	<i>Resources</i> ●●●○○○○○○○	
○○○○○○○○○○○	<i>Retainers</i> ●●○○○○○○○○○	

### OTHER TRAITS

<i>Shipwright</i> ●○○○○○○○○○
<i>Rune-Lore</i> ●○○○○○○○○○
<i>Seamanship</i> ●●●○○○○○○○
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### ROAD

<i>Einherjar</i>
●●●●●○○○○○○○

### WILLPOWER

●●●●●○○○○○○○
□□□□□□□□□□

### BLOOD POOL

□□□□□□□□□□
□□□□□□□□□□

### HEALTH

Bruised		□
Hurt	-1	□
Injured	-1	□
Wounded	-2	□
Mauled	-2	□
Crippled	-5	□
Incapacitated		□

### WEAKNESS



## NORNS' THREAD

**Quote:** "The Norns came to the house that night, those who would fashion a prince's fate; great fame, they said, would mark his future, he would be called the best of kings." Haven't had many Norns visiting around here, have you?

**Prelude:** You like to say that the morning you were born, a raven was dead on the doorstep and a wolf howled at the rising sun. You prefer to leave out the fact that your father fell dead and the cow's milk curdled. If the circumstances of your birth were ill-omened, the rest of your youth seemed fairly normal. Your uncle raised you to be a warrior, and you seemed suited to such things until the Voice first whispered in your ear.

Murmuring to you, the Voice told you stories of the gods and heroes. When you spoke of these things to your family, they became amazed and frightened.

Your uncle summoned a spawoman, to heal what ailed you. Her efforts were for naught, as the spawoman quickly decided the Norns had chosen you. The stories you spoke were the Lays of the skalds, but there was no way for you to have learned them except by the will of the Norns.

As you grew to adulthood, the Voice came and went, but the stories remained a large part of your life. When the chance came, you caught a ship to the south, to seek out skalds and to learn from them other Lays, stories and sagas and the art of *kenning*. While you were never a master of the form, there was a certain truth about your particular versions of the Lays that hinted at prophecy. You let oth-

ers know of the Voice, and soon people were coming to you to seek the wisdom of the Norns.

One of those who came to you proved to be more than just the jester he appeared. He asked many questions about the Voice, whether it came or went, and how you felt about the world and your place in it. Then he told you many things about the real world, and how important it was that your message be spoken. He offered to give you an edge, to help you hear the Voice better and to reach people with more effect. Intrigued, you agreed to try what he suggested. After a few lessons to improve your talents, you paid the price he asked of you. Your life was a minor price to pay, after all.

