

Vegdrasil





Yggdrasill

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Contents

Introduction	4	Characteristic Tests	75	Disengaging from Combat	127
What is a Role-Playing Game?	7	Unskilled Tests	75	Combat Round Sequence	127
Yggdrasill	7	Opposed Tests	76	Using <i>Furor</i> in Combat	134
Historical Accuracy	7	Extended Tests	77	Wounds and Healing	135
Three Concepts	8	Special Results	77	Hit Points	135
In the Shadow of Yggdrasill	9	The Burden of Fate	78	Combat	135
The Primal Chaos	9	Heroes of Midgard	79	Major Wounds & Consequences	135
The Aesir and Vanir	9	The Birth of a Hero	79	Falling	137
Yggdrasill & the Nine Worlds	11	The Concept	79	Suffocation	137
The Gods of Asgard	13	Fate	79	Drowning	137
The Aesir Triad	13	Characteristics	82	Fire	137
The Vanir Triad	17	Gifts and Weaknesses	82	Cold	138
Other Major Gods	19	Skills	82	Sickness and Disease	138
The Disir Goddesses	21	Secondary Characteristics	82	Poisons	139
Cults & Rituals	22	<i>Furor</i>	83	Care and Natural Healing	141
Blot, or the Sacrificial Rites	22	Combat Feats & Magical Spells	83	Natural Healing	141
Undertaking a Blot	22	History	83	First Aid	141
Sacred Places	23	Fate	84	Medicine	142
Funerary Rites	23	Runes, the voice of Fate	84	Runes of Healing	142
Sacred Oaths	24	The Runes	85	Natural Remedies	142
Scandia	25	Frey's Aett	85	Combat Feats	143
A Land Ruled by Cold	27	Heimdall's Aett	86	Acquiring Combat Feats	143
The Kingdom of Denmark	27	Tyr's Aett	87	Attack Feats	144
Geography & Environment	27	Archetypes	89	Defence Feats	147
Human Settlement	28	Archetypes & Vocation	89	Utility Feats	148
Country Organisation	29	Nobles	89	Options	149
Recent Events	30	Warriors	90	Magic	150
Important Figures	31	Sages	90	Magic in Yggdrasill	151
The Kingdom of Svithjod	32	Workers	91	Seidr: Sorcery or Trance Magic	153
Geography & Environment	32	Travellers	91	Galdr: Incantation Magic	162
Human Settlement	33	Characteristics	106	Runes: Sacred Writings	168
Country Organisation	34	Body	106	Ragnorök	174
Current Situation	34	Mind	106	Allies & Adversaries	176
Important Figures	35	Soul	107	Describing Extras	176
The Kingdom of Norway	36	Determining Characteristic Values	107	Personalities	180
Geography & Environment	36	Secondary Characteristics	108	Beasts & Monsters	181
Human Settlement	37	Exhausted & Severely Wounded	109	Statistics	181
Important Figures of Norway	38	Reaction (REA)	109	Beast and Monster Attributes	181
Other Provinces	40	Physical Defence (PD)	109	Scandian Beasts	181
The Land of the Gautars	40	Mental Defence (MD)	110	Creatures of Scandia	182
Geography & Environment	40	Movement (MOVE)	110	Traits	183
Human Settlement	41	Encumbrance (ENC)	110	Unique Creatures	185
Important Figures	41	Furor	111	Equipment And Travel	186
Finland	42	<i>Furor</i> Pool	111	Weapons	188
Other Regions, Other People	43	Calling on <i>Furor</i>	112	Armour	189
The Saxons	43	Savage Warriors & <i>Furor</i>	112	Shields	190
Angles and Jutes	43	Initiates of Odin	113	Day-to-day Equipment	190
Daily Life	44	Regaining <i>Furor</i>	113	Accessories & Jewellery	191
Org. of the Northern Kingdoms	44	Gifts & Weaknesses	115	Starting Character Equipment	193
Family and Clan	44	Gifts	115	Adventuring in Scandia	193
The Social Hierarchy	45	Weaknesses	115	Travelling in Scandia	194
Social Conventions	48	Gifts & Weaknesses in Play	116	Experience and Renown	195
The Land of the Gods	49	List of Gifts	116	Experience	195
Culture & Civilisation	50	List of Weaknesses	117	Renown	197
Lifestyle	50	Skills	119	Offerings to the Great Winter	203
Everyday Life	52	Skill Levels	119	Introduction	204
Food and Festivals	54	Skill Tests	120	The Lady of Ice	205
Habitations	57	Gaining Skills	120	The City of Chains	212
Work	62	List of Skills	120	The Jaws of the Wolf	216
Travel and Transport	63	Combat	125	Return to Hirsik	220
Care of the Sick	64	The Rhythm of Combat	125	Appendix	229
Norsemen and the Sea	64	Movement within Combat	126	Index	231
Raiding and War	66	Free Movement	127	Character Sheet	235
The Game System	72	Engaging an Opponent	127		
Rolling Dice	73				
Tests	73				
Simple Tests	74				

A hoarse roar, like that of a wild animal, came from the berserker. Standing in the midst of a dozen enemy corpses, he brandished a fist towards the reddening sky, thanking Thor for this new victory. In his other hand, he spun his axe, a weapon so heavy that most men of the Northern Kingdoms could barely have lifted it. A groan rose from his right, drawing the wild warrior's attention. Despite the hideous wound in his stomach, one of his enemies was attempting to crawl away. A savage grin deformed Thorgrim Olavsson's features. Slowly, like a predator who knows its prey cannot escape, he closed upon the dying man. Keeping his eyes locked on his foe, he raised the haft of his axe over his body. The wounded man looked up at the warrior as he realised escape was impossible. He made a final desperate attempt to preserve his life, begging for mercy, tears streaking his face. Thorgrim Olavsson deliberately lifted his axe and, swinging it three times, let the blade fall on his victim. He spat on the mutilated corpse. Let him rot with Hel, there was no place in Valhalla for the weak!

A sound came from behind. The warrior let out another bestial growl and turned, ready to attack the newcomers.

"Peace!" Jorun Hrolfsdottir ordered, holding a hand out to the berserker. "There's no one left to fight."

The young aristocrat from the Kjari clan took off her helm, wiped the blood from her sword and sheathed it in the leather scabbard at her side. Spotting a nearby boulder covered in moss, she sat upon it, exhausted. Jorunn passed a hand over her face. The feeling of wet blood on her face made her jump. At least it wasn't hers. Besides a light cut on the calf of her leg, she had not been wounded. Unlike Sigurd Ivarsson. The hirdman attached to protect her had accomplished his task with zeal. Even so, she felt weak and shaken. She had always been in close contact with violence, so inevitable in the life of the northern peoples; in the recitals of sagas by skalds, when the men returned from an expedition or battle, in the death of a friend at the claws of some monster haunting the forest around their domain. But this time, she had been at the centre of the battle. She had killed. Maybe to defend herself and her companions, but she had still killed. Of course, she had trained for this, but this reality had nothing to do with the training she had done since childhood with a wooden sword.

Come now! She needed to get a hold of herself. After all, the king, her father, had given her command of this expedition. She could not show any weakness. A chief had to be strong, so her companions could be too. Jorun Hrolfsdottir quietly drew in a deep breath and stood up straight. It was not a time to think about herself, but of making the most of this fight.

She glanced around. Thorgrim was crouched a little to one side, near a stand of conifers from which their assailants had sprung. His impressive war axe rested in front of him and he seemed to be giving homage to Thor in a respectful ritual of veneration. He had abandoned his leather shirt and the bearskin jerkin he almost never took off. On his naked back and torso, Jorun saw the lattice of scars telling the tale of the berserker's glorious battles. His blood ran with that of their enemies, tracing a new page on his skin.

She could not deny the power Thorgrim brought to their group. But his fury terrified her sometimes, while the rest of the time she found it hard to deal with his crude manners. Turning away, she looked back at the sea and their ship drawn up on the beach. She spotted Klemet Gandalfsson, the clan sorcerer; he was leaning over the hirdman, Sigurd Ivarsson, who was grimacing in pain, sitting propped against the broken stump of a tree. A javelin had struck his shoulder and, while he had not given any ground for the rest of the battle while protecting the young noble's flank, he was now unable to stand without assistance. If she had used a shield, as she had been advised to, the warrior would not have had to stay so close and take the blow meant for her. Jorun felt guilty, but she knew she could not let it show. The hirdman was doing his duty; he did not need any justification from his leader. And in any case, she preferred to use both hands to wield her long, straight sword. She stepped close and glanced in a questioning manner at the sorcerer, who was attempting to remove the studded leather shoulder guard to examine the wound. Sigurd gritted his teeth and did not make a sound.

"The shoulder muscle is torn," Klemet commented with an expert glance. "Your bodyguard is weakened, he has lost a great deal of blood, but the joint has not been affected. He will recover quickly; I will make sure of that."

The hirdman nodded.

Introduction

"I could do with a beer to help my recovery." He tried to smile, but the feeling of the sorcerer's needle stitching up his shoulder turned it into a horrible grimace. "I was lucky; the tip glanced off the edge of my shield. If not, it would have ended up in my chest."

The Kjari princess hid a wince. The shield had saved the warrior's life... as he had saved hers. Preferring to think of something else, she crouched beside Klemet Gandalvsson and touched his arm lightly.

"The living first," the sorcerer answered her silent question. "I will perform the rites over the dead afterwards."

She nodded silently and continued her inspection.

Beside the snekkjar, four of the nine sailors who had brought them to this lost fjord lay in their own blood. She knew them all by name. They had not been warriors, but they had all been ready to seize a weapon. They had bravely thrown themselves into the melee in order to repel the primitive savages who had attacked them as soon as they landed. They had died as warriors; Odin would give them the place they deserved in Valhalla.

The ship's captain, a robust giant with arms as large as tree trunks, nodded towards her. Surrounded by his remaining men, he was overseeing the embarkation and was clearly planning to leave as quickly as possible for the clan lands. With so few experienced sailors aboard, such a journey would be unpleasant. Jorun Hrolfsdottir waved this idea away. She would not give up yet. She would finish her mission.

"A lovely fight," murmured a melodious voice behind her, "Should I narrate it as part of the voyage or as an important battle?"

The skald's ironic tone irked her. Jorun nearly responded curtly, but restrained herself. She was unable to change Yngwe Gilsursson. The young man undeniably had an incredible gift; his songs drew one's soul towards the Gods. Unfortunately, his cynical personality and detached air damaged his image so much that she suspected he would

make a great many enemies with his sarcasm, an art which he had mastered.

"No matter," she finally replied. "As long as the names of the proud members of the Kjari clan who have fallen today are remembered."

He gave a crooked smile, but the princess saw a strange light in the skald's eyes. A peculiar gleam which was different to his usually distant attitude. Had she been wrong about him, too annoyed by his constant bravado? She noticed the young man's impeccable clothing and suddenly doubted he had so much as drawn his dagger. She called after him, as he walked off towards the bundles they barely had time to unload before being attacked.

"Yngwe Gilsursson! Get that beer — it's drawing you like a bear to honey! And go give some to Sigurd. He needs it."

To her surprise, the skald did not reply, but hurried to obey her.

The sun sank behind the high mountains framing the bay they had landed on. Night threatened to fall and trap them on this stony beach where they would be exposed to attack. Jorun Hrolfsdottir doubted that this would happen however. The warriors who had ambushed them clearly belonged to some village, whose fires they had seen rising in the distance. Savages without a clan, barely able to forge decent weapons and living on what they could take from nature. There were many such unexplored regions in the Northern Kingdoms, and many such tribes jealously guarding their territory.

But today, the daughter of Hrolf the Brave, king of clan Kjari, had not come to conquer their lands. Her mission was far more important.

She suddenly realised she had not seen the tall and slender silhouette of her friend Hildir Thorbjornsdottir. Her throat tightened. She had gone ahead to scout out the narrow coast where the attack had taken place. Had she...?

Jorun could not hold back a sigh of relief when she spotted the volva standing to one side, on a heap of rocks dangerously overhanging the freezing waters of the fjord.

Mastering her expression, she walked towards the other young woman. Hild was fine and statuesque while Jorun was built more like a man, definitely of her father's heritage, and no one could say otherwise. The volva was standing up straight with her arms across her chest, watching the eastern mountains closely drown in the fog slowly descending towards their valley. A cold wind suddenly tugged at her gold embroidered wool dress. The princess climbed the damp rocks to stand beside her, following her gaze. The two young women made a rather odd couple, one dressed and built like a Valkyrie, the other garbed as though she was about to preside over a Yule festival worthy of the Gods themselves. However, their hair was of the same bronze colour, their eyes both just as blue, and the long braids they wore on the sides of their faces only accentuated the resemblance. Anyone seeing them for the first time might think them sisters, sisters who had chosen very different paths in life, but sisters none the less. But they were only friends, albeit since childhood. However, it was something other than friendship that had persuaded Jorun to bring Hild with them. The volva was the only one who could lead them to the domain of the Lady of Ice, a sorceress reputed in legend to be immortal and capable of undoing the threads sown by the Norns. Or at least of altering fate.

Hild Thorbjornsdottir shivered in the freezing air. The princess undid the broach holding up her short woollen cape and wrapped the heavy red and green cloth around her friend's shoulders.

She pointed towards the vertiginous heights facing them. She could only make out cliffs and slopes so steep that even a goat couldn't climb them.

"The Lady of Ice is up there, isn't she?"

The young volva nodded. Jorun Hrolfsdottir had

grown used to her friend's lack of words. The silence served her well, as so many of her words held hard truths.

"I cannot see any way up," the young noble continued.

She feared having to turn away, and having to search for shallower slopes to climb. Perhaps towards the savage tribe's village.

This time however, Hild disagreed with a simple jerk of her chin.

"There is a way up. I can see it."

Jorun tried to pierce the darkness, but she could not see anything. No doubt it was too dark. But she knew her friend could see things which were not of this world, and in any case, she could trust her. She shrugged.

"If you say so," She said as she leaped down from the rocks to the beach.

"It is too dark for us to set out now," the young woman who was Hrolf the Brave's daughter called back as she headed off. "We need to honour our dead and prepare a safe camp so we are not attacked in the night. I have to command."

Hild Thorbjornsdottir did not answer her, her eyes still locked on the tops of the mountains now lost in the mists.

"Yes, little sister," she murmured through tight lips. "Give your orders. And get used to the taste of blood and the leader's role. The hour when you must shoulder your Fate is heading towards us as fast as Sleipnir, Odin's eight-legged horse, across the Rainbow Bridge."



Introduction

What is a Role-Playing Game?

A role-playing game is a group game played around a table by a number of players (usually between three and six). The object of the game is for all the players to collaborate in imagining, inventing, and experiencing a compelling shared story. Much of a role-playing game is set down in only general terms; it's up to the inspiration, imagination and improvisation skill of each player to adapt it, and make it something unpredictable and unforgettable.

Each game needs a Game Master. This is a special kind of player who is well-acquainted with the setting and the rules of the game, and who designs adventures (also known as scenarios) for the other players. The Game Master (or GM) describes events, locations, and characters, and adjudicates the application of the rules: in this area, the GM's word is law.

This doesn't mean the other players do not have active roles to play: they create characters and play their parts, reacting to the events described by the GM, talking with individuals their characters meet, investigating mysteries, and exploring the world.

The players gather round the table and the Game Master starts to tell his story. The players imagine how their characters react...

Yggdrasill, the Role-Playing Game

Yggdrasill, the role-playing game, allows you to play through exciting adventures in a detailed and fascinating setting, and to become a hero in legendary Scandia, the land of the "three kingdoms" of Denmark, Norway, and Svithjod (modern-day Sweden). Intrigues, combats, quests, magic, and mythical creatures await you!

As heroes in search of adventure, glory and immortality, you will take part in great battles which will lead you from the snowy plains of Jutland to the halls of kings. Perhaps your characters will become heroes recognised by Odin the Formidable himself in his feasting-hall in Valhalla, as he awaits the time of Ragnarok, the final battle against the giants and their kin, which marks the end of the time of legends and of the Gods themselves.

Mercenary or *hirdman*, *berserker* or noble, soothsayer or sorcerer, Fate will guide you along the frozen shores of the fjords, across deep seas on perilous expeditions

and into monster-haunted forests. The skalds will sing of your exploits for centuries to come!

Men of the North!

The legend starts here!

Yggdrasill and Historical Accuracy

When we studied the historical documents and sagas of ancient Scandia, from the 4th to 6th centuries when our game is set, we were confronted by the great problems which all historians who specialise in this period face. For there are no native writings from this period, and the ones which do exist come from outside sources based on oral traditions, sometimes contradictory and often making little sense.

We were faced with a situation where we wanted to create an action-packed, heroic game set in the "Viking era", but were finding the available historical source material less than inspiring. As a result, we decided to prioritise making *Yggdrasill* a fun and action-packed game above all, rather than one which was completely historically accurate. We decided to fill in some of the blanks ourselves, and even draw elements from different periods of the "Viking era". We'll probably be receiving letters from angry archaeologists for some time to come.

Having said that, we have done our best to respect the source material, and to maintain the spirit of the sagas and skaldic poetry.

Where necessary, we made certain choices and compromised on some points of historical accuracy to give the game the heroic scope it deserved, the feel of the sagas which historical reality rarely conveys.

You don't have to follow this approach if you don't want to. You can ignore our embellishments and modifications, if you want to play an absolutely historical game; or you can add your own elements to make your "ideal" Viking background.

This game is your own: use it to live out your dreams and legends of Scandia. Make it unique.

Here are a few key historical details forming the background to *Yggdrasill*:

- **The term Viking:** the Norsemen are not "Vikings" as such (the era of the "Vikings" stretches from the end of the 8th century to the 11th). The word

“Viking” was a term of abuse which does not designate a particular group of people or population, but no doubt comes from the Old Norse (the Scandian language of the time) term “*fara i Viking*”, to leave on an expedition.

We refer to the “three kingdoms” of Scandia by the names Denmark, Norway, and Svithjod, which occupies part of modern-day Sweden. We don’t use the word Sweden itself, as this is a name belonging to an era after the Viking age.

We use the terms Norsemen, Norse, and Scandian to describe the people of *Yggdrasill*, as that is how they referred to themselves.

- **Horned helmets:** the Norsemen never wore helmets with horns or wings; this myth comes from helmets found in digs, made of leather or pieces of metal with parts which might look like horns, but which were almost certainly used only during ceremonies or rituals.

In any case, horned helmets are heavy, destabilising, and dangerous, and the practical warriors of the north would never have adopted such strange accessories in battle.

- **Drinking from human skulls:** the Norsemen never drank from the skulls of their enemies. This error comes from a bad translation of a *kenning* (a poetic metaphor), where Odin invites a hero to drink from “the curved branch of a skull”, thus, a horn. The Norse people drank from empty bulls’ horns.
- **The drakkar are not ships:** the term *dreki* in Norse means dragon, and the sculpted prows of the ships were meant to terrify even the spirits of the lands they reached. The word “drakkar” is a 19th century invention, and means nothing in the Scandian context. Scandian boats have various names: *knorr* or *knarr*, *snekkjar*, *ferja*, and so on.

Whenever possible, we have attempted to give a fairly realistic view of these Norse warriors; intrepid and eager perhaps, but certainly neither stupid nor the brutish, senseless pillagers described by Christian chroniclers.

Three Concepts for Playing a Northman

“If someone violates the peace of another, he has ipso facto forfeited his own mannhelg, as its roots lie in the same peace as theirs.”

-- Walter Baetke

*“Young was I once,
I walked alone,
And bewildered
Seemed in the way;
Then I found me another
And rich I thought me,
For man is the joy of man.”*

-- Havamal, stanza 47

Three concepts are vital to understanding the Norse spirit in *Yggdrasill*: the essential role of Fate; the notion of *mannhelg*, the inviolability of the individual; and the importance of the family and clan.

We will return regularly to Fate, as it is omnipresent in the legends, and the acceptance of Fate is the mark of a hero. Not to acknowledge Fate is a serious matter.

The *mannhelg* is what the *thing* and the laws protect. It ensures that a free man, a *bondi*, is protected in his rights, security, and peace. Crimes, insults, mutilations, calumnies; these attacks on his *mannhelg* are punished. A man who violates the *mannhelg* of another damages his own in turn. This idea justifies individual vengeance, reparation, and banishment.

As for the importance of clan and family, the Norsemen are aware of their weakness in the face of harsh living conditions, and of the warmth which human contact brings – as well as its problems. Banishment is worse than death for a Norseman. Man is the joy of man; what do those who have no friends have to live for?

Of course, you are free to play blood-thirsty *berserkers*, pillaging friends and enemies alike and respecting only their favourite axe. But this game gives you other options; feel free to use them how you will -

Yggdrasill is your game.

We leave you with the words of the prophetic voice, a voice resounding through the ages:

*“Hearing I ask
From the holy races,
From Heimdall’s sons,
Both high and low;
Thou wilt, All-father,
That well I relate
Old tales I remember
Of men long ago.”*

-- Völuspá, stanza 1

In the Shadow of Yggdrasill Myths & Religion

The Primal Chaos



*"Of old was the age
When Ymir lived;
Sea nor cool waves
Nor sand there were;
Earth had not been,
Nor heaven above,
But a Yawning Gap,
And grass nowhere."*

-- *Völuspá*, stanza 3

As the prophetess relates, in the beginning there was nothing but a gaping void—the *Ginnungagap*. In the North lay the underworld, Niflheim; in the South, Muspelheim, a world in flames. And a river divided them.

At the fountain of ice where the two worlds met, was born Ymir the hermaphrodite giant. He was fed by the cow Audumla, also born of the ice.

Audumla licked the salt from the rocks, and in doing so birthed the race of giants, who themselves birthed the first Aesir: Odin, Vili, and Ve, who slew the giant Ymir.

Ymir's flesh became the solid earth, his blood the lakes and sea, his bones the mountains, his skull the sky, his hair the trees. Sparks from Muspelheim created the stars in the firmament. Sol, daughter of a giant, fled on her chariot, pursued by the wolf Skoll, and preceded by the wolf Hatti, which chases Mani the moon, and brother of Sol. And so night followed day.

In this new world, the first Aesir created the original human beings from two tree trunks—an ash and an elm. They were named Ask and Embla, and Odin breathed life into them.

The Aesir and Vanir

Another family of gods, the Vanir, inhabited the new world. At the dawn of time, a war broke out between the Aesir and the Vanir, perhaps as a result of the torture inflicted by the Aesir upon one of the Vanir, Gullveig, a sorceress obsessed with gold. The two divine families were reconciled after an exchange of hostages, and ever since the Aesir and Vanir have lived together in good accord in Asgard.

The Vanir represent ancient primordial and

Vggdrasill

Þraesvelg

Eikthyrnir

Ratatoskr

Urðarbrunnr

Vanabeim

Alfheim

Asgardr

Valhöll

Bifrost

Midgard

Svartalfheim

Mimisbrunnr

Utgard

Jötunheim

Jörmungandr

Hvergelmir

Hel

Niflheim

Nídhögg

JÉRÔME 01

Vggdrasill

In the Shadow of Yggdrasill

elemental gods of fertility and divination. They are not subject to the laws of the Aesir.

Yggdrasill and the Nine Worlds

*"An ash I know,
Yggdrasill its name,
...Green by Wyrd's well
Does it ever grow."*

-- *Völuspá*, stanza 19

Yggdrasill, the giant ash, the World-Tree whose branches tower even above the sky, is the axis of the world, the axis mundi. Three springs rise from each of its three deep roots:

One lies in **Asgard**, the home of the Aesir; the well of Wyrd where the Norns dwell;
Another lies in **Midgard**, the world of men; the spring of Mimir, the giant gifted with all the knowledge of the world;
The third lies in **Niflheim**, the Kingdom of the Dead; the spring of Hvergelmir, from which all rivers flow.

The Aesir hold their *thing*—their council—at Yggdrasill's foot, by the well of Wyrd.

Yggdrasill, the Axis Mundi, stands at the heart of the Nine Worlds. It is sometimes called Mimameid, Mimir's tree.

The squirrel Ratatosk races up and down Yggdrasill's trunk, carrying messages from the far-seeing eagle Hraesvelg, whose wings create the winds which sweep the world, to the dragon-serpent Nidhogg which gnaws at the root of Hvergelmir, where the serpents dwell.

It was on one of Yggdrasill's branches that Odin sacrificed himself and hung, pierced by a lance, for nine nights to learn the secrets of the runes.

Yggdrasill is always linked with Fate, and the eternal nature of the Nine Worlds, which will be covered in detailed in the first *Yggdrasill* supplement, but which are briefly summarised below:

Midgard

Midgard is the world of human beings. Its name means "the middle enclosure". It is sometimes known



The first Betrayal Of The Gods

The creation of Asgard was tumultuous. After the battle between the Aesir and the Vanir, a giant came and made a proposal to the gods. Within the space of three winters, he would create Asgard, a fortress realm durable enough to resist the assaults of the mountain and frost giants. He would take in payment the goddess Freya and the moon and the sun. After taking counsel, the Aesir agreed, at Loki's suggestion, on condition that the construction must be completed in one winter, and with no other help than the giant's magical stallion, Svadilfari (Disaster). The construction proceeded rapidly thanks to the horse, and the gods demanded Loki find a way to break their promise, blaming him for insisting the giant be allowed to keep his horse. Threatened with death, that very night Loki, in the shape of a comely mare, distracted the stallion from its labours until dawn.

The furious giant confronted Thor, who crushed his skull. Thus the gods used Loki to avoid honouring their promise.

After that night, Loki gave birth to a grey eight-legged colt named Sleipnir ("the one who slips"), the future steed of Odin.

It is this betrayal, the refusal to honour a promise and the attempt to cheat Fate, which will lead to the condemnation of the gods and Ragnarök.



as Mannheim, the world known and inhabited by men. Scandia is part of Midgard.

Asgard

Asgard, the "enclosure of the Aesir", lies on an ever-green plain. There stands Gladsheim, the sublime home of the Gods. Odin and eleven other principle gods meet here when Odin demands. Asgard is surrounded by Midgard, and one reaches it across Bifrost, the Rainbow Bridge.

Valhalla, the Hall of the Slain, lies within Gladsheim.

Vggdrasill



In the Shadow of Yggdrasill

Utgard

This is the “outer enclosure”—not just the outer world, the Great Primal Ocean, but also a dangerous place, strange and not well known, where the great Midgard serpent dwells (known as Midgardsorm, or Jormungand). This vast creature binds the world by grasping its own tail in its mouth, encompassing Midgard and Asgard and holding them together. But eventually, and inevitably, it will be the cause of cataclysm at the time of Ragnarök, when it will bite its tail no longer.

Here too is found Jotunheim, the land of giants (the jotnar) and their citadels above the sea. Utgard and Jotunheim are separated by the River Ifing.

Niflheim

This is the home of the dead, those who have died of old age or illness, a world of darkness and mist. These are the frozen lands which have existed since before the world was made. Hel, goddess of the dead and daughter of Loki, reigns here from her citadel of Eljudnir.

Vanaheim

The Vanir, ancient gods, dwell in Vanaheim, when they do not live in Asgard with the Aesir. Vanaheim is a sort of terrestrial paradise, green and filled with game. Some say that here are found the goddess Iduna's apple trees, whose fruit bestow upon the gods eternal youth.

Alfheim

Alfheim is the legendary world of the *alfar*, the light elves, luminous creatures and minor deities of the Vanir. They are under Frey's tutelage, and thus linked to fertility and the cult of nature spirits. They appear only rarely to mortals, but there are tales of love between the *alfar* and human beings; certain legendary kings have claimed such supernatural ancestry. Ritual sacrifices at the autumn equinox, the *alfablot*, are dedicated to them.

Nidavellir

The kingdom of the *dvergar*, or dwarves, (often confused with the *svartalfar* or dark elves) lies beneath the earth, and little is thus known of it. Legends agree that in the depths lie the great golden halls of famous *dvergar*, said to lie beneath the Dark Mountains in the North, also home to the dragon Nidhogg.

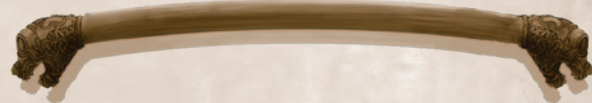
Svartalfheim

The realm of the dark elves (the *Svartalfar* or *Dokkalfar*) is close to that of the *dvergar*. Like the dwarves, the dark elves too are connected with death, corpses, burial mounds, and sometimes nightmares.

Muspelheim or Muspell

In this kingdom of fire, which dates back to the beginning of the world, live the fire demons. They are under the orders of a *jotun*, Surtur, the giant who will unleash waves of flame on Bifrost, the Rainbow Bridge, and win victory in battle over the Vanir god Frey at the time of Ragnarök.

The Gods of Asgard



The Aesir Triad

Odin, Lord of the Aesir

*“I knew that I hung
From the tree, battered by the winds
Nine full nights
Pierced by a lance
... I looked below
gathered the runes,
Howling I gathered them,
And then, I fell.”*

-- Havamal, stanza 139

Odin is not only the king, but also the father of the gods of Asgard, ruling from his throne in Gladsheim, from where he watches over the actions of all the other gods.

An old man, one-eyed, with long hair and a grey beard, Odin wraps himself in a blue or black coat, and hides his features under a broad-brimmed hat. His one eye gleams with all the knowledge of the world. Two ravens, Hugin



Vggdrasill

In the Shadow of Yggdrasill

and Munin (Thought and Memory), perch on his shoulders, and travel the world at dawn to report to Odin everything they have seen. Two wolves, Geri (Ravenous) and Freki (Glutton), also accompany him, and he feeds them the food he is given, as Odin himself consumes only wine.

Odin is feared more than revered. He is an ambiguous god, fearsome and dangerous, with many aspects:

- He is above all the sovereign of the Aesir and Vanir, the oldest of all, and often their father. He is enthroned upon Hlidskjalf, from where he surveys the whole world, in his domain of Gladsheim, in Valhalla, the hall of the slain. The eleven other great gods regularly join Odin here to rule and make decisions, or simply to feast.
- Odin's spear *Gungnir*, and his golden ring *Draupnir*, are the main symbols of his power.
- Odin is the god of the slain, the god who accompanies the souls of the dead on his eight-legged horse, Sleipnir, the grey stallion. He sends his daughters, the Valkyrie, to choose valorous warriors from the battlefields, and escort them to Valhalla. During the twelve nights before Yule, he crosses the sky through the clouds, followed by an army of spirits and Valkyrie, his wild horde. In the hall of the slain, Valhalla, he welcomes his favourite subjects, those who died in battle and were brought back by the Valkyrie. These are the *einherjar*, the "unique warriors", who feast on the flesh of the boar Saehrimnir, which is made whole again every day, and drink the mead from the teats of the goat Heidrun, which lives on the roof. Under Odin's watchful gaze they fight all day, and sometimes are slain, but are brought back to life to feast every night and await Ragnarök. Thus they will stand alongside the gods to fight against the wolf Fenris and the forces of destruction. As a necromancer, Odin can speak to the dead, and steals the knowledge from those who have been hanged.
- God of victory, but not of war, Odin does not fight himself. He decides the outcome of battles by using his cunning and knowledge. The means employed do not concern him; only the result counts. Betrayals, torture, nothing disturbs him. He incites hatred and destruction, as he is also the god of rage, Ygg the Fearsome.

His sacred warriors, the *berserkers*, seem in their battle ecstasy to feel neither pain nor wounds.

- Odin is a great strategist, a tactical genius because of his knowledge (he invented the wedge formation),



Draupnir

Draupnir, "the one which drips", was created by two *dvergar*, Brokk and Sindri (or Eitri). Every nine days, eight other rings "drip" from it, each apparently identical to the original, except the copies cannot create more rings themselves. Odin placed Draupnir on the funeral pyre of his son Balder, and it was Balder's brother, Hermod, who gathered the ashes.

Draupnir is a ring worn on the arm rather than the finger. Odin is not necessarily always its owner.

Heiti and Kennings

Skaldic poetry has two different ways of changing the words it uses to refer to persons or things: *heiti*, which replaces the name of a person or thing with another word which means something similar (ie a synonym); and the *kenning*, which is a longer, more descriptive way of referring to a single person or thing (and often a metaphor).

As examples: Yggr ("the Fearsome") is a *heiti*, or synonym, of Odin; "Freya's tears" is a *kenning*, or metaphor, to refer to gold (as according to Norse legend Freya weeps gold). Of course, the gods with the most *heiti* are those which are most famous in the skaldic ballads; Odin has the most. But this does not mean those deities are necessarily the most popular amongst the people.



and the founder of many human dynasties. He is an aristocratic god, learned and refined.

- Odin is also the god of knowledge and intelligence. He sacrificed one of his eyes to drink from the spring of Mimir to gain wisdom. He is also the Aesir who knows the most about magic. As god of intelligence, he is also the god of merchants, peddlers, and travelling traders.
- Master of all magic, Odin is the god of *gald*r, incantation magic. He learned *seidr*, ecstatic magic, from Freya of the Vanir. Moreover, he is god of the runes, which he obtained by the painful sacrifice of hanging for nine days from Yggdrasill. He is also a shapechanger, and can take any human or animal form he desires.

- Odin is also god of poetry. In the form of an eagle, he stole from the giants the mead of the skalds, created by the dwarves, which gifts the drinker with inspiration.

Odin remains a god who is impossible to fully comprehend. He cannot be trusted; he is constantly in motion, travelling, changing shape and aspect, going from friendly to hostile, as changeable as the wind.

Some Common *heiti* for Odin

Yggr: the Fearsome
 Fraridr: the Rider
 Sidgrani: Long-beard
 Harbard: Grey-beard
 Fimbulthul: the Great Thulr
 Hangagud/Hangatyr: the Hanging God
 Hroptatyr: the Crier
 Sigtyr: Bringer of Victory
 Valfodr: Father of the Slain
 Baleyg: Flaming Eye
 Bileyg: Lost Eye
 Grinnir: the Masked One
 Fjolnir: Shape-shifter
 Fjolsvid: All-Seeing
 Oski: God of Wishes
 Ud: Beloved
 Hrafnagud: Crow God
 Farmatyr: God of Cargoes
 Vidrir: the Wind

Odin's Accoutrements

Gungnir, his spear, carved with runes, a symbol consecrating all beings to Odin by piercing them or passing over their heads.

Draupnir, his arm-ring, placed on Balder's pyre. His faithful crows **Hugin** and **Munin**, his two wolves **Geri** and **Freki**.

His eight-legged courser, **Sleipnir**.
 The severed head of **Mimir**, which predicts the future.

Thor, the Giant-Killer

*"...He lifted the cauldron,
 Whirled Mjolnir
 Against the bloodthirsty,
 The desert monsters,
 All of them he slew."*

-- *Hymiskvida, stanza 36*

Thor is married to the beautiful Sif, who was perhaps a little too proud of her long, lustrous, corn-gold hair. Loki shaved her head one night and stole her hair away. When the furious Thor threatened him with his hammer, Loki swore he would make up for his act. He asked the *dverg*ar to help him and replaced the hair of the outraged goddess with a sublime torrent of gold. This is where we get the *kenning* "Sif's hair" to refer to gold. Sif's fidelity to Thor is sometimes tested by Odin or Loki.

Thor is the god best loved by the men of the North. An incarnation of thunder and the god of war, riding in his chariot drawn by the two rams Tanngnjostr ("Teeth grinder") and Tanngnisnir ("Teeth-barer"), huge and imposing, his beard is bright red and his eyes are flame. Thor is the son of Odin and Jord, the Earth.

Thor wields Mjolnir, a hammer forged by the dwarves: it cannot crack and will always return to his hand. Wearing a belt and gloves of strength, Thor's physical power is unequalled.

Thor is above all the god of strength and fighting, the defender of the gods, the giant-killer, protector of Asgard, and the one who will kill Jormungand at Ragnarök.

Thor also has many aspects, although he is less ambiguous than his father Odin, and more revered by mortals:

- Thor is the god of strength. His battles against the giants are told and retold in the sagas, and he is always swift to use his hammer. No god is stronger than him, and he has no rival, lashing out against his enemies, be they mortal or god.
- Thor is brave, trustworthy, loyal and short-tempered, unsophisticated, yet friendly and sympathetic. A great drinker and great eater, eager to fight, yet always a defender of the peace, he is a god close to men.
- He is a benevolent god.
- Thor's thunder and lightning bring rain, a symbol of fertility. He is invoked during marriages, and his hammer is a symbol of blessing. His rams are also food, but he brings them back to life by blessing their remains with Mjolnir.

In the Shadow of Yggdrasill



The gods originally welcomed Loki's son, the wolf Fenris, to Asgard; but as he grew he became too dangerous, and soon only Tyr dared feed him. The gods decided to tie Fenris up, but no rope could contain the beast's strength. Odin asked Skirnir, Frey's servant, to have the dwarves create an indestructible magical chain. The chain, known as Gleipnir, seemed weak at first sight, being composed of six unlikely materials: a cat's footsteps, a woman's beard, the roots of the mountains, a bear's tendons, the breath of fish, and the spittle of birds.

The gods brought Fenris to an island named Lyngvi on the lake Amsvartnir, and asked him to test the new chain, cunningly suggesting that if he could not free himself, he would no longer be considered as a threat and would then be freed. Fenris did not trust them, demanding one of the gods put his hand in Fenris' mouth as a sign of good faith. Realising what this would mean, Tyr accepted, and sacrificed his right hand. And, thus far, Fenris has been unable to break his bonds.



By way of his overflowing vitality, Thor is a god of life and the son of Earth. He represents the common man, the peasant, the man of the North, simple and direct.

Some Common *heiti* for Thor

Fulltrui: Sure Friend
Einheri: Lone Warrior
Jotnafellir: Giant-slayer
Hafradrottin: Lord of Rams
Hloridi: the Loud Rider
Vingthor: battle-Thor
Ennilang: the one with the wide forehead

Thor's Accoutrements

Mjolnir: "crusher" or "lightning", a short-handled hammer created by the dwarves. It always returns to the god's hand.

He also has a **Belt of Strength** and **Gauntlets of Iron** which allow him to wield the hammer easily.

Tyr, the God of Law

*"Yet there is that one of the
Aesir who is called Tyr.
He is the hardest and bravest,
And has great power in battle.
Thus it is good for valiant men
To invoke him."*

-- Gylfaginning, stanza 25

Tyr, although not often recognised by skalds, is a primordial being and the creator of men. His very name means "god".

A valiant warrior, he rules over the *thing*, and keeps peace over the world until the time of Ragnarök, when he will fight the wolf Fenris, despite having lost his hand.

Tyr is the legitimate god of war, and fights fairly and according to the rules—unlike Odin. Brave Tyr is the only god who dares feed Fenris the wolf, and sacrificed his right hand to make amends for the lies of the gods and keep peace in the world.

Some Common *heiti* for Tyr

Einhindi As: the One-handed God

The Vanir Triad

Njord, Oldest of the Vanir

*"Loath were the hills to me,
I was not long in them,
Nights only nine.
To me the wailing of
Wolves seemed ill,
After the song of swans."*

-- Gylfaginning, stanza 23

A god revered by fishermen and navigators, Njord controls the wind, the sea, and fire. He is rich, and protects the lands and goods of the men who worship him. Njord lives in Noatun ("ship enclosure") by the sea, which is hard on his wife Skadi, the daughter of the giant Thjazi, who prefers mountains.

Njord is the father of the twins Frey and Freya, who he sired on one of his sisters, incest not being forbidden among the Vanir.

Frey, the Lord of the Vanir

*"Wilt tell me, Frey, foremost among Gods,
And answer me as I ask:
Why sittest thou lonely, my Lord, all day
With heavy heart in thy hall?"*

-- *Skirnismal, stanza 3*

The son of Njord, twin brother of Freya and also her lover, Frey is the most worshipped of the Vanir and the second of the great Norse gods.

A luminous god of vegetation, spring, fertility, fecundity, and the harvest, he is also the *alfar* prince and lives in Alfheim. He brings prosperity and peace.

A seafaring god, his magical ship Skidbladnir was built by the *dverg*, and Frey can fold it up and store it in his pocket. His chariot is drawn by the boar Gullinbursti ("Goldenmane"), which can best horses in any race on earth or sea, and whose bristles glow with a golden light to illuminate even the deepest darkness. He also rides his horse Blodughofi ("Bloody Hoof").

Frey rules over fecundity rites and sacred weddings. Even his union with the giantess Gerd, obtained through force, is a symbol of the union of the fertility god with the nourishing earth.

Frey's Accoutrements

Skidbladnir: his magical boat

Gullinbursti: his boar

Blodughofi: his courser

Freya, the Beautiful Lady

*"Folkvang it is called,
And there rules Freya.
For the seats in the hall
Half of the slain
She chooses each day;
The other half is Odin's."
-- -- Gylfaginning, stanza 24*

Freya, daughter of Njord, twin and lover of Frey, is above all the goddess of love and beauty. She is the most beautiful and most licentious of the goddesses, and all the gods and giants desire her. The skalds celebrate her constantly.

Freya possesses a fabulous piece of jewellery forged by the dwarves, which many covet; the blazing golden necklace, Brisingamen.

However, she would not be one of the most important Norse deities if she was limited to the domains of beauty and love:

- Freya, like her brother, is tied to fecundity, fertility, marriage, birth, and thus death. She is often prayed to during births.
- Freya is also a sorceress. She created the ecstatic magic called *seidr* and taught it to Odin. Freya draws her powers from the dead, and can tell the future. Sometimes titled "Dis (or Goddess) of the Vanir" (see below for more on the "Disir" goddesses), Freya can transform herself into a falcon.
- Freya rides on a chariot drawn by two cats. As goddess of war, she shares those who are slain in battle with Odin, to whom she is close, and who is sometimes depicted as one of her lovers. Freya

also rides a golden-haired boar, Hildisvini ("Battle Swine"), similar to that of Frey.

Thus, Freya reigns over diverse domains: love and war, fertility and black magic, life and death.

Some Common heiti for Freya

Mardoll: Sea-Brightener

Horn: Flaxen

Gefn: The Giver

Vanadis: The Dis ("Lady") of the Vanir

Accoutrements

The **Brisingamen** necklace

The **chariot** drawn by two cats

The golden-haired boar, **Hildisvini** ("Battle Swine")

In the Shadow of Yggdrasill

Other Major Gods

Frigga, the Beloved

*"There grows a tree-sprout alone
West of Valhalla: it is called Mistletoe.
I thought it too young
To ask the oath of."
-- Gylfaginning, stanza 49*

Odin's wife, and mother to Balder and Hoder, Frigga is the goddess of married love. She alone can sit on Odin's throne. Because of this, she has the gift of prophecy, but never speaks of what she sees. She is the all-mother, the wife, the hearth-guardian, and with Freya, she presides over marriages and births. Frigga is surrounded by a court of minor goddesses who serve her.

Frigga's attachment to her son, Balder, whom she tried unflinchingly to save from his inevitable death, is the perfect example of maternal love.

Frigga's home is Fensalir ("Fen Halls"), where she often dwells, drinking with Odin and spinning clouds.

Some Common heiti for Frigga

Hlyn: Protector
Saga: Prophetess

Heimdall

*"He hears how grass grows on the earth
Or wool on sheep,
And everything that has a louder sound."
-- Gylfaginning, stanza 27*

Heimdall is the watchman of the gods. His home is where Bifrost, the Rainbow Bridge, touches the sky. He guards access to the Rainbow Bridge, night and day, against the mountain giants. He hears everything, and can see for more than a hundred miles. He must always hold himself ready, for at the first signs of Ragnarök he will sound his horn *Gjallarhorn* ("Yelling-horn").

No one knows if Heimdall is of the Aesir or Vanir. His family ties are mysterious, and he simply says he is son to nine mothers and brother to nine sisters. Perhaps he is son of Odin and the nine Wave Maidens, daughters of Aegir.

Heimdall is the brightest of the gods. His horse is named *Gulltopp* ("Golden Mane"), and his favourite animal is the ram.

It is he who recovered the necklace *Brisingamen* when Loki stole it.

Heimdall, together with Odin and Thor, protects the world against destruction. Loki is his enemy, and they are doomed to fight one another during the final battle.

Some Common heiti for Heimdall

Gullintanni: Golden-teeth
Hvitti As: The White Aesir
Hallinskidi: Crumple Horn (ram)

Attributes

His horn, *Gjallarhorn* ("Yelling-horn")
His horse, *Gulltopp* ("Golden Mane")

Loki

*"Loki is beautiful and comely to look upon,
Evil in spirit, fickle in his moods.
He surpassed other men in that wisdom
Which is called 'sleight',
And had artifices for all occasions;
He would ever bring the Aesir
into great hardship,
And then get them out with craft counsel."*

-- Gylfaginning, stanza 33

Cruel and cunning, Loki is the most troublesome god in the divine assembly. He is at once the one through whom trouble comes, the father of the wolf Fenris, of the Midgard Serpent Jormungand, and the father of the goddess of the underworld, Hel. He uses all his intelligence and cunning to play wicked tricks on the other gods. But Loki is not an evil god; rather he is an agitator who is close to Odin, to whom he is blood-brother, and with whom he shares certain traits, such as ambivalence and cunning.

Nevertheless, some sources say Loki caused the death of Balder, and insulted the other gods, for which he is now chained upon three pointed stones while serpent's poison is dripped onto him. His wife, Sigyn, holds out a dish to collect the poison and protect him, but every time she empties it Loki's spasms of pain shake the earth.

Loki commanded the *dvergar*, the dwarves, to create the following magical items:

- The spear *Gungnir* and Odin's ring *Draupnir*
- Frey's ship and golden boar
- Thor's hammer *Mjólnir*
- Sif's golden hair

Common *heiti* for Loki

Lopt: Air, Wind
Hvedhrung: Foaming

Balder, the Valiant

*"I saw for Balder,
The bleeding god,
Son of Odin,
His secret destiny set."*

-- *Völuspa*, stanza 32

The son of Odin and Frigg, and husband of Nanna the Brave, Balder is the wisest and calmest of the gods. He dwelled in Breidablik, the purest celestial home, and would have become a formidable warrior, but that he was slain by his brother, Hoder the Blind, who was guided by Loki's evil.

Balder is the god who is sacrificed before Ragnarök.

The Aesir gave him a grand funeral, and burned Balder's body on his ship, *Hringhorni*. Nanna, his wife, died of sorrow, and was placed on the funeral pyre also. Odin left his golden ring upon it, too, after murmuring in his dead son's ear; and Balder's mount was sacrificed as well. Thor consecrated everything by lifting his hammer, and the pyre of the flaming ship was launched into the sea before the assembled gods.

The goddess Hel was asked to return Balder to the living world. But she said that first the whole of creation must weep for Balder's death before she did so. A giantess, Thokk, refused. It was, of course, Loki in disguise—and he had the final word to Hel's demand:

*"Thokk weeps
Dry tears...
... Let Hel keep what is hers!"*
-- *Gylfaginning*, stanza 49

Balder and Nanna now dwell in Hel's domain.

Dreams of death troubled Balder. He spoke of them to the other gods, and his father Odin even consulted a dead prophetess to know what would happen to his son. Sore troubled, his mother Frigg travelled the whole of creation, collecting and making safe anything that might harm her son. Now invulnerable, he began a foolish game with the other gods, who attacked him with their weapons or threw things at him, only to be unable to wound him.

Unfortunately, Frigg had neglected to include a sprig of mistletoe when she had made the world safe for Balder, thinking it too young to be any danger. Once Loki realised this, he cut it and shaped it into a dart. Then he tricked Hoder into joining with those gods who were sporting with his brother, and the mistletoe pierced Balder's heart.

Hel

*"And beneath the earth
Does another crow,
The rust-red bird
At the bars of Hel."*

-- *Völuspa*, stanza 43

Hel, daughter of Loki and the giantess Angrboda, is goddess of the shadow world, where dwell the dead who were not chosen by Freya or Odin. The kingdom of Hel is not a place of punishment, but a home of fog and ice, the last dwelling place of the dead.

All who enter Hel's domain can never leave, as the Gjoll river, running from the Hvelrgelmir spring, encircles her home. The entrance is guarded by a monstrous wolf of the same race as Fenris, and a giantess, Modgud, who asks those who wish to cross the golden-roofed covered bridge, Gjallarbru, what they are called and why they wish to enter Hel's domain.

The path leading to Hel's domain descends from there to the North.

Hel herself is a monstrous figure with blue and black skin, who welcomes her guests in her immense hall of Eljudnir. There, intruders come face to face with their dead ancestors.

In the Shadow of Yggdrasill

Rapists, perjurers, and thieves are punished in Niflheim, outside the hall of Hel.

Criminals are devoured by Nidhogg the dragon to the south of the Kingdom of the Dead, on Nastrond, the "Corpse Shore".

*"There Nidhogg sucked
The blood of the slain."*

-- *Völuspa*, stanza 39

Odin himself installed Hel as the absolute ruler of this kingdom, and only she can decide to let anyone leave her domain. She refused to release Balder, despite Frigg's impassioned pleas.

The Disir Goddesses

The Disir are female divinities, goddesses either of fertility, death, or fate. The singular Dis means "lady", so Freya is known as Vanadis, or the "Lady of the Vanir".

Although numerous and rarely named, the Disir are major divinities, to whom sacrifices are offered at the beginning of winter.

Two kinds of Disir are of particular importance—the Norns, and the Valkyrie.

The Norns

*"None outlives the night
When the Norns decree."*

-- *Hamdismal*, stanza 30

The Norns are many, and they preside over the destiny of every mortal. Three are best known, as they decide the fate of the world, and of the gods. The three sisters, Wyrð, Verdandi, and Skuld live at the foot of Yggdrasill, and weave the future of the world, only stopping to take care of the tree and making sure it does not rot. They live in the hall close to the Well of Fate.

Together, the three of them represent fate, and the flow of time.

The Valkyrie

*"Look not up in the air,
When thou art in battle."*

-- *Havamal*, stanza 129



The word “Valkyrie” literally means “chooser of the slain”.

Sometimes called the daughters of Odin, the Valkyrie are Odin’s messengers on the field of battle, where they descend flying to seek out valorous warriors chosen by the Father of the Gods to enter Valhalla.

If they fail in their orders or disobey Odin’s will, the Valkyrie are punished severely, and become simple mortals once more. Sometimes, though, their punishment is more involved.

The Valkyrie Brynhild once chose to take a king who had not been named by Odin, for which she was condemned to sleep on a mountaintop, surrounded by shields and flame, until such a time as a warrior came to set her free and take her as his wife.

Cults & Rituals



Religion among the Norsemen is not dogmatic; it relies neither on revelation nor prophecy, and set prayers are unknown. There are few temples, and no organised caste of initiated priests. The performer of the rites, the *godi*, looks after open air sanctuaries and ensures that the gods are respected, but this is not a permanent occupation, and *godi* can also be clan chiefs, *jarls*, or simply the heads of families. A *godi* is only occasionally an intermediary between gods and men, and then, after the rites, he returns to his usual occupation.

Thus, the Norse “religion”, such as it is, exists only in the seasonal and social rites, such as marriages, funerals, and the swearing of oaths.

Blot, or the Sacrificial Rites

The Norse word *blot* is linked to modern English “blood” and “blessing”, and means “sacrifice”—which is exactly what the seasonal rites consist of. Generally held at equinoxes and solstices, there are three main sacrificial rites:

- In mid-October, during the “Winter Nights”, or *vetrnaetr* (see the boxed text), the end of the harvest is celebrated with the autumn sacrifice. It is sometimes dedicated to Frey, but also to supernatural creatures like the *Alfes* (the *alfblot*) or the Disir (see above) (the *disablót*). These sacrificial rites are often linked with an exceptional meeting of the *thing*.
- In the middle of winter, during the solstice, the Scandians celebrate Jol (“Yule”), and a sacrifice is carried out for future harvests. This is a fertility and fecundity rite which addresses all the gods, but also acknowledges lost ancestors, and many libations are carried out in their memory.
- At the end of April, during the first summer nights, the *sumarblót* is held. Consecrated to war, it is also called the “Victory Sacrifice” (the *sigrblót*); its goal is to give strength to warriors.

Every nine years, special sacrificial rites are performed, as nine is a sacred number.

Sacrifices may be held at any time, when the goodwill of the gods is needed. However, it must not be over-used; the gods can find sacrifices irritating, and do not respond if their aid is too often sought.

In the sacrificial rites of the blot, the aim is to “compel” a god, by augmenting his power using sacrifice and blood, to return the same power back to the mortals making the offering.

Undertaking a Blot Sacrificial Rite

The rites of the *blót* start with an actual sacrifice: a human being (rarely) or an animal (cow, pig, horse, sometimes sheep), depending on which god the supplicants wish to honour. The blood is gathered in a receptacle for this purpose.

The performer of the rites, the *godi*, conducts an augury by dipping a bundle of branches in the blood and sprinkling it over the participants, the altar on which the sacrifice was carried out, and the walls (if in a temple) or surrounding stones (if not). Sometimes, the *godi* also casts wooden pieces engraved with runes in the bloody spatters and interprets their meaning, but the sprinkling with the sacrificial branches is invested with the greatest significance.

In the Shadow of Yggdrasill

The third part of the rite is the feast. The *jarl* provides this, and no one else may bring food or drink.

Meat is boiled in great cauldrons and consumed by all participants, as well as the soup produced in the temple, which also provides the feasting hall, usually a sacred place close to the sanctuary known as the *ve*, or at the house of the *godi*.

The *godi* (usually the *jarl* or king) blesses the cauldrons and the receptacle containing the blood, and consecrates his horn above the fire before drinking and passing it around. The participants drink beer and mead in great quantities to the point of drunkenness, but dedicate each drink to the gods: Odin to begin with, for future victories and the power of the clan or kingdom; then to Njord and Frey for fecundity and peace. Nor are the ancestors forgotten, and many drinks are offered in their honour.

Sacred Places

A sacred place, also known as a *ve*, is generally located outside. The word can also describe the dwelling place of a god; the *ve* is a sanctuary in which the spirit and essence of a god resides.

Outside, a *ve* is marked out by stakes of hazel wood, linked by rope. The same is done for any place where a tribunal or duel is held.

The temple, or *hof*, is rarer, and often close to a grove, mound, swamp, or wood. A temple building is large and rectangular, and is the place where participants meet for sacrificial feasts.

In temples, votive plaques of precious metals are found in front of gold and silver statues of the gods they are addressing, usually Odin, Frey, and Thor.

Nature divinities such as the *landvaettir*, and the dead, possess their own places of worship, located in groves, in front of trees, mounds, or rocks which are believed to be their homes.

Funerary Rites

When a person dies, people “attend” to the deceased. This means closing his eyes, mouth, and nose with wax to prevent his spirit escaping and haunting the living. The body is washed, the hair brushed, and the nails cut short; the hair and nails are then burnt, as people believe the fingernails and toenails of the dead will be used to build Nagflar, the ship the giants will use to attack the



The festival of Winter Nights

For three days, at the end of October, the beginning of the winter season is celebrated. It might be strange to celebrate the beginning of such a severe season, but one should remember that this is the end of the harvest season, and thus of the laborious work in the fields. The cattle are brought back to the stables, and the surplus cattle which cannot be kept until spring are slaughtered to feed the people.

It is a time of rest, which is the significance of this celebration.

It is also during these nights that Odin rushes frenziedly across the sky, followed by his Valkyrie and a host of dead souls—the so-called “Wild Hunt”. The Hunt follows storms, and it is best not to be outside during this time, or even to look up to the sky. Many hapless wanderers have been carried off with the dead, never to return.



gods at the time of Ragnarök. The the corpse is then laid on a funeral bier, and a hole is broken in the house wall behind so that the spirit of the deceased may leave the house. This hole is re-sealed immediately after.

Important men are buried in mounds in the lands of Denmark, but in Svithjod or Norway they are sometimes cremated. If buried in a mound, a boat, or a larger ship, the deceased is placed in a foetal position with his weapons, his finest clothing, and his precious belongings around him. Sometimes his horse or favourite pet

may follow him in death. When an important person dies, his slaves are sacrificed to serve him in the after-life. Then, everything is buried or cremated on a pyre, so the deceased may take his belongings with him. A stone marked with runes may be placed on the mound to indicate the location of the tomb.

The poorest folk content themselves with a simple grave covered with stones, sometimes engraved.



Human Sacrifice

Human sacrifice is a reality, but not a very common one. Usually enemies are sacrificed to the gods after a victory, or to assure one before battle begins. Ritual hangings may be dedicated to Odin, but equally victims may be strangled, or have their throats cut before being thrown into a sacred marsh.

There is even a very ancient Scandian custom which calls for the sacrifice of the king himself, as a last resort during famines to ensure a good harvest, or to stop an epidemic, or bring peace.

In the past, several legendary kings of Svithjod had their throats slit, or were hanged or burned alive, which bestowed on their lands long periods of prosperity. This custom may seem surprising, but one should not forget that the *konung*, the king, is chosen “for a fecund year and for peace”. If he does not fulfil his function alive, he may well pay for it with his death!

The Blood-Eagle or Blodorn

This particularly sadistic sacrifice has long been abandoned in most of Scandia, but it does persist in certain places for very precise circumstances.

The victim is laid flat on his stomach and held, while his back is cut open along the ribs, or his ribs are broken. His lungs are dragged out through the wounds and laid out in the shape of eagle's wings.

This ritual is no doubt dedicated to Odin, like many human sacrifices; but, as cruelty is not necessary in sacrificial rites, this blot, which was already rare, has fallen into disuse.

The funeral feast, known as the *sjaund* (literally “funeral beer”), generally takes place a week after the funerary rites. It is the occasion when inheritances, the designation of heirs, and the transmissions of power are dealt with.

The family drinks to the memory of the deceased, but also to their ancestors, and a skald sings a funeral hymn. It is only after this final ceremony that the designated heir of the deceased may take his new position.

Sacred Oaths

Blood Brothers

The two men wishing to enter into this oath of brotherhood swear always to help one another, but also to adopt the role of brother in the event of mishaps (such as illness, death, inheritance, and everything else a biological brother would be obligated to do), and to avenge each other's deaths if necessary.

The two brothers-to-be cut two strips of turf from the ground, and raise them in the form of an inverted V, supported by a spear. After making a cut in their wrist and letting their blood spill onto the bare earth, they advance together beneath the arch of turf, and, once on the other side, declare with the gods as their witnesses that they are blood brothers (*fostbraethr*).



There are many famous examples of blood brothers in the sagas. The most famous are Gunnar and Hogni, who swore their oaths with Sigurd. Hjalmar the Swedish hero swore such an oath with the Norwegian Orvar-Oddr (in the Hervagar saga).

Legends say that Odin and Loki, too, were blood brothers.



Scandía

Imagine you are an eagle. A majestic raptor, the uncontested master of the skies, nesting in the highest mountains of Norway. Or better still, imagine mighty Odin has allowed you to ride Sleipnir, his magnificent eight-legged horse capable of racing atop the clouds. You launch yourself into the air; soon, the last houses are drowned below in the ocean of forest. As you rise, you can just discern the sails of a large langskip, filled with armed warriors, sailing towards their destination and a booty won by blood. Flying over the Baltic Sea, Scandía—your home—unfurls before your eyes. You see as no mortal before you has ever seen; like a huge map, where you struggle to make out familiar landmarks. What do you see?

An Eagle's Eye View of Scandía



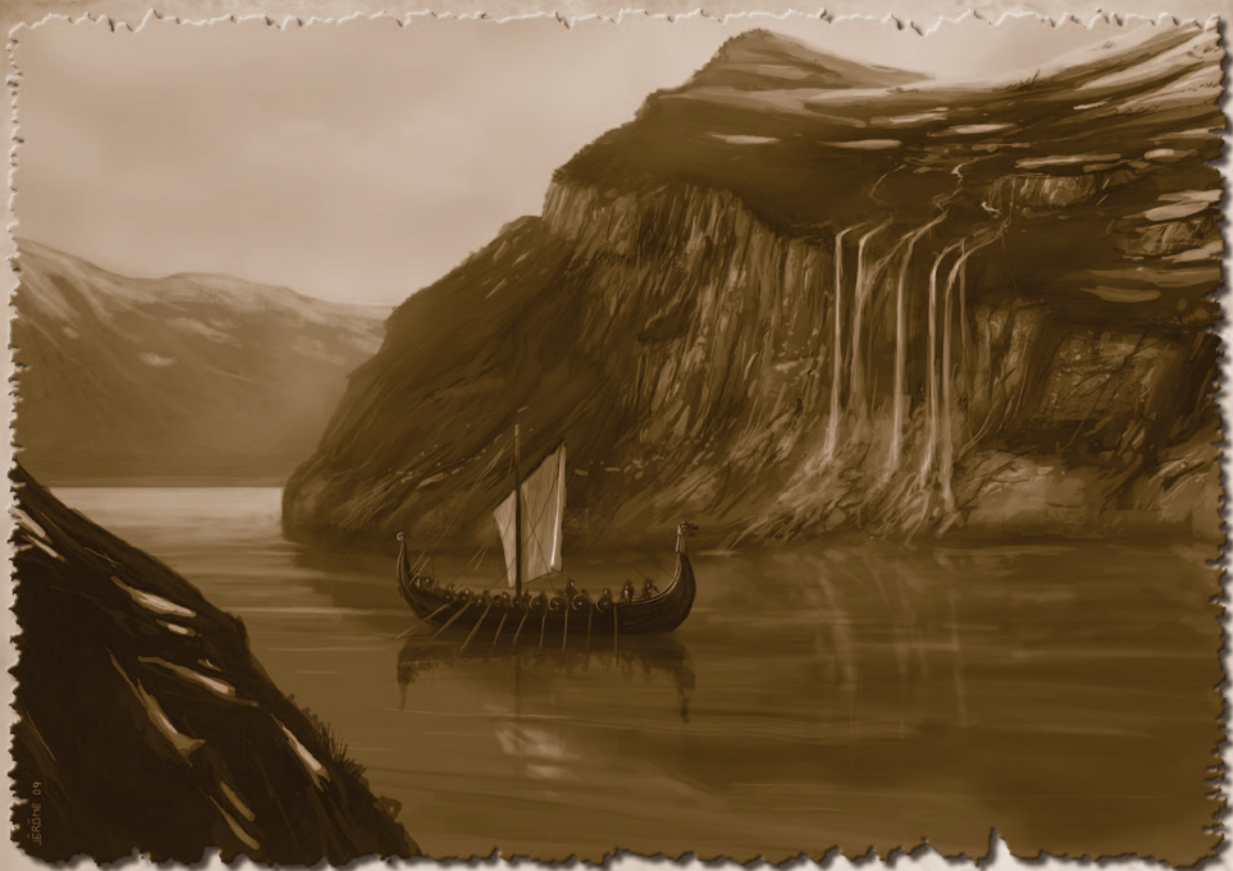
As far as the eye can see, huge stretches of forest cover most of Scandía. At higher elevations evergreens predominate, mostly pines, but the diversity of timber to be found there fulfils the desires of the most demanding artisans. Or at least those artisans willing to go adventuring in the most inaccessible reaches of

the country: the vegetation here is dense, and the trees throw a green shroud around the slopes of the snow-topped mountains. The ground is covered in brown needles, the land pierced here and there by rocky peaks, as though giants had amused themselves by planting them here and there at random.

In the lower hills, along the coasts and plateaus, grow mainly deciduous trees, such as larch, beech, oak, cedar, elm, and birch, providing timber for construction and heating. But these wooded and wild areas are home to a great many types of fauna, predator and prey, and creatures hostile to men. The undergrowth beneath the trees, a veritable sylvan labyrinth, becomes thicker and thicker the further one goes into the forests. Many places are sacred to the gods; natural springs pouring from cracks in the rock, great stones raised and abandoned by unknown beings... Other areas, just as remarkable, are home to horrible entities born from Midgard's magic, or escaped from one of the Nine Worlds entwined in Yggdrasil's roots.

Those hunting big game, woodsmen and any others exploiting these places, must take care to confine their activities to the edges of the forests. In truth, some places are simply inaccessible by land, and no path leads the feet of those bold enough to venture beyond those wooded walls. Thus, when the people of Scandía want to travel, they prefer to go by sea.

The presence of the sea is felt everywhere in Scandía, from north to south, east to west. A source of riches for coastal communities, it dominates the lives of those who live along its coast. But inland areas are also



under its influence; trade, territorial expansion, relations between kingdoms, communications, all depend directly on the sea, which reaches right into Scandia's heart.

In fact, the sea is integral to the functioning of Scandian society; the region's inhabitants count a great many sailors, and they often possess unequalled skill in ship-building and navigation. For the people of the North, the sea is at once an ally, upon which they depend for resources and transport, and an adversary they have never fully mastered. Storms at sea are common and often very violent; the weather can change quickly, and even the most skilled navigators fear facing a storm which can descend from the mountains in a few minutes, whipping the sea into a frenzy around their ship. Rain, often accompanied by strong winds, worsens visibility. The ragged Scandian coasts, particularly around Norway, offer good shelter, but one must know the many channels well to avoid the reefs lurking beneath the surface. How many ships have been wrecked? How many have lost crews and cargoes? The many straits, the multitude of islands, some forming small archipelagos, and hidden shallows all make sea voyages dangerous, not to mention those waters haunted by terrible monsters of the deep, such as the deadly kraken. Anyone venturing into Baltic waters should take a skilled navigator, and such men are, of course, greatly sought after. In the west, the ocean is the final frontier,

upon which many sailors dream of testing their skills.

Long cliffs line the shores of Scandia. Some are only a few metres in height, others tower above the sea. Immense colonies of birds nest there, their cries heard for miles. Approaching the cliffs is often made treacherous by underwater rocks, some only noticeable by the white water around their crowns. Some inlets become veritable marine valleys, cliffs rising high on every side; these are the fjords. Here, the sea is at its calmest, and these natural shelters are sometimes home to a port, when the nature of the terrain makes it possible. Fjords are most often found on the western coast of Norway, where the clans struggle against savage forest tribes and giants reign over the high mountains.

A huge mountain chain separates the kingdoms of Norway and Svithjod. Many passes cross them, but the weather conditions and difficult terrain means they are rarely used. Add to this the various monstrous creatures, hostile tribes, and starving wolf packs, and most voyagers wisely prefer to rely on the sea. The journey usually takes about as long, and the chances of reaching the destination are higher. The mountainous regions of Scandia have only a small human presence due to the harsh nature of the land; isolated communities live within the forests, or close to mines open to the sky, where they dig

out iron, copper, minerals, and other metals, including gold and silver. The steep, conifer-covered mountains are home to savage beasts and other, more fearsome, entities. For the most part, the mountaintops are snow-covered and inaccessible year-round, with vast glaciers dotted with natural traps, to rocky crevasses and rugged hillsides. The peaks of the far north are notorious for being home to the frost giants, formidable enemies of mankind, fierce warriors jealously guarding their inhospitable domains. The foothills slowly descend to regions of thickly-wooded escarpments.

Everywhere, valleys extend between the great mountain heights. Unsurprisingly, these are the most welcoming places for the Scandian population. In the southern reaches, wide grassy plains allow the inhabitants to fatten their cattle and practise significant agriculture. In the north, men must first fell trees before they can plough the earth. In the valleys close to the rivers, the ground is often marshy. Peat bogs are an important resource for villages, but often death awaits those who wander in without knowing the dangers, with quicksand and deceptively deep rivers swallowing their quota of foolish travellers every year.

Villages and cities are mostly beside the sea, at the mouths of rivers or along them, permitting water-borne traffic which only the winter ice interrupts, and even then only briefly.

While cities have their own local markets, large-scale trade is conducted mostly from trading posts. In these permanent or seasonal places, raw materials and finished products are exchanged. Most are production centres where wood, iron, soapstone, bone, or leather are worked; the Birka trading post is one of the most famous, and draws merchants from the three kingdoms, the lands of the Gautars, and other nearby regions. It is ideally situated in the kingdom of Svithjod, on the shores of Lake Malar.

Ribe, on the western Jutland coast, is also important due to its biannual fair. Helgo in Svithjod plays the same role for the other parts of Scandia. Some trading posts last only for a season, such as Kaupang in Norway, often linked with local activities (in this case, whale-hunting, but in other places it may be religious festivals or the hunting season). Intrepid merchants often transport their produce to other regions, too: the establishment of trading posts beyond the Scandian frontier, such as among the Saxons, Angles, or even the Sami, is becoming more common.

As agricultural techniques improve, the amount of arable land is increasing, and the population and the size of cities grows. However, much of the land is still unclaimed, and far beyond the authority of kings and *jarls*.

A Land Ruled by Cold



Those inhabiting the northernmost parts of Scandia live in a harsh and cold climate. In some places the soil never thaws, even in the heart of summer, which is little more than a short pause between endless periods of winter. For half the year, these regions are plunged in icy darkness; the rest of the time, a pale sun barely chases away the twilight which weighs heavily on this Midgard frontier.

Along the coasts, heading south, the climate gradually improves. The difference between the seasons becomes more marked, and the presence of the sea softens the often violent weather. In Jutland, summers are pleasant and generally dry; further to the north it grows colder, and rain is more abundant. Winter is icy throughout Scandia; and there are heavy snowfalls covering the land. Rivers often freeze over completely, trapping ships in port. In the Baltic, icebergs make navigation more perilous than ever.

Spring and autumn are often accompanied by sudden and adverse changes in temperature. As the seasons change, the winds grow stronger and sweep the western coasts. This part of Midgard, although not as harsh as Niflheim, imposes difficult living conditions on its inhabitants. The Norsemen are by nature strong, tough, and enduring.

The Kingdom of Denmark



Geography & Environment

The gentle coasts of Denmark possess many bays, ideal for ports. Islands are commonplace, ranging in size from a simple reef to those large enough to have their own kings; dotted close to the coast and offering shelter for sailors and dangers for unprepared navigators. Some are inhabited, others left to nature. The inhabitants often

defend themselves fiercely against neighbouring *jarls*.

Most bays in the kingdom of Denmark are inhabited; each usually has a watchtower with a warning fire, together with a watchman.

The kingdom comprises the great isle of Sjaeland, the isle of Fyn, and Scania, together with the multitude of smaller islands which surround them. Jutland, the great isthmus to the west, is often erroneously assumed to be part of Denmark, although its interior is mostly unexplored.

The land of Sjaeland is a little higher than that around it, and is a significant population centre in the Northern Kingdoms. Gentle regions of green hills criss-crossed by rivers and great grassy plains make up the majority of the countryside in the heart of the island, with occasional spots of wild woodland. Closer to the coasts are windswept moors and sand dunes descending gently to beaches. The entire south of Sjaeland is edged with steep chalk cliffs which break the monotony and the biting sea winds.

Scania is the name given to Sjaeland's sister-province to the north-east, separated by a narrow strait which it is possible to swim across in places. This mainland territory abuts the land of the Gautars; the southern parts of the country are hilly, and the presence of iron gives everything a reddish tinge. Scania is bordered by the Kattegat: the channel running between the Kingdom of Denmark and that of Svithjod. Its natural frontiers with the land of the Gautars make this people a potential ally, and a constant adversary, for the region's *jarls*.

Two straits, the Little Belt and the Great Belt, and one island, Fyn, separate Jutland from Sjaeland. The latter is a province of the Kingdom of Denmark in its own right; its most powerful *jarl* lives in Odense ("Odin's home"), a large city which rivals the capital in terms of size and riches. The city is built on the shores of a green lake, surrounded by light hills, sparse woods, and arable land. This vast stretch of water is the most sacred place in Denmark, dedicated to the father of the Aesir himself. Moreover, Odense shelters within its walls of wood and stone the greatest concentration of *volva* and *thulr* in the kingdom.

Several Danish communities have settled on the Jutland peninsula. Their *jarls* pay homage to the king of Hleidra, who rules over the territory, and some pay him tribute and are under his protection. For many, Jutland seems part of the kingdom of Denmark; but its indigenous people, the Jutes, refute this absolutely.

Denmark's soil is fertile, and supports significant and intensive agriculture. Barley, rye, linen, and vegetables are the main produce, and wide pastures lie between the

Gefjun's Caprice

The skalds tell a strange tale about the origins of Sjaeland.

Long ago, when the gods still walked in Midgard and men were no more than savages, the goddess Gefjun was looking for a place to live. She wanted an isolated place where she could live in peace with her companion, Skjold, Odin's son. She found the province of Sjaeland, which at that time was still connected to the mainland. In order to make it her secret garden, the goddess gathered her powers and separated this land from the rest; thus the island of Sjaeland was born.

coasts and the kingdom's interior, on which large herds of cattle, horses, and sheep graze.

The sea is rich along the coasts. Many kinds of fish and several species of whale offer good fishing. Great seal and walrus colonies, as well as flocks of sea birds, live on the rocky shores.

The forest is also used, its timber serving to build ships and buildings, as well as for crafts and of course heating. Its quality is such that Danish merchants export it throughout the three kingdoms.

The centre of the land is densely wooded, and almost inaccessible, and is the home of a great many wild animals. The fauna is very varied, ranging from deer and elk to aurochs and bison. Wolves, foxes, and bears hunt there and are hunted in turn for their fur. Inhabited areas are still savage and dangerous; no roads link them, apart from the few rough tracks which connect the most isolated communities. Many travellers have vanished in forests so dense that sunlight never reaches the ground, and these are also home to far worse predators than wolves or bears; trolls, spirits, and other creatures of legend abide in these sylvan regions.

The climate is temperate and quite pleasant. Winters are cold, and snow abundant; the summers quite warm. Spring and autumn offer vital rainfall.

Human Settlement

Small cities are found all over Denmark, both important urban centres and religious sanctuaries, with many sites dedicated to the gods.

The first and main city is the kingdom's capital, Hleidra, on the eastern coast of Sjaeland. The king's palace rises above an average-sized city of immense maritime importance. Dozens of small islets fill the bay, and make its approaches difficult for those who do not know the way through these small parcels of dry land and their intervening reefs and shallows. The city is built around the royal palace, which dominates the area's main high ground, a steep cliff overhanging the water. About ten thousand people live within the wooden walls, and another ten thousand in the rich fields and pastures surrounding it. Whilst the centre of power, Hleidra is nevertheless a city like any other, except that its ruler is a little more influential. Once a year, a *thing* of *jarls* meets, generally just before the onset of winter; at this time, the king affirms his authority and rewards his most faithful vassals. Gold and silver bracelets, precious gifts and oaths, are exchanged during the proceedings. Decisions concerning all of Denmark are discussed in the heart of the palace, at unending feasts or in its many private alcoves. As at the spring fair, the city buzzes with feverish excitement. As King Frodi's ascension to the throne was particularly violent (see page 31), his *hirdman* guard keep a close watch over the city, and Hleidra is no doubt the most heavily policed city in Scandia. A weight hangs over the city, and the supporters of the old king keep a low profile. Further, Frodi fears having to answer for his fratricide before gods or men, and surrounds himself with a veritable mob of sorcerers and mages. These strange men and women give the king's court a fearsome aspect.

Haven is the largest port on the isle of Sjaeland, home to a major fishing fleet which follows the herring shoals to the western ocean. Moored to wooden quays at the back of the bay, warships stand ready to ensure the safety of these shores, as well as the maritime trade routes; during expedition season, the *langskips* traverse the Kattegat and the area's archipelagos, lying in wait for attackers from Svithjod and Norway, or the pirates infesting the region. Few months pass without at least one battle. The *jarl* of Haven bears the heavy responsibility of ensuring the various assaults are repelled, and the king never misses a chance to reward this most important lord.

The city of Odense rises from the shores of the lake of the same name. Sheltered in the green hills at the heart of Sjaeland, it is the most sacred place in Denmark. It is here, more than anywhere else, that Odin appears when he wants to walk in Midgard. The father of the Aesir is connected to this place, and a cohort of women maintains a large building close to the lake, dedicated to the god. Most are initiated into the ranks of the *volva*. Their dreams, direct messages from the one-eyed god, are the object of many interpretations. More sorcerers call this place home than anywhere else in Scandia.

Several hundred islands, few of which are inhabited, surround the Danish coasts. Sjaeland, the largest, is the

heart of the kingdom. The isle of Fyn, between Sjaeland and Jutland, is second largest in terms of population and resources. The island of Bornholm, far to the east, is home to a large Danish colony, whose jarl is fiercely loyal to Denmark's king against the diplomatic approaches from the rulers of Uppsala. He knows that, sooner or later, he runs the risk of seeing an army land on his shores. The area is highly strategic for the region's trade. The kingdom of Svithjod and the land of the Gautars manage matters as best they can, hoping one day to seize control of the island and thus control the sea routes of the region.

Country Organisation

The Danish royal family bears the name of Skjoldung, and can trace their line back to Gefjun and Skjold. Whilst not truly expansionist, the kingdom's rulers have always sought to unify its clans and absorb the small independent kingdoms which flourish on their borders, in territories the Skjoldung consider their own, as well as in neighbouring lands. Battles and skirmishes have broken out between them since time immemorial, and the victories achieved by whatever more powerful king over his neighbours have always been quickly challenged by the turbulent conquered subjects, and weapons never stay sheathed for long. Most of the time, declarations of war are usually due to rivalries between clans in this part of southern Scandia. Even if all of Denmark's inhabitants recognise the royal status of the Skjoldung clan to some extent, many are not willing to obey their orders. The sovereign must often remind his more independent vassals of his power.

The reasons for discord between the clans are numerous, and Denmark finds it difficult to present a united front. The *jarls* of the largest domains, and strategically the most important, usually obtain their posts from the king. They are thus loyal vassals, and influential men who the king can count on being able to control. But the lords of smaller territories, or those furthest from the capital, are less disciplined, and despite the yearly *thing* in the capital, they organise raids and expeditions (closer to piracy or banditry than actual warfare) for their own ends, often in opposition to the king's own policies to his neighbours. These personal initiatives, often disapproved of by the capital, sometimes pursued with tacit approval, complicate the chess game which passes for diplomatic relations between the Scandian powers.

The Danish kings do not hide their desire to become the most powerful in Midgard. Their *jarls* share these ambitions, while trying to grab as much personal power as they can. Their *hirdmen* are renowned for their prowess, and their ships sail all the Scandian seas. For the moment, the king's attention is directed towards the lands lying north of his domains.




The Royal House of Skjöldung

The saga of the Skjoldung clan is told thus: a ship without oars and sails was once wrecked during a storm on the shores of Denmark. Inside was only a child, named Skyld. His head rested on sacks of grain and was surrounded by swords, spears and axes. A *volva* called on the gods for prophecy; everything pointed to the young unknown having a glorious destiny. The Danes did not want to gainsay the gods, and so made the young child their king.

Once he had become a man, Skyld was a just and capable king. He wrote many laws for his country, united the clans, and brought peace and prosperity to Denmark. Upon his death, his subjects mourned deeply. They placed his body on a great ship, and sent it back to the West from where he originally came.

Legends say that Skyld was the son of Skjold, son of Odin, and that the blood of Aesir ran through his veins, and those of his descendants. Peaceful or quarrelsome, the Skjoldung kings have always made much of this divine heritage. However, according to tradition established during the first human settlements in the country, Danish clans consider themselves under the patronage of another of Odin's sons, Thor.

Moreover, while the Skjoldungs consider the rune of Odin to be their personal rune, the apparatus of royalty still falls under the rune of Thor. After all, why should they refuse to take advantage of his support?



Before that, however, King Frodi must first deal with the consequences of his ascension to the throne. He leads a divided kingdom, which he struggles to unite under his rule. He is not known for his mercy, and cruelly puts down any act which questions his authority. On the other hand, he offers many gifts of reconciliation; royal favours, offered to *jarls* who have not yet allied themselves to him. Frodi hopes to quickly win the support of those with whom he hopes to rule the country. Unfortunately, however, he neglects the needs of his own people, considering that to be the responsibility of his *jarls*. Many of the Saxon, Svithjod, and other mercenaries Frodi hired

to depose his brother have not left, and their marauding bands still wander Denmark. While some have found new employers, or have remained in the king's service, acting as a brutal and hated police force, others have turned to banditry, and raid the people. Faced with the growing number of complaints brought to Hleidra, Frodi understands he must act, but fears engaging his personal army in a war on his own soil, a conflict which will weaken him before his rivals and enemies.

Recent Events and the Current Situation

King Frodi reigns over Denmark, united under a bloodied banner. He gained the throne through cunning and fratricide. The worst crimes of the Skjoldung run through his veins, but his history is little different from other monarchs.

His grandfather was Frodi the Peaceful who, by negotiation or the sword, united the *jarls* into a kingdom under his command. Upon his death, his three sons fought over his legacy, and civil war threatened to engulf the kingdom. The oldest, Halfdan, was victorious, but he did not enjoy his triumph long; he died young, in his bed like an old man, bereft of Odin's favour.

Halfdan had two sons, named Frodi and Halfdan in homage to their grandfather and father. But, not wanting the kingdom to be torn apart again, the *jarl* Einar had both brothers proclaimed kings by the nobles' *thing*. Of the two brothers, the eldest inherited Scania, the other Sjaeland.

The brother named Halfdan was a credit to his line. Little inclined to war, but formidable if attacked, he was beloved by his people and remembered as a generous and just king of Sjaeland. He married lady Sigrid, the daughter of a minor Finnish king, and had a daughter, Signy, and two sons, Hroar and Helgi. Signy was married to the powerful *jarl* of Haven, Saevil Einarsson.

