

ULTIMATE DARK AGES GUIDE



VIKINGS



VIKINGS

CONTENTS

Introduction.....	<u>4</u>	Cnut the Great.....	<u>37</u>
Early History.....	<u>5</u>	Magnús the Good.....	<u>38</u>
Germanic People.....	<u>5</u>	Harald Hardrada.....	<u>39</u>
Scandinavia.....	<u>6</u>	Erik the Red.....	<u>39</u>
Fractured Tribes.....	<u>6</u>	Leif the Lucky.....	<u>40</u>
Seafarers.....	<u>7</u>	What's in a Name?.....	<u>41</u>
		Viking Timeline.....	<u>42</u>
Daily Life.....	<u>8</u>	General Timeline.....	<u>42</u>
Social Castes.....	<u>8</u>	Battle Timeline.....	<u>45</u>
Longhouse.....	<u>9</u>	Viking Characters.....	<u>56</u>
Men & Women.....	<u>10</u>	Character Concepts.....	<u>56</u>
Merchants.....	<u>11</u>	Hindrances.....	<u>57</u>
Slaves.....	<u>11</u>	Edges.....	<u>59</u>
Entertainment.....	<u>12</u>	Seithr.....	<u>61</u>
Warriors.....	<u>13</u>	Roleplaying Opportunities....	<u>61</u>
Shipbuilding.....	<u>13</u>	Viking Gear.....	<u>63</u>
Raid Parties.....	<u>14</u>	Weapons.....	<u>63</u>
Beyond Scandinavia.....	<u>15</u>	Armor.....	<u>64</u>
Settlements.....	<u>17</u>	Longships.....	<u>65</u>
Religion.....	<u>22</u>	Non-Player Characters.....	<u>67</u>
Norse Polytheism.....	<u>22</u>	Kveldúlfur Knútsson.....	<u>67</u>
Creation.....	<u>22</u>	Tryggvi Hálfðanarson.....	<u>68</u>
Places.....	<u>23</u>	Sveinn Snorrason.....	<u>69</u>
Æsir Deities.....	<u>27</u>	Viking Adventures.....	<u>70</u>
Vanir Deities.....	<u>30</u>	Honor Bound.....	<u>70</u>
Christianity.....	<u>31</u>	A Losing Battle.....	<u>71</u>
Notable People.....	<u>34</u>	Take to the Seas.....	<u>73</u>
Harald Fairhair.....	<u>34</u>	Bibliography.....	<u>75</u>
Harald Bluetooth.....	<u>35</u>		
Sweyn Forkbeard.....	<u>35</u>		
Olaf II Haraldsson.....	<u>36</u>		



Ultimate Dark Ages Guide: Vikings

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INTRODUCTION

There is a mass of land in the northern reaches of Europe that we've come to know as Scandinavia. Although the term is little more than a convenience for referring to multiple places and people, it is the land that comprises much of modern-day Denmark, Norway, and Sweden. It has played host to a Germanic culture for thousands of years, including the ethnic groups we refer to as Danes (Danish), Norwegians, and Swedes (Swedish). Often called the Nordic countries (Nordic meaning north), these lands also hosted one of the most ruthless inhabitants in history – the Vikings.

Of course, they weren't called the Vikings in their day. In fact, no one can truly agree upon where the term "Viking" came from. Some say it's a Norwegian word for a location from history; others say it's a Norse word for oversea pirate raids; and there are others who say the word just means pirate (there are likely other meanings beyond these). Regardless of where the term actually came from, it has become a symbolic term for anyone who lived in Scandinavia during the Viking Age (there's that term again) and were part of the warrior class. After all, the only thing they did was travel across the world attacking others and stealing their stuff. Right?

The thought of Vikings and their pirate ways has become mostly glorified by the thought of action and adventure abroad. But there are always two sides to every story and to recreate the life of a Viking in a proper sense, it's pertinent to get a clear picture of who they were and how they lived. This way, when you create a Viking character, he or she is much more than a bulky, red-haired human with a horn-helmet and a giant beard.