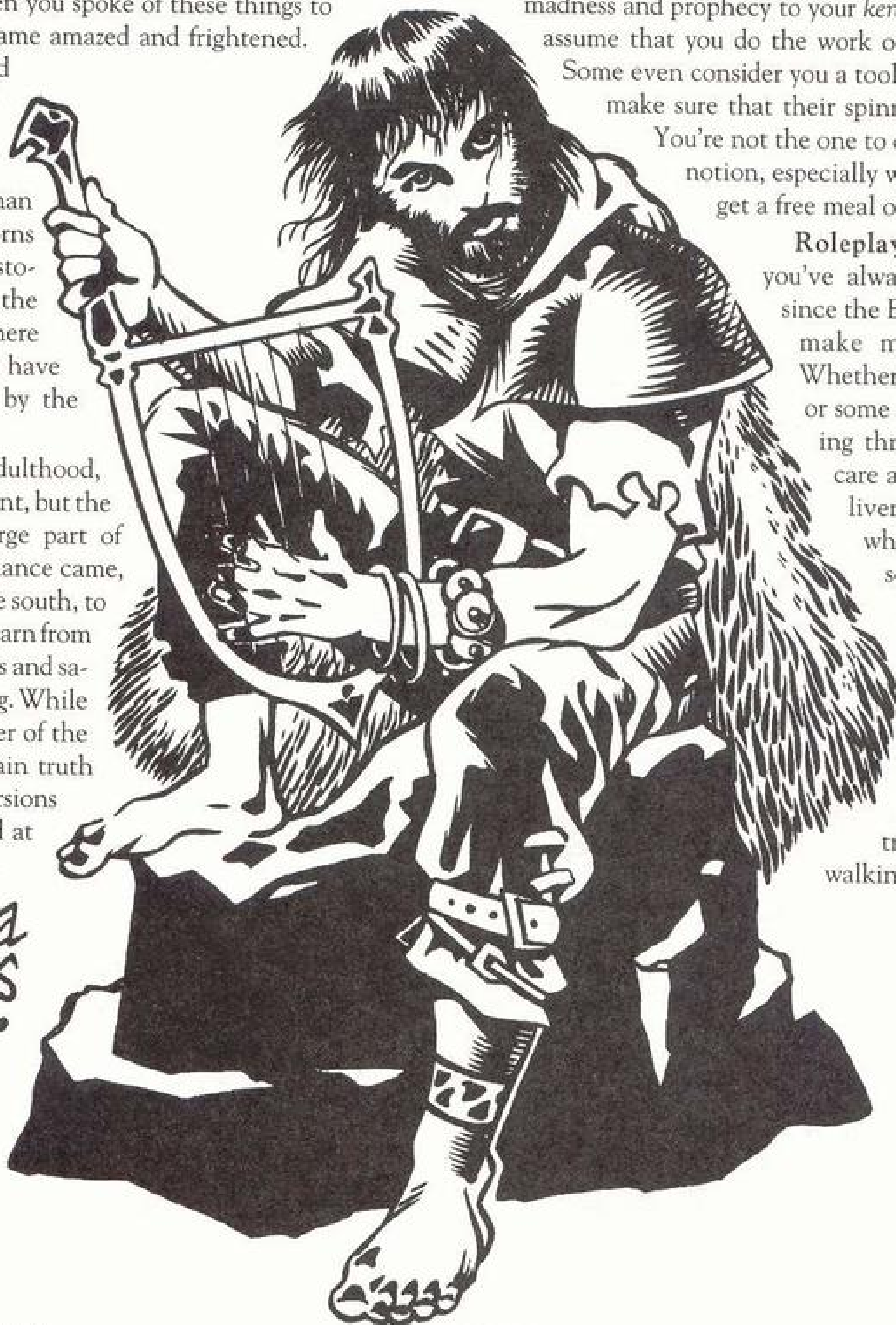
**Concept:** A storyteller of great skill, you are a dispenser of wisdom to any who will listen. However, there is the hint of madness and prophecy to your *kenning* that causes all to assume that you do the work of some higher power.

Some even consider you a tool of the Norns, sent to make sure that their spinning comes out right.

You're not the one to disabuse others of this notion, especially when you can use it to get a free meal or two.

**Roleplaying Hints:** While you've always heard the Voice, since the Embrace it's started to make more sense to you. Whether it is the Norns, Oðin or some stranger being speaking through you, you don't care as long as you can deliver its message to those who need to hear it. If, sometimes, this message isn't what people want to hear, so be it. Your duty to the Voice comes first.

**Equipment:** Commoner garb, traveling pack, sturdy walking boots.





# WOLVES OF THE SEA

FOR VAMPIRE THE DARK AGES

NAME:  
PLAYER:  
CHRONICLE:

NATURE:  
DEMEANOR:  
CLAN: *Malkavian*

GENERATION: *12th*  
HAVEN:  
CONCEPT: *Norns' Thread*

## ATTRIBUTES

PHYSICAL		SOCIAL		MENTAL	
Strength	●●○○○○○○○○	Charisma	●●●○○○○○○○	Perception <i>Insightful</i>	●●●●○○○○○○
Dexterity	●●○○○○○○○○	Manipulation	●●○○○○○○○○	Intelligence	●●●○○○○○○○
Stamina <i>Determined</i>	●●●●○○○○○○	Appearance	●○○○○○○○○○○	Wits	●●●○○○○○○○