The elder brother inherited the worst qualities of the Skjoldung line. Frodi is short-tempered, and so severe that he borders on cruel. He swiftly became jealous of his younger brother. Marrying Broghild, a Saxon princess, he obtained the alliances and means he needed to make his desire for power a reality. Scania became a force with which even the kingdom of Svithjod had to contend with. Broghild died bringing their son, Ingjald, into the world. His education was given over to his maternal grandparents.

Frodi's thirst for power grew every day. In the greatest secrecy, he created unlikely alliances with the Jutes, and

with Svithjod and Danish princes, hungry for power. Finally he raised a great army, and headed towards Halfdan's capital. His soldiers put the city to the sword and flame, pillaging and raping. A final battle was fought between the two brothers; overwhelmed by the number and ferocity of the invaders, Halfdan's troops were defeated and fled. Frodi killed his brother with his own hands.

A murderer is always frightened of the lamb turning on the wolf. Frodi sought out Halfdan's sons, at the time only ten years old, saying he would take them into his care. But many think he meant to put them to death, and his troops searched for them in vain. The children had been placed in the care of *jarl* Regin Erlingsson of Hleidra, but when Frodi's *hirdmen* searched his home, the children were nowhere to be found.

Frodi paid the *wergeld* for his brother's murder. He married his widow, Sigrid, to legitimise his ascension to the throne, and the crown of Denmark. A *thing* of *jarls* was summoned, and each of the lords present had to swear on their golden rings to give their loyalty to the new king; sometimes in good faith, but many to save their lives and those of their subjects. Some found an excuse to not attend the ceremony and avoid swearing their oaths. The king's soldiers now patrol his domain, and crush the least sign of rebellion.

A year has passed since Frodi took the throne. The country is bent and silent under his yoke. The king sometimes proclaims he wants to reconcile himself with his people and offers many acts of benevolence to accomplish this. But at the same time, he meets with *volva* and *thulr* in his search for Halfdan's sons, who still elude him.

Perhaps they are dead, after all. But until he can be sure, this murderous king cannot sleep at night.

Important figures of Denmark

Frodi, King of Denmark

Frodi has a stern character and demeanour, typical of those who do not sleep well. He is small, like many Skjoldungs, but quick of movement and even more of mind. He acquits himself well both with words and blade, and strikes unerringly at his goals. His long brown hair frames an emaciated face, with eyes as cold and blue as ice. A close-trimmed and carefully groomed beard surrounds a greedy mouth, overhung by a pointed nose.

Although generous with his riches, Frodi enjoys the luxury which his status brings. He dreams of beautiful clothes, enjoys dressing in mantles trimmed with rich furs, and wears many jewels. An elegant man, he impresses guests both by his appearance and his diplomatic skills.

The king knows how to conduct a diplomatic meeting to his advantage, and how to gain what he wants by any means. If this fails, he grows angry and resorts to threats and intimidation, relying on the strength of his army to bolster his arguments.

For the year he has sat on the throne of Denmark, Frodi has been obsessed with the sons of the brother he murdered with his own hands. He no longer goes anywhere without his personal guard, reinforced by a dozen *berserkers*.

Regin Erlingsson

As a young man, Regin followed Frodi the Peaceful, and later Halfdan, before becoming ward of the king of Sjaeland's children. When the final battle was lost, the *jarl* of Hleidra returned as quickly as possible to send the children to safety. He entrusted them to a faithful servant, and now no longer knows their whereabouts. Frodi suspects he was involved in the children's disappearance, but without proof he does not want to alienate the capital's population, and so for the moment Regin Erlingsson still maintains his post. The two men hate each other and so far the *jarl* has managed to avoid declaring allegiance to the new king, finding every pretext to avoid attending the *thing*. But Regin is growing old, and knows he cannot continue without putting himself in danger. If he must swear allegiance to Frodi, he will do so to the letter of the law—and leave the spirit open to interpretation.

Regin Erlingsson is a just and well-liked ruler, from a renowned Danish line. He once wielded a sword with great skill, but today, with age weakening him and his position less secure, the old *jarl* relies on his wisdom, nursing a secret hope that Frodi will be deposed from his stolen throne. He hopes for one final chance to honour Odin, so the king of the gods will remember him well.

Sveijar Einarsson

The powerful *jarl* of Haven is an intelligent and thoughtful man; some say he is detached from everything, but the thirty year old constantly calculates the pros and cons of every situation. He was one of Halfdan's principle allies, as well as being his son-in-law. However, he was also one of the first to present himself at Frodi's bloodied throne. This quick about-turn permitted him to keep his position, and he has maintained a relative independence in his dealings with his subjects and affairs. Sjaeland's maritime defences depend greatly on Haven's fleet, and Sveijar Einarsson deals with this responsibility zealously. His *hirdmen* are among the most accomplished in Denmark, his ships among the fastest and most powerful. Consequently, those still faithful to Halfdan hope to see him lead a rebellion against the murderous king. However, Sveijar has resisted until now, and some call him traitor and—even worse—one who "licks Frodi's boots".

Sveijar Einarsson pretends not to hear those who call him traitor, and swallows his anger. His mother-in-law married the new king, creating family ties which require a certain degree of loyalty from Sveijar, who holds such things important. Moreover, Sveijar knows Frodi is having him watched closely, and does not want his command over Haven and his role as the kingdom's protector called into question. The *jarl* keeps his thoughts to himself, but his friends know he is weighing all possibilities and, while he does not say so out loud, he has no personal loyalty to his sovereign.

Sveijar Einarsson is a tall and robust man. His black beard and hair frame an often unreadable face, where only his brown eyes sometimes reveal his innermost thoughts. Haven's *jarl* is miserly with his words, carefully weighing every decision. He can act quickly if the situation warrants, and his decisions have often saved Sjaeland's coastal communities. An accomplished warrior, he no longer leads his troops into battle, preferring to coordinate their manoeuvres from the city. Fond of justice and respectful of traditions and the gods, he is well-liked by his people. While he has his enemies and rivals, he refuses to rise to their provocations. At least, for the moment...

The Kingdom of Svithjod



Geography & Environment

Most Scandians recognise Svithjod as the most powerful of all the kingdoms. Its territory extends along the Baltic Sea to the Gulf of Bothnia, and it is larger and more densely populated than any other of Midgard's mortal domains.

Svithjod's climate is relatively temperate, despite its northern position; warm currents, well known by sailors, chase the cold away from its coasts. But winter covers it with ice and a coat of snow, sometimes freezing its lakes and ports.

The greater part of Svithjod is covered by immense dark forests, through which only a few paths lead. Many animals live there, providing an inexhaustible supply of game.

In the southern provinces, wooded areas are composed almost entirely of broad-leafed trees, which farmers fell to clear areas for cultivation. In the north, great ever-green forests furnish abundant timber for construction. A multitude of rivers and streams criss-cross the countryside, connecting lakes, and many are navigable at least as far as the mountains, providing the kingdom with a wide-spread and useful transportation network.

In Svithjod's most northerly regions, at the edges of Midgard, the sun never sets in summer, and winter becomes a night without end. Primitive tribes and unallied clans dwell in these parts, and, until now, the sorcerer-kings of Uppsala have only timidly tried to expand their holdings there. Although the northern reaches are rich in natural resources, including metal deposits, the kings are dissuaded by the expense which their exploitation would require, and conquest of this far-off territory is not currently on the cards.

The great seas to the east, comprised of the Baltic Sea and the Gulf of Bothnia, contribute to the mild climate, and also bring their share of resources. To the west, a wild mountain chain remains largely unexplored, separating Svithjod from the kingdom of Norway.

Southern Svithjod forms a frontier with the land of the Gautars, and the inhabitants of these more pleasant lands lean more towards agriculture. The density of the forests increases as one progresses north; likewise, population is greater in the south, particularly in the valley of Lake Malar. Some lakes, such as Lakes Vanern and Vattern, are veritable inland seas, upon which flotillas of fishing boats sail.

The Svithjod coasts are fairly rugged, and offer numerous small fjords as shelter for ships. There are many coastal villages, and many small islands, often grouped into archipelagos. The islands of Gotland and Oland are the most important, and each have their own settlements, whose role is as much to work the earth as it is to control the maritime commerce which passes their coasts.

The island of Gotland is an "advance base" for Svithjod. It forms a low plateau, surrounded by steep cliffs and a few rare beaches where ships can moor. The small colony settled there by the kings of Uppsala is led by a *jarl*, traditionally chosen by their faithful followers. While the colonists watch over the island's few resources as best they can, attempting to introduce sheep to the islands and cultivate the thin earth, their attentions are often elsewhere: Gotland's strategic location on the sea routes from Finland to Svithjod allows them to control passage, and a fleet of *langskips* is moored in Gotland's only port (and only village).

All men of Gotland are sailors and warriors. Fishing is their main means of survival, as they have settled here with their families to make the most of the island, although their main role is to guard the Uppsala sea route. However, Gotland's actual ruler, Harbein Runolfsson, is something else entirely: respected by his men and his clan, a sailor and accomplished warrior, Harbein has managed to attract the wrath of his king. His nickname, Honey-Tongue, comes less from his skill as a courtier, or his prowess with women, than from his habit of saying too much when he drinks too much mead. One evening, drinking in the court at Uppsala, Harbein reproached his monarch for his friendly overtures to the Gautars, when the *jarl* himself wanted to slaughter them beneath Svithjod blades. Fearing his vassal's words would reach inquisitive ears, and to punish him for his stupidity, King Egil decided to send him away from the court, and a few months ago gave him the island of Gotland. Harbein saw this rightly as a punishment, and while previously he did not hold the king in high esteem, now he actively dislikes him. King Egil wants to make allies of the Gautars, in order to resist the Danes while they are weakened from their civil war. However, Harbein Runolfsson hopes to improve his revenue by attacking the ships and nearby colonies of the Gautars, and as a result could well create a breach between Gotland and the strategic interests of Svithjod. The more he thinks about it, the more Harbein likes the idea of being king of his own domain.

Human Settlement

The mythical city of Uppsala is the capital of the Svithjod kings. Built at the mouth of the River Fyris, the city dominates a great lake which offers abundant fishing. An immense arable plain stretches to the east as far as the eye can see. Poor roads lead to a few farmsteads and isolated hamlets, but most farming villages are connected by lanes which divide the cultivated lands into individual parcels. An well-maintained earthen road snakes between the hills, climbing from the banks of the river and the bridge which crosses it, to the plateau where the houses are found. To the west, a dense and dark forest covers an undulating countryside as far as the chain of mountains whose snowy summits fill the skyline.

An imposing wooden palisade surrounds the whole city. As tall as two men, it is regularly punctuated by watchtowers where vigilant sentries are always posted, ready to sound their horns in case of alarm. Two huge gates, one to the east, the other to the west, control who comes in and out of the fortified town. The guards always inspect merchant carts and question all new arrivals, or at least those who do not seem as though they are from the city, as to the reasons they have come here. The *hirdmen* carrying out this thankless task are not the most valiant, but they know that their lord will severely punish

any lapses; he commands the city be kept safe, and they do as he commands.

Uppsala is the largest and most populated city in Scandia. More than twenty thousand people live within its walls, in an area barely large enough to contain them. Buildings have been erected piecemeal, and conform to no plan, and the roads are a chaotic, busy mess, at least to newcomers. Narrow and winding, they open without warning onto large or small squares, usually packed with people. In some areas, remnants of an old wall are built into existing structures; the old city walls, abandoned once the capital outgrew them.

As well as the human population, many animals inhabit the city. Fowl are everywhere and, more surprising to visitors from abroad, countless pigs scavenge freely among the hustle and bustle. For this is Frey's city, the first legendary Yngling, and the pig is favoured by the fertility god.

Houses are often two storeys high, their balconies overhanging the streets often plunging them into darkness, even in broad daylight. Built with excellent timber from the nearby forests, they give a sense of opulence and sturdiness.

The palace of the sorcerer-kings occupies a rocky outcrop in the centre of Uppsala. A second wooden wall surrounds this roughly square space. Tall, brooding buildings surround a large paved courtyard, where homes for servants and stables for horses line the walls. Despite the ornamentation on the facades and walls, the palace is austere and sinister, and the dark timber used in its construction only reinforces this impression. Rumour says its reddish tinge comes from the blood of enemies sacrificed here; more prosaically, the inhabitants of Uppsala believe it is due to the blood of animals regularly sacrificed to Frey. In any case, the fearful silhouette of this imposing building stretches its shadow over the rest of the city, a symbol of its inhabitants' power.

Half a league from the city, the famous Uppsala temple stands on a promontory of grey stone, veined with black. It is the largest building of its kind in all of Midgard, and the entire population of the city can stand within its precincts during feast days. It is visible for kilometres around, from the valley beside the lake to the edge of the plains stretching from the foot of the city.

Built on the edge of a deep forest, the temple acts as a gateway to the many sacred places hidden amongst the trees. Constructed in a traditional design, the great Uppsala temple's roof reaches to the sky. All its pillars, pennons, even the edges of the roof are carved with fearsome dragons' heads. But most remarkable is what happens when the sun catches the temple building, and

it blazes with blinding light: its walls are not painted, but covered with gold.

There are no windows in the temple walls. Inside, racks of candles chase away the darkness, and, in the main hall, wooden statues of the twelve major Norse deities welcome worshippers. Out of their number, Odin, Thor, and of course Frey are held in the highest esteem; but also Balder, Tyr, and Heimdall are considered of great importance. Runes and scenes depicting Ragnarök decorate the pillars and inner walls, and a huge altar allows horses and sacred bulls to be sacrificed. Grooves in the stone funnel the blood into cups, to be sprinkled with willow branches, after which the meat is cooked in huge cauldrons in an adjoining room, and then distributed. But the sorcerer-kings of Uppsala also sacrifice people, too, in macabre rituals to strengthen the power of their sorceries.

Only women are allowed to live within the Uppsala temple, apart from during ceremonies. They take care of the temple, in particular washing the divine statues with water drawn from a sacred spring in the forest.

Svithjod has many cities; among the most important are the war ports of Helgo and Vendel. Sheltered in natural harbours, surrounded by rocks, the Svithjod ships are maintained and repaired here before departing on patrols of the Baltic. The *snekkjar* control the Svithjod coasts, and maintain a careful watch on neighbouring lands.

Hoggom is a city established fairly recently, which has flourished since King Egil decided to support the creation of Svithjod colonies in Finland. The city maintains ties to these expeditions, and keeps the trade routes open between the two coasts of the Baltic sea.

Jasberg stands on the northern shore of Lake Vanern, which stretches to the Kattegat and permits the kingdom of Svithjod to launch its ships to the sea. While the city is deep inland, Jasberg is still an important port, and ships of all kingdoms moor at its quays. The southern edge of Lake Vanern lies on the far side of the Gautar frontier, a disputed stretch of land which is both a bone of contention for the two kingdoms and the heart of the trade between them.

Country Organisation

The Svithjod kings can trace their line back to the god Frey, one of the most important Vanir. In this land he is known as Yngvir, and few are the villages and hamlets which do not have an altar to him. It was under this name that Frey founded Uppsala, and from his seed brought

forth the first representatives of the dynasty which still rules Svithjod today.

The royal clan of Svithjod bears the name of Yngling, and rules the kingdom from its sacred capital. Its kings perform strange sacred rites which mingle fertility and death, and their blood gives them the power to perform sorcery, making the people view them as equals of the gods. While the Ynglings were once also great warriors, this ability seems to have waned in recent generations, and the current Svithjod rulers are known for their sorcerous gifts. Should the gift manifest itself too weakly in one of their number, they instead rely on cunning and strategy; skilled politicians, the Svithjod kings have attained their goals by indirect means, their skill in politics, as in other domains, assuring glory for their armies and strength for their positions. The arrogance of the Svithjod kings is surpassed only by their power.

The king of Uppsala reigns over his domain with an iron hand. An ancestral enmity sets the Ynglings against the Skjoldungs of Denmark, and many wars have been fought between the two kingdoms, and many more are no doubt still to come.

Current Situation

The throne of Svithjod is currently occupied by Egil, of the royal Yngling line. He rules from his capital at Uppsala, but his authority does not extend far into Svithjod's lands, and most of the country is under the control of *jarls* of varying power, who have all sworn allegiance to him. However, while none dare overtly assert their independence, the political situation is complicated.

In the south, Svithjod lords try to forge alliances with princes of the Gautars, despite personal rivalries. Such alliances are fragile, and are quickly broken if the opportunity for loot or land presents itself.

In the north, the *jarls* fight amongst themselves, as they have for centuries, and only rarely pay tribute to the king in Uppsala or administer their lands. Most instead look towards the riches in furs, amber, and slaves which Finland offers. However, in poor seasons they must also face raids from the *jotuns* of the mountains at the edge of Midgard. They receive little aid from Uppsala in this conflict, and consequently are little inclined to respect the letter of their oath of allegiance.

Ottar is the king's brother. He rules over his own domain, a rich land on the eastern coast. He is a greedy and quarrelsome man, quick to anger. He would like to see one of his two sons, Asmund or Adils, ascend the Svithjod throne. But Egil also has a legitimate heir by the

name of Ali and, although still young, the throne is his by right. Ottar plots and plans, but is not foolish enough to defy his elder brother.

Egil is one of the sorcerer kings who rule the kingdom of Svithjod. The blood of the gods is sometimes felt more strongly in one member of the royal house than another, and Egil is particularly skilled in sorcery, surrounding himself with a court of *thulrs* and *volvas* who act as devoted priests of his personality cult, and mentors to develop his magical abilities.

But while Egil proclaims himself a demi-god, and insists his people worship him, he does not forget to sacrifice to the gods, and to Odin and Frey in particular.

Important figures of Svithjod

Egil, Sorcerer-King of Svithjod

The Svithjod lord Egil bears many of the marks of



the Yngling line. Tall and slender, his severe and emaciated face with its short beard prematurely ages him. His intense stare and sunken eyes seem to scrutinise those before him to the depths of their souls. King Egil speaks little, weighing his words carefully, often worryingly ambiguous. A silver circlet holds his golden hair off his face, braided with coloured threads, and also serves to hide the disfiguring scar which runs from the side of his head to his chin. Skalds paid by the king say this was caused in his youth, when he was only a prince, and that he won it gloriously on the battlefield; others say it is an unpleasant souvenir dealt the king by a slave in a stable. In any case, the king's already harsh features darken whenever it is mentioned.

King Egil is skilled at turning every situation to his advantage. He spends the Ynglings' considerable fortunes on his sumptuous wardrobe and even more magnificent furnishings, but he is also cunning and skilful speaker. No one ever questions his skill at oratory, and many clans have allied to him without bloodshed. Initiated into the secrets of sorcery, he adds these to his own persuasive skills.

Like all the Yngling line, King Egil is generous in his sacrifices to the gods. He presides over all ceremonies in the great Uppsala temple, and the blood of animals runs in rivulets from his silver and ivory dagger. Extremely superstitious, the king neglects nothing which might be an omen, and many *volvas* interpret his dreams.

As he grows older, Egil no longer leads his troops into battle as often as he did. His personal guard of twelve savage warriors, *svinfylkingar* followers of Frey, accompany him everywhere; but it is his brother Ottar who today leads the war expeditions commanded by the king of the Svear clan. However, King Egil should not be underestimated: his sword with its gold and mother-of-pearl encrusted pommel never leaves his side. While his bearing may not be as impressive as his younger brother's, he remains a formidable warrior who has proven his strength and courage in many battles.

Ottar

This imposing fellow, ill-tempered and taciturn, is younger than his kingly elder brother by a decade. Powerfully built and prone to flights of rage, Ottar is as expansive as his brother is restrained. Red-headed and heavily bearded, with fierce eyebrows and beady eyes, he seems in a constant fury.

Ottar has no gift for Yngling sorcery. He is a leader of men, a fierce warrior who loves nothing better than the clash of steel and the cries of warriors. Although he still holds the post of warlord for King Egil, he has few battles to fight; since ascending the throne, the king has

managed to bring stability to his lands. Further still, Egil seems to have little stomach for war beyond his borders, and his son, Ali, is a coward and a weakling in Ottar's eyes.

Ottar fears Egil, and never contradicts his king. However, deep down, he does not want to see Ali ascend the throne. To him, this would spell the beginning of the end for the kingdom of Svithjod. Egil is getting older, and the question of succession will have to be resolved sooner or later. For the moment, Ottar keeps an army of *hirdmen* to fight against pirates and the Gautar bandits who threaten Svithjod's trade; in his city of Helgo, he awaits the right moment to act.

Adils Ottarson

King Egil's second nephew is no doubt the child in whom the Yngling blood runs strongest.

His broad and ruddy face is hidden behind a long beard and thick hair the colour of amber; thick brows overhang unblinking eyes, so clear they seem made of ice, and a thin nose like the blade of a knife. Adils, despite his youth, already shows signs of stoutness which contrast with his great height and powerful silhouette. He wears only the finest clothes, and affects a great elegance, accentuated by quantities of golden jewellery. However, a sour smell follows him everywhere, and his hygiene leaves much to be desired.

When Adils speaks, the growl of his voice alone is often enough to intimidate whoever he is speaking to. In Svithjod, he is considered one of the best *thulrs* in the land, after his uncle. But while his subjects see him as a severe and grasping lord, they also admit he has an agile mind and fine feel for politics.

Like his brother Asmund, Adils has designs on the throne. But he knows very well that he is only third in line, after his cousin Ali and elder brother. But no matter—Ottar's youngest son is nothing if not patient. What is more, he has consulted the runes more than once, and knows the gods have a special destiny marked out for him in the history of Scandia. He has also divined that a battle for the throne may engulf Svithjod; and hopes that the two other claimants will exhaust themselves so that he, in his turn, will be able to seize the right moment to strike.

Adils does not doubt his exceptional destiny, and is ready to sacrifice to the gods every drop of blood required to see it fulfilled.

The Kingdom of Norway



Geography & Environment

To the west of powerful Svithjod, beyond the savage and unexplored mountains, the kingdom of Norway includes all the people who have settled on the seaward face of Midgard. More so than the other two kingdoms, it is a mosaic of independent clans and small sovereign states, which often war against each other.

The straits of Skagerrak connect with the Kattegat and separate southern Norway from Denmark. These two seas have become favoured places for piracy by the Norwegians. The entire western coast of their country faces the great western ocean; as far as the eye can see, the horizon ends at this huge stretch of water. Sailors say that those who sail towards the setting sun will eventually pass out of Midgard and into another world; many navigators have attempted to sail into this great unknown, but the few who return tell of nothing but the turbulent sea, violent storms, and sea monsters.

A multitude of islands dot the Norwegian coast, creating a formidable maze. The largest are home to fishing communities who, if opportunity presents, readily turn pirate and chase down merchant ships from other kingdoms; hailing from independent clans, Norway's king has little control over them.

Among these archipelagos, the isles of Lofoten lie just below the Arctic Circle, in the Vestfjord, a stretch of sea rich in fish which separates the islands from the mainland. The climate is relatively warm due to coastal currents, but it is also subject to rapid changes in weather which sailors have learned to dread. The main island, Vestvagoy, is covered in forests filled with game (deer, bears, beavers, and reindeer), and in arable areas, peasants cultivate a rough corn and grass for their cattle. However, the communities living here survive mostly on fishing, and hunting whale and seal. A little further south, the Vesteralen islands are similar, but with a larger population ruled by a *jarl* faithful to King Hring.

This region, however, is best known for the maelstrom.

The Norwegian coasts are particularly rugged, with many steep-sided fjords and sheltered coves, some going

going far inland. Some are home to villages and ports, from simple hamlets to towns of more than a thousand people. Many parts of the coast are uninhabited, and sometimes even unexplored.

The further one goes inland, towards the country's highlands, the more wild and unforgiving the landscape becomes. Most of Norway is mountainous. At first these are foothills separated by deep valleys, often impassible in winter, often a conifer-covered maze inhabited by savage tribes, hereditary enemies of the clans; deeper in, black mountain peaks devoid of vegetation climb above the clouds, covered in eternal snow and imposing glaciers. The few passes and paths through these mountains are perilous in summer and almost unusable in winter.

The northernmost reaches of Norway have no seasons, but merely a long freezing day in summer, and an endless, lethal night in winter. The Halogi, a Nordic tribe with a culture similar to other Norwegians, but fiercely independent, inhabit this inhospitable world.

They have adapted to their environment, and use reindeer to draw their carts. Though they worship the Aesir and Vanir, they also pay homage and sacrifice to many nature spirits; their *thulr* are often chiefs of their communities. Formidable warriors, it is said that *jotun* blood flows in their veins. Some become mercenaries in service of the Scandian monarchs, others are taken as slaves by the same during raids on their lands. Halogi slaves are known for their great strength and endurance, but also for their unbreakable spirit.

Cultivated areas in Norway are far less extensive than other kingdoms, due to both the lack of arable land and the severe climate. However, on the western coasts,

thanks to warm sea currents, the fields benefit from better conditions and provide an acceptable harvest. Livestock, fishing, and hunting comprise the most important elements of the kingdom's economy, and small communities tend to form around natural metal or mineral deposits (such as iron, copper, gold, silver, and precious stones). Unfortunately, such mines attract the attention of bandits in the back country, and often lie in the lands of savage mountain tribes.

Finally, Norway has many sacred sites. Groves, caves and natural chasms, mountains and natural springs, these legendary places give the Norwegian countryside a sense of magic and mystery.

Human Settlement

The lands around the Oslofjord are part of the domain of the king of Norway. He reigns from Fort Njord, a great building surrounded by mighty fortifications, but whose luxurious decorations and furnishings are as lavish as any in the Scandian kingdoms. The building and its walls dominate the small city of Oslo bordering the river which runs through its deep valley down to the sea, and Norwegian ships and merchant *knorr* constantly traverse its calm waters. To reach Oslo's long, stone-pillared quays, one must first pass the watchful warships of the king which patrol the bay.

Norway has few towns, and even the most significant have barely five thousand residents. Klepp and Maere, which face the great Western Ocean, are fishing centres; grey, austere cities, built on great open fjords which lead to the highlands. Their citizens exploit the forests, and their agricultural harvests are barely enough to feed them. Many hamlets lie inland, but rarely more than two days from the city. There, free men (*bondi*) eke out a meagre existence from their harvests, raising sheep and hardy horses adapted to the harsh climate.

Borre is the only merchant city in the kingdom. Open to the Skagerrak, every month it welcomes ships from all over Scandia. Here Danes, Jutes, men of Svithjod, and even Saxons and Balts come to trade for the kingdom's goods: amber, wood, silver and gold, furs, minerals and precious stones are all in high demand. Whale oil and meat are sold during hunting season, from spring to the end of summer. Borre is a cosmopolitan city, whose small population of less than two thousand swells three-fold during the twice yearly fairs, twenty days after the spring equinox and summer solstice.

In the highlands, officially still part of the kingdom, clans are spread over a wide area. There are no towns, and the villages are little more than isolated hamlets, all proud of their independence. While some tribes pay

The Maelstrom

Born from the meeting of two powerful currents (sea or river), a maelstrom is a powerful whirlpool capable of swallowing and crushing a ship. No one escapes its grip, and legends say that the maelstrom which lies between two of the Lofoten islands drags its victims to one of the Nine Worlds of Yggdrasil.

Lastly, these archipelagos are also infamous for the number of krakens which haunt their waters, of which the greatest and most powerful is the "Kraken-Lord of Lofoten".



The Half-Giants of Norway

Not all giants come from Jotunheim. Many have come to Midgard in the past, and others visit for reasons other than to fight those loyal to the Aesir and Vanir.

Norway's wild and mountainous places are particularly well-suited to such creatures. Rumours and travellers' tales say that giants settle in places humans find hard to reach, although few people can claim to have met one and survived to tell the tale.

In any case, the people of Norway have a great many men and women among their number of impressive build and uncommon strength, and it is commonly believed that such people have *jotun* blood running in their veins. During the time of myth period at the dawn of human-kind, giants wandered Midgard freely as they warred with the gods. Since then, the appearance of 'half-giants' remains rare, but nevertheless quite real. The phenomenon is more common in Norway, where it is not usually seen as a curse, unlike the other kingdoms of Scandia.



a tribute of sorts to the *jarl* at Fort Njord, just as many refuse to submit to him.

Norway comprises a great multitude of clans and independent domains. Each valley and fjord claims its autonomy, and sporadic conflicts break out between tribes which often raid each other. Some chiefs may make vague alliances if faced with dangers threatening their small kingdoms, but these rarely last. For several generations, by the command of the lords of the Oslofjord, new ties have been made between the clans, forged through the political marriages of young nobles. This practice has spread outwards from the royal domain and, little by little, has helped stabilise the kingdom. Norway's other *jarls*, and in particular the fierce Halogi, balk at adopting this practice. But, in view of the prosperity acquired by their ancient adversaries, signs of peace and more reliable trade links are spreading throughout the whole of western Scandia.

The kings of Norway reign from their domain at Fort Njord. Although worship of the sea god can be found everywhere, Norway's kings claim descent from the line of Thor. Considering their hot-blooded temperament, such a claim is difficult to deny.

In the mountains and deep forested valleys, savage peoples in primitive tribes continue to defy Norway's

rulers. They make their homes in the mountain chain which separates Norway from Svithjod, making land travel between the two all the more dangerous. Despite making many plans for war, the kings of the Oslofjord can never muster enough men, nor convince enough jarls, to put an end to this threat.

Important figures of Norway

Hring, King of Norway

Hring, King of Norway, is a giant of a man, with a thick beard and long curly hair which has attracted many women. Gifted with an incredible build, he towers a head or more over his *hirdmen* guard. He has a constitution equal to his appearance, arms and thighs like tree-trunks, and few men can keep up with him when feasting and drinking. Hring enjoys life, loving good food and mead, and always ready to hunt and celebrate. His thunderous laugh resounds through his long house, but those close to him know that this laughter can turn to the blackest rage at the drop of a hat.

While still young, Hring ascended the throne after his father's death in a war against one of his vassals. While Hring's clan clamoured for a vendetta, the new king accepted *wergild*, and wedded his younger sister to the leader of his ancient foes. Despite his excesses, King Hring is all too aware of the dangers he faces: Norway is a divided land which, despite its natural resources, could become easy prey for more powerful enemies. Aware that he could not unify the jarls who had become too accustomed to their independence, he continued his grandfather's plan to create a network of alliances through political marriages. Nevertheless, Hring remains a warrior, and is always eager to draw sword and lead the many campaigns he must against rebel nobles or savages at the frontiers. The sight of this colossus leading his troops is always terrifying; units of *berserkers* follow him into battle, although the king is wary of them, and does not include them in his personal guard. Hring affirms his kingly authority by the sword, but also works to establish a more peaceful form of politics during his reign. He has recently begun to search among his vassals and adversaries for a wife who can strengthen his hold on Norway's throne.

Starkad, the Skald

Starkad is said to be the best skald in Scandia; his songs are said to make kings weep and women faint. It's also said that misery dogs his steps. Rumours and legends



follow him everywhere, and Starkad never denies or confirms them.

Dark-eyed and raven-haired, with a finely trimmed beard, Starkad's fine hands and handsome face make him much desired by the women he meets. But the skald never stays anywhere for long, and leaves more sighs than hopes behind him. He has already wandered across Scandia three times over, and he is not yet thirty. Elegant and refined, Starkad is a seducer whose warm and calm voice gives his words unequalled gravitas. Wherever he goes, he always finds a modest home or lordly palace to welcome him, as his reputation is known to all. Starkad always looks morose, except when speaking about his art.

Starkad is said to be half *jotun*, and he is indeed very tall even for a Norwegian, standing over two metres in height. He incurred Thor's hatred from the moment of his birth; born with six hands, the Thunder God tore off four, but Odin adopted the child, decreeing he would live three lives of men. His son took umbrage at this and, unable to undo what his father had done, added a curse to each blessing: during each of his lives, the skald would commit an act of the worst cowardice. Odin gave him his best weapons, and Thor added that he would never hold land. Odin gave him victory in every battle, but Thor decided that he would always be wounded. The father of the Aesir made him the greatest skald, but the god of thunder cursed him to forget every song once he had sung it.

Starkad has been the victim of these blessings and curses, which together have made his life a living hell. Eternally prey to sorrow, unable to find a home though welcome everywhere, he wanders the world endlessly, as if carrying secrets too heavy to share.

Other Provinces



The Land of the Gautars

The lands south of Svithjod, facing Scandia, are inhabited by the Gautars, a Germanic people whose culture has been strongly influenced by the Norsemen.

The land of the Gautars, also known simply as "Gautar", has the misfortune of lying between two of the most powerful kingdoms of the northern lands. While

not in open war, the Ynglings and Skjoldungs battle for dominance over this land which separates their domains. Naturally, both dream of simply annexing the land, but lack the military resources.

The Gautars vacillate between alliance and defiance before these two powerful neighbours. Whenever possible they play one against the other, but more often their lands are the prize or arena of battles between these two royal lines.

However, the Gautars having nothing to be ashamed of when it comes to ferocity and war; they are more than capable of defending their kingdom and, although often raided, they have never been conquered.

Geography & Environment

The south and east of the land of the Gautars comprise great plains, the greater part of which is under cultivation. Great conifer forests cover any remaining terrain. An incredible number of lakes and rivers lie within the region, and human communities gather around them, using the waterways for travel and communication. The land of the Gautars benefits from its hundreds of miles of Baltic coastline, but the Gautars themselves tend to prefer the land over the sea. The wilderness, although still uninhabited in many places, is more developed than the other Scandian kingdoms; divided by roads and large areas of fields and farms, it is home to the majority of the Gautars. But it in the northern highlands where one of the most fertile parts of the country is found: the Vastergotland.

Around the royal domain, whose capital is the city of Vadstena, the country is calm and fertile. The city is home to about eight thousand people, living on a long, thin strip of land between the shores of a lake and steep hills. The buildings stretch for several leagues, and only the heart of the city is surrounded by a tough palisade with low watchtowers. The king's longhouse stands on the shore of the lake, and his ships are close by, beyond the small paved courtyard of the communal hall. Vadstena buzzes with activity; it is well known for its leatherworkers, and many nearby farms furnish it with raw materials. Vadstena is an excellent urban centre to live in.

Along the small strip of land bordering the Kattegat, the hills become more numerous, and an archipelago of rocky islands line the coast. In spring, hundreds of thousands of cranes migrate south and gather in the lakes of this region. It is close to Scania, part of Denmark, but the borders between the two kingdoms are unclear, and often the source of conflict.



Human Settlement

The prosperous city of Ahus, in the south of the kingdom, is the best-known glassmaking centre in Scandia. The *jarl* organises an annual fair, and the glass-making trade provides employment for much of the population. The city is crammed into a narrow fjord, and all the buildings close to the water contain glass workshops or artisans working in naval construction.

The Gautar population is very rural; peasants are more numerous than in other kingdoms, as are arable plains. The country exports part of its harvest, particularly wheat and barley, but also hemp, and an amber beer popular throughout Scandia.

The few cities are of modest size, rarely home to more than five or six thousand inhabitants. Large agricultural lands invariably surround these cities, and provide the food necessary to feed its citizens.

Although their land seems fairly safe, as long as one avoids the great forests, the Gautars uphold the same martial traditions as their neighbours – in fact, these neighbours are the main reason for them doing so. The land of the Gautars is caught between the three great Scandian kingdoms, and is often the place where they settle their conflicts. Pirates, *jarls* hungry for conquest

and slaves, marauding mercenaries or campaigning armies regularly assault the Gautars, and fortifications and watchtowers are a common sight along the coasts and on the most frequently used roads. In spite of these, every year the Gautars have to face war and pillaging on their lands.

In turn, the Gautars are no less vindictive. Scania is still a source of conflict between the kingdom and its neighbour, Denmark. The expansionist politics of Svithjod, as well as the nearby riches of Norway, mean that Gautar troops are constantly on the alert.

Important figures of the Gautars

Hugleik, King of the Gautars

Barely twenty years old, Hugleik, son of Aegthjof, has held the Gautar throne for three winters. His father was recognised as a powerful sovereign who, during his reign, managed to maintain a semblance of unity among the region's clans.

Small but stocky, his square face framed by long blond hair and a short beard, Hugleik is fairly reserved in character. He does not have the political skill of his

predecessor, and although surrounded by valorous and wise councillors who for the most part also served under Aegthjof, the new Gautar king is hesitant, and timid in his decisions. Many *jarls* have used this to declare their independence from his centralised rule. Although they still consider themselves to belong to the same people, the Gautars are now only united when threatened by their powerful neighbours.

Before his death, Aegthjof had hoped to invade Scania, that Danish thorn in the Gautars' side. His death, and Frodi's ascension to the Danish throne, has made this invasion impossible. However, Huggleik's counsellors are still pushing him to continue the campaign, to bring glory to his reign, confirm his power to the other kingdoms, and to rally all the Gautars under his banner. Out of all his counsellors, only the influential Bjovulf advises caution, considering war with Denmark, Svithjod, or Norway could more easily bring ruin than supremacy to the kingdom. Huggleik listens carefully to the Gautar hero, and while he dreams of conquest and leaving his mark on history, he thinks more of lands far beyond the Scandian frontiers.

Finland



Beyond the kingdoms of Norway and Svithjod, far to the northeast, dwell a multitude of tribes generally referred to as the *Finns* or *Sami*.

These people are very different to their Baltic counterparts. For the most part they are nomadic tribes and reindeer herders, with no real political organisation, except for their great tribal convocations, where they meet to celebrate their rites and ceremonies. The Finns do not build towns, except for a few sedentary villages on the coasts, or on fertile plains where they can graze their herds all year round.

Their language has nothing in common with Old Norse, the *dansk tunga*, again setting them apart from the other inhabitants of Midgard. The Sami have their own tongue, but frequent invasions have pushed some of them to use the invader's tongue, particularly among those of mixed blood. Their physical appearance is also different to the north men: smaller, stocky, with round faces, slanting eyes, and high cheekbones, their hair is almost invariably golden.



Bjovulf

Bjovulf is a Gautar hero, made famous through countless Scandian sagas and corresponding to the "Beowulf" of the unfinished Anglo-Saxon poem, which dates from somewhere between the 8th and 11th centuries. His name means "bear", or (in literal translation) "bee wolf". A paragon of bravado and wisdom, in several texts Bjovulf is King Huggleik's nephew, who often listens and takes counsel with him.

He is also famed as a legendary figure of great vigour and endurance, and a slayer of monsters, trolls, and sea monsters.

This is the Bjovulf we will be using in *Yggdrasill*.



The Sami are not in the least bit expansionistic, and their culture does not drive them to war, but rather to a life in harmony with the nature which feeds and protects them. As a result, their shamans, well versed in ritual magic and ancestor cults, have a reputation for great power, and magic – both animist and divine – fills Sami culture. It is the domain of women, who have a powerful place in society. The Norse who dealt with the Sami tell of the terrible spells they cast on their enemies, and indeed the Finnish nomads seem to rely more on their spells than on their weapons, more often made of flint than iron, in battle against the warriors of Scandia.

However, these defences seem insufficient to deter pillagers, attracted by the riches in furs, leather, and slaves to be gained in Finnish raids. Colonies from the three Scandian kingdoms are settling these inhospitable lands, pushing the Finnish peoples further north and east. Most are no more than trading posts and advanced forts designed to organise further expeditions into the heart of the country. But, more and more, people think of carving out their own domain in this land where everything seems up for grabs.

Finland's nomads have not yet tried to drive off these newcomers, lacking both the sense of unity and martial capacity to resist them. Most Finnish clans prefer to pay tribute to the invaders and continue to live according to their traditions.

The Finnish landscape is much like that of Scandia, at least on the coast: fjords and sheltered bays lead to the sea; rivers cross narrow plains towards the mountains; forests cover almost everything, wild and mysterious.

Beyond, towards the unexplored interior, the familiar terrain gives way to immense steppes dotted with rocky hills and peaks like monuments to the gods. This is the land of the Sami, and where they live for most of the year, returning only to the warmer coastal climes in winter. This inland region is also inhabited by wolves, and local legends tell of monsters and other supernatural creatures haunting the steppe.

Other Regions, Other People



The Saxons

The Saxons live in heavily forested and marshy lands to the south of Jylland. They speak mostly Old Norse, although their tribal dialects have enough local differences to make understanding them difficult. There are also strong Germanic influences in the Saxon tongue.

The Saxon tribes extend mostly to the south, and rarely come into contact with the three kingdoms; however, some independent tribes settle along the Baltic. Although the Saxons count many fierce fighters among their number, they do not have the power necessary to threaten their better organised and more numerous neighbours.

Also, like the kingdom of the isle of Als, whose king claims to be Odin's descendant, Saxon communities prefer to ally with the closest *jarl*, while jealously guarding their independence. Saxon banners usually use red and blue in their motifs, giving a semblance of unity to a people divided between would-be kings and local warlords.

Saxon kings chose their own heirs, and it is fairly common for a woman to be named. More than one Danish or Svithjod chief has mistakenly thought them to be easy prey, assuming a queen to be weaker than a king.

The Saxons possess a treasure envied by the north: merchants from these countries bring barrels of wine, rare and highly prized in the Scandian kingdoms. More than one raid has been staged to seize these alcoholic riches.



The Witch-Queens of Finland

No warrior from Scandia can claim to have seen these women, but a persistent rumour, hinted at by the Finns themselves, claims they exist. They are said to be the most powerful sorceresses of their people, a group of three, five, or seven witches initiated into the secrets of the world and the gods. Although they are called queens, the Sami do not appear to receive any commands from them, and live life as they please.

The Witch-Queens hold no court, instead moving with their servants like their followers move with their flocks. But the claims of the treasures, gold, and goods they possess intrigue many Norsemen; when the Sami are questioned, they point to the farthest east as the queens' abode. All expeditions there return confused, if they return at all.

The terrible storms, heralded by a lowering black sky, which sometimes affect this region, are attributed to these invisible queens.



Angles and Jutes

Jutland is marked by rugged lands, abrupt hills, long plateaus, and deep valleys, once the coasts have been left behind. The Mollehoj, at the heart of the kingdom, is little more than a hill higher than the rest.

A long low wall, divided by bastions, runs along the southern frontier of Jutland, known as the Wall of Kings. Built during the reigns of several sovereigns, it is meant to keep at bay the savage Germanic tribes beyond.

Unfortunately, through lack of care and interest, this defensive wall is in a deplorable state, and the few isolated villages in the vicinity would do little to hold back an invading army. For now, these villages deal only with small raids, but there are rumours that trolls may soon join the enemy hordes.

The town of Ribe lies on the western coast of Jutland, facing the Western Ocean. It is home to the king of the Jutes, and hosts a seasonal fair which attracts merchants from every part of the Northern Kingdoms. The city of Ludenborg, on the eastern coast of Jutland, is the most important Danish colony on the peninsula.

Daily Life

Despite regional differences, the three great Northern Kingdoms, as well as most of the provinces surrounding them, share many cultural elements; enough, at least, so they can be considered the same civilisation. Together, they inhabit the lands of Midgard; sharing familiar ways of life, they act as much like potential allies as hereditary enemies. This chapter introduces many details of the everyday lives of these people for the Game Master to include them in play.

Organisation of the Northern Kingdoms



Family and Clan

*"Best have a son
Though he be late born
And before him the father be dead:
Seldom are stones on the wayside raised
Save by kinsmen to kinsmen.*

-- Havamal, stanza 72

Long before the rise of kingdoms and nobility, family and clan were the backbone of Norse society. Faced with a hostile environment, these fundamental ties offered the best chance of survival.

Foreign visitors travelling through Scandia for the first time may think the people they meet are deeply individualistic. Each seems to think first of his own interest, and personal conflicts seem numerous and permanent between members of the same community. But, under this apparently uncompromising egotism, the Norsemen define themselves above all as members of a family. In their eyes, this is the absolute foundation of their identity.

When introducing themselves, after giving their names, most Norse mention their lineage (sons add the suffix "-son" and daughters "-dottir") and their clan. Only then do they mention their king or any loyalty to a kingdom, and even then only if it is of interest to those they are speaking to (for example, to justify a raid on a province warring against his own sovereign).

This feeling of belonging to a family group is vital to understanding relationships in this society characterised by violence and the strong personalities of those who lead it. It explains the concept of vendetta, and the problems it constantly causes. A sacred tie unites the members of a family, and the betrayal of one of their number results in extreme reactions, calling for the death of the perpetrators or the destruction of their line. Children are expected to take revenge on their parents' killers; an offence caused to a family member drags in all the

other members to demand amends. Although a *wergeld* payment is usually enough to appease the wronged party in most cases, many sagas relate the incredible lengths some go to to avenge a family member. Apart from the epic nature of these sagas, and the exciting way they are presented to their audiences, these tales always have a tragic dimension – a form of warning which almost all Scandians studiously ignore.

An extended family forms a clan. Although not all clan members are directly related, they can usually trace their lines back to a common ancestor linking them closely together. This is often a heroic or legendary figure, sometimes even supernatural, to whom everyone in the clan traces their ancestry. The founding tales where this ancestor appears are often the root of many enmities, alliances, and traditions, which no one questions. Belonging to a clan is vital, because it is through the clan that family ties are expressed. However, it's rare for a *thing* to allow an entire clan the right of vendetta: the clan has more of a social function, while the family forms the basis of an individual's identity.

Clans can combine to form larger communities – villages, towns, provinces, and kingdoms – and ultimately define the Scandian peoples – Danes, men of Svithjod, Norwegians, Gautars, etc.

The Social Hierarchy: Jarl, Bondi, and Thrall

*"Growing up there,
Raised by the Jarl;
Training horses,
Carving shields,
Fletching arrows,
Making spears of ash.
-- Rigsthula, stanza 42*

The society of the Northern Kingdoms divides its members into three distinct classes of very different sizes. This structure is found everywhere, and more or less matches the clan system; a family almost always occupies a position in the social hierarchy roughly equivalent to its importance to the clan. Even within a given class, there are differences based on the personal wealth of individual members.

At the top of Norse society are the nobles, composed exclusively of free men, and the richest and most powerful families. They owe their position to an ancestor recognised as a clan founder, and who has passed into legend as a mythical hero.

Nobles own most of the community's land, and control most of its wealth. They occupy a dominant position in society, and their voices carry great weight in decisions made by the *thing*. Nobles have a great many titles, depending on their personal wealth and holdings and the number of men directly dependent upon them (such as farmers, artisans, *hirdmen*). A simple isolated village might have no more than a simple chief, from the local nobility and often from a single ruling family. A *jarl* who leads a clan is more important; he has the means to raise and maintain a militia of free men trained as warriors – the *hirdmen*. *Jarls* sometimes recognise the supremacy of a king, who is generally the most powerful or most charismatic of their number. A king's authority over his fellows is largely symbolic unless he can back it up with force. When a king's position is more solid, as in Svithjod or Denmark, he can appoint his own vassals from his kingdom's nobility as heads of his provinces or bestow upon them the title of *jarl*.

Many conflicts between clans aim to unite communities under the same banner, or to conquer a neighbouring territory to ensure a king's power. But the clan system, the mentality of this proud and independent people, as well as the piecemeal distribution of land amongst a multitude of noble families, all conspire against any possibility of unifying the whole of the land into a single and indivisible kingdom. The undisciplined Scandian nobility must be controlled by force, fear, family ties, or ambition, in order for a king to remain on his throne.

Most people in the Northern Kingdoms belong to the class of free men (*bondi*). These include all families who contribute to a community's day-to-day survival: farmers, artisans, merchants, fishermen, sailors, foresters, and so on. Often, *bondi* engage in more than one of these occupations: a peasant may become a woodcutter during the winter, and a tanner may raise his own sheep.

The *bondi* enjoy all the rights of a citizen and a member of the clan they belong to. They may participate and vote during a *thing*, demand justice and reparations from a *jarl*, start a family, and own possessions and slaves in their own right. Even the poorest members generally have at their disposal a stretch of land large enough to support them and their family, but they also work the lands owned by the nobles, in exchange for the payment of a tribute, usually comprising part of the produce of that land, paid to its owner. Each *bondi* may also be called upon to fight in the defence of his village, or on expeditions organised by the *jarl*. All men are trained to fight from a very young age.

In the *bondi* social class, the rights and status of men and women are much the same. Although women are not permitted to participate in the *thing* except in exceptional circumstances or if accompanied by a man, they hold the keys to the hearth, and have the final say in



decisions concerning the family.

Lastly, slaves (*thralls*) occupy the lowest class of society, made up mostly of prisoners of war captured in raids on rival clans. Other thralls are enslaved as punishment for crimes committed against community members. A thrall may be given the right to start a family (in a union between slaves, of course), the children from which belong to the same social class as their parents. Thralls possess nothing – neither goods nor rights. However, although there are exceptions, the life of a *thrall* is not a hellish existence; a well-treated slave is more productive, and the Norse are not so stupid as to pointlessly destroy a human being, no matter how servile, if he can still be of use to them and their clan. Unfortunately, however, thralls are usually the first to feel the impact in times of trouble.

In most clans, the law permits an owner to free a slave. He must first gain permission to do so from the *thing*, although such a demand is rarely refused; a slave is usually only freed after he has performed a vital service to the clan, his master, or the gods, and one which everyone recognises. Bravery in combat and loyalty to the point of self-sacrifice are the two virtues most appreciated in this respect.

Clan members obey the *jarl* or king who leads them. The land belongs to the nobility, and the peasants work the lands allotted to them. Among free men, there are three groups which do not participate in this direct economic relationship: sailors (fishermen or navigators), craftsmen, and traders. *Skalds*, *berserkers*, and *hirdmen* are also free men but, although under the command of the clan chief, their particular status sets them apart from the rest of the social hierarchy. They remain economically dependent on the *jarl*, who hires their services and ensures their survival.

Lastly, *volva* and sorcerers often play a separate role within a community: the former are usually married to a *bondi* and therefore run their homes; the latter may also be foresters, healers, herders, and so on. Even those these occupations may be somewhat set apart from the mainstream of Scandian society, they are nevertheless still bound by its laws and obligations.

The Nobility and the People

The Scandian nobility occupy the dominant position within a clan, economically, militarily, and politically.

They own most of the land farmed by the free men. From this landed wealth, they often extract enough riches to maintain their rank and, in addition, devote themselves to their other concerns: war, and politics.

The *jarl* is a clan chieftain who answers only to his king. His sovereign recognises, or entrusts him with, his rule and protection of part of the kingdom. In his domain, this lord benefits from the same prerogatives, rights, and duties as the monarch whose vassal he is. Moreover, many regions ruled by a *jarl* – generally those in the areas most cut-off from the seat of power – possess a very real independence, and render only a nominal allegiance: their relationship with the king resembles more an alliance than anything else.

While nobles enjoy superior status in society, they must, in exchange, fulfil certain obligations to their communities. They are its principle protectors. A *jarl's* prestige depends on four things: the renown of his blood-line; the strength of his personal guard (the *hirdmen* he employs from his own wealth); the size and richness of his home; and finally his generosity (which generally corresponds to the number of guests he can welcome in his hall).

The extent of the lands possessed and administered by a *jarl* are very much a side issue in this respect. In fact, a chieftain possessing only modest lands, but with followers skilled in fighting and sailing, may achieve greatness through courage and force of arms. His renown will grow, and be undoubtedly greater than a king who passively rests on the riches of his lands.



Evocative Epithets

Often, when a *jarl* becomes famous enough for the skalds to sing of his exploits, or when he is acclaimed king, it is traditional for his name to be associated with an epithet to frighten the spirits. Thus are remembered Svein the Killer, Olav Red-sword, and Thorgréd Iron-Axe.

This custom occurs amongst the *bondi*, also. In addition to their family name, the best-known and most-recognised members of a community sometimes gain a nickname or epithet reflecting a virtue (the Brave...), a skill (Iron-Forger...) or an idiosyncrasy or feature (the Lame...).



The God-Kings

In Scandia's northernmost lands, the tradition of the "god-kings" still persists amongst the most archaic tribes. Scholars and skalds, however, relate that the tradition still influences even peoples such as the Svear of Svithjod and their sorcerer-kings, most of whom claim divine ancestry. According to the tradition, kingship is hereditary, and based on descent not from a mythical hero, but rather from the gods themselves. Needless to say, such peoples, amongst whom savagery and fanaticism reign, receive only distrust and hostility from other clans.



Norse custom states that the children of the nobility should be raised with lower-status clan members. In this way, future rulers learn about the lives of ordinary people, and establish ties to their fellows which will be of use when they come into their power.

The king possesses several residences across his domain. He tours between them throughout the year, gathering news from the different provinces and hearing complaints, ensuring his peoples' well-being and loyalty.

The Role of Women

*"I counsel thee, Stray-Singer,
accept my counsels,
They will be thy boon if thou obey'st them,
They will work thy weal if thou win'st them:
Seek not ever to draw to thyself
In love-whispering another's wife."
-- Havamal, stanza 114*

The women of the north are highly independent. Many tasks fall entirely under their charge. Married women, recognisable for wearing their hair in a bun, hold the keys to the home, and are responsible for all decisions pertaining to the house and its functions. Sewing, weaving, and cooking are among their skills, as well as certain domestic crafts. But they are also in charge of slaves, and the education of the children, and manage the family's livestock.

In many respects, women have the same rights as men. They may own property, and are subject to the same laws, which permits them to demand justice of the *jarl*. Although they may not participate in the *thing*, nothing prevents wives from giving advice to their husbands. In practical terms, women play an important role in Scandian society: beyond their traditional roles, running the home and educating children, Scandian women participate in politics and the decisions which shape the communities in which they live. This role becomes more significant still when the men of the clan go to war or depart on expeditions; as a result of such absences, women have become aware of their power, and have no desire to relinquish it again.

Older women are respected for their wisdom and their knowledge born of long experience. Many women die young, mostly due to the high mortality rate during childbirth.

Of course, the daughters of the nobility receive a better education, as befits their rank. While they have to get used to the usual tasks involved in running a home, they must also learn everything they need to know about being the wife of a *jarl*, to be worthy of their status. Rules of etiquette, dance, and embroidery are also part of this education. Finally, and particularly if there are no male heirs, daughters are often raised as if they were boys. Although this meets with mixed reactions within the community, such young women train with weapons and study the geography and politics of Midgard.

While young noblewomen may seem to benefit from such advantages, one must remember that they are destined for political marriages with little regard for their own desires. Such marriages are sometimes against their will, and may lead to tragedy, such as when the husband of a noblewoman decides to launch an attack on his wife's family.

However, although a free man may only have one legitimate wife, he may take as many concubines as he wants under his roof, without his wife being able to stop him, on condition that he is able to maintain them all, and his wife remains head of the household – that is, the one who holds the keys. Children from these unions are illegitimate and cannot inherit, unless their father legitimises them before the *thing*. In everyday life, few women complain: marriage is usually an arrangement between two families, not a matter of love. A concubine represents an extra pair of hands to care for the children and carry out household chores, and provide the husband with nightly company which the wife, too often pregnant or too old, might rather avoid.

Social Conventions

*"Fed and washed
Should one go to the thing."
-- Havamal, stanza 61*

Law and Justice

Every year a great assembly is held, called the *thing*. All free men in the community gather in a great open space or a hill large enough for all to participate. The meeting takes place in a circle, so there is no notion of precedence among the attendees. During the *thing*, they debate ordinary and extraordinary problems, individual and public. The participants punish criminals and decide on new laws. The *thing*, beside its major legislative role, allows the most distant members of a community to gather together and share news; it's also frequently an excuse for private and public festivities. Often, traders and craftsmen use the *thing* as an opportunity to set up stalls around the sacred space.

At the level of the kingdom, the monarch can also call such an assembly, officially consisting of the *jarls* under his command. This meeting is also held, traditionally, once a year, usually on a sacred day. However, these formal meetings are very rare, and only meet at the king's command.

Laws are not written, but are orally transmitted within the clan. A member of the community has the duty of remembering them during each meeting of the *thing*. Having learned these laws by heart, his exhaustive knowledge generally makes this figure a valued counsellor to lords and kings.

The *wergeld*, which literally means "the man price", is a sum of money demanded as reparation for the murder of an individual, or other grave crimes. It is an important custom which allows many problems to be resolved before they become even greater. It is a "fine" paid to the victim or his family; in the case of a killing, the amount paid depends on the status of the person killed. Moreover, the amount payable in *wergeld*, according to the traditional definition, also permits ransoms to be easily calculated.

A vendetta, or right of vengeance, is a complicated and dangerous tradition. No chieftain can refuse it to one of his subjects: it is used to settle a quarrel between two families or (more rarely) two clans. A vendetta, as it is commonly recognised, must be declared before the *thing*: it is invoked in the face of an insult, or the murder of a member of the offended party. From that moment, the two camps wage a personal war, which may last months, even years, and in which many people may be killed.

When peace finally becomes once again thinkable, and assuming neither side has been wiped out, the *thing* is once again called, and determines which of the two sides must pay compensation to the other for damages done.

In addition to these assemblies, the *jarl* also has complete authority to pronounce sanctions against those responsible for crimes: only the most serious are submitted to the *thing*. Punishments usually take the form of heavy fines, paid once again to the wronged party.

However, the most serious crimes do not benefit from this degree of clemency. Life in the north is hard, and there is no place for thieves and parasites. Thieves are usually hanged or decapitated and put on show; banishment awaits those who refuse to pay their fines, or who are responsible for crimes against the clan. Insults and defamations are considered serious crimes (see the adjacent box).

Those malefactors who have been banished (known as *vargr* – wolf, criminal, banished, outlaw) may not receive shelter, and all doors are closed to him: sheltering or feeding a condemned man is a crime in itself. Without a home, unable to find a clan, banishment is often a death sentence, and the condemned may be killed without it being a crime.

A banishment may be only temporary (from as little as three months, to as much as twenty years); the period may be reduced by family intercession on behalf of the banished man before the *thing*, or even extended by the family of his victim.

Inheritance

Social positions are hereditary according to the law of the thing. Inheritance, if necessary, can be passed through the mother. However, tradition dictates that the children inherit equal parts of the parents' goods; all legitimate children of the same father benefit from this. Of course, this equitable system becomes very problematic once the stakes become higher, and therefore, among the nobility, it is customary for the *jarl* to designate which of his sons inherits his title. If he has no male heir, his son-in-law inherits.

Likewise, all the children of a king may aspire to their father's throne, without no priority to age. Quarrels over succession are common, and more than one kingdom or clan has seen its chieftain take control amidst family betrayal and brother's blood.

After all, anyone who can claim some degree of legitimacy, gather sufficient supporters, and then arm them, can win a throne.

If the king or *jarl* dies without an heir, it is the *thing*



The Seriousness of Insults

Attacking the honour of a free man and his family and clan by defamation or insult is a serious crime in Scandian society, and one which attacks the victim's *mannhelt* (see page 8). Laws are very strict on this subject, and transgressing them gives the insulted party the right to avenge himself by killing the one who threatened his honour. This can also be an effective way to challenge an enemy, by using verbal barbs, often poetic in nature.

There are many examples of such serious insults in literature (in a form of poetry known as *senna*). In generally it is best to hold one's tongue, however, as this kind of attitude can result in family or clan vendettas. Defamation has nothing in common with a simple dispute between drunks.

The most frequent insults involve accusations of passive homosexual conduct, real or imaginary (or even supernatural, such as changing into a female animal and bearing young), lack of respect for family vengeance, practising activities reserved for women or slaves (dealing with domestic animals, spinning wool), or comparing the insulted party to an outlaw (a corpse-feeding wolf, for example).



– the assembly of either the *jarls*, or the free men of the community – which decides in an extraordinary meeting who will inherit. The *thing* comes to a decision by a show of hands: its choice is usually (but not always) from the ranks of nobility. An election of this nature is an occasion for the tangled alliances, intrigues, and power games between the various factions come to the fore.

The Land of the Gods

The Northern Kingdoms share the same religious beliefs and the same pantheon of many gods. The Aesir, gods of the sky, and the Vanir, gods of earth and water, are everywhere in their culture. They are much like men in their weaknesses and desires, but also have great powers. The names of the gods are invoked in many circumstances, in particular during war and important events (such as marriages, births, and harvests): warriors howl the names of Tyr and Thor in battle, the wisdom of Odin is called on when serious decisions are to be made, Freya and Frey preside over sowing seasons and harvests, Njord is called on to be merciful to sailors leaving port...

To attract the favour of the gods, sacrifices must be

offered. Sacrifices of animals, goats, horses, or bulls are dedicated to them (see *blot*, page 22); and, in very grave cases, human sacrifices may even be made, usually of prisoners of war. Blood is considered the most sacred gift. It is not possible to deny the existence of the gods; to do so would be to doubt one's own *mannhelt*. Like the gods, people belong to the sacred world, bound together by Fate.

Fate

Three sisters, the Norns, preside over the fate of the universe. Sitting at the foot of the tree Yggdrasill, they weave the threads of fate for every living being. Their shadow falls on every newborn; the Norns see all, and begin to weave a new thread to trace the child's future. Their decision, once made, cannot be changed. The Norsemen are stoic in the face of fate and the blows it strikes them; imposed by superior and inaccessible beings upon them, as it is on the gods, they might as well accept it. Even if their end is already written, there is no greater glory than facing the inevitable, embracing one's fate, even (and especially) if it means death. Scandians are not a fatalistic people; on the contrary, they accept their place in the world, and in so doing glorify their names and that of their family as much as they can.

After Death

Funeral rites are formal; existence does not end with death. Different kingdoms await the dead, depending upon how they lived. For valorous warriors, fallen in combat, carried away by the Valkyries, the best awaits: Odin welcomes them in Valhalla, his golden palace, and receives them at his table for an eternal feast. They form the ranks of his armies, called to fight in the eternal war in the service of the gods. Others, particularly celibate young women, sorcerers, and *volva*, go to dwell in the abode of Freya, a place of peace and serenity, but also of enchantment.

In contrast, those unlucky ones who die of illness, or who have stained their lives with crimes against honour, depart for Niflheim. There they join the legions of the goddess Hel, harsh queen of this sinister domain, plunged in a perpetual freezing fog.

Heroes and Sagas

Brave warriors who fall in combat are honoured by the skalds, and become the heroes of epic sagas.

For skalds, poets, magicians, and orators, there are many occasions to bring to life the exploits of mythical

heroes. The Northern Kingdoms, despite the efforts of the clans, remain a hostile place. As soon as one leaves the lands controlled by men, one comes across marauding monsters and other fearsome creatures. Spirits of nature and invisible forces wander the world of the living. While some are benevolent, such as the few *alfar* who help men reap good harvests and bear strong children, others are far less helpful. Winter wolves, trolls, and giants bring death to those who cross their path; such meetings, which generally end in epic battles, are celebrated in the sagas. A saga follows the exploits of a hero or family. As well as their entertainment factor, these tales transmit the essential values of Scandian culture: the importance of destiny, family ties, and individual heroism.

Culture & Civilisation



Lifestyle

*"Most blest is he
Who lives free and bold
And nurses never a grief,
For the fearful man
Is dismayed by aught,
And the mean one
Mourns over giving."
-- Havamal, stanza 48*

Norse warriors do not aim for a peaceful life. All know that their names will survive them should they win enough glory. But, most of all, according to the myths, a warrior who has proved his bravery and fallen in combat will rejoin the gods in Valhalla. There he will feast at their table, waiting for the day of the ultimate battle when he will bear arms again – Ragnarok.


Many Scandians die young. War and the hostile the environment are the main causes. A person who survives to the venerable age of fifty is considered a sage; his knowledge and experience benefits the community, but only as long as he remains hale and healthy. When the old man becomes weak or falls ill, he becomes a burden to his family and, in some clans by the Arctic Circle and

amongst the Sami, old people go voluntarily into exile so as not to be a burden. By departing into the wilderness, they go to certain and honourable death.

Relations between clans, kingdoms, even families, are founded on force and brutality. Everyone knows they may only reserve their love, loyalty, and honesty for their own family, chieftains, and close friends; all other representatives of humanity are either possible enemies or potential prey.

Superstitions are always uppermost in the minds of Scandians. The gods, but also fate and the environment, constantly provide signs. The *volva*, capable of reading runes and interpreting omens, are accorded high status and fearful respect. The powers of the *thulr*, privileged intermediaries between men and the universe, between living and dead, are also greatly sought after, even though they are less integrated in the community, and practise more questionable rites.

There are no schools for children. Education is left to the family, particularly the mother in the first few years. Girls help their mother at home, learning sewing, weaving, and cooking; boys work in the fields, or in their father's workshops to learn the family trade. They




The Holmgang - a Ritualised Duel

A duel is an excellent way to end a quarrel (a question of honour, a demand for restitution, debts, avenging a parent, blood brother, or friend) so it does not cause a vendetta. The death of one of the duellists is not considered murder.

Three to seven days after the insult which provoked the challenge, the two adversaries meet in a space fenced off with four hazel rods, where a piece of cloth is often spread out over the place of combat. Witnesses may act as judges, and before the duel conditions and permitted weapons are decided upon. The duel then begins, and continues until one or both participants are unable to fight, due to crippling injury or death.

If one of the two adversaries does not attend the duel, or refuses the challenge, they are considered to be *nidhing* – without honour, unworthy of being a man – and this may, depending on the significance of the duel, condemn him to banishment. It is a very serious offence.



learn to ride horses if the family can afford them, and fight with wooden swords and shields. Girls join in these games, too, so as to be able to protect their homes. Lastly, in most coastal communities, the children are trained in navigation; in small boats, they learn how to set and trim the sails, as well as how to prepare an expedition.

Pride is without a doubt the foremost quality defining the men and women of the north. They adhere to a code of honour which rules over many of their actions. They also maintain an oral tradition which varies from place to place. There are certain constants in behaviour: an accusation of theft, cheating, or cowardice is seen as a direct attack on the person's honour; loyalty and courage are virtues prized above all others; a warrior who feels insulted may demand his honour be restored by a duel. Often, such ritual combat ends with the death of one or both of the combatants.

In questions of honour, courage, or a simple quarrel, it is common for two warriors to challenge each other to a duel. The insulted party calls out his adversary with "Strike my helm!", or insults him, calling him an inferior, or some other intolerable offence. This can be resolved in two ways: either an official holmgang duel (see adjacent box) taking place three to seven days after the provocation; or an informal duel, an *einvigi*, without judge, oaths, or rules, which may result in many acts of vengeance.

According to the code of hospitality, a traveller may request food, dry clothes, and a place for the night. Depending on the host's means, this may be no more than a vegetable soup and a straw pallet in the stable, but it is better than spending the night outside without food. Only those who have been banished, marked by infamy, are refused such generosity; abetting a condemned person is a serious crime. In exchange for the hospitality, the guest brings news, and helps with chores about the house.

Social Rites

Marriage is a clan affair, an alliance between two families of the same social class. A man wanting to marry must ask permission of the bride's father, and will pay him tribute, usually in the form of money or goods. The father may refuse the contract, but if he accepts, the future wife has no right to refuse, and must agree to the union. Sometimes she is often not even told until negotiations have finished. Some clans also require the *jarl* to give his approval for a union to go ahead. Sex between the couple, like marriage, is likewise rarely a matter of love. However, infidelity by a spouse is a crime against the family, and is recognised by the laws of the *thing*.

Widows have a great deal more liberty, as long as their father is no longer alive. They need ask no one's




The Marriage of Heidh and Ivar

The *jarl* gave his permission, and the young woman's father did as well. It was an honour for the family to marry their daughter to a *hirdman* so close to their lord. As custom decreed, the bride spent her last day among her friends, before leaving, dressed in new clothes and crowned with flowers and leaves, for her husband's house. Her husband's parents laid down new rushes in the house and bedroom. Along the way, accompanied by the village *volva*, bride stopped to place a crown of flowers by a stone dedicated to Freya.

The ceremony, on a Friday to honour Frigga, Odin's wife, and presided over by the *godi*, takes place in the evening. It is short and solemn; the marriage is quickly consecrated to the gods, along with a sacrifice. The festivities begin once night has fallen. The servants have lit a great fire before the longhouse, and all the villagers are invited to rejoice with the new couple. The banquet lasts long into the night, beer and mead flowing in torrents. The husband helps his wife over the threshold, since if the wife trips it is a very bad omen.

According to tradition, Heidh left the communal room first. Accompanied by her husband's friends, or at least six witnesses, bearing torches, she heads to their bedroom. There, they speak in favour of the husband in order to attract the blessing of the spirits on the new couple, promising them happiness and a long life. Ivar will drink and celebrate a while longer; he will be finding it hard to walk when he rejoins Heidh.

In the morning, before their door, they will find gifts left by the guests, among them a gift from the *jarl*.



permission to marry again, a custom which means single-parent families are avoided.

Divorce is a right accorded men and women alike; they may demand reparation from the *thing* by claiming their spouse treats them badly. If the assembly recognises the validity of their argument (from witnesses), divorce is permitted, and the wife retains half of the couple's belongings and the upbringing of the children; if without children she regains her dowry. Custom allows a woman

who wants to divorce her husband to throw his weapons and belongings out of the house; the husband may then not return until the *thing* denies or approves the divorce. In some cases, the wife waits for her husband on the threshold, accompanies him to their bed where, before witnesses, she gives him the reasons she wants to divorce him. The unfortunate husband must then leave the house and await the judgement of the *thing*.

Sometimes, husband and wife are in agreement about ending the marriage, particularly if the union is sterile, and each regains their belongings. The wife then goes back to her father's home if he is still alive.

It is important to note that divorce is rare. Firstly, because if the husband and wife's families are in disagreement, it could result in vendetta; but also, the harsh lives the Scandians lead means a married couple finds life easier than unmarried individuals. The single man is looked down on in this society founded upon the importance of family.

While giving birth, the women crouches and the baby is first laid on the ground, then presented to the father, who examines it. If the child seems to be healthy and robust, he lifts it towards the sky, splashes it with water, and gives it a name as a sign of its acceptance into the family. If it is weak or ill, it will be abandoned.

Contracts, pacts, or oaths are sealed by a handshake.

One swears allegiance to a *jarl* or king. This simple ceremony consists of presenting oneself to the lord, who holds out his hand with the golden rings he wears as a symbol of his rank. The vassal swears him fealty in the name of Thor, Frey, and Njord; then the two men share a horn of mead, and shake hands. The lord usually offers a gift he considers worthy of his subject, allowing him to honour or even humiliate the subject, depending upon the gift's value.

Everyday Life

Hygiene and Beauty

Living conditions are good enough for the people of the north to be in sound physical health, and they often reach an advanced age. It is not rare to reach the respectable age of sixty, and those of seventy are not much rarer. However, due to their harsh and warlike way of life, deaths in battle are common, particularly among the men. Most warriors die in combat, and few reach forty.

In good physical health, the people of the North possess a robust constitution that spares them most

minor illnesses such as colds. The average height for men is 1 metre 75, 1 metre 59 for women.

The inhabitants of the Northern Kingdoms consider personal hygiene to be very important. Most houses have a corner dedicated to washing, and many have a room with a hearth and bathtub, whether a simple wooden barrel or large bronze tub. Everyone washes once a week, usually on Saturdays; there is often a private room for this. The bathing ritual, which is performed in common, consists of pouring water on hearthstones heated until they are red hot. The people then sweat in the steam, and scrape themselves over with willow branches before jumping into a tub of cold water to rinse off. Hands are washed before meals and in the mornings, along with the face.

Men usually have a beard, always well-maintained whether long or short. Some prefer a moustache, sometimes braided, or a long fine goatee. Few men shave their faces, something generally seen as a lack of virility.

Male hair is very well cared for, and regularly washed using a caustic soap. It is generally worn shoulder-length, or even longer, in braids which allow threads of coloured wool to be intertwined. Richer members of society may wear gold and silver threads. On a practical level, nothing is worn which may obscure the eyes. Barbers are often called on to trim beards and hair, and to style and perfume them.

Women also wear their hair long, and are just as attentive to their style. Hair is worn loose until marriage, then the style changes to reflect their new status; it is customary to gather the hair in a sophisticated net gathered to the neck, or in an elaborate bun. Everyone has a comb, either in bone or wood, sometimes ornamented, which they carry with them at all times. In a personal satchel, made of leather or cloth, are also nail clippers and pine toothpicks, tongs, a clay or metal bowl, and a mirror of polished bronze.

Both men and women wear makeup around their eyes, ringing them in black to make their stare more intense.

Elegance is a must. Once work is done, the tough and practical daily clothes are shed in favour of evening clothes. These are usually brightly coloured, with a preference for greens and reds.

Clothes and Ornaments

Naturally, clothing varies according to the social class of the wearer, and thus has a great deal of significance. It is common to give clothes as gifts, their cost and quality making them much valued.

Slaves wear rudimentary clothes characterised by a bad quality of material and craftsmanship, but also by their functional look. On the other extreme, nobles possess wardrobes filled with precious and elaborate robes.

A man's clothes include a pair of trousers, a shirt, and a coat. However, the cut, weave, colours and ornamentation vary greatly. Hirdmen usually wear a leather doublet, either without sleeves or with very short ones; the surface is covered with metallic decoration, often finely made. These accessories indicate the rank of the *hirdman*, and who he serves.

Women wear a pinafore dress that hugs the upper body, with a square neckline and straight hem. Four straps, all attached by threads, hold the dress in place, with two long straps at the back and two short ones at the front. A long blouse, with or without sleeves, and sometimes a tunic with a narrow neckline, complete the female ensemble. Nobility wear much the same kind of clothes; the ornaments are simply richer, and furs decorate the neck and sleeves. Finally a coat (much like the male version) or a shawl protects the wearer from inclement weather and cold.


The costume does not change much through the seasons; the number of layers simply increases. In winter, a coat will be lined with goose feathers or sheepskin to make it warmer, more weather-resistant, and waterproof.

Wool is by far the most common material. It is spun in different ways to get different thicknesses and textures in the finished material. Linen is also greatly used, particularly for undergarments and shirts, summer trousers and clothing for slaves.

Clothes rarely keep their original colours. Many dyes, made from natural materials (shells and plants), are used to add colour. The rarest, and most expensive, colours are a sign of prestige and wealth for those who can afford them. The most vibrant colours are the most sought after, and contrasting shades are much in demand by the nobility and free men. Embroidery and stitching in metallic threads decorate clothes, and indicate the social status of those who wear them.

Fur allows for warm winter coats, and is also used to decorate other kinds of clothes around the neckline, waist, or sleeves. There is a hierarchy in the value of furs used, and this reflects upon those who wear them. Wolf, bear, and mink are more highly valued than rabbit, badger, or fox.

Shoes are made from a single piece of leather stitched into shape. Depending on fashion and the time of year, they may be high or low, pointed or round. Their manufacture depends on the shoemaker, a specialised



craftsman who also repairs shoes when they split. Softer shoes, due to how they are made, wear out more quickly and are more fragile. As soon as they can no longer stand repair, they must be discarded and a new pair bought. Sometimes shoes are covered in thick layers of fur, tied up by laces. Thick woollen socks add comfort, and protect feet from the cold.

Among accessories, gloves and hats are most common. Men often wear a sheepskin cap, while women prefer linen or wool shawls.

Oval or round pins and broaches are used to fasten coats, capes, robes, and dresses, and are often of ornamental value. They are as much jewellery as accessories, and permit the metalworkers who make them to display their skill. Men wear them on the left shoulder; women wear one on each shoulder, and sometimes a third attached to their tunics and connected to a leather loop to carry their keys.

Jewellery is very highly prized, both for its aesthetic aspect, but also as a symbol. Rings, for example, are symbols of bravery and wealth. Each day, everyone picks out their best jewels: brooches, bracelets, finger rings, torques, and necklaces. Nobles often wear a band around their heads, sometimes a simple ring of metal, sometimes a veritable crown. Made of worked gold, silver, rock crystal, glass, and precious stones, these creations demonstrate the skill of the craftsmen of the Scandian kingdoms. Most of these artefacts are finely engraved, mixing several materials, and are often decorated with epic scenes or legendary creatures. Details are added using filigree with drops of molten or hammered silver.

Craftsmen also work in horn, but the manufacture of such items is very difficult, and most content themselves with bone. Combs, beads, brooches, and sewing kits are made of this material. Walrus ivory is also highly valued, and used to make small luxury items (jewellery, combs, and sewing needles). Expeditions are sent to the northern coasts of Norway where these creatures abound. Despite the perils they must face, of which the dangerous coasts and pirates are the least, such ventures promise significant profits and are often successful.

Another item of jewellery, well known for its magical powers, is very widespread among the people of Scandia. This is a silver pendant, attached to a cord or metal threads. This amulet takes the shape of Thor's hammer, and is more or less finely carved according to the wealth of the bearer. The talisman brings strength to warriors in combat; farmers count on its power for fertility, and never take it off when working the land. A Thor amulet helps the herds and fields to prosper. However, everyone agrees it is pointless to rely solely on the power of the

gods when carrying out a task; it provides an aid, nothing more, to a warrior's arm or a farmer pushing his cart.

food and festivals

Food

The people of Midgard are used to two daily meals. In the morning, they break their fast with a filling meal of oat- or barley-bread, or hot gruel with cheese or butter, giving strength for the day's work. The main meal, in the early evening, is mostly fish and meat.

Black pudding (made by mixing lard, offal, and the blood of a freshly slaughtered animal in a sheep's intestine) is a favourite meal; with cumin, garlic, and juniper added, this dish honours guests and is prepared for special occasions and feasts. Meat, domestic and game, accompanies vegetables, peas, cabbage, onions, and beans. The women place large rolls of bread directly on the table, beside the steaming platters, and the feasters share with their neighbours.

Wild berries are picked in summer, and served with cheese. In winter, nuts and frozen milk are offered as dessert. Honey is used for mead, and is often taken on long voyages.

Food is served on wooden platters and in soapstone bowls. For cutlery, the feasters use metal utensils and bone and horn spoons, of which each has their own set. These utensils are well-made, and at noble tables are often decorated with precious materials.

Beer and mead are the preferred drinks of the Scandians. Water is only drunk when working. Milk and whey, gathered after cheese making, are preferred by women and children. Servants bring drinks in engraved beakers of silver-plate, or of earthenware decorated with geometric shapes. Cups and clay bowls are used to hold food. Drinking horns, lighter and stronger, are usually reserved for feasts and voyages. Most are bound by worked metal rings, permitting loops of leather or wool to be attached for easy carrying.

During feasts, only men eat at the table, separate from the wife and daughters of the *jarl*. Important guests, as well as people the jarl wishes to honour, also share his table, seated at the top of the communal hall. Less important guests must content themselves with a table in the middle of the hall, facing that of the master of the house.

Other women – slaves, servants, and wives – prepare the food, and serve it on great earthenware plates.



Celebrations like these are opportunities to celebrate a victory, marriage, or any other important community event. The lord uses such a celebration as a chance to show off his generosity and wealth, and to reward those loyal to him and his warriors. His guests wear their finest clothes, each trying to show himself off as best he can, and they remain on their best behaviour during the feast (drunk, one may speak too loud or too boldly). Festivities can last several days, as long as there is food to eat, and more especially drink. For such feasts, carts arrive from all over the region for several days beforehand to deliver the necessary goods.

The Arts

The main artists of Scandia are the skalds; poets, storytellers, and musicians, they wander the world from village to village, bringing news and entertaining people with their epic tales. *Jarls* and kings often hire a skald to their service; their duties include entertaining guests during feasts, by relating extracts from sagas of the exploits of ancient heroes, or edifying stories about the acts of the gods. Their words may vary between wisdom and buffoonery, and the skald also understands he is required to vaunt the virtues, real or imagined, of

his lord in his tales or odes, complementing them with music from his harp and song. When he is not called on for his gifts as narrator, he becomes a musician. The skald then accompanies the meal and entertains the gathering with various songs.

Although he possesses a great imagination, the skald must also have an excellent memory. No recital is written down: he bases his skills on the oral traditions of the clans he has visited. These oral traditions, and the sharing of stories, are fundamental to Scandian culture, and tales are never forgotten.

Circuses consisting of tumblers, jugglers, and acrobats also travel between cities and visit the most distant parts of the land. Their performances are primarily visual, and aim simply to entertain; they are not comparable to the performances of the skalds, to which they are seen as an inferior art.

Festivities

The *jarl's* longhouse is a place of many celebrations, the heart of which is an enormous feast, where the lord demonstrates his generosity and showers those loyal to

him with gifts and drink. It is customary to welcome the return of a husband, brother, or parent with a lavish feast. For more important occasions, such as a treaty of allegiance between two kingdoms, each participant lays on such a feast, and festivities can continue for up to eight days.

During such festivities, acrobats and dancers provide entertainment throughout. Music is very important and, depending on how much they have drunk, the audience often joins in with energetic dancing.

In the evenings, skalds perform as storytellers, regaling their audiences with tales of the heroes of the Northern Kingdoms, as well as sagas about the gods. These recitals do not always show the gods at their best, and more than one skald has made his reputation through an irreverent portrayal of the gods.

One of the most important festivals is Yule (or *Jol*), which celebrates midwinter. It is dedicated to Thor, who keeps the ice giants out of Midgard. During the night of Yule, evil spirits are abroad, Odin leads his Wild Hunt, and it is best to stay inside with good company. Warriors wear armour, and carry their weapons all day. As well as the libations and usual excesses, it is also customary to build a large ship, which is then burned in a great bonfire meant to light and heat the night. Alcohol and rites dedicated to the gods of winter, as well as the inevitable challenges the participants dare each other to do, mean the festival rarely passes without someone getting hurt, if not worse.