Ultimate Dark Ages Guide: Vikings explores the many facets of these Scandinavian people. This chapter will be the only time they are referred to as Vikings in a historical sense (not in a role-playing gaming sense though). Instead, they will be referred to as Norsemen or Scandinavians to signify their heritage as Germanic people and not the stereotypical Vikings that many have painted them to be. Sometimes they will instead be referred to by their associated kingdom; Danish, Norwegian, or Swedish, but only when referring to a specific kingdom.

Before you continue on and read the rest of this sourcebook, keep one fact in mind: the Germanic Norse people did not document their history. Yes, there are runestones and poems out there, but most of what is known about Scandinavians comes from a person who attempted to document their history 300 years later along with what others wrote down secondhand (such as the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle) and what archaeologists have found in Scandinavian burials and ruins. Thus, it is a collection of fact and speculation along with the piecing together of what has been written down (regardless if it's substantiated). This includes folklore and mythology, which were the beliefs of the Norse people, no matter how farfetched they might seem.

EARLY HISTORY

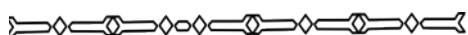
Ultimate Dark Ages Guide: Vikings focuses on the Norse people during the Viking Age; from the eighth century through the eleventh century. Historically, this period is fairly short, and very ruthless, but it's not where their history begins. These Norsemen are part of the larger Germanic ethnicity and had lived in the Scandinavian area, and nearby territories, since the Bronze Age over 2,000 years before the Viking Age.

GERMANIC PEOPLE

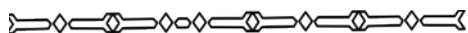
Much of what is known or theorized about the Germanic people comes from linguistic studies and archeological evidence. It starts in the Bronze Age (~1600 BC) with a culture that settled in Northern Europe. Their culture and language was a blend of what's known as Indo-European and the "Megalithic" cultures that built megaliths such as Stonehenge. This culture appeared to have settled in and around modern Denmark, including areas in Northern Germany and lands across the Baltic Sea.

Many cultures developed beneath the "umbrella" of the Germanic ethnicity (i.e. the cultures whose archaeological evidence mimics that of the Germanic people). Although these cultures were not unified, they spoke a common or similar language and practiced common or similar beliefs. They lived a pastoral and agricultural life, along with hunting and foraging when needed. They even came into contact with the Roman Empire and were subsequently influenced by it.

During the Bronze Age and into the Iron Age, the Germanic people began migrating. The cultures began to split into West, East, and North (Norse). The



So why is this sourcebook titled "Vikings" and not "Scandinavians" or "Norsemen"? Simply put, because most people associate with the term "Vikings." That and making a Viking character, setting, or adventure sounds a lot cooler than making a Scandinavian one. The word Viking is so synonymous with action and adventure (and pirate raids) that the term invokes a sense of excitement.



East Germanic tribes migrated south and east; the West Germanic tribes migrated west; the Norse tribes remained in their inherited part of Scandinavia and even expanded their territory across the Baltic Sea. The three groupings of cultures began to deviate in some of their languages and beliefs, but were ultimately very similar. It probably wouldn't have taken much for an East Germanic culture to learn the Norse or one of the Western languages with a little practice.

VIKINGS

SCANDINAVIA

The Norse tribes established throughout roots throughout the land around the Baltic Sea. The “warm” waters of the Baltic Sea (warm compared to the water north of Scandinavian territory) provided an optimal location for self-sufficiency. Although the land was generally rugged and filled with fjords and mountains, it also contained large strips of land ideal of agriculture, forests for building homes and finding food, and cool to warm summers. It is the abundance of natural resources that make it a land where the Norse culture could survive and thrive.

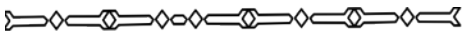
The Norse tribes spread out across the Scandinavian lands, creating the means of survival based on the terrain and environment of their new homes. Denmark epitomizes the best of the locations they found in Scandinavia. The landscape is generally flat with arable land ideal for agriculture. Much of it is rolling plains that meet the large sandy dunes along the coastline.

Norway, primarily the southern areas where the Norse cultures lived, has a rugged coastline with huge fjords and thousands of islands. Along the fjords are large strips of land ideal for agriculture. It has a continental climate with warm summers and cold winters in some areas, though dipping into cool summers elsewhere. Large predators stalk the land and sea, but if hunted, they can provide a lot of resources.