## ABILITIES

TALENTS		SKILLS		KNOWLEDGES	
Acting	●●●○○○○○○○	Animal Ken	○○○○○○○○○○	Academics	●●○○○○○○○○
Alertness	●●●○○○○○○○	Archery	○○○○○○○○○○	Hearth Wisdom	●●○○○○○○○○
Athletics	○○○○○○○○○○	Crafts	○○○○○○○○○○	Investigation	○○○○○○○○○○
Brawl	○○○○○○○○○○	Etiquette	●○○○○○○○○○	Law	●○○○○○○○○○
Dodge	○○○○○○○○○○	Herbalism	○○○○○○○○○○	Linguistics	●●○○○○○○○○
Empathy	●○○○○○○○○○	Melee	○○○○○○○○○○	Medicine	○○○○○○○○○○
Intimidation	○○○○○○○○○○	Music	○○○○○○○○○○	Occult	●●○○○○○○○○
Larceny	○○○○○○○○○○	Ride	○○○○○○○○○○	Politics	●○○○○○○○○○
Leadership	●○○○○○○○○○	Stealth	○○○○○○○○○○	Science	○○○○○○○○○○
Subterfuge	●○○○○○○○○○	Survival	●○○○○○○○○○	Seneschal	○○○○○○○○○○

## ADVANTAGES

DISCIPLINES		BACKGROUNDS		VIRTUES	
<i>Auspex</i>	●○○○○○○○○○	<i>Contacts</i>	●●○○○○○○○○	Conscience/Conviction	●●●●○○
<i>Oementation</i>	●●○○○○○○○○	<i>Fame</i>	●●●○○○○○○○	Self-Control/Instinct	●●●○○○
<i>Obfuscate</i>	●○○○○○○○○○	<i>Resources</i>	●○○○○○○○○○	Courage	●●●○○○
<i>Presence</i>	●○○○○○○○○○	_____	○○○○○○○○○○		
_____	○○○○○○○○○○	_____	○○○○○○○○○○		

### OTHER TRAITS

<i>Rune-Lore</i>	●●●●○○○○○○
<i>Sagaman</i>	●●●○○○○○○○
_____	○○○○○○○○○○
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_____	○○○○○○○○○○

### ROAD

*Æsirgārð*

●●●●●●●○○○

### WILLPOWER

●●●●●●●○○○  
□□□□□□□□□□

### BLOOD POOL

□□□□□□□□□□  
□□□□□□□□□□

### HEALTH

Bruised		□
Hurt	-1	□
Injured	-1	□
Wounded	-2	□
Mauled	-2	□
Crippled	-5	□
Incapacitated		□

### WEAKNESS



## HOLDER OF THE KEYS

**Quote:** *Ottar is dead? A hunting accident? I'm shocked. He seemed such a good man. Why, weren't you even thinking of following him when he left to start his own settlement, Jorund?*

**Prelude:** Growing up the daughter of a powerful jarl meant being prepared almost from birth to be the wife of an important jarl. You learned everything you could about managing a household and a village from your mother, and she impressed upon you the important role you would play in the success of your husband. At the same time, you studied the techniques your father used to keep his warriors in line.

When the time of your marriage came, it was to an aging jarl of the Trond to whom your father owed a favor. The match was disappointing to you from the start, for your husband was unskilled at managing his people. He relied on fear, rather than respect, to keep them in line. At the end of the first year, pregnant with his child, you knew that his rule was not going to last the time it would take for your son to take his place.

While your husband was off raiding, you cultivated the respect of the women of the village with a practiced concern for their well-being. You fostered your son into the care of your father's best warrior, telling your husband it was to further ties between your clans. Then you convinced your husband to undertake a last raid to establish his reputation in legend — and to keep him out of your hair for more than a summer.