But Yule is, most of all, a chance to seek comfort and hope among members of one's own family in the middle of the coldest season, and to celebrate the unity of the clan. People use the occasion to offer each other presents, and to organise great feasts where the gods have place of honour. Everyone knows the gods walk among mortals tonight, the longest of the year, and bring them gifts and presents. Who could refuse opening the door to a traveller who arrives just before dark?

Leisure Time

Children play with wooden figures carved to resemble mythical figures, animals, and supernatural creatures. Toy boats sail across lakes and rivers in summer, and boys and girls share the same games and play with wooden replicas of their parents' weapons. Nordic society sees this as not just a game, but also a way to train young people in combat and toughen them up.

Dice games are common among the *bondi*. Bets are not usually placed, but more than one game has ended

in a fight, as the proud Scandians tend to be sore losers.

Hnefatafl is a strategy game using a plank of wood carved like a chessboard, and pawns. It is one of the most esteemed forms of entertainment among the nobility, besides hunting with dogs or falcons.

Music occupies a vital place in festivals. Flutes, lyres, and percussion instruments mingle with the songs and tales of skalds. Dancing is uncommon inside a lord's longhouse, but is usually done out of doors.

At the various festivals which dot the annual calendar, villages put on competitions between their members, or between representatives of various clans. These are a chance for the men to test their strength and display their martial and physical skills in peacetime (and thus their virility, too).

Wrestling is particularly favoured. Wearing only leather or cloth loincloths held up by a large belt, each participant attempts to bowl over his opponent, throw them out of a circle traced on the ground, or immobilise them through strength or agility. Rules often change from place to place, but it is forbidden to punch or bite, or attack the opponent's eyes. These combats, often dedicated to the gods, draw large crowds and many bets are placed around the wrestling ring which is usually set up in the middle of the village. A victory can make the winner a local hero and give him, until the next year, a high status among his fellows. The vanquished clan nurses its revenge until the next year's bout. It can happen that the taste of defeat is so bitter that they simply cannot wait that long, and the festival winds up in a general free-for-all. But this is rare: the bout is after all a fight to honour the gods, and few would dare question its outcome, blessed in their names.

Races, swimming, and jumping contests liven up the summer season. Shedding their heavy winter clothing, the men test their abilities in all kinds of physical trials. The status and rewards are the same as for hand-to-hand combat.

In winter, ice-skating and skiing on snowy slopes offer the chance for competitions in organised tournaments, while waiting for the better weather to take up arms again for a new season of raiding and exploration. Skates are usually made of sharpened bone, and although taught as a sport, skating can easily save one's life by shaking a pursuer on the ice.

Archery, sword fighting, and axe and javelin throwing are other competitions greatly enjoyed both for the fun



Eddic & Skaldic Poetry

A skald is a professional poet, recognised and respected. His mastery of language and voice often inclines him towards magical practises such as galdr enchantments, as well as cultural ones such as sacrifices. His role is to immortalise heroes by singing of their exploits.

- The difference between *eddic* and *skaldic* poetry is that, while the first is very ancient and its author unknown, the author of the second is clear. Moreover, the techniques used in each are different, skaldic poetry being more complex.
- Poetry is transmitted orally, but committing it to memory requires considerable effort. The heavy use of alliteration, pronounced rhythms, and an incantation-like style makes them easier to remember.
- As explained in the chapter on the gods, poetry uses alternate names (*heiti*) and metaphors (*kenning*, plural *kenningar*) for things. *Kenningar* can be up to six words long.

Here are a few examples of commonly used *kenningar* and *heiti*:

Kenningar

The sea of wounds, the dew of the slain: blood
The blood gull: crow
The noble muscle of life: heart
The sword-tree: a warrior
The wolf's delight: a carcass
The blood-serpent, the war-thorn, the wound wand: the sword
Hearth-dew: sweat
Charnel beast: a wolf
Fish of the woods: a snake
Horse of the sea: a ship
The jewelled shoal: a woman

Heiti

Limewood: shield (shields are made from limewood)
The howling: wind
Fine roof: sky
Glutton: fire
Metal: weapon
Wolf: criminal
Courser: horse



of it and as martial training. Warriors test their strength, agility, and toughness, and the winners gain prestige in the clan, and possibly promotion to the rank of *hirdmen* if they are not already members.

Tournaments always attract spectators. In villages where horses are bred, fights between stallions are sometimes organised, which can bring the same kind of rewards.

The Oral Tradition

Scandians use the spoken word to transmit their clans' histories, or those of their families, as well as their own exploits. It's easy to imagine the importance of the skald in such a society, founded as it is on oral traditions, both as storyteller and bringer of news from across all the kingdoms. Moreover, contracts and pacts are sealed in verbal engagements before witnesses, and once again a skald must be present to ensure the legitimacy of the oath between the two parties.

These customs are greatly facilitated by the fact that all clans use the same language: Norse. While there are regional differences, they are not large enough to be obstacles to communication. Some isolated communities may speak their own dialects, but these are always derived from Norse (the *dansk tunga*), and with a little effort it is possible to make oneself understood and exchange at least some information.

Habitations

Faced with a hostile natural environment, the Scandians have adapted to surviving in bad conditions. During the invariably cold winters, they must shelter their flocks: in towns, stables and barns on the outskirts or running along the inside of the town walls are used for this; whereas in the countryside, the classic long house is separated into two halves, one for people, the other for animals.

Towns

Urban centres are led by the most powerful clans, and are located along the main trade routes. Trade is the main reason for a simple village to grow into a town; and the largest cities hold great fairs twice a year, bringing in an influx of traders and visitors from all around the kingdom, if not all of Scandia.

Taxes, set by the *jarl*, are paid by the townsfolk, as well as by those passing through.



The Runes

Runes constitute an alphabet of twenty-four letters, the *Futhark*. Odin learned their secret as magical symbols, but they are first and foremost a system of writing; runes are not always symbols of power. Sentences written using runes are not always divided into words, and there may be no gaps or symbols indicating a space or link between them.

There are no rules on how to write using runes: they can be written from right to left, or left to right, or follow grooves or be written in the shapes of animals – often in the shape of a snake, symbolising Jormungand surrounding Midgard. They are often hard to decipher.

Fragments of skaldic poetry can sometimes be found written in runes on roadside stones, commemorating an event or proclaiming the glories of a victorious king or dead hero, even though poetry is usually mostly oral.

Runes are often engraved using a pointed object (such as a stiletto or dagger) on a hard surface (stones, pieces of bone, wood panels, jewellery, weapons, tools, works of art). Engravers may be simply people who know their letters, or renowned craftsmen, who often sign their work.

Few people in the Northern Kingdoms know how to write, of course. This is partly because of the strength of the oral tradition, and because there is no organised education in reading or writing. But, most of all, the runes are considered a “magical” alphabet, the preserve of an elite. Only *skalds* and *volva*, and certain scholars, *thulr*, craftspeople, and a few rare nobles, know how to use them.

In the hands of those trained in the magical arts, the twenty-four runes take on another dimension,

and serve a more symbolic purpose, used to write down magical spells. It is possible to imbue an object with magical power by inscribing it with runes, as long as this is done correctly, with appropriate sacrifices. Few people master such knowledge; the *volva* and *thulr* specialise in it. These sorcerers are particularly sought after... and feared.

Lastly, the cryptic nature of the runes means they can be made complex, and encoded to ensure even a scholar cannot read them.

Through all the Northern Kingdoms, people erect stones to commemorate their history. Texts are sometimes engraved in the runes to honour the memory of the dead, or commemorate an important event. But, most often, these steles are covered in evocative images, depicting scenes from the lives of heroes, monsters, giants, and gods, or simply dedicated to the memory of a lost loved one (such as are found in mortuary circles). Beyond their simple educational and aesthetic aspect, these stones serve as landmarks in the most dangerous lands.

The Futhark

The word *Futhark* is the name given to the Scandian alphabet, and derives from its first six letters (f, u, th, a, r, k). It is almost certainly inspired by the ancient Etruscan alphabet.

The runes of the *Futhark* are divided into three aetts, or groups of eight runes, each of which is dedicated to a deity. The first aett is ruled by Frey, the second by Heimdall, and the last by Tyr.

Each rune corresponds to a letter of the alphabet, but also is a symbol. It may be used to signify a single letter, or in magic to signify a symbol with a positive or negative meaning.

Such a concentration of wealth, however, attracts pirates and bandits. Most towns are fortified: a wall of earth, the height of a man, topped by a wooden wall or simple palisade, surrounds the houses. *Hirdmen* stand guard, making sure taxes are paid and ensuring the safety of those inside the walls. Farms in the surrounding area provide food for the townsfolk; if the town is attacked, they are often the target of frustrated assailants.

Four main roads, oriented towards the four compass points, lead through cities. Traffic increases greatly during the summer, and drops in winter. Outside the walls, the stalls and tents of travelling traders cluster around the gates. As well as offering sometimes unusual objects for sale, they are lively places, and many visitors gather there just to see a scuffle break out or to hear news from far-off lands.

Within the walls, houses are built close together due to the limited space. Most have a workshop or a small shop. Smaller than rural farms, there is no room for livestock, although they use the same construction methods, with wooden walls and thatched roofs.

Between the workshops and the houses the narrow streets resound with the sounds of conversation, laughter, cries, and the noise of craftsmen at work. This din, exacerbated by the noise of animals, never ceases until night-fall. The smoke from the houses mixes with the smell of hay, sawdust, dung, cooking food, sweat, and the pitch which coats the houses.

Villages

Smaller communities rarely comprise more than six or seven farms, gathered within a protective wall of stone, often surrounded by a ditch. The largest rural centres can number more than twenty homes. A road passes through the village and separates it in half, most often along an east-west axis. Tame dogs wander between the houses or sleep inside, standing guard and alerting the inhabitants if anything approaches.

Each farm consists of a central building used for living space, surrounded by a wall of stone or wood. Small huts, half dug into the ground or leaning against the walls, are used as storerooms or workshops. A nearby garden is used for growing basic vegetables.

Each village has a square large enough to hold the local thing and, occasionally, a market. This is not necessarily within the walls; many such public events are held on nearby hilltops.

As another place of importance, villages always make sure to set aside a small stretch of woodland, as a place for sacrifices to the gods. In urban centres, this wooded



Makeshift Shelters

An expedition caught out by bad weather, a shepherd tending his flock, an outlaw exiled from his clan... there are many times when people need rudimentary shelter. Every child learns how to build a lean-to from branches, half-buried in the ground and covered with turf and leaves, to take shelter (albeit basic) from the rain. A fire in the centre provides heat, while smoke escapes from a hole in the roof. Another advantage of such lean-tos is that if well-constructed they blend in perfectly with their surroundings and are hard to spot if in enemy territory.



area is usually replaced by a small area marked out by carved stones.

Coastal cities all have a port, with simple wooden or stone quays and many warehouses and dry cellars.

Houses

Houses are spacious and large enough to house an entire family. Usually rectangular, they are normally about fifteen metres long. Two thirds of a house comprises a living area for the family, while the remainder, at the far end and separated by a fence, shelters the family livestock, mostly cattle and sheep. More than twenty animals can be housed in the largest homes, and bring warmth during winter. The building is ideally built on a slope so animal waste runs out of the house down the hill, and not towards the family area.

External beams and columns are decorated with dragon's heads and are sometimes painted. These figures frighten off trolls and other evil spirits which inhabit Midgard and wander around inhabited areas at night.

The interior ground floor of a house is lower than the outside to maintain warmth; stone foundations are covered with peat, with wattle walls over a wooden frame, covered in planks which are sometimes painted. The roof, supported by large pillars and often painted, is also made of planks, and may be covered externally with thatch or sod. In the northernmost regions, roofs may reach down to the ground.

A single door allows access to the house; there are no



The Sorcerer's Seat

In the house of a *volva*, or a lord who often calls on such a sorcerer, there is a particular piece of furniture: the Sorcerer's Seat, reserved for those who practise the *seidr* and *seidr-hjallr*. This can be a simple beech stool, high and three-legged, carved of ash, elm, and hawthorn. Only one who practises the magical arts may sit on the Sorcerer's Seat without incurring the anger of the gods.



windows, again to keep the heat in. Unfortunately houses are often humid and filled with smoke from the fire, which sits in the middle of the house to spread its heat evenly.

The floor is of beaten earth, mostly flat, covered in straw and sometimes planks, particularly in the sleeping area.

Large stones surround the hearth, which are heated red-hot when there is a fire. A metal cauldron is placed on the stones to heat water or cook food. Depending on the weather, the chimneys sometimes fail to work, and smoke is forced to gather around the ceiling.

A storeroom keeps goods sheltered and fresh. Cheeses are stored there, along with other foodstuffs. This is sometimes simply a wooden cabin, but often farmers prefer to dig a ditch and cover it with branches and peat. The temperature is constant, and a wooden tree trunk with cropped branches serves as a ladder, allowing access into the ditch.

The houses of the richest clan members can be up to four times the size of simpler dwellings. They are divided into living rooms (communal halls and kitchens) and sleeping chambers (bedrooms). The walls are carefully painted and carved. Stables and other buildings stand on the other side of an adjoining yard, as the fireplaces provide sufficient warmth to their interiors. As in lower class homes, there is also a workshop for manufacturing day-to-day items.

Furniture and Housework

Family members' beds are lined up against the walls; a straw mattress, linen sheets, wool blanket, and fur throw are the norm. The parents' bed often has two

posts, sculpted to resemble ship figureheads, often large enough to permit some degree of privacy. Some also add a screen, usually cloth or folding wooden panels.. Everyone has a personal coffer or small chest at the foot of their bed. Curtains are used to separate parts of the house into different areas.

A large trestle table with benches and stools is used for guests and family members to take communal meals; it's traditional to have a place reserved for guests, or for strangers seeking shelter. The place of the head of the household is marked by two wooden posts placed vertically on a bench – the high seat.

Only the most luxurious homes have separate bed chambers and permanent tables.

In the corner of the house reserved for cooking, utensils are kept in coffers and on shelves set against the walls, and barrels on the floor store food and drinking water. Smaller kegs of beer and mead are stacked out of the reach of children.

Tapestries and sometimes even wooden sculptures decorate the house and add a touch of colour. The men of the house hang their weapons and shields on the walls, close to the door to be able to grab them in case of trouble. Smoked meats hang from the roof where they are preserved and dried.

All houses have a loom against one wall, and an area dedicated to washing. Toilets are usually outside, often a simple hut with wicker walls with a hole in the ground. A spade and pile of earth are close by and allow waste to be gathered and used to fertilise fields. It is customary for a warrior to take his sword with him.

The Longhouse

The home of a noble has a distinctive shape, and is called a "longhouse". Unlike a king's longhouse, noble longhouses have more in common with fortresses than palaces. Unlike normal houses, most longhouses have at least two storeys, with a ground floor partly below ground level. A balcony supported by pillars surrounds the house, beneath which passers-by may take shelter during bad weather. Its wooden walls, with interlaced and entwined geometric designs, are carved by local craftsmen; the tops of their pillars are shaped like fantastic creatures, both to impress visitors and to scare away evil spirits. A thick layer of earth and sod covers the sloping roof, hiding the overlapping planks beneath.

At one end of a longhouse is the entrance, which leads to a small vestibule where visitors leave coats and

weapons if they are not part of the lord's staff. Guards and important guests are permitted to keep theirs; they can hang them on hooks in the great hall. This chamber takes up most of the ground floor, and coloured shields and heavy embroidered hangings decorate its walls. Servants frequently change the rushes on the beaten earth floor, which gently slopes towards its centre, where a large sacred fire is always burning, fed night and day by slaves using wood stacked in a corner. The wooden walls are criss-crossed with many horizontal planks, much like a ship's hull. Raised on planks, wooden benches line the walls; at the north end, the seat of the head of the household stands on a wooden dais decorated with sculptures.



The Grotti Mill

Frodi the Peaceful, the old king of Denmark, had an extraordinary mill called Grotti. It had always been there – no one knew how old it was – but legends say it was built by the first inhabitants of the land. The *volva* said that anything could be milled there. Unfortunately, no one was strong enough to turn its great mill-wheel.

One day, a vassal *jarl* launched a raid against a Norwegian clan. They won a great deal of treasure, and took many prisoners as slaves. Among them were two giant women, who rumour said were of *jotun* blood. Frodi bought them, and took them to the mill. Menja and Fenja, as they were called, managed to make the great mill-wheel turn.

But Menja and Fenja were warrior sisters, and they sang of their exploits as mercenaries of the kings of Svithjod. For nine years they bent their backs to the mill, and enriched the Danish king, but he refused to free them and gave them no honours.

One of the sea kings, Mysing, came to free them. He killed Frodi, set fire to his palace, and took both the giantesses and the mill on his ship. The women had cried their curse, and it had fallen on the house of Skjoldung.

A skald said these words after the funeral of Frodi the Peaceful: "A king possessing much land and a marvellous mill is rich. A lord who knows the true value of his men and accords them honours is richer still".

But Mysing also wanted to put the two warrior women to work, and asked them to mill salt. He insisted even when, under the weight of the salt, his ship sank beneath the waves, and that is why the sea is salty.



There is sometimes a second, equally decorated, seat for his wife. The *jarl's* weapons, tapestries, and trophies are hung on the wall behind him. At the other end of the great hall is another seat, reserved for guests the master wishes to honour. Two rows of columns along its length separate the communal room into three areas. As well as supporting the first floor, these pillars, on heavy stone blocks, add to the impressive gravitas of the chamber. They are decorated with representations of divine and heroic figures, plants and animals. Light is provided by small, narrow windows and, at night, by candles placed around the room. In either case, the chamber is relatively dark.

This great hall is where the lord receives his guests and holds feasts. Servants set up trestle tables in front of the benches and set out soapstone dishes, or metal ones for more important guests. The dishes stop coming only when there is no more food. The kitchen, because of the danger of fire, is set apart, where its stoves and ovens can provide heat for the house, but do not risk setting fire to the furs and tapestries which decorate the great hall. Once the feast is over, the trestle tables are dismantled and stored away. The guests, who are by then usually drunk, sleep where they are; important people on benches, and everyone else on the floor.

In more modest communities, where the longhouse does not necessarily have a second storey, the lord and lady sleep in a bed at one end of the hall. In larger houses, the upper storey becomes the main sleeping area, where inhabitants may have their own rooms, with the children sharing one room, and another reserved for guests. Comfort is very important; if, for safety's sake, they do not have a fireplace, they will have heavy hangings and thick woollen rugs, as well as furs, to insulate the walls and floor. Another room is dedicated to weaving, with large windows to allow in as much light as possible. At night, these are closed with heavy shutters, and covered in winter with tanned hides.

The *jarl* may also have his own room, to meet with those loyal to him, away from inquisitive ears.

Outbuildings and storerooms are usually arranged around an interior courtyard, sometimes paved, but most often of beaten earth. The dwellings of the *hirdmen* and their families are placed close to the longhouse entrance. Stables are usually set apart, by the more modest houses of the servants and the slave area. A second set of dwellings house the craftsmen necessary for the longhouse's smooth running. Within this enclave surrounded by a deep ditch topped by a palisade of stakes, there may be a bakery, a forge, a brewery, and a carpenter's, as well as other craftsmen living with their entire families.

The lord's home buzzes with activity. In addition to those living there, and the many domestic animals

wandering freely inside its boundaries, there are traders, emissaries from other clans, wandering skalds and travellers. They may also be vagabonds to whom the *jarl* gives a little food and a bed of straw in the stable as reward for news of the lands they come from.

Work

Agriculture

The Scandian economy is based almost entirely on agriculture, but commerce has allowed the creation of specialised urban centres. Traders and craftsmen play significant social roles, which provide for them and their families.

The people of the Northern Kingdoms both till the fields and raise livestock. However, in particularly mountainous regions, the few flat fields and the thin and rocky topsoil means the cultivation of wheat or barley is almost impossible. Instead, there are many natural pastures to graze cattle and sheep on, and their herds provide milk and meat to feed the community.

Farmers harvest hay and hemp in particular. The latter is primarily cultivated in wetlands, and produces fibres used to create fabric softer than wool. Women use this to make underclothes and shirts worn directly against the skin. Hay is used to feed animals in winter; gathered in autumn, it is dried on a vertical trellis and stored in special barns far from other homes to minimise the risk of fire.

Arable land is worked with crude wooden ploughs, drawn by oxen. The labour is difficult, and requires great physical strength.

Where the land permits, particularly in the rich fields of Sjaeland, farmers cultivate corn, rye, barley, and flax.

Each family also grows its own crops and medicinal plants, in a garden close to their farm. Scandian healers also grow (among other plants) leeks, thyme, mugwort, watercress, and chervil. Sorcerers know, of course, how to find a great many more plants and mushrooms growing in the wild.

Livestock

In the northernmost regions, the clans have long known how to domesticate reindeer. They still raise their traditional herds of goats, cattle, and sheep, but horses are rarer in those parts. Reindeer serve as both pack and draft animals, but rarely draw carts, instead most often

drawing light chariots (in summer) and fast sledges (in winter, on the snow or ice-covered ground). Reindeer meat is considered a delicacy in most Northern Kingdoms, but particularly among nomadic tribes. Herders also use the other parts of the animal: their milk is drunk fresh or fermented; the tanned skin is turned into soft leather for clothing or accessories like purses, pouches, and sandals; and the bones and horns are worked into ornaments. These goods are often traded between clans and with southern Scandia.

Domestic animals live in and around the village. Farmers raise pigs, goats, sheep, and cows, as well as poultry such as geese, chicken, and ducks. Each farm has enough eggs, milk, and meat to feed their family, with surpluses kept for winter or sold. The richest lands, which most often belong to the nobility, also allow the rearing of horses, which are sold as mounts for war and travel. Horses may be trained to face fire and voyages on-board ship, in anticipation of expeditions to distant lands.

Many dogs roam the villages. The largest are trained for hunting as well as defending the village against wolves and marauders. At night, they stand guard and sound the alert in case of danger.

Hunting and Fishing

Most human settlements lie close to the coast, on an estuary or river. The sea is rich in fish, and with nets and traps, fishermen catch herring and cod, and freshwater fish such as eel, trout, and salmon. Shellfish, oysters, and mussels in particular add variety. Ships leave port to fish on the high seas, or to hunt whales for their blubber and flesh. Fish are left to dry in the sun on wooden frames, then smoked before being stored in barrels.

Children climb cliffs to gather eggs from birds' nests. Seals and walrus, abundant on the rocky shores, are also choice prey.

Hunters track numerous wild animals. Bears, wolves, and foxes are hunted for their furs, and deer, hare, wild geese, and boar for their meat. Everyone takes part in hunting: farmers set traps and hunt smaller game in the forests around villages; nobles and warriors organise expeditions, led by packs of dogs, to track down larger prey. They also hunt birds or small game (such as squirrels and hares) with trained birds of prey.

Crafts

There are few specialised craftsmen; in each family,

everyone makes and repairs the tools they need. From building a house to making furniture, from carving utensils to children's toys, it is necessary to know how to do a great many things. Thus, most farms have their own forge to repair the tools the inhabitants need.

However, blacksmithing is a craft that does allow for a degree of specialisation. In some regions, wandering smiths travel from village to village to sell their services. Urban centres and more powerful clans will hire the services of a talented smith to make weapons, armour, and all sorts of metalwork more complex than an iron pickaxe or nails.

Goldsmiths and silversmiths and manufacturers of luxury items also need special training and a superior mastery of their skill. The best of them work with deer antler, horn, and bone, as well as more precious materials such as gold and silver.

Workers in soapstone are common in Scandia. People make rough carvings of objects out of soapstone (usually crockery), then send them to a specialist craftsman for finishing.

There is an essential feature to Norse crafts: aesthetic detail. Few items are without decoration or engraving. Complex patterns, simple geometric shapes, scenes from legends or daily life decorate items made in workshops, adding to their value as well as the pleasure of ownership, and showing off the crafter's skill.

Weaving is a domestic industry. Each home has its own loom, and the work falls to the women of the house. However, there are workshops where master weavers work, particularly for sailmaking.

Soapstone, a dense, soft rock made of steatite, is mined in northern Svithjod, greatly prized for making small ornaments, cooking pots, and other cooking utensils. An entire business has grown up around this activity, and traders transport blocks of soapstone throughout the Northern Kingdoms. Unfortunately, deposits in the lands of friendly peoples remain scarce, and it is becoming necessary to head deeper into wilderness areas to find new ones.

Trade and Commerce

The economic relationships between the different regions of the Northern Kingdoms rely almost entirely on the exchange of produce. Agricultural products, iron ingots, stones to sharpen blades, soapstone, cattle, and other goods are traded between neighbouring and distant villages.

Barter is the most common form of trade. However,

the use of money, inspired by the practises of merchants from the southern parts of Scandia, is starting to gain a foothold. This is still confined to cities for the most part, and often only during fairs; only the most significant traders rely on it. In many cases, payment is made in small iron ingots or pieces of silver; gold is only used in gold working. Silver pieces are much lighter, but there is no "international exchange rate"; merchants have a portable pair of scales to ensure fairness.

Actual money is therefore unknown throughout most of Scandia. Traders still barter goods in villages; merchandise is exchanged and its value estimated, based on rarity, beauty, and the needs of the moment (furs for winter, for example).

Scandians are a curious people, interested in novelties, and traders often carry rare goods on their trade expeditions. In doing so they participate in the circulation of goods, and also help to spread knowledge of crafts, and strengthen ties between remote communities.

Travel and Transport


The modes of travel depend upon the routes of communication. While adequately maintained land routes connect cities and villages close to the coasts, this network becomes less comprehensive and less reliable, the further one travels inland. Many rural communities are isolated for much of the year, visited only by a few vagabonds and travelling traders. Across all of Scandia, dense, dark forests are only one of the many natural obstacles through which the few roads permit travel, and, in winter, the abundant snow makes such journeys even more difficult. Mountainous regions are often only accessible after intense effort.



The Onion Test

A wound in the stomach is usually fatal, sooner or later. In such a situation, the healer prepares a cereal soup containing a great quantity of onions. He has the wounded man eat it, and waits. In time, he smells the wound. If he can smell the onions, the stomach is pierced and the victim is doomed; there is no point in trying to heal him, and instead it is best simply to give him drugs to dull the pain.





However, all these dangers do not stop the people of the north from travelling. While farmers are by necessity sedentary, others trade goods, knowledge, and news throughout Scandia. One may always meet skalds and traders on the muddy roads; the former tend to travel alone, the latter with carts, servants, and slaves, or in caravans with several other traders following a similar trade route. On the way, they meet itinerant craftsmen, official messengers from local lords, war-bands en route to areas of conflict, lords and their retinue visiting an ally or parent, vagabonds cast out onto the highway by dishonour or fate. Whatever the case, travellers try to group together whenever possible, finding safety in numbers and improving their chances of surviving the many dangers along the way.

Nobles often travel by chariot, generally with four wheels and drawn by two to four horses. However, this form of transport is often reserved for women and older people. Once again, craftsmen find inventive ways to push the technology, and some chariots are true works of art, covered with ornament, carvings, and precious metal inlays.

Men prefer to travel by horse or on foot. Their favourite mounts are often closer to ponies, robust and tough, adapted to the northern climate. Many paths and roads are hard to travel; there are few bridges over waterways, which are often crossed at fords. Most travellers go on foot, and can cover more than forty kilometres a day (with ten hours of walking) in more civilised regions, and less than a quarter of this in wilder areas.

Faced with difficult terrain and the dangers of travel, it is not surprising that most Norsemen prefer to rely on the sea. They have become expert sailors, mastering every facet of this role. The Scandian kingdoms are all connected by water, and have many kilometres of coastline. Their preference for the sea is obvious; most travel between coastal cities is by ship. Faster, but not necessarily safer when the dangers are taken into account (reefs, currents, sea monsters, and pirates), it is nevertheless a favoured method of travel. Shipwrights build a great many kinds of ship, adapted to the needs of traders, warriors, and sailors. A multitude of ships, either private or parts of royal fleets, sail the home seas of Scandia.

Indeed, it is rare not to see a sail when following a trade route or approaching the coast. Norse sailors do not balk at striking out ever further with their expeditions, searching out trading opportunities or engaging in raids towards Finland, the lands of the Germanic peoples, the wild northern lands, or even along the coasts of Jutland to the south. Many daring sailors eye the great Western Ocean, or the mouth of the Baltic to the east, and it is only a matter of time before one of them, braver than the

rest, decides to finance an expedition to unknown seas.

Lastly, in winter, horse- or reindeer-drawn sledges become common once snow has covered the land. People also use rudimentary skis (simple curved planks laced to their boots) for overland travel, as well as wooden skates to cross lakes and frozen rivers.

Care of the Sick

Hygiene is very important in Norse society. Thanks to this, as well as their healthy and varied diet, the people of Scandia enjoy generally good health.

However, the constant fighting means many people bear scars and other marks of combat. Natural medicine, the knowledge of the *thulr* and *volva* of in the secrets of healing plants, permit most wounds to be treated, as long as they are not too severe. The loss of an eye, hand, or leg is a serious matter, but many live well despite their handicap. Moreover, medical knowledge and mastery of herbs and potions permits most illnesses to be avoided. Between this and the robust constitution of Norsemen, relatively few people fall prey to influenza, even in the depths of winter.

Older people often suffer from rheumatism and arthritis. Unguents and balms lessen the pain, and allow them to lead a normal life. As soon as greater handicaps threaten, these elders fear becoming a burden to their families, and sometimes decide to leave their homes. For some, this means embarking on a last solitary expedition that might end in a glorious death, the only way to join Odin's feast.

From their knowledge of plants and minerals, the *thulr* and *volva* create numerous potions and curative mixtures. These natural remedies are almost always accompanied by magical spells and supernatural symbols; the healer traces runes on the skin of the wounded person, or on a bone they place near him. The same goes for other complaints; a healer may trace similar runes on the skin of a woman giving birth in to reduce the pains.

Even though healers trained as midwives know how to deal with births, it is still a difficult and dangerous time. The mortality rate for mothers is still fairly high, despite the protective runes and rituals that accompany it.

Norsemen and the Sea

For a navigator in charge of a ship, the choice of



a maritime route depends on the stars, the sun, and a knowledge of nature and geography. There are no maps of Scandia, no charts of sea routes, and no navigational instruments such as compasses. A good sailor must remember important landmarks.

If he is trained in astronomy and weather-watching, he can also observe the ocean currents, the waves, the winds, the movements of bird colonies and shoals of fish... A man who masters these skills can always be sure of finding a ship to take him on. If his fame spreads far enough, he may even be engaged by a *jarl* of a distant land, eager for his services. Sea travel between the Northern Kingdoms is at once a matter of knowledge shared between navigators, and also the pragmatic observation of the environment.

Fishing is a major source of food for coastal communities. Specialised sailors bring home the fruits of their labours every day.

For coastal fishing, almost every family has a small boat. This is at best a large sloop capable of holding six people, propelled by one or two pairs of oars, and its narrow keel and shallow bottom mean it is a dedicated coast-hugger. As most sailors would not think of leaving

the safety of the fjords for the high seas, this is not usually an issue. They are very manoeuvrable, capable of sailing over shallow waters and stable enough for nets to be hauled in. Everyone knows something about fishing, which is vital if the harvest is poor.

Ships and Sailors

Geographical constraints and the nature of the environment force the Norse to look to the sea. They hone their navigation and shipwrighting skills side by side, to become bold and competent sailors.

Many different kinds of ship are built, answering diverse needs. Local variations exist, but ships sailing the northern seas have several points in common.

All ships have two forms of propulsion. A square sail hoisted on the mast makes the most of the wind; and benches in the ship permit the crew to sit and row if the ship is becalmed, or when performing difficult manoeuvres.

The sail is sometimes made of cotton, but more often of wool. Some rich lords dye or embroider the sails of



Recruitment

In an invasion of clan lands, all able-bodied men are called to join the *jarl's* army. Horns sound from the royal palace and arrows are let fly. An arrow feathered in a specific colour is used to signal war; the first is shot into the middle of the assembly-place of the *thing*. Then, other archers shoot their arrows in turn, sending the signal far and wide, from one place to the next, until their arrows and the call to war travel clear across the land, reaching even the most distant hamlets and isolated farms.



their ships (most often the *langskip*) to make them stand out and ward off spirits. Sails may be red or brown, puce or yellow, or a mixture of colours. Motifs include the gods, real or legendary creatures (such as dragons, snakes, wolves, and crows), or symbols of war (such as weapons and shields).

The construction of these ships, renowned for their speed, toughness, and manoeuvrability, requires a great deal of skill and knowledge. Shipwrights are valued experts, and their services are bought with gold. Each clan makes sure to hire at least one of these craftsmen.

The keel and ribs of the ship are made of oak. For long ships, trees of forty metres or more in height must be found. The sides are made of oak or birch planks, fixed with iron nails. The mast must be made of a very long straight trunk, most often pine.

The rudder, a large square piece of wood, is steered by the pilot, who gives orders and carries out manoeuvres from a raised bench.

The *karv* is a small vessel designed for coast-hugging and sailing within fjords. It can carry a maximum of ten people. It has a short mast and, while its small sail means it cannot travel quickly with the wind, it is very manoeuvrable. The *karv* is the typical fishing boat of the Baltic sea.

The *knorr* is a heavy transport ship. Large and full-bellied, it is almost exclusively a trading vessel as it is time-consuming and expensive to build. Particularly stable, it can cross open seas just as easily as coastal waters. Equipped with mast and oars, it is somewhat

slow, but its large hold allows it to carry a substantial amount of merchandise, and even livestock.

The *langskip* ("long ship") is the archetypal warship. Long and thin, it can navigate high seas and is faster and more manoeuvrable than any other vessel. Like other Scandian ships, it uses both oars and sail. The keel is short and shallow, and allows the *langskip* to beach itself onto a shore, removing the need for a quay or port to land. The poop and prow are decorated and sculpted by the best craftsmen and generally painted red, carved in the shape of dragon's heads (*dreki*) or other fantastic animals to terrify attacked populations and ward away spirits.

The *snekkjar* is a light ship, used for war expeditions and voyages of exploration. It is a transport ship, much like the *knorr* in conception, but smaller and more refined. It gains in speed what it loses in stability and space. Its raised prow is often sculpted in the shape of a dragon's head like that of the *langskip*. Approaching a poorly-protected village, the *snekkjar* quickly sheds its mercantile appearance in favour of that of a warship bearing down on its prey.

Raiding and War

Armies

The Scandian kingdoms do not possess royal armies as such; their sovereigns do not maintain a contingent of soldiers who represent the kingdom. Instead, each clan and community is responsible for its own protection.

Scandian nobles, including the monarch, who possess the means, often hire a private army of professional warriors, the *hirdmen*. These free men are devoted to their role as warriors and protectors of the king. It is also the nobles who finance expeditions against enemy clans. The construction of a ship and the recruitment of a crew, as well as the organisation of such an operation, costs a great deal; only the nobility and a few rich traders can afford it. Of course, the promise of loot (in treasure and slaves) will hopefully make the effort worthwhile, but beyond simple material gain, it is also a chance for warrior aristocrats to increase their prestige and glorify their name and reputation.

At times of danger, or to muster a larger force, the *jarl* may call on the *bondi* of his clan. This mass recruitment results in major reinforcements, as most people of the north are warriors. From a very young age, all free men and women are trained in combat, and most have their own weapons. As for armour, most make do with leather

coats, although some can afford vests reinforced with metal plates. Always ready to defend their homes, they are just as enthusiastic when it comes to heading off on an expedition, if the promise of loot and glory is good enough. A wise chief avoids calling on them too often: the *bondi* are the workforce and wealth producers, and depending on the agricultural calendar, they may do more good in the fields than on the battlefield.

The *jarl* leads his troops into battle himself; he cannot allow this prestigious position to pass to anyone else, despite the danger. He displays his courage and defiance of death, inspiring his troops. Moreover, there is no better way for a Norse warrior to die than in battle: the doors to Odin's palace will be open to him.

War is, in theory, no place for women. However, they are always ready to defend their homes, armed to the teeth. Most are trained in combat (by their husband or father), and carry a dagger, spear, or axe. Further, they often accompany expeditions that are likely to last several seasons; they run the fortified camp, deal with daily life (meals, maintaining the stockade, and so on), and tend the wounded. Noble women often have more comprehensive weapons training, and many learn how to fight with a sword. They possess their own arms and armour, and sagas abound with tales of warrior women who fight as well as men. There are also a few women among the *berserkers*.

Scandian warriors are above all foot soldiers. Battles are fought on foot, on open ground or in ambush. A major battle rarely involves more than a thousand warriors on each side; however, a war between two lords can quickly degenerate into a series of endless skirmishes, slowly exhausting their resources and reserves.

Set battles are actually a mass of individual combats: each warrior seeks to prove his valour, and win as much honour as possible. Having said that, large-scale strategy is not completely absent from a battle; the war chief organises the movements of his men, their deployment and, with advice, decides on the tactics and possible stratagems to use.

Very few mounted warriors participate in combat, and those that do act as messengers or scouts. If they must confront the enemy, they charge their mounts forward and join the melee, making the most of their height advantage. When an enemy breaks, they ride down those fleeing the field if their horses are still up to the chase.

Lastly, ships play an important wartime role. Using rowers, the *langskip* slides up on the beach, and its warriors disembark close to their objective or behind enemy lines. Naval combats are common; other warships patrol the coasts to prevent such landings. After a brief exchange of projectiles, each ship manoeuvres to ram the

other and board in favourable conditions. Everything then becomes, as on land, a fight between individual warriors. Naval battles often take place close to the coast, and more than one has ended with warriors jumping into the water and swimming to shore.

Savage Warriors

"...Odin's warriors wore no coats of mail, enraged like dogs or wolves, biting their shields, strong as oxen or bears. They slew, but neither fire nor steel could touch them. That is the fury of the berserker..."


-- *The Ynglinga Saga*

Among the fighters of the Northmen, none are as powerful as the savage warriors. These madmen hurl themselves into combat without thought for their own safety, and have but one goal: to annihilate their enemies, destroy their lineages and bathe in their blood. They combine an undeniable skill in combat with incredible physical power, and a fanatical desire to please the gods. Caught up in the excitement of combat, they fear nothing and no one, and often only their deaths, or the destruction of their enemies, can end their fight.

The status of *berserker* is more than that of a simple warrior. The gift of the *odr*, the *furor* gifted by Odin, makes them more divine than mortal. A *berserker* is as much a mystical worshipper and agent of the gods as he is a warrior – the living human equivalent of the *einherjar*, the dead warriors the father of the Aesir gathers in Valhalla. Savage warriors are as much devotees as warriors, part of the cult of the gods, and particularly of Odin, which has earned them the sobriquet "Odin's warriors". Almost all sovereigns of the three kingdoms surround themselves with a bodyguard of *berserkers*, always twelve in number.

One does not choose to become a *savage warrior*; only Fate can make this decision. For most, this is apparent from a young age but rarely, others only discover this capacity once they reach adulthood. Their spirit animal (bear, wolf, or boar) triggers their first trance, and identifies them as *berserker*. From this moment on, the totem animal becomes part of them, and its host slowly learns how to control it. In the end, a *berserker* can enter his battle rage at will.

Savage warriors are usually men, but there are a small number of women among their number. Odin's gift seems to be hereditary. It may jump a generation, but is generally transmitted to the eldest of a warrior's children, whether boy or girl.



A *berserker* lives with their fellows, depending on their totem animal, of which there are three: bear, wolf, and boar. An initiation ritual joins them to the group directly; it consists of killing the symbolic animal and drinking its blood.

In combat, a savage warrior enters a trance, permitting the spirit animal to take possession of them. This is a religious experience, touching upon the supernatural being which lives within the warrior. The trance lasts a variable amount of time, from a few seconds to several minutes. During this time, the host remains conscious, although he feels as though he is watching everything from a distance. This detachment allows him to feel no remorse or regret for the actions, often incredibly violent, he commits during the trance.

The warriors muscles stiffen, his face twists until it resembles that of his totem animal, and he pants, groans, and roars. His rage dominates him; he bites his shield, sweats, snarls, then hurls himself on the object of his rage in a destructive frenzy.

During the trance, the warrior's strength is greatly increased. He cannot feel pain, and can withstand blows that would floor almost anyone else. His sense of smell becomes sharper but, overcome by the *furor*, the *berserker* does not even notice his environment, he is so completely focussed on his target. He feels no fatigue, and is dominated by his instincts. The *berserkers* are justly feared, but there is no greater glory than to strike down one of these warriors on the battlefield.

Once out of their trance, the *berserker* is exhausted. Shattered, completely spent, it can take several minutes for him to be able to move or even speak.

There are three kinds of *berserker*. All are chosen by Odin, and they venerate him above all other gods. But, depending on the spirit animal within them, these warriors also worship another deity.

Berserkers are the most common, to the point where the other two are often included in the same term (although strictly speaking it is wrong to do so). Associated with the bear totem, the *berserkers* worship Thor who, like them, relies on brute force, solo combat, and a distinct lack of discipline. They wear bearskins into combat, and their maddened rages terrify their foes. They are the most solitary, attacking in disorganised fashion with two-handed axes.

The *ulfhednar* (singular *ulfhedinn*, "wolf skin") are wolf warriors. They venerate Odin, and identify with his two wolves, Freki and Geri. A long spear with a huge head is

their favoured weapon; a wolf skin covers their chain-mail. The *ulfhednar* fight in trained units, together. They use their savagery in lethal ambush and guerrilla tactics. The long howl they give when charging into an enemy camp sows fear among their foes.

The *svinfylkingar* pay homage to Frey, and are called the boar-warriors; they wear a boar skin over their leather armour. They also fight in a group, using a very particular kind of tactic, the "snout" or wedge formation, which legend says Odin invented. They charge the enemy lines and form into a wedge at the moment of impact. Under the pressure of this attack, the enemy line often breaks, and the *svinfylkingar* flood into the breach.

Weapons

Every warrior in the Northern Kingdoms owns his own equipment, both offensive and defensive, and is responsible for its upkeep. The poorest can afford little better than a leather tunic and helmet, a spear or axe, a knife, and a bow and arrows; the richest *hirdmen* bear sharp swords and shields, metal helmets, and mail coats.

Swords

There are two kinds of sword: long and short. Both have blades of worked iron, strong and supple, double-edged. The rounded pommel, like the small thick guard, is usually decorated in gold and silver. Many warriors with swords of the best quality consider them precious treasures, and guard them lovingly. Many blades are named (such as *Lightning Blade* or *Brain-Death*). It is common to be buried with one's sword.

Axes

Derived from a woodman's hatchet, an axe is made of plain iron, with a single edge, set on a straight handle about eighty centimetres long, about an arm's length. A longer version needs two hands to be wielded. These heavy weapons are deadly in the hands of powerful warriors, such as the *berserkers*. The blade is capable of splitting a shield or helmet in a single blow.

Spears

These consist of a long blade, sometimes barbed, set on a wooden pole that can be up to two metres long. It is one of the most common weapons in Scandia.

Knives

Most warriors carry a knife at their belts. More than

just a weapon, it serves multiple functions. The straight guard is often decorated, as is the single-edged blade.

Bows

These are made of ash or yew wood, and are between one and a half and two metres long.

Shields

There is only one kind of shield: round, and about an arm's length in diameter, from the wrist to the shoulder. It is made of wood, and covered in leather. Most warriors cover their shields in colourful motifs and terrifying figures. A circle of riveted iron in the middle protects the bearer's hand; leather straps hold it close to the arm.

Helmets

A simple cuirbouilli (leather boiled in wax) cap for the poorest warriors, it protects the skull and is worn fur-covered in winter. *Hirdmen* prefer metal helmets, which for some can be veritable works of art. The helmet resembles a bowl with a nose or "spectacle" guard to protect the eyes. The craftsmen who create them often cover them with engraved scenes or symbolic images, encrusted with silver and gold, making each piece unique.

Armour

Light and simple armour offers a minimum of protection; the most common item is a leather jerkin. It has short sleeves covering the shoulders, although it may be sleeveless, and usually covers down to the mid-thigh.

Hirdmen and the richest *bondi* wear leather byrnie covered with attached pieces of metal, either scale, mail shirts, or metal plate. Long or short, with or without sleeves, they are made to measure; the latter two are the preserve of elite warriors and those equipped by the most well-off *jarls*.

Animal skins, as well as offering protection from the cold, complete the range of armour used, and are mostly worn by *berserkers* who wear the skins of their totem animals. Bracers and leather bracelets, more rarely metal ones, cover the arms and forearms. All of these are often richly decorated by the craftsmen who make them.

In the Field

On expeditions far from their homes, the Norsemen prefer to build a fortified camp. Unless it is a simple raid, no one knows how long such an expedition might last (usually not later than the beginning of winter, but expeditions can be trapped by bad weather until spring).

The fortified camp serves as lodging, base camp, and refuge for the warriors if the local population attacks. Usually circular, it is surrounded by a high wall of earth topped by a fence of stakes. Wooden huts and tents are set up inside the walls, sometimes including a watchtower.

On maritime expeditions, it is common for camps to be built beside the water (either in a cove or upriver) to keep an eye on and protect ships essential for the return journey. A overland attack does not have these limitations, but if the army has horses and chariots, the fortress is made large enough for them as well.

Expeditions and Colonies

The people of the Northern Kingdoms are adventurous by nature, always ready to brave the dangers of surrounding lands to discover new horizons. Bold traders, free men searching for new lands, conquering *jarls*... there are many reasons for expeditions to be launched.

Smaller ships, such as the *kvarr* and *snekkjar*, are light enough to be drawn up on shore and carried by the men, or pushed on logs, if a river becomes impassable. The vessel can thus be moved to the next waterway and used there.

Clans which run out of space in their territories may assemble a flotilla and seek out new lands to settle. This voluntary emigration allows the clan to grow in power, and to gain access to new resources. Many such communities are born after a charismatic chief or *jarl* is exiled due to a decision taken by the *thing*, and his family and followers decide to join him.

In any case, if the colonists manage to survive their first winter and to carve out a territory large enough to feed themselves, they will found a new city. Of course, being exiles, they often find themselves the rivals, if not the sworn enemies, of the people from whom they separated. This is the case of the small city of Skola, more of a fortified camp than an urban centre. Built in a narrow Finnish fjord, between steep cliffs at the foot of an inhospitable mountain, the community established ten years ago by Brajni Haraldsson was founded on piracy. Traders have learned, to their sorrow, to be wary of this coast, where many of their number have vanished.

Norse colonists are not usually aggressive towards the natives of these lands. If there is enough space and natural resources, they prefer to live peacefully, and on good terms with their neighbours.

"Damned women!" Sigurd Ivarsson grumbled for the tenth time since entering the small cave. A gust of wind blew his black cape across his face, and the hirdman retreated behind the shelter of a large rock by the entrance. As they had been climbing the mountain the blizzard had come from nowhere, hiding the limpid blue sky which had accompanied them that morning. The cold and snow had threatened to swallow them, but princess Jorun had refused to call off their climb, or to wait for better weather. Frozen, almost blinded by the snow lashing their faces, they finished the climb in dead silence. Guided by the volva, the little group finally reached the rocky promontory she had said was their destination. A cave entrance, gaping like the mouth of a hungry serpent, opened before them.

"Damn them both, and particularly the one in breeches!" He growled, collapsing beside the feeble fire Klemet was trying to maintain.

Thorgrim Olavsson's savage laugh answered him. Leaning against the cave wall, he sharpened his axe. Sigurd wondered if the berserker ever spoke except in grunts.

"Is it that you have to recognise her as chief which irritates you so, or because she did not allow you to follow her to the witch's lair?"

Once again Yngwe Gilsursson was absolutely right. The hirdman growled and shrugged, the movement aggravating the pain in his arm. His wound was painful, but he refused to show it, not wanting to seem weak.

"I do not renounce the vow I made to the king, I would follow her to the heart of Niflheim if I had to! But by Odin, how can I guard her if she does not allow me to go with her?"

At dawn, Jorun Hrolfsdottir had given the order to leave. The sailors had remained close to the ship; ready to defend it if the barbarians attacked again. There was no trail leading to the summit Hild pointed out, and they had to cut their way through a thick wood on the steep slopes. Sigurd did not think anyone, no matter what magical powers

they might have, could live in such conditions, but no one else seemed to think so. Once they reached the cave, Jorun gave them the order to wait while she entered, the volva behind her. Thankfully, they had been able to find shelter in this cave, out of the wind. Klemet had dug out some herbs and, with the help of a few branches, lit a weak if smoky fire. Since then, the four men had waited.

"Women have secrets which do not concern us," the skald added, amused, holding out a flask of mead to the hirdman. "But, by Hel, I would like to be taken into their confidence."

"Rubbish!" Sigurd Ivarsson snorted.

He pulled his heavy woollen cloak around him. Klemet Gandalvsson threw dried moss on the fire, which blazed up a little, and gave off more heat.

"Only women can meet with the Lady of Ice," his hoarse voice resounded darkly in their rocky shelter. "Legend tells that men who meet her gaze fall under her charm and will never leave her. At least, until she tires of them, and even then one never sees them again."

The warrior growled a few more curses against the female sex, but this time, he did not raise his voice, for fear of being overheard.

"Which might be a better fate than this," Yngwe answered, shivering.

The three companions drew closer to the fire.

In his corner, Thorgrim contented himself with smiling and caressing his axe.



They had barely crossed the threshold when the roar of the wind dropped to a distant murmur and a faint light illuminated the darkness ahead. The two young women turned and, though they could see the blizzard a few paces away, they seemed to be in another world. Without commenting on this

strange phenomenon, Hild Thorbjornsdottir set off again. Her friend followed, respecting her silence despite the questions burning inside.

At the end of the cavern, three tunnels led deeper into the mountain. The volva hesitated. She sniffed the air as if to find a clue. Her face, although rigidly neutral, revealed to Jorun her indecision. King Hrolf's daughter approached the tunnels and glanced inside, but nothing offered a clue.

"Very well," the princess sighed, "if the runes set us on this path, I doubt the gods would abandon us now."

"The gods care nothing for the problems of mortals, unless it concerns them."

"Then I hope the fate you see for me interests them." Jorun smiled slightly.

Without further discussion, she headed for the right tunnel.

Walls covered in ice crystals lit the cavern with a spectral light. The cold became intense, and white clouds hovered around their mouths with each breath. Finally they emerged into a huge hall, roughly circular and bathed in the same opalescent light. The roof was more than forty feet above, and droplets of water ran down the stalactites and fell into the lake filling most of the room. The dripping echoes were deafening, drowning any other sound, even that of their boots on the rocky ground. A giant column, made from the meeting of a massive stalagmite and stalactite, occupied the centre of the watery expanse. If six men had linked their arms, they could not have encircled its girth. Hild drew her attention to the fantastic decoration. The noblewoman's mouth dropped open.

"Yggdrasill!"

She had only once seen a representation of the World Tree, on a chiselled stone far from the village, but she would recognise it anywhere. The image was carved on the column. Its roots plunged under

the surface of the lake, covered by a thin covering of ice; its branches were lost among the stalactites. The carving covered the pillar completely. There, she saw Jormungand, the Midgard Serpent; here, the mountains of Jotunheim, land of the Giants. Stunned, the two women could not look away, trying to make out every detail. Jorun laughed, spotting the image of Ratatosk the squirrel, huddled in the branches, Bifrost, the Rainbow bridge leading to Asgard, the Kingdom of Hel, Odin's Palace. The immensity of Yggdrasill was before them, open to their eyes.

"I have never seen such a perfect reproduction," Hild Thorbjornsdottir said.

"The question is; who could have made it?"

A blast of freezing wind shook the huge cavern. Ice crystals formed on their clothes, their eyebrows, the corners of their mouths. Without hearing her enter, a tall woman pale as ice now stood framed in the tunnel they had entered by. Her feet were lost in fog. She was enveloped in a thick coat of white fur. A golden circlet held back hair of the same colour, which reached to the ground. Half a dozen braids interlaced with silver thread framed her violet eyes, seeming almost too large for her thin face.

"Welcome to my home, Jorun Hrolfsdottir, and you too, Hild, daughter of Thorbjorn and Gudny the volva. I have been waiting for you."

"You were... but how..." The young warrior was stunned.

Instead of responding, the Lady of Ice smiled. She motioned them to be silent, then to follow her, before turning and disappearing into the fog.

The two friends exchanged a worried glance, then Jorun headed towards the misty tunnel.

"We have not come this far to go without an answer," she declared.

The Game System

The world of Midgard has its own rules and principles of existence, such as the law of nature, as do all the Nine Worlds. The mortal inhabitants of Midgard are subject to these laws, and so are the gods – although they can bend and break them far more often.

Characters in *Yggdrasill* also have to respect certain laws. These are the **game rules** which define what characters can do, and when a chance of failure presents itself. This chapter contains the core rules for the *Yggdrasill* game system, together with examples of how those rules work.

Bear in mind that the game system is a tool in the hands of the Game Master and players, not a straitjacket to limit the game and the pleasure of playing. Don't use the rules more often than you need; sometimes, a simple interaction between Game Master and players is enough to resolve a situation. If you need an impartial arbiter, or you're facing a situation where chance plays an important part, that's the time to refer to the rules.

This game is yours. If a rule seems pointless, change it or ignore it. There's only one immutable rule: have fun!

Success and failure

When a character attempts an action at which he can't fail, then he succeeds automatically. Likewise, if he attempts an impossible action, he fails automatically.

Between these two extremes, there are a near-infinite number of possibilities. When a character attempts an action with an uncertain outcome, where success or failure is vital to the continuation of the game, the Game Master uses these rules.

Rolling Dice



The *Yggdrasill* game only uses one type of die, a ten-sided one known as a d10. The zero on the die is read as a score of 10. You'll need several d10s – between 5 and 10 is best. Each player should have a set of dice available for simultaneous tests, so play doesn't slow down.

Rolling dice represents chance, luck, or Fate, which surrounds all actions which aren't automatic successes.

Rounding fractions

Sometimes, a rule asks you to divide a value. In this case, always round down to the nearest whole number. The only exception to this rule is a 1d5 roll (see below).

Tests

The Game Master tells the players to roll dice for appropriate tests when there's a chance of failure, or an obstacle or opposition to overcome.

A **test** uses a character's characteristics, and often his skills as well; the Game Master decides which. Players may decide to approach a situation or problem in different ways, suggesting different skills or characteristics, but ultimately the Game Master has the final word.

In a test, a player rolls a number of dice equal to his score in the characteristic used for the action. He keeps the results of two of the dice rolled – usually the highest – and adds them together.

If any single die roll results in a “10”, then the player may **re-roll that die**, and add the new score (i.e. 10 + the re-roll) to the final result. Each subsequent roll of “10” is treated the same way, resulting in an open-ended die roll.

The grand total resulting from the dice rolls is added to the skill level of the skill required for the test.

The final result is compared to a **success threshold** (ST) determined by the Game Master: if it equals or exceeds the ST, the action succeeds; if not, it fails.

Summary

- x d10 are rolled, where x is the value of the relevant characteristic.
- Two dice results are chosen and their values added together.
- The skill level is added to this total.
- If the final result is equal to or higher than the success threshold (ST), the action succeeds.

**Test = Best two dice of
[characteristic value] d10 + skill level**

Here are a few examples of dice rolls with a characteristic of 3 and a skill level of 5.

Dice Result	Final Score
4, 6, 9	20 (6 + 9 + skill 5)
2, 4, 8	17 (4 + 8 + skill 5)
4, 8, 10 (10(4))	37 (8 + 10 + 10 + 4 + skill 5)

In a case where the value of a characteristic is 1, the player only rolls a single d10 and, of course, can only keep that one result. However (as above), if this is a 10 it can be rolled again, and the second result added to the total.

1d5

Some rules ask you to roll 1d5, or a five-sided die. While you might be able to find a specialist company making a d5, they are not common, so it's more usual to roll a d10 and halve the result. Round up any fractions (this is the only exception to the rule that fractional results are normally rounded down).

D10	D5
1 to 2	1
3 to 4	2
5 to 6	3
7 to 8	4
9 to 10	5

fate and Heroes

Fate sustains heroes, and allows them to accomplish extraordinary feats, often far beyond the capabilities of those around them. A character's three Fate runes can mystically enhance his normal abilities; when a situation brings the character close to the threads woven for him by the Norns, he may add the results of up to three of the dice he rolls, instead of two. For more details, see the Fate chapter on page 84.

needed in a given test to succeed in the action. A character succeeds at a simple test if he rolls equal to or higher than the success threshold on his test dice. Otherwise, he fails.

The numerical difference between the dice roll result and the success threshold is called the **success margin** (or **failure margin**) of the action. The greater the difference, the greater the margin.

(Dice total + skill) equal to or over the ST = action succeeds

Difference between test result & ST = success margin (or failure margin, if neg.)

The Success Threshold Table above gives an idea of how the system works, and a few examples, to help the Game Master evaluate the difficulty of the actions which characters undertake.

Example: Svein has to climb a steep cliff to escape from pursuers. He can hear the barking of their dogs from the nearby wood. The Game Master tells him this requires his Climbing skill. The surface is steep, but has many handholds, and the Game Master declares it an "Average" difficulty task. However, because Svein has to hurry to complete

Simple Tests

When a character attempts an action with no one opposing him, it's a **simple test**.

The Game Master decides on a minimum **difficulty level** for the action (see the table below). Each difficulty level has an associated **success threshold** (ST), which is the result

Difficulty Levels

Success Threshold	Modifier	Difficulty Level	Example
5	± 1	Very Simple	Getting off a bench
7	± 2	Simple	Threading a needle
10	± 3	Easy	Climbing a rope ladder
14	± 4	Average	Throwing a dagger from three yards away
19	± 5	Difficult	Hitting a bird in flight
25	± 6	Very Difficult	Mapping one's position at sea on a cloudy day
32	± 7	Exceptional	Climbing a glacier bare-handed
40	± 8	Legendary	Killing an ice giant single-handed
49	± 9	Divine	Beating Odin at a game of strategy

Note: Certain situations may modify the difficulty of a test. This simply means changing from one difficulty level to another. So, increasing an Average test (ST 14) to the next higher level would make it a Difficult test (ST 19). Likewise, reducing it by one level would make it Easy (ST 10).

The Game Master can also apply a circumstantial modifier to a test, the precise value of which varies according to the test's difficulty level. For example: favourable conditions for an action with an Average success threshold (ST 14) may add a bonus of +1 to +4 to the dice roll; correspondingly, unfavourable conditions may impose a -1 to -4 penalty. The precise value is determined by the Game Master. If the situation requires greater variation than provided by this circumstantial modifier, it's better to change the difficulty level itself (circumstantial modifiers may apply here, too – see below).

this task, the Game Master decides that a circumstantial modifier applies, and that Svein is suffering a -2 penalty to his test to reflect this urgency. As a result, the Game Master fixes the Climbing test at Average difficulty (ST 14), with a circumstantial penalty of -2.

Characteristic Tests

Most of the time, the tests a character makes depend on his skills. However, sometimes situations occur where no skill seems to apply. For example: a hero is trying to break down a door. Logically, this action relies only on strength; in consequence, the test the character rolls depends only on his STR characteristic.

When the Game Master demands a pure **characteristic test** like this, the player rolls the dice normally, and adds the **value of the characteristic** to the result.

For example: Svein is stopped in his climb by an overhanging rock. He notices that it's not attached to the rock-face, and decides to topple it out of the way. He braces himself against a ledge and pushes with all his strength.

The Game Master rules that this is a Difficult (ST 19) task, using only the character's Strength characteristic. The young hirdman's STR value is 3; his player rolls three dice, keeps the best two results, and adds a +3 bonus (for Svein's Strength). Svein also realises that he has enough space for his sword, too, and draws it to use as a lever. The Game Master accepts this improvised idea from Svein's player, and allows him an extra circumstantial bonus of +2.

Unskilled Tests

Characters often end up in situations where they have to try to use skills they don't possess. This is called an **unskilled test**. If a character has no experience in a skill, then its skill level is zero.

Unskilled tests may not be made for all skill tests. Some skills require a skill level of at least 1 to be able to even attempt the test. These skills are categorized "skilled only", and are marked with an asterisk in the skills list (see page 120 - 124).

In an unskilled test, a character rolls only a number of dice equal to the appropriate characteristic score. Unlike a characteristic test (see above), he **may not add his characteristic score** as a bonus.

For example: Svein has managed to push the rock out of his way, but its fall has started a rockslide that threatens to hurl him to the bottom of the cliff. The Game Master declares Svein must pass an Acrobatics test to heave himself



Modifying the ST

Each difficulty level is associated with a specific success threshold; an Average difficulty level corresponds to a success threshold of 14. However, if the situation isn't straightforward (as in the example of an additional obstacle, above), then the Game Master can impose a penalty on the test to make it more challenging.

There are two ways of doing this: first, the Game Master can **raise the difficulty level** (e.g. from Average to Difficult); second, she can apply a **negative circumstantial modifier** to the test. This modifier can range from as low as -1, up to the number which would push the test to the next difficulty level (i.e., applying a -5 penalty to an Average test would make it Difficult).

The same method can be used to improve a character's chances of success, where appropriate. If a character is using good equipment, or is working under other favourable conditions (such as being able to take his time), then the Game Master can apply a **positive circumstantial modifier** (or bonus) to his dice rolls (or, alternately, lower the difficulty level). Such a bonus can range from +1, up to the number which would drop the test down to the next lower difficulty level (so that adding +4 to an Average test (ST 14) would make it Easy (ST 10)).

These **circumstantial modifiers** enable the Game Master to more carefully gauge a character's action and, if desired, add more precision to the action's difficulty.

Note: circumstantial modifiers don't change the success threshold itself, but rather add or subtract from a player's rolls. As a result, players always know the target number they have to reach is defined by the success threshold.



out of the way, and decides on an Average difficulty (ST 14). Unfortunately, Svein has no skill in Acrobatics, and may only roll the three dice allowed by his Agility characteristic score. He does not add a +3 bonus for his Agility score, as this is an unskilled test and not a characteristic test.

Tests Involving Multiple Skills

Sometimes an action demands the use of more than one skill at a time. In such a case, the player automatically uses the weakest skill level as the bonus when he makes the check. If he has none of the required skills then he makes an unskilled test (see above).

Some Examples of Extended Tests

Eloquence	Convince a village to rally for an enemy <i>jarl</i> . Very Difficult (ST 25)	Period: One week
Runes	Trace runes of healing on the skin of a pregnant woman. Average (ST 14)	Period: Five minutes
Herbalism	Prepare an unguent against frostbite. Easy (ST 10)	Period: Twenty minutes
Knowledge (Etiquette)	Organise a meeting between two kings, and its festivities. Difficult (ST 19)	Period: Four hours
Craft	Make a finely detailed, average sized pot. Average (ST 14)	Period: Three hours
	Repair a <i>knorr's</i> sail. Easy (ST 10)	Period: One hour
	Make a good pair of leather shoes. Average (ST 14)	Period: Three hours
	Assemble a large wooden coffer. Average (ST 14)	Period: Half a day
	Weave a rich hanging decorated with heroic scenes. Difficult (ST 14)	Period: One day
Craft (Smithing)	Carve a dozen arrows for a bow. Easy (ST 10)	Period: Thirty minutes
	Make a coloured shield. Average (ST 14)	Period: Half a day
	Make a sword or axe blade. Difficult (ST 19)	Period: Half a day
	Make a magnificent helm decorated with precious stones. Very Difficult (ST 25)	Period: Four days
Ride	Train a young foal for war. Difficult (ST 19)	Period: One week

Note: the above parameters assume the character has adequate materials and tools. If not, the Game Master may prolong the period, or apply a circumstantial penalty to the ST.

Example: Svein finally reaches the top of the cliff and finds an isolated farm. His pursuers are at the bottom of the cliff and are preparing to go around it to reach him. The hero spots a horse in an enclosure and decides to borrow it, but as he jumps onto the horse's back, the bondi races out of his house, wielding a spear to stop the thief. Svein attempts to master his mount and parry the attack at the same time. The action draws on both the Ride and Long Weapons skills. Svein is a better warrior than he is a rider, so he uses his Ride skill as the bonus when he makes this test.

Opposed Tests

When two or more characters oppose each other in some kind of competition or conflict, this is called an **opposed test**.

In an opposed test, the Game Master does not need to set a success threshold; instead, this is determined by each character's opponent. The Game Master still decides which characteristics and skills apply to the test; these might be identical for both participants (e.g. Ride for a horseback race), or different (e.g. Stealth to escape a guard's Vigilance).

Daily Life

As in a simple test, the Game Master can also apply circumstantial modifiers, reflecting any advantages one character may have over another. So, a spy trying to slip silently behind a guard's back may receive a circumstantial bonus if he's attempting the deed at night and in a poorly lit area. It's up to the Game Master to decide if any of the adversaries receives a bonus.

In an opposed test, only external conditions can offer positive circumstantial modifiers. If one of the participants is suffering from a disadvantage (ie is drunk, blind, etc), then that character incurs a negative circumstantial modifier (a penalty) to his roll.

When two or more characters are using actions against each other, follow the procedure below:

Each participant in an opposed test attempts a test using an appropriate characteristic and skill, as determined by the Game Master.

- The highest result wins the test.
- If all results are equal, the opposed test is not yet resolved, and continues into the following round.
- The success margin (or failure margin) is determined by the difference between the two scores.

***For example:** after avoiding the spear blow, Svein flees. Three riders appear on a nearby hill and pursue him. The Game Master decides all the participants must make opposed tests using their Agility + Ride. Svein has Agility 3 and Ride +3; his player rolls the three dice for his Agility and gets 4, 6, and 9. He chooses the two results 6 and 9, adds +3 for his Ride skill, and obtains a total of 18.*

The NPC riders have Agility 2 and Ride +5. The Game Master makes a single test for all the NPCs and gets a 19 (7 and 7 for the dice, +5 for the skill). The riders are slowly gaining on Svein...

The combat rules are also based on the opposed test. However, many more variables apply in these perilous situations, including some optional rules, so combat is more than simply a series of opposed tests. It's explained in detail in the "Combat" chapter (see page 125).

Extended Tests

Some actions require a significant investment of time and energy. Examples include: forging a sword, building a *knorr*, or preparing healing balms.

In these cases, the Game Master may use an **extended**

test. She decides on a **period** for the required task (hours, days, or weeks), sets the success threshold as normal, then asks the player to make an appropriate test.

- On a success, the task is accomplished at the end of the set **period**.
- If the roll is a **critical success**, the **period** required for the task is reduced by a third.
- If the roll fails, the task is not finished at the end of the period, and the player may continue, taking another period and attempting another test with a +2 bonus, cumulative for any further attempts.
- If the roll is a critical failure, the character must begin the extended test again; all materials and time invested are lost.

***For example:** to shake off his pursuers, Svein heads into a dark forest, a taboo place for the people of this country. Although he quickly leaves his pursuers behind, Svein is now lost. The Game Master decides that, as Svein refuses to back-track, he must regularly try to orient himself to get through the forest to the far side. This is a long-term action, requiring an extended test.*

The Game Master decides on an ST of 19 (Difficult), and a circumstantial penalty of -3 since Svein doesn't know the region. He also decides that the period for the extended test is one day (i.e. Svein will make one test per day).

Svein's first test (Instinct + Survival) results in 15 (1, 5, and 9 for the dice, -3 for the penalty, +4 for the skill). This isn't enough, and Svein spends the night in the forest.

The next day, he attempts another test, which benefits from the (cumulative) +2 bonus from yesterday's test (presumably he's closer to the far side). His final result on this test is 29 (6, 7, and 10 (+9), -3 penalty, +4 skill, +2 bonus). As a result, Svein manages to find his way out of the forest.

Special Results

When making tests, extreme results – whether successful or disastrous – can have specific effects.

Critical Success

A **normal success** on a test occurs if the final result is **greater than the ST**, but less than twice the ST.

ST < Final result < ST × 2 = Normal success

If the final result is **equal to or greater than twice the success threshold**, a **critical success** has occurred.

Final result $\geq ST \times 2 =$ Critical success

Fumble

This depends on the individual results of each character-istic die rolled in a test. A fumble occurs, when, excluding extra dice (for heroic actions, Furor dice, Fate, etc):

- Rolling 1-3 d10, all of the dice show only “1”.
- Rolling 4 or more d10, at least three dice show “1”.

It's very difficult to obtain a critical success on tests of Exceptional difficulty (ST 32); correspondingly, it's far more likely on tests of difficulty level Easy (ST 10). Likewise, a character with a high characteristic score is less likely to fumble than one whose score is low.

A **critical success** indicates an above-average success, which greatly improves a character's situation. A **fumble** corresponds to a situation that gets worse due to a character's actions.

It's up to players and Game Master to be inventive when interpreting these results in a given situation.

Note: the results of critical successes and fumbles made in combat are noted on page 133. Their use is optional, however.

The Burden of fate

Three runes are associated with each character's Fate (see page 84 *Fate chapter*) and they influence his actions in some situations. These three **Fate runes** are closely linked to the saga you're playing.

If the Game Master declares that the context of a test you're attempting is connected to your character's Fate, you may add the result of a third die you have rolled to your final test result.

Of course, if you're not actually rolling that many dice (perhaps because of you have a characteristic score of 1 or 2), you may only retain the maximum possible number of dice (in this case, one or two).

***For example:** Svein believes he has escaped, but barely gets a few leagues before he meets his avowed nemesis, the jarl Eirik the Cruel - who has sworn to decorate his home with Svein's head!*

To add to Svein's problems, the jarl is accompanied by his usual entourage of twelve berserkers. Faced with such opposition, and despite his horse being tired, Svein decides to flee. The figure of Eirik the Cruel comes from an interpretation Svein's player had decided upon with the Game Master for one of Svein's runes: Othal (paternal income). Eirik had stolen the lands of Svein's family, and as his father's heir, Svein has sworn vengeance upon him.

The Game Master confirms that any action Svein takes regarding escaping from Eirik's clutches is connected to Svein's Fate runes. Svein's player can therefore retain the scores from three of the dice he rolls, rather than two, when making his Ride test. As a result, Svein successfully manages to gallop away.



Heroes of Midgard

This chapter deals with one of the fundamental areas of any role-playing game: the creation of characters. In order to create heroes both the players and Games Master desire, they should both ensure they spend sufficient time on this essential stage.

The Birth of a Hero



To begin with, you'll need a character sheet for writing down all the information about your character. You'll also need a pencil and eraser, as it's almost certain you'll need to amend the character sheet several times. A step-by-step guide to character generation follows.

The Concept

Start by defining the type of character you wish to play - what we call the **basic concept**. The Game Master can give you an idea about the world of *Yggdrasill* the character inhabits, and from this you can decide the kind of character you want.

It isn't necessary to define the concept precisely - a rough outline is enough: a silent *berserker*, a quarrelsome *hirdman*, an enigmatic *volva*, a boastful *skald*; these simple concepts are enough to base your character on. You can use the archetypes included in this book, or invent others for your character. Then work up a more precise description of your hero: this will guide your choices during the following stages, when deciding your character's statistics.

If you're in a hurry to begin adventuring, use one of the six archetypes (see page 92 - 103): they have their own histories, motivations, strengths, and weaknesses. They're also suitable for use in the scenario on page 203.

Creating Your Character

1. Concept

Decide who your character is going to be, and select an archetype from the Archetypes chapter beginning on page 89. Note the privileged skills that come with the archetype you choose.

2. Fate

Randomly determine the 3 runes that control your character's destiny as described on page 84 & 88). Either two must be positive and one negative or two must be negative and one positive.

3. Characteristics

Distribute 19 points among the 9 characteristics listed under **Body**, **Mind** and **Soul**. Each one must end with a rating of 1-4. Characteristics may go up to 5 only with experience. The characteristic level is the amount of dice you roll when attempting an action, choosing the best two.

Calculate scores for Body, Mind and Soul by adding up the 3 characteristics in each group.

4. Gifts & Weaknesses

Choose 1 gift from the list on page 116. You may select a second gift, but only if you also choose a weakness from the list on page 119.

5a. Secondary Characteristics (Initiative)

Reaction (REA) is equal to

INT + PER + INS

Note any Encumbrance (ENC) or Armour penalty.

5b. Secondary Characteristics (Personal Defence)

Personal Defence (PD) is equal to AGI + VIG + INS. It may be modified by ENC and gains +3 when using a shield.

5c. Secondary Characteristics (Mental Defence)

Mental Defence (MD) is equal to TEN + INT + INS. It may be modified by magical effects.

5d. Secondary Characteristics (Movement)

Base Movement score (MOV) is equal to AGI + VIG

Running speed is $MOV \times 2$ (sustainable for VIG in hours)
Sprinting speed is $MOV \times 3$ (sustainable for VIG $\times 2$ in combat rounds)

5e. Secondary Characteristics (Encumbrance)

Total Encumbrance capacity (ENC) is equal to $(STR \times 2) + VIG$

Carrying more weight than ENC makes you 'Hindered' (-3 penalty to all tests and make an ST:19 Vigour test each hour (see page 110)).

When weight carried passes $ENC \times 2$ you are Encumbered: all tests are 1 level of ST harder and an ST:19 Vigour test must be made each hour (see page 110). Encumbrance penalties are cumulative with wound penalties.

The character sheet is a complex form with various sections for character creation. It includes fields for Name, Surname, Age, Kingdom, and Gifts. There are sections for Archetype, Profession, Height, Weight, and Weakness. The sheet is divided into three main columns: BODY, MIND, and SOUL. Each column has a list of characteristics and a table for calculating scores. The BODY column includes Strength, Vigour, and Agility. The MIND column includes Intellect, Deception, and Tenacity. The SOUL column includes Charisma, Instinct, and Community. There are also sections for Initiative (INI), Personal Defence (PD), Mental Defence (MD), and Movement (MOV). The bottom section includes a table for Hit Points (HP) and a section for Wounds.

5f. Secondary Characteristics (Hit Points)

Total Hit Points (HP) are equal to $(Body \times 3) + (Mind \times 2) + (Soul \times 1)$

Character is **Bloodied** after suffering any damage.

Character is **Wounded** when reduced to less than half their HP total (Suffers a -3 penalty).

Character Generation

Character is **Seriously Wounded** when reduced to less than a quarter of their HP total. May only keep 1 die in tests.

Character is **Unconscious** when reduced to 0 HP.

Character is **Dead** when reduced to a negative total equal to a quarter of their total HP.

Special rules exist for Berserk characters in a state of Battle Furor.

7. Determine Actions

- Characters may make 1 Primary action each round. They may also make (AGI+1) Secondary actions.

8. Furor

- For characters with the 'Savage Warrior' gift Furor pool = VIG +INS +TEN
For characters with the 'Initiate' gift Furor pool = VIG +INS +INT

For all other characters
Furor pool = (VIG +INS +TEN)/2 (round down)

Furor points are spent to add the result of an additional dice to a skill test.

Savage Warriors and Initiates may use them for other abilities (see page 112 - 113).

9. Combat Feats and Spells

- All characters have 12 points to spend on Combat feats and magic. Each feat, Galdr domain, Seidr spell or Rune costs 3 points per level. Levels must be bought sequentially where possible.

10. Equipment and money

- All characters can be assumed to own each weapon they are skilled with. The Gamemaster may allow players to choose armour or issue it themselves. They may buy additional equipment from their starting wealth, which is 1D10×10 in silver. Record the details of any weapons owned (p185).

6. Skills

- You have 35 points to spend on skills. Privileged skills cost 1 point for each level you buy. Any other skill costs 2 points per level. All skills begin with a level of 0, and may be bought up to a maximum of 7. Skills may rise up to level 20 with experience.

Skills are grouped into General, Magic and Combat skills. The value of the skill is added to the result of the dice in resolving a test.

11. Final Touches & Renown

Decide on a name and surname, and record a few notes about your character's history.

Renown is equal to your character's highest skill. The noteworthy deeds are for you to fill as your character's destiny brings him fortune and adventure.

fate

Fate is an important concept for the people of Midgard; even the gods bow to Fate. Your character is no exception; and at the beginning of character creation you'll determine the three **runes** which will define your character. How to do this, and the effect those three runes have, are discussed in more depth later (see page 84).

Characteristics

Characteristics are a character's innate capabilities. They change over time, as your hero improves, and define his very nature.

There are nine characteristics, divided into three groups:

- **The BODY** group comprises **Strength, Vigour** and **Agility**.
- **MIND** comprises **Intellect, Perception** and **Tenacity**.
- **SOUL** comprises **Charisma, Instinct** and **Communication**.

Characteristics range from a value of 1 (Feeble) to 5 (Legendary), and correspond to the number of dice the player rolls when he attempts a relevant action. This part of the game system is described in its own chapter (see page 106).

Each player has 19 points to distribute among these nine characteristics. Most people in Midgard have an average of 2 in each characteristic, so characters are slightly better than average, and can advance far beyond that.

Gifts and Weaknesses

Characters in *Yggdrasill* are called to exceptional fates. When the sagas tell of their exploits, their personalities are as important as their actions.

Gifts and weaknesses allow you to better define your character and, in rules terms, give him a slight advantage (or a small handicap). Each player can choose a single gift for their character during character creation. Players can then decide if they would like a second gift: if they do, the character must also accept a weakness.

At the beginning of a game, a character has a maximum of two gifts and a single weakness. These factors are more than simply game mechanics, and help a player find the best way to interpret his character.

The game effects of gifts and weaknesses are described on page 115.

Skills

Characteristics determine what a character is, but **skills** determine what he can do. They correspond to his training and other learned abilities.

Levels of competence range from 0 (incompetent) to 20 (living legend). This **skill level** indicates the amount of expertise a character has in the associated skill.

Each player has 35 points with which to buy skills for his character. Each archetype grants five **privileged skills**, which are cheaper to buy; all other skills can be bought freely according to the image the player has of his character.

The process of gaining skills is explained on page 120.

Secondary Characteristics

Secondary characteristics are statistics based on the nine primary characteristics. Calculate and note them on the character sheet, as they are vital in the game, particularly during combat.

Hit Points (HP) represent a character's resistance to wounds and sickness.

Reaction (REA) represents how quickly a character can react, and is important in determining initiative.

Physical Defence (PD) represents how well a character can avoid injury.

Mental Defence (MD) represents a character's resistance to magical attacks.

Movement (MOV) indicates how fast a character can move in a game turn.

Weight Capacity indicates how much weight a character can carry, and limits his personal equipment.

Character Generation

See page 108 for details on how to calculate secondary characteristics.

furor

Furor represents a hero's capacity to dig deep within himself and find, through his emotions and connection to the magic of Midgard, the energy and will to overcome obstacles in his path. It is a reserve allowing him to deal with critical situations.

Furor is a heroic bonus corresponding to the energy a mortal can normally draw upon. Panic, rage, thirst for blood, and other strong emotions can push a human to discover their *furor*. However, only those chosen by Odin, including the savage warriors, can reach the state of sacred furor trance which increases their abilities.

For details on the nature and use of furor, see page 111.

Combat Feats and Magical Spells

No matter the chosen concept, the heroes of Scandia are all trained in fighting, if only to defend themselves from the many dangers around them.

Note on the character sheet what particular combat techniques your character knows under "Combat Feats" (see page 143), as well as the characteristics of his preferred weapons. If a character practices a form of magic, you should decide on the spells they are able to cast (see page 150).

Each player has 12 points to spend on these feats and spells to make his character more formidable. Note this information on the character sheet.

During character creation, each combat feat or magical spell costs its level \times 3. For *galdr* (see page 162), each domain costs its level \times 3 points, and each domain must be bought separately and progressively. For example: in the Illusion domain, a *galdr* spellcaster must first buy Hearing, before Sight or Taste. For Curses, the character must first buy Minor Ailment or Impediment before he can purchase Moderate Ailment or Impediment.

History

Finally, it only remains for you to bring your hero to life. Choose a name and define any other details. Check with the Game Master when defining your character's past, kingdom, and origins. By answering the following questions you can create a unique character:

For example: What clan does your character come from? What part of Scandia does he call home? Who were his parents? How does he get on with his family? What is his goal in life? What are his habits? How does he act towards men / women / his *jarl*? What does he fear? What does he do when in trouble?

You can add more detail to these answers, and in so doing you'll see your character come to life. It isn't necessary to define everything up front, or in much detail: once you've started creating your character, more ideas will occur to you during play, and your character will become more rounded; but don't neglect this part of the game, as it's one of the great pleasures of playing.





fate

Fate is fundamental when it comes to understanding the world of *Yggdrasill*. Fate exerts its inescapable influence over the newborn; the Norns, its personification, weave Fate, and mere humans can do nothing except obey - and, for heroes, embrace it. Fate does not hurry. Man is touched by the magic of his world and made conscious of it; his dignity and grandeur is to fulfil his Fate.

Even the world of the gods is controlled by Fate. No one can escape. In breaking their promises, the gods condemned themselves to Ragnarok.

During character generation, your character will call on Fate.

Runes, the voice of Fate



When you create a character, you decide his Fate by casting the runes. These are the same sacred, magical runes that Odin learned by hanging from the tree of Yggdrasill, pierced by his own lance, for nine days.

These runes are referred to as your character's **Fate**

runes, and he will have three of them. A method for determining these during character generation is set out below, but feel free to modify it according to the needs of your campaign, or because you want a character to have a particular rune to predict an event in his life or your campaign.

With the Game Master's agreement, you can include events in your character's history which are the result of the predictions made by his Fate runes. However, a character's Fate runes are also intended to be actively used during the game, and it's recommended at least one should be held in reserve for this purpose.