The raid lasted two years, and you used the time your husband was away to good effect. First, you cultivated the support of the older warriors who remained behind and the young men just coming into adulthood. Those few who didn't come over to your side, you found ways to secretly murder or goad into reckless acts that led to their demise. Second, you worked long and hard to ensure that the luck of the village was better under your careful rule than your husband's. You had everything prepared for your husband's return.

That's when things took a strange twist. Your husband returned a changed man, newly vibrant and acting half his age. His crew numbered less than a third of the original size, and the remaining warriors were weak and pale. It wasn't long before rumors spread of how your husband was a monster and that something had to be done.

## WOLVES OF THE SEA

What the villagers didn't know was that on the first night of his return, your husband took you into the Embrace, and told you of his plans. He spoke to you of Embracing his son as well, and making a family of his kind. He pledged his love for you, and told you how he hoped to make you Queen of a unified Scandinavia. You feigned interest in these grand stories of a new era, biding your time for a few days.

When you judged that the villagers were ready, and that your husband trusted you completely, you acted. In the early hours of the morning, when your husband had laid down to his rest, you thrust a stake through his heart and destroyed him. You spun out a story to the villagers about *mortwights* and monsters, and how your husband had been one. The people accepted the story, and also the return of your young son to lead them. However, everyone knows you really run things and they treat you with respect and a little fear.

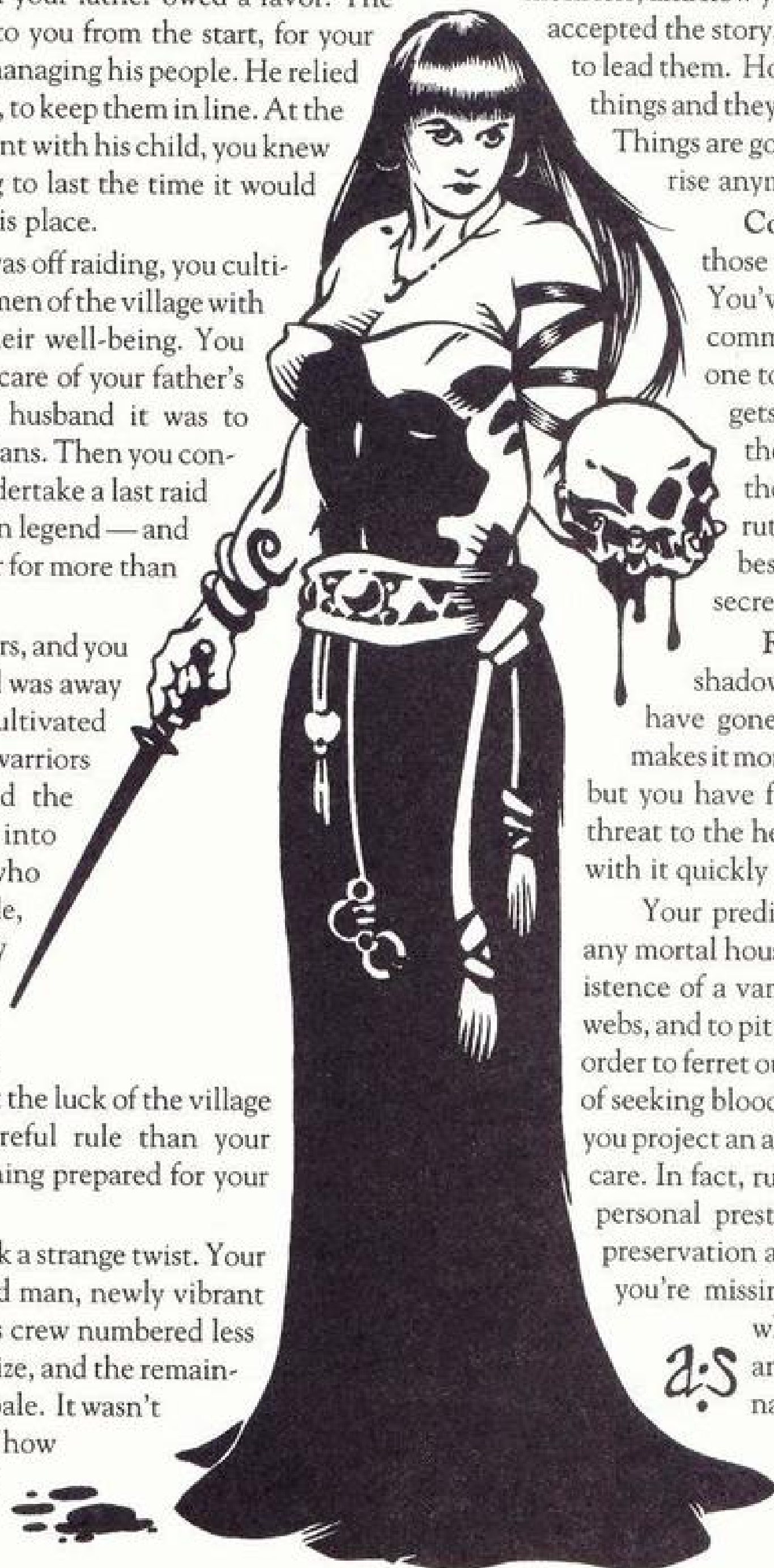
Things are good, even if you don't get to see the sun rise anymore.

**Concept:** The Hall is your domain, and those within and around it in your charge. You've worked hard to make this a thriving community, and will allow nothing and no one to threaten its prosperity. Anyone who gets in your way will find this out, whether they be kin or stranger. It wouldn't do for those who rely on you to know of your ruthlessness, even though it is in their best interest. Some things are best kept secret, in the name of a greater good.

**Roleplaying Hints:** You operate in the shadows and the night, when the others have gone to their beds. Your new existence makes it more difficult to make your wishes known, but you have found ways around this. If there is a threat to the health of the Hall or yourself, you deal with it quickly and without pity.

Your predilection for plotting goes far beyond any mortal householder's, though. The paranoid existence of a vampire forces you to spin webs within webs, and to pit your followers against one another in order to ferret out hidden loyalties. The constant pall of seeking blood makes you callous and cold, though you project an air of false compassion to those in your care. In fact, running a hall is no longer a matter of personal prestige or power; it's a matter of self-preservation and survival. You constantly feel like you're missing something, but you don't know what it is. Should you ever run across another vampire, though, the machinations will be fierce indeed — and more satisfying than any hot blood.

**Equipment:** Keys to the Hall, fine dress, dagger





# WOLVES OF THE SEA

FOR VAMPIRE THE DARK AGES

NAME:  
PLAYER:  
CHRONICLE:

NATURE:  
DEMEANOR:  
CLAN: *Ventrue*

GENERATION: *11th*  
HAVEN:  
CONCEPT: *Holder of the Keys*

## ATTRIBUTES

PHYSICAL		SOCIAL		MENTAL	
Strength	●●○○○○○○○	Charisma	●●●○○○○○○	Perception	●●○○○○○○○
Dexterity	●●○○○○○○○	Manipulation <small>Cunning</small>	●●●●○○○○○	Intelligence	●●●○○○○○○
Stamina	●●○○○○○○○	Appearance	●●●○○○○○○	Wits	●●●○○○○○○