To cast a character's Fate runes:

- 1.) Each player rolls 1d8 three times; not 3d8 together, but three separate rolls of 1d8, one for each aett, or group of runes. This gives you three runes.
- 2.) You may choose whether a given rune has been cast in a positive or negative aspect (some runes have only positive aspects, or only negative). Details of the meaning of a rune, based on its aspect, are given below. You may select the following choice of aspects:
 - Two positive runes, and one negative. Do this where one of your runes is unequivocally malevolent, to counterbalance its effect.
 - One positive rune and two negative runes. Do this where the negative runes are not too unpleasant, or if the positive rune is unequivocally beneficial.

Character Generation

- 3.) Incorporate the interpretations of these three runes into your character, based on the events and background of your campaign. Select advantages or disadvantages for your character bestowed by the runes depending on their aspect (these might be bonuses and penalties, or appropriate gifts and weaknesses)

An example of casting Fate runes during character generation is given below (see page 88).

Each *aett* is under the influence of a god. You can use this to incorporate appropriate elements into your campaign. For example, if the player characters begin play in Svithjod, they may be under the influence of Frey; if their goal is to establish justice, that of Tyr; if they have to find a precious item, Heimdall. This is only an example: use the runes as you want, but be aware that they can have major effects:

If, during play, a player realises that one of his character's Fate runes is directly relevant to his current situation, he may roll and keep an extra die on any tests he makes (meaning he rolls three dice instead of two, for example). However, be careful! You can only do this for one action per encounter, although you can do it several times in a scenario if the situation warrants.

Note: It's important to keep the spirit and mystical feel of the runes. Although each player knows his character's three Fate runes, and maybe even their effects, the character himself isn't aware of them unless they've been revealed to him by a sage. Fate is more suffered than manipulated; a Game Master may even keep the interpretation of the runes secret from the player. Casting the runes to see what Fate has in store for a newborn is a Scandian custom, and the Norns will still decide your fate even if you have no idea of your runes. In *Yggdrasil*, the only Master of Runes is you, the Game Master.

The Runes



frey's Aett



1 – Fehu

Positive Aspect: Living in prosperity, riches, gaining goods, abundance and social success.

The character may be born into a rich family, or have reached his favourable status through hard work and perseverance. It is possible his status might change dramatically during his life.

Negative Aspect: Loss of goods, poverty, social rejection. The character might be born in a poor family and find it hard to survive, or he will suffer a reversal of fortune and never regain his social status.



2 – Urz

Positive Aspect: Vital force, health and energy. The character has an iron constitution, never falling ill. He will be strong and healthy.

Negative Aspect: Sickness, lack of energy, passivity. The character will suffer or fall ill often, and will not be strong enough to take up arms when sick.



3 – Thurz

Negative Aspect Only: This malevolent rune symbolises the destructive powers of the frost giants. The character will be often caught up in conflicts, in dangerous situations or places

where his life is at risk. Misery seems to follow him. In a more supernatural game, the character may even be a descendant of a giant, or hunted by a giant, or will have to face a giant at some point in their lives.



4 – Ansuz

Positive Aspect Only: This rune is always positive. It is a sign of Odin's blessing, indicating great skaldic and magical power, or simply that Odin has marked out the character from birth – a Fate

not without risk! The character may be a great skald, famed sage, or even a powerful *berserker* if he chooses the corresponding gift.



5 – Reith

Positive Aspect: Voyage, travel, evolution in life. The character may be a constant traveller, never staying in one place, visiting towns and countries; or he progresses positively in his social life and / or

knowledge. He is always ready to change.

Negative Aspect: Immobility, finding it hard to evolve. The character is fixed in their ways and far prefers not to change or move around.



6 – Kaun

Positive Aspect: Passion, creativity, technical skills. The character may be a gifted craftsman or have a passion for a certain activity in which he excels.

Negative Aspect: Instability, lack of perseverance. The character has no particular interest in anything.



7 – Geþō

Positive Aspect: Equilibrium, godly gifts, sacrifices made to the gods by the character are always welcomed. The character has the right qualities to become a godi (see page 22).

Negative Aspect: Either the character never performs sacrifices to the gods and receives no divine aid, or the gods never pay attention to him despite his offerings.



8 – Wunjō

Positive Aspect Only: This symbol is a sign of happiness, of good living and pleasure. The character will enjoy life, liking parties and romantic adventures; he will work to live in the best of

conditions, and will be blessed in love.

Heimdall's Aett



1 – Hagall

Negative Aspect Only: This rune is always negative, and represents rage and the power of nature: natural catastrophes, hail, losses and other disasters. The character will offend a god of nature at some

point in his life (Frey, the *alfar*, the *landvaettir*, totemic spirits or souls of ancestors) and suffer the consequences: bad harvests, famine, sickness, harsh winters. Or the character may accidentally find himself in a dangerous situation: have his ship destroyed by a storm, trapped due to a snowstorm, etc.



2 – Nauthr

Negative Aspect Only: this rune is always malevolent. It represents poverty, suffering and torment. At some point in his life, the character will know a painful loss, imprisonment, loss of goods,

famine, sickness, or temporary banishment.



3 – Isa

Negative Aspect Only: This rune is always malevolent. It represents cold, ice and stagnation, betrayal. The character will not be able to reach a goal he has set his heart on, or will be betrayed; or he will

betray a person who trusted him and will suffer heavy consequences; or he will be in a situation he will not be able to escape from.



4 – Jērā

Positive Aspect Only: This is the rune of good harvests, of prosperity and peace. It can end any ongoing situation, from imprisonment to vendettas. The character will know an entire year of prosperity, good

health, good fortune and peace, or he will see favourable opportunities and know when to act on them.



5 – Iwaz

Positive Aspect Only: This rune is that of the World Tree, of Yggdrasill. It represents protection, stability and strength. All reasonable projects the character embarks on will be successful, or

the character will be surrounded by loyal people who will help him when he is in trouble. The character will be considered as a loyal person one should be proud to call a friend. At the Game Master's discretion, the power of this rune is forever broken if the character betrays someone close to him or breaks any oath.



6 – Perth

Positive Aspect: This is the rune of secrets, divination, and femininity. The character may have a gift for divination, be able to answer strange riddles, or detect the use of magic. He may be less

susceptible to illusions and other spells.

Negative Aspect: the character understands nothing of magic, cannot comprehend its subtleties, and is vulnerable to illusions and spells.



7 – Algiz

Positive Aspect Only: Algiz is the most powerful protective rune against malevolent energies, traps, and supernatural creatures. The character is protected from

Character Generation

harmful influences, attempts to manipulate him, and curses of any kind. This may be due to the character's own magical skill, divine protection, or just an innate talent that draws on this protection. As with Iwaz, if the character commits an act of betrayal, breaks an oath, or refuses to assume his Fate (refuses vengeance, to help a parent or blood brother, a duel, shows cowardice on the battlefield, etc), or uses the *seidr*, *galdr*, or runes to cast a curse, the rune's power is broken forever.



8 – Söl

Positive Aspect Only: The rune of the sun cannot be negative. It brings victory and improvement in the life of the character. This may be a striking victory (for the group or the character himself),

friendship with a highly-placed person, an unexpected windfall improving his life if he is poor, and so on.

Tyr's Aett



1 – Tiwaz

Positive Aspect: This rune is that of the god Tyr, god of law. The character may never suffer from arbitrary decisions by the *thing*, or be challenged for false reasons. He may be influenced by the god to

always respect the laws.

Negative Aspect: The character suffers from systematic injustices, fails in competitions, or is always thwarted in his actions for fear of breaking the law.



2 – Bjarken

Positive Aspect: This rune represents fertility, marriage, birth. The character may be in a happy marriage, have the strong children he wants, or avoid constraining arranged marriages and the trou-

bles they entail.

Negative Aspect: the character may have an unexpected child and / or an unhappy, constraining marriage; have weak children he has to abandon, etc.



3 – Ehwaz

Positive Aspect Only: This rune is that of the horse, Frey's animal. For the character it represents a favourable progression or successful

voyage, without incident. It also supports other positive runes (Positive Aspect, or Positive Aspect Only), by maximising their positive effects.



4 – Mathr

Positive Aspect: This rune represents the human race and the individual. It reflects cooperation between persons, familial relations, clan and society. The character may be considered a good person, intel-

ligent, a good communicator, or even a leader of men.

Negative Aspect: The character cannot rely on help from his fellows. Perhaps he is too untrustworthy or a known manipulator. He probably does not speak much and never makes many friends. In any case, he elicits no compassion or friendship. This can lead to isolation, which can be deadly.



5 – Lögr

Positive Aspect: This rune represents water, the liquid expanses. It favours imagination and dreams. The character may be particularly intuitive, have premonitions in dreams without using magic, or be particularly gifted in divination if he is a sorcerer.

Negative Aspect: The character will always be a little confused and will not control his life. This may stem from a lack of education, being something of a dreamer, an isolated childhood, or a sense of permanent danger.



6 – Ingvi

Positive Aspect Only: Ingvi is the rune of virility, good sense, familial warmth, relief and serenity. The character may have a supportive and even powerful family he can rely on in times of trouble. Or

perhaps the character is very sure of himself and faces the future without fear, thanks to a happy and reassuring childhood.



7 – Dagaz

Positive Aspect Only: This rune is that of day, light, warmth and hope rising after the waning of the night. The character will know unexpected relief after touching rock-bottom, or will find an answer to a

problem which was ruining his life. This rune can also symbolise success after failure.



8 – Othall

Positive Aspect: Othall is the rune symbolising paternal income. Unlike Fehu, it often means inheritance or acquired wealth. The character comes from a rich family or has several rich relations who will designate him as heir; or he will receive lands and houses as thanks for his skills or through marriage.

Negative Aspect: The character will never inherit from his parents if they have goods, or will make a poor marriage. He will never own much in the way of land. If the Game Master permits, the character can own a house and small patch of land, but no more.

Example of Casting the Fate Runes:

Christopher wants to create a berserker, and Game Master James has him roll 1d8 three times. The first die is a 3, the second an 8, and the last also an 8, giving the runes Thurz, Sol, and Othall. That's one negative aspect only rune, one positive aspect only, and a third with two possible aspects.

James decides on a negative aspect for his Othall rune, because Christopher has chosen a berserker archetype and the rune won't affect him much - inheritance is not a priority for this archetype. Had he decided to create a noble, the two negative runes, particularly that of Othall, would have been too unbalancing. Either way, it's the Games Master's decision based on his campaign requirements.

Thurz: Christopher's character, Ragnar Geirson, knows giants have massacred some of his family and wants to avenge them. His honour depends on it. James decided on this interpretation since the scenario will involve an expedition into Norwegian forests and a few violent encounters.

Söl: Ragnar is in a good position as the berserker of a powerful Norwegian jarl. His lord is pleased with his strength, and if the berserker returns victorious over the giants, he may well be rewarded and his exploits recognised.

Othall: Ragnar comes from a poor family which has struggled to survive. He has no chance for an inheritance, and it's impossible for a berserker to advance through marriage. Christopher knows he has drawn these three runes, but not what the future has in store. Ragnar cannot read runes.

frey's Aett

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Fehu	Uruz	Thurz	Ansuz	Reith	Kaun	Gebō	Wunjō

Heimdall's Aett

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Hagall	Nauthr	Isa	Jērā	Iwaz	Perth	Algiz	Söl

Tyr's Aett

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Tiwaz	Bjarken	Ehwaz	Mathr	Lōgr	Ingvi	Dagaz	Othall

Archetypes

To help you build your character concept, this chapter details six **archetypes** which correspond to typical individuals in Scandia. These six heroes can serve as ready-to-play characters, or inspirations to help you create your own, whether using these archetypes or archetypes you've created yourself. Treat them as templates: the character generation system of *Yggdrasill* is flexible enough to allow you to create any kind of hero.

These archetypes aren't intended to be exhaustive, but do cover a wide variety of choices. They're grouped according to the classes of Norse society.

After a brief description of each archetype, you'll find a short list of **privileged skills**. None of these are mandatory: feel free to choose the skills that suit you. After all, nothing prevents you from playing a noble skilled in medicine, a skald who's also a talented merchant, or a *berserker* who loves music and legends. The only limitation for characters in *Yggdrasill* is this: only those chosen by Odin can become a *berserker*, or practice magic. In game terms, this means a player must choose the *Savage Warrior* or *Initiate* gifts to be able to choose the corresponding archetype.

In all other cases, the following selection is only meant to guide, and help decide on an initial character concept.

Archetypes & Vocation

Newly-created characters are usually young, barely into adulthood, aged between 16 and 20. The archetype you choose for your character reflects his training and social and familial origins, and for nobles even their status in the clan. But a character's archetype does not necessarily indicate what role he will play in the future in his clan. Of course, Odin initiates and savage warriors will always keep their original gifts, unless they incur from a terrible curse. But it is up to the player to define how his character develops, and the role which the sagas will accord him.

Nobles

Jarl

The *jarl* leads the clan. He is the head of a community and responsible for its protection. To this end he finances a private army, consisting of *hirdmen*. The *jarl* directs military operations and organises political life around the *thing*. This high-ranking noble encapsulates the values of the clan he represents.

Privileged Skills: Eloquence, Ride, Tactics, Traditions, a combat skill of your choice.

War Chief

This noble leads the troops when a *jarl* decides to wage war, whether on a raid against an enemy or to defend his lands. Trained in military techniques, the war chief is also an excellent warrior. When the *jarl* directly takes

control of the army, this character commands a warband.

Privileged Skills: Intimidation, Knowledge (Geography), Ride, Tactics, a combat skill of your choice.

Counsellor

The *jarl* often surrounds himself with the wisest and most experienced members of the community, helping him make decisions affecting the future. These trusted men also act as emissaries during diplomatic missions. They can also act as spies, becoming the chief's eyes and ears.

Privileged Skills: Eloquence, Knowledge (Scandinavian Politics), Negotiation, Stealth, a combat skill of your choice.

Warriors

Hirdman

Soldiers loyal to the *jarl* or mercenaries selling their skills to the highest bidder, the *hirdmen* are above all professional warriors who live by their remarkable combat skills. In times of peace, they ensure the safety of trade routes and their lord's domain. They may be tasked to act as bodyguards for important people in the clan or to track down bandits and dangerous beasts. When war is declared it is the *hirdmen* who form the backbone of the army.

Privileged Skills: Athletics, Dodge, Ride, two combat skills of your choice.

Berserker

These savage and formidable warriors deserve their fearsome reputation, forming the *jarl's* main bodyguard. Although their combat prowess cannot be doubted, their lack of manners and arrogance often alienates them from the rest of the population. People find them filthy and repugnant, poorly mannered and unpredictable – but who would dare say that to their face?

Privileged Skills: Athletics, Dodge, Intimidation, Survival, a combat skill of your choice.

Note: To create a berserker or other warrior dedicated to Odin, you must take the Savage Warrior gift for your character (see page 117).

Mercenary

Mercenaries rely on their swords to earn a living; perhaps they come from a fallen clan or are foreign warriors or vagabonds. Mercenaries sell their services to any who are able to pay; most only find employment when war ravages the land. They add to the *jarl's* armies and many die before they make their fortune. In times of peace, without employment, they may turn to banditry.

Privileged Skills: Games, Negotiation, Ride, Survival, a

combat skill of your choice.

Sages

Note: To create a sage talented in magic, you must take the Initiate gift for your character.

Volva

The gift of the *volva* is transmitted from mother to daughter in certain families, dedicated by Odin to the glory of the gods. The *volva* strive to lead normal lives in their community, but also hear the voices of the Aesir and Vanir. Through their spells, they answer questions for members of the clan, although interpreting omens and divining fate is a heavy burden.

Privileged Skills: Empathy, Knowledge (Divinities: Aesir and Vanir), Superstition, a combat skill of your choice, a magical skill of your choice (*Seidr*, *Galdr*, or *Runes*).

Thulr

Respected within his clan, the *thulr* is a practitioner of ancient sacred rites, knowledgeable in the secret ways of nature. His community is usually uneasy about his eerie and often unsettling presence, so he lives in isolation, close to the village, but in the wild places he loves. The *thulr* can heal wounded men and sick animals with the spells and natural remedies he has mastered. He also presides over funeral rites, and is said to converse with the dead. He can cast the evil eye on anyone in the community who displeases him.

Privileged Skills: Herbalism, Knowledge (Funerary Rites), Survival, a combat skill of your choice, a magical skill of your choice (*Seidr*, *Galdr*, or *Runes*).

Skald

No exploit would be legendary if a skald was not there to tell of it. Far more than an entertainer to distract a lord with grand tales and subtle music, the skald represents the memory of Scandia: of heroes and their tales, sometimes glorious, often tragic, and those of the gods and their deeds. Wandering or employed by a lord, the skald is an accomplished artist, a true scholar who knows legends of past heroes, and who may even be ready to join an adventure himself so he can get a good story out of it.

Privileged Skills: Art (*Specialisation*), Eloquence, Sagas, a combat skill of your choice, a magical skill of your choice (*Seidr*, *Galdr*, or *Runes*).

Healer

Free men or women who have their own place in the clan, healers maintain the medical traditions of their

Archetypes

ancestors, the knowledge passed down through the generations. This is not magic, but rather a good working knowledge of the body and its functions: a healer knows how to set a broken bone, stitch a wound, and defeat an infection. He knows how the organs work, and of remedies that relieve pain. The healer does not compete with the *thulr*, but rather each complements the other. After all, the healer works with medicine, the *thulr* with the powers of the gods.

Privileged Skills: Empathy, Herbalism, Medicine, Survival, a combat skill of your choice.

Workers Craftsmen

The majority of the inhabitants of Scandia create their own everyday items. The specialised craftsman, however, goes far beyond this comparatively crude handiwork, mastering all the subtleties of his work, ensuring all his creations are unique. Even the most banal object can become, in his hands, a work of art.

Privileged Skills: Craft (*Specialisation*), Commerce, Knowledge (Legendary Artisans and their Creations), Runes, a combat skill of your choice.

Farmer

A free man, the farmer is the backbone of the community. He works the earth and grows the resources necessary for survival. Herder and cultivator, he can also take up arms when the *jarl* calls on his vassals for war, or when his lands and people are in danger.

Privileged Skills: Craft (*Specialisation*), Drive, Knowledge (Agriculture and Herding), Superstition, a combat skill of your choice.

Forester

Living in the forests bordering the clan lands, the forester and his family exploit this immense resource. He sells wood and charcoal to the community, but also acts as game-keeper and ensures the forest is well stocked. Finally, working in the sylvan stretches where so many hostile creatures live, he also sounds the alert when danger threatens.

Privileged Skills: Craft (Woodworking), Knowledge (Scandian Forests), Survival, Vigilance, a combat skill of your choice.

Miner

Soapstone, stone, precious metals, iron, copper, and many other minerals are dug from the bowels of the earth. Communities form around newly discovered deposits, and sometimes only last long enough for them to be exhausted. Work in the mines is difficult, but often

very rewarding; each clan guards its mines jealously, and protects them with vigour – a useful precaution as they are often located in wild and hostile places.

Privileged Skills: Craft (Stonemasonry or Carpentry), Knowledge (Mining), Search, Survival, a combat skill of your choice.

Travellers

Merchants

No community, no city can survive without trade. Buying foodstuffs, selling the products of Scandian craftsmen, the merchants create a network between communities. More than simple traders, they are also adventurers who are always ready to discover new trade routes. Sometimes, they also become spies in service of their *jarl*, noting down possible targets for future raids.

Privileged Skills: Commerce, Knowledge (Geography), Navigation, Negotiation, a combat skill of your choice.

Emissary

A loyal and faithful counsellor to a lord and a talented diplomat, the emissary has a vital role on the political chessboard of Scandia, and is well travelled in the northern lands. He often carries messages for the king, and negotiates treaties and oaths. His network of connections makes the emissary very important when major events are afoot.

Privileged Skills: Eloquence, Empathy, Knowledge (Important Persons of Scandia), Negotiation, Traditions.

Wandering Blacksmith

A specialised craftsman, he excels in creating weapons and armour, all highly prized by the *jarl* and his *hirdmen*. He never lacks for work as the Northern Kingdoms are perpetually in conflict. Although capable of creating a great many items quickly, the wandering blacksmith makes sure each is unique, by carving it beautifully or inlaying it with precious metal. Often, his reputation precedes him in each new community.

Privileged Skills: Craft (Blacksmithing), Commerce, Drive, Knowledge (Geography), a combat skill of your choice.

Spy

No wise king would waste the services of a good spy network. What are his ambitious neighbours planning? A king wants to pillage the port of a neighbouring kingdom, but what defences are awaiting his men? Which vassals are plotting behind his back? What means of waging war does his rival possess? An efficient spy can answer these questions, and more, for his lord.

Privileged Skills: Search, Stealth, Theft, Traditions, a combat skill of your choice.

Sigurd Ivarsson

Archetype: Hirdman

These Northern Kingdoms in which we live are dangerous lands where violence is part of our daily life. In the clan system, all of us free men — legitimate members of the *thing* — and most peasants carry weapons. At any time, we can be called on to defend our homes or go to war if the *jarl* mobilises us — and there are many such calls. Often they do not lead farther than the next village, where a rival clan might hunger for the riches of our lands and the fish-rich waters of our rivers.

In the deep forests, wolves are not the only creatures hunting the cattle-herds.

Unspeakable creatures, born deep underground, wander on the edges of civilisation, always ready to cross the fortified walls of our villages to snatch away our children.

Many of the people of our land are born with a tool in one hand, a weapon in the other, but, as a *hirdman*, my tools are my weapons! My axe crushes the skulls of our adversaries; my sword slays my lord's enemies. My shield protects my warrior brothers. I am a *hirdman*, an elite warrior among a warrior people!

My companions and I are the personal guard of Hrolf Knudson. Professional soldiers, paid by our *jarl*, *hirdmen* like myself, form a permanent army within our clan, well skilled and formidable. We know each other on the battlefield in our rattling armours and coloured shields; and although I fear no one, I prefer to fight my own kind rather than simple *bondi*. I fight for my clan, for the glory of Hrolf Knudson, and for my name. My reputation shall soon be known outside the valley. I am a *hirdman* and my strength is rooted in the words of my liege.

I understand the fate awaiting me is marked by iron and fire. Since this is the case, I shall ride the storm and dominate it, rather than be dominated by it. Live and die by the sword, under Odin's judging eye — can there be a better way to live?

Of course, loyalty and faithfulness sometimes takes us on strange roads. My lord has given me a strange task. I dream only of the battlefield and the clash of weapons, and he orders me to protect his daughter and heir, Jorun Hrolfsdottir. The proud and noble descendant of Kjari Lightning-Blade, haughty, she incarnates the grandeur of the clan. However, even if Fate seems to promise a great future for me, I cannot help but feel that this task will distance me from the battles I long for. Nonetheless, I am a *hirdman*, and I obey my lord.

Statistics

Fate Runes: Reith (-), Sol (+), Mathr (+)

Body

Strength 3 Vigour 2 Agility 2

Mind

Intellect 2 Perception 2 Tenacity 3

Soul

Charisma 2 Instinct 1 Communication 2

Gifts: Guided by Thor, Striking

Weakness: Hot-blooded

Reaction: 5

Movement: 4

Weight Capacity: 8

Physical Defence: 5

Mental Defence: 6

Hit Points: 40 (20/10/0)

Furor Pool: 3

Skills

Athletics 3, Dodge 4, Navigation 2, Ride 3, Saga 1, Survival 1, Swim 1, Throw 4, Vigilance 2, Long Weapons 7

Combat Feats

Level 1: Stun, Quick as Lightning

Level 2: Come to Me!

Equipment

(ENC: 6. Total armour value: 12)

Long sword, two throwing axes, lamellar armour, helmet, reinforced leather bracers, reinforced leather greaves, shield.

Archetypes



Hild Thorbjornsdottir

Archetype: Volva

For my people, the gods are more companions and omnipresent masters than distant and inaccessible symbols. Although possessing divine powers, they too are controlled by Fate. There is no point in fatalism; quite the opposite, because it is in fighting or accomplishing his Fate that each entity asserts itself – men as well as gods.

I watch them all.

I see those who attempt to stand against Fate, despite all their efforts, finally walk the path laid down for them. I hear the Aesir and Vanir whisper their words, wise or mad, in my mind. Runes, symbols, and mystical signs speak through me, allowing me to see the threads of the future and the hidden meanings of things.

I have this gift, like my mother before me, and her mother before her. Our line has always produced *volva*. Since our very first ancestors decided to settle this fertile valley, my family, always through the first-born, have transmitted the words of the gods and taught the hidden meaning of the world to common men.

Volva – that is our title. We are prophetesses and seers when the auguries are good, but foul witches when the threads of Fate deceive us or take a roundabout route.

My mother has just died. The *jarl* gave her the homage she deserved, and I was proclaimed *volva* of the clan. I am the intermediary between the magic of Midgard and my people. From my childhood I was trained in the mysteries and secrets of the gods; I tell the prophecies they are so fond of, and speak of the reality of the world that surrounds them. The Norns have sought me out; they tell me their wishes and orders. I hear, obey, and carry out their sacred words.

I do not mind my role. It is my heritage, my gift. I like the respect, even the fear, in the eyes of the men I meet. The fate of warrior-wives and peasants shall never be mine. The gods themselves are my companions.

A great Fate awaits me. The runes are clear. The *jarl* has asked me to question the divinities about his daughter, Jorun Hrolfsdottir. The future of the Northern Kingdoms rests on her shoulders, and those who follow her through her trials. I shall be one of them. Even though, since I have read the runes, I am fearful of casting them again. I understand that there is nothing good awaiting us. Can I live with this knowledge? How can I look my friends in the face if I see the suffering they must endure? Can I warn them away from the Fate promised to them?

Too many questions. Silence is my best shield.

I know so many things. I cannot say them all.

Statistics

Fate Runes: Ansuz (+), Algiz (+), Bjarken (-)

Body

Strength 1 Vigour 2 Agility 2

Mind

Intellect 3 Perception 2 Tenacity 3

Soul

Charisma 2 Instinct 3 Communication 1

Gifts: Initiate (Runes), Perfect Memory

Weakness: Fearful (of being trapped underground)

Reaction: 8

Movement: 4

Weight Capacity: 4

Physical Defence: 7

Mental Defence: 9

Hit Points: 37 (18/9/0)

Furor Pool: 8

Skills

Empathy 3, Knowledge (Divinities: Aesir and Vanir) 3, Saga 1, Search 2, *Seidr* 6, Superstition 3, Survival 1, Vigilance 2, Short Weapons 4, Runes 2

Combat Feats

None

Magic

Seidr: Murmurs in the Bone (Level 2), Master Fog (Level 1), Remove Fear / Cause Fear (Level 1)

Equipment

(ENC: 1. Total armour value: 2)

Dagger, fur shoulder guards on long robe, knucklebones, sorcerer's staff, pouch of ingredients.

Archetypes



Thorgrim Olavsson

Archetype: Berserker

“... At dawn, alone, his imposing silhouette dominates what will soon be the battlefield. Standing on a rock, he brandishes his weapon towards the heavens and lets out a savage howl towards his enemies. Lightning. Rolling thunder. Thor has answered his call. The warrior feels the primordial power flow through him. His body burns with the longing for combat. His spirit howls for blood. Tremble, enemies of the clan, supernatural creatures and demons of the north! By his axe and fury, through the power of the gods that give him life, he challenges you and promises a violent death! And if today, his fate is to fall under your blade, so be it. He already has a place in Valhalla, at the table of the immortal warriors, because he is a berserker! The lightning sword, the vengeful axe, the bringer of Odin's carnage!

His adversaries are trembling with fear. They back away, hesitating. Can they still flee; escape the rage of the bear-warrior? No, because the berserker will follow them to Hel if necessary, to end their cowardly lives.

Suddenly, one of them dares to step forward. Courage or bravado? He wants to fight, but in the end knows only the agony of a bloodied blade.

The very essence of the gods flows through Midgard, the land of men, and marks everything. They created people in their image, strong and proud, but Odin also gifted the fiercest among them with a unique ability. They are his chosen ones. They draw their energies from the link between Midgard and Asgard.

The berserker knows the secret of the king of the Aesir, the howling of the spirit inside him, and the ferocity of the animal within. He makes it his champion, knows how to command the trance that multiplies his strength and thirst for blood. He no longer feels pain or exhaustion: no blow can wound him; no reasonable man can face him on the battlefield without fear. Few adversaries can withstand his presence.

Standing on the rock, mocking his enemies, the bear-warrior holds out an offering to the father of victory, his long axe that he wields like a lightning bolt.

The totem-spirit of one of the three sacred animals burns through them. All are gifts from Odin, but each brings the savage warrior closer to the god. The Wolf devotes himself to Odin, master of Geri and Freki. Working close together, their spears spill enemy blood in honour of the Father of the Aesir, and protect the kings. The Boar is dedicated to Frey. They fight in packs and no enemy line has ever held against them.

But he, the Bear-warrior, is a loner. He accompanies the hirdmen, but follows no law, but that of Thor, son of Odin. The strength of the gods incarnate, he wears the colours of his clan. A standard of red blood!

He leaps. He licks his lips, rage in his heart. By Thor! Let battle begin! Today shall be a day of blood, a day when the enemy disappears beneath the blows of the berserkers!”

-- Extract of a tale of the Battle of Slogga by Yngwe Gilsursson, skald of clan Kjari.

Statistics

Fate Runes: Reith (+), Nauthr (-), Tiwaz (+)

Body

Strength 4 Vigour 3 Agility 2

Mind

Intellect 1 Perception 2 Tenacity 3

Soul

Charisma 1 Instinct 2 Communication 1

Gifts: Savage Warrior (Berserker), Iron Body

Weakness: Impetuous

Reaction: 5

Movement: 5

Weight Capacity: 11

Physical Defence: 7

Mental Defence: 6

Hit Points: 40 (20/10/0)

Furor Pool: 8

Skills

Athletics 3, Climbing 2, Dodge 3, Intimidation 4, Navigation 2, Superstition 1, Survival 4, Swim 1, Vigilance 3, Two-handed Weapons 7

Combat Feats

Level 1: Impetuous Charge, Bloodthirsty Howl

Level 2: Fierce as a Bear!

Equipment

(ENC: 5. Total armour value: 5)

Two-handed axe, fur shoulder guards, reinforced leather bracers, reinforced leather greaves.

Archetypes



Klemet Gandalvsson

Archetype: Thulr

I contemplate, alone, the village at the bottom of the cliff. From where I stand, I can see over the entire valley. Yes, even our king's longhouse to me is no more than a simple building among the others I see to the east through the trees. It is true that I live alone in the forest, but it is my home. I belong there more than I belong with the men of the clan, those quarrelsome boasters. I am part of the community, but nature is my true home. In any case, they prefer to see me here than within their frail enclave. Let them stay there and rot!

I prefer the view before me. The mirror-like waters of the river, the blue sky like a brilliant frame for the sun, the green carpet covering the hills, their tops white even in late spring. I know how to see and hear. Midgard speaks to me every day and teaches me its secrets.

The world of men is a hostile land. The climate of the Northern Kingdoms, the country, with its steep cliffs, the wild lands and unconquered territory, the natural and legendary creatures who live within it, make this a dangerous place. But life is like the sap of Yggdrasill – it offers vigour every day. Of course, its companion, death, is also always present.

They are blind and deaf to its words. For my people, the *thulr* is halfway between wisdom and madness. They are always ready to call on me when they need my skills: a sick child or cow, an infected wound, a harvest threatened by insects... They count on me, as though I could bend the gods to my will. They do not understand that I am Midgard's servant. I observe, and it teaches me.

Thulr. I am initiated into the teachings of the ancients, and can draw the best from whatever surrounds me. I am a healer after battles or when sickness threatens the community; I know how to find food in the wilderness when famine strikes; I can lead the king's men across unknown lands or track a creature threatening the village; and I am close to the dead. I preside over funeral rites, and my magic can cast the evil eye on my enemies.

They fear me; justly, no doubt. They bow to the young *volva*, obey her sacred words. She is spokesperson for the gods; I am emissary of Midgard and the ways of Yggdrasill. I know the ways to other worlds, hidden in the branches of the Great World Tree. The Aesir and Vanir themselves are subject to its laws. It is my simple presence, or the runes on my clothes, or the skull that decorates my hut, which reminds them that everything, even the gods, will die at its appointed hour.

I understand; I am part of this law. That is my role.

Hmm, I see our jarl and his daughter, accompanied by their *hirdmen*, heading towards young Hild Thorbjorns-dottir's house. A trumpet sounds; she is called to the *thing*. An important decision is to be made.

I shall prepare myself. Terrible things will happen soon. Midgard will warn me in its own way. I will be ready, I am its servant; but I also serve my clan.

To save Midgard, and for the survival of my clan.

Statistics

Fate Runes: Gebō (+), Iwaz (+), Mathr (-)

Body

Strength 2

Vigour 2

Agility 2

Mind

Intellect 3

Perception 2

Tenacity 3

Soul

Charisma 1

Instinct 3

Communication 1

Gifts: Initiate, Woodsman

Weakness: Strange

Reaction: 8

Movement: 4

Weight Capacity: 6

Physical Defence: 7

Mental Defence: 9

Hit Points: 38 (19/9/0)

Furor Pool: 8

Skills

Empathy 1, Herbalism 4, Knowledge (Funeral Rites) 3, Medicine 3, Stealth 2, Survival 4, Short Weapons 4, Runes 2, *Seidr* 6

Combat Feats

Level 1: Stun

Magic

Seidr: Improve Physical Defence (Level 1), Healing Hands / Harming Hands (Level 1)

Equipment

(ENC: 1. Total armour value: 4)

Axe, fur shoulder guards on cloak, leather vest, morbid trinkets, medicinal herbs.

Archetypes



Vngwe Gílsursson

Archetype: Skald

Come closer, I'm not going to eat you! I cannot believe that the children of clan Kjari let themselves be scared by one man.

Here, youngster, bring over that tankard of beer left on the table. It seems fuller than mine. Fill my drinking horn, while you're there. The night is long and I'm thirsty.

Come on, aren't you better off here, closer to the warm embers and on these thick furs? I did the same, when I was your age. In the morning, I crept into the longhouse, empty at last, dreaming of the day I would be allowed in. Songs and drinking! *Skål!*

I imagine you want a story. After all, that is what a skald does, yes? Let me guess... not a story for children. Rather one of those tales filled with battle and fury that your fathers love. A saga filled with heroic warriors, fallible gods, and cruel trolls. Am I wrong? No, of course not.

Let me see... Ah! I remember a saga where...

... and that is how it ended. None can escape the path the Norns weave for them!

Come, children, your parents will worry and shall not be happy that you skipped your morning chores. Off with you! In any case, I'm too drunk and tired for anything else.

Yes, young one? Why are you looking at me like that? Did I grow a troll's nose during the night?

Sorry? You want to know how you can become like me? A skald, you say? You don't dream of magic swords and battles like your friends. Do you know what that means?

No, clearly.

The Northern Kingdoms breed warriors. The will and power of the gods marks out our destinies. Iron, fire, and ice are our legacy and symbols of our power; but I shall tell you a great secret: the tales of warriors only become legends when a skald deems them worthy of a saga. Without us, their adventures remain no more than empty boasts, with no more renown than what they hide in their breeches. We, the skalds, forge the legend.

We are the guardians of the oral tradition. Know that a skald's word is sacred, and that *jarls* put our verbal prowess to use as emissaries and diplomats among other clans.

If you want to become a skald, you have to find a master to train you and teach you the skills of a musician and narrator, of a poet and comedian. You have to bring the sagas of heroes to life, and relate the edifying lives of the gods; but you also need a gift: that of dreaming, and being able to share that dream. A good voice, a handsome face, a sense of flattery and a good dose of disrespect also help, believe me.

Sometimes, you'll head off into adventure, right next to a hero so you can tell of his deeds. Take, for example, Jorun... Believe me, as soon as I am sober, I'll follow her everywhere. I'm sure that Fate has something important in store for her, and for her companions, something worth being told. I

wouldn't miss it for the world; even Ragnarök couldn't keep me away...

But you, you dream of legends. I can see that in your big eyes, always looking beyond the horizon. You see as the gods wanted us to see, not like men, am I right?

Yes, you might make a skald. If you can find a master who would take on a snotty kid like you.

Who? Me?

Don't count on it! I've enough trouble taking care of myself. You wouldn't be safe with me.

Listen... maybe... if I come back from the adventure ahead, I'll tell you all about it. You, before anyone else. If you have the gift, you might be able to make something out of it.

Now, off outside! I'm tired. I shall rejoin the gods in my dreams. It's often where I get my best stories.

Statistics

Fate Runes: Reith (+), Nauthr (-), Logr (+)

Body

Strength 2 Vigour 2 Agility 2

Mind

Intellect 2 Perception 2 Tenacity 2

Soul

Charisma 2 Instinct 2 Communication 2

Gifts: Initiate (*Galdr*), Loki's Mask

Weakness: Curious

Reaction: 6

Movement: 4

Weight Capacity: 6

Physical Defence: 6

Mental Defence: 6

Hit Points: 37 (18/9/0)

Furor Pool: 6

Skills

Art (Music) 3, Art (Poetry) 2, Dodge 2, Eloquence 5, Sagas 4, Stealth 2, Traditions 2, Long Weapons 3, *Galdr* 4

Combat Feats

Level 1: Quick as Lightning

Magic

Charms: Sleep, Seduction

Illusions: Hearing.

Equipment

(ENC: 0. Total armour value: 3)

Short sword, leather vest, reinforced leather bracers, lyre.

Archetypes



Jorun Hrolfsdottir

Archetype: Noble

I do not like these eyes upon me.

The silence that falls on my father's longhouse is more intense than the furious discord of our skald, Yngwe Gilsursson. All watch me as I take my place. They fear, or hope perhaps, to see me weaken. Let them be reassured or swallow their disappointment: I advance among them with my head held high and the steady step of my rank and new status. I am the daughter of Hrolf Knudson – his only child – and the Fate of clan Kjari weighs on my shoulders. Such is the message of the gods. I shall not fail; neither myself nor my clan.

In the silence, I take my place in the seat reserved for me. Sitting at the end of the communal hall, I contemplate the assembly before me: free men, *hirdmen* – my people. The royal guard hesitated upon my arrival. Should they escort me to the dais, as they would a *jarl*? I did not give them time. I cross the hall at a steady pace, more assured than I really feel, but I cannot show my doubts. Not now. Not here.

My father lays an affectionate hand on my arm. His touch burns my frozen skin. He smiles, but I see the worry in his grey, shadowed eyes. White hairs in his beard and long hair are beginning to appear. My lord is tired. I smile back and he relaxes. He regains the stature that has made him a great chieftain, a fearsome enemy. He lifts his drinking horn and stands. His grave voice resounds through the vaulted hall.

“Drink! To Odin's wisdom! To my daughter, Jorun! To the future of clan Kjari! *Skål!*”

All stand and repeat it, more or less convinced.

The blood of Kjari Lightning-Sword flows in my veins, but most of those here see something else: too fine a face, too pale a skin, and curves under my robe.

Of course, our laws allow no difference between free people, but all would have preferred that my mother had a son. All of my father's confidence cannot remedy this. This is my heritage. Belonging to the aristocracy of the Northern Kingdoms offers more responsibilities than privileges.

For me, the gods were formal. The *thing* wanted to choose an eventual successor for the aging lord. His arm is still strong, but the years pass and every day he grows more tired, Hrolf never hid his desire to have his line continue on the throne. How many wanted to marry me in order to inherit the title? More wanted an election, which might have fractured the clan.

The *jarl* chose a third way. He asked the gods. Hild Thorbjornsdottir became the intermediary between us and Fate. The runes have spoken and revealed the choice of the Father of the Aesir: clan Kjari shall survive through me. I will reign, but the cost is blood.

The weight of the stares bothers me. They show so much doubt, fear, hate, veneration. I pray to the gods to be worthy of this Fate, whatever it is.

Oh, Hild, my childhood friend, could you be wrong? You only translated the words we could understand, but you know much more than we do, you can read the torment that is ready to fall. Is that what you were trying to tell me when you said that a new era started here? An era of heroes?

Statistics

Fate Runes: Uruz (+), Hagall (-), Tiwaz (+)

Body

Strength 3 Vigour 2 Agility 2

Mind

Intellect 2 Perception 2 Tenacity 2

Soul

Charisma 3 Instinct 2 Communication 2

Gifts: Empathic, Leader of Men

Weakness: Rigid

Reaction: 6

Movement: 4

Weight Capacity: 6

Physical Defence: 6

Mental Defence: 6

Hit Points: 37 (18/9/0)

Furor Pool: 3

Skills

Dodge 1, Eloquence 4, Empathy 2, Negotiations 2, Ride 4, Swim 1, Tactics 3, Traditions 4, Long Weapons 2, Pole Arms 6

Combat Feats

Level 1: By Thor's Arm (1), Inspired by Odin (1)
Level 2: Come to Me!

Equipment

(ENC: 6. Total armour value: 6)

Long sword, spear, leather vest, helmet, reinforced leather bracers.

Archetypes





Map of the World



Characteristics

In *Yggdrasill*, a character is defined by nine characteristics. These represent innate and essential traits, and are grouped into three categories.

In game terms, each characteristic governs a type of challenge a hero might face, whether strength, or intellect, perception, or charisma. To succeed at such a challenge, a character makes a dice roll known as a **test**; the number of ten-sided dice (d10) he uses in this test is determined by the value of the characteristic in question.

Body



Body is the category of characteristic corresponding to the hero's physical makeup: Strength, Vigour, and Agility. Skilled warriors usually have higher scores in these characteristics than any other. However, in the hostile world of Scandia, almost anyone can find themselves relying on a hand-to-hand weapon at some point in their lives.

Strength (STR)

Strength represents the character's physical strength. It is tied to muscles as well as energy and dynamism.

Vigour (VIG)

Vigour corresponds to a character's constitution and physical endurance. The higher the Vigour score, the better the character resists fatigue, blows and wounds, or sickness and poisons.

Agility (AGI)

Agility defines the character's physical coordination. It measures how the character masters his body, his suppleness and dexterity.

Mind



Mind is the category of characteristic corresponding to the hero's mental aspects. The three characteristics within this group (Intellect, Perception, and Instinct) are favoured by nobles, scholars, and those who learn about their environment.

Characteristics

Intellect (INT)

Intellect indicates the character's ability to reason. It corresponds to intelligence, his ability to analyse information and draw conclusions, but also to how well he learns.

Perception (PER)

Perception involves the hero's five senses. It measures vigilance and his capacity for perceiving subtle changes.

Tenacity (TEN)

Tenacity represents strength of spirit, the character's will. It measures a hero's capacity to face adversity, his courage and resolution.

Soul



Soul is the characteristic category corresponding to the hero's social ability. The three characteristics in this group (Charisma, Communication, and Instinct) are much used by skalds, other magic users, and those skilled in interacting with the other inhabitants of Scandia.

Charisma (CHA)

Charisma measures a character's ability to influence those around him. It represents his aura and corresponds to a mix of conscious attitude, physical attraction, and natural magnetism. Charisma is used in Seduction tests, but also when a hero wants to impose his will on those around him.

Communication (COM)

Communication defines the character's capacity for interaction. The higher the level of Communication, the better the hero can express his ideas and feel more at ease in society.

Instinct (INS)

Instinct represents a character's intuition and sixth sense. It measures his degree of natural empathy with his surroundings and those around him.



Characteristic Values

Characteristics range in value from 1 to 5, as shown on the following table:

- 1 Feeble
- 2 Average
- 3 Strong
- 4 Heroic
- 5 Legendary

Ordinary mortals have characteristics ranging between 1 and 3; only heroes, those marked by Fate, or other exceptional persons possess higher scores.



Determining Characteristic Values



Each player begins with 19 points to divide among his nine characteristics. Each point spent improves a characteristic by 1. Each characteristic must be given at least 1 point, but cannot be higher than 4 points when you create the character.

Secondary Characteristics

Secondary characteristics are derived from the nine characteristics, and are used at certain times during the game.

Hit Points (HP)

Hit Points represent a character's resistance to wounds, sickness, physical damage, and fatigue. The more Hit Points a character has, the better he can endure physical trauma.

Use the following formula to calculate a character's Hit Points:

$$\text{HP} = (\text{Body} \times 3) + (\text{Mind} \times 2) + (\text{Soul} \times 1)$$

Body is the sum of the three characteristics Strength, Agility, and Vigour.

Mind is the sum of Intellect, Perception, and Tenacity.

Soul is the sum of Charisma, Communication, and Instinct.

A hero's HP score determines the thresholds of his five wound levels. The **wound levels** are: Bloodied, Wounded, Severely Wounded, Unconscious, and Dead. As a character's Hit Points are lost through wounds or

sickness, he passes through these wound levels from Bloodied and eventually to Dead. The lower levels impose condition modifiers (in this case, penalties) on the character's actions. When calculating, round down any fraction to the nearest whole number.

Bloodied: The character still has more than half his Hit Points. He can act normally and does not feel his wounds.

Wounded: *Threshold = less than half Hit Points (HP/2).*

The character has less than half his Hit Points. His body is covered with cuts and superficial wounds. Racked with pain, he draws on his willpower to resist and ignore it. Any tests incur a -3 condition modifier.

Wounded Threshold = HP/2
Condition Modifier = -3

Severely Wounded: *Threshold = less than quarter Hit Points (HP/4)*

The character has less than one quarter of his Hit Points. Deep gashes and savage cuts cover his body. A healer must eventually stitch up at least one ugly wound. If he wants to continue to fight, the hero has to grit his teeth and deal with the pain, but he knows that he is collecting scars that, upon his death, will prove his courage once he reaches Odin's feasting hall. The player

Characteristics

retains only one die (1d10) when rolling a test (instead of two).

Severely Wounded Threshold = HP/4
Condition Modifier: Only keep one die (1d10).

Unconscious: *Threshold = zero Hit Points (0 HP) or less.*

The character is reduced to zero Hit Points or less. His wounds have caused severe physical trauma. The pain is so intense or the blood loss so great that he falls unconscious. While unconscious, he continues to lose one Hit Point every hour unless a healer stabilises him (see page 141). The character suffers from very deep wounds and internal bleeding.

Dead: *Threshold = over quarter negative Hit Points (-1/4 HP)*

The character has taken more than one quarter of his negative Hit Points as damage. As soon as a character reaches this horrendous number, he is dead. No one can do anything for him except to prepare funeral rites according to tradition, and pray to the gods to welcome him into Valhalla.

However, there is a further wound level, only reached by berserkers in a state of **battle furor** (see page 112).



Exhausted and Severely Wounded

When a character's *furor* pool runs out because he has no more *furor* dice, he drops to an *Exhausted* condition, which means he can only use one die to determine the result of his tests.

If he is also *Severely Wounded*, he loses another die. The hero is in such a state he is unable to make any more tests. He is too weakened, his body in agony, his mind blank. The character can still stagger, speak, and carry out simple actions that do not require tests, but he has to wait a little to recover a few Hit Points to improve his wound level, or regain *furor* dice before being able to do tasks where the chances of success are not automatic.



Indestructible!: *Threshold = up to total negative Hit Points (-HP) and **battle furor**.*

A berserker fighting in a state of *battle furor* cannot even think, and has only one goal: to kill his enemies. In this situation, he can endure terrible wounds that would instantly kill any other man. As long as the berserker's Hit Points never drop below the negative of his starting score, he is still standing and continues killing. Once he reaches this number, he collapses and breathes his last, the severity of his wounds finally catching up with him.

However, if the combat ends because there are no more people to kill, the berserker falls unconscious immediately. He loses a Hit Point every turn, and dies if he falls under the absolute negative. A healer can attempt to save the dying man and stabilise him, but this is very unlikely (see page 141).

Reaction (REA)

This secondary characteristic corresponds to the speed of a character's reflexes and reactions. When an in-game situation requires you to calculate the passage of time precisely, such as when using combat rounds, each character involved should calculate his Initiative (INI), which is based on the character's Reaction score. The Reaction score is calculated as follows:

$$\text{REA} = \text{INT} + \text{PER} + \text{INS}$$

A character's Reaction score is also modified by Encumbrance penalties, as well as (in combat) the attack type chosen and the effects of certain combat feats. It may also be affected by magic. See the "Combat" chapter for an explanation of how Reaction is used to determine Initiative (see page 128).

Physical Defence (PD)

This secondary characteristic estimates a character's natural ability to avoid enemy attacks. It determines how well he can feint, dodge, guard in combat, and how well he can avoid taking the full impact of a blow.

Physical Defence is used as a modifier to enemy attacks. It increases the success threshold (page 74) required to hit the character.

$$\text{PD} = \text{AGI} + \text{VIG} + \text{INS}$$

A character weighed down by too much equipment has a reduced Physical Defence (see "Encumbrance" on

page 110). Physical Defence may also be modified by magic and also by a character using a shield.

Mental Defence (MD)

This secondary characteristic determines the character's will and psychic resistance. It is normally used when a character tries to resist the effects of a spell or overcome his fear. As with Physical Defence, Mental Defence increases the success threshold for an enemy spell, or provides a bonus to Tenacity tests.

$$\text{MD} = \text{TEN} + \text{INT} + \text{INS}$$

Mental Defence may also be modified by magic.

Movement (MOVE)

This secondary characteristic determines how far and how fast a character can move. It corresponds to how fast a character can march, and how swiftly he can move into and out of combat. During a combat round (page 128), a character can only dedicate one action (see page 127) to actual movement (running or sprinting). However, normal actions can be carried out after this movement has been made.

$$\text{MOVE} = \text{AGI} + \text{VIG}$$

A character's running distance is double his Base Movement score ($\text{MOVE} \times 2$); it's impossible to move like this for longer than (Vigour) hours. Sprinting distance is triple a character's Base Movement ($\text{MOVE} \times 3$); it's impossible to move like this for more than (Vigour $\times 2$) consecutive combat rounds.

Encumbrance (ENC)

This secondary characteristic indicates how much a character may carry and still move about easily. Smaller objects have no encumbrance value – an average person can carry about a dozen of them without feeling their weight. This includes nails, keys, small utensils, and other objects which can be carried in a pouch. Normal clothes do not encumber a person's movement either.

Equipment only has an encumbrance value if it is genuinely heavy, and carrying it makes it hard to move. Weapons, armour, and winter clothing fall into this category.

A person can carry, without difficulty, a total encumbrance value equal to or under his Encumbrance (ENC).

$$\text{ENC} = (\text{STR} \times 2) + \text{VIG}$$

Hindered: If the character's encumbrance value is more than his Encumbrance total, but less than double it, he is Hindered. Hindered characters suffer a -3 penalty to all their tests; furthermore, they must succeed at a Difficult (ST 19) Vigour test every hour, or be forced to rest for (ENC) minutes. If it's impossible to rest, a Hindered character loses Hit Points equal to his total encumbrance value.

Encumbered: If a character's encumbrance value is between double and triple his Encumbrance, he is Encumbered. All success thresholds are increased to the next difficulty level; furthermore, the character must make a Difficult (ST 19) Vigour test every hour, or be forced to rest for (ENC $\times 3$) minutes. If it's impossible to rest, an Encumbered character loses Hit Points equal to his total encumbrance value.

Overburdened: If burdened beyond maximum encumbrance (ENC $\times 3$), a character cannot move, and his success threshold is increased by two difficulty levels.

Note: all condition modifiers are cumulative. Thus, a character who is both Wounded and Hindered incurs a total of -6 (two -3 penalties).



furor

“Ketil... began to sway as he pushed himself into the rage which characterised his kind. Saliva ran into his beard. His cheeks swelled, turned purple, he bit his shield, brandished his sword, and howled like a beast.”

-- The Saga of Hrolf Kraki

Powerful and robust, formidable adversaries with wills of steel, the inhabitants of Scandia are proud and valorous men and women. It is not surprising that many heroes have come from their ranks. Many sagas tell of the epic exploits of those who have risen above other mortals to crown their names, and sometimes their lives, with the aura of legend. Because if anything can be expected of the greatest heroes of the northern lands, it is to prove themselves worthy of their warrior gods.

Of course, Fate plays a great role in the lives of these colourful characters, but most of all they have embraced and exploited their every resource in order to create their own legend. Among these abilities, the most important is their heroic capacity to allow the mystical energy of the *furor* to flow through them.

The *furor* is at once an emotional state, internal energy, natural rage, and mystical resource; it allows heroes to surpass themselves when a situation – or Fate – opposes their will.

Any character can call on the *furor* and regain enough vitality to overcome obstacles in their way. However, for savage warriors and initiates of Odin, *furor* becomes a

kind of mystical trance which goes far beyond the basic capacities of other characters. However, this gift from the father of the gods has its price.

Furor Pool



Each character has a furor pool, represented by a variable number of ten-sided dice (d10) which the character can roll to add to test results.

To calculate a character's **furor pool**, use the appropriate formula below:

For berserkers and Odin's chosen ones (characters with the *Savage Warrior* gift), the *furor* pool equals the total of Vigour, Instinct, and Tenacity.

$$\text{Furor Pool} = \text{VIG} + \text{INS} + \text{TEN}$$

For initiates (characters with the *Initiate* gift), the furor pool equals the total of Vigour, Instinct, and Intellect.

$$\text{Furor Pool} = \text{VIG} + \text{INS} + \text{INT}$$

For all other characters, the furor pool equals half the total of Vigour, Instinct, and Tenacity, rounded down.

$$\text{Furor Pool} = (\text{VIG} + \text{INS} + \text{TEN}) / 2 \\ \text{rounded down}$$

Calling on Furor



When faced with a difficult obstacle, frustrating situation, or immediate threat, *Yggdrasill* characters can draw on a deep reserve of energy to prevail. This energy is called *furor*.

In game terms, a character in such a situation can spend a die from their *furor* pool, and add the result of this *furor die* to the result of the test dice rolled on his current action. In most circumstances, only one such *furor die* can be spent at one time. This use of the *furor* pool represents a character's ability to channel their energy towards their goal.

Savage warriors in battle and Odin's initiates casting spells can go further than ordinary characters, and may roll more than one *furor die* per test. This is known as battle *furor* or mystical *furor* respectively.

Note that if your *furor* pool reaches zero for any reason, your character becomes immediately **Exhausted**, which may have dangerous consequences. This condition lasts for 10 minutes per *furor die* expended. The character's limbs are heavy, his mind foggy; in game terms, he may only keep the result of one die, rather than the usual two of his choice, for all tests taken while Exhausted.

However, if the character is in a situation where one of his Fate runes applies (see page 78), he retains the extra Fate die that it gives him (so he can keep two, even though Exhausted).

Finally, once this period is over, the character regains one *furor die*, and is no longer Exhausted. The rest of his *furor* pool is regained at the normal rate (see "Regaining Furor" below).

Savage Warriors & furor

For the most part, a savage warrior character benefits from *furor* just like other characters: he may spend a *furor die* to add heroic power to his actions.

However, in combat or other life-threatening situations, he may also voluntarily enter a **battle furor**, which will enhance his abilities – but only for a limited time before he becomes Exhausted and therefore vulnerable.

As soon as a savage warrior enters a battle *furor*, he **benefits** from the following effects:

- The player may choose to add the result of one or more *furor dice* (but no more than his **Tenacity** characteristic) to the result of his current attack test. The dice spent are removed from his pool. However, it then becomes impossible to use fewer *furor dice* in subsequent attacks. If, during an attack, the character augments the results of a test by using two dice from his *furor* pool, he must continue to use at least two dice from the *furor* pool for subsequent actions. He can use more than two dice, but if so then this rule applies again and his new minimum is equal to the increased number of dice. He cannot use less, until his *furor* pool runs out – at which point he becomes Exhausted.
- Whilst in his battle *furor*, a savage warrior may drop to as many **negative Hit Points** as he has **positive Hit Points**, effectively doubling the Hit Points he has, before collapsing, dead on the spot. Thus, a berserker with 40HP would be able to drop to -40HP before dying. Once the battle *furor* has ended, this no longer applies, and if the savage warrior's current level of negative Hit Points would now be enough to kill him, he dies.
- As long as the battle *furor* lasts, the savage warrior **ignores all wound modifiers** (penalties), and acts normally.

For example: *Ulv the berserker stands on the front line. His clan will soon face the warriors of the Danish king who wants to make an example of their dissident community. Ulv starts shaking, spinning his great axe and howling challenges and insults towards his enemies.*

The battle begins. In the first combat round, Ulv carries out several secondary actions, and his chances of success are reduced. His player decides to use two dice from his furor pool, to roll a total of 4d10 for his next test. However, he cannot now improve his chances with a single die from his furor pool: he must use 2d10 or more for all subsequent tests.

In the following round, an enemy attacks Ulv and wounds him, causing Ulv to lose 8 Hit Points. Ulv has 40 Hit Points in total: in his battle furor, he can lose twice this number in total (down to minus 40 Hit Points) before dying. He also doesn't apply wound penalties to any of his tests. This injury isn't going to stop him.

A character in a battle *furor* also has the following **disadvantages**:

All tests involving **Perception** have their **difficulty level increased by one**. The character's mind is completely focussed on his goal (generally involving slaughtering his enemies), and is almost blind to everything else around him.

His **Physical Defence (PD) value is reduced to zero**. A savage warrior is totally focussed on the battle, and his bloodlust drives him to slaughter his enemies with no care for his own safety. Additionally, he may only retain one die during defence tests (see page 133).

Finally, each combat round, the savage warrior must **perform at least one attack action** and apply the *furor* dice bonus. Once in a battle *furor*, he must augment all of his offensive actions by at least the same amount, even if he wants to attack several times in the same round.

A character in a battle *furor* may still continue to augment other non-offensive tests using a single *furor* die (+1d10) from his *furor* pool.

Once Exhausted, the savage warrior immediately drops out of his battle *furor*. If a player wants his character to drop out of battle *furor* before this happens, he must make an Intellect test, adding his Mental Defence score to the result, against a success threshold (ST) based on the character's health and the number of *furor* dice expended, as follows:

Unharmed or Bloodied: Intellect test + MD.
ST = 5 + number of *furor* dice expended.

Wounded: Intellect test + MD.
ST = 7 + number of *furor* dice expended

Severely Wounded: Intellect test + MD.
ST = 10 + number of *furor* dice expended

If the Intellect test fails, the savage warrior, drunk on rage and overtaken by murderous fury, attacks the nearest creature (if this is an animal, this must be at least the size of a sheep, otherwise the warrior attacks the nearest human). The player can re-try the test at the beginning of each combat round. The character leaves his battle *furor* as soon as the test succeeds, or his *furor* pool drops to zero.

Initiates of Odin

Like other characters, initiates of Odin may spend *furor* dice to improve the results of their tests.

More importantly, an initiate of Odin may enter into a mystical trance when calling on his magical powers, and add the result of one or more *furor* dice (but no more than his **Instinct** characteristic) to the test result when casting a spell. This is called a **mystical *furor***.

For each magical effect the character casts while in this mystical *furor*, he must spend at least one die from his *furor* pool. He can improve his chances of success by spending more dice (up to his Instinct score, as stated above), but **must** spend at least one.

However, unlike the savage warrior, the initiate may decide how many *furor* dice to use. So, even if an initiate spends three dice for one spell, he may use only one for the next. Odin's initiates decide how much power to give their spells on a case by case basis.

These *furor* dice are spent to improve the chances of their spell succeeding. However, during the round in which the initiate calls on Odin's gift, he incurs a -3 penalty to both his Physical and Mental Defence scores, down to a minimum of zero.

As usual, the *furor* dice are removed from the *furor* pool. When there are no more dice left, the initiate is Exhausted for 10 minutes per *furor* die expended. Whilst Exhausted, the initiate may only retain one die from any tests.

Regaining furor

Only prolonged rest, a period of relaxation, or certain magical effects allow *furor* dice to be regained.

- A character regains one *furor* die for every two hours of sleep, or all *furor* dice after a full, undisturbed night's sleep.
- A character regains one *furor* die if he takes part in a festival or feast where he can eat and drink freely.

Note that if a character's *furor* pool is reduced to zero, then he immediately regains one *furor* die as soon as the Exhausted period is over.

After that, use the rules above.



Vggdrasill

JÉRÔME 09.

Gifts & Weaknesses

Characters in *Yggdrasill* are called upon to change the world. Their exploits will give skalds material to create long and vibrant sagas, but heroes are more than just the deeds they accomplish, the enemies they defeat, and the treasures they gather. Their personalities and the individual traits which mark them out are just as vital for inspiring such epic poems.

In game terms, a character's traits correspond to **gifts** and **weaknesses** which allow you to personalise your character by selecting advantages and disadvantages.

Called to do great things, favoured by the Norns, *Yggdrasill* characters automatically have a gift chosen from the following list. Players may also select a second gift for their character, but must also select a weakness if they do so.

Gifts



A gift doesn't just give the character a bonus in the situations they apply to; it's way of personalising your character and making him unique. Gifts influence the way a character sees the world: a *hirdman* with the

Leader of Men gift will be more certain of himself, and will attempt to lead the group in social situations; one with the *Woodsmen* gift will be more solitary and taciturn. Of course, nothing prevents you breaking clichés: the goal is to give your character a unique personality.

Weaknesses



More than gifts, weaknesses are vital to understanding your character. Some have no mechanical constraints, and serve as a way to individualise the hero.

Be careful about choosing weaknesses, as they can ruin character concepts and turn promising situations into fiascos. Both the Game Master and players should take advantage of elements like weaknesses to bring greater flavour to the game and provide for an entertaining game. Weaknesses are there to improve your game, not to restrict a character's potential.

Gifts & Weaknesses in Play



Once per game session, when a gift possessed by a character is directly relevant to a situation, a player can invoke its effects. The Game Master decides whether or not to allow the player the benefits of the gift, based on his description of how the gift helps him in that situation.

A gift allows a character to roll an extra die in any test where the gift applies. He only keeps the result of two dice. However, if one of the character's Fate runes is also in play (see page 78), he can keep three dice instead. The effect of the gift is simply to add an extra 1d10 to the number of dice used in the test.

For example: *on a moonless night, Svein hears the inhuman roar of the troll he and his companions have been tracking for three days - a howl so terrifying it freezes the blood of the fiercest Scandian warrior. The Game Master asks Svein to make a Tenacity test, adding his Mental Defence to the result, to resist the effects of terror. However, Svein declares he wants to invoke his Brave gift; with a Tenacity of 3, he rolls a total of four dice - three for Tenacity, one for the gift - and keeps the two best results. The dice come up 1, 2, 7 and 7, and so the result is 14.*

Likewise, once per session, the Game Master may decide a character's weakness is interfering in a specific situation. In this case, he may require a player to keep the highest die roll, **and** the lowest. Fate can intervene here, too, and allow three dice to be kept; but one of these must still be the lowest.

For example: *the troll's howls are becoming more distant in the dark forest. Svein and the other heroes are advised by their guide to let it flee, and pick up the trail the next morning. But the Game Master remembers Svein has the Impetuous weakness: it will be hard for the hero to hold himself back. Frustrated by three days of fruitless searching, Svein must make another Tenacity test to resist the urge to chase the troll down and finish it here and now. Unfortunately, his Impetuous weakness interferes; Svein's player rolls three dice, but must keep only the best and worst of the rolls, 3 and 9 (having rolled 9, 9 and 3).*

The following lists of gifts and weaknesses are not exhaustive, and players and Game Masters are encouraged to expand on them as desired.

Gifts

Affinity: The character is particularly skilled in one form of magic (*galdr*, *seidr* or runes). The player decides which when creating the character.

Agile: The hero is very supple and has perfectly mastered his movements. This gift is very useful in all physical activity which needs a great deal of coordination.

Ambidextrous: The character can use each hand interchangeably. He does not suffer a penalty for using his off-hand.

Beloved of Njord: The character is at ease on the seas. He is a born seaman, guided by the god of the sea.

Blessed by Fate: The character has incredible luck. When luck comes into play (such as when heroes use dice), this gift intervenes. The hero can never draw the short straw.

Brother to Mimir: The character is very wise. Faced with a situation which needs to be analysed or which needs some thought, he often finds the best solution.

Brawler: The hero likes to fight with his bare hands. He has a good technique and good timing, which in such situations might well be critical.

Brave: The hero does not need to boast about his bravery. He fears almost nothing.

Colossus: The character is a giant among his fellows, and unusually strong. Whether intimidating enemies, or doing heavy work, he is the man.

Deft: The character is very skilled with his hands. When he crafts an item, his gift expresses itself.

Discreet: The character can be very silent, melt into a crowd, and ensure that no one notices him.

Empathic: The character is sensitive to the emotional states of others. He can quickly discern their humours, and often knows when he is being lied to.

Gifts & Weaknesses

Frey's/Freya's Gift: The character is a seducer. He chooses his words, his manners, and his expression to attract sympathy and love from others.

Guided by Thor: The character's weapons seem to be animated by the god of thunder. In combat, he can strike terrible blows.

Horseman: The character is at ease among horses. He rides well and can care for these animals well, as well as being able to judge a good mount.

Initiate: The character has received Odin's gift of understanding the divine energies which flow through Midgard. He can practise magic – either *galdr*, *seidr*, or the runes, depending on his approach (skald, *volva* or *thulr* – see page 90) – as well as enter a mystical *furor* (see page 113).

Inspired: The character has the soul of an artist. He can produce magnificent works which fascinate his audiences.

Iron Body: The hero can resist almost any blow. He gains an extra die whenever he has to stand up to a blow.

Leader of Men: The hero knows how to give orders, and commands respect and authority. If in doubt, most men turn to him for a decision.

Loki's Mask: The hero benefits from an innate gift for acting and lying. He can win almost any argument or pretend to be someone else with frightening ease.

Mountaineer: The hero is at ease in this harsh terrain. He understands the natural resources of the land and knows everything about mountain climbing.

Perfect Memory: The character does not forget anything. He can remember everything he has seen, even from years ago. In time, the details fade, but the most important information is still clear in his memory.

Robust: The character is very resistant to harsh conditions. Cold, heat, and hunger does not bother him. He is also far more resistant to illnesses and toxins, including alcohol.

Savage Warrior: The character has received Odin's blessing. He can enter a state of battle *furor* (see page 112). The player should decide whether his character will be a *berserker*, *ulfhedinn* or *svinfylkingar* (see page 68).

Scholar: The character is very cultured, and knows a

great deal about Scandia, its legends, history, geography, and so on.

Sharp Senses: The character is permanently alert, and the master of all his five senses. It is hard to surprise him or take him unawares.

Striking: The character has a handsome face and perfect body. This gift counts when physical appearance is of importance, such as when making a good first impression.

Thoughtful: The character likes mind games, puzzles, and everything which involves the brain.

Woodsmen: The character feels at home in the wild lands of Scandia. He never gets lost and is able to lead a solitary life in the wilderness.

Weaknesses

Amnesia: The character cannot remember his past. He may have suffered a blow, physical or mental, and lost his memory.

Arrogant: The character never misses a chance to assert himself on those he considers below him – which is almost everyone.

Bold: The character charges straight into situations, not paying attention to danger. He refuses to believe his actions can fail.

Brutal: The character has no manners, and all his relationships depend on force.

Cold: The character is very distant, and he does not interact with others much. His capacity for seduction and sympathy are greatly reduced, even though he may feel emotions very deeply.

Cruel: The character likes to see others suffer, and is without compassion. The team spirit of any group suffers whenever people count on him to help them.

Curious: The character never resists a chance to stick his nose in where it doesn't belong. This weakness is likely to make him many enemies.

Distracted: The character finds it hard to concentrate on anything. He's always miles away, and it's easy to surprise him.

Drunkard: The character is always drinking. He never misses a chance to drink, and often talks too much when drunk.

Fearful: The character is terrified of some otherwise perfectly ordinary aspect of Scandian life. In the presence of that aspect, he is very uneasy. Examples include: the night, wolves, women, fire, the sea.

Forbidden: The character follows a rigid personal code, which he will never break. The player should decide upon this at character generation, in discussion with the Game Master. Examples include: never attack a disarmed enemy, never let an insult go unpunished, never attack an enemy by surprise, never eat meat except for bear.

Grudge: The character never forgets an offence, real or imagined. He treats anyone he associates with the offence very badly.

Hedonist: The character wants nothing more than the satisfaction of good meat, drink, and the company of handsome members of the opposite or same sex. He never misses a feast or night of pleasure.

Hot-blooded: The character never refuses a challenge and is easily provoked.

Impetuous: The character refuses to leave for later what can be done right now. He often acts without thinking, and is anything but patient.

Loki's Curse: The character is incredibly unlucky. He loses all games of chance, and whenever a seagull flies over the group, he's always the one hit by the droppings.

Misogynist / Misandrist: The character doubts the abilities of the opposite sex. This is not necessarily hostile, but more often condescending.

Naive: The character believes everything he is told. He tends to trust easily, even those he doesn't know.

Outlaw: The character has been banished from a country or kingdom in Scandia; if he returns there he will be killed.

Physical Disability: The hero suffers from a physical disability. Examples include: club-footed (MOVE -1), one-eyed (-2 to Perception tests), one-handed (-3 to tests involving two hands), one-legged (MOVE/2), hunchback (MOVE -1). The Game Master and player should work together to decide penalties for other disability. In Scandian society, the character may be looked on with distrust or pity.

Rigid: The hero will never betray his oath, or the person he considers his king – even if shown the lunacy of his oath.

Sickly: The character has a weak constitution and falls ill more often than other people. He is strongly affected by alcohol.

Smooth-faced: The character (who must be male), cannot grow a beard, and in Scandian society this puts his virility in doubt. Women prefer the company of other men, and his fellows doubt his courage (and his skills in bed).

Strange: The character has an aura which worries other people, and frightens animals and children when he is near.

Weak: The character tires quickly, and his muscles often fail him, preventing him from using his (feeble) physical strength.

Vendetta: The character has a personal or family vendetta. He'll do everything in his power to avenge his honour, even if it involves making new enemies.

Note: Obviously some gifts and weaknesses are mutually exclusive, and can't both be selected by one character. For example, a character can't be both Robust and Sickly. If necessary, the Game Master can disallow certain choices, for example if a weakness is too excessive or clashes with an already-selected gift.



Skills

Skills represent training the character has undergone and areas of expertise he has developed. At character generation, a character has only the skills he has developed since infancy. Some reflect where he comes from, others his vocation, natural abilities, or personal interests.

The archetypes presented above (page 89) provide groups of skills in which members of those archetypes are typically proficient.

The list of skills in this chapter is by no means exhaustive. However, it does cover the most common situations; if you need to create more skills – such as one to cover a field for which you are sure no skill currently exists – feel free to do so.

Skill Levels



Skill level is a numeric value indicating how proficient a character is with a skill; the higher the level, the better the character's chances of success when using that skill. Skill level ranges from 0 to 20, defined according to the following scale:

Unskilled (0): The character has never learned this skill, and doesn't even know the basics. For skills which are defined as "skilled only" (see below), a character can't even attempt a skill test; for other skills, unskilled skill tests may be attempted by relying on a character's intuition and natural abilities. In such a case, the character only rolls a number of dice corresponding to his characteristic (see "Unskilled Tests" on page 75).

Novice (1 – 3): The character has had an apprenticeship, and knows the basics of the skill. He's capable of dealing with simple situations.

Competent (4 – 7): The character uses his skill on a regular basis – probably as part of his work.

Expert (8 – 12): The character is experienced in this skill, and his talent is recognised locally. He can teach the basics to apprentices.

Master (13 – 17): The character excels in this skill. His renown has reached the edges of the kingdom, and he's considered as one of the best in this domain.

Legendary (18 – 20): Only the greatest heroes and most talented masters reach such a level of expertise. The character's reputation is known throughout Scandia, and skalds sing of his exploits. He is becoming a living legend.

Skill Tests



A **skill test** is required whenever you use your skill in a challenging situation. Add your skill level to the result of a characteristic dice roll.

The situation and the manner in which the character deals with it determine which characteristic is used in a skill test: certain skill / characteristic combinations are more obvious than others. For example, a character who wants to check his mount's health would need a Perception + Ride skill test.

A player can try to use a specific and possibly different characteristic in a test, by varying the description of what his character does. It's up to the Game Master to decide whether the proposed skill / characteristic combination is allowed.

Gaining Skills



At character creation a player has 35 **skill points** to buy skills. If he has opted for an archetype, five of his skills are specified to be **privileged skills** (see page 89).

To raise a privileged skill by one level during character creation costs one skill point; to raise a non-privileged skill by one level costs two skill points. You can increase a skill by several levels at one time; however, during character creation no skill can be increased to higher than Competent (a maximum skill level of 7).

List of Skills



The following list of skills covers a great many situations which may be encountered in a game. Skills with names followed by an asterisk are "skilled only", which means a character must have at least a skill level of 1 to attempt a skill test with them; for others, being Unskilled (0) does not stop the character from attempting to use the skill, although he'll only be able to use his innate ability (a single characteristic score) and luck to do so (see "Unskilled Tests" on page 75).

Some skills require the character to specify a particular **specialisation**. This is the case for the Craft skill, among others. The player determines this specialisation when selecting the skill. The skill may be chosen multiple times, each with a different specialisation, reflecting the character's proficiency with different domains covered by the skill.

General Skills

Acrobatics: The character has mastered his body; supple and wiry, he can attempt hazardous manoeuvres (such as jumping from one ship to another during a sea battle) with a decent chance of success. A successful Acrobatics test also allows him to halve the amount of Hit Points lost by falling: the difficulty level is Average (ST 14) for a fall of seven to nine metres, modified by one difficulty level for every two metres higher or lower. For example: a fall from a twelve metre high cliff would require a Very Difficult (ST 25) skill test.

Finally, a character who is Competent in this skill can work as an acrobat to earn a living.

The Acrobatics skill is also used in tests requiring balance; the character is steady on his feet, and can avoid situations which would otherwise make him fall. Acrobatics is very useful for sailors, or those who have to cross Scandia in winter: it allows characters to use bone skates and skis to travel on snowy roads and frozen lakes. Under normal conditions, no test is required, but if the character attempts a more risky manoeuvre, he will have to make a roll.



Skills

Art (*Specialisation*): The Art skill can represent a simple natural gift, a professional activity (for a skald), or a leisure activity. It allows a character to create an original work of art, or copy an existing one. Specialisations include: goldsmithing, song, music, dance, carving, spoken poetry, flattery, painting.

Athletics: Athletics involves the more classical physical skills. A character uses it if attempting to jump (high or long) or run (sprinting, chasing, or endurance races).

Climbing: This skill allows a character to climb steep slopes, but also tree trunks, masts, or rope. The Game Master determines the success threshold, adjudicating for exterior conditions: a penalty for violent winds, rain, slippery surfaces, or a strong list to a ship; or a bonus if there are many handholds and the character has good equipment (such as ice axes and rope).

Commerce: Commerce represents knowledge of the laws of supply and demand. A character with this skill can negotiate or evaluate deals or money exchanges, and knows where to find various goods within Scandia, and the markets where he can make the most profit. Dates and places of fairs and markets are very important for him. Finally, the skill also includes the administrative aspects of commercial activity.

Craft (*Specialisation*): The Craft skill comprises a variety of skills, all creating various objects. Most Scandians practise these techniques, and can create and repair basic items: a Competent level in a Craft skill means the character is a professional, and can earn his living using the skill. The best craftsmen are famous and greatly valued.

Using this skill usually requires a test. Specialisations include: shoemaking, blacksmithing, cooking, carpentry, tailoring, tanning, rope making, stone working, pottery, saddle making. Two specialisations require further explanation because of their importance in northern lands:

Craft (*Shipbuilding*): This specialisation allows the character to build ships capable of sailing the Scandian seas. He has some knowledge of naval architecture and carpentry, but can also lead other craftsmen in making a ship under his instruction. The best shipbuilders are in great demand among the *jarls* of the Northern Kingdoms.

Craft (*Blacksmithing*): The secrets of the art of smithing are passed from master to student. A Novice character can make simple, everyday objects (nails, tool heads, rings); once he reaches Competent, he can create more complex objects (horseshoes, locks, ornaments), as well as weapons and armour. While some smiths wander the land practicing their craft, they always need a workshop and tools in order to do their job. A smith is one of the most respected craftsmen.

Dodge: The character anticipates attacks against him, and avoids projectiles and blows. Although often used in combat, Dodge can also be used to avoid a deadly collision, such as a team of horses charging towards him, or a rockslide. Whether a Dodge skill test succeeds or not, a dodging character always ends up on the ground, a few paces away from his starting position (the player chooses the direction).

Drive: The character knows how to drive an animal team, on a wagon in summer and a sled in winter. He can maintain the wagon or sled, and care for the draft animals.

Eloquence: The character can be convincing and persuasive. He presents his argument in the most pertinent fashion during a discussion, in order to turn the audience to his point of view. He can tell the most obvious lies, and make them seem credible, to get what he wants.

Empathy: Empathy represents a character's ability to understand the emotional state of others around him. The skill is a mixture of people knowledge and intuition. A successful Empathy test can tell a character if someone is lying.

Games: The character knows the rules and how to play most of the games popular among Scandians, such as dice and *hnefatafl*. It is often used in opposed tests of characters' respective Games skills, but also allows characters to cheat. Observant onlookers may attempt opposed tests of Perception + Vigilance to realise a character is cheating. The outcome of such successful tests is often rather... bloody.

Herbalism: This skill involves the knowledge of plants, herbs, and other natural products, allowing the character to create remedies, as well as dyes and poisons of all kinds. A character versed in Herbalism can recognise plants in the wild, and determine where a specific plant can be found.

Intimidation: Through verbal or physical intimidation, the character forces a target to obey him. An Intimidation attempt requires an opposed test against the target's Tenacity + Mental Defence.

Knowledge (*Specialisation*): The Knowledge skill covers the varied fields of knowledge, expertise, and information accumulated by the people of Scandia. Although a character will have a particular specialisation, he may also attempt a "General Knowledge" test – a simple Intellect test against a difficulty level based on the complexity of the information sought. Specialisations include: divinities (Aesir and Vanir), geography, Scandian politics, local history, creatures and monsters, *alfar*, and of course many others.

Languages* (*Specialisation*): All characters speak **Norse**, the common tongue of all the kingdoms of Scandia. Each specialisation in this skill represents facility with another additional language or discrete local dialect, although characters can also attempt to understand widely divergent dialects of Norse with an Average (ST 14) Intellect test. Specialisations include: Saxon, Finnish, Baltic, Germanic.

Medicine*: This skill corresponds to a knowledge of Scandian medical practises, allowing a character to: diagnose a patient's condition, heal common illnesses, treat wounds, splint a fracture, help in a birth, as well as determine the possible causes of an unexpected death. A character skilled in Medicine can perform First Aid (see page 141), as can a character skilled in Survival.

Navigation: The character can steer a ship and lead a crew. He has learned how to find landmarks on Scandian coastal voyages, and knows the more frequent routes and main ports. The character can also observe currents, the position of sun and stars, the flight of birds, and other natural clues which allow him to trace a safe route to his destination.

Negotiation: This skill allows a character to lead a conversation towards an acceptable compromise, and is very useful for Scandian diplomats. It's also used by merchants when buying and selling goods.

Ride: The character can ride a horse or other domestic animal trained as a mount (mule, pony, reindeer). He can also care for the animal, and even train a wild one as a mount. A Ride test isn't

required for a simple mounted journey, but for more complex manoeuvres, such as galloping in pursuit of an enemy or jumping over a fence.

Sagas: There are countless Scandian myths and legends, telling of the gods and great heroes who walked – or still walk – the lands of Midgard, and their many deeds and often tragic fates. All of these legends, however fantastic, always have their roots in reality. Skalds bring these tales to life, and everyone in Scandia knows at least a few. Each saga carries a certain lesson for those who know how to listen; a Sagas skill test allows a character to remember a lesson from one of these tales, or a place, object, name, situation, or other detail.