## ABILITIES

TALENTS		SKILLS		KNOWLEDGES	
Acting	●○○○○○○○○○	Animal Ken	○○○○○○○○○	Academics	○○○○○○○○○
Alertness	●○○○○○○○○○	Archery	○○○○○○○○○	Hearth Wisdom	●○○○○○○○○○
Athletics	○○○○○○○○○	Crafts	●○○○○○○○○○	Investigation	○○○○○○○○○
Brawl	○○○○○○○○○	Etiquette	●●○○○○○○○	Law	●●○○○○○○○
Dodge	○○○○○○○○○	Herbalism	○○○○○○○○○	Linguistics	○○○○○○○○○
Empathy	●○○○○○○○○○	Melee	○○○○○○○○○	Medicine	○○○○○○○○○
Intimidation	●●●○○○○○○○	Music	●○○○○○○○○○	Occult	○○○○○○○○○
Larceny	●○○○○○○○○○	Ride	○○○○○○○○○	Politics	●●●○○○○○○○
Leadership	●●●○○○○○○○	Stealth	○○○○○○○○○	Science	○○○○○○○○○
Subterfuge	●●●○○○○○○○	Survival	●○○○○○○○○○	Seneschal	●●●○○○○○○○

## ADVANTAGES

DISCIPLINES		BACKGROUNDS		VIRTUES	
<i>Dominate</i>	●●○○○○○○○	<i>Generation</i>	●○○○○○○○○○	<i>Conscience/Conviction</i>	●●○○○
<i>Fortitude</i>	●○○○○○○○○○	<i>Resources</i>	●●●○○○○○○○	<i>Self-Control/Instinct</i>	●●●●●
<i>Presence</i>	●○○○○○○○○○	<i>Retainers</i>	●○○○○○○○○○	<i>Courage</i>	●●●○○
<i>Auspex</i>	●○○○○○○○○○	_____	○○○○○○○○○		
_____	○○○○○○○○○	_____	○○○○○○○○○		

### OTHER TRAITS

_____	○○○○○○○○○
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_____	○○○○○○○○○

### ROAD

*Humanity*

●●●●●○○○

### WILLPOWER

●●●●●○○○

□□□□□□□□

### BLOOD POOL

□□□□□□□□

□□□□□□□□

### HEALTH

Bruised		□
Hurt	-1	□
Injured	-1	□
Wounded	-2	□
Mauled	-2	□
Crippled	-5	□
Incapacitated		□

### WEAKNESS

\_\_\_\_\_





# Appendix: Notable Scandinavian Einherjar

*A furore Normannorum libera nos, Domine!*  
(From the fury of the Northmen deliver us, O Lord!)

- Prayer throughout western  
Christendom during the Viking Age

The impression left by the Vikings resounds throughout history. Little wonder, then, that the vampires among them wield similar influence in the society of the unliving.





## THE ALL-HIGH

Few *einherjar* cast a longer shadow in the lands of the High North than the Gangrel Methuselah known as the All-High. He was old when he first began moving north, during the Age of Migrations. He was known by a different name then, and served as a priest among the Germanic peoples. There he became identified with the god Oðin, in the minds of his German worshippers and perhaps in his own mind as well.

Rarely staying in one haven for more than two or three years, the All-High moved north as the Western Empire fell into ruin behind him. Eventually, as if he had found a long sought-after goal, he settled at Uppsala, the center of Swedish Æesir worship. From 650 until the earliest years of the 12th century, he dwelt there as priest and primary object of worship, regarded as half man and half god, as perhaps he is.

With the All-High come the trappings of Oðin's worship. Like his divine role-model, the All-High travels extensively through Scandinavia during the Viking Age, embracing those who come to his attention. Most of the Gangrel in Scandinavia can place the All-High in their lineage, and many use his bloodline as a justification for their rule as *vargr*-kings.