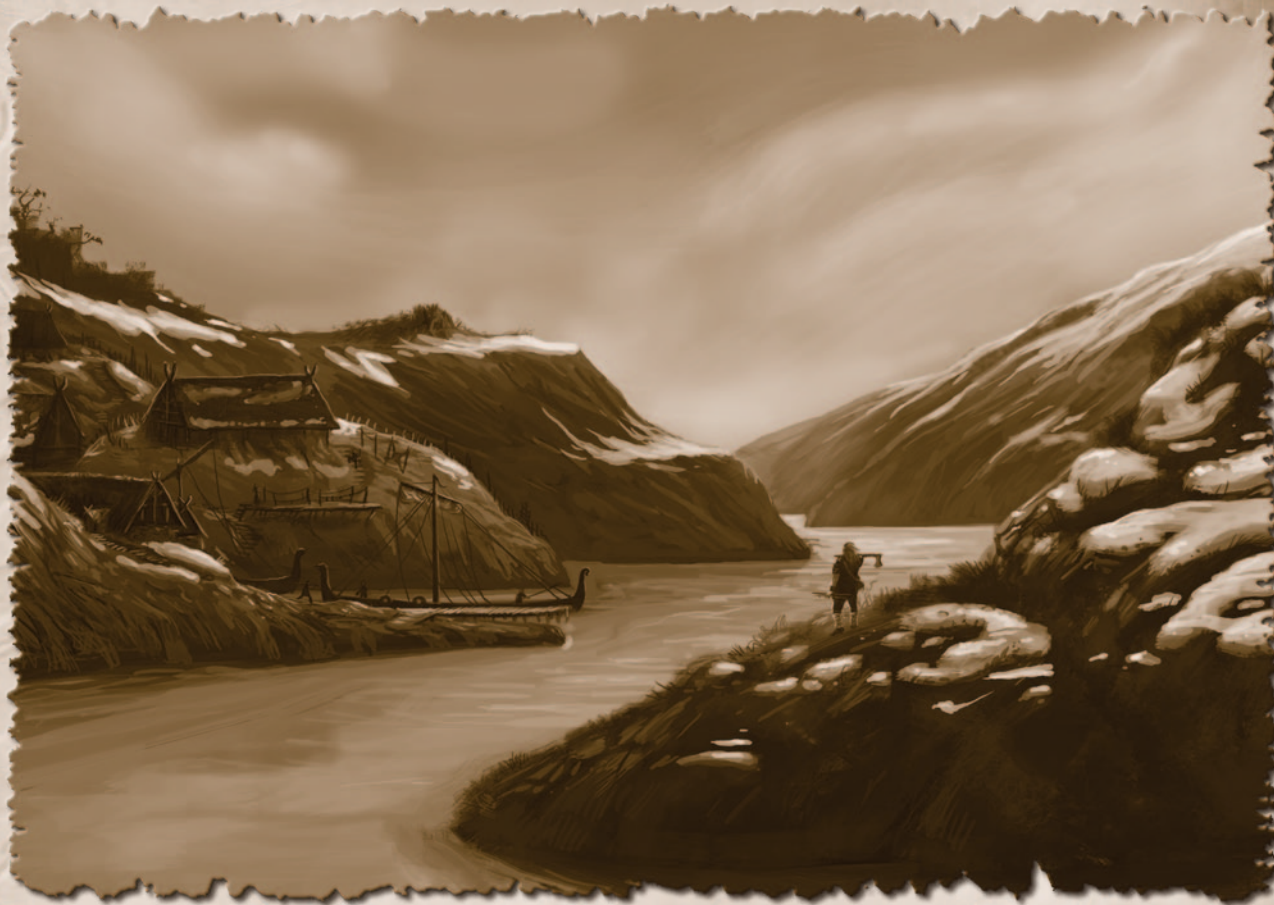
Search: The Search skill is used whenever a character is searching a particular area. It allows him to find hidden objects or clues. Unlike the Vigilance skill, Search implies the character is **actively** looking.

Seduction: This is the character's ability to present themselves in the most appealing fashion, putting forwards his (or her) physical, intellectual or artistic charms. A successful Seduction test allows a character to gain favourable attention from the target by attempting to please them physically, sexually, or intellectually.

Stealth: The character can move silently, making the most of cover in order to pass unseen. The skill allows a character to hide effectively, or to conceal an object or make it disappear.

Superstition: The world is full of divine signs and natural details which reveal the hidden reality of things; a character with the Superstition skill knows how to see and interpret these signs. It's usually used to see favourable or unfavourable signs pertaining to the present moment, but also warnings sent by the gods. Scandians are generally a very superstitious folk, and see signs and omens everywhere; the Game Master can exploit this to slip a few obscure details into the description of a character's situation, where the significance may otherwise only be recognised when it's too late.

Survival: The character feels at ease in natural surroundings, and lives in harmony with nature. The skill allows him to find enough to eat and drink, a place to sleep, and to make fire and gain protection from extreme weather conditions, such as winter blizzards. Survival also covers hunting and tracking, as well as orientation and performing First Aid (see page 141).



Swim: This skill involves moving through water and remaining afloat in case a ship sinks. The Game Master may apply penalties to Swim tests equal to the protection value of the swimmer's armour. The character can also swim underwater, and dive from high places with a good chance of success.

Tactics: Tactics involves the knowledge of various battle techniques, whether involving a dozen combatants or an entire army. The character knows how to make plans for military operations, lead a battle, and command men. In a battle, the two leaders attempt opposed Tactics tests; during the first combat round, those warriors fighting on the side of the victor in the Tactics test receive a bonus to their attack tests equal to their leader's success margin.

Theft: This skill covers the nefarious activities of thieves and robbers. It allows a character to open a lock without using a key, pick a pocket, or cut a purse. Where appropriate, Theft is used in an opposed test against Perception + Vigilance.

Traditions: Traditions enables a character to remember the rules, customs, and laws of the region or city in which he finds himself. While the judicial system is similar across the whole of Scandia, there are always local variations when determining punishments for crimes. The ways and customs of some places may even be sufficiently different from those the characters are familiar with to lead to some very unfortunate situations. A character who is Expert in Traditions can create laws within the *thing*.

Vigilance: Vigilance is an unconscious skill, and only the Game Master can ask for a test which uses it. In certain circumstances, she may even make the roll herself behind her screen. Vigilance represents the attention a character pays to his environment; it allows him to notice unusual details, and often acts like a "sixth sense". Of course, the Game Master may apply conditional penalties to Vigilance tests if a character is inattentive (distracted by an attractive woman, very drunk, etc).

Magical Skills

A character may only use magical skills if he has the *Initiate* gift. All magical skills are considered to be “skilled only”.

Runes*: This skill allows a character to read and understand the meaning of the twenty four runes, and understand the occult insights they provide into the world. Those who know the runes know how to use them to cast spells of protection, curses, and healing.

Galdr*: The *galdr* are magical incantations which rely on the power of the voice. Any practitioner of magic can use them; it's not necessary to have a good voice or be able to sing to cast these spells.

Seidr*: *Seidr* is sorcery, the ancient magical art taught to Odin by Freya. Women are the main users of this art, as it's linked to work which is considered primarily feminine, such as spinning wool, wearing ceremonial vestments to receive visions, or controlling other characters. Some men practise *seidr*, while others use less compromising spells and combine them with runes and *galdr*.

Combat Skills

Although the Scandian kingdoms are characterised by a semi-permanent state of war, the arsenal of the Midgard warriors is fairly straightforward. The use they make of it, however, is almost unlimited: the warriors of the northern lands are skilled with most weapons, and are formidable adversaries.

Hand-to-Hand: Whether a simple disorganised brawl or a trained wrestling match, a character skilled in Hand-to-Hand uses his body (fists, elbows, head, feet, knees) to wound his opponent. The skill also includes martial arts and throws.

Improvised Weapons: The character may use almost any object as a weapon. Of course, such a weapon is not particularly effective, but, as One-Armed

Sborg reflects bitterly, “it's better to parry an axe with a log than an arm!” The Game Master should determine the difficulty of the combat tests a character makes based on the nature and size of the improvised weapon.

Long Weapons: This skill involves larger weapons, including long swords and axes, which make up the arsenal of most warriors. Usually these weapons only require one hand to wield, with the other bearing a shield, but their hilt or haft is long enough to be held in both hands to strike a more powerful blow (see the “Combat” chapter on page 125).

Pole Arms: A character trained in this skill can wield, with dexterity, a weapon comprising a metal head fixed to a long haft. In Scandia, this is always a spear.

Ranged Weapons: The bow is used both as a hunting tool and as a weapon of war. Many warriors practise with bows, at least as a hobby. Some clans train skirmishers who harry the enemy on the battlefield or hunt game in times of peace.

Short Weapons: This skill includes the use of small weapons, such as daggers and hatchets. These weapons need only one hand to wield, and make up for their limited damage and small range with the virtue of being easily hidden.

Throw: This skill allows the character to throw a weapon at a target. It includes daggers, throwing axes, javelins, and throwing spears. For improvised weapons, such as rocks and bar stools, or for throwing weapons not constructed for throwing (swords, heavy axes, etc), the Game Master should apply a circumstantial penalty (page 75) appropriate to the attack.

Two-handed Weapons: This skill involves weapons which require a firm, double-handed grip to wield effectively. This usually means the great axe wielded by *berserkers*, but also includes the great swords of the style used by the Germanic tribes. A warrior with a Strength of 4 or more can wield a two-handed weapon one-handed, without penalty.



Combat

"His men were fighting well beside him but, one by one, overwhelmed by the sheer number of enemies, they fell. Helgi was pierced with spears everywhere not covered by his helm and armour. Blood and sweat filled his boots, the metal covering him deflected blows, but he felt their force in his bones. He still fought, his furious blade wet with blood.

-- The Saga of Hrolf Kraki

The lands of the north are hostile places, and its inhabitants are proud. There are many reasons to fight in daily life, and even more in the life of a hero. From the creatures lurking in Midgard's darkest corners, to wars between kingdoms, clan enemies, and personal vendettas, a character will call on his combat skills many times. The *Yggdrasill* universe is resolutely violent, and many quarrels end, at best, in first blood. Players will grow accustomed to seeing their alter egos brandish their weapons to carve their rightful place among its heroes.

Combats in *Yggdrasill* are very intense, threatening the lives of characters and possibly becoming vital parts of their sagas. The *Yggdrasill* combat system uses simple and opposed tests, with additional rules to provide more precision and style. The system is designed to allow you to recreate epic battles, and showcase the combat skills the greatest Norse warriors were famous for.

Read this chapter and practise using the rules

to become familiar with them. Once you and your players have understood the basics, you should be able to create epic battles worthy of the Norse sagas yourselves!

When running combat, bear in mind that the atmosphere and mood of epic fights rely as much on the way they're described as on the rules which support them. Both players and Game Master should pay particular attention to combat scenes in their descriptions: it's easy for them to get bogged down in a routine of "I hit, I parry". Try to provide intense descriptions, and carefully describe the scenery of the battlefield so that players can work it into their narratives, combat manoeuvres, and the effects of their attacks. As Game Master, make an effort with your narration: try to become a skald, excited by your recital, and give the combats a raw, violent, heroic or even comic quality depending on the atmosphere you want to create. Your players should quickly pick up on it and do the same.

The Rhythm of Combat

A battle between several combatants can quickly become confusing. To avoid this, *Yggdrasill* organises combat into combat rounds, each of which is subdivided into actions. These give each participant a chance to attack or defend himself, and make the whole combat easier to follow.

One combat round represents the period of time needed for all the participants in a combat to take one or more actions, such as attacking, dodging, or parrying. It usually lasts somewhere between 3 and 6 seconds of game time.

Movement within Combat

In a combat round, participants are constantly moving and circling each other, dodging and trying to get into a good position to deliver a decisive blow. These movements do not need to be described individually within the game; unless a character is trying to run or sprint, it's assumed he is moving and manoeuvring in combat at the same time as his opponent.

Once a combat is underway, and the order of actions within a combat round has been determined (by a process known as **initiative** – see page 128), combat proceeds according to the rules below. Additional characters may also join the fight; rules for entering combats which are already underway follow.



Vggdrasill



Realistic Movement

The movement characteristic (MOVE) gives a relative indication of how fast a character can walk. It isn't used directly in melee combat; once a melee has begun, the participants are said to be **engaged**, and remain in close contact with one another, and may not move apart unless one of them decides to **disengage** (see below).

For characters who are not yet engaged in combat, use common sense. The movement characteristic is used to determine if an individual is close enough to become engaged in combat in the current combat round. As long as the distance is within a character's movement range, he can join the battle and engage in combat with an opponent. Remember – in the Scandian mindset, few people turn down the opportunity to join a fight!



Free Movement

A character may use one of his available actions in a combat round to perform one (and only one) **free movement** to either run or sprint.

To run, a character covers a distance equal to double his Movement characteristic ($MOVE \times 2$); to sprint, he covers three times his Movement characteristic ($MOVE \times 3$).

In either case, the character must make an AGI + Athletics test. For running, this is against an Easy difficulty (ST 10); for sprinting, the difficulty is Average (ST 14). Failing this roll means the character reduces the expected movement distance by a number of metres equal to the failure margin (minimum 1 metre). A fumble on the roll means the character falls or twists his ankle. A critical success increases the distance covered by up to half the success margin, as desired.

A free movement requires one action to complete. Within a combat round, it is subject to the secondary action rules (see page 128).

Engaging an Opponent in Combat

A character can cross a distance equal to or less than his Movement characteristic (MOVE) to engage an enemy in combat without needing to use a separate action; instead, the warrior carries out an **attack action** after his movement (or during it, if launching a projectile). If a character must cross a distance greater than his Movement characteristic, he must use a free movement action (see above) to do so, and any subsequent attack requires a separate action.

Disengaging from Combat

A character must use a free movement action to **disengage**, i.e. distance himself from his enemy. Disengaging requires an Average (ST 14) difficulty test with a penalty equal to his opponent's combat skill. The opponent may also react to the attempt to disengage, maybe even chasing after the character.

Once disengaged, a character can perform actions as usual, including engaging and attacking a new enemy (see "Secondary Actions" on page 128).

Combat Round Sequence



At the beginning of each combat round, each player tells the Game Master what his character is intending to do. Most of the time, this will involve using a combat skill. However, it's also possible to use other skills while engaged in combat. Each use of a skill requires one action to perform; some uses may require even longer (such as picking a complex lock while allies delay the guards, for example).

The Game Master determines the actions of any NPCs participating in the combat.

The order of actions in a combat round depends upon the participants' **initiative**.

Initiative

Each participant in a combat determines the order in which he will take his actions by rolling initiative. This is done at the beginning of a battle; each participant rolls 1d10, and adds his modified Reaction score (see page 109).

Initiative Score: 1d10 + modified Reaction

The combatant with the highest **initiative score** takes his first action before all other participants. This is known as a character's primary action. After that, all other combatants take their **primary actions**, acting in descending order of initiative.

Once all participants have taken a primary action, some characters may be able to take a secondary action (see below). **Secondary actions** are also resolved in initiative order, after all primary actions have been taken.

Once all primary and secondary actions have been taken, the combat round ends. The original initiative order is retained into subsequent combat rounds, and so player actions still occur in the same order, unless any combatants have left the fight.

Sometimes a character joins a combat after it has already begun. In such a case, the character rolls initiative at the beginning of the combat round he engages his enemies in. Once determined, the newcomer takes his primary and any secondary actions at the points in the combat round indicated by his initiative.

In the case of tied initiative, the character with the higher modified Reaction score acts first. If this is also a tie, the character with the higher Agility score acts first. If there is still no clear winner, both participants act at the same time.

Primary Actions

In a combat round, each participant has at least one opportunity to perform a decisive action, known as a **primary action**. This may require a skill test (attacking or parrying a blow, climbing a wall, riding a horse into the middle of a battle, etc), but equally could require nothing more than the player declaring what his character is doing (such as hiding under cover or shouting encouragement to his troops). A free movement (i.e. running or sprinting) also constitutes an action.

A character who is targeted by an attack and who has not yet acted in the current combat round can immediately try to defend himself by parrying or dodging the attack (see below). This defence uses up his primary action for the round.

Simple activities which are easy to perform do not require an action; for example, drawing a weapon, switching to defensive mode (page 132), shouting a quick order, choosing a target, attracting the attention of others, dropping what the character is carrying. Game Master and players should work together to decide what is and is not an action.

Secondary Actions

A combat round is the length of time that the least agile (and hence slowest) character would take to perform one action. Such an action is considered to be that character's primary action; each character gets a single **primary action** per combat round.

However, more agile characters may be able to act two or even three times in the same period. To represent this, in a combat round a character may perform a maximum number of actions equal to his Agility characteristic, plus one. The first of these actions is a **primary action**; any subsequent actions are **secondary actions**.

For example: a character with an Agility score of 3 may take 4 actions: once as his primary action, then three times more as three secondary actions.

Regardless of Agility, each action a character takes in a combat round **after the first action** incurs a progressively larger penalty to any test made in that action, as shown on the table below.

Player Action	Test Penalty
Primary	0
1st Secondary	-2
2nd Secondary	-5
3rd Secondary	-10
4th Secondary	-15
5th Secondary	-20

A character isn't required to use all his potential actions in a combat round, but may never take more than the number allowed (Agility score +1).

Once all participants have taken their primary actions, characters with secondary actions may act for a second time, again in initiative order; then any characters with

Counting Actions

A new combat round has started. A *berserker* has the highest initiative, and attacks one of the characters, who takes the opportunity to parry, thereby using his own primary action to defend. When the Game Master announces the character's own action in the initiative order, he will have to check if he has any secondary actions left in the round. If he does, he can choose to make an attack (with the appropriate secondary action penalty). If the character has no secondary actions remaining, he cannot act, and must wait for the next combat round to commence.

There's a box on the *Yggdrasill* character sheet (see page 235) to simplify the process of counting actions in a round. Write down the maximum number of actions the character's Agility gives him ($AGI + 1$); then, with a die, counter, or some other marker, mark the number of the last action the character undertook. Every time he acts or reacts, move the counter to the right. This also indicates the penalty (if any) the character incurs on his current action.

At the beginning of each new combat round, reset the counter to "zero".

third secondary actions, and so on. No one is compelled to use all their actions – although they may wish to use them to parry or dodge if attacked.

Note that secondary actions do not accumulate from combat round to combat round: any actions which have not been taken by the end of the combat round are lost, and the character begins the next combat round only with his usual number of actions.

Attacking

The point of combat is to stop your enemy. Whether this means wounding him, killing him, or knocking him out, the goal is the same: seize the upper hand, and vanquish your foe!

In combat, each participant attempts to **wound** his opponent. Protected by armour and shield, each warrior aims to land a telling blow using the various combat skills at his disposal: a *hirdman* relies on the mastery of swordplay afforded by his long hours of training, while

a *berserker* counts on his brute force and rage; another warrior, with a supple and agile body, relies on his natural grace to slip past his enemy's defences.

Melee Attacks

In *Yggdrasill*, there are three principle forms of melee attack:

Classic Attack

In a **classic attack**, a character tries to find the best spot to strike. He loses in raw power what he gains in skill. Of course, as he attacks the least-defended parts of his enemy, he's more likely to hit a well-armoured location, but is also more likely to strike his target. This is simplest form of attack, and the first technique a novice warrior learns.

In a classic attack, a warrior relies on his Agility (AGI) rather than Strength (STR): his Strength characteristic score is not added to the total damage.

Classic Attack: AGI / Penalty -0

Power Attack

In a **power attack**, the attacker strikes with all his strength, counting on his physical power rather than any technique to reach his target and cause as much damage as possible. The player carries out a (Power + combat skill) test; a successful attack allows his character to add his Strength characteristic score to the damage caused by the attack.

Power Attack: Penalty -0 / Damage + STR

Optionally, the character can invest even more Strength in his attack. In this **devastating attack**, the attack test incurs a penalty equal to the character's Strength score; if the attack hits, the additional Strength damage is tripled.

Devastating Attack: Penalty -STR / Damage: + STR x 3

Precise Attack

Unlike the previous attacks, in a **precise attack** the character carefully targets a weak area in his opponent's protective stance and armour, and tries to break through his guard. The attacking character makes a (PER +

combat skill) test: if the attack is successful, the target's protection is reduced by the character's Perception score.

Precise Attack: **Penalty 0 / Enemy Protection: -PER**

A character may also attack the weakest point in his opponent's defence, by incurring a penalty to his attack test equal to his own Perception score. If the attack succeeds, the opponent's armour value (natural or not) is reduced by three times the character's Perception score.

Aimed Attack: **Penalty -PER / Enemy Armour: -PER × 3**

Types of Melee Attack	
Classic Attack	AGI / Penalty -0
Power Attack	Penalty -0 / Damage + STR
Devastating Attack	Penalty -STR / Damage + STR × 3
Precise Attack	Penalty -0 / Opponent AV: -PER
Aimed Attack	Penalty -PER / Opponent AV: -PER × 3

Ranged Attacks

In the same way, there are three principal forms of ranged attack. These cover the use both of thrown weapons (hatchets, daggers, spears) and drawn weapons (bows, slings).

Composed Shot

The classic ranged attack learned by all Scandian warriors, the character attempts to land a solid blow on his target. His attack loses strength, but uses his training to maximise his chance of hitting the opponent. In a **composed shot**, The player makes an (Agility + combat skill) test.

Composed Shot: AGI / Penalty -0

Power Shot

In a **power shot**, the attacker attempts to deliver the maximum impact to his target, counting on physical power and the violent shock of the projectile to stop his opponent in his tracks. The character makes an (Instinct + combat skill) test for a drawn weapon, or a (Strength + combat skill) test for a thrown weapon.

Power Shot: **Penalty -0 / Damage +INS or +STR**

The character may also make greater use of his Instinct or Strength characteristic in the attack, incurring a penalty to the attack test equal to the corresponding characteristic score. If this **devastating shot** attack succeeds, the damage modifier is tripled.

Devastating Shot: **Penalty -INS or** **STR / Damage +INS × 3 or +STR × 3**

Note that a devastating shot may not be made beyond the weapon's medium range.

Precise Shot

With a **precise shot**, the character carefully targets a weakness in his opponent's armour, attempting to pierce through its protection. This requires a (Perception + combat skill test).

Precise Shot: **Penalty -0 / Opponent Armour: -PER**

The character may also elect to incur a penalty equal to his PER characteristic on his attack; if the attack is successful, this **aimed shot** reduces the opponent's armour value (whether natural or not) by triple the character's PER characteristic.

Aimed Shot: Penalty -PER / **Opponent Armour: - PER × 3**

Types of Ranged Attack	
Composed Shot	AGI / Penalty -0
Power Shot	Penalty -0 / Damage + STR or INS
Devastating Shot	Penalty -STR or INS / Damage +STR × 3 or INS × 3
Precise Shot	Penalty -0 / Opponent Protection: -PER
Aimed Shot	Penalty -PER / Opponent Protection: -PER × 3

Combat Modifiers

Combat modifiers are circumstantial modifiers (see page 74) which are added to the results of defence or attack tests, depending on the situation. They are cumulative.

In melee

The defender is ...

On higher ground	−3	(mounted, on a table, the attacker is on the floor)
Flanking	−3	(standing to the attacker's left or right)
Behind	−8	(standing at the attacker's back)
Flanked	+3	(presenting his flank to the attacker)
Turned away	+6	(his back turned to the attacker)
On his back	+6	(lying at the attacker's feet)
Blinded	+8	(unable to see the attacker)
Trapped or immobilised	+10	(tied up or frozen in fear)
Surprised	+6	(has not seen the attacker)

Ranged Attacks

The defender is ...

At short range	+3	
At medium range	−0	
At long range	−6	
At extreme range	−16	
Immobilised	+8	
Moving quickly	−6	
In shadow	−8	
Under cover	−3 to −6	according to how much of the body is covered

Hitting the Target

For all attacks, whether hand-to-hand or using ranged weapons, a simple test indicates whether the attacker has hit the target.

The success threshold of this attack test is fixed at Average (ST 14), modified by the target's Physical Defence. Circumstantial modifiers are then added to give the final score, as shown on the table below.

Attack Test:
Characteristic + skill \geq 14 + PD

Parrying an Attack

If a character has an action (primary or secondary) remaining in the current combat round when targeted by an attack, he may choose to parry the blow. This requires an action and a successful **parry test**. The success threshold of the parry test is equal to the opponent's attack test result.

Parry Test: $AGI + skill \geq \text{result of opponent's attack test}$

Note that parry tests are subject to any secondary action penalties that apply (see page 128). Parries may not be attempted if the defender is bare-handed.

Dodging an Attack

As a final recourse, a character can try to dodge an attack which is targeting him. This requires an action and a **dodge test** using the character's Dodge skill. The success threshold is equal to the opponent's attack test result.

Dodge: $AGI + skill \geq \text{result of opponent's attack test}$

Defensive Mode

Any character who is facing an opponent with a higher initiative who has just failed his attack on that character, and who subsequently elects not to attack back, but instead to conserve his action to defend against a possible subsequent attack, automatically enters **defensive mode**.

Defensive mode means a character does not attack on his action in the initiative order, but instead conserves his actions to "see the next attack coming". The combat round moves to the next participant in initiative order.

Once in defensive mode, a character can no longer use his actions to attack. He may perform any other actions using general skills, or defend himself normally. Until the end of the combat round, the character may not attempt a riposte attack; having entered a totally defensive stance, he is far too occupied avoiding opponent attacks.

At the beginning of each subsequent combat round, the character may decide to remain in defensive mode, or return to an active fighting style.

For example: Having been accused of stealing by a powerful jarl, Svein must face one of the jarl's bodyguards, a fierce berserker, in a judicial duel to decide the young warrior's fate. At the beginning of combat, the bear-warrior enters a trance and charges, frothing at the mouth. Svein realises he has little chance of surviving a direct engagement, and decides to try and let the berserker exhaust himself before riposting when he least expects it.

The berserker gains the initiative and acts first. By chance, the attack misses. However, Svein then prudently opts to not use his action in a counter-attack (which he doubts would be effective anyway). As a result, he automatically enters defensive mode.

In the same combat round, the berserker attacks again. This is a secondary action, and incurs a -2 penalty. This time, the attack threatens to slice off Svein's arm, and he attempts a parry. Faced with his opponent's attack test result, Svein opts to use a furor die to augment his parry test result, and as this is his first action of the combat round he incurs no secondary action penalty. He just manages to deflect the axe!

A new combat round begins. The powerful bear warrior once again attacks Svein. His player decides Svein will remain in defensive mode, hoping the berserker will soon get out of breath.

Damage

Once an attack has hit its target, the damage it causes should be determined. This damage is equal to the **success margin of the attack test, plus the weapon's damage bonus**.

The success margin is calculated from the original ST of the attack test, or the defender's dodge or parry test result, if the defender fails.

Success margin = attack test result – (ST or defence test result)

This damage is then reduced by the armour value of any armour or other protection the defender benefits from.

Damage = attack success margin + weapon damage bonus – defender's armour value

A **power attack** allows an attacker to add his Strength characteristic score to the damage (or triple his Strength for a **devastating attack**).

A **precise shot** reduces the defender's armour value by the attacker's Perception characteristic score (or triple his Perception for an **aimed shot**).

Which Defence Test Result?

When a character has been hit, he can choose between using his failed parry test result or dodge test result, or the attack test's success threshold (ST 14 + PD), whichever is greatest. This allows a defender to reduce the attacker's success margin as much as possible, and thus the amount of damage incurred.

Remember: always use the best defence test result possible

Critical Successes and Fumbles in Combat

A fumble result (see page 133) in a combat test means the situation for the one who suffers its effects suddenly gets a great deal worse. A combatant may drop his weapon, drive it into an enemy shield, lose his balance, and so on. The Game Master has final say over the exact description of the fumble, based on the current circumstances, but a **combat fumble** always means the combatant is in a bad position.

Likewise, a critical success in a combat test (a **combat critical**) means the combatant gains a significant advantage over his opponent. He may force him to retreat, trip him up, knock his shield out of his hands to get a better attack next turn, and so on.

The Game Master may also simplify combat criticals by declaring the character either does double normal damage, or breaks his opponent's weapon.

Note: it is not necessary to achieve a critical success on a defence test in order to successfully defend against a critical success on an attack test; a defence test result higher than the opponent's attack test result is sufficient. However, if you're using the Combat Fumble and Combat Critical Effects tables above, the attacker still benefits from the advantages of his special results. The same situation applies to a critical success on a defence test: the attack is avoided, and the defender gains the benefits of the critical result.

Optional rule: The Combat Fumble and Combat Critical Effects tables can be declared to be optional, and instead the effects of criticals and fumbles can be translated directly into game terms. The Game Master and players should agree on the status of the Combat Fumble and Combat Critical Effects tables before beginning play.

Combat Fumble Effects

1D10 Effects

1 The combatant strikes his closest ally and inflicts damage equal to (failure margin + weapon damage bonus); armour is applied normally. If no ally is within range or line of attack, the weapon becomes stuck in something and / or breaks.

2 - 3 The combatant hits his closest ally and inflicts damage equal to (failure margin + weapon damage bonus)/2; armour is applied normally. If no ally is within range or line of attack, the combatant loses control of his weapon and his next attack incurs a -2 penalty.

4 - 7 The combatant drops his weapon, which lands 1d5 metres from him in a random direction.

8 - 9 The combatant wounds himself. He may twist his ankle, pull a muscle, or even hit himself with his attack. He incurs (failure margin + weapon damage bonus)/2 points of damage; armour is applied normally.

10 As above, but this time the combatant suffers (failure margin + weapon damage bonus) points of damage; armour is applied normally.

Combat Critical Effects

1D10 Effects

1 The target staggers under the blow and loses an action from his total. If he has no more actions remaining, the attack forces him to act last during the next combat round (his initiative, for the next round only, is reduced to zero).

2 - 3 The blow breaks the target's weapon, and inflicts +5 damage.

4 - 7 The attacker disarms the target, who staggers under the blow and falls to the ground, suffering an additional +10 damage.

8 - 9 The attacker does not count this action. However, he cannot attack again until his following action. The target suffers an additional +5 damage.

10 The attacker can attack again immediately. This does not count as a secondary action; if the attack was a secondary action itself, the next attack is carried out with the same secondary action penalty). The target suffers an additional +10 damage.

On a fumble, the attacker always fails his attack. This is even the case if the final attack test result, once everything has been calculated (i.e. dice + skills), exceeds the required success threshold.

Using furor in Combat

In combat, the *furor* dice offer characters a boost in energy and potential. Any character with an available *furor* pool may use it to gain a bonus.

When faced with a particularly effective attack, *furor* dice may be vital, particularly when the success threshold for a parry or dodge is very high. Likewise, when penalties accumulate as a result of conditions or secondary actions, *furor* dice improve a character's chances of success.

The situation for *berserker* characters is somewhat different. When a *berserker* character enters battle *furor*, he must resist the urge to abandon himself to it, and is not limited to using just one *furor* die. A *berserker* thus becomes a true "killing machine" on the battlefield.

However, a *berserker* cannot voluntarily reduce the number of *furor* dice he rolls, and must continue to use the same amount for all subsequent

attacks. No matter how large a *berserker's furor* pool, it is exhausted very quickly.

This is the dilemma of using *furor*. It allows characters to become stronger, better, able to carry out the most extraordinary actions; but once reduced to zero, the character becomes Exhausted, and easy prey if combat is not yet over (since Exhausted characters only retain a single die for their tests).

While other characters may be able to deal with this aspect, it's much harder for a *berserker* to restrain his savage instincts. *Furor* is a powerful ally, but comes with a price. For more details on using *furor*, see page 111.



Wounds and Healing

In the harsh world of *Yggdrasill*, the heroes of your sagas confront terrible dangers. They may be badly wounded in battle, marking them forever, and even the environment is perilous, bringing its lot of injury and sickness. Swords are awash with blood, axes crush bones, and swamp fevers lay low the strongest of men. Thankfully, cures can be obtained through the magic of the runes and the knowledge of healers.

Hit Points



Hit Points (HP) measure a character's vitality, and his ability to absorb blows and damage. As explained on page 108, a character's current Hit Points indicate where he is on the scale of the five **wound levels**: Bloodied, Wounded, Severely Wounded, Unconscious, or Dead.

Losing Hit Points moves the character downwards through the wound levels and ultimately to death. There are many ways to lose Hit Points, but the most common is combat.

Combat

In combat, characters risk physical injury. Every warrior's goal is to vanquish their adversary.

A successful attack test inflicts a loss of Hit Points equal to the success margin of the test, plus the weapon's damage bonus. If the character used a **power attack**, he also adds his Strength characteristic score.

Other factors may also apply on rare occasions, such as magic, or a character's weakness to certain types of attack.

The cumulative effect of injuries means characters become weaker (by incurring penalties), and may eventually become unable to continue fighting.

Note: NPC extras do not have Hit Points, but a "Vitality" attribute. They are wounded when they suffer damage equal to or above this value; and are killed or taken out of combat when they suffer a second wound, or when the total damage they have incurred exceeds twice their Vitality score (see page 177).

Major Wounds and Consequences

An accumulation of light wounds and bruises can bring a character down just as surely as a single well-placed blow.

However, the most powerful attacks can cause considerable damage.

When a character incurs damage equal to or greater than half of his original Hit Points **from a single attack**,

2D10	Wound	Consequences	Permanent Consequences
2	Crushed Thorax	A powerful blow breaks one of the character's ribs and winds him. The player must make a Vigour test (ST 19); if failed, the character cannot act for the next 1d5 combat rounds. The success threshold of all the character's tests is increased by one difficulty level until he receives first aid.	VIG -1
3	Broken Jaw	The attack strikes the character's jaw. He is shaken for the remainder of the combat round, and cannot attack. The player must make a Vigour test (ST 14); if failed, the character enters defensive mode (page 132) for a number of combat rounds equal to the failure margin.	COM -1
4	Broken Wrist	Roll 1d10: 1-5 right wrist, 6-10 left wrist. The blow causes a great deal of pain. The character must succeed at an Agility test (ST 19) or drop whatever he is holding in that hand.	AGI -1
5	Gashed Thigh	The player must succeed at a Vigour test (ST 19) or the character collapses to the ground.	MOVE -1
6	Dislocated Shoulder	The character buckles under the blow and cannot attack for the rest of the combat round.	AGI -1
7	Broken Leg	The player must succeed at an Agility test (ST 25) or the character collapses to the ground.	MOVE -1
8 - 12	Gaping Wound	A deep wound marks the warrior's body. Blood runs down his armour. The wound will cause a nasty scar, but nothing more.	—
13	Broken Ribs	The player must succeed at a Tenacity test (ST 19) every combat round. If failed, the character may only perform one action that combat round.	STR -1
14	Cut Open	The player must succeed at a Vigour test (ST 25) or the hero collapses to the ground. All his characteristics are reduced by 1 point.	STR -1
15	Deep Wound	The character is bleeding badly, losing 2 HP per combat round.	VIG -1
16	Internal Haemorrhaging	The player must succeed at a Vigour test (ST 19) or the character falls unconscious. He loses 2 HP per combat round until someone stops the bleeding.	—
17	Gashed Eye	The eye socket is fractured and the eyelid becomes swollen, rendering the character blind on that side. All of his Perception tests are increased by one difficulty level.	PER -1
18	Gashed Head	Blood runs down the character's face, and a dull pounding through his skull. All tests involving Mind characteristics (Intelligence, Perception, and Tenacity) are made with one die less.	—
19	Cut Off!	The blow completely slices off or crushes the character's finger, ear, nose, etc.	AGI -1 or CHA -1 according to the area affected
20	Amputated!	The attack severs or crushes the character's hand, foot, arm, or leg. He loses 4 HP every turn until someone stops the bleeding. All characteristics are reduced by 1 point.	AGI and STR -1 for the hand or arm; MOVE -2 and STR -1 for foot or leg

Wounds and Healing

he may suffer a **major wound**, and must immediately make a Vigour characteristic test (page 108) against the number of Hit Points lost. If successful, he continues to act normally; on a failure, the character falls to the ground, overcome by agony and unable to take any actions for the remainder of the combat round. The character must succeed at a Tenacity test (ST 14) at the start of each new combat round in order to recover and act normally again. A fumble in either of these tests (Vigour or Tenacity) means the character loses consciousness for 1d10 combat rounds.

Optional: the Game Master may use the above table to determine the consequences of a major wound. The table describes the wound the character has suffered and its immediate effects; these last until the character receives a successful Survival test (First Aid, ST 19) or Medicine test (ST 19). These tests allow the most urgent consequences to be dealt with (stopping the bleeding, setting a broken limb, putting a compress on a wound, etc). They do not restore any Hit Points to the character, but merely prevent matters getting worse.

Permanent consequences: as soon as a character begins to recover from his wounds (see “Care and Healing”, page 141), he must check to see if he suffers any permanent damage.

This is a Vigour characteristic test against a success threshold equal to his Hit Points lost, divided by 2. If a healer is assisting the character, he may add the healer’s Medicine skill level to his roll. If the Vigour test succeeds, the character will only have a nasty scar to show for his misadventure; otherwise he will have a more significant consequence, as shown in the “Permanent Consequences” column of the table above.

Note: if a characteristic is reduced to zero, the character dies from his wounds.

Falling

Scandia has many coastal cliffs and mountain chains. For many, these are opportunities for challenging climbs, and often lead to spectacular falls.

No matter how active or agile a character may be, falling from a great height runs the risk of serious injury. For a fall up to three metres, an Average (ST 14) Agility + Acrobatics test allows a character to fall without injury; if this fails, or if he falls from a greater height, the character incurs Hit Point damage equal to the height in metres, plus 1d10 for every three metres he falls.

For example: Svein is fighting on the edge of a precipice. Pushed back by his opponent, he steps into the void and

topples over the edge. By sheer luck, an outcropping stops his fall five metres down. However, the shock is a nasty one; he loses 5 + 2d10 Hit Points.

A successful Acrobatics test results in half falling damage. The Game Master may also modify the damage according to the terrain the character lands on. For example, he would roll 1d10 fewer dice for landing in water, and 1d10 more dice for landing on rocky ground. Protection provided by armour never reduces falling damage.

Suffocation

Whether someone is trying to strangle him, or he’s trapped in a cave with the air running out, a character will die if he cannot breathe.

A character can hold his breath for 30 seconds per point of Vigour, after which he must breathe or suffocate. For each combat round in which he cannot breathe, a character loses (10 – Vigour) Hit Points. He will die quickly if he does not receive aid.

Drowning

A character swimming in open water risks drowning if he fails a Swim test. He must then make a second test at the same ST: success means the character has managed to surface just in time; failure means he starts to drown and sink. Refer to the “Suffocation” rules above for holding your breath and taking damage.

The above tests also depend on external conditions, such as how calm the water is. The table below provides example success thresholds and the amount of time between the two tests.

Conditions	Difficulty (ST)	Delay
Calm water, slack tide	Simple (7)	One test
Weak current	Easy (10)	Every 5 mins
Moderate current	Average (14)	Every 2 mins
Strong current, uncertain sea	Difficult (19)	Every 1 min
Rapids, stormy sea	Very Difficult (25)	Every 5 turns
Storm, hurricane	Exceptional (32)	Every turn

Fire

Depending on a fire’s size and intensity, a character may lose Hit Points as soon as he’s in contact with the heat source. Burns are very painful, and often leave deep scars. Use the following table to evaluate the intensity of the flame; damage is inflicted immediately at the beginning of each combat round, for as long as the character remains in contact with the flames.

Type of Fire

Torch, brazier
Fireplace, campfire
Inferno
The heart of a bonfire

Damage

1d10
2d10
3d10
4d10

Cold

In the frozen reaches of Scandia, cold kills just as surely as fire. If exposed to extremely low temperatures, a character risks dying of hyperthermia; his hands, feet, and face freeze, and may become frostbitten, which can end in amputation (of fingers, toes, ears, or nose). In extreme cases, the lungs freeze, and the poor unfortunate suffocates (see the "Suffocation" rules above).

Cold causes the loss of 1d10 Hit Points upon exposure to hostile conditions. The table below indicates the frequency of such losses.

Condition

Winter cold, day
Winter cold, night
Snowstorm
Blizzard
Immersed in freezing water

Frequency

3 hours
Every hour
Every hour
Every 10 minutes
Every minute

Cold damage is subject to the following modifiers:

- 2: the character is well protected against the cold (furs, warm clothes)
- 3: the character is extremely well prepared for the cold (thick furs, cap, gloves, warm clothes)
- +2: the character is not well protected against the cold (thin clothes, metal armour)
- +5: the character is very badly prepared for the cold (naked, wet)

Sickness and Disease

Scandians are for the most part robust, with a high standard of personal hygiene, enough to avoid the most common illnesses. Few people catch colds, even in the middle of winter.

A Vigour test is required whenever a character is exposed to a sickness or disease. The following list describes the diseases which can lay low even the greatest of heroes. They are described as follows:

Name: the most common name for the illness

Category: each illness is categorised according to its severity: Minor, Moderate, or Major. These categories represent mild complaints; illnesses which require at least a modicum of rest to treat; and, finally, the most lethal and deadly diseases.

Each illness has a virulence level with an associated success threshold. A character must make a Vigour test upon exposure; if successful, he avoids infection; on a failure, the character catches the illness in question.

- **A Minor illness has an Easy (ST 10) virulence level**
- **A Moderate illness has an Average (ST 14) virulence level**
- **A Major illness has a Difficult (ST 19) virulence level**

Period: once a character contracts an illness, his body fights the pathogen. After a certain period of time, the character makes another Vigour test against the ST of its virulence level. Failure means the character suffers the effects of the illness as described below; a fumble means its category is increased by one level of severity, if possible (a Minor illness becomes Moderate, a Moderate illness becomes Major). Two consecutive fumbles means the character is either dead or in a coma. Success reduces the category by one level of severity (a Major illness becomes Moderate, a Moderate illness becomes Minor, a Minor illness is cured). If the character remains affected by the illness after the test, a new test is attempted after the next period. Once the illness' virulence level is reduced below Minor, the character is cured.

Effects: this paragraph details the loss of Hit Points and other effects the illness has on a character.

A Few Common Complaints

Arthritis

Category: Minor (ST 10)

Period: Six months

Effects: This disabling illness rarely affects those under forty. It's characterised by joint pains and, as the character gets older, deformation of the joints.

When a character reaches the age of forty, he must make a test every six months. If this fails, he has started feeling the effects of arthritis, and must make a new test every subsequent period. A character suffering from arthritis incurs a penalty to his actions which varies according to severity: -2 (Minor), -5 (Moderate), or -9 (Major).

Arthritis cannot be cured. Once a character suffers from it, a successful Vigour test simply means he has overcome the symptoms this time, thanks to balms and unguents. Its effects can only get worse.

Dysentery

Category: Moderate (ST 14)

Period: One day

Wounds and Healing

Effects: The infection is caught by drinking dirty water. Simply mixing the water with alcohol is enough to kill the germs. Dysentery is one of the reasons few Scandinavians drink water, or prefer only the purest springs; the illness is accompanied by foul and bloody diarrhoea and agonising abdominal cramps. Unable to stand, lacking energy, the character must remain in bed and rest. If he must act, all his tests incur a -12 penalty.

Gangrene

Category: Moderate (ST 14)

Period: One day

Effects: Gangrene is always caused by an infected wound, and seems to result from a lack of care or hygiene in the treatment of open cuts.

The affected area slowly rots, becoming foul and agonising to touch. An affected limb must be amputated as soon as the gangrene enters the "Major" stage, or the sickness will spread and risks turning into septicaemia.

At the beginning of each new period, the character loses 1d10 HP, which can only be regained once the illness has been cured.

Scurvy

Category: Minor (ST 10)

Period: One week

Effects: Scurvy is caused by a lack of vitamin C. Symptoms include bleeding gums, tooth loss, constant exhaustion, oedema, and haemorrhages. In the worst cases, the victim dies of exhaustion. Eating cabbage, radishes, fresh or dried fruits (blackberries, cranberries, etc), leeks, parsley (all of which are sources of vitamin C) will lessen the symptoms until they finally disappear. However, the victim may well have lost teeth or suffered internal damage in the meantime.

A character with scurvy loses 1d10 HP per week, which can only be regained once the illness has been cured. He also incurs a -1 / -3 / -6 condition penalty, depending on the severity of the illness.

Food Poisoning

Category: Minor (ST 10)

Period: One day

Effects: Food poisoning is transmitted by eating pork, game, whale, seal, or moose meat which has been badly cooked. It is caused by intestinal parasites. The victim suffers from abdominal pain, nausea, diarrhoea, and vomiting; often fever accompanies these symptoms, along with muscle pains and itching. This sickness can only become fatal due to complications, but in a majority of cases has no more affect on a character than influenza.

Until healed, a character with food poisoning incurs a condition penalty to all his actions of -3 / -6 / -9, depending on severity.

Pulmonary Tuberculosis

Category: Moderate (ST 14)

Period: One month

Effects: Symptoms of pulmonary tuberculosis include a heavy cough, sometimes accompanied by blood, loss of weight, and nightly sweats. It is always terminal, and cannot be cured; a successful Vigour test means only that it has been kept at bay at the current stage – it can never improve.

Every day, upon waking, a character must make a Vigour test against the success threshold of the illness' current virulence level. If successful, the character can act more or less normally, apart from regular outbreaks of coughing; failure means he suffers a -5 penalty to all his actions that day.

Tuberculosis is very contagious and is transmitted by air.

Poisons

Knowledge of plants and minerals has tempted some individuals to create toxins of varied effects. However, their use remains very rare – what glory is there in bringing down a beast weakened by poison? Not to mention the danger of eating its flesh afterwards. The use of poison remains, both in sagas and Scandian culture, a shameful, despicable thing: its use is extremely rare and, if caught, the penalties are severe. Only unscrupulous NPCs and certain creatures resort to such methods.

Nevertheless, these substances do exist, and can threaten northern warriors, particularly when it comes to venoms used by certain supernatural creatures.

Poisons are described much like illnesses:

Name: The name of the venom or poison.

Category: there are three categories of poison, depending on toxicity: Minor, Moderate, and Major. These categories represent mild irritants; incapacitating poisons; and, for the third, the most lethal and deadly venoms.

Each type of poison has a success threshold corresponding to its toxicity. A character must make a Vigour test as soon as he is exposed to the toxin. If successful, he is not affected by the poison; on a failure, he succumbs to its effects.

- **A Minor poison has an Easy (ST 10) toxicity level**
- **A Moderate poison has an Average (ST 14) toxicity level**
- **A Major poison has a Difficult (ST 19) toxicity level**

If no category is given for a poison, the poison is impossible to resist!

Type: this indicates how the poison is administered: it can be injected into the victim's bloodstream (injection); swallowed with food or drink (ingested); transmitted through the skin (contact); or through the lungs if a gas (inhaled).

Effects: this paragraph details the Hit Point damage and other consequences of the poison.

Examples of Poisons

Aconite

Category: Major (ST 19)

Type: Ingested

Effect: The character's body temperature drops. He vomits, becomes slowly paralysed, and dies of cardiac arrest after (Vigour +2) hours. Only a specialised antidote, administered before the end of this period, can save the character. Even then, the character is reduced to half his full Hit Points, and can only regain the rest through natural healing.

Death-cap Amanita

Category: Major (ST 19)

Type: Ingested

Effect: This powerful toxin, easy to find and prepare, destroys the character's liver and kidneys. The pain is unbelievable: the victim thrashes in agony until the end. Death comes in (Vigour) hours. Only a specialised antidote, administered in the first hour, can save the victim. Even then, the character is reduced to half his full Hit Points, and can only regain the rest through natural healing.

Fly-Agaric

Category: Moderate (ST 14)

Type: Ingested

Effect: The character suffers terrible stomach pains, accompanied by neurological problems (trembling, finding it hard to concentrate) lasting 2 to 11 (1d10+1) hours. The poison is not deadly, but greatly handicaps those who suffer from it; as long as a character is suffering from its effects, he incurs a -9 condition penalty to all actions, and loses 1d10 HP.

Arsenic

Category: Moderate (ST 14)

Type: Ingested

Effect: This poison can be mixed with food or drink. The victim presents symptoms of acute intestinal illness: vomiting, diarrhoea, dehydration, and agonising stomach pains. Death follows in a few hours. The symptoms can easily be confused with those of dysentery, and the death passed off as natural.

Succeeding in a Vigour test allows a character to resist these effects, although he is still severely ill for 1d10 hours. The test incurs a cumulative -3 condition penalty

for each subsequent dose of arsenic consumed.

A character poisoned with arsenic loses 1d10 HP every ten minutes; only an efficient antidote can save him. People can increase their immunity to arsenic by ingesting small, but increasingly potent doses; in this case, the character may retain 3d10 for his Vigour test, instead of the usual 2d10.

Belladonna

Category: Major (ST 19)

Type: Ingested

Effect: The victim suffers from total respiratory paralysis. Death usually follows in under an hour (Vigour x 10 minutes); only a specialised antidote can save the character. Even then, the character is reduced to half his full Hit Points, and can only regain the rest through natural healing.

Mistletoe

Category: Moderate (ST 14)

Type: Ingested

Effect: The fruit of the mistletoe must be ingested for its poison to work; it often results in minor digestive trouble in the majority of cases (-5 to tests, and a loss of 1d10 HP). The symptoms disappear after (7 - Vigour) days.

If too many mistletoe fruit are ingested, the victim may suffer possibly fatal cardiac complications: he must make a second Vigour test after the first. If this one also fails, death follows in (Vigour) hours.

Soporific

Category: Minor (ST 10) to Moderate (ST 14)

Type: Ingested or injected

Effect: There are a great many varieties of soporific poisons, mostly derived from vegetables. All make the victim feel sleepy: his vigilance lessens, and one dose is usually enough to put him to sleep.

A character who fails his Vigour test falls asleep for about four hours per dose.

Natural Toxins

Category: Minor (ST 10)

Type: Ingested, contact or ingestion

Effect: Certain animals and many plants secrete poison. These substances can be used as they are, or refined by an expert in Herbalism. The characteristics given above correspond to standard toxins: you can vary them to reflect other, similar substances.

In general, natural toxins cause a local reaction in the affected area. Skin reddens and swells for contact poison; stomach cramps are felt for ingested poison; and

Wounds and Healing

muscular cramps for an injected poison. In the gravest cases, the toxin causes progressive paralysis, and the character dies in a few hours, or even minutes.

Care and Natural Healing



Happily for the Scandians, their fair knowledge of the body, elaborate medical techniques, and strong culture of personal hygiene, allow most people to recover from wounds and illnesses. The healers and *thulr* of the Northern Kingdoms have a great deal of knowledge concerning traditional medicines, superstition, and magical practises.

Natural Healing

In favourable conditions, a wounded or sick character can slowly recover. However, this **natural healing** has its limits.

A character attempting a complete recovery – that is, resting comfortably, close to a fire, and well-fed – regains a number of Hit Points equal to his Vigour score every night.

However, if he engages in even mild activity (traveling, more arduous housework...), two nights' rest are required for the same result.

If the character cannot rest (normal activity, harsh voyaging conditions), it takes a full week to regain Hit Points equal to his Vigour.

A character whose Hit Points fall below zero needs immediate aid. Natural healing can only occur once the character's total Hit Points return to zero or positive levels.

First Aid

A character whose injuries are so severe that he approaches the gates of Valhalla needs **immediate assistance** so as not to die in the next few minutes. However, even the mildest wounds can benefit from a healer's attentions.

In order to practise First Aid, a character must have reached Novice level in Survival or Medicine. He must know how to immobilise and set a broken limb,

clean and bandage a wound, stem bleeding, restart the breathing of a drowned man, and so on.

To tend to a wounded character, a healer makes an Intellect + (Survival or Medicine) test against a success threshold determined by the target's wound level.

Target Wound Level	Difficulty Level	ST
Bloodied	Easy	10
Wounded	Average	14
Severely Wounded	Difficult	19
Unconscious	Very Difficult	25
Dead (Dying)	Exceptional	32

If the healing test succeeds, the target immediately regains a number of Hit Points equal to the healer's Intellect. If he was close to death, this may be enough to bring him back to positive Hit Points and save his life. An unconscious character quickly regains his senses.

A critical success doubles the number of Hit Points healed. A fumble, however, indicates the target's condition worsens, and he loses another 1d5 HP. In some cases, this may be enough to kill him.

A character may only benefit from First Aid to an injury once. If the healing test fails, another person may try instead, but as soon as the First Aid attempt has been successful, the victim cannot be helped by First Aid again, unless they incur more damage and therefore new



Chasing Away the Valkyries

A mighty blow or massive trauma may send a character's Hit Points plummeting below the lethal threshold, leaving them dying. At such a moment, the most valorous heroes are summoned by the Valkyries to Valhalla.

However, even then, there is still a small chance to save the poor unfortunate.

If a healer manages to stabilise the victim's condition by making an Exceptional (ST 32) Intellect + Survival test, the victim's Hit Points return to a level one better than the death threshold (-1/4 HP). This **stabilisation test** must be made within (victim's Vigour) combat rounds of the lethal blow.

Even if the character is stabilised, a Medicine test is necessary in the following hour to stop the character from falling into a coma and finally expiring.



wounds. Any further treatment to a character who has received First Aid must be done with Medicine.

A character cannot regain all of his Hit Points through First Aid; there will always be 1 Hit Point which only the Medicine skill (or natural healing) can help him regain.

Medicine

Healing Wounds

A character skilled in Medicine can care for his companions and heal their wounds.

The healer makes an Intellect + Medicine test against a success threshold determined by the victim's wound level (see the table below). If this succeeds, the patient is stabilised and he regains a number of Hit Points equal to half the test's success margin; an unconscious character regains consciousness.

A critical success doubles the number of Hit Points healed, ie a number of Hit Points equal to the full success margin.

A fumble worsens the patient's condition, causing them to lose a further 1d5 HP. In some cases this may kill the patient. The healer can attempt one Medicine test per patient per day.

Target Wound Level	Difficulty Level	ST
Bloodied	Simple	7
Wounded	Easy	10
Severely Wounded	Average	14
Unconscious	Difficult	19
Dead (Dying)	Very Difficult	25

Healing Diseases & Poison Damage

To successfully treat diseases and the effects of poison, a healer must first make a successful diagnosis. This is an Intellect + Medicine test against a success threshold determined by the disease or poison category. The healer checks the symptoms and various signs to determine exactly what the victim is suffering from.

Once a diagnosis has been made, the healer may prescribe an appropriate treatment and help the patient to heal. Each day, the healer must make an Intellect + Medicine test against the same success threshold; his success margin on this roll is then used as a **bonus** to the patient's own Vigour test against the same ST. During this time, the healer provides medicine and potions for traditional remedies, steam baths, magical spells, basic surgery, and so on.



Bleeding

Some major wounds, as well as some poisons, cause internal bleeding or external haemorrhaging which can kill the victim.

A successful First Aid or Medicine test will staunch this blood loss; however, a character who is bleeding this way may only start regaining Hit Points after this roll has been made.

First Aid is just that, and only serves to stop the bleeding; Medicine tests over subsequent days are required to help the patient heal.



For poisonings, the healer first diagnoses which antidote is required; then, the Intellect + Medicine test enables him to administer the antidote correctly and save the victim's life.

Runes of Healing

Many healers use the runes for healing. They are traced around the wound or on a particular area of a wounded body. This practise is often more closely linked to medicinal tradition than magic; however, a healer who knows the runes (and who has reached at least the level of Competent in the Runes skill) benefits from a +2 bonus to his Medicine tests. This might just be superstition, but who can question the wisdom of the gods?

Natural Remedies

The folk of Scandia have numerous remedies, unguents and salves, balms and philtres of clearly established curative value. Most come from herbalists and are composed of plants, roots, bark, etc.

When a sick or poisoned character takes a natural remedy, the player gains a +5 bonus to the Vigour test to combat the illness or poison. This modifier is cumulative with a healer's intervention, and lasts for the time required for the character to undergo treatment.

The Game Master is free to invent other means of healing, with various effects. Some remedies may allow a character to regain Hit Points immediately; others may only counter secondary effects. Players whose characters are skilled in Herbalism may also experiment with new formulas with the same effect.



Combat feats

The warriors of Scandia are renowned for their incredible exploits, which will be told and retold down through the ages. Whether inspired by the gods, or whether from rage and thirst for blood, the heroic prowess of these legendary warriors is sung by skalds all across the Northern Kingdoms.

A warrior's prowess comprises manoeuvres, special attacks, and combat techniques, all of which are together referred to as **combat feats**. A combat feat allows a warrior to perform spectacular acts, at the cost of great personal danger and an expenditure of energy.

Acquiring Combat Feats



At character creation a player receives 12 points to spend on combat feats (or on magical spells, for Odin's Initiates – see page 113). Each combat feat costs a number of points equal to its level \times 3.

To use a combat feat, a player declares his intention. Each use of a combat feat costs an action, and has a specific **type**, whether **attack**, **defence**, or **utility**. Each combat feat also has a **penalty**, which is applied to the dice roll for the test required to use the feat; this is in addition to any secondary action penalty (see page 128) and any other modifiers (combat modifiers, target's Physical Defence, etc).

It's perfectly acceptable, and often recommended, to spend furor dice when attempting difficult combat feat tests.

For example: Svein has successfully parried his opponent's attacks. He sees a chance to counter-attack as the berserker is starting to tire. This uses one of his secondary actions, and therefore incurs a -2 penalty. Svein decides to use his Helmsplitter combat feat, which is a level 3 feat, with a -9 penalty, for a total penalty to the dice roll of -11. The Game Master decides no other modifiers apply: the player attempts a power attack, requiring a (Strength + Long Weapons) test against an ST of 14, with a penalty equal to the berserker's Physical Defence, plus the -11 penalty.

Faced with the difficulty of the task, Svein decides to use a furor die in the attempt.

Attack feats

Level 1

Impetuous Charge (Level 1 Attack)

Weapon: All melee weapons

Prerequisite: Novice combat skill level.

Penalty: -3

Description: The character must move to reach his target; if his attack hits, the character may add his MOVE score to the damage inflicted. If the character spends the previous action running or sprinting towards his target, and succeeds at an Athletics test, the damage bonus is increased to **MOVE** × 2 (for running) or **MOVE** × 3 (for sprinting).

No Safe Place (Level 1 Ranged Attack)

Weapon: Drawn weapons, thrown weapons.

Prerequisite: Novice combat skill level.

Penalty: -3

Description: The character may attack a target hiding behind an obstacle, as long as he knows the target is there and the projectile can be reasonably expected to pierce the barrier. So, an arrow can pass through a woven wicker fence or thin wood; a throwing axe can split a keg in which an enemy is hiding. If the attack test succeeds, the target is hit, but suffers only half normal damage, ignoring the protection offered by the obstacle.

Shield Blow (Level 1 Attack)

Weapon: Short weapons, long weapons

Prerequisite: Novice combat skill level.

Penalty: -3

Description: The character must be armed with a shield. If he succeeds in a parry test, he carries out an immediate riposte and bashes his opponent with his shield. This counter-attack costs an action and is thus subject to the secondary action penalty, as well as the standard -3 combat feat penalty. If the character succeeds in an Improvised Weapons test, he causes (success margin + STR + 5) points of damage.

Stun (Level 1 Attack)

Weapon: All melee weapons

Prerequisite: Novice combat skill level.

Penalty: -3

Description: The character rains blows down upon his opponent, aiming to disorientate him. If his attack test is successful, the opponent takes normal damage, and must immediately make an Easy (ST 10) Tenacity test, with a penalty equal to the damage taken. If the Tenacity test fails, the opponent is forced into defensive mode (see page 132). For extras, this is a Mental Defence test against the same ST. The opponent cannot counter-attack for the remainder of the combat round.

Level 2

Bear Hug (Level 2 Attack)

Weapon: Hand-to-hand

Prerequisite: Competent combat skill level.

Penalty: -6

Description: The character grapples his opponent to crush him in a powerful hug. The opponent can attempt to free himself by making an opposed test, costing one action for each attempt. As long as the character maintains the hug, he automatically inflicts (STR × 2) points of damage on his opponent at the beginning of each combat round. He cannot do anything else during this period.

Come To Me! (Level 2 Attack)

Weapon: Long weapons, two-handed weapons, pole arms

Prerequisite: Competent combat skill level.

Penalty: -6

Description: The character must be facing multiple opponents. If his attack test succeeds, he may divide the total damage he does between all his opponents. In the attack test, use the defenders' highest Physical Defence score.

Death Bringer! (Level 2 Attack)

Weapon: All melee weapons

Prerequisite: Expert combat skill level.

Penalty: -6

Description: The character must be facing several opponents, all of whom must be extras. He chooses a single target among them; if his attack test succeeds, and he takes that opponent out of combat, the character may immediately make a **second attack** against another nearby opponent. This is a secondary action, and each attack after the first incurs secondary action penalties as normal, in addition to the combat feat penalty associated with this action (-6). If this second attack is enough to kill the next opponent, the character may continue until he decides to stop, or there are no opponents left, or he fails to incapacitate his opponent with a single blow.

Empty Hands (Level 2 Attack)

Weapon: Short weapons, long weapons

Prerequisite: Competent combat skill level.

Penalty: -6

Description: The character makes a series of dodges and feints, then strikes his opponent's weapon violently. If the opponent fails a dodge or parry test, he drops the weapon at once. The weapon falls 1d5 metres away, in a direction of the attacker's choosing.

Head Butt (Level 2 Attack)

Weapon: Short weapons, long weapons, two-handed weapons

Combat feats



Prerequisite: Competent combat skill level.

Penalty: -6

Description: The character is engaged in hand-to-hand combat, and succeeds in a parry test. He may immediately spend an action to strike his opponent in the face with his head. This requires a Hand-to-Hand skill test; if successful, the character inflicts (success margin + Strength) points of damage (add the armour value of the character's helm to the damage, if any). The opponent then incurs a -3 penalty to his next action. If the character fumbles his Hand-to-Hand skill test, however, he loses 5 Hit Points, ignoring any protection. On a critical success, any helm the opponent is wearing is crushed, and must be discarded; if the opponent isn't wearing a helm, the damage is doubled.

Knock-out (Level 2 Attack)

Weapon: All melee weapons

Prerequisite: Competent combat skill level.

Penalty: -6

Description: The character aims for his opponent's head, and delivers a powerful, controlled blow, attempting to knock him unconscious. If his attack test is successful, the character's opponent incurs only half normal damage, but must immediately make an Average (ST 14)

Vigour test, with a penalty equal to the attack's success margin (extras roll 2d10 + Physical). If the Vigour test fails, the opponent falls unconscious for 1d10 minutes.

Smash the Shield (Level 2 Attack)

Weapon: Two handed weapon

Prerequisite: Competent combat skill level.

Penalty: -6

Description: The character strikes his opponent's shield with all his strength. If his attack test succeeds, he immediately destroys the shield, which becomes useless and cannot be used to parry any more blows.

Unseat (Level 2 Attack)

Weapon: Two-handed weapons, pole arms, thrown weapons

Prerequisite: Competent combat skill level.

Penalty: -6

Description: The character deals a powerful blow to knock an opponent from his mount. Calculate damage normally. The target must make an Average (ST 14) Vigour + Ride test, with a penalty equal to the damage incurred (a test of Physical + 2d10 for extras). On a failure, the opponent falls to the ground and must either spend his next action getting to his feet, or fight from the ground.

Yield Before Me! (Level 2 Attack)

Weapon: Hand-to-hand, two-handed weapons

Prerequisite: Competent combat skill level.

Penalty: -6

Description: The character attempts to unbalance his opponent and throw him to the ground. If the opponent cannot dodge or parry the attack, he falls at the character's feet. However, the opponent incurs only half normal damage.

Level 3

Behind Enemy Lines (Level 3 Attack)

Weapon: All melee weapons

Prerequisite: Expert combat skill level.

Penalty: -9

Description: The character must attempt a charge against three or more opponents. For the attack test, use the defenders' highest Physical Defence (or Conflict / Defensive for extras); if the character succeeds, calculate damage normally and designate a single target from among the opponents; the character ends his action behind his opponents, at a distance equal to half his Movement value (MOVE / 2).

Helmsplitter (Level 3 Attack)

Weapon: Long weapons, two-handed weapons, pole arms, thrown weapons

Prerequisite: Competent combat skill level.

Penalty: -9

Description: The character sacrifices his defence in order to strike his opponent a vicious blow to the head. The character's Physical Defence score is reduced by 2 (PD -2) for the remainder of the combat round. If his attack test succeeds, calculate damage normally; the opponent's helm is crushed, and the opponent's armour value reduced accordingly. Further, the opponent must make an immediate Easy (ST 10) Vigour test, with a penalty equal to the damage suffered. On a failure, the opponent is stunned, and goes into defensive mode (page 132) for the remainder of the combat round (extras must make a Physical + 2d10 test against the same ST).

Human Projectile (Level 3 Attack)

Weapon: Hand-to-hand

Prerequisite: Expert combat skill level.

Penalty: -9

Description: The character must have succeeded at, and maintained, a Bear Hug combat feat test in the preceding combat round. He may now throw his opponent up to his Strength in metres, inflicting (STR x 2) points of damage. If other opponents are targeted, they also suffer the same damage, and must make an Average (ST 14) Agility test or fall over (a test of Physical + 2d10 for extras). This reaction test does not use up an action.

Strike! (Level 3 Attack)

Weapon: Drawn weapons, thrown weapons

Prerequisite: Competent combat skill level.

Penalty: -9

Description: The character throws his weapon with all his strength, or aims at a precise area to unbalance his opponent. Under the force of the attack, the opponent is forced (STR) metres back, and falls to the ground if he fails an Average (ST 14) Agility test, with a penalty equal to the damage incurred (a test of Physical + 2d10 for extras).

Level 4

Between the Eyes (Level 4 Ranged Attack)

Weapon: Drawn weapons, thrown weapons

Prerequisite: Expert combat skill level.

Penalty: -12

Description: The character makes a precise and very deadly shot. If the projectile hits its target, the target immediately loses half its current Hit Points. Extras are killed on the spot.

Variable Level

Boar's Charge (Level 1 - 4 Attack)

Prerequisite: *Svinfylkingar* (page 68), sword and shield

Penalty: -3 / -6 / -9 / -12 by combat feat level

Description: The character charges crashing into his opponent. If his attack test succeeds, his opponent may only try to dodge this attack, with a penalty equal to the combat feat penalty (-3 / -6 / -9 / -12).

An opponent hit by a Boar's Charge takes damage equal to the *svinfylkingar*'s STR, plus the attack's success margin, plus a base value derived from the combat feat level (+5 / +10 / +15 / +20, for levels one through four respectively). Armour is applied normally.

The opponent must make an Agility check against an Average difficulty level (ST 14), plus the damage caused by the attack, or be thrown to the ground at a distance of (*svinfylkingar* STR + combat feat level) in metres.

By Thor's Arm! (Level 1 - 4 Attack)

Weapons: Long weapons, two-handed weapons, pole arms, thrown weapons.

Prerequisite: Novice combat skill level

Penalty: -3 / -6 / -9 / -12 by combat feat level

Description: The character calls on the god of thunder and strikes his opponent an implacable blow. If the attack test succeeds, calculate damage normally; however, also roll a number of d10 equal to the combat feat level (1d10

Combat feats

to 4d10), and add the result to the damage.

Note that each level of this combat feat must be bought separately, but that it's not necessary to buy lower levels of the feat first (so the level 1 combat feat isn't required to buy the level 2 feat).

Deadly Hail (Level 2 - 4 Ranged Attack)

Weapon: Drawn weapons, thrown weapons

Prerequisite: Competent combat skill level.

Penalty: -6 / -9 / -12

Description: The character looses from two to four projectiles at once, depending on his combat feat level (he notches several arrows, grabs two javelins in the same hand, etc). He may only target one opponent with this attack; if it succeeds, the damage inflicted is equal to (success margin + weapon damage) x number of projectiles.

The opponent's armour value applies to each projectile; as a result, the damage taken is reduced by the opponent's armour value multiplied by the number of projectiles.



Feat versus feat

In a given combat, it's possible to respond to an attack feat with a defence feat. If this then allows the defender to counter-attack, he carries out this counter-attack action immediately; if it succeeds, his opponent can try and parry the blow – and so on. However, in the very short time a combat round represents, it's not possible for a character to employ multiple combat feats of a single type – although he may always use furor dice to augment his chances of success.

Consequently, in a given combat round, each participant may use **one and only one** combat feat of each type (attack, defence, or utility).

For example: for his first action in the combat round, the berserker attacks Svein with the *Yield Before Me!* combat attack feat.

Svein parries the attack and ripostes with the *Head Butt* attack feat; the savage warrior tries to dodge, and succeeds. Both warriors have now used attack feats: before the end of the combat round, each can still use both one defence and one utility feat, with the usual penalties for secondary actions, but no more attack feats until the next combat round begins.

Some defence feats permit counter-attacks. If the character hasn't yet used an attack feat, he can use it at this point. However, regardless of the result, no combatant may use one type of combat feat more than once per combat round.



Fierce as a Bear! (Level 1 - 4 Attack)

Prerequisite: Berserker, two-handed axe

Penalty: -3 / -6 / -9 / -12 by combat feat level

Description: The berserker is completely overcome by combat rage, and his long axe swirls round him and cuts down opponents like ripe wheat. The character receives a damage bonus based on the combat feat level (+5, +10, +15, +20), and also adds 1-4 dice to his *furor* pool (again according to combat feat level). This second effect only applies once per battle; if the berserker uses this combat feat more than once in a given combat, he still benefits from the damage bonus, but receives no additional *furor* dice.

Jaws of the Wolf (Level 2 - 4 Attack)

Prerequisite: Ulfhedinn, spear

Penalty: -6 / -9 / -12 by combat feat level

Description: The character harasses his opponent with blows from his spear, keeping him at bay. In a single action, the player rolls one, two, three, or four attack tests (based on the combat feat level), with the corresponding penalty. Each successful attack lands inflicts damage equal to (Strength + spear damage + combat feat level). Success margin is not used here.

Defence feats

Level 1

Body Feint (Level 1 Defence)

Prerequisite: All melee weapons

Penalty: -3

Description: The character attempts to parry and avoid an opponent's attack. If his defence test succeeds, his opponent's next attack test incurs a -3 penalty.

Leap of the Lynx (Level 1 Defence)

Prerequisite: Competent Dodge skill

Penalty: -3

Description: The character throws himself to one side and rolls, immediately back on his feet at the end of the manoeuvre, whereupon he's once again in contact with his opponent and can continue close combat.

The character's opponent suffers a 2 point penalty to his next attack roll against the character as he needs to shift his stance and close distance.

If the character uses this feat to dodge a projectile, he moves a distance equal to half his Movement value (MOVE / 2) in a direction of his choice.

Level 2

Friendly Fire (Level 2 Defence)

Prerequisite: Competent Dodge skill.

Penalty: -6

Description: The character must be in combat with

multiple opponents. He spends an action to dodge an attack; if the dodge succeeds, the character remains in position, without falling, and lets the attack pass him by. Instead it hits one of his other opponents, who suffers half normal damage.

Iron Defence! (Level 2 Defence)

Weapon: Long weapons, short weapons

Prerequisite: Competent combat skill level.

Penalty: -6

Description: The character must be in combat with multiple opponents. He may use one action to parry two attacks from two different opponents in the same combat round. The player makes each parry test with the usual secondary action penalty, as well as the -6 combat feat penalty.

Level 3

Iron Wall (Level 3 Defence)

Weapon: Long weapons, short weapons

Prerequisite: Competent combat skill level.

Penalty: -9

Description: The character sweeps the area around him with his weapon, creating a wall of iron between himself and his opponents. If his parry test succeeds, he does not spend an action; if it fails, the action is spent normally.

Neither Cut Nor Thrust (Level 3 Defence)

Weapon: Long weapons

Prerequisite: Competent combat skill level.

Penalty: -9

Description: The character spends an action to parry an opponent's attack. For the remainder of the combat round, he may make a second parry test without spending an action; this second defence is part of an extended parry connected with the first. He need not apply a secondary action penalty (but must still incur the -9 combat feat penalty). The second parry is not counted as an action during the current combat round. This defence feat only allows the character to parry a blow; it does not allow him to counter-attack.

Variable Level

Block (Level 2 - 4 Defence)

Weapons: All melee weapons

Penalty: -6 / -9 / -12 by combat feat level

Description: The character makes a powerful parry to block his opponent's weapon. If the defence test succeeds, the character's opponent may not attack on his next action, whether that action takes place in this

combat round or the next. The opponent may use the action for something else, but not an attack. If the character fails in his defence test, he still manages to reduce the damage he takes by 2, 4, or 6 points, depending on the combat feat level.

Utility Feats

Level 1

Bloodthirsty Howl (Level 1 General)

Prerequisite: Novice Intimidation skill

Penalty: -3

Description: The character throws himself howling at his opponent, making an Average (ST 14) Charisma + Intimidation test, augmented by the opponent's Mental Defence (Magic / Passive for an extra). The test does not cost an action, and is made just before the attack test. If successful, the opponent's Physical Defence (or Conflict / Defensive value for an extra) is reduced by the character's Charisma score (minimum zero) for the remainder of the combat.

Quick as Lightning (Level 1 General)

Prerequisite: Novice Athletics skill

Penalty: -3

Description: The character suddenly changes his combat rhythm and shifts position to gain an advantage over his opponent. He spends an action and makes an Athletics test against an Average (ST 14) success threshold, plus the Physical Defence (or Conflict / Defensive) of an opponent with a higher initiative rank (remember the -3 combat feat penalty). If the Athletics test succeeds, beginning with his next action the character exchanges his initiative rank for that of his opponent. The new value is used for the remainder of the combat, both against this opponent and any others.

Level 2

Rally to Me (Level 2 General)

Prerequisite: Competent Tactics skill

Penalty: -6

Description: The character rallies his troops. On the battlefield, he sounds his horn, beats a drum, and calls his men around him. The player makes an Intelligence + Tactics test; if successful, all allies in earshot benefit from a +5 bonus to all actions for the remainder of the combat round. The character cannot perform any other actions during this period.

Combat feats

Level 3

Fenris' Roar (Level 3 General)

Prerequisite: Competent Intimidation skill, *thulr*, savage warrior

Penalty: -9

Description: The character spends an action to make an Intimidation test, giving a deafening roar which resounds around the battlefield with the promise of death. All opponents within earshot must make an opposed Tenacity + Mental Defence (or Mystical / Passive) test against a success threshold equal to the character's result, or incur a penalty equal to the character's Charisma score to all actions for the remainder of the combat.

Level 4

Not Dead Yet! (Level 4 General)

Prerequisite: Tenacity 3+

Penalty: -12

Description: If the character is reduced to the Dead wound level, each combat round he may make an Average (ST 14) Tenacity test. Wound penalties aren't applied to this test, although the -12 combat feat penalty is applied as usual; if the character is Exhausted, he may only retain one die. If the test succeeds, the character may act normally for this combat round. He does not lose any more Hit Points as long as this feat is in effect; once he fails the test, or the combat ends, the character collapses and expires.

Variable Level

Inspired by Odin (Level 1 - 4 General)

Prerequisite: Instinct 3+

Penalty: -3 / -6 / -9 / -12

Description: The character calls on the father of the Aesir to help him in battle. He makes an Average (ST 14) Instinct test, including the corresponding combat feat penalty. If successful, the character gains a +3 / +6 / +9 / +12 bonus (by combat feat level) on all Tenacity tests for the duration of this combat. Inspired by Odin, he no longer fears death, knowing the Valkyrie will take him to Valhalla and the home of the Father of Victory.

Options

The following two *optional* rules deal with specific combat situations.

Wielding a One-handed Weapon in Two Hands

The style of Scandian axes and long swords allows them to be wielded two-handed, the wielder benefitting from increased power at the cost of reduced manoeuvrability. A character using a weapon in both hands this way receives a +3 modifier to damage, and a -2 penalty to Initiative (see page 128).

Fighting with Two Weapons

Warriors of the Northern Kingdoms are used to fighting with sword and shield; some, however, attempt to fight with a weapon in each hand. A character cannot use two-handed weapons or pole arms in this way; the most common combination is a short sword or axe, and a dagger.

The character must have a Strength score of at least 3.

When fighting with two weapons, a character may decide between two sets of modifiers, as follows:

+AGI to attack test and -AGI to parry test; or

+AGI to parry test and -AGI to attack test.

These modifiers apply only to attack and parry tests, and never to dodge tests.



Magic

“Odin changed his form. While his body slumbered, as though asleep or dead, he had become a snake, a bird, or a fish, and in an instant was travelling in distant lands, examining his affairs and those of others.”

-- Ynglinga saga, ch.7

Magic is divine in origin; it was taught to men and women by the gods. One must be chosen, marked by Fate, to practise the arts of divination and curses.

Nature and Magic

The **initiate** is chosen by the gods to work magic, manipulating the world around him as long as he knows the correct words, incantations, gestures, and objects to bend it to his will.

Magic is more practise than theory, transmitted orally from mother to daughter, master to pupil. Simply being chosen by Fate is not enough to be able to cast spells.

Those Who Work Magic

Marked by Fate and often hailing from a family known for its magical ability, a magic-user is otherwise a normal person, with a family life and profession, and a place in society. Magic is not considered a profession in

itself, but rather an ability which allows those who work it to master the stuff the world is made of to change it to their will.

The Threefold Soul

Scandians believe there are three souls, sometimes termed *hugr*, *hamr*, and *fylgja*.

Magic uses mainly the first two – *hugr* and *hamr*.

Hugr

The first soul, the *hugr*, does not belong to the individual. It is rather part of the invisible force of the world. The *hugr* is impersonal, universal, and active, often imposing itself on a person. It can be called upon, used and controlled by individuals to achieve a malevolent or aggressive goal.

The *hugr* is the Soul of the World, the vital force.

The Hamr

The *hamr*, however, is individual – a form which clings to the body. Each person has one before birth, and it enters their body upon birth. Likewise, it can escape the body, taking the appearance of the person from which it comes, or sometimes a different form.

Magic

Some use it to run in animal form – the *hamrammer*, often a family gift.

The *hamr* does not change the body; rather, the individual simply allows his *hamr* to emerge. This may manifest as a change in behaviour (the person becomes more violent), but only wielders of magic truly take on the forms of wolves, bears, and other animals, and when they do, only their eyes betray their true human nature.



fylgja

The third form of the soul is the *fylgja*, meaning “that which follows” and also referring to the placenta which follows upon the child at birth. The *fylgja* is a person’s spiritual companion, the “spirit guide”. This does not always mean this soul is a character’s double; it can be an animal spirit, or even that of the clan (*fylgjukona*).

Seeing one’s *fylgja* is a bad omen, as it is a manifestation of Fate, and may signify one’s impending death. On very rare occasions, though, it can manifest during important moments for a person’s clan.



Magic in Yggdrasil



“Then Odin rode
To the eastern door,
There, he knew well,
Was the wise-woman’s grave;
Magic he spoke
And mighty charms,
Till spell-bound she rose,
And in death she spoke.”
-- Baldrs Draumar, stanza 4

Gaining Spells

At character creation an initiate receives 12 points with which to buy spells; remember, too, that these same points are also used to buy combat feats (page 143). Each

spell or **domain** costs a number of points equal to the spell or domain level \times 3.

Casting a Spell

Spellcasting depends on the kind of magic used, whether it is **seidr**, also known as **sorcery**; **galdr**, sometimes called **incantation**; or the mysterious power of the **runes**. Spellcasting parameters such as success thresholds and preparation times directly depend on the type of magic being used.

Spell Range

Simply put, the range of a spell is **line of sight**; with a few exceptions (such as certain runes), if a spellcaster can see his target, it is within range. Even with *galdr*, which rely on the caster’s voice, the target does not need to hear that voice to be affected by the spell – its range is still line of sight.

Preparation Time and Actions

Spellcasting tests are subject to the secondary action penalty rules (page 128) as normal. However, they sometimes take more than one action to cast. Irrespective of how many actions they take, the secondary action penalty (if any) is always calculated for the action in which the spellcaster **begins to prepare his spell**. The actual spellcasting roll, including this penalty (if any), is made on the final action required by the spell’s preparation time, which is also when the spell takes effect. If the spellcasting requires more actions to cast than the spellcaster has in the current combat round, the casting may continue into the following combat round.

For example: as his primary action, a magic-user decides to cast the Improve Physical Defence spell, with a preparation time of 3 actions. On his third action, he makes his spellcasting test with no penalty, since the spell was begun on his primary action. If he had started his spell on his third and last action, it would have taken effect the following combat round with a -5 penalty (i.e. the appropriate secondary action penalty for a third action).

Reducing Preparation Time

Each spell has a **preparation time category**, either action, combat round, minute, hour, or day. Spell preparation times are given as a number of units of the specified time category, and spells take effect after the total

units have passed. Thus, a “3 combat rounds” preparation time means the spell takes effect after 3 combat rounds of preparation.

A spellcaster may reduce a spell’s preparation time, in return for cumulative penalties to the spellcasting test, as follows:

- **-3** penalty per time unit reduced (e.g. a -6 penalty to reduce a “3 actions” preparation time to “1 action”, or a -3 penalty to reduce from “2 combat rounds” to “1 combat round”).
- **-10** penalty to reduce the time category by one step (e.g. a -10 penalty to reduce a “3 hours” preparation time to “3 minutes”, or a -20 penalty to reduce from “3 minutes” to “3 actions”).

For example: a magic-user needs to cast Protection from Curses in one action – a spell which usually requires 3 combat rounds.

This requires an INS + Seidr skill test with a total penalty of -19: -3 for the spell level modifier, -10 for reducing the time category from “combat round” to “action”, and -6 for reducing from “3 actions” to “1 action”.

Extending Preparation Time

In addition to reducing spell preparation times as described above, spellcasters can also extend preparation times to improve their spellcasting chances. This provides the following cumulative bonuses:

- **+3** bonus per additional time unit (e.g. a +6 bonus for increasing a “2 actions” preparation time to “4 actions”, or a +3 bonus for increasing preparation time from “2 combat rounds” to “3 combat rounds”).
- **+10** bonus for increasing the time category by one step (e.g. a +10 bonus for increasing a “3 minutes” preparation time to “3 hours”, or a +20 bonus from “3 actions” to “3 minutes”).

For example: a spellcaster wanting to impress his audience decides to cast the Master Breezes spell. The spell has a preparation time of 1 action. The spellcaster decides to take his time, so that the effect will last longer, and increases the preparation time from “1 action” to “1 minute”. At the end of the minute, the spellcaster makes his spellcasting test.

This is an INS + Seidr skill test, with a total bonus of +17 (-3 for the spell level modifier, +10 for increasing the “1 action” preparation time to “1 combat round”, and +10 for increasing from “1 combat round” to “1 minute”).

Damage & Concentration

When a spellcaster wants to cast a spell, he must concentrate, utter magical phrases, make magical gestures, and so on, all of which take up the preparation time. While concentrating in this way, the spellcaster’s Physical Defence score is reduced by -3. If the spellcaster is injured during this period, he must make a Tenacity + magical skill test against a success threshold equal to the damage incurred, to try and maintain concentration on his spellcasting. If successful, the spellcaster may continue his preparation normally; on a failure, the spellcaster loses concentration, and must begin the entire preparation time again from the beginning. Note that no furor pool dice are spent if a spell fails like this, but only when the caster completes the spell.

This rule also applies when a character is concentrating to maintain or control an existing spell. If the test fails, the spell is broken.

Resisting a Spell

A target of a magical spell who does not want to suffer its effect, whether consciously or unconsciously, may add their Mental Defence score to the success threshold of the spellcasting test. This applies whether the spell is cast on a person or their belongings, and irrespective of whether the spell has a positive or negative effect.

In some cases detailed in the spell descriptions below, the target of a spell may make a Tenacity + Mental Defence test to resist the spell’s effects. If the target obtains a higher result than the spellcaster, the spell has no effect. See “Opposed Tests” on page 76.

Opposing Spells

If the spells of two spellcasters are opposed, or attempt to cancel each other out, treat this as an Opposed Test (page 76); the spell which gains the highest spellcasting test result succeeds.

For example: a seidr sorcerer tries to maintain a magical fog to escape his pursuers, and receives a result of 21 on his Seidr skill spellcasting test. One of his pursuers, a skald, realises the fog is unnatural, and tries to dissipate it with a Galdr skill test. He receives a result of 26 on his spellcasting test, and so succeeds in dissipating the fog.

Prolonging a Spell

Spellcasters do not need to concentrate on a spell once it has been cast. However, each spell, which has a predetermined duration (1d5 actions, 1d5 hours, etc), may, upon its expiration, be extended by a spellcaster. To do so, he must cast the spell again upon expiration, with the following modifications:

- Prolonging a spell requires one action, regardless of the spell's original preparation time.
- The success threshold is 14, with no modifiers except for any secondary action penalty and the spell level modifier.
- A spellcaster may only prolong one spell at a time.

Cumulative Spell Effects

If a spell is cast several times on the same target, it does not have a cumulative effect. No spell of any kind is cumulative, even if cast by different spellcasters. In the latter case, the Game Master decides which competing spell takes effect, to the target's advantage.

For example: a seidmadr (see below) with an INS of 3 decides to cast Augment Other's Health on a hirdman. The spell succeeds with a success margin of 12; the seidmadr

rolls 3d10 and obtains 2, 5, and 7: the hirdman's hit points are increased by 14. If the same spellcaster casts the same spell on the hirdman again, but this time with better results, the first spell's effects will be replaced by those of the second.

However, the negative or positive effects of different spells are cumulative. So, a character may have benefited from an Improve Physical Defence spell and an Augment Dice Reserve spell from the same seidr spellcaster, and also have a rune stone which improves his Physical Defence.

Seidr: Sorcery or Trance Magic



Overview

Seidr was originally the magic practised by Freya, and which she taught to Odin. Its strong shamanic connection means it's sometimes confused with the magic of the Sami sorcerers, often distrusted by the Nordic warriors.

Seidr involves active magic rituals, quite complex and based on sacred ecstatic rites. It can be benevolent or malevolent according to the will of the practitioner, or simply neutral, as for example with divinations. The practitioner of seidr (known as a *seidmadr* for men or *seidkona* for women) enters into a sacred trance, which frees and strengthens his *hamr* (see page 150) to communicate with the spirits.

The *seidr* sorcerer uses precise magical instruments which he carries with him: a magical staff, often carved with runes and various symbols, or sometimes a distaff, a pouch containing herbs and objects as diverse as animal claws, nails, hairs, and another pouch containing chicken bones.

For some ceremonies, the *seidr* sorcerer wears ritual clothing, such as a blue or black cloak, black and white furs, puce robe, and so on.



Although Odin himself practises *seidr*, a man practising it is not well regarded in Norse society. In the *Lokasenna*, Loki mocks the father of the gods and says *seidr* is unworthy of a man, being less virile. Is this because trance magic makes a spellcaster lose contact with the real world, sapping the sorcerer's strength? Is it because the ceremonial robes resemble women's garb? Or is it because of its undeniable shamanic origins, governed by the goddess Freya? Perhaps it is all of these reasons. Whatever the truth, suspicions of unmanliness surround the magic of *seidr*, in a society where passive homosexuality is the worst insult a man can suffer.

Consequently, far more women than men practise *seidr*, casting particular spells such as divinations or curses. Many of the male *seidmadr* prefer instead to master the elements, healing, and protection magic, augmenting their knowledge with that of the runes.



Casting Seidr Spells

If a *seidr* spell has a neutral or positive effect on its target, it has a base success threshold of 14. The magic-user makes a spellcasting test using his Instinct characteristic score (INS) plus his *Seidr* skill.

If a *seidr* spell has a negative effect on its target, it has a base success threshold of 14, plus the target's Mental Defence score (MD).

Neutral / Positive Spell: $INS + Seidr \geq 14$

Negative Spell: $INS + Seidr \geq 14$
+ target's MD

Duration of Seidr Spells

Use the table below to calculate the duration of a *seidr* spell, based on its spellcasting success margin (SM).

SM	Spell Duration
0 - 5	1d5 Actions
6 - 10	1d10 Combat Rounds
11 - 15	1d10 Minutes
16 - 25	1d10 Hours
25+	1d5 Days

Seidr Spell Descriptions

Each *seidr* spell is described using the following format:

Name: The name of the spell.

Preparation: How long the spell takes to prepare and cast.

Penalty: The penalty to the spellcasting test; usually $3 \times$ spell level.

Duration: How long the spell lasts. In most cases this is determined using the above table.

Area: The spell's area of effect. This can range from affecting the spellcaster alone, to affecting other people, to affecting an entire area, depending on the spell.

Effect: The spell's effect in game terms.

Reverse Effect: Some spells can be cast in reverse; the effects are described here.

Seidr Spells

Divination

Level 1

Sinister Omens

Preparation: 1 action

Penalty: -3

Duration: Instantaneous

Area: An event (a flight of birds, call of a crow, whirlpool in a river, stumbled horse, unstoppable sneezing, etc).

Effect: The spellcaster receives a Good or Bad omen about the near future.

Level 2

Murmurs in the Bones

Preparation: 3 combat rounds

Penalty: -6

Duration: Instantaneous

Area: n/a

Effect: The spellcaster throws the knucklebones in his pouch to the ground while chanting. Upon examining them, he gains a vague idea of what the future holds, including a few succinct details.

Level 3

Prescient Dreaming

Preparation: 1 hour

Penalty: -9

Duration: One night

Area: The caster

Effect: The spellcaster dreams about a particular subject, bringing him vague and uncertain images of the future. The dream may occur either while the caster is asleep, or during a trance provoked by the beating of a drum or by spinning his distaff.

Prophecy

Preparation: 3 hours

Penalty: -9

Duration: Preparation time

Area: The clan

Effect: The spellcaster may only cast this spell while sitting on a high wooden seat covered with furs. His feet may not touch the ground, and he must wear his ceremonial vestments and trappings. Once the spell is cast and the spellcaster has entered a trance, he can feel if the clan's future is threatened, allowing him to provide advice on how to avoid the worst. The prophecy is transmitted through confused and blurred images which the character must interpret.



Level 4

Sleeping on the Mound

Preparation: 1 hour

Penalty: -12

Duration: One night

Area: The mound

Effect: At night the spellcaster comes into contact with a spirit of the dead, which will answer a number of questions for him based on the spellcaster's success margin. This spell is also known as the *Spell of Exhorting the Dead*.

SM	Number of Questions Answered
0 - 5	1
6 - 10	2
11 - 15	3
16 - 25	4
25+	5

Protection Magic

This form of magic augments (or lowers) an object's armour value (AV) or a person's Physical Defence (PD) or Hit Points (HP). The spellcaster observes the target of the spell steadily while chanting a seidlaeti incantation; if the target is a person, the sorcerer also runs his hands over the target's body while chanting.

Level 1

Improve Physical Defence

Preparation: 3 actions

Penalty: -3

Duration: See table

Area: The caster

Effect: The spellcaster improves his Physical Defence by a value equal to his INS score. This bonus is cumulative with any other bonus (magical, shield, etc).

Strengthen Armour / Weaken Armour

Preparation: 2 actions

Penalty: -3

Duration: See table

Area: Any protective item other than a shield

Effect: This spell provides a bonus to the armour value (AV) of armour, a helmet, or any other protective item, other than a shield. The bonus is equal to the spellcaster's INS score.

Reverse Effect: On a successful spellcasting test (ST + target's MD), the spellcaster may lower the armour value (AV) of an opponent's armour, helmet, etc. The protective item targeted incurs a penalty to its armour value equal to the spellcaster's INS score.

Level 2

Augment Health

Preparation: 2 combat rounds

Penalty: -6

Duration: See table

Area: The caster

Effect: This spell allows a spellcaster to increase his maximum Hit Points. He rolls a number of d10s equal to his INS score, and adds the result to his total Hit Points (10s are not re-rolled). The spell does not heal the spellcaster, who must be uninjured (at maximum HP) to benefit from it. The additional Hit Points are considered to be a bonus, and do not affect wound penalties.

Improve Another's Physical Defence/ Weaken Another's Physical Defence

Preparation: 2 combat rounds

Penalty: -6

Duration: See table

Area: One person

Effect: The caster augments another person's Physical Defence by a value equal to his INS score. This bonus is cumulative with any other bonus (magical, shield, etc).

Reverse Effect: On a successful spellcasting test (ST + target's MD), the spellcaster may lower the target's Physical Defence by a value equal to his INS score.

Strengthen Weapon / Weaken Weapon

Preparation: 3 combat rounds

Penalty: -6

Duration: See table

Area: Any weapon

Effect: The caster augments the damage bonus of a weapon of their choice, providing an increase equal to his INS score.

Reverse Effect: On a successful spellcasting test (ST + target's MD), the spellcaster may lower the damage bonus of a target's weapon by a value equal to the spellcaster's INS score.

Level 3

Augment Another's Health

Preparation: 3 combat rounds

Penalty: -9

Duration: See table

Area: One person

Effect: This spell increases the maximum Hit Points of another character. The caster rolls a number of d10 equal to his INS score, and adds the result to the target's total Hit Points (10s are not re-rolled). This spell does not heal the target, who must be uninjured (at maximum HP) to benefit from it. The additional Hit Points are considered to be a bonus, and do not affect wound penalties.

Augment Furor Pool

Preparation: 3 combat rounds

Penalty: -9

Duration: See table

Area: The caster

Magic

Effect: The spellcaster adds a number of dice to his furor pool equal to his INS score +1. The spell cannot bring the caster out of an Exhausted state, and he must have a full furor pool to benefit from it.

Improve Armour

Preparation: 2 combat rounds

Penalty: -9

Duration: See table

Area: Any item of armour other than a shield

Effect: The spellcaster improves the armour value (AV) of armour, a helmet, or any other protective item, other than a shield, providing a bonus equal to his *Seidr* skill score. The spellcaster may use this on one item of armour only.

Level 4

Augment Another's Furor Pool

Preparation: 3 combat rounds

Penalty: -12

Duration: See table

Area: One person

Effect: The spellcaster adds a number of dice to the furor pool of a target equal to the caster's INS score. This spell cannot bring the target out of an Exhausted state, and he must have a full furor pool to benefit from it.

Augment Physical Defence

Preparation: 3 combat rounds

Penalty: -12

Duration: See table

Area: A number of people equal to the caster's INS

Effect: The spellcaster augments the Physical Defence score of a number of people up to or equal to his INS score. The total augmentation equals his *Seidr* skill score. This bonus is cumulative with any other bonus (magical, shield, etc).

Improve Weapon

Preparation: 3 combat rounds

Penalty: -12

Duration: See table

Area: Any weapon

Effect: The spellcaster augments the damage done by a weapon of their choice by an amount equal to his *Seidr* skill score.

Healing Magic

Level 1

Healing Hands / Harming Hands

Preparation: 2 actions

Penalty: -3

Duration: Instantaneous

Area: One person

Effect: The spellcaster causes the target to regain 1d10 Hit Points, up to his maximum Hit Points score.

Reverse Effect: On a successful spellcasting test, the spellcaster causes the target to lose 1d10 Hit Points. Armour does not protect against this damage.

Heal Minor Illness

Preparation: 3 combat rounds

Penalty: -3

Duration: Instantaneous

Area: One person

Effect: On a successful spellcasting test against a success threshold equal to the minor illness' virulence level (page 138), the spellcaster cures a target suffering from that illness. The spell does not heal any effects of the illness the target has already suffered.

Protection from Curses

Preparation: 5 combat rounds

Penalty: -3

Duration: See table

Area: One person

Effect: The spellcaster gives the target a bonus on tests to resist against all kinds of curses (*seidr*, *galdr*, or runes) equal to the caster's MD.

Remove Fear / Cause Fear

Preparation: 3 actions

Penalty: -3

Duration: Instantaneous / Special

Area: One person

Effect: On a successful spellcasting roll, this spell permits a target who has already failed a Fear test (see below) to reroll the test, with a bonus equal to the caster's *Seidr* skill score.

Reverse Effect: The target must be able to see the spellcaster when this spell is cast. On a successful spellcasting test, the target must make an opposed TEN + MD test against a success threshold equal to the spellcaster's test result. This is known as a Fear test. If the target fails, he is overcome with fear and may take no other action than to get as far from the caster as possible. The duration of the fear is shown on the Duration Table.

Stabilisation

Preparation: 1 action

Penalty: -3

Duration: See table

Area: One person

Effect: The spellcaster causes an Unconscious or Dead (Dying) target (between 0 Hit Points and Dead) to regain consciousness with 1 Hit Point. This spell does not stop bleeding.

Level 2

Preparation of Balms and Unguents

Preparation: 3 hours

Penalty: -6

Duration: Instantaneous

Area: One person

Effect: This spell permits the character to make balms and unguents. These last a very long time—months or years—as long as they are kept out of the light and in sealed pots. When a balm or unguent is applied to a wounded target, the target automatically regains 2d10 Hit Points, up to his maximum Hit Point total. The number of doses the spellcaster prepares when he casts this spell depends on the success margin of the spellcasting roll.

SM	Number of Doses
0 - 5	1
6 - 10	2
11 - 15	3
16 - 25	4
25+	5

Recover from Exhaustion

Preparation: 2 actions

Penalty: -6

Duration: Instantaneous

Area: One person

Effect: This spell causes the target to immediately regain 1 die to his dice pool, permitting him to recover from his Exhausted state. If the target has not yet acted during the combat round this spell takes effect, he must wait until the beginning of the next combat round to act.

Stop Bleeding

Preparation: 1 action

Penalty: -6

Duration: Instantaneous

Area: One person

Effect: This spell stops the target bleeding. This does not allow the target to regain Hit Points, but he will not lose any more Hit Points due to bleeding from the moment the spell is cast.

Level 3

Heal Moderate Illness

Preparation: 3 combat rounds

Penalty: -9

Duration: Instantaneous

Area: One person

Effect: On a successful spellcasting test against a success threshold equal to the moderate illness' virulence level, the spellcaster may cure a target suffering from that illness (see page 138). This does not heal any damage or effects already caused by the illness.

Heal Poison

Preparation: 3 combat rounds

Penalty: -9

Duration: Instantaneous

Area: One person

Effect: On a successful spellcasting test against a success threshold equal to the poison's virulence level, a victim of poisoning is completely cured of its effects, the caster having destroyed all traces of the poison. The spell does not heal the victim of any damage or poison effects already suffered (loss of life, characteristic points, etc).

Moderate Healing / Moderate Harming

Preparation: 3 actions

Penalty: -9

Duration: Instantaneous

Area: One person

Effect: This spell causes the target to regain 1d10 Hit Points for every point of the spellcaster's INS score, up to his maximum Hit Point total.

Reverse Effect: On a successful spellcasting test, the target must make a TEN + MD test against a success threshold equal to the spellcaster's test result, or lose 1d10 Hit Points for every point of the spellcaster's INS score. Armour does not protect against this damage.

Preparing Potions

Preparation: 3 hours

Penalty: -9

Duration: Instantaneous

Area: One person

Effect: This spell allows the spellcaster to make a potion. Potions last for months or years as long as they're kept out of the light in sealed pots. A wounded character drinking the potion immediately regains 1d10 Hit Points for each point of INS the spellcaster has, up to his maximum Hit Point total.

Regain Furor Pool / Lose Furor Pool

Preparation: 3 actions

Penalty: -9

Duration: Instantaneous

Area: One person

Effect: This spell causes a target to regain a number of dice in his furor pool equal to the spellcaster's INS score, up to his maximum furor pool. If the target was Exhausted, he recovers from that state. If the target has not yet acted during the combat round this spell takes effect, he must wait until the beginning of the next combat round to act.

Reverse Effect: On a successful spellcasting test, the target must make a Resistance test against a success threshold equal to the spellcaster's test result. On a failure, the target loses a number of dice from his furor pool equal to the spellcaster's INS score. However, this spell may not cause the target to become Exhausted, and so the target's furor pool cannot be reduced to less than one die.

Remove Minor Curse from Object

Preparation: 3 hours

Penalty: -9

Duration: See table

Area: One object

Effect: On a successful opposed spellcasting test against the power of a minor curse affecting an object possessed by a character and affecting that character, the character is freed from the curse and the object rendered temporarily ineffective. The object itself remains cursed, and anyone touching it once the spell's duration is over may be cursed again. The length of time the cursed object is rendered temporarily ineffective is determined on the Duration Table.

Level 4

Complete Recovery

Preparation: 4 combat rounds

Penalty: -12

Duration: Instantaneous

Area: One person

Effect: This spell allows the spellcaster to heal a wounded target of any Hit Point damage, restoring his maximum Hit Point total. The spell does not heal the effects of major wounds.

Remove Minor Curse

Preparation: 3 hours

Penalty: -12

Duration: Instantaneous

Area: One person

Effect: On a successful opposed spellcasting test against the power of a minor curse affecting a target, the spellcaster frees the target from that curse.

Level 5

Balm of Complete Recovery

Preparation: 3 hours

Penalty: -12

Duration: 1d10 minutes

Area: One person

Effect: This spell allows the character to make a powerful healing balm, which will last for months or years if kept out of the light in sealed pots.

When applied to a wounded target, the balm takes 1d10 minutes to act, whereupon the target recovers all his Hit Points, his full dice pool, and any bleeding is stopped.

The spellcaster may create a number of doses of this balm on a successful spellcasting test based on the success margin.

SM	Number of Doses Created
0 - 5	1
6 - 10	2
11 - 15	3
16 - 25	4
25+	5

Heal Major Illness

Preparation: 3 combat rounds

Penalty: -15

Duration: Instantaneous

Area: One person

Effect: On a successful spellcasting test against a success threshold equal to the major illness' virulence level, the spellcaster is able to cure a target suffering from that illness (see page 138). The spell does not heal any damage or effects already suffered by the character.

Mastery of the Elements

To control the elements, the spellcaster must fill his lungs while walking a circle in the open air, tracing its line with his staf and chanting his seidlaeti. He must walk the circle three times in the opposite direction to the sun's passage and, to reverse the spell, three times in the direction of the sun's passage.

Level 1

Invoke Rain

Preparation: 1 hour

Penalty: -3

Duration: See table

Area: $INS \times 100m^2$ on the ground

Effect: If the weather is favourable, such as if there are heavy clouds in the sky, the spellcaster may cause it to rain. Alternatively, he may stop any rain currently falling. The spell allows the caster to slightly modify the weather, but not, for example, to make rain fall during a drought.

Master Breezes

Preparation: 1 action

Penalty: -3

Duration: See table

Area: $INS \times 10m^3$

Effect: Within the spell's area the caster can manipulate breezes, increasing or decreasing the intensity of winds by $10km/h \times$ the caster's INS score, as well as changing their direction. He may modify the speed and direction of the breeze each combat round for the spell's duration. If the caster attempts to increase or decrease the winds beyond this amount, the spell fails.

At the maximum wind speed, all projectiles in the affected area incur an attack penalty equal to the caster's INS score. The spell may be cast indoors or outdoors.

Master Fog

Preparation: 4 minutes

Penalty: -3

Duration: See table

Area: $INS \times 200m^3$

Effect: The spellcaster can raise or dispel fog. Its density is at the caster's discretion, ranging from a simple mist to a thick fog impossible to see through.

The fog's dimensions are also determined by the spellcaster, who can readily create a fog circle large enough to

encircle a ship. This spell may only be cast outdoors, and the fog, once cast, does not move with the caster.

Level 2

Create Darkness / Banish Darkness

Preparation: 4 actions

Penalty: -6

Duration: See table

Area: $\text{INS} \times 10\text{m}^3$

Effect: The spellcaster can control the amount of light and darkness in an $\text{INS} \times 10\text{m}^3$ area. He can vary the intensity throughout the spell's duration, from the darkness of a moonless night to a cloudless afternoon. The spellcaster is always at the centre of the spell's area of effect, even if he moves (the spell's area moves with him). Torches and other light sources function normally within the area. The spell may be cast indoors or outdoors.

Part Minor River

Preparation: 3 combat rounds

Penalty: -6

Duration: See table

Area: $\text{INS} \times 10\text{m}^3$

Effect: The spellcaster may gradually part the waters of a small river to create a path across its bed. Although he controls the water's flow, he cannot completely stop the river, and if he attempts to do so, the sheer power of the water will break the spell to continue its natural course.

Level 3

Master Winds

Preparation: 2 combat rounds

Penalty: -9

Duration: See table

Area: $\text{INS} \times 100\text{m}^3$

Effect: The spellcaster can increase or decrease the winds within the spell's area of effect by up to $50\text{km/h} \times$ the caster's INS score, and also control the wind's direction. He may modify the wind's speed and direction every combat round throughout the spell's duration. If he attempts to increase or decrease the wind speed beyond this amount, the spell fails.

At maximum wind speed, any character in the spell's area of effect except the caster loses a number of Hit Points per combat round equal to the caster's INS score due to the violence of the winds. Armour does not protect against this damage. Characters will be blown over and struck by small wind-blown objects. Ranged weapons may not be used within the spell's area of effect, and any movement requires a STR + Athletics test against a success threshold equal to the current wind speed divided by 10. On a failure, the moving character is thrown to the ground, or slammed against a wall, for the rest of his action. All hand-to-hand or melee combat actions within the spell's area of effect incur a penalty

equal to the current wind speed divided by 10.

This spell may be cast indoors or outdoors.

Master Rain

Preparation: 1 hour

Penalty: -9

Duration: See table

Area: $\text{INS} \times 100\text{m}^2$ on the ground

Effect: Identical to the Invoke Rain spell, except that the spellcaster need not depend on the current weather conditions to make it rain. He can summon or dissipate rain clouds as required.

Part Major River

Preparation: 3 combat rounds

Penalty: -9

Duration: See table

Area: $\text{INS} \times 100\text{m}^3$

Effect: The spellcaster can part the waters of a major river in order to cross it. Although he controls the water's flow, he cannot completely stop the river, and if he attempts to do so, the sheer power of the water will break the spell to continue its natural course.

Level 4

Create Snowstorm

Preparation: 1 hour

Penalty: -12

Duration: See table

Area: $\text{INS} \times 500\text{m}^2$ on the ground

Effect: The spellcaster creates a violent snowstorm covering the area. This has several elements: violent winds (see the Master Winds spell for effects); an intense cold which bypasses any armour or other protection and causes Hit Point damage to all targets in the area equal to the caster's INS score; and blinding snow reducing visibility to zero.

It takes only a few minutes to cover a small group of adventurers with freezing snow, a few hours to cover a house, or a few days to swallow a small village. The amount of snowfall depends on the spell's duration.

Unit of Spell Duration	Snowfall (cm)
Per action	INS
Per combat round	$\text{INS} \times 5$
Per minute	$\text{INS} \times 20$
Per hour	$\text{INS} \times 40$
Per day	$\text{INS} \times 60$

Divert River

Preparation: 2 hours

Penalty: -12

Duration: See table

Area: A river or stream

Effect: This spell allows the caster to divert the current of a river or stream. He decides in which direction he wants the river to flow; and the river subsequently finds a new

Magic

natural path for the spell's duration. The caster can divert a river so it flows right through a village, or to its right or left, and so on.

The table below indicates the spell's destructive potential. For characters, this indicates damage done by being caught in the river, calculated per combat round, and representing drowning as well as violent shock and river-borne debris. Armour does not protect against this damage. The table also indicates damage to structures.

	Hit Point Loss	Wooden Structure Damage	Stone Structure Damage
Stream	1d10	Damaged*	Untouched
River	2d10	Destroyed	Damaged*

* Structure has lost its doors, windows and possibly roof.

Landslide

Preparation: 10 minutes

Penalty: -12

Duration: Variable

Area: INS x 100m³

Effect: The spellcaster causes a landslide or avalanche on a mountainside, hill, or cliff. The damage caused depends on the type of material of which the landslide or avalanche is composed; in any case, armour offers no protection. In addition to individual damage, the spell also affects wooden structures (stone structures are unaffected). Duration depends on the type of landslide, and is measured in combat rounds.

Landslide Type	Duration (CR)	Individual Damage	Wooden Structure
Mud	9	1d5 ÷ CR	Unharmed
Snow	7	1d10 ÷ CR	Lightly Damaged (broken windows/doors)
Earth	5	2d10 ÷ CR	Damaged (broken walls)
Stone	3	3d10 ÷ CR	Destroyed

Level 5

Cause Earthquake

Preparation: 2 hours

Penalty: -15

Duration: See table

Area: INS x 200m² on the ground

Effect: The spell causes a terrible and devastating earthquake. The table below indicates its effects, based on the terrain in which it occurs. For individuals, this is the damage incurred by being in the affected area, calculated every combat round, and representing violent shock as well as being struck by falling objects. Armour does not protect against this damage. The table also indicates damage to structures.

Terrain Type	Individual Damage	Wood Damage	Stone Damage
Desert Plain	1d2	A*	I
Grassy Plain	1d5	A*	I
Sparsely-wooded plain	1d10	A*	I

Thickly-wooded Plain	2d10	A*	A*
Desert Hill	1d5	A*	I
Grassy Hill	1d10	A*	I
Sparsely-wooded Hill	2d10	D	A*
Thickly-wooded Hill	3d10	D	A*
Desert Mountain	1d10	D	I
Grassy Mountain	2d10	D	A*
Sparsely-wooded Mountain	3d10	D	A*
Thickly-wooded Mountain	4d10	D	D

I – Intact

A – Damaged

D – Destroyed

* The structure has lost its doors, windows, and possibly even roof.

Curses

Norsemen fear a sorcerer's curse more than anything else, and spellcasters must be careful when using them, as casting a curse is a crime which will be dealt with by the *thing* if cast on anyone other than enemy clans and kingdoms. They should be used in moderation—or at least with discretion.

Level 2

Sinister Dreams

Preparation: 3 combat rounds

Penalty: -6

Duration: See table

Area: One person

Effect: The spellcaster shakes a black goatskin while chanting a seidlaeti which incorporates the victim's name. At the end, he throws the skin over his head and closes his eyes. His victim feels a great weight overcome his limbs, a powerful lassitude, and an overwhelming urge to close his eyes and fall into a deep sleep troubled by sinister, threatening dreams. This is not a healing sleep, but rather a sorcery-induced trance.

The victim of the curse must make a Tenacity + MD Resistance Test (see page 165), against a success threshold equal to the caster's spellcasting test result. On a failure, the victim falls asleep for the spell's duration. The pain of a simple slap is enough to rouse them from this sleep, but external noises—however loud—will not wake them.

Level 3

Confusion

Preparation: 3 actions

Penalty: -9

Duration: See table

Area: One person

Effect: This spell sows confusion in the target's mind until he loses all interest in what he was doing. The target

walks off a battlefield, leaves his home, his own marriage ceremony, all without a word, utterly silent, and wanders aimless and unthinking for the spell's duration.

The target must make a Tenacity + MD Resistance Test against a success threshold equal to the caster's spellcasting test result. On a failure, the target succumbs to the spell's effects.

Once the spell ends, the victim has no memory of the confusion, and feels as though he has just awoken.

Level 4

Blind Panic

Preparation: 3 actions

Penalty: -12

Duration: See table

Area: One person

Effect: The spellcaster walks backwards into a circle he has traced on the ground, chanting the name of his victim, who is immediately overcome with panic and forced to flee, unable to understand what is happening. While fleeing, the victim will attempt to kill anyone who crosses his path.

The victim must make a Tenacity + MD Resistance Test against a success threshold equal to the caster's spellcasting test result. On a failure, the victim enters a state of blind *furor*, unable to tell friend from foe. Even if Exhausted, the victim continues to fight until the spell ends or he falls unconscious.

Level 5

Ride of the Mara

Preparation: 3 hours

Penalty: -15

Duration: See table

Area: One person

Effect: The target of this spell must be asleep for the spell to take effect. The spellcaster lies down in his ceremonial vestments, staff in hand, and lets his *hamr* leave his body and spiritually ride on his *staf* to his sleeping victim. His *hamr* then leaves his staff and "rides" his victim—straddling his chest, making it difficult to breathe, and giving him terrible nightmares.

The target must make a Tenacity + MD Resistance Test against a success threshold equal to the caster's spellcasting test result. If successful, the target awakens utterly exhausted (with 1 die left in his dice pool) and his hair strangely tangled.

If the test fails, the target's Fate is in the spellcaster's hands, and he may decide with what wound level he awakens (Bloodied, Wounded, Severely Wounded, Unconscious, or Dead (Dying)). The awakening victim has only one die in his *furor* pool, and his Hit Points correspond to his wound level.

The spellcaster may also decide to have the *mara* ride a tethered horse instead of a human target, which will be found the next morning exhausted and covered in sweat.

Galdr: Incantation Magic



*"Shall thurses hate thee
And horses ride thee,
Shall all straws stick thee,
All storms stun thee:
And woe worth thee
But my will thou doest!"*

-- Busluboen, *The Curse of Busla*, stanza 8

Galdralist, or the art of *galdr* or incantation, is tied to the power of the voice, and thus most commonly used by skalds, with their unique mastery of vocal techniques, although *thulr* and *volva* also employ it. *Galdrs* (incantations) are chanted in falsetto or head voice, and above all adhere meticulously to the particular rhythm and metre of *galdr* known as *galdralag*, which is close to the verses chanted by the skalds. *Galdr* is therefore not usable by just any spellcaster; Odin is its master, just as he is master of poetry, and often boasts of knowing eighteen or more powerful incantations.

Overview

Unlike *seidr*, which possesses a specific list spells, *galdr* is divided into three paths: **Curses**, **Illusions**, and **Charms**, each of which is further divided into five **domains**, indicating the development of the magic-user's knowledge of each path. As a result, the more domains a spellcaster knows in a path, the more he masters it.

The Domains

Each domain of a *galdr* path provides a spellcaster with a direction, a set of options, and certain limits and restrictions for defining the effects of an incantation. The spellcaster may then use these parameters to decide precisely what effect he wants his incantation to have. The different domains in each *galdr* path are explained below to define what a spellcaster can do with them.

For example: a spellcaster uses the Sight domain from the path of Illusion. He may decide what kind of illusion his incantation creates; its shape, colours, and so on.

Casting Galdr Incantations

A spellcaster uses his Presence characteristic and his *Galdr* skill level to cast an incantation. The success threshold varies according to the duration, area, or effects the spellcaster wants to create. Preparation time for a *galdr* incantation is 3 actions, which may be extended or shortened (see page 151).

Components of Galdr Incantations

An incantation has three components: a domain, a duration, and an area of effect or number of targets.

Domain: this is the basis of the incantation, the raw material of which it is composed. The domain defines the spellcaster's actions and what he is attempting to achieve.

Duration: this defines the time period for which the incantation is active.

Area of Effect / Number of Targets: this defines the area affected by the incantation. For example "40m³" may be the area of effect of a Fog illusion, while "3 people" may indicate the number of people affected by the Moderate Impediment curse.

Calculating the Success Threshold

To calculate the overall success threshold (ST) of a *galdr* incantation, total the sum of the individual STs of each component of the incantation selected by the spellcaster, as shown on the tables below. Thus, the more powerful or long-lasting the incantation, the more difficult it is to cast.

For example: a spellcaster wants to cast an Illusion incantation with the form of a man fleeing down an alleyway, to draw the attention of some guards. The first component of the incantation is the domain: the spellcaster decides it will use the Sight and Hearing domains, for a component ST of 6 (see "Inclusive Domains" below for why this is ST 6 and not ST 9). He doesn't need the illusion to last long, but to make sure the guards see it he uses a second component, Duration, to make it last 1d10 combat rounds, which also has an ST of 6. As the illusion must resemble a man, the spellcaster uses a third component—Area of Effect—to cover an area of $INS \times 1m^3$, roughly the size of a man, which adds an ST of 9.



The Nid

There exists a terrifying curse called the *nid*. It can be entirely spoken—the *tungunid*—or it may take the form of a "staff of shame" called the *nidsstong*, a hazel staff topped with engravings offensive to the victim, either in words or in images often suggesting the victim's passive homosexuality, which is more serious and corresponds to a major curse. Such a curse attacks the target's *mannhelg*, which is a sacred and inviolate thing; however, if the target is from an enemy clan or is the target of an ongoing vendetta, the spellcaster may justly invoke this terrible curse.

The following is a major *nid* curse well known among the Norsemen.

*"Let the gods wake,
Let them chase the prince from his kingdom,
Odin's powers are irate
As is my will;
Let Frey and Njord chase the sovereign
From his lands,
Let the Aesir of the land be enraged
Against the man who violates the sanctuary."
-- Egil's saga, son of Grímr the bald.*

When the famous skald who authored the above *nid* was condemned to exile, he created a *nidsstong*, a staff of hazel wood, on which he carved a horse's head turned to face the king he wanted to curse. For good measure he carved runes on the staff, then left the country: the cursed king in turn was condemned by his own spirit guardians (the *landvaettir*) to go into exile.



The incantation's final success threshold is 21: Domain 6 + Duration 6 + Area 9. If the spellcaster had chosen an Area of Effect of $INS \times 10cm^3$ to create an illusion of a cat instead of a man, the final ST would have been 15 (Domain 6 + Duration 6 + Area 3).

Curses

Overview

Curses have a very wide potential, as spellcasters may curse a victim with almost anything, depending on the seriousness of the attempt. A curse may threaten anything which might frighten a target: natural calamities, but also illness, weakness, bad luck, and even death

Curses

ST	Domain	Duration	Number of Targets
3	Minor Impediment	1d5 Actions	1
6	Moderate Impediment	1d10 Combat Rounds	2 - 4
9	Minor Curse	1d10 Minutes	5 - 9
12	Major Impediment	1d10 Hours	10 - 49
15	Major Curse	1d5 Days	50+

and above all an ignominious end leading straight to Hel.

As a result, curses are often used as threats, as their actual use may have grave consequences.

A character casting a curse should note the dice roll result obtained on his spellcasting test, as this may be used later (see “Resistance Tests”, below).

Dangers of Using Curses

The main danger from using a curse comes from the vendetta a victim’s family might declare on the spellcaster during a *thing*.

Magic is tolerated among Norse clans, despite the fear it provokes, because it is useful to *jarl* and king alike, and also helps the *bondi*. But any magic is deeply distrusted if it attacks the integrity of a free man—his sacred inviolability, his *mannhelg*. It’s therefore essential to know who it is you’re attacking, and if that attack risks grave repercussions (and even banishment and death) if the victim’s family or blood brother accuse the spellcaster before the *thing*.

Curse Domains

Minor Impediment

These do not include long-lasting impediments, and cannot have serious or permanent consequences. They are limited in scope (examples include forgetting to go somewhere, the failure of a minor request to the *thing*, failure in a minor commercial enterprise, temporary loss of hair, insomnia, and so on).

Moderate Impediment

This curse may cause the illnesses detailed in the chapter “Wounds and Healing” (see page 135). It may also cause impediments, which are nevertheless still limited and cannot be truly destructive or lead to banishment

or death. Examples include: forgetting to go to one’s own marriage, catching dysentery, one’s renown being forgotten for a week, turning milk sour upon entering a house, being temporarily hated by animals, and so on.

Minor Curse

With minor curses, the effects start having a significant impact on the target. They include: losing badly at gambling, a bad marriage, never being known through your renown, and so on.

Major Impediment

The illnesses caused by this curse are severe, and can cause death if not healed in time (see “Wounds and Healing”, page 135). Impediments may include: being disgraced before a *jarl* or king, being unable to have children with one’s wife, losing goods and property, and so on.

Major Curse

Major curses generally involve the exile, ruin, or death of the victim, or of a person they are close to (such as a brother, son, or wife). Curses of this nature rarely go unpunished.

Resistance Tests

Any character targeted by a curse must make a **Resistance Test**. This is a test of Tenacity + Mental Defence against a success threshold equal to the result of the caster’s spellcasting test. If the target obtains a score equal to or higher than the ST, the curse fails.

Illusions

Overview

Illusions are useful in many cases: helping a character flee, improving a hiding place, creating a diversion

Illusions

ST	Domain	Duration	Area of Effect
3	Hearing	1d5 Actions	INS × 10cm ³ (cat, ball, sword)
6	Sight	1d10 Combat Rounds	INS × 50cm ³ (drum, child)
9	Smell	1d10 Minutes	INS × 1m ³ (man, 2 children)
12	Taste	1d10 Hours	INS × 5m ³ (cart, 2 riders)
15	Touch	1d5 Days	INS × 10 ³ (house, kraken, ship)

during a battle, and so on.

An illusion is incapable of causing damage or magical effects. It vanishes once the spell ends. The spellcaster must have a very detailed idea of the illusion he wants to create; if he cannot describe it well, the spell fails.

It's therefore essential for him to have seen, heard, felt, touched, or tasted the sensation his illusion seeks to duplicate.

An illusion is able to move (to approach or move away from a target, and so on).

Illusion Domains

Hearing

The spellcaster may reproduce a sound, and make it seem to come from anywhere, such as a woman's scream, a wolf's howl, a rockslide, the rustling of leaves, a galloping horse, etc. He must have already heard the sound to be able to reproduce it.

Sight

The spellcaster may create the image of any object, animal, or human being, such as an aggressive warrior, laden ship, rearing horse, locked chest, etc. He must have already seen the object to be able to reproduce it.

Smell

The spellcaster may create a recognisable odour, heavy or delicate, of any origin, such as the smell of a fire, of cooking, a woman's perfume, etc. The spellcaster must have already smelled the odour to be able to reproduce it.

Taste

The spellcaster may create the illusion of a taste he is familiar with. This taste will not actually be dangerous to the intended target of the illusion. For example, the

spellcaster could create the taste of a poison, which the target might recognise and be terrified, but that taste will not actually poison the target. However, the illusion can be used to convince someone eating spoiled meat that it is fresh, and consequently suffer from food poisoning.

Touch

The spellcaster creates a tangible illusion. This domain is always accompanied by another, usually that of Sight. It provides a penalty to any Resistance Test against the illusion equal to the caster's *Galdr* skill score.

The illusion of tangibility does not actually mean it truly is. For example, a tangible illusion cannot be used to stop a rock fall or dam a river.

However, if the target of a tangible illusion believes it to be real (ie fails his Resistance Test), he will suffer its effects and act accordingly: an illusion of a door will block entry, and the illusion of an armed guard, or a monster, could wound its victims.

Damage caused by an illusion is not real and cannot cause death. A target reduced to 0 Hit Points by such an illusion falls unconscious for 1d10 minutes, and awakens unharmed.

Inclusive Domains

Illusion is the only *galdr* path where each subsequent domain may include within it (at the spellcaster's discretion) the effects of prior domains, instead of adding the STs of those domains together. So, a spellcaster using the *Smell* domain (ST 9) may also incorporate effects of the prior *Sight* and *Hearing* domains at the same success threshold (ST 9), instead of adding the three separate domain STs (3, 6, and 9) together. A tangible illusion (ST 15) therefore also includes the effects of the *Sight*, *Hearing*, *Smell*, and *Taste* domains, if the spellcaster desires.

Charms

ST	Domain	Duration	Number of Targets
3	Sleep	1d5 Actions	1
6	Seduction	1d10 Combat Rounds	2 - 4
9	Charm Animals	1d10 Minutes	5 - 9
12	Charm People	1d10 Hours	10 - 49
15	Charm Monsters	1d5 Days	50+

Resistance Tests

A target of an illusion who has no idea he is facing an illusion does **not** make a Resistance Test. A target who suspects he is facing something which is not real, and who articulates that suspicion (ie says it out loud, etc!), may attempt a Resistance Test. A character "resisting an illusion" in this way makes a Tenacity + Mental Defence test against a success threshold equal to the result of the caster's spellcasting test. For this reason, a spellcaster should always note the result of his spellcasting test when he succeeds at an illusion incantation.

A character who comes into contact with an illusion lacking the *Touch* domain causes it to fail immediately.

For example: a spellcaster creates an illusion of himself, which is attacked by a berserker in a fury. Taking the spellcaster by surprise, the berserker strikes the illusion with his great axe. As the spellcaster did not create the illusion with the Touch domain, the berserker's axe passes straight through it, and the illusion vanishes immediately.

Concentration and Illusions

When a spellcaster creates an illusion, it requires all his attention to make it move, speak, and act. Unless the illusion is static (such as a wall or rock), the spellcaster must concentrate to make his illusion seem alive; the illusion acts on the spellcaster's Initiative during a combat round, but need not make any tests—the spellcaster decides if his illusion succeeds at the tests it makes or not.

When the spellcaster is concentrating in this way, use the "Damage and Concentration" rules on page 152.

Charms

*"When all sweetness and love
I would win from some artful wench,*

*Her heart I turn,
And the whole mind change
Of that fair-armed lady I love."
-- Havamal, stanza 160*

Overview

The casting of charms is one of the great specialities of the wielder of magic. In the legends, Odin himself seduces any woman he wants, even though he is old, one-eyed, and hardly handsome. But charms do not concern love alone: spellcasters also know how to tame the wildest of animals, gain trust from suspicious people, and attract the attentions of the most indifferent.

There is one limit to this power: a charmed creature will never obey suggestions which put its life in danger. If the charmed target is attacked in any way, either physically or even verbally, the charm is broken.

A charm cannot be cast once combat has begun.

Charm Domains

Sleep

The spellcaster can make someone fall asleep, or wake someone from a magical slumber. The target may be asleep in bed, but may also be a palace guard or a companion in an adventure who collapses in the middle of his turn. Nothing can wake the sleeping target except for the end of the spell.

Seduce

The spellcaster can seduce and charm people, and has no trouble luring people to his bed. Likewise he can engender similar feelings (and even relationships) between two targets. He can also repel other people, or extinguish their desire for himself or anyone else, or sever relationships.



Charm Animals

The spellcaster is trusted by animals, but can also make them hostile. This incantation affects both domesticated and wild species. However, this will cause wild animals to trust the spellcaster's companions as well—just him.

Charm People

The spellcaster can charm other people, persuading them to take any action which doesn't put them directly in danger. The charmed person will do nothing against his *mannhelg* (see page 8); nor will he put his own life at risk, nor that of his clan or family, nor will he betray anyone, nor commit acts he sees as degrading.

Charm Monsters

The spellcaster can charm supernatural monsters (*troll*, *alfar*, *dvergar*, *landvaettir*, etc), except for unique legendary creatures. The spellcaster must be alone; even one companion breaks the charm.

Resistance Tests

A target of a charm incantation must make a **Resistance Test**. This is a Tenacity + Mental Defence test against a success threshold equal to the result of the caster's spellcasting test. As a result, spellcasters should note down the result of their spellcasting test when casting a successful charm.

If the target succeeds in the Resistance Test, the incantation fails.

Runes: Sacred Writings



*"I saw and was silent,
I saw and pondered,
I listened to the speech of men
Of runes they spoke,
And the reading of runes
Was little withheld from their lips:
At the High One's hall..."*
-- Havamal, stanzas 109-110

The runes are the little-used alphabet of the Norsemen. But for those who know their secrets, they contain immense magical power.

Odin hung from Yggdrasill, pierced by his own lance, for nine nights to unlock the secrets of the runes. He is Master of the Runes, and of the charms and curses one can cast with them.

Preparation

*"Dost know how to write them?
Dost know how to read them?
Dost know how to paint them?"*

-- Havamal, stanza 143

In order to work magic with a rune, it must be **cast**—that is, engraved on wood, leather, or metal, or painted on the skin, or on hides or cloth. The material used determines the duration of the rune spell cast.

When a rune is cast, the spellcaster may decide if the rune is engraved "the right way up" or "upside down". A rune engraved the right way up has its "normal" effect, which may be a positive or negative effect depending on the nature of the rune (see the descriptions below); one which is engraved upside down has an effect which is the reverse of its normal effect, ie a negative effect if the rune is usually positive, and a positive effect if the rune is usually negative.

Regardless of the material used, the runes must be stained with the blood of the caster. It is blood, the stuff of life imbued with the initiate's magical power, which activates the runes.

Casting a Rune

Casting a rune—the act of engraving it on a particular material—requires a test of the Communication characteristic + the Runes skill against a specific success threshold. A minimum of one dice from the caster's *furor* pool must also be expended on this test: the very act of casting a rune is a magical one.

The time required to casting a rune depends on the material used and the spellcaster's Agility score.



Magic

Material	Duration
Skin	(6 - AGI) Actions
Fabric	(6 - AGI) Combat Rounds
Leather	(6 - AGI) Minutes
Wood	(6 - AGI) Hours
Stone, Metal	(6 - AGI) Days

Defining a Rune's Power

A spellcaster may decide upon the power of a rune's effects, from a minimum of 1 point to a maximum of 15. As a result, when a spellcaster succeeds on his rune-casting test, he must note down the power he has invested in that rune. **The power of the rune is used to modify the success threshold of the rune-casting test;** the more powerful the rune, the harder it is to cast.

Rune Power Modifier = Power of the Rune (+1 to +15)

Rune Duration

The duration of a rune is based on the material on which it is engraved and the Runes skill of the caster. See the table below. Note that the material used also adds to the success threshold of the spellcaster's rune-casting test.

Material	Duration	ST Modifier
Skin	Runes × Hours	+3
Fabric	Runes × Days	+6
Leather	Runes × Weeks	+9
Wood	Runes × Months	+12
Stone, Metal	Runes × Years	+15

Calculating the ST

To calculate the success threshold of a spellcaster's rune-casting test, first determine the level of the rune used (see the descriptions below). The base success threshold is equal to three times the rune's level.

Base ST = Rune Level x 3

Then, add the Rune Power Modifier (+1 to +15) and the Rune Duration Modifier (+3 to +15) to the base success threshold.

Total ST = Base ST + Rune Power Modifier + Rune Duration Modifier

For example: Thorolf decides to cast the Bjarken rune to help the jarl's wife give birth. He paints it on the skin of the young woman (Rune Duration Modifier +3 for 11 hours—his Runes skill is 11).

Due to the woman's social position, Thorolf imbues the rune with nine points of Rune Power (Rune Power Modifier +9). As the Bjarken rune is level 3, it has a base success threshold of 9 (3 × 3). Thorolf's rune casting test to paint the Bjarken rune on the young woman's belly has a total ST of 21 (9 + 9 + 3). If he succeeds on the rune-casting test, Thorolf's player notes this down as "Bjarken, Rune Power 9, 11 hours".

Resisting Runes

A person affected by a rune against their will, whether or not he is conscious of the fact, must make a **Resistance Test** of TEN + MD against a success threshold of 14 + the Rune's Power Modifier.

A target must either be touching a rune or at least in close contact with it in order to be affected by its magic. A runecaster generally conceals or otherwise disguises a rune which has negative effects, and the target must seek out the source of his misfortunes in order to destroy it.

In order to maintain suspense, the Game Master may decide to roll a character's Resistance Test herself, so as not to alert the player to something his character isn't aware of.

For example: Thorolf dislikes Ulv the blacksmith, and never misses a chance to harass him with his magic. He knows he soon has a case to plead before the thing, as his wife is demanding a divorce because of his mistreatment of her. Thorolf carefully prepares his attack, and slips a reversed Tiwaz rune into the blacksmith's pocket during the pushing and shoving at the beginning of the meeting.

The rune has a power of 6. Ulv must make a TEN + MD Resistance Test against an ST of 20 (14 + 6, the power of the rune); he gets a 13. Ulv now has a -6 (the power of the rune) to all his Eloquence tests before the thing. A sad day for him, he risks having to leave his house with nothing but a pack on his back.

List of Runes

Level 1

Kaun

Target: One person

Domain: The rune of creation, of the craftsman.

Positive Effect: The bearer of this rune gains a bonus to any Craft test equal to the rune's power.

Negative Effect: None

Reith

Target: One person

Domain: The rune of travelling and voyaging.

Positive Effect: The bearer of this rune is never lost, and gains a bonus to his Navigation tests equal to the rune's power.

Negative Effect: The bearer is easily lost, and incurs a penalty to his Navigation tests equal to the rune's power.

Söl

Target: One person

Domain: The rune of victory.

Positive Effect: The bearer of this rune gains a bonus to his Tactics tests equal to the rune's power.

Negative Effect: None

Tiwaz

Target: One person

Domain: The rune of Tyr, of justice and law.

Positive Effect: The bearer of this rune gains a bonus to his Eloquence tests before the *thing* equal to the rune's power.

Negative Effect: The bearer of this rune suffers a penalty to his Eloquence tests before the *thing* equal to the rune's power.

Level 2

Algiz

Target: One person

Domain: The rune of protection against malevolent forces.

Positive Effect: The bearer of this rune gains a bonus to his Mental Defence (MD) equal to the rune's power.

Negative Effect: None

Fehu

Target: One person

Domain: The rune of possessions, including riches.

Positive Effect: The bearer of this rune gains a bonus to Negotiation tests in commercial transactions equal to

the rune's power.

Negative Effect: The bearer of this rune incurs a penalty to Negotiation tests in commercial transactions equal to the rune's power.

Jerá

Target: One person

Domain: The rune of diplomacy.

Positive Effect: The bearer of this rune gains a bonus to tests relating to diplomacy equal to the rune's power.

Negative Effect: The bearer of this rune incurs a penalty to tests relating to diplomacy equal to the rune's power.

Ingvi

Target: One person

Domain: The rune of serenity and tranquillity.

Positive Effect: The bearer of this rune can sleep soundly, as he gains a bonus to his Vigilance tests against anyone trying to surprise him while asleep equal to the rune's power.

Negative Effect: None

Wunjo

Target: One person

Domain: The rune of pleasure and amorous seduction.

Positive Effect: The bearer of this rune gains a bonus to Seduction tests equal to the rune's power.

Negative Effect: None

Level 3

Ansuz

Target: One person

Domain: The rune of Odin and magical inspiration.

Positive Effect: The bearer of this rune gains a bonus to his Magical Defence tests equal to the rune's power.

Negative Effect: None

Bjarken

Target: One person

Domain: The rune of birth and fertility.

Positive Effect: If the rune is used during a birth, both mother and baby gain a bonus to all Vigour tests equal to its power.

Negative Effect: If the rune is used during a birth, both mother and baby incur a penalty to Vigour tests equal to its power.

Dagaz

Target: One person

Domain: The rune of day, opposing night.

Positive Effect: The bearer of this rune gains a bonus to Perception tests at night equal to the rune's power.

Negative Effect: None

Gebō

Target: One person

Domain: The rune of sacrifices to the gods.

Positive Effect: The bearer of this rune gains a bonus to any *Seidr* skill tests equal to the rune's power.

Negative Effect: The bearer of this rune incurs a penalty to all *Seidr* skill tests equal to the rune's power.

Isa

Target: One person

Domain: The rune of stagnation.

Positive Effect: None

Negative Effect: The bearer of this rune incurs a penalty to Reaction and Initiative tests equal to the rune's power. Note that an Initiative test cannot be lower than zero.

Mathr

Target: One person

Domain: The rune of Man and intelligence.

Positive Effect: The bearer of this rune gains a bonus to Intellect tests equal to the rune's power.

Negative Effect: The bearer of this rune incurs a penalty to all Intellect tests equal to the rune's power.

Othal

Target: One person

Domain: The rune of owned land.

Positive Effect: The bearer of this rune gains a bonus to Charisma tests equal to the rune's power, as long as he is on his own lands (if any).

Negative Effect: The bearer of this rune incurs a penalty to Charisma tests equal to the rune's power, as long as he is on his own lands (if any).

Perth

Target: One person

Domain: The rune of detecting magic.

Positive Effect: The bearer of this rune gains a bonus to any magic-related Perception tests equal to the rune's power.

Negative Effect: None

Uruz

Target: One person

Domain: The rune of personal vitality and health.

Positive Effect: The bearer of this rune regains a number of Hit Points every hour equal to the rune's power.

Negative Effect: The bearer of this rune loses a number of Hit Points every hour equal to the rune's power.

Level 4

Hagall

Target: One person

Domain: The rune of illness and physical weakness.

Positive Effect: None

Negative Effect: The bearer of this rune incurs a penalty to all Vigour tests equal to the rune's power.

Lōgr

Target: One person

Domain: The rune of premonitory dreams.

Positive Effect: This rune is employed when the bearer wishes to have a premonitory dream. It has the same effect as the level 3 *seidr* spell Prescient Dreaming, except that the bearer of the rune need not be a magic-user. The rune's power is used instead of the *Seidr* skill score in the test (INS + rune power).

Negative Effect: None

Nauthr

Target: One person

Domain: The rune of torment.

Positive Effect: None

Negative Effect: The bearer of this rune suffers a penalty to all tests involving Mental Defence equal to the rune's power.

Thurz

Target: One person

Domain: The negative rune of Frost Giants and destructive conflict.

Positive Effect: None

Negative Effect: The bearer of this rune provokes antipathy in all he meets, possibly leading to attacks. He incurs a penalty to all Charisma and Communication tests equal to the rune's power.

Level 5

Ehwaz

Target: One person

Domain: The rune of Frey.

Positive Effect: This rune must be used in association with another positive rune, and enhances its effects. The bearer receives an additional bonus to the bonus already received from the other rune equal to the Ehwaz rune's power.

Negative Effect: None

Iwaz

Target: One person

Domain: The rune of *Yggdrasill*

Positive Effect: The bearer of this rune gains a bonus to all Vigour tests to heal illness equal to the rune's power.

Negative Effect: None

The blizzard ended as quickly as it had begun, and the four men shared strained smiles. They pushed away the snow piled outside their shelter, and made the most of the faint sunlight filtering through the grey clouds. Hild and Jorun emerged from the cavern into which they had disappeared two hours earlier.

Yngwe Gilsursson prepared one of his quips, but when faced with the stern, pale faces of the two young women, decided against it. They walked steadily towards the companions, who made a circle to welcome them. The heir to clan Kjari had her arms wrapped around a beautifully carved lance. The barbed blade seemed to be of silver, engraved with animal shapes. Wolves, crows, and horses mingled in a wild horde. The haft of pale wood seemed both supple and strong, decorated with many runes along its length. As they were not well-versed in the runes, they could recognise only one: Odin.

The companions saw the blood on the noble's hands. Before they could ask, she walked past them wordlessly and sat down on a rock jutting out from the cliff face. With a small gesture, the volva motioned them away, leaving her alone. Shadows surrounded her eyes, and she seemed drained of strength.

"What happened?" Sigurd pressed her. "Did you find the sorceress? Do you know what awaits us?"

The others sat around her, impatient to hear more. Hild, ill at ease, stepped away, trembling. The hirdman removed his cloak and wrapped it around the woman's shoulders, while Thorgrim held out a full water skin. The volva turned to them.

"No answers, only more questions." She said, finally.

A short silence followed. Then the questions began to fly. Hild Thorbjornsdottir backed

away again, waiting for the four men to calm down.

"The Lady of Ice was waiting for us. She confirmed what we already suspected. Great danger threatens the three Northern Kingdoms, and we, in following Jorun Hrolfsdottir, will have a role to play. That will be our fate.

"And that's it?" Sigurd exclaimed. "And now? What do we do now? How..."

"We certainly haven't received permission to go home and hunt snow hares," the skald mocked, interrupting. "I doubt the lance our princess carries was forged for that goal."

Together, they turned to the noble descendant of Kjari Lightning-sword. She still held the weapon against her, rocking backwards and forwards as though rocking a child. Drops of blood stained the snow beneath her wounded hands. She was crying. Her eyes closed, she was trying to find words.

"The lance is a gift from the gods. A path, a strength. A mystery. Jorun had to break the ice surrounding it with her bare hands. She broke her fingers and lacerated her skin. Such a task makes her a worthy leader. But the runes prophesied that one of us will fall by this divine lance."

A respectful and fearful silence followed the volva's words. All were wondering what tasks awaited them and what sacrifices they would have to make.

Klemet Gandalvsson searched in his bag and withdrew the leather purse in which he kept his balms and medicinal herbs.

"Come, let us rejoin our chief," the thulr said.

There was no irony in his words.

In relays, the four men helped the exhausted

women down the mountain. Jorun's bandaged hands made her descent difficult, but she did not complain, any more than she allowed them to take the silver lance from her. As they descended, a beautiful eagle circled above them. The bird of prey disappeared when they entered the dense wood leading to the coast. A day had gone by, but they had a sense of finishing a long and epic voyage. They spoke little, no more than necessary. Once within the dark forest, they could make out few landmarks. Klemet led their small group without hesitation.

"Midgard speaks to me," he explained when Yngwe complained that they were lost.

They soon spotted light filtering through the trees. If the sorcerer was right, they were approaching the pebbled beach, where their ship had beached the previous day.

Thorgrim suddenly stood still, all his senses sharpened. His companions did the same.

"What? What's going on?" Gilsur's son demanded. "I hear nothing."

"Exactly." The berserker seized his axe.

"The animals are hiding," Klemet Gandalvsson added.

"Maybe we should do the same?" The skald enquired, without really believing he would be listened to.

He was right; the group drew their blades and began to march on.

They emerged on the shore of the fjord, where they had arrived the night before. The snekkjar was still resting on its rounded stomach, but they saw no trace of the sailors. A little further on, the funeral pyre they had built after the ambush by the savages was still smouldering. Pressed close together,

they stepped onto the deserted beach. They reached the ship without seeing any movement. Then the plaintive note of a horn resounded through the valley.

Around them dozens of warriors, wearing leather armour, brandishing javelins and iron swords, rushed from their hiding places. The berserker let out a furious roar, but Sigurd held him back before he started a combat they could not win.

"These are not savages – they are men of a northern clan," the skald called. "Is that good?"

"Keep together," Jorun ordered in a low voice. "On my signal, run to the ship. We will be under cover and will be able to fight on a single front."

But before she could give the signal, an arrogant looking warrior stepped out of the lines and came towards them. His luxurious clothes, the gold clasp of his fine cloak as well as his beautifully worked helm, signalled that this was undoubtedly a chief. Approaching to within ten feet of them, he challenged them with his sword.

"Where is princess Herdis? What have you done with her?"

His authoritarian tone was subtly threatening. He spoke the dansk tunga, the common tongue of the Three Northern Kingdoms, perfectly, but with the accent of those from the eastern lands.

Jorun and her companions had no idea what these people wanted, and had no reason to trust them. She was about to answer him in the same tone, when she noticed the decoration on his golden clasp: a spear bearing the rune of Odin. Hild had seen it, too. To her companions' great surprise, Hrolf Knudsson's noble daughter lowered her guard. By this sign, Fate had spoken, and showed itself before them.

Ragnarök

*"Axe-time, sword-time,
Shields are sundered,
Wind-time, wolf-time,
Ere the world falls;
Nor ever shall men
Each other spare."*

-- *Völuspa*, stanza 45

The word *Ragnarök* means, in Old Norse, "The Fate of the Great Ones", and is often translated as the "Twilight of the Gods". It does not mean the end of the world, merely the end of *this* world; the end of Odin, and the old gods.

This catastrophe has no fixed date, but the characters of *Yggdrasill*, unless they are chosen by the Valkyrie upon their deaths, will not be there to see it. The apocalyptic texts are clear that Fate cannot be put off, and that even the gods are subject to destruction and the end which Fate decides.

The gods are doomed. Fate has spoken, and they can do nothing but gather their armies valorous warriors who died in combat. They train every day, feast in Valhalla, and wait for the final hour.

The *volva* of the prophecy known as the *Völuspa*, a seeress who foresaw Ragnarök, describes the end of the world thus:

"First there are omens. Balder's death, the storms which rage, the iron forest in the East which feeds Fenris' brood, the river Peril (Slidr) filled with swords."

"Then three cockerels sound the alarm: Fjalar the Watcher, a vermilion cockerel, cries on the gallows; among the Aesir, Guillinkimbi of the golden crest awakens Odin's warriors in Valhalla; and finally the last, a red cockerel, sounds his victorious cry from the domain of Hel."

"Then brother will kill brother, no laws will stand. Incest and crime will reign."

"Heimdall blows his horn Gjallarhorn. Yggdrasill trembles and groans. The einherjar, Odin's unique warriors, don their armour and leave Valhalla to gather behind their lord. Odin consults in vain Mimir's head. The wolves Skoll and Hati swallow the moon and sun they have chased so long."

"And Fenris breaks free."

"The Earth convulses, and the mountains fall."

"The giants attack. Hrym arrives from the East,

Ragnarök

raising his shield high, and the fire giants, the sons of Muspell, sail their boat of dead men's nails, Naglfar, with Loki at the helm.

"Odin, armoured in mail and armed with Gungnir, battles the wolf Fenris and dies. One of his sons, Vidar, rips off the muzzle of the beast and avenges his father. Thor slays the Midgard Serpent with his hammer, and staggers back nine steps before falling to the ground, dead. Frey dies fighting Surtur, leader of the fire giants. Heimdall and Loki kill each other.

*"The sun turns black,
Earth sinks in the sea,*

*The hot stars down
From heaven are whirled;*

*Fierce grows the steam
And the life-feeding flame,*

*Till fire leaps high
About heaven itself."*

-- Völuspa, stanza 57

It is the end.

But a new earth will rise from the waters.

*"Now do I see
The earth anew*

*Rise all green
From the waves again;*

*The cataracts fall,
And the eagle flies,*

*And fish he catches
Beneath the cliffs."*

-- Völuspa, stanza 59

*The surviving Aesir meet as before upon Idavoll, the "Splendour Plain".
They speak of past events, and Odin's ancient runes.*

*Suddenly, the renewal is upon them. Balder returns with his brother Hoder; a
golden hall, Gimli, more beautiful than the sun, rises to shelter the gods.*

And Alfodr the Most High descends from the sky; Odin, the all-father.

Yggdrasill, which sheltered all life during the cataclysm, spreads its branches.

The old world is dead, and a new Golden Age comes.

-- The Volva.

Allies & Adversaries

Whilst vast areas of Scandia are devoid of men, the Kingdoms of the North are home to a significant population. Hardy and eager to discover new horizons, the Norse peoples are always ready to travel the roads and maritime routes of their lands.

Your heroes are going to cross paths with many people during their adventures. Some will leave no more than a faint memory, while others will become intimately tied to the heroes' saga.

This chapter is dedicated to making these characters come to life.

In *Yggdrasill*, persons created by the Game Master are known as Non-Player Characters, or NPCs. There are two types of NPC: **extras** and **personalities**.

Extras are no more than minor NPCs with generic characteristics. They represent the run-of-the-mill folk of Scandia. They animate the landscape; the heroes meet them, sometimes interact with them, and forget them immediately they have parted. Extras have only general characteristics, making it easier for the Game Master to integrate them into the game. Although the Game Master can make them more unique, through their personalities and roles, extras remain in a secondary role, occupying a marginal place in the saga.

Personalities are more developed, and are described later.

Describing Extras



Extras are described using simplified characteristics. There are six of these, known as **attributes**.

Conflict: This attribute represents the extra's combat ability and the level of opposition he offers in a direct attack. It is divided into two aspects: **Offensive**, which acts as a bonus to the extra's attacks, and **Defensive**, which improves the extra's ST when a character attempts to attack him (similar to a character's Physical Defence). The attribute is noted in the format "Conflict X / Y", where X corresponds to the Offensive score and Y to the Defensive.

Relationships: This attribute represents the extra's social aptitude. It allows him to communicate and interact with others.

Physical: This attribute corresponds to the extra's physical capacities. It represents his vigour, strength, and agility.

Mental: This attribute represents the extra's intellectual and sensory abilities. It incorporates reflection, intelligence, the extra's senses, and his astuteness.

Mystical: This attribute represents the extra's willpower and strength of mind, but also his ties with the supernatural forces of *Yggdrasill*. It is divided into two aspects: **Active** when the extra uses magic, and **Passive** when he suffers its effects (similar to a character's Mental Defence). It's noted in the same format as Conflict, ie "Mystical X / Y".

Vitality: This attribute represents the extra's health, and his resistance to blows and wounds. Unlike characters, Vitality is not a reserve of Hit Points. Instead, it defines three wound levels for the extra: **Unhurt**, **Wounded**, and **Dead**. When a single blow from an attack causes an extra damage equal to or exceeding his Vitality score, he drops one wound level (from Unhurt to Wounded, or from Wounded to Dead). Blows which aren't powerful enough to exceed the extra's Vitality score are considered to cause only superficial wounds.



famous Extras

Often, extras don't even have names. Maybe they're those three quarrelsome men sitting at the back of the inn, the stable boy who takes care of the characters' horses, those drunks passed out on the street, etc.

Sometimes, though, the Game Master may decide to expand on these minor NPCs. Maybe those three men are the Gudsson brothers, brutes who work the farm just east of the village. Or the young stable boy admires the heroes and begs to join them. Or hidden among the drunks on the street, a bandit notices the characters and decides to set an ambush for them.

Simple descriptions like these allow Game Masters to add more depth to extras and make them more noticeable and individual. There's no effect of doing this in game terms.

However, it can happen that an extra becomes so important to the story it's necessary to make them into a full personality. The three Gudsson brothers organise an expedition to kill the giants attacking their lands; one of the heroes decides to take the young stable boy under his wing and train him to be a warrior; the bandit spy becomes a sworn enemy. In cases like these, the Game Master simply has to fill out a character sheet for the upgraded extra.



How Attributes Work

Attributes for extras represent *modifiers*. They're applied to the tests made by players, as well as serving as statistics for extras.

When a hero acts against an extra (attempts to hit him, persuade him, etc), the value of the appropriate attribute is used as a penalty to the attempted action.

When an extra attempts an action, the value of the attribute becomes a bonus to his test: the Game Master adds it to the result of two ten-sided dice (2d10), and uses the final score to determine the success or failure of the action.

Attributes and Tests

Here are the most common uses for attributes. You can expand these to include other tests for particular situations.

Attribute	Active (bonus for the extra)	Passive (penalty for the hero)
Conflict	Attacking (Offensive)	Defending (Defensive)
Relationships	Seduce, lie, convince	Resist arguments, detect lies
Physical	Make an effort	Arm-wrestling, wrestling, chase
Mental	Analyse a situation	Spot someone, barter
Mystical	Use a magical effect	Resist a magical effect (MD)

Effects of Vitality

Vitality does not function like other attributes. It does not provide modifiers to tests, but is simply a threshold which, once crossed, takes an extra to a lower wound level.

A single blow that inflicts more points of damage than the extra's Vitality score takes that extra from the *Unhurt* wound level to *Wounded*; a second such attack takes him from *Wounded* to *Dead*, as long as the opponent is wielding a lethal weapon. The opponent may decide if the extra is knocked unconscious for 1d10 minutes, or killed. If killed, the extra is removed from the game with no chance of recovery. Note that at the Game Master's discretion, the extra may fall into a coma instead of dying immediately.

A blow powerful enough to cause damage equal to twice the extra's Vitality score kills the extra outright, taking him straight from *Unhurt* to *Dead*.

Damage \geq Vitality:
extra's wound level drops one level
Damage \geq Vitality \times 2:
extra is killed outright

Extras in Combat

The Conflict attribute defines an extra's attack bonus. It also acts as his Physical Defence when he is attacked.

When an extra manages to land an attack, he inflicts a number of points of damage equal to the sum of their Physical attribute, plus the success margin of the attack test, plus the result of a ten-sided die (1d10).

Attack: 2d10 + Conflict
Defence: 2d10 + Conflict

**Damage: Physical Attribute +
Success Margin + 1d10**

Individualising Extras

If you want to, you can simply use an endless array of faceless and anonymous extras, each one just like the rest. However, feel free to give them individual attributes or particular foibles if you want; this isn't complicated, nor does it take long. Your players will no doubt eventually get bored with fighting endless enemy *hirdmen*; but if an elite guardsman who bars their access to the longhouse of the *jarl* they must meet is described as "irascible", and is accompanied by another "with a long braided red beard", the scene will seem much more alive to the players.

There's no need for extras to resemble each other, and there are many ways you can add individuality to their descriptions. As you get used to it, your extras will rapidly transform into unique individuals—stout, muscled, affable, suspicious, ugly, broad-chested, svelte, seductive, and so on.

Random Extra Damage

Extras are minor individuals, usually anonymous to the player characters. Often, the Game Master will describe them quickly, focusing the players' attentions on one or two details. Their equipment can be kept vague, or roughly sketched out: the fifteen brigands who surround the heroes brandish an assortment of axes, swords and spears.

Likewise, the *Yggdrasill* rules do not require an extra's weapons to be specified, as it doesn't matter whether he's using his strength, guile, or combat skill to attack. Aiming for simplicity, and to give a sense that the extra is a match for the character, an extra simply isn't that detailed. It isn't necessary to work out whether a character was attacked with a spear or a sword, or whether an extra is using brute strength: describe the scene as you want, making the combat as dynamic as possible. Then roll 1d10, adding the extra's Physical attribute value and success margin to calculate how much damage he does (do not re-roll a result of 10).

The 1d10 bonus damage only applies if the extra is armed; in unarmed combat, an extra does not add the extra die roll to his damage.

Extra Archetypes

The table on the next page lists the attributes of various extras common in Scandia, allowing you to prepare extras quickly when you need them. These archetypes also serve as a basis from which to create more detailed secondary characters (see page 176).

Customising Extras Using Traits

The archetypes below provide a range of ready-to-play extras which can be further customised to give you just the extra you need. This is done by applying one or more of the following **traits** to an archetype's basic attributes.

Traits

The following traits allow you to modify an extra's basic attributes and provide some idea of his role and

Extra Archetypes

Berserker (elite)	Conflict 12 / 8 Mental 2	Relationships 2 Mystical 3 / 5	Physical 8 Vitality 12
Bondi (militia)	Conflict 6 / 3 Mental 3	Relationships 2 Mystical 2 / 1	Physical 3 Vitality 10
Hirdman (veteran)	Conflict 10 / 6 Mental 3	Relationships 3 Mystical 2 / 2	Physical 6 Vitality 10
Merchant (emmisary)	Conflict 2 / 2 Mental 4	Relationships 10 Mystical 1 / 2	Physical 3 Vitality 6
Noble (chief)	Conflict 8 / 7 Mental 5	Relationships 6 Mystical 2 / 2	Physical 5 Vitality 10
Peasant (villager)	Conflict 2 / 2 Mental 2	Relationships 2 Mystical 2 / 1	Physical 4 Vitality 8
Pirate (bandit)	Conflict 8 / 6 Mental 3	Relationships 4 Mystical 2 / 2	Physical 6 Vitality 10
Skald	Conflict 6 / 4 Mental 5	Relationships 10 Mystical 7 / 5	Physical 5 Vitality 8
Thulr	Conflict 5 / 3 Mental 6	Relationships 5 Mystical 8 / 6	Physical 4 Vitality 8
Volva	Conflict 4 / 2 Mental 8	Relationships 7 Mystical 8 / 8	Physical 3 Vitality 7

personality. Select three traits for each extra, and apply the effects to their attributes.

No attribute can ever drop below zero or rise above 20 as a result of traits, although a level of zero is possible. Effects of traits are cumulative.

Agile

The character controls his body perfectly. Supple and flexible, he can perform amazing feats of acrobatics.

Physical +3 / Vitality +1

Alert

The character has keen senses and is very vigilant.

Mental +2 / Mystical (+1 / +0)

Bold

The extra is brave to the point of fool-hardiness. **Mystical (+0 / +3)**

Brawler

In bare-handed combat, the extra is a deadly fighter.

Conflict (+1 / +0) / Physical +1 / +1d10 bare-handed damage

Brutal

The extra is a rough ill-mannered fellow who prefers to communicate with his fists.

Physical +1 / Relationships -2

Coward

The extra is a coward who always attempts to avoid direct confrontation.

Conflict (-1 / +0) / Mystical (+0 / -3)

Initiate

The extra understands the magical paths taught by Odin. He has mastered one spell for each 3 points of his (Active) Mystical attribute.

Mystical (+2 / +1) / Mental +1

Leader

This extra is the head of a warrior group, bandit gang, or other gathering dedicated to a particular goal.

Relationships +3 / Mental +1

Machiavellian

The character is cunning and manipulative. His pawns act in secrecy, and his flawed arguments always seem convincing.

Mental +2 / Relationships +2

Mystic

The extra is marked by Odin to use the supernatural energies which shape the universe.

Mystical (+3 / +1) / Physical -1

Powerful

The extra is enormously large, or someone of great physical strength.

Physical +2 / Vitality +2

Primitive

The extra comes from a culture which thrives in the savage expanses of Scandia. This may include, for example, the savage tribes of the Norwegian mountains.

Relationships -2 / Mystical (+2 / +2)

Robust

The character has an unusually powerful constitution. It takes a great deal of damage, or a particularly powerful blow, to kill him.

Vitality +3

Scholar

The character possesses a great deal of knowledge and wisdom.

Mental +3 / Mystical (+1 / +0)

Seducer

The extra knows how to use his body and natural charm to win favours from those around him. He may be a manipulator, or simply fond of sex.

Relationships +2 / Conflict (-2 / +0)

Superior Protection

The extra has heavy armour of very good quality. He may be wearing a helmet or furs which improve his defensive capabilities.

Conflict (+0 / +2) / Vitality +2

Superior Weapon

The extra has a particularly good weapon or item of equipment.

Conflict (+2 / +0) / Damage +2

Swift

The extra is very fast and acts quickly.

Conflict (+1 / +1) / Physical +1

Traitor

The extra has a talent for betrayal. He always feigns innocence, but has his own hidden agenda, and is ready to do anything to make it a reality.

Relationships -1 / Mental +1

Weak

The character has a feeble constitution and falls ill easily.

Vitality -3 / Physical -2

Veteran

The extra is a skilled warrior who has fought in many battles.

Conflict (+1 / +1) / Mystical (+0 / +1)

Violent

The extra is brutal and cruel. He loves combat above all else, and releases his full rage in the heat of battle.

Conflict (+3 / +0) / Relationships -2

Personalities

Personalities are major and important non-player



characters, vital to the saga. They are individuals: they have names, characteristics, and specific roles in the campaign.

Personalities are constructed in the same way that players create their own heroes, using the character creation rules (see page 79). The only exception is when drawing Fate runes (page 84): this is meaningless for most personalities, although Game Masters may choose to include Fate runes for the characters' main adversaries or allies.

Beasts & Monsters



The following is a brief Scandian bestiary. Each entry represents a typical member of its species. The most common animals are described, as well as a few supernatural monsters from the Norse legends. Other legendary creatures are described in the *Yggdrasill* supplement *The Nine Worlds*.

Statistics

Like extras, most beasts and monsters function as minor NPCs, and are defined by attributes, which the Game Master can modify by using traits (see above and also below). Unless you're trying to create particularly powerful monsters (such as mighty trolls), no beast or monster may have more than three traits.

However, certain remarkable—and often unique—creatures may use the complete character creation rules, and are treated like major NPCs (personalities) or full characters themselves.

Beast and Monster Attributes

Beasts and monsters use the same attributes as extras (see above). However, some attributes are only used in very specific circumstances, as follows.

Conflict: This attribute normally defines a creature's offensive and defensive capabilities.

Mental: This corresponds to the creature's ability to understand a command, instruction, or instinctively analyse a situation.

Relationships: For creatures of animal intelligence, or governed by their instincts, this attribute measures their show of strength (mostly intimidation). For creatures capable of being trained, the Relationships attribute modifies training-related tests (so that the penalty is equal to 10, minus the creature's Relationships score). For intelligent creatures, the attribute operates normally, measuring their social relationships and communicative ability.

Mystical: Some creatures have supernatural powers, and this attribute is used during related tests. For

non-supernatural creatures, the attribute serves simply as their Mental Defence.

Physical: The attribute represents the creature's physical capabilities.

Vitality: The attribute functions normally (see page 177).

Scandian Beasts

Bear

This powerful and respected animal lives in every Scandian forest, hunted for its flesh and fur. A powerful adversary, it can sometimes even defeat human opponents.

Conflict 6 / 4 Relationships 1 Physical 7
Mental 1 Mystical 0 / 1 Vitality 10v

Deer

Preferred game for the nobles of the North, deer of all kinds abound in the temperate forests of the Northern Kingdoms. Sagas sometimes accord supernatural or magical powers to these animals, and many have important roles in legends, often as messengers of kings.

Conflict 1 / 1 Relationships 0 Physical 6
Mental 0 Mystical 0 / 1 Vitality 8

Dog

These are the great hunting dogs, powerful and tough, which the Norsemen raise to guard their homes and hunt big game. Well trained, a dog of this kind is ready to attack a wild boar, and some are even used on the battlefield.

Conflict 4 / 3 Relationships 4 Physical 3
Mental 1 Mystical 0 / 1 Vitality 5

Horse

This Scandian mount is stockier and more robust than the European riding horse. It serves as a mount, and sometimes as a draft animal.

Conflict 1 / 2 Relationships 3 Physical 5
Mental 1 Mystical 0 / 1 Vitality 8

Reindeer

This animal is prized prey for the Scandians and Norwegians. Certain tribes in the most northern reaches, along with the Finns and Sami, raise it in captivity, and use it to draw carts and sledges. Its flesh is enjoyed, too, and its skin and antlers used by artisans. The reindeer is particularly well-adapted to the climate and geography of Scandia.



Conflict 0 / 1 Relationships 1 Physical 5
Mental 0 Mystical 0 / 1 Vitality 7

Whale

The whale is hunted for its meat and fat as well as for its ambergris. Whale hunts are veritable expeditions, and face great danger when they encounter whales moving in groups: more than once these great beasts have turned on their hunters, and in their rage can easily sink a knorr.

Conflict 2 / 4 Relationships 0 Physical 15
Mental 0 Mystical 0 / 1 Vitality 25

Wolf

Apart from a few solitary males, wolves live in packs, and are far more dangerous when encountered as such. Skilled in group hunting tactics, these fierce animals will attack a lone human, if lost and far from home. The wolf is feared and distrusted, considered as a carrion-eater ("Wolf's son" is a serious insult). It is hunted for its fur, and to protect villages from a pack becoming too bold.

Conflict 4 / 4 Relationships 1 Physical 3
Mental 1 Mystical 0 / 1 Vitality 5

Monsters and Creatures of Scandia

The creatures described here each represent average members of their species. Most have traits reflecting their monstrous natures; their effects on the creature's attributes have already been calculated. Additionally, some monsters have supernatural powers, particularly **Terror**. They use the same rules as extras, and are presented in the same way. You can add up to three additional traits, as well as innate powers, to customise them further.

Giant (Jotun)

Hailing from the lands of Jotunheim, a kingdom hidden in the roots of Yggdrasill, the giants are the hereditary enemies of the Aesir and Vanir. For the most part, they show equal hostility towards the people of Midgard, although there are very rare cases of individuals born from the union of a giant and a human being.

Giants range from three metres tall to more than twelve. Their physical strength makes them terrible foes,

Allies & Adversaries

but they are also feared for their cunning, and the violent rage which compels them to ravage everything around them.

Conflict 14 / 8 Relationships 2 Physical 14
Mental 2 Mystical 2 / 4 Vitality 22
Traits: Natural Armour (6), Terror (4), Ravager

Hel's Warriors

These rotting warriors are damned souls from the kingdom of the infernal goddess, Hel. It is very rare for them to haunt the lands of Midgard voluntarily; instead, their appearance may be the result of a plan or plot commanded by their terrible and cold goddess, or more often of a summoning performed by a *thulr*.

Conflict 10 / 6 Relationships 0 Physical 6
Mental 1 Mystical 1 / 5 Vitality 12
Traits: Natural Armour (4), Terror (4), Undying

Kraken

A marine monster much feared by sailors, the kraken resembles a giant octopus. Some are large enough to crush an entire ship with their tentacles, which can reach dozens of metres in length. They have slowly retreated far from navigated waters as a result of hunting, but nevertheless still infest the more isolated coasts of Bothnia, Kattegat, and the deserted fjords of western Norway. A few of the more powerful kraken may swim up the currents to the heart of the Baltic, and hunt for prey amongst its archipelagos.

Conflict 12 / 8 Relationships 0 Physical 18
Mental 1 Mystical 2 / 4 Vitality 30
Traits: Natural Armour (10), Terror (6), Ravager, Multiple Attacks (6), Weak Spot (eyes), Aquatic

Margygr

The Scandian siren is not known for her beauty; in fact, most are hideous. They have the upper body of a woman and the lower body of a fish. Sailors consider their appearance an omen, although whether for good or ill is something only the future can reveal. Legends says that a margygr which surfaces close to a ship and follows it will bring it bad luck, but if it swims away, luck will smile on the vessel. The *margygr* drag away men sleeping on ships to make them their lovers: they pull them down into their domain where, inevitably, they drown.