Under the All-High's direction, the Temple at Uppsala came to resemble the Valhal. The Methuselah's underlings and direct progeny, the *Walkurie*, traveled across Scandinavia during the Viking Age in search of the blood of heroes. Some,

## THE FUTURE OF THE *WALKURIE*

After Christianization of Scandinavia and the razing of Uppsala, the *Walkurie* disappear from the scene. Most enter voluntary torpor in the High North, and a few others filter into conventional *einherjar* society by ones and twos. But even those who stay alert for the intervening centuries do not forget. In the early 1980s, the remaining *Walkurie* once again gather together at Uppsala, whose burial howes have by that point been excavated and found strangely empty. Their motives mysterious, the resurrected *Walkurie* may have goals of their own, or may await the awakening of their ancient Sire.

too injured to live, they drained dry. Some very few heroes were Embraced, for the All-High forbade the *Walkurie* to procreate. The vast majority of the wounded and dying heroes who came to their attention, however, were made ghouls and taken back to the Uppsala shrine to serve the All-High.

At the temple, these *einherjar* and *huskarls* were feasted and treated as heroes. Each day they practiced fighting with real weapons and armor. Each night they feasted on wild boar and drank from the Blood-horn, the All-High's greatest treasure. When but a single drop of blood was added to the ale in the gigantic drinking-horn, all the ale within it was changed into blood. If it was filled with mead and but a single drop of *einherjar* vitae was added to the horn, it became entirely the vitae of the *einherjar* who added the drop. Thus did the All-High and his progeny sustain themselves and their ghouls at the table of Valhal.

Those *einherjar* not practicing their battle-skills or feasting were charged by the All-High with guarding the three burial howes near the temple. Both day and night, the mounds were watched by dozens of alert eyes. The sentries each kept an unlit torch and the makings of fire-arrows at hand, for the stirring of aftergangens that the All-High warns them is the first sign of an impending Ragnarök.

In the early days of the 1100s, the people of Sweden finally began to turn *en masse* to the Christian faith. New in the region and still strong with the convert's faith and miracles, champions and holy men came from across the region during the day to raze the heathen temple at Uppsala. Though the All-High's *huskarls* resisted them, they were soon dispersed with miracle and steel, and the temple was put to the torch, burning many of the *Walkurie*. The All-High was not seen after that say, and may have perished in the blaze, fled or perhaps entered torpor.

During his residence at Uppsala, the All-High served as the elder and center of Scandinavian *einherjar* society. Not only do his own progeny appeal to him to justice and judgment, so do the vast majority of Scandinavia's *einherjar*. With the disappearance of the All-High and the final Christianization of Scandinavia in the 1110s, the position of the *vargr* as the



bitter-end last stand of a dying social system was cemented, and the death-knell sounded for *einherjar* paganism in Scandinavia.

## EIRIK LONGTOOTH

Eirik Longtooth (then called by a different name) fled civilized Norway in the 870s when Harald Fairhair burned his hall and confiscated his family estates for Eirik's opposition to Harald's campaign to unify Norway. Unlike other Norwegians, Eirik did not flee across the whale road to the Shetlands or Orkneys or to the newly-founded colonies in Iceland. Instead, he retreated into the dark pine forests of the Norwegian interior, to live as a *vargr*, an outlaw and a menace to the king's justice.

Most men would have found a cold death, but Eirik survived on the proceeds of his robbery and with the help of sympathetic *jarls*. One of the most-wanted men in Norway, the Longtooth seemed possessed of a magical ability to evade pursuit, and the superhuman power to kill all who pursued him into his wilderness lair, despite numbers or odds. This exceptional mortal evaded marauding *vargr* and the monsters of the wilds, returning sporadically to harry the followers of Harald. In one notable incident, he walked into a public house in Trondheim and murdered three of Harald's *huskarls* in the public room, cutting the blood eagle on them after he dragged the bodies into the street. Almost a hundred and twenty men and twice that many dogs beat the countryside for three days, until the hunters realized how sharply their numbers seemed to have dwindled. The seventy-two surviving hunters and their dogs withdrew from the hunt. Eirik Longtooth became a living legend, and a heroic symbol of resistance for those Norwegians hateful of Harald's iron-fisted rule. But when the rule of Harald's successor, Eirik Bloodaxe, disintegrated in a welter of regional tensions and political ambitions, the Longtooth didn't come out of the woods and take up his reputation and plow at his old stading.