Conflict 4 / 8 Relationships 2 Physical 4
Mental 5 Mystical 4 / 4 Vitality 10
Traits: Aquatic, Murmur

Marmennill

Aquatic by nature, these are the males of the siren people. The *marmennill* can also live among human beings on earth, but they always long for the sea, and wish to rejoin the ocean. Humanoid, they can easily pass

as human out of the water, although they retain their original appearance, olive-skinned and beardless. The *marmennill* possess the gift of prophecy; If a fisherman catches one in his nets, he may demand the *marmennill* tell him his Fate, in return for being set free. The *marmennill* are not particularly hostile towards people, but nor are they particularly friendly, either.

Conflict 6 / 8 Relations 2 Physical 6
Mental 4 Mystical 4 / 4 Vitality 12
Traits: Aquatic

Troll

The word "troll" applies to supernatural beings who seem to hail from the lineage of giants (*jotun*). Though humanoid, they are unspeakably ugly, and often possess bestial traits such as horns, goat's hooves, or fur. Most are solitary by nature, and hate the other inhabitants of Scandia. Of all trolls, the legendary Grendel is the most notorious.

Conflict 14 / 6 Relationships 1 Physical 8
Mental 2 Mystical 3 / 3 Vitality 18
Traits: Natural Armour (6), Terror (4), Ravager

Winter Wolf

This monster resembles a wolf in all ways, save for its fur and size: the largest winter wolves can reach the size and build of an ox. Some legends say they are Fenris' progeny, born of matings with normal wolves; others connect them with the giants. Winter wolves are very intelligent and, although usually solitary, may form packs to carry out concerted attacks. In such cases, their combined power makes them formidable indeed, and even the greatest heroes cannot face them easily. Their fur is white and luxurious, and their pelts are highly prized.

Conflict 10 / 10 Relationships 1 Physical 7
Mental 3 Mystical 4 / 4 Vitality 12
Traits: Natural Armour (2), Terror (5), Ice Jaws

Traits

Alpha

The creature is the dominant individual in his group or pack. This may be an old male in a wolf pack, or a chief among Hel's Warriors. More powerful and vicious than its fellows, the alpha is a particular menace as it's usually supported by less powerful but numerous followers.

Conflict (+2/+2) Relationships +1 Physical +2
Mental +1 Mystical (+0 /+1) Vitality +2

Aquatic

The creature lives in the sea or in rivers. It can breathe underwater and swim at a speed equal to its Physical



attribute score in metres per combat round.

Armed

The creature is impressively armed, bearing excellent weapons and armour. These are adapted to its nature, and generally useless to human heroes.

Example: a giant's axe, an alfar's black iron cuirass, a ship's mast used as a club by a kraken, etc.

Conflict: (+4 / +4)

Colossal

The creature is far larger than most of its kind: a wolf as big as a pony, a kraken large enough to crush two knorr, a giant whose head is higher than the Uppsala watch-towers, etc.

Physical +3 / **Vitality** +5

Fierce

The creature attacks savagely and seeks to tear its prey to pieces.

Conflict (+2 / -1) / **Mental** -1

Freezing Fog*

The creature is permanently surrounded by a freezing mist, covering an area up to (Mystical / Active x 10) or (INS x 10) metres in diameter. All heroes caught in this area incur a -3 penalty to Perception tests and ranged weapon attacks. Additionally, at the beginning of each combat round, a character must make a Vigour test against a success threshold of 14 + the creature's INS or Mystical / Active score, or lose 1 Hit Point due to the biting cold.

Ice Jaws*

The creature's jaws radiate intense cold, and paralyse its victims. A target wounded by such an attack must make a Tenacity + Mental Defence test against a success threshold of 22 (Difficult), + the creature's Mystical / Active attribute. On a failure, the target feels his body start to freeze: his Initiative is reduced by -2, and he begins each combat round on his second action (suffering the -2 secondary action penalty). Multiple bites from Ice Jaws do not have a cumulative effect.

Multiple Attacks (x)

The monster may attack several times in one action;

each attack requires a separate test. It may attack up to (x) different targets, or concentrate on one victim. Each attack incurs a penalty equal to double the number of attacks attempted (for example, a -6 penalty for three attacks).

Murmur

The creature uses its mode of communication to speak to its victims and make them fall under its spell. A target must make an Instinct + MD test against a success threshold of 14 + the creature's Mystical / Active score in order to keep his free will. On a failure, the target mindlessly obeys the first command the creature gives.

Natural Weapons*

Great horns, enormous claws, or razor-sharp fangs, the monster has particularly deadly natural weapons. When rolling for damage, the monster rolls 2d10 instead of 1d10, and uses the better result.

Natural Armour (x)

The creature's hide is as tough as leather, its scales as hard as iron, its fur thick, or perhaps it simply cannot feel pain. Whatever the case, this gives it an important amount of natural protection. X corresponds to the creature's armour value.

Ravager

The creature's attacks are devastating and can tear its victims to pieces. Re-roll any damage die which rolls a "10" and add the new result to the total.

Terror (x)

The creature provokes fear and terror in the hearts of all who face it. Targets must make an Average (ST 14) Tenacity + Mental Defence test; the creature's Terror value (x) acts as a penalty to the test. On a failure, the target incurs a penalty equal to his failure margin to all of his actions while fighting the creature.

Undying

The creature is particularly tough. It must suffer two wounds before being wounded. It only dies after suffering damage equal to three times its Vitality.

Weak Spot*

The creature has a vulnerable or exposed area, which it attempts to protect at all costs. A character attempting to strike this area incurs a -12 penalty on his attack test: if he succeeds, the creature's Vitality score is halved for this attack.

* This trait may only be taken by supernatural monsters.

Unique Creatures

Unique creatures are monsters which are little more than legends for most folk, or mighty trolls told of in the sagas. They use the same character creation rules as the players' characters: they have characteristics, some have skills, and others have special powers, some of which are unique. They are presented in the same format as the characters and heroes of Scandia: here is one of these incredible creatures.

The Kraken-Lord of the Lofoten Islands

Few legends are more feared among Scandian sailors than that of the Kraken-Lord of the Lofoten Islands. It's said it is thirty times the size of a horse, and that its tentacles are large enough to crush the greatest longship, leaving no debris larger than a log. Men killed by the Kraken-Lord disappear forever, and neither Freya, nor Odin, nor even Hel can find their souls. It's rumoured the Kraken-Lord is immortal, and has lived in the maelstrom since the dawn of time.

The Kraken-Lord is said to be one of Njord's children, born to avenge an insult given him by Thor, and to punish the Norsemen who laughed. It's believed the god of thunder fears facing the monster, and has sworn that whoever slays it will be his equal at Odin's table in Valhalla.

Or so it's believed...

Because no seafarer has ever had a direct confrontation with this mythical creature and survived to tell the tale. However, no one can ignore the worrying number of ships which vanish every year among the Lofoten Islands.

Statistics

Body

Strength 10 Vigour 14 Agility 6

Mind

Intellect 2 Perception 4 Tenacity 8

Soul

Charisma 0 Instinct 6 Communication 0

Reaction: 12

Movement: 20

Physical Defence: 26

Mental Defence: 13

Hit Points: 112 (56/28/0/ -28)

Armour: 12 points due to its thick, scaly skin

Skills: Seize and Crush 16, Swim 20

Traits: Aquatic, Freezing Fog, Multiple Attacks (6), Natural Armour (12), Ravager, Terror (10), Weak Spot (Eyes)

Equipment And Travel

The heroes of *Yggdrasill* will wander the lands of Scandia and discover new horizons. They will engage in many battles, and while some of the people they meet will be friendly, many will not. On their travels, characters will use tools and equipment to help them on their way.

This chapter contains a non-exhaustive list of the most common equipment *Yggdrasill* characters can use and buy. It includes weapons and armour, but also a great number of ordinary objects. Prices are purely indicative: indeed, many communities don't use money at all, and instead barter for what they need. The prices given will help you estimate how valuable one item is in comparison with another, but bear in mind these relative values also depend on region and current demand; a warring clan will pay more for weapons, while one suffering from famine will demand far more furs from hunters in exchange for their scanty food supplies.

The Game Master is free to modify the following approximate rates of exchange to reflect situations and perceptions.

Here are a few rough rates of exchange. For simplicity's sake, it's assumed these apply throughout Scandia unless the Game Master rules otherwise.

8 ounces of silver = 1 ounce of gold
2 ounces of silver = 1 milk cow
1 ounce of silver = 3 sheep
1 ounce of silver = 9 metres of woven wool (about 1 metre wide)



Hacksilver

In the age of legends, the Norsemen do not mint their own coin. They may at times use foreign money, acquired during expeditions by either pillage or trade, but most often they will estimate its value according to its weight in silver or gold rather than any face value. Silver is easy to re-forg or transport in the form of rings of silver such as armlets or bracelets, which is the most common form the characters will encounter it in.

Gold and silver is measured in *eyrir*, a word originating with the Latin *aurus* (gold). An *eyrir* weighs 27 grams, or roughly one ounce.

When precious metals are found not in the forms of reformed rings, but as manufactured objects, ornaments, or pillaged jewellery, they are literally hacked apart with whatever weapons are at hand, and weighed using a small, easily carried scale to easily assess its value. This is known as *hacksilfr*, or hacksilver.



The ounce of silver is the basic "currency" in the Scandian kingdoms.

Equipment & Travel



JÉRÔME 09

Weapons

Melee Weapons	Damage Bonus	Hit Points	Encumbrance	Price (silver pieces)
Short Weapons				
Dagger*	+3	9	0	5
Hatchet*	+4	8	0	3
Long Weapons				
Short Sword / Sax	+5	11	0	20
Long Sword	+7	11	1	40
War Axe	+9	10	2	10
Two-handed Weapons				
Long Axe	+14	12	3	30
Two-handed Sword	+12	14	3	50
Pole Arms				
Spear*	+10	11	2	40

* These weapons may be thrown (see below).

Ranged Weapons	Damage Bonus	Hit Points	Encumbrance	Range (S/M/L/E)	Price (silver pieces)
Thrown Weapons					
Javelin	+6	7	2	5/10/20/40	4
Dagger	+3	9	0	3/6/9/12	5
Throwing Axe	+4	8	0	3/6/9/15	3
Throwing Spear	+8	11	4	5/10/15/30	40
Missile Weapons					
Hunting Bow	+6	8	2	10/20/40/80	10
War Bow	+7	10	2	10/30/50/100	20
Sling	+4	12	0	10/20/30/40	5

Of course, it's most commonly found in small silver blocks, or larger ingots for bigger transactions. Blocks range from one, two, or five ounces; ingots may weigh as much as ten.

In *Yggdrasill*, to simplify transactions of this nature, we use the term piece as a unit of value. One piece corresponds to that portion of a silver bracelet equivalent to a tenth (1/10) of an ounce of silver. This is the basic unit for buying cheaper equipment.

As Game Master, you might decide to keep the barter system in ounces of gold and silver for the sake of authenticity. This alternative is provided to simplify trade and purchases by characters.

Weapons

No Scandian hero could imagine facing Fate without a decent weapon in his hand. Most sagas are carved in blood and fury. Beset by dangers on every side, a wise character relies mainly on his strength, but never shuns the aid of two feet of tempered steel.

Weapons are defined by their **encumbrance**, **Hit Points**, and **damage bonus**.

Encumbrance represents the weight of a weapon, and how much it restricts its wielder's movements.

Hit Points correspond to a weapon's toughness. When a character achieves a critical success on a parry or attack



Encumbrance

Most small daily objects don't encumber the person carrying them. A character can carry ten or twelve such minor objects around with him. Keys, purses, jewels, and other similar items aren't counted either.

Encumbrance doesn't so much represent *weight*, but rather how much an item of equipment 'gets in the way', and restricts a character's movements.

As a result, normal clothing does not encumber, but armour, and winter clothing do.

Make a note of how much a character's equipment impacts on his actions, and be sure to let players know when their characters are *Hindered* or *Encumbered* (see page 110). It's then up to them to deal with this excess equipment.



test, reduce the attacking or parrying weapon's Hit Points by 1. On a fumble (a critical failure) on a parry or attack test, reduce the weapon's Hit Points by 2.

When a weapon's Hit Points reach zero, the weapon is useless (broken, bent, crushed, etc), and it must be exchanged for another, or, if the Game Master permits, repaired (by replacing the broken haft of an axe, for example).

Damage Bonus indicates how dangerous the weapon is. It is added to the success margin of an attack test, plus any other bonuses, to obtain the total damage caused by an attack.

Finally, the price of the object (in silver pieces) gives a rough indication of how much it is worth if traded in Scandia.

Armour

Scandian warriors use all kinds of protection to keep themselves safe from harm, from simple vests reinforced with pieces of leather to elaborate chainmail coats decorated with gold thread.

A character may only wear one kind of armour at a time; it's impossible to wear two types of armour to combine their armour values. However, some optional pieces of armour (such as a helmet, or bracers) may be

added to a character's basic armour, and provide a bonus to its armour value.

For example: Equipping himself for battle, Svein dons a coat of mail over his usual clothes. The armour value of this armour is 9. Then he puts on a helmet and leather bracers, which each offer a bonus of +3 and +1 respectively. His total armour value is now 13.

Armour	Armour Value (AV)	Enc.	Price (silver pieces)
Leather Vest	2	0	3
Reinforced Leather	4	1	10
Lamellar	6	3	20
Mail Shirt	9	5	80

Pieces of Armour	AV	Enc.	Price
Helmet	+3	2	20
Fur Shoulder Guards	+2	1	6
Reinforced Leather Bracers	+1 (pair)	0	3
Reinforced Leather Greaves	+2 (pair)	1	4

Armour Descriptions

Leather Vest: This is as much a piece of daily clothing as armour. It covers the torso, stomach, and hips; some also have short or long sleeves. The leather is soft and supple and does not restrict movement.

Reinforced Leather: The vest is thicker, and lined with fabric. Pieces of metal such as flat copper, bronze, or iron rivets add extra protection to exposed areas. The collar sometimes reaches to the throat.

Lamellar: Strips of more rigid leather are attached or stitched onto the vest. The chest, stomach, shoulder-blades, and elbows are particularly well protected. Tough, rounded, semi-rigid pieces of leather sometimes cover the shoulders.

Mail Shirt: made up of hundreds of iron rings, a mail shirt covers the same parts of the body as a leather vest. It never hangs lower than the knees as this restricts combat mobility. An undershirt is worn beneath the mail shirt: sometimes this is a leather vest.

Helmet: the most common type of helmet has a nose guard and eye guards to protect the eyes. Shaped like a metal bowl, metal strips are riveted in place for extra rigidity. The inside is lined with leather and cloth to cushion the wearer from shocks.

Fur Shoulder Guards: This is usually a single large piece of animal hide covering the wearer's shoulders and neck. As well as its protection, the nature of the hide (wolf,

bear, bison, and so on) indicates the warrior's status.

Reinforced Leather Bracers: These protect the forearms, from the back of the hand to the elbow. Often carved with decorative motifs, they are composed of strips of stiff leather tied with thick laces.

Reinforced Leather Greaves: Tied around the thighs and/or calves, these protect the warrior from attacks targeting the legs. Craftsmen often ornament greaves with richly decorated inlays.

In combat, or whenever an impact causes damage to a character, his armour value is subtracted from the damage incurred. Damage may be completely negated by armour in this way. However, armour does not protect a character from losing Hit Points by other means, such as falling, poison, or drowning.

If a warrior falls into water while wearing armour, its armour value becomes a penalty applicable to all Swim tests.

Shields

There is only one kind of shield used in the Northern Kingdoms. It is round, with a diameter equal to the length of an arm, from the shoulder to the wrist, and protects the warrior's left side. Made of wood, it is covered by stretched leather and usually painted. A bowl of metal protects the centre of the shield and the warrior's arm.

Shield **PD+3** **Enc: 0/2*** **Value: 4**

***In Combat / Out of Combat:** The second value is the encumbrance value when the bearer is not in combat. Once attached to the arm in combat, the warrior is trained to use his weapon and shield together, and is not encumbered by it; however, when carried in other non-combat situations, usually strapped to the back, it often gets in the way and increases encumbrance by +2.

Unlike other pieces of armour, a shield does not modify a character's armour value. Instead, it improves the character's Physical Defence score; it's used to deflect attacks, rather than as armour, which absorbs impacts.

Day-to-day Equipment

Clay bowls, gold and silver jewellery, fur coats, rope, drinking horns; all these are items a character might use during his adventures, often without noticing. The

Armour and Charisma

Armour protects a warrior, but it also indicates his status, his prestige, and his wealth. Scandia's *jarls* and greatest warriors often array themselves in richly decorated and unique pieces of armour, costing five times the price of normal armour of the same type. Such pieces may be decorated with precious metals, woven with gold and silver thread, carved with runes, images of animals, and scenes from the sagas.

The wearer of superior armour of this kind gains a +1 bonus, for each armour piece so decorated, to all Charisma tests used to intimidate or impress those around him. Naturally he must be wearing the armour at the time.

following list gives some of these items, together with their approximate value in silver pieces.

Kitchenware usually consists of clay plates and soapstone cups (sometimes metal for richer owners). People normally eat with their fingers, or with knives (everyone always carries at least one), although wooden spoons are also used.

Kitchen Utensils

Kitchen Utensils	Price (silver pieces)
Clay plates (×6)	1
Clay platter	2
Clay pot	2
Drinking horn	1 to 6, according to how elaborate it is
Knife	1
Metal cauldron	4
Metal cup	1
Metal plate (×1)	1
Ornate metal platter	5
Soapstone cup (×3)	1
Spoons (×10)	1

Clothes

Shirts, coats, cloaks, leather accessories, torcs, under-clothes, etc; all civilised people wear these in public.

Equipment & Travel

Clothes	Price (bad quality/ordinary/luxury)
Belt	5 / 10 / minimum 20
Boots	10 / 20 / minimum 30
Cloak	5 / 10/ minimum 30
Fur coat	30 / 60 / minimum 100
Leather trousers	20 / 40 / minimum 70
Robe	5 / 10 / minimum 40
Shirt	4 / 8 / minimum 30
Torc	10 / 20 / minimum 30
Underclothes	1 / 5 / minimum 10
Wool trousers	10 / 30 / 50
Woollen coat	10 / 16 / minimum 50

Cloth and Rugs (1m wide)	Price (silver pieces)
Piece of hemp (5m)	2
Piece of wool (5m)	5
Piece of linen (5m)	3
Piece of leather (1m)	9
Rug, small	16
Rug, large	40
Woollen hanging	20

Accessories & Jewellery

As well as clothes, characters often wear a few accessories or items of jewellery. Most Scandians enjoy dressing themselves up with jewellery and ornaments, both for aesthetic reasons and as a show of status.

Accessories	Price (silver pieces)
Bone comb	1 to 5
Leather purse	5
Pouch	2 to 5
Wicker basket	1

Jewellery	Price (silver pieces)
Bracelet	10 to 500
Brooch	10 to 500
Necklace	10 to 1,000
Ring	5 to 100

Travelling Gear

The Norsemen are great explorers; those about to face the hostile wilderness and bad roads of Scandia gather all the equipment necessary for their travels.

Item	Price (silver pieces)
Bag, small	2
Bag, large	6
Lantern	12
Rope (10m)	1



Option: Armour Damage

The following optional rule can be used to simulate the effects of armour wear and tear. Each time a character's armour negates all the damage from a single attack, the armour (or pieces of armour) is damaged.

Reduce the armour value of one piece of armour worn by the target by one point. Once the armour value is reduced to zero, that item of armour becomes useless, and will no longer offer any protection.

Armour may be repaired as long as it has lost less than half its total armour value. A craftsman skilled in leather- or metal-working, or armouring, must make an extended test with a period of one day and a success threshold of 19 (Difficult) to do so.

For example: Svein receives a sneak blow to the flank in the midst of battle, incurring 12 points of damage. However, his armour negates all of the damage. The Game Master decides to use the armour damage rule.

Svein's player must reduce the armour value of either Svein's mail shirt by -1 (down to 8), or that of his helmet (down to +2), or those of his bracers (reducing it to 0, and therefore destroying them). The player decides Svein's mail shirt has been damaged; several rings have been torn off, and the mail shirt now only has an armour value of 8.

Svein's total armour value is now reduced to 12.



Skates (pair)	20
Sledge	80
Tinder	2
Waterskin	2

Medical Equipment & Medicines

There is no set standard for medical equipment and medicines: each healer has his own choice of materials and equipment. Most of the time, these are herbs and potions he has concocted himself. For a few silver pieces (from 2 to 5), anyone can get hold of a pouch with clean bandages and materials necessary to stitch a wound.

Cures and potions are not available for sale; anyone who wants to benefit from them must pay for the services of a *thulr* or healer.

Animals

Horses are reserved for travel and war; peasants raise oxen to work their fields. Dogs guard herds or houses, and cats keep rats away from granaries. Each family raises the animals they need, and only horses are generally traded.

Animal	Price (silver pieces)
Bull	30
Cat	5
Chicken (x2)	1
Cow	20
Dog, guard	15
Dog, hunting	20
Dog, war	30
Falcon	20
Goose	1
Horse, Riding	100
Horse, War	200 to 1000
Ox	12
Pig	10
Sheep	4

Buildings

These costs include construction, building materials, and manual labour.

Building	Price (silver pieces)
Cabin	100 to 200
Farm	1000 to 5000
House, large	500 to 2000
House, small	200 to 1000
Longhouse	5000 to 100,000
Palace	500,000 to 5,000,000
Workshop	1200 to 2000

Furnishings	Price (silver pieces)
Bed, double	30
Bed, single	18
Bench	5
Brazier	6
Chair	3
Chest, large	30
Chest, small	15
Keg	2
Stool	1
Table, large	35
Table, small	10

The Scandian laws of hospitality allow all travellers, apart from those who have been banished, to benefit from shelter and a meal when needed. For this reason, there is no need for inns or roadhouses.

In the final analysis, the *jarl* himself is responsible for travellers in his lands, and must provide them with lodgings and food; in towns, there are establishments specifically dedicated to doing so. Often, the food and shelter there is less than ideal, however, which prompts many lower-status travellers to haggle with locals for an empty house to lodge in and the other things they need.

Organising a Feast

Scandian nobles are fond of endless feasts. The most important invite dozens, if not hundreds, of guests under their roof. Religious festivals, or those organised after military victories or expeditions returned from afar, are also good excuses to organise sumptuous feasts.

Food	Price (silver pieces)
Apples (x6)	1
Barley (a barrel)	2
Beef, per kg	3
Berries (1 kg)	1
Cabbage	1
Chestnuts (x12)	1
Chicken, per piece	1
Crustaceans, per kg	2
Eggs (x12)	1
Fish, per kg	1
Game, per kg	4
Garlic, per kg	2
Goose, per piece	1
Honey, per kg	5
Mushrooms (1 kg)	4
Mutton, per kg	1
Plums (x12)	1
Pork, per kg	2
Salt, per kg	3
Seafood, per kg	2
Turnips (x4)	1
Walnuts (x12)	1
Wheat (a barrel)	5



Drink	Price (silver pieces)
Beer	2
Cow's milk, per litre	1
Fruit liquor	5
Goat's milk, per litre	2
Mead, per litre	5
Wine, per litre	15

Starting Character Equipment

To work out what equipment a new character possesses, the Game Master and player should make selections from the above lists. Use common sense: a beginning character will have his weapons and armour, as well as basic equipment. Apart from nobles, and a few *bondi* or *hirdmen*, only those who raise them possess horses. Characters will have a place to live, and a few goods they have made themselves or inherited. Finally, as personal wealth, each character begins the game with a few silver rings, usually about 1d10×10 silver pieces in value.

Adventuring in Scandia



As attached as characters can be to their clan, their adventures will doubtless take them to new places, perhaps even beyond the limits of Midgard to the other kingdoms of *Yggdrasill*.

Scandia has few well-maintained roads, and most are no more than dirt paths. Sometimes there are no roads at all, if an area is isolated enough. There are many wild and unexplored areas, dangerous for any expedition.

The sea offers an alternative to land travel, but it has dangers all of its own. However, the Norsemen count among their ranks the best sailors in Midgard, and prefer this mode of transport above all others.

Travelling, exploring, and the conquest of new territories are reoccurring themes in the sagas. No doubt the characters will have their fair share of exploits to accomplish in their Scandian adventures!

Travelling in Scandia

Travellers aiming to visit new lands have a choice of several modes of transport, presented in the table below. Each mode of transport indicates the average distance which can be covered in about 10 hours of travel. At a forced march, it's possible to double this distance.

Mode of Transport	Average Distance Covered (10 hours travelling)
-------------------	---

Cart	20km
Foot	25km
Horseback	50km
Sledge	30km
Barge	30km
Ship, rowing	20km
Ship, sailing	60km

Note: Bad roads slow travel a great deal; carts often have to be pushed out of deep wheel-ruts. Travel by foot or on horseback is extremely fatiguing, and frequent rest-stops must be made.

Sledges can only be used on thick snow. They ignore the "Snow" travel modifier, although "Blizzard" applies normally.

Weather Conditions and Travel Modifiers

The distances indicated above assume favourable conditions, on relatively good roads in decent weather.

Terrain and weather both influence this. The following table provides modifiers for particular conditions. Multiply the distance covered in one day by the travel modifier to obtain the actual distance the characters are able to travel.

These modifiers are cumulative. So, crossing a mountain on foot when it is snowing means the distance covered is reduced to 1/4 of 25km; the character travels only 6km (always round down). If the ground is snow-covered, too, divide the distance by two again; in this case, the character ends up only being able to cover three kilometres that day.

Weather Conditions	Travel Modifier
--------------------	-----------------

Blizzard	× 1/3
Moderate Rain	× 3/4
Torrential Rain	× 2/3
Snow	× 1/2
Favourable Winds at Sea	× 3/2
Storm at Sea	× 1/3

Terrain	Travel Modifier
---------	-----------------

Dense Forest	× 1/2
Forest and Uneven Terrain	× 1/3
Mountains	× 1/4
Rough Terrain	× 2/3
Steep Hills	× 1/2
Swamp	× 1/3



Experience and Renown

Experience



As your characters adventure, they will accomplish many feats, and learn from their experiences to improve their abilities and grow stronger.

In game terms, this process is represented by the acquisition of **Legend Points** (LP). Legend Points allow characters to increase their skill levels and develop their knowledge and domains of expertise.

At the end of every adventure a character has participated in, he receives a number of Legend Points, determined by the Game Master. The character's player may then spend these Legend Points, to do things like improve characteristic scores and skill levels, and learn and improve combat feats and spells.

The Game Master and player should work together to provide a satisfying in-game explanation of how these improvements fit with the events the character has lived through.



Legend Points

Action Accomplished	Legend Points awarded
Participating in the adventure	2
Roleplaying your character convincingly, adding to the game.	0 - 2
Proposing ideas which advance the game; solving a puzzle or resolving a situation with cunning or intelligence; discovering secrets.	0 - 2
Acting heroically, attempting dangerous actions worthy of a saga, risking your life for you clan or group.	1 - 2
Facing a dangerous foe, overcoming an obstacle, avenging yourself or your family or blood brother	1 - 2
Gaining prestige, obtaining a privileged position, improving your status.	1



Gaining Legend Points

Only characters who learn quickly will survive Scandia's many dangers. Overcoming heroic obstacles, living through epic adventures, fighting terrible enemies—these are all ways for a character to gain experience and grow.

But experience is not the only teacher. Characters can also improve their abilities by training, either under the benevolent eye of an accomplished expert or mentor, or by training alone and regularly.

Your Saga

Your characters gain Legend Points by surviving heroic adventures and taking part in the scenarios created by the Game Master. You can keep or spend your Legend Points as you wish.

The Game Master determines the number of Legend Points awarded to each character at the end of the scenario. Players may spend their Legend Points immediately, or the Game Master may require them to be spent between adventures. The table above is a rough guide to the number of Legend Points to award.

Generally, a player receives 2 to 10 Legend Points per adventure, depending on his contribution to the group's goals and their exploits. The Game Master is the ultimate arbiter, and can determine how fast or slow the characters improve, and set the challenges of her adventures accordingly.

***For example:** Svein returns home after a short adventure in Norway. He has fought pirates, found their hideout, and—notably—defeated their chief. He also led a rebellion against the pirates, and won a victory in a battle that had seemed lost.*

At the end of the adventure, the Game Master decides how many Legend Points Svein receives. He gained 2LP for participating in the adventure; +2LP for facing a powerful enemy; +2LP for vanquishing that powerful enemy; and +2LP for overcoming a difficult situation by coming up with a cunning plan. This gives Svein a total of 8 Legend Points, which he can spend immediately to improve his statistics, or keep for use later.

Training

A character may take time to train, alone or with a master. This allows him to develop his characteristics and skills, or even learn a new combat feat or spell.

Training takes time, and a character doing so may not interrupt his training (to take part in an adventure, for example), without risking losing all the benefits he's gained so far.

A character training alone gains 1LP for every week spent training; with the help of a master, he gains 1 LP for every 5 days.

Only a character with a level of at least *Expert* in a skill can act as a master to train a student in that skill, or a related domain, combat feat, or spell. The master may train a student up to his own skill level, but no further.

Legend Points gained through training may only be used to improve the skill or characteristic concerned, or to purchase a specific combat feat or spell.

Skills marked with an asterisk (see the "Skills" chapter, page 119) cannot be trained without a master.

***For example:** Svein wants to improve his Ride skill. He has decided to return to his jarl's village and to train there. Every day, he mounts his horse and spends long hours riding.*

He trains like this for two weeks, and gains 2 Legend Points. At the end of this period, Svold Berrensson, the horsemaster at the jarl's stables, begins giving him advice. Svold is an Expert rider, and spends ten days with Svein, giving him another 2 Legend Points. Svein now has 4LP with which to improve his Ride skill.

Spending Legend Points

By spending his Legend Points, a character can improve his skills and characteristics, and gain new skills and combat feats. In so doing, he can grow closer to the status of a mythical hero.

Improving Characteristics

To improve a characteristic, the player must spend a number of Legend Points equal to five times the characteristic score he wants to attain. Each point of increase must be bought separately.

***For example:** Svein wants to increase his Vigour characteristic from 2 to 3. This will cost him 15 Legend Points.*

Improving or Acquiring a Skill

Improving a skill level costs a number of Legend Points equal to twice the skill level the character wants to attain. Each point of increase must be bought separately.

Experience & Renown

To acquire a new skill at level 1, the character must spend 5 Legend Points. Thereafter, each new level may be purchased as normal (4 LP for level 2, 6 LP for level 3, and so on).

***For example:** Svein wants to improve his Ride skill. His skill level is 3. He must spend 8 Legend Points to reach level 4. He also wants to learn a new Acrobatics skill. This will cost 5 Legend Points to acquire at level 1.*

Acquiring a New Combat Feat

To acquire a new combat feat, a character must spend Legend Points equal to five times the level of the feat. The character must fulfil any prerequisites.

Note: A combat feat may have a variable level (between 1 and 4). Each level must be bought separately, and in order: a character must buy the level 1 combat feat, before buying level 2 of the feat, and so on.

***For example:** Svein wants to learn the Impetuous Charge combat feat. He studies this with a veteran hirdman he knows. As this is a level 1 combat feat, it will cost Svein 5 Legend Points and some time (as well as a few bruises!).*

Acquiring a New Spell

As with combat feats, the character must first meet any skill level prerequisites before acquiring a new magical spell.

He must then spend a number of Legend Points equal to five times the level of the spell to be acquired. If the spell is an improved version of a spell, the character must first possess the original spell or all lower versions of the spell.

Recalculating Secondary Characteristics

If your character has used his Legend Points to improve his characteristics, it may be necessary to recalculate any secondary characteristics which are based on the changed characteristics.



Renown



Characters in *Yggdrasill* are integral parts of their societies. They undertake missions to serve their *jarls* or kings; they seek to gain power or personal wealth; and, most of all, they embrace the Fate the Norns have woven for them since birth.

More than their exploits and adventures, heroes carve their very names in blood and fire, and it is the epic tales of them as heroes which the skalds use to create immortal sagas.

This is how characters become heroes, covering their names with undying glory so even the gods will recognise them, and so doing they carve themselves a place among the great heroes of Scandia. A hero who surrounds himself in life with great renown will have his deeds woven into the very fabric of Scandian society.

Renown measures a character's reputation in the Scandian kingdoms, and sometimes even beyond. The higher it is, the better known the character through his acts and exploits, and the more likely to be recognised wherever he travels.

Renown does not account for the morality of a character's actions: great renown can be a result of a character's heroic battles, but also of his crimes as a bloodthirsty bandit. It is only important that his deeds are *recognised*.

Renown in Play

The **Renown** score allows a Game Master to determine if a character is recognised during his travels and adventures, depending on where he is. Recognition may have positive effects (a well-known hero may be warmly welcomed by a local lord) or negative ones (a notorious bandit may be challenged by a member of a clan that has suffered from his attacks). The nature of recognition depends on the actions which created the Renown.

Characters can also use the Renown of NPCs to recognise them, learn their reputations, and glean information about the people they meet on their travels.

When a character is created, his starting Renown is equal to his highest ranking skill.

Archetypes

Renown makes use of archetypes, as described in character creation (see page 79).

The following is a list of archetypes, and examples of the roles they play in Scandian society:

- **Nobles:** *Jarls*, war chiefs, lord's counsellors.
- **Warriors:** *Hirdmen*, savage warriors, mercenaries, pirates
- **Sages:** *Volva*, *thulr*, skalds, healers.
- **Workers:** Craftsmen, farmers, foresters, miners.
- **Travellers:** Merchants, emissaries, wandering blacksmiths, spies.

Feats and Exploits

The heroic deeds a character commits have a **Deed Level** which varies from 1 to 8 points.

The Deed Level depends on several factors:

- **The magnitude of the consequences** the deed has on the community the hero is in at the time he commits the deed. This community may be a few isolated individuals, to the inhabitants of a city. The deed must change or significantly influence the life of the community. For example, a simple fight between drunkards does not affect many people (the drunkards, and maybe their families), while the death of a *jarl* affects an entire domain. A group of bandits who rob a traveller do not have much of an impact (only the victim and those close to him); whereas, if pirates attack the trading ships that supply a village, then the whole village community suffers directly from the effects.
- **The heroic aspects of the deed itself;** an extraordinary deed displays abilities far above those of ordinary people. Either by using particular powers (combat feats, magic, enchanted artefacts, etc), or because the deed itself was said to be impossible, or at least very dangerous to accomplish. For example, a single warrior managing to kill a kraken is considered an impossible deed. The use of combat feats or magical skills in combat impresses common folk who witness the battle and the deeds of their new heroes.

Using the above two criteria, the Game Master determines the Deed Level according to how it is appreciated by those witnessing it. The lists below provides some examples:

Deed Level 1

This category includes deeds which are important to the character, but which involve very few people, or which are easily accomplished.

Examples:

- Fighting bandits on the road.
- Winning in physical games or feats during a festival.
- Discovering a treasure or pillaging a hamlet.
- Being called on to give advice to a *jarl* during council.
- Marrying someone from one's own village.
- Being the last to pass out during a feast.
- Profaning the tomb of a local ancestor.

Deed Level 2

This category includes deeds important to the character which affect several dozen people (a village, a small community, etc), or which are not easily accomplished (requiring combat feats, magic, etc).

Examples:

- Fighting in a judicial duel, defeating a powerful enemy.
- Bringing back the head of a savage beast that terrorised a village.
- Saving the life of a *jarl* or an influential person in the community.
- Facing down a *jarl* or fighting in the longhouse.
- Ending a vendetta.
- Pillaging a small village.

Deed Level 4

In these deeds, the character must have used extraordinary means (magic) or heroic ones (combat feats). Deeds which affect a significant community (a town, a domain, etc), or which are believed to be impossible, fall into this category.

Examples:

- Being part of a king's council and convincing him through one's arguments.

Experience & Renown

- Pillaging a town.
- Standing alone against a group of at least a hundred men.
- Bringing back the head of a troll that terrorised a village.
- Ending an epidemic.
- Opposing someone of important renown.
- Showing powerful magical power.

Deed Level 8

These deeds always require extraordinary and heroic actions. It's vital that they affect a large community, and include succeeding against odds believed by all to be impossible.

For example:

- Conquering or pillaging a kingdom.
- Being crowned king.
- Bringing back the head of a troll that terrorised a kingdom.
- Opposing a god or his agents.
- Provoking the destruction of an entire clan.
- Having the gods intervene in one's favour.

The above examples are not exhaustive. However, they should provide a basis to enable Game Masters to assign a Deed Level to a given character's deed.

Witnesses and Locations

Once you've decided on a Deed Level for the deed in question, you must then evaluate the second element for calculating Renown: the speed at which knowledge of the deed itself spreads.

To do so, consider the number of witnesses present and their potential influence. It doesn't matter if you defeat a terrifying troll if no one is there to see it. Of course, sagas play their part in spreading such tales as entertainment, and as such are vitally important: the tale circulates, retold by the skalds and connecting the character's name to the deed.

Consider also the location where the deed took place. Using the above example: killing a troll at the bottom of a

valley lost in the mountains will not have the same impact as killing it before the walls of the capital city, during the day and before the eyes of the city's inhabitants.

The **speed** at which the tale of the deed spreads ranges from 1 to 4, as follows:

Speed 0: No witnesses to the deed.

Speed 1: A few witnesses with little influence in their community, such as isolated farmers.

Speed 2: A few witnesses with little influence, up to a crowd of the same. Or, the deed is witnessed by a few important witnesses (such as a merchant, skald, *jarl's* councillor, *hirdmen* guard, etc).

Speed 3: A crowd of more important witnesses (villagers, warriors from a war band), as well as a few influential witnesses such as a rich merchant, renowned skald, *jarl* or chief of an important clan, and so on). Or, perhaps the deed takes place before the eyes of a very important Scandian individual, such as a king's counsellor or war chief.

Speed 4: The deed takes place before a crowd of important witnesses (citizens, *hirdmen*, the *jarl's* army), or in the presence of major Scandian individuals (a king, a royal court, a famous skald, etc).

Changes in Renown

Over time, and through his adventures, a character's Renown will increase from its starting level at character creation. Each significant deed increases Renown, by an amount equal to the Deed Level of the deed, multiplied by the deed's Speed.

For example: Svein chases away the bandits who have been kidnapping visitors to his village; the Game Master assigns this deed a Deed Level of 2. In doing so, Svein managed to free a *jarl* who had been taking captive; the Game Master determines this is an influential witness, which gives the deed a Speed of 3. As a result of the deed, Svein's Renown increases by 6 points.

Noteworthy Deeds

Some deeds are more noteworthy than others, and are accorded a special place in the sagas. When a character increases his Renown by 5 points or more as a result of a single deed, he should note the deed down as a **noteworthy** deed, which the skalds will sing about on many an occasion.

As well as noting down the circumstances of the deed,

the player also notes the amount of Renown gained, and also (optionally) the means by which the deed was accomplished (its location, severe wounds incurred, important witnesses, etc).

***For example:** Svein has a Renown of 21. After killing the bandit chief, chasing off the surviving outlaws, and freeing the jarl, a skald decided to honour the deed by composing a saga based on Svein's victory. For this noteworthy deed, Svein's Renown increases by 6 points, giving him a Renown of 27. On his character sheet, Svein's player notes: "27 – Killed the bandit chief, act recognised and reward by a jarl present on the occasion".*

Noteworthy deeds allow the stages in a character's saga to be commemorated. These stages are called **deed periods**, and correspond to the time separating two noteworthy deeds.

***For example:** Svein, thanks to numerous minor deeds (none of which has increased his Renown by over 5 points in one go), has seen his Renown rise from 27 points (achieved in his first noteworthy deed) to 38 points. It is then that the jarl he once saved asks him to fight a terrible troll terrorising his domain; none of the men the jarl has sent before have returned, but he believes Svein may be the one to finally kill it!*

After a brutal combat, Svein brings the troll's head back to the jarl's longhouse. For this noteworthy deed (the second in his life), Svein's Renown increases by 12 points in one fell swoop (Deed Level 4 for killing a troll single-handedly, multiplied by Speed 3 as the jarl and his skalds spread the news quickly). Svein's Renown reaches 50 points, and he now has two deed periods: the first, beginning at 27 Renown (and continuing to 49), and the second beginning at 50.

Losing Renown

A character's Renown grows with his heroic deeds, but also thanks to the skalds who tell of them in their epic tales. However, some heroes are doomed to be forgotten, either through Fate, or because they do not wish to be remembered.

When a character decides to retire from the world, his exploits are slowly forgotten by the folk of Scandia. Only the skalds will remember him, but, even then, the hero's deeds lose their notoriety.

When a character no longer achieves great deeds capable of feeding his reputation, he risks seeing his Renown diminish. After a year without an increase in



1 d100

Rolling a hundred-sided die (1d100) means rolling two ten-sided dice (1d10), where one die represents the tens, and the other the units. The result is a number between 1 and 100.

For example, rolling a "4" on the "tens" 1d10, and a "7" on the "units" 1d10 gives a final result of 47. A result of "0" on both dice indicates a result of "100", and not zero.



Renown, he begins to lose one point of Renown per month for a year; then two points a month the year after; then three points a month the year after that; and so on. As soon as a character achieves a deed which increases his Renown again, he halts this inexorable slide into oblivion.

***For example:** During a terrible combat, Svein suffers a severe wound. It takes him five months to recover, and another year to recover his strength. In the end, he remains away from the world for seventeen months, during which time he accomplishes no heroic deeds to increase his Renown. As a result, he loses 1 point of Renown per month after the first year (so 5 points in all). Svein's Renown falls from 50 to 45.*

Becoming a Legend

Some stories are so powerful, so striking, and so loved by skalds that they are always eager to relate them. While a character's minor feats may be forgotten, sagas themselves are born from their greatest of deeds. As a result, the points of Renown which are gained from noteworthy deeds (see above) can never be lost.

***For example:** During his recovery, Svein lost 5 points of Renown, which dropped from 50 to 45 points. However, no matter how much Renown he loses, it will never drop below the total gained from his noteworthy deeds: 18 points (6 for saving the jarl, 12 for killing the troll).*

Often the only way for a character to become anonymous is to change his name and hope that no one recognises him. But what hero would want such a fate?

Being Recognised

Recognition Tests

A character may sometimes benefit from being recognised for his deeds, such as when he arrives at a king's court and is treated to the best hospitality. At other times, a character's fame might be more problematic, such as when he tries to infiltrate an enemy city to uncover its chief's plans.

A Recognition test is used to determine if a character recognises a target. This is a roll of a hundred-sided die (1d100 – see the adjacent box); if the result is equal to or less than the target's Renown (including the modifiers detailed below), the Recognition test succeeds, and the character making the test has already heard of the target, and may even remember some of his more noteworthy deeds.

Who is being Recognised?

There are two possible starting points for a Recognition test:

- If the character already knows a few details about the target, ie he has already met him, or has heard of his deeds, etc, then the base level for the test will be the target's Renown, as described above. This score is modified appropriately (see below).

***For example:** The jarl has decided that Svein should meet his daughter. To check if the daughter has already heard of this hero who killed the troll terrorising the jarl's domain, she attempts a Recognition test using Svein's Renown (a base of 50).*

- If the character has no means of recognising the target, the base level for the Recognition test equals the target's Renown divided by 10.

***For example:** During his travels, Svein stops at the house of some peasants who offer him hospitality. The head of the family examines this tired, but well-dressed traveller, who he has never seen in these parts before. He makes a Recognition test against a base of 5 (Svein's Renown of 50, divided by 10), which is modified appropriately (see below).*

Who is Doing the Recognising?

Once the base Renown value is determined for the Recognition test, the applicable modifiers should be determined. This gives the final success threshold against which the 1d100 Recognition test is made; remember the 1d100 result must be *below* the threshold.

Possible modifiers are as follows:

Archetype: if the character making the Recognition test belongs to the same archetype as the target of the test, use the base Renown value. However, if they belong to different archetypes, the base Renown value is halved.

Location: depending on where the Recognition test takes place, skalds may have spread tales of the target's deeds, or rumours may have reached the local inhabitants. As a result, the Renown value may be modified further.

The capital of a kingdom: no modifier.

- The target hails from the same region (city, village, etc): no modifier.
- Coastal regions or Scandian towns: the Renown value is divided by 2 (round down).
- Inland villages close to trade routes: the Renown value is divided by 3 (round down).
- Isolated villages far from trade routes: the Renown value is divided by 4 (round down).
- Beyond Scandia: the Renown value is divided by 5 (round down).

***For example:** Svein, confident in his Renown after killing the troll, leaves to seek adventure. After several disasters and losing everything, he finds himself begging hospitality in a small village lost in the Norwegian highlands. The head of the community questions the sorry-looking traveller. To determine if he has heard of the valourous Svein, the Game Master makes a Recognition test. Svein's Renown of 50 is first divided by 2, as Svein is a warrior and a different archetype to the head of the village. The resulting score of 25 is further divided by 4, as the location is an isolated village far from the trade routes. The final result to be used in the 1d100 Recognition test is 6.25, rounded down to 6. It's unlikely the head of the village knows who Svein is!*

Noteworthy Deeds

If the Recognition test succeeds, the target has been recognised. The Game Master then decides the reactions of those who have heard of the target's deeds, whether good or ill.

To ascertain which of the target's noteworthy deeds people remember, make another 1d100 Recognition test, this time against the target's base (unmodified) Renown. The result indicates which of the target's deed periods (see page 199) the people remember. If the result of this second Recognition test is less than the target's Renown, then the people remember all of the target's noteworthy

deeds which occur before the Renown level equal to the dice roll result. If the Recognition test result is higher than the target's Renown, the people have only heard of the target's most recent noteworthy deed.

For example: The village chief who welcomes Svein makes a Recognition test against a Renown value of 6. Remarkably, he rolls 1d100 and gets a 05—a success!

He now makes another Recognition test, this time against Svein's unmodified Renown (50), to ascertain which of Svein's noteworthy deeds he has heard of. The second result is 43, which corresponds to Svein's first deed period; the village chief knows that Svein once protected a village from bandits and saved the life of a jarl. This is fortunate for Svein, who is invited to a feast in his honour, his host impressed by his guest's heroism!

Changing or Hiding your Identity

A character may hide his identity or use a fake name to avoid being recognised. This is often the case when the character's reputation risks causing him trouble in a particular place or among specific people. For example, a character who hunts outlaws will find few friends when he attempts to infiltrate a bandit gang!

When a character adopts a new identity, his Renown drops to 0. His old Renown is not erased; instead, the character now has two (or more) separate Renown scores, one for each identity he uses.

However, it is possible to discover the true identity of a character hiding himself in this way. The base Renown value used for a Recognition test made to unmask an incognito target's true identity is equal to his hidden Renown, divided by 10 then rounded down.

For example: After enjoying the sumptuous feast, Svein heads off again. Not knowing the area well, he wanders for several days without shelter. Starving and exhausted, he joins a troop of merchants on their way to Jutland. Unfortunately, he has faced warriors from this country more than once, and raided their villages several times, when he fought in the guard of the jarl of Odense.

Once at Ribe, Svein decides to change his name and call himself Thorfin. This new identity has a Renown of 0, while Svein's actual identity still has its Renown of 50. To unmask Svein's true identity requires a Recognition test against a Renown value of 05—Svein's actual Renown (50) divided by 10.

Some Examples

This table lists relative Renown scores (before modifiers) for key Scandian archetypes and occupations:

Famous artisan	20
Pirate captain	60
A lord's chief of guard	75
Kingdom's war chief	150
Village chief	30
Mercenary chief	25
King's counsellor	150
Savage warrior, <i>thulr</i> , <i>volva</i>	25
Jarl of a small domain	50
Important jarl	100
Local personality	50
King of a small kingdom	200
King of one of the three kingdoms	500
Skald	40
Rich merchant	70
Travelling merchant	30



Scenario: Offerings to the Great Winter

Synopsis

The runes have spoken, and through them, the gods. But their words remain obscure. The characters are dispatched to find answers, to the western coasts of Norway to consult a powerful sorceress. The way is dangerous, a gauntlet they must run to reach their goal. They meet Jutish sailors, under attack from a notorious gang of pirates; once the pirates are defeated, the characters discover their fate is linked to the kidnap of a Jutish princess. They set out after the young noble and her ship, but the situation becomes complicated, with powerful adversaries working from the shadows. The characters' voyage takes them around the Skagerrak.

Little by little, all is revealed, and the characters must make difficult choices while facing a peril which threatens to throw all of Denmark into war. Can the love between two people be worth this much?

Background

All sagas have a beginning, and this is the start of the heroes' saga. The events described in this scenario assume the characters all come from the same clan, allowing you to use the archetypes presented in this book. If the players create their own characters, you will have to modify the scenario to take this into account. A few possibilities are presented at the beginning of the adventure.

Summer is ending in Scandia. Soon, the forests of Denmark will attire themselves in browns and the colours of fire, and a cold wind will bring grey clouds from the north. King Frodi has been on the throne for less than a year, and his army represses any attempt at rebellion; but he knows that anger rumbles in his subjects' hearts. Scania is faithful to him, Sjaeland bows its head... but in Fyn, they speak of a new king. Frodi is wise and cunning, a talented politician. Through gifts and well-reasoned negotiations, he has managed to keep any immediate threat at a distance from his borders, dedicating his time to consolidating his position within his own country. Skalds in his pay broadcast his desire to unite the country under his banner, the sign of the hammer; Frodi himself offers many gifts to his subjects; his wedding to his brother's widow has been the cause of great rejoicing; and he has received homage from many *jarls*. But not all.

On the isle of Fyn, Hord Beinirsson is the powerful lord of Odense. He has not yet come to Hleidra, citing the recent death of his wife as an excuse. The king is not fooled. Hord was a friend of Halfdan, Frodi's brother, whom Frodi killed so as to ascend the throne. However, the king has found a way of controlling this dangerous province. Since his ascension to the throne, Frodi's emissaries have been going to Jutland; the peninsula is at once an excellent gateway to the south and west (and thus a valuable trading partner), but also a potential enemy. Frodi has therefore negotiated a marriage between the daughter of the Jutish king, Olaf Gundersen, and one of his most powerful vassals – the *jarl* of Odense himself.

Hord has taken this announcement very badly, but he cannot get out of it without declaring war on his sovereign, a war he knows he cannot win.

What is more, the proposed alliance would be of great value to his domain. It would protect the isle of Fyn from Jutish raiders, and bring a considerable increase in trade. Of course, it is also a way for Frodi to bring this rebellious lord under his control. On the island of Fyn, in every village, everyone is talking about this. Or almost everyone...

Note: This scenario is an introduction to the world of *Yggdrasill*. Some details remain hidden from the players and their characters. Depending upon the players' decisions and their characters' actions, the adventure may have important consequences for Denmark, including war and the wrath of the gods. The text boxes below provide additional side plots which you can also develop.

Introduction



The adventure begins in the kingdom of Denmark, and assumes the players are using the archetypes in this book. If the players create their own heroes, you will have to modify their backgrounds accordingly; ideally, they should come from the town of Rohald, from a Danish clan on the island of Fyn.

You can decide where the town is, but ideally its *jarl* should be close to Hord Beinirsson. Of course, the announcement of Hord's second marriage to a Jutland princess is very important, and causes much discussion; some are delighted by this marriage between the two kingdoms, while others see it as yet another manoeuvre by Frodi to secure his own interests.

However, another concern currently preoccupies the inhabitants of Rohald. At the insistence of its *jarl*, the court *volva* has consulted the gods, and the runes are clear: a time of troubles is approaching clan Kjari. Other omens have appeared, but remain incomprehensible, even for the *volva*. Someone, somewhere, has the answers...



The City of Rohald and Clan Kjari

This coastal city has a small, sheltered port at the mouth of a river, home to about a thousand inhabitants. It is on the western side of the isle of Fyn, exposed to raids by Jutish pirates. As a result, the population is made up of hard men, quick to take up weapons.

The *jarl* of Rohald is a descendant of Kjari, a local hero whose saga is engraved on a large runic pillar, close to a sacred grove. The community is known for their loyalty to clan Kjari, and has ties of blood, dating back many generations, to the lord of Odense. Consequently, decisions made in that great urban centre also affect life in Rohald.

Hrolf Knudson, *jarl* of Rohald, is a friend and loyal lieutenant to Hord Beinirsson, lord of Odense. Like him, until now he has excused himself from paying homage to King Frodi in Hleidra. But he knows that, sooner or later, he will have to make a choice. He simply wants to act in his clan's best interests.



Hrolf Knudson, *jarl* of Rohald, has decided to send emissaries to meet with the Lady of Ice, said to be the most powerful sorceress in Scandia. He chooses the heroes, for different reasons: one may be a member of his family, or another close to him, whom he trusts (a noble, *hirdman*, or *volva*); others are tasked with escorting the expedition (a *berserker* or *hirdman*) or to provide specialist support (a *skald*, *volva*, or *thulr*, for example). More precisely, the runes have said who should participate in this expedition. In any case, the heroes are on the quay, hearing a few final words of advice from Hrolf Knudson.

Scenario: Offerings to the Great Winter

Chapter 1: The Lady of Ice



Scene 1: Leaving for the Ice fjord

Note: Plunge the characters straight into the scenario with this scene. Impress upon them the jarl's and clan's dependence on them, and their responsibilities. Then, explain the situation (see page 203). The players should feel more strongly involved, and be ruled by emotions more than reason.

The ship which will take you to the coasts of Norway is rocking gently against the wooden quay, where a large crowd has gathered. Children play nearby, running between the legs of the sailors who are loading supplies onto the ship. The jarl, his wife, and some of his guard are facing you. You are listening to the last orders from your lord before setting off on this voyage, which promises to be glorious. The strong, hoarse voice of Hrolf Knudson drowns out the slap of the waves against the dock, and everyone listens in silence. Soberly, with his usual economy with words, the jarl salutes your courage and calls on the gods to favour your expedition. Then he turns to each of you in turn, last of all to the one designated as the leader of the expedition. Hrolf hands her a silver piece of jewellery from his purse, a pendant in the shape of Thor's hammer, carved with runes which bring good fortune. A gift of great value, the pendant has belonged to the clan since the time of Kjari, the clan founder, and proves in the eyes of all the importance the lord accords to the expedition. After final farewells with your parents and friends, you climb on board. Soon, the ship leaves the port, and slowly sails down the river towards the sea. Standing close the navigator, you see the land you have grown up in slowly fade into the distance. Your adventure has begun. As the roofs disappear behind the ranks of trees, the memories of the last few days haunt your minds.

A Warning From the Gods

Once on the ship, you should give the characters the information necessary to understand what the jarl's mission entails. It is up to them to decide how best to prepare their expedition.

If you want, you can do this as a series of flash-backs. These represent the events leading up to their departure; in each case, which character or characters might be present is indicated.

- **A bad dream:** A week ago, in the middle of the night, Hrolf Knurdsson woke from his bed in a cold sweat. Waking from a nightmare, he lets out a cry which wakes everyone in the house. Once calm, he recounts this horrible dream: *"I was travelling on a knorr made of the bones of my people. I was alone, and the magical ship was sailing without sailors to steer it. The sea was made of blood, and a thick fog shrouded the ship. I was cold. Then, little by little, the mist disappeared. I saw... by the gods! I saw our lands in flames! The houses, the fields, the forests of Fyn were on fire. Black smoke hid the sky, and there was a terrible smell of burning flesh. In the sea, corpses floated between shreds of debris. From the beach came cries of pain. Their clothes in flames, those who hoped to escape by sea died on the beach, where sea monsters savaged the wounded and fed on their bodies. By Odin! What does all this mean?"*

Everyone knows that the gods speak to the lords of Midgard through their dreams. A bad omen. (Types of character present: noble, hirdmen, berserker).

- **Divination:** The next day, Hrolf Knudson asks the *volva* of the community about the meaning of this dream. In the darkness of the house, through the smoke of the brazier, the sorceress calls on the power of the runes, but a look of doubt crosses her face. She confirms a terrible peril threatens the country, and maybe even the whole of Scandia, but when the jarl presses her to be more specific, she shakes her head sadly. Odin's message is hard to interpret, and she does not know what to think. Then, with a shaking finger, she points out a figure traced out by three knucklebones which have fallen to one side: "but I know who may tell you more..." she murmurs. (Types of character present: noble, *volva*, hirdman).
- **Counsel:** That evening, the jarl calls on those close to him, to ask their opinion. Many do not want to ignore the coming threat, but consider the *volva*'s words dangerous; she has recommended they visit the legendary Lady of Ice, a sorceress of sinister reputation. Each has their own opinion, and repeats terrible stories which frighten children more than they correspond to reality. Hrolf Knudson sees this, and finally hammers on the table; he orders a ship to be prepared, and carefully chooses those who will go, taking into account their value to the clan, but also those who want to prove themselves in the eyes of the gods. It will be up to them to bring an answer to the dream which still haunts him. (Types of character present: all.)

- **Preparations:** In the city, people murmur against this project. Such an expedition might end in the deaths of everyone. And the expense would be better spent elsewhere...

But Hrolf Knudson has no time for timid men, and continues with the preparations. Around a well-laden table, together with Osvif, the man who will command the ship, he shares with the Player Characters what little people know about the Lady of Ice, and particularly what the tales of skalds tell about her.

A *volva* or *thulr* can confirm that she is known to be the most powerful sorceress in Midgard, capable of seeing all the Fates decreed by the Norns. It is said that the price of her services is to bring bad luck to any who seek her counsel. Rumours say she imprisons men who come to see her, makes them her lovers and, once tired of them, freezes them in ice to decorate her home. No one really knows where she lives, although western Norway is a good place to start. Osvif relates "Suddenly, the sea all around is covered in thin ice, the ship with frost, and the fog fades away to reveal an unknown shore. A steep fjord, its flanks covered in snow, opens before you. It is so cold... that's how you know you've arrived. I heard this from the mouth of a sailor in Haven who lost both his feet from the supernatural cold. I believe he was telling the truth!"

With this meagre information, the characters prepare their supplies. (Types of character present: all.)

- **Farewell:** Dawn rises over the town. The characters have been up for some time already; they take their time eating, before bidding farewell to those close to them and slowly heading towards the port. (Types of character present: all.)



The Voyage

If you desire, you can include one or two encounters during the voyage. Merchants may come alongside to share news, a pod of whales may accompany the ship, or pirates may chase them for several days. For the latter, you can describe the red sails and pennants of the Pirates of Hirsk; the characters will likely have heard of these easily recognisable criminals (an ST 10 Knowledge or general culture test).



Into the Unknown

Scandians are a very superstitious folk, and events which are not "normal" automatically belong to the realm of the supernatural. The first part of this scenario exploits this attitude to create a sense of mystery and suspense.

The arrival at the hidden fjord is part of this. Ask for a few Average (ST 14) Agility or Navigation tests to keep the characters from falling into the sea as the ship strikes something (a rock?) hidden beneath the waves. Characters falling into the sea should be rescued as quickly as possible, but not before something unknown swims around them. Fill this scene with fear and suspense.

When they arrive in the valley, carefully describe the sinister surroundings (the dark forest, jagged rocks, and howls of wild animals) and the presence of savages around them. Feel free to ask for Perception or Vigilance tests from time to time, without result; keep the players' attention, and alternate between states of tension and calm. Keep the characters under pressure. After all, they are heading into the unknown, and failure is not an option.



Once the characters have all the information above, return to describing the ship.

The *snekkjar* slides through a smooth sea, and soon the familiar coast disappears into the distance. A flock of seagulls accompanies the ship for a time, like a final escort. Let the characters discuss the situation and plan their expedition.

Scene 2: The Ambush

For several days, the ship follows the Norwegian coasts, heading north. As the characters cross the Skagerrak, they see sails on the horizon, but the ships follow other routes and do not approach. Merchants or fishermen, no doubt.

The lands become wilder as they head north, and the few beaches are increasingly replaced by high, precipitous cliffs. Dense forests cover the sides of hills and low mountains breaking up the horizon. The nights are cold, but not intolerable, and the sun shines during the day.

Until this morning. The night slowly gives way to

Scenario: Offerings to the Great Winter

dawn, and leaves behind it a thick fog. The cold is biting, and wakes the characters from where they are sleeping on the ship. There is no wind, and no noise but the sound of the sea. Frost covers the ship, and a thin layer of ice clings to the hull. Suddenly, a great roar is heard as the *snekkjar* strikes rock and keels over to starboard. Sailors hurry about, and everyone – characters included – watch the sea. The characters only spot the next rocks at the last moment, and the hull cracks terrifyingly as they brush past. A sailor leans too far over the side and falls overboard, instantly swallowed by the icy waters. Suddenly, two huge rocky pillars loom out of the mist. The ship sails straight towards them. In a great feat of strength, Osvif manages to wrench the helm around, and the *snekkjar* passes between the two, grinding against the rocks and sending the characters tumbling to the deck.

The mist lifts suddenly, and everything is calm once more. The ship emerges into a narrow fjord, steep mountains covered in frosty conifers surrounding a seaward valley shaped like an arrow. A grey pebbled beach lies at the arrow's point, the only place landfall can be made.

The *snekkjar* sails slowly towards the beach. A vigilant character will see three columns of smoke rising from behind the trees, far to the east of their location.

A successful Sagas test allows a character to remember that “creatures” are said to guard this region, but nothing more precise. In fact this is true: hunters from a primitive tribe notice the characters and sound the alarm. They prepare an ambush as soon as the characters land, considering them enemies like anyone who enters their lands – an additional trial for those attempting to reach the Lady of Ice.

A successful Perception test permits a character to spot a few warriors approaching the beach, and also a cave in a mountain high above.

A Savage Attack

The attackers rush from the trees as soon as the characters set foot on the pebbled beach. Their tactics are rudimentary; they count on the element of surprise and their numbers to overcome their foes. The savages howl and charge towards the Danes, throwing their javelins before closing for hand-to-hand combat.

There are three opponents per character, and another dozen who attack the sailors. Despite their numerical superiority, the enemies are not as skilled as the characters. Additionally, give bonuses to the characters if they have noticed the ambush and attempted to avoid it.

The sailors face the danger bravely. However, one of

them is wounded every combat round once melee has begun (select the victim randomly, or simply choose one). There are nine sailors, plus Osvif (1d10). Any sailor who is wounded twice dies. This allows you to quickly determine losses among the sailors without taking attention away from the player characters' actions.

The savages brandish primitive weapons made of stone, bone, and wood, and wear only foul furs as armour. As soon as half of them are killed or disabled, the rest run for the cover of the trees and disappear, taking whatever they can steal from the *snekkjar*.

Primitive Warriors

Conflict 6 / 2	Relationships 0	Physical 4
Mental 2	Mystical 4 / 3	Vitality 6
Traits: Primitive (modifiers already included)		

These warriors worship the Lady of Ice as a goddess, and satisfy her needs through various offerings left before the cave.

Scene 3: The Lady of Ice

Once their adversaries have been routed, the characters may inspect the area where they have landed. The narrow beach lies between two rocky promontories and the edge of a forest. The neighbouring mountains are not too high, but are very steep, and covered in snow. A ceiling of grey clouds hides the sun and, at night, the stars; it is impossible to tell where they are. A character may even wonder if they are still in Midgard.

If they have not already noticed it, one of the characters will spot the cave in the cliff face far above. Using the runes, a *volva* can confirm this is the home of the Lady of Ice. However, there seems to be no path up to the cave.

A successful Survival test allows the characters to find a narrow path through the trees. It quickly splits into two: one branch leads east, the direction of the smoke the characters saw earlier, and traces of the fleeing savages are clear; the other branch leads towards the cliff.

Note: If the characters do not spot the path, they will have to hack their way through the dense vegetation. This slows progress by half and characters must make regular Survival tests to avoid becoming lost, losing another two hours before reaching the base of the cliff.

The forest buzzes with life, but no animals are to be seen. The heroes have the feeling they are being watched, but it is impossible to discover any observer. The frozen soil crackles beneath their feet, and the thick evergreen

Vggdrasill



JÉRÔME 09

Scenario: Offerings to the Great Winter

foliage filters out the meagre light. It is very cold.

Finally, the characters arrive at a thin patch of bare ground at the base of the huge cliff. Once again, there are no paths leading up, but a careful observation of the cliff face allows characters to discern a series of ledges and crevices forming a sort of stairway leading up to the cave. The climb is long and exhausting (requiring three Average (ST 14) Climbing tests; each failed test causes 1d10 damage). Eventually, the characters reach their goal as night falls on the valley, the landscape fading into darkness. From this height, the characters can make out the fjord, although the sea is covered in mist, which starts at the two pillars they sailed through earlier.

The cliff is almost vertical. A path, invisible from below, starts at the top and winds down to the bottom. Before the characters, the gaping mouth of the cave seems to be waiting; but, as the characters struggle towards it, a freezing blizzard blows up, lashing swirls of snow in their faces. The cave is the only shelter.

Once in the cave, the way ahead narrows to a thin path into the rock. Inside, the characters discover baskets of food, meat, vegetables, and fruits. Four passages lead off from the cave: all end in the same place, after many turns and double-backs – the Hall of the Pillar. The walls of all the tunnels are covered in ice, which flickers with rainbow reflections when light falls on it. The phenomenon also creates strange illusions, which will affect each of the characters in different ways, depending on their Fate runes. Each character will face something, such as an adversary, treasure, or source of terror, linked in some way with one of their Fate runes. Be inventive! Depending on their reactions, characters may fall prey to their own fears, or become aggressive (even attacking their companions), or be lost in a dream-like illusion... An Easy (ST 10) Instinct test is required to break the enchantment; those who break free can help others do the same (+2 to the next test). As each character is lost in his own illusion, tell the players separately what they see, and have them narrate their actions before the other players.

Once this trial has been completed, the characters may enter the heart of this subterranean realm – a huge, roughly circular hall, whose walls, covered in ice crystals, give off a spectral light, and whose roof is more than forty feet above. Water drops trickle down stalactites and form a pool on the floor. But, dwarfing all else, a gigantic pillar occupies the centre of the cavern, formed by a stalactite and stalagmite joining together. An incredible representation of Yggdrasill is carved into its surface; its roots plunge beneath the surface of the pool, and its leafy boughs are lost among the stalactites.



A Debt to the Lady of Ice

The debt owed to the Lady of Ice will be in the form of an important sacrifice or personal service. It will put the one who pays it in deadly danger or great difficulty, which may have repercussions for those around him, as well as his entire lineage.

The man who is bedded by the Lady of Ice receives a strange blessing: he becomes far less susceptible to cold. Any tests he carries out to resist its effects are reduced by one difficulty level. Do not tell the character this directly; instead, let them discover it gradually, when an appropriate situation presents itself. The character will doubtless wonder where such a gift has come from...



The cold becomes more intense, and clouds of white vapour drift from the characters' mouths. Out of nowhere, the Lady of Ice appears. She is tall, even for a woman of the north. Her fine and delicate features only add to her beauty. Her hair is so pale it is almost white, as white as her skin and her fur-trimmed clothing. The sorceress regards the characters with a slight, unconcerned smile, examining them with her frosty eyes, before taking her seat on a throne sculpted from a large golden stalagmite. Without a word, she motions the characters to explain the reason for their visit to her realm.

Attempt to make this scene as surreal as possible (the pale light, the silence, the cold...). The Lady of Ice listens without speaking. Her movements are slow and graceful. Anyone attempting to approach her finds their feet have been frozen to the ground; anyone trying to attack suffers the same fate, their bodies slowly turning to ice.

When they have finished their explanation, the sorceress stands up, and motions towards the carved column. She murmurs a few incomprehensible words, and the runes carved around the giant tree start to glow. Then they are extinguished, one by one, until only a few remain. A *volva* will realise this is a powerful divination ritual. The Lady of Ice speaks, in a cold, hoarse voice:

"Ice and fire, fear and bravery, day and night, all become one. Who can stop it, when even the gods may succumb? The children will pay for the sins of their fathers. Your Fate has already been written, the Norns have seen to that. Now only the battle matters. You! You may have the power for such a fight. Were you seeking an answer? This is only the

beginning. If you believe you are strong enough to follow your Fate, then glory awaits. Nothing will be in vain. Seek out the face of Odin!"

Then she sits down again, and falls silent, ignoring any further questions. However, if the characters ask the price of her services, she smiles hungrily.

"Soon, you will pay what is due. But for the moment, be still..."

The Lady of Ice chooses the most attractive man (with the best average score of Charisma and Strength) in the group, and motions him to come with her. If he refuses, she chooses another. She takes him into a nearby room, into her fur bed. He comes back an hour later, with the sensation of having lived through an experience as terrifying as it was marvellous. If the characters search for the Lady of Ice, they will realise the sorceress has vanished.

Scene 4: A Sign from the Gods

When the characters leave the cave, they will discover it is daylight outside. Although they seem to have only spent a few hours in the cave, the day seems well advanced. The blizzard has stopped, but the entire countryside is covered with a thick coat of snow. If the characters look into the valley, they see smoke rising from where they suspect the primitive tribesfolk village is.

The players will, no doubt, attempt to descend using the path they discovered the day before – the cliff face is otherwise frozen and impassable, and the path will hide them from prying eyes below.

The sun makes a sudden, if brief, appearance, and a flash of something attracts their attention. Something is reflecting the light from a ledge fifty feet above, in the middle of a looming glacier. Two ravens circle above.

Upon the glacier, the path is narrow and precarious, and only a single, lightweight person may attempt to climb it at a time, and only then with difficulty. It's a bare-handed climb to the ledge, and all handholds are frozen with a supernatural chill which makes gloves useless. Instead of a Climbing test, a Difficult (ST 19) Tenacity test is required, with a +10 bonus if the character is from a noble lineage or one of Odin's *ulfhednar*.

Upon reaching the ledge, the hero discovers a silver spear thrust into the ice. It will take several minutes to dig it out bare-handed, as all tools will break as soon as



The Raven Spear

This magnificent spear has a haft short enough to be used in close combat. The barbed head seems to be made of silver, carved with the figures of animals. Wolves, horses, and many ravens are entangled in a wild horde. The wooden haft seems at once solid and supple. Several carved runes cover the surface along its length, claiming this spear has Asgardian origins.

It also wounds any *jotun* who dares to touch it (automatically inflicting 20 points of damage).

However, a wielder from Midgard may bear the spear without difficulty; his Pole Arms skill is increased by 3 points, the spear inflicts +5 damage, and gains a free parry action every combat round. Additionally, the wielder's healing rate is doubled. Finally, the blade gleams brightly when Odin's name is invoked.

The Raven Spear was not on the ledge by accident. It is destined to accompany the heroes through their adventure and, most of all, to defeat the pirates at Hirsk. A gift from Odin himself, or a whim of Fate?

A skald can relate the following about the spear's history with a successful Average (ST 14) Sagas test (ST 19 for a non-skald):

The Raven Spear was forged for the god Balder, who lost it in a bet with a frost giant. A hero by the name of Jund Jaralsson stole it from the *jotun* called Grondak the Thunder, piercing the creature's foot as he fled; it has limped ever since. Armed with this spear, Jund Jaralsson accomplished many heroic exploits in the land of the Sami, where a sorceress cursed him. Fleeing again, he travelled south and disappeared, refusing to face his Fate and the black magic behind it. A glorious death was denied him, despite his great deeds, for none escape the fate the Norns have woven for them...



they are used; the character's hands will be cut to the bone. Once the precious object is retrieved, the character can rejoin his companions, climbing back down with great difficulty (the character's hands are almost useless, the fingers frost-bitten and bleeding). But if he keeps hold of the spear, as every instinct screams at him to do, he will discover the wounds are almost entirely healed the next day, although small white marks criss-cross his hands forever after.

Vggdrasill

Scenario: Offerings to the Great Winter

As soon as the character has scaled half the distance to the ledge, a pack of wolves appears and circles the rest of the heroes. Their leader is an old, one-eyed wolf, fur turned grey and white with age. Incredibly agile, no blow can hit it. It remains out of reach, but its companions (two per Player Character) attempt to dart in and bite them before backing away. They do not go for the kill, but simply harass the heroes, unusual behaviour for such animals. If more than half their number has been wounded, they retreat with long, plaintive howls. However, as soon as the spear is in the characters' possession, the leader gives out a cry, which sounds like a laugh, and the pack retreats, followed by the old wolf, and disappears into the forest.

Scene 5: A Troubled Return

On the beach, the characters feel they are being watched, but no one appears or tries to attack them. They can reach the sea and, oddly, their passage between the two pillars is very calm.

Note: If you want, there can be another attack by the savage warriors as the Player Characters leave. This time, more than fifty men emerge from the undergrowth and attack; the heroes must hold them back long enough for Osvif and his men to put the ship to sea. Once the characters are out of arrow range from the beach, the savages curse and swear, but are otherwise powerless.

After reaching the end of the Norwegian coast, Osvif turns his ship south. Favourable winds push the *snekkjar* at a good speed, and the jagged entrances to fjords come quickly into view.

After another day, as the ship approaches the entrance to the Skagerrak, someone on watch (a Player Character if possible) spots two sails in the distance. One ship is pursuing another. The first seems to be in a bad way, its sail badly set up and torn. However, an Easy (ST 10) Navigation or Knowledge (sailing) test allows the characters to recognise the red sail of the second ship; it is a pirate and slave ship, a sworn enemy of Danish trade.

The pirates push their prey towards land, where the ship finally beaches. Its crew jump ashore and prepare to defend themselves. The pirates, far more numerous, prepare to face them.

If the players want to help the first ship, they may do so after the pirates have just landed; if they are uncertain, Osvif decides for them, but the combat has already been joined to the pirates' advantage.

The keel of the heroes' *langskip* scrapes across the gravel beside that of their enemies'. They may jump ashore to fight; their unexpected reinforcements give new heart to the crew of the first ship.

Battle on the Beach

The pirates are simple extras, but there are forty-two of them. The Jutes (who were fleeing) only have thirteen good warriors. The Characters' arrival makes the battle more balanced. This fight threatens to be brief and violent. Each character fights at least one adversary, two if he kills the first in less than three combat rounds. The pirates think better of such an uncertain fight, and attempt to return to the sea. If the Player Characters stop them, they finally beg for mercy. There will only be a dozen left at this point, most of them wounded (9+1d10).

Pirates

Conflict 8 / 6
Mental 3

Relationships 4
Mystical 2 / 2

Physical 6
Vitality 10

Victorious, the characters can now meet those whose lives they have just saved.

The ship is Jutish, but in a pitiful state. It escorted one of King Frodi's ships, sent to fetch the Ribe princess promised to the *jarl* of Odense. She was on the royal ship, accompanied by Vagn Hordsson, the son of Odense's *jarl*. When they entered the Skagerrak, four unknown ships appeared on the horizon, out of range, but always within sight. Then, just as an unexpected storm was brewing, they showed themselves to be pirates, and attacked. The battle separated the flotilla; the Jutish sailors were cut off, and lost sight of the princess' ship. Chased by the enemy ship, they fled north but, taking on water, they beached their *snekkjar*, and the pirates attacked. The characters arrived just in time.

The Jutish chief, Guerd Latik, thanks the characters warmly. An important detail should come to the character's attention; Guerd is one-eyed ("seek out the face of Odin", the Lady of Ice said...). His ship needs serious repairs and, unless the characters captured the pirate ship, will take about two days to be made seaworthy. But the one-eyed warrior seems very concerned, and his joy quickly gives way to fear; nevertheless, he offers to organise a feast to celebrate their victory. The Jutland *snekkjar* contains several barrels of mead, and Guerd's idea is unanimously agreed upon. Night is falling, and it would be dangerous to continue immediately.

A feasting area between the two ships is quickly set up. Improvised tables and chairs are placed in a circle, and a great fire lit for warmth. As night falls, the Jutes and

Danes talk over their meal. Drinking horns emerge from their sheaths and the night rings with laughter.

In spite of all this, Guerd remains taciturn. If he has not done so already, he explains the circumstances of Princess Hedriss' disappearance. The characters may maintain that the Danish ship may have escape the pirates and made it to the island of Fyn, but the Jutish warrior is reluctant to believe in the forces of chance.

If the characters question Guerd Latik about the pirate ships, he says he can remember that one of them had a image of a chain on one of its sails. An appropriate Easy (ST 10) Knowledge test or a divination by a *volva* will connect this with pirates from the City of Chains (see below); these criminals are known throughout the Skagerrak, capturing ships and selling their crews into slavery, stealing anything they can. They are formidable warriors and sailors, and the highly defensible location of their base, and the political skill of their leaders, have prevented the local lords from joining together to stop them.

During the discussion, make sure the characters realise the danger should the alliance resulting from the Princess' marriage fail – the most likely outcome being war between their two countries. Guerd asks for the characters' help in his search; he insists on the urgency of the mission, yet his ship is in no state to sail.

Guerd wants to sail to the island of Fyn to see if the princess has arrived safely, and to give the precious gifts his king is offering to the *jarl* of Odense. Meanwhile, he asks the characters to search the Norwegian coasts around Hirsk, a task of utmost importance.

Guerd Latik asks two of his men to volunteer to join the Player Characters in their search. One of them, Juren, is a cheerful warrior, but capable of terrible rages; the other, Ligurd, is more distant. He is secretly part of a Jutish faction which is against the alliance with the Danes. While he genuinely wants to find Princess Hedriss, he also hopes to complicate the characters' task to prevent the planned marriage. Ligurd is as sly as he is fanatical.

Note: What if the characters decide to return to Fyn? In this case, they quickly discover that Vagn's ship never made it to port. During the journey, you can include another attack by the pirates from the City of Chains. If the battle goes well, a prisoner will confirm Vagn's ship was taken by slavers; if it goes badly, they learn this after being captured by the pirates themselves!

Chapter 2: The City of Chains



Scene 1: An Icy Welcome

Hirsk, the City of Chains, was built on a high rocky promontory in a narrow bay filled with rocks. Close to a low, wooded mountain, it is only accessible from the land via a narrow path. Facing the sea, fortifications and watchtowers guard the entrance. The City of Chains owes its name to the slavery it specialises in, but also to an immense chain which, upon any maritime attack, bars the entrance to the port in seconds. It is said the chain was forged by giants and, judging by the size of each huge link, this may very well be true.

The lord's longhouse dominates the port and the houses of the city's permanent residents, a good thousand people. Steep and dirty alleys, divided by gates, make progress through its streets difficult. Slave hovels and enclosures, which can hold up to two thousand people, are crushed into a thin strip of land close to the port. Wooden quays welcome twenty or so ships, half of which belong to merchants; the rest bear the red sails and chain emblem of the pirates. Hirsk trades slaves for food and manufactured goods; the town is home to many criminals and outlaws from all over Scandia, but also unscrupulous mercenaries, veterans of many wars whose skills are prized by warring princelings.

The sentinel's horn sounds as the characters approach the city, and a dozen warriors crowd onto the quay to meet them. While they are used to seeing *knorr*, a *langskip* arriving at Hirsk is a more unusual sight. The warriors have few manners, and do not even wait until the ship is moored before interrogating the Player Characters. They expect the characters to identify themselves and their reasons for coming to the city. If they are aggressive, the situation will quickly degenerate into a fight, attracting pirates from all over the port, who will quickly overwhelm the characters.

The guards do not flinch at the mention of Vagn or

Scenario: Offerings to the Great Winter

Princess Hedriss; emissaries from the Scandian kingdoms often come to buy back people captured by the pirates. If the characters present themselves as such, the warriors will be content with the explanation, but nevertheless do not relax their guard. They motion towards an inn the characters can stay at, a rotting hovel of a building close to the enclosures where most of the transactions take place. However long they stay, the characters will feel the oppressive suspicion all around.

Note: During their stay in Hirsk, make sure the characters are aware of this atmosphere. Everyone is wary of them, which makes discussions difficult. If they are too generous, they will attract the attention of cut-throats who will ambush them in an alleyway to rob them. If they are too direct in their searches, doors will close on them, or they will be sent on wild goose chases. Hirsk's inhabitants are quarrelsome, boastful, selfish, and sly. They are the dregs of Scandia, trusting no-one, and only force – or the threat of force – will make them talk. Hopefully, the characters will realise this early on.

Scene 2: First Steps

Let the characters investigate as they see fit. There are several leads they can follow: some are red herrings, offering nothing but trouble; others may provide potential allies.

As soon as the characters set foot in Hirsk, they should realise they will need patience and tact to deal effectively with the inhabitants. Let them organise a plan of action: below are a few clues they can follow, but characters will no doubt come up with other avenues of investigation. Keep the following in mind:

- Apart from the King of Hirsk, and those close to him, no one is aware of Princess Hedriss' presence, as she is imprisoned in an underground cell in the slave quarters of the king's longhouse.
- Most of the population is hostile to the characters, and will only answer their questions if they think they can get something out of it (even if it's just their lives – but such people are always ready to seek revenge on those who threaten them, risking turning an already bad situation worse).
- Impress upon the players the sordidness of the city, the groans and cries of slaves kept like animals, the armed men they pass, the stench, the bad beer flowing in torrents, the dark alleys full of cut-throats...
- It's only in the docks area where the characters will find any real help, merchants hungry for money and without scruples, ready to tell them anything they want for a profit.

The fate of Vagn and Hedriss

In addition to the ferociously independent faction in Jutland, there are other people who are less than happy about the potential alliance between Denmark and Jutland. In particular, certain Danish *jarls* do not care for Frodi, and have been trying to keep him from consolidating his power. A skald close to one of them, named Hjalti Thorrodsson, inveigled himself into Vagn's crew and, using his skill with *galdrs*, sowed the seeds of love between Vagn and Princess Hedriss, a love which has only grown since then. He hopes to cause trouble and compromise the alliance, by turning the powerful domain of Odense against the usurper Frodi. Vagn is known for his impetuous nature and his hatred for Frodi. If the alliance fails due to the actions of the lord of Odense's own son, no one doubts that the tension between Denmark and Jutland would quickly turn to war, greatly weakening Frodi's position. The skald Hjalti has used the sea voyage to reinforce through words and magic the love between Vagn and Hedriss, encouraging them to flee together.

Unfortunately, the pirate attack ruined his plans. The situation at Hirsk has become more complicated.

Several *jarls* are here, in a hierarchy based on the strength of their private armies. One governs the city, and is more or less considered to be king. The other *jarls* have their own ships, and benefit from the protection Hirsk offers to conduct their business.

The ships which attacked Guerd and Vagn belong to one of these lords. Once back in the City of Chains, the king was told of the attack. Fearing the Jutes and Danes would ally against him, to avenge themselves as much as to unite their countries and end his piracy, the king of Hirsk ordered his vassal *jarl* to send the princess and her court to him as hostages. In compensation, he left him Vagn to ransom. In turn, the king of Hirsk is buying up Danish sailors so as to offer them to the King of Denmark as a form of appeasement.

Hjalti the skald has managed to stay close to Vagn. He has no plan, but is improvising. He fears that, sooner or later, current events will force an alliance between the Jutes and Danes, as they are likely to work together in a punitive raid against the city of Hirsk. As a result, he must make sure that both Hedriss and Vagn escape from the pirates, particularly if he can ensure they do so together.

The Spy

Juren and Ligurd, the volunteers from Guerd Latik's crew, follow the PCs' lead. While Juren can be problematic and cause embarrassing situations, Ligurd proffers his advice in an acerbic tone. He does not know that there is anything to find in the City of Chains but, if there is, he tries to get as much out of it as he can.

Juren wants only one thing: to find Princess Hedriss and take her to Odense. Ligurd also wants to find her, but wants to prevent the marriage from taking place by blaming the Danes for this whole incident. As soon as he gets the opportunity, Ligurd will speak to each character individually, in turn. Although he pretends to be delighted by the marriage, he is more than willing to elaborate on the negative effects of such a union (reinforcing Frodi's power, the union of other nations against Denmark against this alliance, many raider princelings declaring independence to continue raiding Jutland...). He sets out his case as worries, but his goal is to sow doubt in the characters' minds. With female characters, he attempts to appeal to their emotions, saying that Princess Hedriss loathes the idea of marrying a man so much older than her, and that she had in fact been promised to a Saxon prince who may avenge her by attacking the island of Fyn. Ligurd wants the characters to ask themselves whether the marriage is a good idea.

As soon as the characters uncover any trace of the Jutish princess, Ligurd changes tack, and subtly attempts to slow their investigation. He hopes to drag things out as much as possible so that the Danes will be considered responsible if something was to happen to the princess. He does not want this to happen, hoping to get rid of the characters and rescue the princess himself, then return her to Ribe, accusing the Danish warriors of negligence. On the other hand, if he must, he will murder the faithful Juren, and frame the characters for the crime.

Present Ligurd's part in the scenario carefully. Under a cold exterior he seems polite and even affable, and attempts to convince everyone of his trustworthiness. Played correctly, the characters should view him as a distant, but trustworthy man. His actions are always subtle, hidden amidst other considerations, which he presents as personal fears he is sharing with the characters. Ligurd will only reveal his real nature if unmasked, and pushed to the edge.

In comparison, Juren is jovial, but easily gets carried away. He would be an amiable bear of a man, if he would just stop trumpeting the superiority of the Jutes above all other Scandians, and distrusting anyone not from the noble or hirdmen class. Xenophobic and short-tempered, he will no doubt quickly irritate the characters.

Let the characters explore. There are warehouses containing stolen merchandise, taverns along the quay, and the slave enclosures nearby. If the characters climb to the top of the rocky promontory, they can get close to the lord's house, passing through filthy streets where they are regarded with hostility.

The following rumours are fairly commonplace:

- A Danish ship has recently been captured, which contained great riches.
- In a fit of rage, King Ari Stigsson has killed the leader of his *hirdmen*. The man was apparently having an affair with the king's wife, now locked up in her house. The two men's followers are at daggers-points, and it would not take much for a bloody riot to break out between the two factions. The funeral is to take place the day after the Characters' arrival.
- Emissaries from Uppsala have spent several days in Hirsk. Bearing many gifts, they met and feasted with Ari for two days before leaving.
- An important slave convoy will leave soon for the Norwegian iron mines, at the edge of the lands of the giants.
- Hrapp Annsen is well known in Hirsk. A vassal of king Ari, he owns a flotilla of half a dozen ships, making him the second most powerful man in the City of Chains. The hostility between the two men is well known. The characters can easily find out that Hrapp has retired to his village several leagues south of the pirates' lair.

Use these rumours however you want, and invent others as needed. Clever players will always find a way to exploit them to their advantage.

Scene 3: Meetings and Questions

Here are a few avenues the characters could investigate in Hirsk. These are in no particular order, but can be introduced based on the characters' actions, or used to complicate other situations.

- **The Quay:** While searching among the warehouses, the characters will hear a great many rumours, but also meet many merchants ready to sell information. Unfortunately, few among them know anything useful. However, there is one exception.

Blotolf is a small man with greasy hair and sly eyes. He is known as one of the main fences in Hirsk. The characters will quickly hear about him. If they approach him, he listens to them carefully and offers to help; in fact,

Scenario: Offerings to the Great Winter

he wants to use the characters against one of his rivals. He gestures towards the house of a man called Lodin, explaining that rumour says he has an important personage hidden inside. He hopes the characters will attack the place, and cause a great deal of damage, before being killed by the guards. The fact that he asks for nothing in return, or brushes such a question off with a “we’ll talk about that later”, should tip the characters off to his true motives. Much of the treasure from Vagn’s ship is in Blotolf’s warehouses and, if confronted, he will give the name of the pirate who sold it to him: Vendrad the Four-Fingered.

- **Among the Merchants:** Guldeif Guldeifsson is a well-known Scanian merchant, who trades his goods for slaves which he sells in northern Scandia. He also spies on everything happening in the region for King Frodi. If he notices the characters, or if they come to see him because of his trade, he will tell them what he knows. He will not do anything which may threaten his cover, but he is willing to help. He will tell the characters that a dozen Danish sailors, recently arrived, are being held in a separate enclosure. Guldeif gives information to the Player Characters as soon as he receives it, and will try to find out more. If they ask, he will try and buy the sailors, but this is difficult. Guldeif will help the characters as much as possible, without getting too involved himself.
- **The Ships:** If patient, and free with their bribes, the characters will be pointed towards Vendrad, a stinking giant of a man who is missing the index finger on his right hand. He refuses to speak with Danes, and can even be threatening if the party insist upon questioning him. On the quays, he can count on help from his crew; twenty ruffians always ready for a fight. However, he spends his night in the dock taverns, quickly getting drunk and talking too much. If drunk, it is possible to get him to talk, and he will tell the characters about the attack on the Jutes and Danes. He will reveal the name of his lord, Hrapp Annsson, and the tense situation between Hrapp and the king of Hirsk. The captured sailors can be found in the slave enclosures.
- **The Slave Quarter:** The characters will sooner or later learn of the presence of the Danish sailors. However, they are unable to approach them, and it will be explained that they belong to Ari Stigsson. If they are finally able to speak to them, by infiltrating the guarded quarter or by getting authorisation from the king, the characters will hear about the pirate attack and the capture of Vagn and Hedriss, as well as that of the princess’ followers (three servants) and Hjalti the skald. This group has been separated from the sailors, who do not know where they are.

However, they do know that the ships which attacked them belonged to a vassal of the king of Hirsk, and the king was furious when the prisoners arrived. It was the king who ordered the vassal, named Hrapp, to hand over the nobles to him. Finally, one of the sailors will admit having seen the Danish noble Vagn and the Jutish Princess Hedriss exchange a kiss – something which will doubtless confuse the characters, but which Ligurd will do his best to exploit, perhaps accusing young Vagn of betraying his own lord and father.

- **The Taverns:** Various rumours can be gathered here, as well as the names of important NPCs such as Guldeif, Vendrad, and Blotolf. It is up to the characters to be persuasive enough to obtain them. These are dens of iniquity and can be dangerous. You can also use them to provide information or encounters with NPCs, inhabitants of Hirsk, or travellers, which may lead to new adventures
- **The Drunk:** This old toothless man staggers out of an alley. If the characters are carrying the Raven Spear, he begins shouting, and throws themselves at their feet. His senseless gibbering includes a few words of Norse, calling on the gods and passers-by, gesturing towards the characters: “...ill-omened raven... blood and smoke... betrayal...”. Then he collapses, unconscious from drink. If the characters wake him, he remembers nothing, and does not even speak *dansk tunga* (he is a Finnish slave who was cast out of the slave enclosures because of his madness, and now wanders the city). If the spear is hidden, the drunk behaves in the same way, except he addresses himself only towards a single character. Choose the character carefully: the old madman’s prediction is just as incomprehensible, but mentions one of the character’s Fate runes. Once again, be inventive, and use it to give the character a clue about what his destiny holds.
- **The King’s Longhouse:** The characters must be clever to get an audience with the king of the City of Chains; without good reason, the king’s *hirdmen* will simply refuse them entry. Mentioning Vagn or Hedriss, or presenting themselves as potential enemies of the monarch, will make them somewhat more reasonable.

Ari Stigsson is a handsome man; neither young nor old, elegant and smiling. But the hardness of his eyes reveals the cruelty he is capable of. With a tankard of beer, guarded by two *berserkers* who never leave his side, he listens to the characters carefully. If they lie about the reasons for their visit, he is not fooled. King Ari will tell the characters that Hedriss and Vagn were captured by his vassal, Hrapp Annsson, but he pretends not to know

if they are still alive. He will also say he has bought the Danish sailors, who he hopes to send back to their king by way of reparation. Of course, he hopes to receive a few “gifts” in exchange, and even asks the characters to take charge of the transaction (which will keep them from Hirsk for a few weeks).

While he appears friendly, Ari judges the heroes carefully during the audience, trying to discover what they really know. If he thinks they might be dangerous, he will send a band of his pirates to kill them once they have left Hirsk.

During the discussion, the king’s wife, Osk, appears and joins them. The king is visibly irritated, but says nothing in front of the characters. Osk is a pretty woman, still young, but pale, with shadowed eyes. She listens and serves drinks, only speaking to complain about the disappearance of the Jutish princess. If the conversation becomes more personal, she speaks of her Danish origins and asks for news of her old country, then exchanges a few banalities with her husband. An attentive character (an easy (ST 10) Empathy test) may realise Osk hates her husband, and would do anything to escape him.

The characters may also speak with Junder, a pale, thin man and one of the king’s loyal retainers. He will only mention his lord’s involvement in this affair if his life depends on it, but will never admit that Princess Hedriss is in the Hirsk fortress, claiming she was killed during the pirate raid.

Ari Stigsson’s Intentions

The king of Hirsk is in a difficult position. His main vassal, Hrapp Annsso, dreams of taking his place and, thanks to his recent gains, might well get the funds necessary to raise an army and rally other malcontents to his cause. What is more, the death of his war chief has alienated the *hirdmen* of Hirsk. Thankfully, Ari still has his *berserker* guard, and the support of the merchants and the various criminals he protects and rules with an iron hand.

Ari Stigsson wants to regain control of the city and get rid of his enemies. He hopes the Danes will wreak vengeance on Hrapp, and is ready to give him up if he could be sure they would do nothing against Hirsk directly.

As for Hedriss, by virtue of the law of the City of Chains which allows the king to seize part of any treasure taken, she is in his possession. For the moment, he hopes to gain time. An alliance between Jutland and Denmark disturbs him. With such a hostage as Hedriss, he hopes

he can strengthen his position, or even (as he dreams) be acclaimed rightful sovereign of this region in the northern Skagerrak.

After spending some time in the city, the characters should gain an understanding of the situation. Depending on their actions, they may have made allies (Guldeif and even the *hirdmen* or Ari’s wife, if they play this card against the king), but also enemies. Take note of their actions in Hirsk, as these might be vital later on. Logically, they should head off to meet with Hrapp Annsso, who holds the Danish prince Vagn captive.

Finally, if the characters have made enemies (such as Vendrad, or Blotolf, who will want to steal the Raven Spear if he sees it), they will launch an attack on the characters as soon as they attempt to leave the city. Perhaps making the most of the funeral of the leader of the *hirdmen*, which attracts most of the city’s inhabitants, they will attempt to ambush the characters on the quay. They will have gathered a great many criminals for this (twice as many as there are characters), but they are cowards, and will flee as soon as a third of their number have fallen. If interrogated, they claim not to know who hired them to attack and rob the characters.

Chapter 3: The Jaws of the Wolf



If Osvif is still alive, he sails the *langskip* down the *Gautar* coast if the characters’ direct him to do so. If he is dead, it is up to them to sail the ship (unless they hire the services of a navigator at Hirsk, managing to find a man they can trust, or if they decide to travel by land). The coast has few landmarks, with gravel beaches sloping gently up to steep hills covered in thick forests. After a day’s travel, the characters will discover a small village in a shallow bay. Three ships are moored at a single quay; one, with serious battle damage, resembles the ship the Player Characters saved. They have found Vagn’s *snekkjar*.

As the characters approach, fifteen or so warriors leave the houses and take up positions on the wooden quay. The characters should quickly realise they are not

Scenario: Offerings to the Great Winter

welcome, and the risk of violence is very high.

If they nevertheless insist on meeting the leader of this community, they will be taken to the longhouse under heavy guard.

Jarl Hrapp Annsson, a corpulent man with a prominent nose, receives the characters coldly, and attempts to find out as much as possible about their mission. If asked about the Danish ship, or the presence of Hedriss or Vagn in his domain, he freely admits he took them captive. However, the jarl refuses to listen to the characters, particularly if they mention their visit to Hirsk and King Ari. In his domain, Hrapp is in a powerful position; he has a guard of almost a hundred warriors.

Throughout the conversation, a man is standing behind the *jarl's* seat. This is a *thulr* by the name of Hermod (see below), who has a great deal of influence over the *jarl*. When Hrapp tries to end the conversation, Hermod murmurs something in his ear. The *jarl* frowns, then tries to smile.

"I understand your fear for your friends. I will offer you, as is traditional, hospitality for tonight. We will speak of this tomorrow, and will no doubt come to an arrangement."

Even though he appears to respect the Scandian tradition of hospitality, his sudden change of heart should worry the characters. Hrapp explains he would like to gain the recognition of such a powerful king as Frodi, and his support against his enemies, although he refuses to say any more on the subject. His argument seems sensible, but the truth lies elsewhere:

Hermod has immediately realised the characters' real reasons for being here, even if they do not mention it directly, and has suggested to Hrapp that he take them prisoner.

The *jarl* orders that a feast be prepared for his guests. Tables are set up, barrels of beer opened, and men hurry to the longhouse. Use the description in the "Daily Life" chapter as a reference, but note that Hrapp's house does not possess a second storey. The *jarl* intends to get the characters drunk, and then capture them easily, and will be generous in his offerings of food and alcohol. Players should be suspicious of this sudden show of generosity, and wonder about the identity of the strange advisor who leaves his usual place in the shadows to speak to them. If the characters want to use the preparation time for the feast to investigate the village, Hrapp agrees, after a moment's hesitation.

The village is a typical coastal community, but the *jarl's* warriors place themselves to keep the characters from

Hrapp Annsson's Plan

Hrapp Annsson is not a skilled politician. He is relying on a ransom from the Danes in exchange for Vagn, and using that gold to buy the loyalty and swords of enough mercenaries to attack Hirsk. He first assumes the PCs have come to rescue the young noble, and refuses at first to negotiate with them. But his sorcerous counsellor, Hermod, whispers an alternative. If captured, the characters themselves might constitute a supplementary source of ransom, or (in the longer term) even a means to put pressure on Denmark. Further, he is hoping to seize the PCs' ship and add it to his own fleet. Hrapp expects to use these hostages to gain from King Frodi either financial support or actual intervention against Hirsk to help his plans of rebellion.

the houses by the forest's edge. Of course, this is where Vagn is being held prisoner.

Let the players evaluate their chances and prepare a plan. During the evening, Hrapp Annsson's men, apart from ten of his personal guard, will get very drunk, and will soon be unable to fight. If the characters remain sober, the *jarl*, losing patience, will stand on his seat and order them taken captive (remember the characters will not have weapons in the common hall, unless they have used some subterfuge to keep them). The *jarl's* guards surround the characters and rush them; any combat will be in a confined space with stools and other parts of the decor available as improvised weapons. However, if the characters are drunk, or pretend to be, the men will tie them up and take them to another house, close to where Vagn is imprisoned. They will be left in this hovel which, in winter, is used to house livestock.

From this point on, everything depends on how the characters have dealt with the situation. They may be prisoners, or they may have departed, planning to return

later. If they have won the fight against Hrapp Annsson's *hirdmen*, they may even have captured the *jarl*...

The possibilities are endless. Improvise the subsequent events based on the position the characters find themselves in. To help you do so, this chapter details the layout of the area, the situation, and the characters, as well as how the drama might unfold. Use these elements to respond to the characters' actions.

Note: What if the characters are skilled negotiators? If the characters did not present themselves openly as friends of Ari Stigsson, they may have the opportunity during the feast to approach Hrapp Annssohn and speak to him. They may have deduced his intention to overthrow the king of Hirsk, and may even try to ally with the rebellious *jarl*. Surprised at first, Hrapp, then Hermod, will listen attentively; the idea is very seductive. However, the pirate lord is determined to maintain a dominant position, and will still attempt to take the characters captive during the night. Unless the characters are more powerful than his own men, in which case he rescinds the order, the *jarl* hopes to keep them at his mercy and negotiate an alliance between them according to the terms he dictates. Finally, Hrapp fears an alliance between Jutland and Denmark as much as Ari. He will not speak of Hedriss to the Danes, claiming she is dead, unless they explain she is a vital element in any negotiation, and could push Frodi to attack Hirsk.

The Nameless Village

This little community was only founded around fifteen years ago. Hrapp's father was a banished *hirdman* from the lands of the Gautars, who found refuge in the City of Chains and joined its king. For his services, he was allowed to found a colony in the unexplored lands south of Hirsk. Hrapp is still a vassal of Ari Stigsson, and provides his sovereign's city with wood, food, and furs. Although few refer to it as such, the village is named after its founder, Ann.

The village has just over three hundred inhabitants, of which a hundred are slaves, working in fields reclaimed from the forest. The remainder include the warriors of clan Annssohn and their families. The village closely resembles that described in the "Daily Life" chapter, with two exceptions. First, the houses are built around a large central square, with the workshops, barns, and slave quarters forming a second concentric circle outside that. As a result, it more closely resembles a fortified camp in enemy territory than an agricultural village. No gate leads to the forest from the encircling wall, whose palisade is twice the height on that side. The formidable Beast of Ann lives in the forest; a gigantic bear with grey and black fur, said to be immortal. In any case, no one ever goes far into the woods, and then never alone. The beast sometimes wanders into the area, killing cattle or isolated individuals.

The long house of the village is large and low. An enclosure for horses and a stable abut one of the exterior walls.

The characters may notice there are an unusually high number of slaves in the village, but the proximity to Hirsk no doubt explains this. Two isolated houses stand outside the palisade on the forest side. One is the home of the formidable Dusk, a giant Finn, and a warrior and trapper, who has sworn to kill the beast of the forest. Vagn is held in his house. The second is a shelter filled with straw, where any Player Characters taken prisoner are held, together with Hjalti the skald.

The Protagonists

- **Hrapp Annssohn:** this evilly smiling chieftain is more bandit than noble. He hates his status as a vassal, and the humiliations he suffers from King Ari. The two men hate each other, but Hrapp knows that he has neither the means nor the courage to face the king of the City of Chains. Hermod's honeyed words have made him realise there are other possibilities. Hrapp agreed to give Princess Hedriss to the king as a sign of his "good will" and to regain his favour; he has kept Vagn for himself to ransom him to the *jarl* of Odense. With the gold he expects to gain from this, he plans to raise a mercenary army and declare his independence, before starting a conquest of coastal villages in Scania to the south in order to enlarge his domain. As for the characters, Hrapp hopes to make use of them soon, either in exchange for ransom, as Hermod has suggested, or by sending their corpses back to Hleidra and blaming Ari for their deaths. The characters' deaths, and the kidnap of the Jutish princess, should be enough to provoke Frodi into mounting a punitive expedition against Hirsk, an idea which delights the *jarl* of Ann. If the characters manage to take Hrapp Annssohn captive by some means, he will do anything to save his skin, and will wait for the right moment to betray his captors in turn.
- **Hermod:** This *thulr*, disfigured by a deep wound, hates Ari Stigsson more than anything, for Osk is his legitimate wife, stolen from him during a raid on their village where he received his wound. Since then, he has sworn revenge on the king of Hirsk. He came to Ann three years ago and, by dint of his counsel and knowledge of human weakness, made himself indispensable to the easily-manipulated Hrapp. Hermod hopes to provoke war between vassal and lord and – with the capture of Vagn – between Denmark and Hirsk. Only the desire for vengeance drives him, and he cannot be reasoned with. If the Player Characters take control of the situation, he will reveal Ari's lies, and Hedriss' presence in the City of Chains.
- **Dusk:** This colossus knows only a few words of *dansk tunga*, but is so taciturn he hardly ever speaks. Once

Scenario: Offerings to the Great Winter

a slave, Hrapp gave him his freedom, in exchange for which Dusk promised to protect him. The giant started a family, and was working as a woodcutter when the great Beast in the forest took his wife and newborn child. Since then, he watches the forest every night, listening for its roar, whereupon he his axe and heads into the forest. So far his efforts have been in vain, but one night he or the Beast of Ann will put an end to the other.

- **The Warriors:** These outlaws and exiles once swore loyalty to Ann, and have now done so to his son, Hrapp, thus becoming part of a clan they can be proud of. Most are only moderately skilled fighters, apart from the ten *hirdmen* who make up the *jarl's* guard, and are completely devoted to him.
- **The Slaves:** Apart from their situation, life is no harder for them here than anywhere else. There is little chance they will rebel against their owners. However, a dozen of them, Norwegian sailors only recently captured, will happily join with the characters if given weapons and freed from the chains they wear at night.
- **Vagn:** Since his capture, Vagn has been shut up in a corner of Dusk's house, behind a wall of planks. Two warriors stay with him and make sure he cannot escape. He is very weak as he refuses to eat, and is slowly dying despite Hrapp's anger. He has already attempted to escape, and has received bad wounds to his thigh and side which have disabled him. Gnawed by guilt, tormented by love and the knowledge he was unable to save the princess, as well as the double betrayal he has committed against his father and his duty, Vagn is incapacitated by his pain.
- **Hjalti Thorrodson:** He is described in more detail in the NPC section (see page 226). He fears the characters may ruin his plans, but also knows they can be used to further his ends. He is also dealing with an unexpected situation: his original goal was to arrange Hedriss' death while she was under Vagn's protection, and in so doing provoke war between Jutland and Denmark. His capture by Hrapp has changed everything, but he sees that the characters can help him regain control of the situation. He has told Hrapp nothing of his plans, still hoping to escape and free the Jutish princess to carry out his original plan. Hjalti is a born manipulator, and the characters may never realise his real role in this twisted intrigue.

The Situation

Hrapp Annsen dreams of grandeur, Hermod of vengeance. Both agree the best thing to do is to provoke war between Hirsk and the Danes. They think they hold all the cards, but the characters' arrival has forced them to reconsider. Vagn is Hrapp's prisoner, whom he wants

to exchange for a considerable ransom. Hrapp would also like to see the king of Jutland reproach the king of Denmark for the death of the princess. A war between the two kingdoms would also benefit his plans of conquest. Vagn is tormented by guilt: still in love with Hedriss, although she is promised to his father, he cannot bear his situation. If freed, he has only one idea in his mind – to find the princess.

For Hjalti, events have taken a turn for the worst, as he no longer controls the princess' destiny. But the characters can help; if he thinks it possible, he will help them free Vagn and continue with his plan. The skald hopes to reunite the two lovers, and thereby provoke a crisis between Jutland, Denmark, and Hirsk. He expects to take advantage of the chaos caused by the fighting between the three to strike with impunity.

But what about the characters? They find themselves in this nest of vipers with a mission to rescue the princess and the son of the *jarl* of Odense. Once they have freed the latter, and learned the whereabouts of the former, it is up to them to decide what to do next.

Possible Events

The characters arrive in Ann, discover the Danish ship, and meet with Hrapp Annsen, the village *jarl*.

After an icy welcome, Hrapp's attitude changes, and he invites them to his table. He tries to get them drunk during a feast and take them captive.

Thrown into a cell, the heroes meet Hjalti, who tells them where Hedriss and Vagn can be found. They escape (persuading a slave to aid their cause, or knocking out their jailer, or during an attack by the beast of the forest...), or attack Hrapp when he comes to interrogate them.

Many other things may happen at this point, depending on the characters' decisions. If Vagn has been killed, the *jarl* of Odense will be very upset; if Princess Hedriss dies, the king of Jutland may hold the Danes responsible, ruining any chance of an alliance, and even leading to a declaration of war – an outcome Hjalti sorely wants to bring about. Hjalti does not want to kill the princess himself, or perhaps only as a last resort, and only if he can blame someone else. He will do whatever he can to put Vagn or Hedriss in danger, including alerting guards, if he can be sure he himself can escape.

Chapter 4: Return to Hirsk



Scene 1: The Battle Plan

The characters should now know about the prisoners and the situation at Hirsk, including where the Jutish princess is imprisoned. They will no doubt have discovered that the king of the City of Chains has manipulated them. What is more, the love between Vagn and Hedriss only complicates the situation. At this point, there are several options open to the characters.

Negotiations

If the characters travel to Hirsk that very day, they will miss the arrival of three ships belonging to Hord Beinirsson (see below). In this case, they will encounter them upon their return to Ann, if Ari Stigsson chases them off. At Hirsk, the characters may propose paying a ransom for the princess, the daughter of Jutland's king. If they take Hrapp Annsson hostage, and attempt to exchange him for the princess, they will quickly understand that Ari Stigsson wants nothing to do with this troublesome vassal, and would be happy to see him killed. They will have to do much better than that if they are to negotiate with the pirate king.

During negotiations, if the characters are not in a position of power, the king of Hirsk will not hesitate to imprison them, or chase them away, depending on how they treat with him. If they have not shown him the respect he believes he deserves, they will discover it is more difficult to escape the slave pits of the City of Chains than those of Ann. However, even then, if the characters gain the attention of Osk, or that of the *hirdmen* partisans, they may receive some unexpected assistance.

If the negotiations or the overall situation go against Ari, he will play his final card, and offer to let the characters enter his service, offering them land, ships, and riches enough to satisfy their ambitions. He is serious about this, hoping to gain time to assemble his forces, and even gain an ally or two into the bargain.

Reinforcements

If the characters take the time to evaluate the situation and learn more before acting against Hirsk (for example, by visiting the merchants of a Saxon trading post a day's sailing away, which was once allied to Hirsk, or by interrogating captured pirates), they will be surprised to see, the very next day, five sails heading towards them. If they are still at Ann, the ships will divert their course as soon as they see the Danish ships. If the characters are at sea or beached elsewhere, the convoy of *langskips* do the same, but the men onboard will be suspicious when they meet. You may also decide these ships encounter the characters as they are heading towards the City of Chains.

In any case, this is Guerd Latik accompanied by four *langskips* from Odense, led by the *jarl*, Hord Beinirsson, in person. Worried by the lack of news, the *jarl* has set sail to look for his son, Vagn. On the way, he met a Jutish noble who told him what had happened. Suspecting the Hirsk pirates were responsible, Hord decided to find out for himself, and set sail towards the city. He has more than a hundred and twenty warriors to add weight to his demands.

The reunion with his son is very cold. He reproaches him for incompetence with barely-veiled anger, for having endangered their house and failed in his mission. Hord is a hard man, demanding and showing no compassion, even towards his own son. Once he has met the characters, he listens to their account in silence. Then, ordering a camp to be prepared for the following night, he calls on a small group, including the characters, Hjalti, Vagn, as well as Guerd Latik and a few of his men (including Ligurd if he is still alive). Together, they will decide the best path to take. The night promises to be long, and the arguments heated. There are two main possibilities, but the characters may well come up with more.

- **Negotiate:** see above, but this time, they will be in a position of strength. Hord will choose the characters as emissaries as they have already met Ari Stigsson.
- **Free Hedriss from her prison:** this solution is preferred by most of the warriors, who consider negotiating with the pirates pointless, not to mention dishonourable. Hjalti does not take sides, but subtly directs the discussion towards this alternative, hoping to use the confusion of an attack to carry out his plan and kill the princess, just as she is under the Danes' protection.

They might also decide to assault the city directly, but this option is extremely risky; it would be best to concentrate on plans with a better chance of success.

Scenario: Offerings to the Great Winter

Jarl Hord counts on the characters, as they have already visited Hirsk, to come up with a battle plan. Reply to any tactical questions the characters ask, as long as they had a decent chance of making the necessary observations during their first visit. Numbers of guards, main defences, access routes, and so on are detailed below, or in the description of the city. Lastly, let the characters organise the attack; the following is a possible list of options:

- The characters may have realised there is a great deal of bad feeling between the *hirdmen* and the king of Hirsk, which the characters may be able to use to their advantage. Advance spies may be sent to establish contact with potential rebels. If they already attempted this during their last visit, they will already have met the *hirdmen's* new chief, Thorfin Aersson, who is faithful to Ari Stigsson; but his second-in-command, a man of Svithjod with an evil smile by the name of Vigfur Oddsson, is the leader of the malcontents. An Easy (ST 10) Empathy test allows the characters to realise he could be corrupted, and hates Ari Stigsson enough to side with the characters against him.

However, the warriors remain dubious allies, who would be all too happy to turn against the warriors from Odense if it seems to be to their advantage. If the characters manage to convince Vigfur, he can rally more than two-thirds of the *hirdmen* to his cause, and bring about a bloody civil war within the city.

- The characters may try to obtain the aid of Osk. In either case, Hord will ask the characters to return to Hirsk as scouts, to investigate both possibilities.
- The great chain bars entrance to the city, stopping the passage of enemy ships. However, a small determined group of warriors could take the watchtowers and open the channel (travelling overland and climbing the cliffs which overhang the area). However, reinforcements will quickly arrive from the city, and the characters' position could quickly become untenable unless they were to render the mechanism inoperable... which is probably impossible, as it was indeed made by giants. Only the Raven Spear can destroy the device, but in so doing the chain would explode and the spear shatter into fragments of ice, melting away to nothing – although it will have served its purpose. If the chain is not destroyed, any ships already in port may only depart once the chain has been raised by new guard.
- Even if the ships enter the port, they may only do so in single file. They will be able to disembark their warriors in the port, but the narrowness of the channel means only one ship can do so at a time. The place is not well protected, but interior gates separate it from the centre of power in the city proper. A

landing action of this nature will create panic among the merchants and slaves, a perfect diversion for another group to infiltrate the city.

- Infiltrating the city by land is possible, but once again, only a small group can enter the city through the pass leading to it, or by climbing down the cliff faces overhanging it. They must still negotiate the gates and palisades, kill the guards, and cross the perimeter guarded by *berserkers*, to get to the longhouse.
- In the longhouse, and in the buildings in its immediate vicinity, Ari Stigsson is guarded by his most loyal men, thirty or so devoted warriors who will only surrender if their chief is killed or taken hostage. If a diversion has been arranged, these warriors will become more spread out, and only a dozen will remain to guard the king, including two *berserkers*.

During this council, as the characters formulate their battle plan, Vagn is silent, his eyes on the sea. Once or twice, Hjalti will murmur something in his ear, to which the young man responds with a motion of his head. His distress is obvious; if a character speaks to him, he glances at Hord sadly, who ignores him and continues to talk. Clearly he does not want to speak in his presence.

Once the battle plan has been decided upon, the skald asks a question:

"Sire, do you not think the pirates could put the princess to death once the alert is sounded?"

The *jarl* of Odense's face becomes even harder. He replies, in a monotone:

"It would be very foolish to get rid of such a valuable hostage. But if Fate decides otherwise... then, it will happen. I will not negotiate with these criminals!"

At these words, Vagn gives a strangled cry, claiming exhaustion and withdrawing, followed by Hjalti.

If the characters meet Vagn afterwards, he is still with the skald. His wounds prevent him from directly participating in the coming battle, and his father refuses to let him board for Hirsk, instead planning to send him back to Odense the following day. Hjalti urges Vagn to say what his on his mind; distressed, he hesitates a moment, then speaks:

"- I beg of you! Make sure nothing happens to Hedriss. I... She... Oh, for the love of Denmark, save her!"

He can say no more, and goes to rest.

Civil War in Hirsk

Some of the elements presented here will only become important if the characters have decided to set in motion an insurrection in Hirsk as described in *Scene 3: Fire and blood* (see page 223), particularly the encounters with Vigfur and Osk. Here is a probable timeline of the events marking this civil war:

- The heroes return to Hirsk.
- They meet people willing to help them (Guldeif, Vigfur, Osk), and do what they need to to organise the *hirdmen* rebellion or Hedriss' rescue.
- The enemies of King Ari Stigsson take up arms and attack the king's longhouse and *berserker* guard. Fighting breaks out throughout the city.
- Eventually, Hord Beinirsson's ships assault the city, and a group of heroes must break or lift the chain to let them through.

The Beast of Ann

If the players remain in Ann while making their plans, the Beast of Ann attacks. During the night, terrible roars echo through the darkness. They come from around the village, grow distant, then begin again as soon as the beast is believed gone. Domestic animals will panic, and the people of Ann behave barely any better. If Dusk is still alive, even as a prisoner, he becomes hysterical, demanding the characters arm him and let him go to kill the beast. Soon after, silence descends, and the palisade by the forest cracks as though struck by a battering ram. The Beast of Ann enters, to feed in an enclosure holding a dozen ewes and their lambs. If the characters act promptly, they will be among the first on the scene.

The beast stands as high as a man at the shoulder, and holds the bloody body of a sheep in its slavering jaws. It has already killed half a dozen others. As soon as people arrive, it rushes back towards the forest. A hunt might well ensure, perhaps led by the Characters, but the creature is cunning and fierce. If the group splits up, it attacks the smallest group, trying to kill as many hunters as possible.

Give this scene a surreal aspect. The moon illuminates the undergrowth with a silvery light, silence reigns, the smell of blood is everywhere. Tell the players they have lost the trail, then have the beast burst out of nowhere in a violent attack. Use anonymous NPCs accompanying the characters to describe how the bodies are torn apart by claws as sharp as razors, the bones broken beneath the beast's paws, the skulls crushed by its powerful jaws.

Perhaps the characters will kill the Beast of Ann, or perhaps it escapes. An Average (ST 14) Survival test

allows them to corner it against a rocky cliff, and end the menace once and for all. In any case, the encounter is an opportunity for one of the characters to perform a heroic deed.

Scene 2: Leaving for the City of Chains

As soon as dawn breaks through the thick fog, unwelcome news quickly reaches the characters' ears: Vagn has disappeared!

Hord Beinirsson falls into a black rage, yelling at his men, accusing them of being responsible for this. He then goes to the house the young man was supposed to have stayed in.

At first glance, the door has clearly not been forced, and the slaves claim to know nothing. But one of the slave women is shaking in fear. If threatened or reassured (an Easy (ST 10) Empathy or Intimidation test), she reveals her secret. When the Beast of Ann attacked, and the warriors left to kill it, Vagn called the skald to him and they spoke for a long time. Later that night, taking advantage of the ongoing chaos, Vagn left, and Hjalti spoke to the young slave, saying, "This has to be done. It is useless to fight against fate. Not a word to anyone. I go with the Dane to watch over him".

This is all she knows. Two horses are also reported missing from the village stables. Tracks show them heading north, towards Hirsk.

The players may have an idea what Vagn is planning. However, are they willing to take the *jarl* of Odense into their confidence?

Faced with this new situation, Hord Beinirsson seems incredibly calm. If the characters suggest going after his son, he thinks the idea over for a moment before rejecting it. *Jarl* Hord insists the characters keep to their original plan, either to head into Hirsk to negotiate for Princess Hedriss, or to scout it out for a rescue mission. Hord adds: "Whether he is running, or if he wants to atone for his failure, I do not care!" The characters are left to carry out their mission.

The characters leave for the City of Chains. It is up to them to prepare for the expedition; they may go by ship, or on foot, which will take longer (almost two full days), but allows for a more discrete approach. Let them organise the journey however they want, and discuss

Scenario: Offerings to the Great Winter

what awaits them. Once in view of the watchtowers by the fjord, and the roofs of the hovels, a major surprise awaits them which puts all their plans at risk (see below).

Finally, if Hord Beinirsson has permitted the characters to make a direct attack, following his son's disappearance, the Jutish and Danish ships will gather around the entrance to the fjord. Attacking Hirsk will prove easier than expected.

Note: It is impossible to predict everything the players may do. The most likely solution is to send the characters as emissaries or scouts, and this is the assumption here. However, they may decide to have the other ships follow them at a safe distance; in such a case, this will involve a direct raid on a city ravaged by internal conflict. However, the characters may prefer a more secretive approach, infiltrating the City of Chains and getting through to the place where Princess Hedriss is being held prisoner. No one strategy is better than another; adapt to what the players decide. The following chapter describes the conditions and environment the characters face; use it to set up the final climactic scene of the scenario.

What if the Player Characters Were Keeping an Eye on Vagn?

Vagn still summons Hjalti to talk with him. Although Hjalti will pretend it was Vagn's idea, it was in fact the skald who convinced the young noble to flee and rejoin Princess Hedriss. If unmasked by the Player Characters, Hjalti attempts to rally them to his side. After all, they all have the same goal: to free the Jutish princess. Hjalti will use all the arguments at his disposal to convince the characters to accompany him; he plays a double game, insisting that Fate will decide the future of the two young people, all the while advocating caution.

If the characters convince Vagn to stay in Ann, he will pretend to agree, and flee the moment their backs are turned, still accompanied by the duplicitous skald.

Scene 3: Fire and Blood

As soon as the characters come within sight of Hirsk, they will realise they need to rethink their plans. Thick plumes of black smoke rise from within the port; the warehouses are on fire, as are some of the ships at the quays. The City of Chains, which has survived uncounted attacks from neighbouring lords, is succumbing to its own internecine struggle. The criminals who inhabit Hirsk are fighting a bloody civil war which promises to lead to its destruction.

As the characters may suspect, the hatred of the *hirdmen* has finally overcome their loyalty towards their cruel and untrustworthy king. Ari Stigsson's men, and those loyal to the dead war chief, are fighting in the narrow streets of Hirsk. The battle is still raging around the houses and docks when the characters arrive, but the longhouse and its neighbouring buildings will soon come under attack. By the light of the flames, the merchant ships which have managed to flee the docks are travelling as fast as they can away from the doomed city, loaded with as much merchandise (slaves and goods) as they can carry. But the guards at the entrance to the fjord are raising the chain, stopping any further escapees.

Let the characters review their plans in the light of these new and unexpected events. In spite of the obvious danger, they have an excellent opportunity to enter the city and attempt a rescue. What is more, if they wait, it may be too late for the princess...

Option: The Insurrection Cannot Happen Without the Characters...

In the above case, the *hirdmen's* insurrection makes the characters' task somewhat easier, and adds an apocalyptic tone to this final part of the scenario.

However, if playing with experienced gamers or GM, you may decide on a different approach. In such a case, the *hirdmen* are still furious, but do not have the courage to rise up. Instead, it is up to the characters to set off the events which will lead to the fall of Hirsk.

Let the characters meet with the *hirdmen* and their leader and push them towards open rebellion. Osk, Ari Stigsson's wife, may help them meet and rally the palace servants to their cause. Further, they can count on logistical support from Guldeif Guldeifsson. They will need no more than a few days to set the uprising in motion – and why not use an attack from Hord Beinirsson's fleet to add to the chaos? Use the information given in the previous section where the Danes were planning their rescue of Hedriss. This approach, far more heroic, requires much more preparation time and improvisation by the Game Master. The characters will need to show great skill in negotiation and organisation; once the revolt begins, they will find themselves on the front lines.

Vagn and Hedriss amidst the Chaos

When will Vagn arrive in Hirsk? Well, whenever it suits the Game Master. To keep things coherent, figure it will take him two days to ride to the City of Chains. The players, by ship, will only take one day, but they will

have, at best, half a day's delay from the moment they leave Ann. Vagn will thus arrive a little after they do, exhausted by his wounds and the hard journey, to be present in the final scene, or to participate in the characters' preparations if they are plotting a rebellion (which may complicate things if he is captured by one of the king's *berserkers*).

As for Princess Hedriss, she is Ari Stigsson's "guest", and remains in his home under strong guard. As soon as the revolt begins, she is confined to a safe house at the top of the rocky promontory, watched over by Junder. She manages to escape during the fight and enters the burning city.

Scene 4: Civil War

Whether they are the instigators, or if they take advantage of the revolt to attack directly or act discretely, the characters find themselves caught up in the chaos which engulfs the City of Chains.

Once again, this part of the adventure depends on the characters' actions. If the Danish ships are at the mouth of the bay, they will have to deal with the problem of the giant chain. Armed groups are fighting in the streets, King Ari is hiding in his longhouse, panic is raging through the city... and amidst this chaos, the characters must somehow complete their mission. Here are a few events you might use to bring the rebellion to life, and provide a few obstacles for the Player Characters to overcome.

- The characters are caught between two groups of warriors from opposing factions. While one is clearly loyalists, the other is less identifiable, and are in fact pirates whose captain is allied to Hrapp, and who are making the most of the situation.
- Looters are attacking Guldeif's warehouse and threatening to throw the merchant into the freezing waters of the port.
- If they have not done so already, the characters find Vagn and Hjalti wandering through the city and attempting to reach the king's longhouse.
- Slaves chained up in a burning ship (or building) scream for someone to help them.
- A group of five *hirdmen* hold a palisade and block the path to the promontory. It is impossible to tell which faction they belong to. They throw improvised projectiles at anyone attempting to reach the gate.
- The king's men hold their ground around the chain mechanism and keep any ships trying to flee in the bay.
- At the top of the promontory, two of the king's *berserkers* guard the main doors leading to their



Hedriss' fate

Hedriss lives in the hope that Vagn will save her; their fledgling love has become her sole reason for living. If the *jarl's* son dies, or if she believes he has, she will refuse to resign herself to it and will commit suicide.

However, if the heroes save her, Vagn will arrive soon after. The battle is still raging throughout the city, and fire has reached the king's quarter. The two young nobles embrace before the PCs and proclaim their love. While enemy attacks force the characters to protect them, Vagn and Hedriss speak to the skald. Once the situation has calmed down, they beg the characters to let them flee, far from Denmark, far from Jutland. If the characters agree, and are willing to deal with the consequences, they disappear while the city is still gripped by chaos. Hjalti offers to go with them.

If the characters refuse and insist on carrying out their duty, the two lovers pretend to be resigned to it. But as soon as the characters' attention relaxes for a moment, such as when Hord or Guerd appear, they jump from the cliff or into the flames, in each other's arms, and nothing can be done to save them.

In any case, the planned marriage in Odense will not occur.



master's longhouse. They challenge any who approach. The bodies of seven *hirdmen* already lie at their feet.

In crossing the city, the characters may face many combats, depending on how powerful they are. Try not to kill them at this stage of the adventure, unless they do something stupid - their enemies are simple extras. However, these attacks may weaken the characters, and make their mission harder once they reach their goal. And, most importantly, they will slow them down.

Focus on the apocalyptic feel of the city. Flames threaten everything; the inhabitants fight the fires as best they can. Slaves are screaming; warriors struggle in the muddy, smoke-filled alleyways. Many take advantage of the disaster to settle personal scores or loot buildings; rivers of blood quickly run through the streets. If Hord's Danes intervene, or if Hrapp Annsson joins in the attack, the situation becomes even more confused. If Hrapp is present, he hopes to use the chaos to seize the

Scenario: Offerings to the Great Winter

city, hoping to betray the Danes immediately. But neither the hirdmen nor Ari's men will rally to him, and the civil war will have a third faction. The noise, the smoke, the screams and sound of steel on steel, the smell of blood and burnt flesh, the fear and suffering, all fill the city.

Vagn is in no condition to fight, but insists on accompanying the characters. If they do not protect him, the son of the *jarl* of Odense risks death this day.

As the characters approach the longhouse, Hjalti chooses his moment to vanish. He tells Vagn that he hopes to find Princess Hedriss, and take her to safety before the fighting threatens her life. This is actually true, but for more sinister reasons. In the confusion, if the characters are not very vigilant, simply mention the skald has disappeared. If Vagn is with them, he will try to reassure them, although they may draw their own conclusions.

Scene 5: No One Escapes His fate

The characters may head to the longhouse of the king of Hirsk to free his prisoner. To do so, they must fight the two *berserkers* guarding the gate, unless they approach more indirectly, perhaps scaling the cliff or climbing the palisade (both of which are Difficult (ST 19) Climbing tests). The top of the promontory is hidden in smoke; once there, the characters must fight their way through the last of Ari Stigsson's guards (at the most two per Player Character). In the longhouse, they find themselves face-to-face with King Ari, who is also looking for the princess to use her as a hostage. The characters have the opportunity to fight the pirate king, or try to negotiate with him.

Possible Events:

- The insurgents regroup and launch attacks throughout the city.
- Fires ravage Hirsk, the merchants try to flee, but the chain blocks the entrance to the port (the Danish ships are waiting outside).
- Vagn and Hjalti rejoin the characters and follow them to the king's longhouse.
- During their assault on the king's quarter, the Characters fight the last guards, the *berserkers* and *hirdmen* loyal to the king. The skald slips discretely away and attempts to find Princess Hedriss in the chaos.
- If the situation turns against him, Ari Stigsson hides in his house with those few still faithful to him, and

Hrapp Annsson and/or Hord Beinirsson launch their final assault. The Player Characters see the king fleeing, using a narrow path following the cliff and leading down to the port.

- Hjalti meets with Hedriss, who has hidden in the slave quarter of the royal household. He tells her that Vagn has died during the attack, and the Danes attacking the port have not come to save her, but only to take revenge. The young woman loses all hope and decides to commit suicide. She throws herself from the cliff.

Of course, it is hoped the characters will change these events, and reach Princess Hedriss before the skald does. Hjalti will not raise a hand against her, but does not want her to fall into the hands of Hord Beinirsson. If she dies during the Danes' assault, or while the characters are trying to save her, he hopes the king of Jutland will hold them responsible, and reject the proposed alliance. However, if the characters know Hedriss killed herself, the skald will change his tactics, making himself scarce and praising their courage.

On the other hand, Ligurd may still betray the PCs, and try to abduct Hedriss, taking advantage of the confusion which still reigns. He kills her with a Danish arrow, then dumps her body in the port, close to where Guerd Latik is. The Jutish warrior will no doubt think it an accident, but it will ruin the alliance between the two kingdoms.

It does not matter whether King Ari, the *hirdmen*, or even Hrapp win the battle; whoever is victor, Hirsk remains an outlaw city, albeit weakened. Possible outcomes include:

- Hrapp Annsson seizes power. If he manages to find Princess Hedriss, he tries to hide her, hoping to use her as a hostage and prevent the alliance between his powerful neighbours. He takes over the City of Chains, and is such a bad leader that he is killed by one of his lieutenants within the year.
- Hord Beinirsson leads the assault. After a few quick victories, he has to retreat under the sheer weight of enemies, and risks being trapped in the city. Unless the characters turn the tide, Hirsk will remain an outlaw city.
- If the *hirdmen* overcome their enemies, they will proclaim their leader the new king of the city, and he will immediately wed Osk. Ari, if he is found, will be publicly executed (hanged from the cliff face); otherwise, the old king will flee to Norway with a few loyal subjects. They will return in a few years to enact vengeance.
- The royal warriors put down the rebellion. The rebels

are executed in a spectacular and hideous fashion, to serve as examples to others who may plot against the king. King Ari attempts to make peace with the Danes, and offers to give them Hedriss if she is still in his hands (as long as they allow him to keep the throne). If the Jutish princess is dead, he accuses his enemies of her murder.

Conclusion



Once aboard their *snekkjar*, the characters watch the Norwegian coast disappear into the distance. They will soon be back home, to enjoy the feast Hrolf Knudson is preparing for them. However, a bitter taste fills their mouths. Hedriss is probably dead, and the alliance between the Jutes and the Danes will not happen. Worse, if Guerd is convinced the characters or Hord's men are responsible for her death, war threatens the two kingdoms.

If Vagn survived, he is prostrate in a corner of the ship. The young man, broken-hearted, will soon leave Odense on an expedition. He will not return for many years.

As for the characters, what have they discovered? The Lady of Ice has given them more questions than answers. Yes, they have accomplished heroic exploits, and they know a disaster without precedent threatens Scandia. But when? And how?

Only the gods know the answers.

As they are carried over the water, the cries of ravens are heard. Two black birds follow them for a moment before heading north. Their cries sound much like laughter...

Extras

Danes and Jutes

Osvif and the nine Danish sailors

These are tough men used to carrying out expeditions all over Scandia. All are deeply loyal to their jarl and his representatives, the Player Characters. They are not skilled warriors, but if their ship is in danger, they are more than ready to take up swords and axes to defend it.

Danish Sailors

Conflict 5 / 3 Relationships 3 Physical 6

Mental 3
Traits: Agile

Mystical 2 / 1

Vitality 9

Vagn Hordsson

Tall and thin, with an almost childlike face despite his 19 years and growing beard, Vagn grew up in the shadow of an authoritarian father who preferred his elder son, killed during the civil war which put Frodi on the throne. The young man, although an accomplished warrior, has no innate skill with weapons, but is instead something of a dreamer. He is torn between his guilt, and his deep love for Hedriss. Faced with a tragic decision, he risks making the worst choice.

Noble

Conflict 7 / 7

Relationships 5

Physical 5

Mental 5

Mystical 2 / 2

Vitality 10

Traits: Swift

Hedriss Olafsdottir

A young Jutish aristocrat, barely 17 years old, she has reluctantly agreed to her father's wishes. Since birth, she has been taught she must always act according to duty, and not her own wishes; however, she cannot restrain the love she bears for Vagn. Once separated, this fledgling love becomes a devouring passion, fed on the fear of never seeing each other again. Hedriss has slowly been convinced by Hjalti's cunning words that she can choose her own life... or at least refuse the one her entourage wants to inflict on her.

Noble

Conflict 4 / 4

Relationships 6

Physical 4

Mental 4

Mystical 2 / 2

Vitality 8

Guerd Latik and the Jutish warriors

Loyal to King Olaf of Jutland, Guerd's honour has been stained by his inability to protect Hedriss. He attempted to blame on Danes, as Hedriss was on their ship, but he is not looking for excuses, and would be ready to go to Hel's hall itself to regain his honour.

His men are veterans he has commanded for years, hirdmen from the royal guard. They would follow him anywhere, and never question his orders. Use this same profile for Juren and Ligurd, too.

Jutland hirdmen

Conflict 10 / 6

Relationships 3

Physical 6

Mental 3

Mystical 2 / 2

Vitality 10

Guerd has the **Bold** trait

(add +0 / +3 to the Mystical attribute above).

Scenario: Offerings to the Great Winter

Juren has the **Powerful** trait
(add +2 to the Physical and Vitality attributes above)
Ligurd has the **Traitor** trait
(add +1 to the Mental, -1 to Relationships attributes above)

Hirsk criminals

Vendrad the Four-Fingered and the Pirates of Hirsk

A rag-tag group with only a shared love of cruelty to hold them together, as well as the love of money and the fear, rather than respect, that Hrapp inspires in them. In combat they fight as individuals, but as warriors they should not be underestimated.

* *Traits are already included in the attributes.*

Pirates*

Conflict 8 / 6	Relationships 4	Physical
Mental 1	Mystical 2 / 2	Vitality 11

Traits: Brutal

Vendrad has the **Veteran** trait (add +1/+1 to the Conflict attribute and +0/+1 to the Mystical attribute).

Junder

This thin, pale man carries out King Ari's orders. He has no scruples, and is known for his cruelty and cowardice whenever he is not in his master's shadow.

Junder*

Conflict 4 / 5	Relationships 3	Physical 4
Mental 3	Mystical 2 / 0	Vitality 7

Traits: Coward

Blotolf and Lodin:

Use the base attributes for merchants.

Pirates*

Conflict 2 / 2	Relationships 10	Physical 3
Mental 4	Mystical 1 / 2	Vitality 6

Guldeif Guldeifsson

This small man with a pronounced squint is of non-descript appearance, and prefers it that way. A cunning merchant, he acts as Frodi's eyes and ears in this part of Scandia. When Vagn and Hedriss were captured and brought to Hirsk, he prepared to return to Hleidra to warn his master. But the arrival of the characters offers him a new course of action. When revolt breaks out in the City of Chains, he attempts to protect his goods while helping the characters, as long as it does not put him at risk.

Merchant*

Conflict 2 / 2	Relationships 10	Physical 3
Mental 6	Mystical 2 / 2	Vitality 6

Traits: Alert

The Hirdmen

A varied group of warriors from all over Scandia; more than two thirds of them hate the king for killing their last leader. Their dislike is such that it would take very little for them to turn against the king.

Hirdmen

Conflict 10 / 6	Relationships 3	Physical 6
Mental 3	Mystical 2 / 2	Vitality 10

Thorfin Aersson has the **Veteran** trait (add +1/+1 to the Conflict attribute and +0/+1 to the Mystical attribute)

Vigfur Oddson has the **Brutal** trait (add +1 to the Physical attribute, subtract -2 from the Mental attribute).

Berserkers

Even more than those found elsewhere, these warriors are filthy, repugnant, and arrogant. They sow terror among the king's opponents, and glory in their privileged status now the hirdmen have fallen into disgrace.

Berserker*

Conflict 12 / 8	Relationships 2	Physical 9
Mental 0	Mystical 3 / 5	Vitality 13

Traits: Brutal

In Ann Hermod

Captured with Osk during a raid by Hrapp and Ari against his village, Hermod owes his survival to his silver tongue and magical skills. The king of Hirsk, charmed by his young wife, decided to wed her, telling her her husband was dead. Hrapp, who was meant to kill Hermod, decided to keep him for his services. The *thulr* now detests the two men and dreams only of vengeance. He uses his new position to manoeuvre them to their destruction.

Thulr*

Conflict 5 / 3	Relationships 7	Physical 4
Mental 9	Mystical 9 / 7	Vitality 8

Traits: Initiate, Machiavellian

Dusk

This taciturn giant never smiles. Hrapp sees him more like a domestic animal than a human being. The jarl hopes that the Finn will kill the Beast of Ann during one of his hunts in the forest. Despite his brutal appearance, Dusk is a good man, scarred by suffering and the loss of all that was good in his world.

Dusk*

Conflict 10 / 6	Relationships 1	Physical 10
Mental 2	Mystical 2 / 2	Vitality 15

Traits: Powerful, Robust

Characters

Ari Stigsson

Swedish Noble 44 years old 1m85 / 85kg

Still a handsome man despite approaching his forty-fifth year, Ari has occupied the throne of Hirsk for almost ten years, a staggering accomplishment considering the short reigns of his predecessors. Cunning and intelligent, he has always known how to wield carrot and stick to keep the criminal city under his control. Impulsive, and truly besotted with Osk, he made his first mistake by killing the leader of his *hirdmen*. He has realised that this mistake, and Hrapp's ambitions (of which he is perfectly aware), make his position all the more precarious. Hedriss, Vagn, the heroes... Ari Stigsson hopes to manipulate everything to come out victorious, ideally with an alliance with Frodi.

Statistics

Body: Strength 3 Vigour 2 Agility 3
Mind: Intellect 3 Perception 2 Tenacity 3
Soul: Charisma 2 Instinct 2 Com. 3

Gifts: Empathic, Loki's Mask

Weakness: Hot-blooded

Reaction: 7

Movement: 5

Weight Capacity: 8

Physical Defence: 7

Mental Defence: 8

Hit Points: 47 (23/11/0)

Furor Pool: 3

Skills

Athletics 3, Commerce 2, Dodge 4, Eloquence 5, Empathy 4, Negotiation 9, Ride 4, Tactics 4, Vigilance 4, Long Weapons 9, Short Weapons 7

Combat Feats

Level 1: Stun

Level 2: Come to Me! Empty Hands

Equipment (ENC: 4. Total armour value: 7)

Long sword, two daggers, reinforced leather armour, reinforced leather bracers, reinforced leather greaves, shield (Physical Defence +3)

Renown: 88

Hrapp Annsson

Gautar Pirate Noble 42 years old 1m76 / 94kg

Although most people think that Hrapp is an idiot, unskilled in politics, this is not strictly accurate. They forget the *jarl's* ability to inspire loyalty in his men

through gold and fear, but also his charisma. Hrapp also benefits from Hermod's political advice, but knows what he wants: to sit on the throne of Hirsk. And for this, he is ready to commit any betrayal, enter or break any alliance, even though recent events have forced him to act before he is ready.

Statistics

Body: Strength 3 Vigour 4 Agility 1
Mind: Intellect 2 Perception 2 Tenacity 2
Soul: Charisma 3 Instinct 2 Com. 2

Gifts: Robust, Leader of Men

Weakness: Cruel

Reaction: 6

Movement: 5

Weight Capacity: 10

Physical Defence: 7

Mental Defence: 6

Hit Points: 43 (21/10/0)

Furor Pool: 4

Skills

Athletics 3, Dodge 3, Eloquence 3, Empathy 2, Games 4, Intimidation 6, Navigation 5, Negotiation 3, Ride 2, Superstition 2, Tactics 2, Traditions 3, Vigilance 4, Short Weapons 6, Two-handed Weapons 10

Combat Feats

Level 1: By Thor's arm! (1), Impetuous charge 1

Level 2: Yield Before Me!

Level 3: Helmsplitter

Equipment (ENC: 9. Total armour value: 10)

Two-handed axe, dagger, reinforced leather armour, helmet, reinforced leather bracers, fur shoulder guards.

Renown: 47

Hjalti Thorrodson

Danish Skald 32years old 1m79 / 75kg

Hjalti the skald usually works in Frodi's court. He previously served Halfdan, his brother. Some consider him a traitor, but Hjalti is above all an opportunist. What is more, he knows he is more useful in his current role in order to be able to weaken the power of the usurper. If the characters understand that Hjalti, the main conspirator against the proposed marriage alliance, is actually motivated by a desire to weaken Frodi's position, they may see him in a different light. He acts with the support of several Danish lords whose names he will never reveal. One question remains: does the end justify the means, considering the sacrifices of Hedriss and Vagn? Hjalti believes so.

The skald has an average physique, but his blue eyes glow like stars. His manners are excellent, and his sense of humour is somewhat grating, but he knows how to

Appendix

spread the poison of his pernicious ideas.

Hjalti enjoys decorating his clothing, usually grey, with pieces of golden fur.

Statistics

Body: Strength 2 Vigour 2 Agility 3
Mind: Intellect 3 Perception 3 Tenacity 2
Soul: Charisma 3 Instinct 2 Com. 3
Gifts: Initiate (*galdr*), Frey's Gift
Weakness: Grudge
Reaction: 8 **Movement:** 5

Weight Capacity: 6

Physical Defence: 7 **Mental Defence:** 7
Hit Points: 45 (22/11/0)
Furor Pool: 7

Skills

Acrobatics 4, Art (Music) 5, Art (Spoken Poetry) 7, Athletics 2, Dodge 2, Eloquence 8, Empathy 5, Galdr 6, Games 3, Negotiation 3, Ride 4, Seduction 2, Stealth 5, Superstition 2, Traditions 3, Short Weapons 6, Throw 2

Combat Feats

Level 1: Quick as Lightning
Level 2: Iron Defence!

Magic

Charms: Sleep, Seduction
Illusions: Hearing.

Equipment (ENC: 0. Total armour value: 2)
None when the characters meet him. Later: dagger, leather vest.
Renown: 23

The Beast of Ann

This huge bear has haunted the woods since Ann was founded, and legends says it is part of its curse. No one has ever managed to kill the Beast, and some say it is more troll than animal. In fact, the Beast of Ann, though most do not know it, has supernatural powers.

In particular, the Beast is immune to most blows; its heavy hide is more like armour, and it quickly regenerates wounds. But, above all, the Beast carries a terrible curse. Whoever bathes in its warm blood gains the permanent power to regenerate his wounds. In game terms, this doubles the character's healing rate. At the same time, however, any wounds caused by silver blades will never properly heal, and each such wound will reduce the character's Vigour score by 1 point.

Statistics

Body: Strength 5 Vigour 5 Agility 3
Mind: Intellect 2 Perception 4 Tenacity 4

Soul: Charisma 0 Instinct 4 Com. 0
Reaction: 10 **Movement:** 8

Weight Capacity: -

Physical Defence: 12 **Mental Defence:** 10
Hit Points: 63 (31/15/0)

Skills

Athletics 13, Dodge 6, Stealth 5, Survival 12, Vigilance 9, Claws 11, Jaws 9

Damage: The Beast of Ann chooses every round whether to use its jaws or claws. It cannot parry enemy blows, only try to dodge them.

Claws (6) **Jaws** (9)

Armour: Thick Skin (3)

Traits: Terror (6)

Renown: 22

Appendix: NPC List

King Frodi: King of Denmark, who usurped the throne after killing his brother Halfdan.

Hord Beinirsson: *Jarl* of Odense, opposed to Frodi, future husband to Hedriss.

Olaf Gunderson: King of Jutland, father of Hedriss.

Hrolf Knudson: *Jarl* of clan Kjari and chief of the town of Rohald on the island of Fyn.

Osvif: captain of the Player Characters' ship.

Vagn Hordsson: Son of Hord Beinirsson, Danish noble from Odense, Hedriss' lover.

Hedriss Olafsdottir: Daughter to the king of Jutland, promised to Hord Beinirsson, Vagn's lover.

Guerd Latik: One-eyed warrior, chief of the Jutes tasked with escorting the princess to Odense.

Hjalti Thorrodson: Skald, emissary of Danish lords opposed to the alliance with Jutland.

Ari Stigsson: King of Hirsk.

Drapp Annsson: *Jarl* of Ann, pirate, and vassal of King Ari, whom he dreams of overthrowing. His men have captured Vagn and Hedriss, and he holds the Danish noble in his village.

Junder: damned soul serving King Ari.

Hermod: *Thulr*, counsellor to Drapp Annsson, legitimate husband of Osk.

Dusk: Once a Finnish slave, a giant who has sworn to kill the Beast of Ann.

Juren: Jutish warrior accompanying the Player Characters. Arrogant and xenophobic.

Ligurd: Jutish warrior accompanying the Player Characters. A traitor, he has sworn to stop them.

Blotolf: Hirsk merchant, he wants Drapp's loot and pushes the characters to attack Lodin.

Lodin: Hirsk merchant, a rival of the precedent.

Vendrad the Four-Fingered: Pirate chief in Drapp's service who captured the two nobles.

Guldeif Guldeifsson: Danish merchant in Hirsk, a spy

for Frodi.

Thorfin Aersson: The new chief of the hirdmen in Hirsk, loyal to the king, hated by his men for the same reason.

Vigfur Oddson: Thorfin Aersson's second, a Svithjod hirdman ready to betray the king of Hirsk to avenge his old chief and friend.

Inspirations

Yggdrasill has been inspired by the legends of the age of the Vikings and of the story of Beowulf (the 4th to 6th centuries of the Christian era).

Films

There are few films which are accurate representations of this era. Others may have some good historical elements, but also many errors (whether deliberate or not).

Beowulf & Grendel, by Sturla Gunnarsson (2005): no doubt the best visual representation, close to historical with supernatural elements.

The 13th Warrior by John McTeirman (1999): good to average, but the Men of the North are fairly well depicted.

Outlander by Howard McCain (2008): if one ignores the extraterrestrial elements, there are some good scenes, such as the shield challenge.

Beowulf by Robert Zemeckis (2007): the legend of Beowulf, reinterpreted.

Erik the Viking by Terry Jones (1989): for a bit of fun... Iconic, amusing, and very funny.

Books

Edda by Snorri Sturluson, ed. Anthony Faulkes.

The Poetic Edda translated by Carolyne Larrington.

A History of the Vikings by Gwyn Jones (2001): excellent overview of the scale and extent of Norse civilization.

The Vikings by Jonathan Clements (2005)

The Penguin Book of Norse Myths: Gods of the Vikings by Kevin Crossley-Holland (1996, 2011)

Family Names

Men use their father's name as a surname, followed by -son; women do the same, followed by with -dottir.

first Names in the Three Kingdoms

Male			Female
	Haldor	Orm	
	Halfdan	Ospak	
Agnar	Hall	Osvif	Aasta
Alf	Hallstein	Ottar	Alfdis
An	Ham	Reidar	Astrid
Ari	Harald	Rongvald	Aud
Armod	Harbein	Runolf	Bera
Arnel	Hauk	Sigurd	Bergotha
Arnor	Heinrek	Skati	Borghild
Askjel	Helgi	Skule	Brunehilde
Asgault	Herjolf	Snorri	Freyvar
Asgeir	Hermod	Stein	Gerreid
Audun	Hildebrand	Stig	Gjaflaug
Balder	Hjalti	Stigandi	Groa
Bard	Hord	Styr	Gudny
Beinir	Horik	Sumarlidi	Gudrid
Bersi	Hoskuld	Svein	Gunnhild
Bjarni	Hrani	Svertig	Gunnvor
Bjorn	Hrapp	Svipdag	Gytha
Bjovulf	Hroar	Thangbrand	Heidh
Blotolf	Hrolf	Thorarin	Helha
Bolli	Hrörik	Thorbeg	Herdis
Dag	Hugleik	Thorbjorn	Hild
Domar	Hulvid	Thorfinn	Hrefna
Egil	Hunbogi	Thorgils	Hvit
Eilif	Hunding	Thorgrim	Ingebjorg
Eirik	Hvsing	Thorleik	Ingunn
Eldgrim	Ingemar	Thormod	Jorunn
Eyvid	Ingjald	Thorod	Melkorka
Frodi	Ingolf	Thorolf	Olof
Gandalv	Isleif	Thorstein	Osk
Ganger	Ivar	Tjodolv	Signy
Geirmund	Ketil	Tryggve	Sigrith
Gest	Kjallak	Ulfar	Skuld
Gisli	Kjari	Ulv	Thahild
Gizur	Kjartan	Unn	Thorgunna
Gorm	Klemet	Vagn	Thorunn
Grimm	Knud	Vendrad	Thurid
Guldaug	Knut	Vermund	Valthjona
Guldeif	Kolbein	Vifil	Gunnar
Lodin	Vigfur	Gunnstein	Magnar
Yngrar	Gyrd	Magnus	Yngwe
Hagbard	Odd		
Hakon	Olaf		

Index

Accessories & Jewellery	191	Buildings	192	in Combat	133
Acquiring Combat Feats	143	Burden of Fate	78	Cults & Rituals	22
A Debt to the Lady of Ice	209	Calculating the Success Threshold	163	Culture & Civilisation	50
Adils Ottarson	36	Calling on Furor	112	Cumulative Spell Effects	153
Adventuring in Scandia	193	Care and Natural Healing	141	Curse Domains	164
Aesir and Vanir (The)	9	Care of the Sick	64	Curses	161
Aesir Triad (The)	13	Casting a Rune	168	Customising Extras Using Traits	178
A Few Common Complaints	138	Casting a Spell	151	Daily Life	44
After Death	50	Casting Galdr Incantations	163	Damage	132
Agriculture	62	Casting Seidr Spells	154	Damage & Concentration	152
A Land Ruled by Cold	27	Changes in Renown	199	Danes and Jutes	225
Alfheim	13	Chapter 1: The Lady of Ice	204	Dangers of Using Curses	164
Allies & Adversaries	176	Chapter 2: The City of Chains	212	Day-to-day Equipment	190
An Eagle's Eye View of Scandia	25	Chapter 3: The Jaws of the Wolf	216	Defence Feats	147
Angles and Jutes	43	Chapter 4: Return to Hirsk	219	Defensive Mode	132
Animals	192	Characteristics	106	Defining a Rune's Power	169
Appendix: NPC List	228	Characteristic Tests	75	Describing Extras	176
Archetypes	89	Characteristic Values	107	Determining Characteristic Values	107
Ari Stigsson	227	Characters	227	Difficulty Levels	74
Armies	66	Charm Domains	166	Disengaging from Combat	127
Armour	189	Charms	166	Disir Goddesses	21
Armour and Charisma	190	Chasing Away the Valkyries	141	Divination	154
Arts (The)	55	Civil War in Hirsk	221	Dodging an Attack	132
A Savage Attack	207	Classic Attack	129	Domains	162
Asgard	11	Clothes	190	Draupnir	15
Attack Feats	144	Clothes and Ornaments	53	Drowning	137
Attacking	129	Cold	138	Duration of Seidr Spells	154
Attributes and Tests	177	Combat	125	Eddic & Skaldic Poetry	57
A Warning From the Gods	205	Combat Feats	143	Effects of Vitality	177
Background	203	Combat Feats and Magical Spells	83	Egil, Sorcerer-King of Svithjod	35
Balder, the Valiant	20	Combat Modifiers	131	Encumbrance (Equipment)	189
Battle on the Beach	211	Combat Round Sequence	127	Encumbrance (ENC)	110
Beast of Ann (The)	221	Combat Skills	124	Engaging an Opponent in Combat	127
Beasts & Monsters	181	Components of Galdr Incantations	163	Equipment And Travel	186
Becoming a Legend	200	Composed Shot	130	Everyday Life	52
Being Recognised	201	Concept	79	Evocative Epithets	47
Birth of a Hero	79	Concentration and Illusions	166	Examples of Poisons	140
Bjovulf	42	Conclusion	225	Exhausted and Severely Wounded	109
Bleeding	142	Counting Actions	129	Expeditions and Colonies	69
Blood Brothers	24	Crafts	62	Experience	195
Blood-Eagle or Blodorn	24	Craftsmen	91	Extended Tests	77
Blot, or the Sacrificial Rites	22	Creating Your Character	80	Extending Preparation Time	152
Body	106	Critical Success	77	Extra Archetypes	178
Books	229	Critical Successes and Fumbles		Extras	225

Extras in Combat	178	Hamr (The)	150	Kraken-Lord of the Lofoten Islands	185
Falling	137	Holmgang (The) – a Ritualised Duel	51	Law and Justice	48
Family and Clan	44	Healing Diseases & Poison Damage	142	Legend Points	195
Family Names	229	Healing Magic	157	Leisure Time	56
Famous Extras	177	Healing Wounds	142	Lifestyle	50
Fate	84	Hedriss' Fate	224	List of Runes	170
Fate and Heroes	74	Heimdall	19	List of Skills	120
Fate of Vagn and Hedriss	213	Heimdall's Aett	86	Livestock	62
Feats and Exploits	198	Heiti and Kennings	15	Loki	19
Feat versus Feat	147	Hel	20	Longhouse	60
Festival of Winter Nights	23	Heroes and Sagas	50	Losing Renown	200
Festivities	55	Heroes of Midgard	79	Maelstrom	37
Fighting with Two Weapons	149	Hild Thorbjornsdottir	94	Magic	150
Films	229	Hirsk criminals	226	Magical Skills	124
Finland	42	History	83	Magic in Yggdrasil	151
Fire	137	Hit Points	135	Major Wounds and Consequences	135
First Aid	141	Hit Points (HP)	108	Makeshift Shelters	59
First Betrayal Of The Gods	11	Hitting the Target	131	Marriage of Heidh and Ivar	52
First Names in the 3 Kingdoms	229	Hjalti Thorrodson	227	Medical Equipment & Medicines	191
Food	54	Houses	59	Medicine	142
Food and Festivals	54	How Attributes Work	177	Melee Attacks	129
Free Movement	127	Hrapp Annsson	227	Mental Defence (MD)	110
Freya, the Beautiful Lady	18	Hrapp Annsson's Plan	217	Midgard	11
Frey's Aett	85	Hring, King of Norway	38	Mind	106
Frey, the Lord of the Vanir	18	Hugleik, King of the Gautars	41	Modifying the ST	75
Frigga, the Beloved	19	Hugr	150	Monsters and Creatures of Scandia	182
Frodi, King of Denmark	31	Human Sacrifice	24	Movement (MOVE)	110
Fumble	78	Hunting and Fishing	62	Movement within Combat	126
Funerary Rites	23	Hygiene and Beauty	52	Muspelheim or Muspell	13
Furniture and Housework	60	Illusion Domains	165	Myths & Religion of Yggdrasil	9
Furor	111	Illusions	164	Nameless Village	217
Furor (Character Generation)	83	Important Figures of Denmark	31	Natural Healing	141
Furor Pool	111	Important Figures of Norway	38	Natural Remedies	142
Fylgia	151	Important Figures of Svithjod	35	Nature and Magic	150
Gaining Legend Points	196	Important Figures of the Gautars	41	Negotiations	219
Gaining Skills	120	In Ann	226	Nid (The)	163
Gaining Spells	151	Inclusive Domains	165	Nidavellir	13
Galdr: Incantation Magic	162	Individualising Extras	178	Niflheim	13
Game System	72	Inheritance	49	Njord, Oldest of the Vanir	17
Gautars (The Land of the)	40	Initiates of Odin	113	Nobles	89
Gefjun's Caprice	28	Initiative	128	Nobility and the People	46
General Skills	120	Inspirations	229	Norns (The)	21
Gifts (List)	115	In the Field	69	Norsemen and the Sea	64
Gifts and Weaknesses	82	In the Shadow	9	Noteworthy Deeds	199
Gifts & Weaknesses in Play	116	Into the Unknown	206	Odin, Lord of the Aesir	13
Gods (The Land of the)	49	Introduction	204	Onion Test	63
God-Kings	47	Jorun Hrolfsdottir	102	Opposed Tests	76
Gods of Asgard	13	Kingdom of Denmark	27	Opposing Spells	152
Grotti Mill	61	Kingdom of Norway	36	Option: Armour Damage	191
Habitations	57	Kingdom of Svithjod	32	Options	149
Hacksilver	186	Kitchen Utensils	190	Oral Tradition	57
Half-Giants of Norway	38	Klemet Gandalvsson	98	Organisation of the Northern Kingdoms	44

Index

Organising a Feast	192	Scandia	25	Tests Involving Multiple Skills	75
Other Major Gods	19	Scandian Beasts	181	Thorgrim Olavsson	96
Other Provinces	40	Scenario: Offerings to the Great Winter	203	Thor, the Giant-Killer	16
Other Regions, Other People	43	Scene 1: An Icy Welcome	212	Those Who Work Magic	150
Ottar	35	Scene 1: Leaving for the Ice Fjord	204	Three Concepts for Playing a Northman	8
Parrying an Attack	131	Scene 1: The Battle Plan	219	Threefold Soul	150
Personalities	180	Scene 2: First Steps	212	Towns	57
Physical Defence (PD)	109	Scene 2: Leaving for the City of Chains	221	Trade and Commerce	63
Poisons	139	Scene 2: The Ambush	206	Training	196
Power Attack	129	Scene 3: Fire and Blood	222	Traits	178
Power Shot	130	Scene 3: Meetings and Questions	213	Traits (Beasts & Monsters)	183
Precise Attack	129	Scene 3: The Lady of Ice	207	Travel and Transport	63
Precise Shot	130	Scene 4: A Sign from the Gods	209	Travellers	91
Preparation	168	Scene 4: Civil War	223	Travelling Gear	191
Preparation Time and Actions	151	Scene 5: A Troubled Return	210	Travelling in Scandia	194
Primal Chaos	9	Scene 5: No One Escapes His Fate	223	Tyr's Aett	87
Primary Actions	128	Secondary Actions	128	Tyr, the God of Law	17
Prolonging a Spell	153	Secondary Characteristics (Char.Gen)	82	Undertaking a Blot Sacrificial Rite	22
Protagonists	217	Secondary Characteristics	108	Unique Creatures	185
Protection Magic	156	Seidr: Sorcery or Trance Magic	153	Unskilled Tests	75
Ragnorök	174	Seidr Spell Descriptions	154	Using Furor in Combat	134
Raiding and War	66	Seidr Spells	154	Utgard	13
Random Extra Damage	178	Seriousness of Insults (The)	49	Utility Feats	148
Ranged Attacks	130	Shields	190	Vagn & Hedriss amidst the Chaos	222
Raven Spear	210	Ships and Sailors	65	Valkyrie (The)	21
Reaction (REA)	109	Sickness and Disease	138	Vanaheim	13
Realistic Movement	127	Sigurd Ivarsson	92	Vanir Triad (The)	17
Recruitment	66	Simple Tests	74	Villages	59
Reducing Preparation Time	151	Skjöldung (The Royal House of)	30	Voyage (The)	206
Regaining Furor	113	Skill Levels	119	Warriors	90
Regin Erlingsson	31	Skills	82	Weaknesses	115
Reinforcements	219	Skills (List)	119	Weaknesses (List)	117
Renown	197	Skill Tests	120	Weapons (Daily Life)	68
Renown in Play	197	Social Conventions	48	Weapons (Equipment)	188
Resistance Tests	164	Social Hierarchy: Jarl, Bondi, and Thrall	45	Weather Conditions and Travel Modifiers	194
Resisting a Spell	152	Social Rites	51	What is a Role-Playing Game?	7
Resisting Runes	169	Some Examples of Extended Tests	76	Which Defence Test Result?	133
Rohald (The City of) & Clan Kjari	204	Sorcerer's Seat	60	Wielding a One-handed Weapon in Two Hands	149
Rolling Dice	72	Soul	107	Witch-Queens of Finland	43
Rounding Fractions	73	Special Results	77	Witnesses and Locations	199
Rhythm of Combat	125	Spell Range	151	Women (The Role of)	47
Runes (The)	85	Spending Legend Points	196	Work	62
Rune Duration	169	Spy (The)	214	Workers	91
Runes of Healing	142	Starkad, the Skald	38	Wounds and Healing	135
Runes: Sacred Writings	168	Starting Character Equipment	193	Yggdrasill and Historical Accuracy	7
Runes, the voice of Fate	84	Success and Failure	72	Yggdrasill and the Nine Worlds	11
Sacred Oaths	24	Suffocation	137	Yggdrasill, the Role-Playing Game	7
Sacred Places	23	Summary	73	Yngwe Gilsursson	100
Sages	90	Svartalfheim	13	Your Saga	196
Savage Warriors	67	Sveijar Einarsson	31		
Savage Warriors & Furor	112	Synopsis	203		
Saxons	43	Tests	73		



Name	_____	Archetype	_____
Surname	_____	Profession	_____
Age	_____	Height	_____
Kingdom	_____	Weight	_____
Gifts	_____	Weakness	_____



FACE RUNES		BODY		MIND		SOUL	
1	_____ + / -	Strength	_____	Intellect	_____	Charisma	_____
2	_____ + / -	Vigour	_____	Perception	_____	Instinct	_____
3	_____ + / -	Agility	_____	Tenacity	_____	Communication	_____

INI	PD	MD	0	ST 10	ST 14
REA _____	Base _____	Base _____	MOV _____		
ENC _____	ENC _____	Arm. _____		-3	+1 Level
Arm. _____	Arm. _____	Magic _____	ENC _____		
Magic _____	Magic _____				
Total _____	Total _____	Total _____	Renown _____		

Acrobatics _____	Medicine* _____	Galdr* _____
Art _____	Navigation _____	Runes* _____
Athletics _____	Negotiation _____	Seidr* _____
Climbing _____	Ride _____	
Commerce _____	Sagas _____	Hand-to-hand _____
Craft _____	Search _____	Improvised Weapons _____
Dodge _____	Seduction _____	Long Weapons _____
Eloquence _____	Stealth _____	Pole Arms _____
Empathy _____	Superstition _____	Ranged Weapons _____
Drive _____	Survival _____	Short Weapons _____
Games _____	Swim _____	Throw _____
Herbalism _____	Tactics _____	Two-handed Weapons _____
Intimidation _____	Theft _____	
Knowledge _____	Traditions _____	
Languages* _____	Vigilance _____	

HP	Weapons	Level	Damage	HP	SR	MR	LR	ER	feats
Healthy	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
0	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
-3	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

Uncon. 0 Dead	Actions					furor Pool
	Base	-2	-5	-10	-20	

Money /Equipment

History

Renown

Noteworthy Deeds:

COMBAT FEATS

Name

Level Effect

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

SEIDR SPELLS

Name

Level

Penalty Prep.

Area

Effect

_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

GAEDR INCANTATIONS

ST Domain

Duration Area of Effect

Effect

3
6
9
12
15

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

ST Domain

Duration Area of Effect

Effect

3
6
9
12
15

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

RUNES

ST Name

Level Material / Duration

Effect

3
6
9
12
15

_____	_____	Skin - Hour	_____
_____	_____	fabric - Day	_____
_____	_____	Leather - Week	_____
_____	_____	Wood - Month	_____
_____	_____	Stone /Metal - Year	_____