One freezing night, some time between the burning of his hall and the end of the first unified Norwegian kingdom, Eirik Longtooth died and was reborn as one of the brood of Oðin. A Childer of one of the true *vargr*, the forest-Gangrel of the north, there was no longer any going home for him.

Since his Embrace, Eirik has been the leader of the most extreme *vargr* camp in opposition to the modern era. While Christ-worship is their target of priority, Eirik and his people oppose not just the Christianization of Scandinavia, but the centralization of its governments. If they had their way, Eirik and his allies would forcibly dissolve the Scandinavian states and bring back the old days of petty kingship.

Eirik and his progeny have been directly responsible for the sacking and burning of seven churches in or near the back country of Norway and Sweden, as well as the murder of any number of missionaries, mendicant priests and wandering friars, including three Lasombra who strayed too far from Oslo on a hunting expedition. Eirik has a number of ongoing feuds



with other Scandinavian *einherjar*, and has only avoided outlaw status because placing him beyond the law would make him a greater threat to the *vargr* and their place in Scandinavia — after all, a hunted man is one thing, but a hunter *einherjar* is a threat to all of the unliving, once the mortals start killing all of the vampires they find. Sooner or later, Eirik's luck is going to fail him.

## ARNULF JORMUNGANDRSSON

Arnulf Jormungandrsson was born Arnulf Seamundsson. He came into the world at Bergen in 793, the same year that the Vikings first raided Ireland. His father was a factor in the amber trade, and Arnulf journeyed to the south in his father's company, taking the long river-routes through Russia and the Byzantine Empire to trade with Arabic merchants in Alexandria.

There, Arnulf found a life completely different from the one he had lived in the north. His luxuries in Scandinavia were common household fixtures to any merchant worth his salt. His ignorant father was systematically robbed for trinkets while he ignored the world of learning, commerce and sensuality around him. Instead, his father chose to swill overpriced wine in the merchant's quarter with his cronies.

Arnulf made some friends among the locals and got a chance to see the Alexandrian night life. Then he made some





friends among the court and got a chance to see the *real* night life of Alexandria. He attracted the attention of the Followers of Set, and he learned just what the words "night life" mean.

Arnulf became a willing convert of Set in 805. Living beyond the grave in Alexandria, it is easy to see the harsh

conditions and attitudes of his homeland as easily exploitable in the service of Set. With the blessing and assistance of his fellows, Arnulf set out north to begin the historic conquest of the High North for the Great One.

It wasn't as easy as he had imagined. Nidhoggr, the great serpent that gnaws on the World Tree in the darkness of the void, already had worshippers, foul and unpleasant and very, very powerful. That cost him one fledgling cult when the true followers of Nidhoggr eliminated Arnulf's upstarts in a rather spectacular and shadow-bitten strike. Jormungandr, the serpent that wraps around the world, didn't have cultists, but that was mostly because it wasn't exactly the sort of deity to encourage an active worship. Nevertheless, the scaly aspect is, Arnulf feels, important to the worship of Set. There were other difficulties — the Get of Fenris, the scarcity of resources, and the lack of the cities where the Followers of Set prosper best. Despite these problems, though, Arnulf persevered, developing a small cadre of men who followed his direction and worshipped the serpent in exchange for eternal vitality.

In the middle of the tenth century, the Ismaili Revolution caused Arnulf to lose contact with his parent organization. By then, he had built a moderate Ragnarök cult in the hostile environment of Scandinavia. Mostly composed of retired Vikings whose decadence was equaled only by their riches, the cult focused its efforts primarily on gradual growth and gathering riches during the Viking age. *Einherjar* with wealthy mortal pawns or relatives may cross swords with Arnulf and his lackeys.

During the **Dark Ages** period, after the dissipation of the Viking wealth, the cult becomes much less active. Instead, it concentrates purely on survival in the hostile North while conserving its resources for future growth.



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