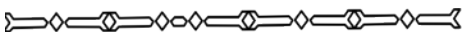
Sweden, primarily the southern areas, has large areas optimal for agriculture with large forests heading north. It has a varying combination of climates with oceanic in the south (cool winters and cool summers) and humid continental immediately to its north (cold winters and cool to mild summers). Both influenced by the Baltic Sea, the wooded areas to the north are considered subarctic. A large mountain range along its western border separates it from Norway.

Possibly due to the terrain or tribal conflicts, the Norse people “split” culturally to create a “western” Norse culture of Norwegians and an “eastern” Norse culture of Danes and Swedes. Whether these people were ever really unified is mostly unknown, but their cultures still retained similarity as did their language. How-

ever, the cultures would remain separated for centuries to come, leading to periodic conflicts over sovereignty.



The Migration Period of the Germanic people occurred over multiple centuries, probably in waves of tribes. One could speculate why the migration occurred, but it's likely safe to say they migrated for the same reason most cultures migrated during the Bronze Age: food and land. When populations grow, it's often necessary to find better ways to support them.



FRACTURED TRIBES

Early Germanic tribes made their way across Scandinavia and settled in neighboring territories. They maintained a clan-like way of life whereas one would likely associate with the clan first and the culture second.



EARLY HISTORY

These clans were founded on the importance of family and kinship, creating a territory of like-minded families. However, the “clan” did not have any power; it was an association rather than a governing entity. Instead, each family owned and maintained their own large plot of land (in the form of a farm), creating miniature hamlets that dotted the landscape. Some of these farms may have been close enough in proximity to be considered a village or town, but ultimately the homes were far enough from each other that one plot would be large enough to be self-sustaining (room for a longhouse, farm field, pasture, stables, blacksmithing, etc.).

The clan was an integral part of life before, leading up to, and during the early years of the Viking Age. Each clan had its own style of politics and was responsible for policing its people. Jarls, a clan chieftain, was a high-ranking individual within the clan responsible for organizing the freemen into fighting bands (effectively militias, although no army existed) when necessary. Because the cultures were so fractured and lacked any form of real unification, each clan had to protect itself from neighbors and outsiders. It wouldn’t be until the Viking Age when the clans started coming together as a somewhat cohesive culture, battling abroad as brethren.

SEAFARERS

Exploration and trade were common features amongst the Norse cultures since the Bronze Age. With the proximity of the Baltic Sea and the many rivers that led to places of trade, it was inevitable that they develop into a seafaring culture. Archaeological evidence seems to point to shipbuilding in the Nordic territories during the Iron Age, likely leading to the ship the Norse culture is most famously known for: the longship.

It is difficult to know to what extent the Norse people traveled prior to the Viking Age. Encounters with central European nations, especially Rome, seem to be few, but interaction with the Celtic tribes and possibly nearby Germanic tribes is more likely. This may be what eventually brought them to the shores of the British Isles, but no one truly seems to know.

Much of the extent of historical Norse trade is measured by evidence of the food they ate and the goods left behind. Some of this evidence pointed to trade that extended from Scandinavia all the way down to the Mediterranean. Travel across land for extensive trade such as this would likely be inefficient if possible at all. Using the existing waterways could prove otherwise.

DAILY LIFE

Ultimate Dark Ages Guide: Vikings focuses on the Norse people during the time of the Viking Age, approximately 793 AD – 1066. This period is referred to as the Viking Age due to the almost 300 years of pirate-like raids the Norsemen performed on foreign soil. It started with Lindisfarne on June 8, 793 and effectively ended with the defeat of Harald Hardradi (the Anglicized version of his name) at the hands of the Saxon King Harold Godwinson in 1066, after the Battle of Stamford Bridge. Although Scandinavian life before and after that time may not have differed much from those dates, this is when the foreign raids were frequent, threatening many people's way of life before some type of stability set in.

During the years leading up to the onset of the Viking Age, the Norse people were scattered about amongst the Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish territories. Small farms dotted the landscape, with prosperous regions clustered into what could be considered a small (population-wise) village. Less prosperous regions saw farms being farther apart, but if the land could accommodate it, the farms were plenty and the land was put to good use.

SOCIAL CASTES

At the advent of the Viking Age, Scandinavians were divided into three social castes: jarl, karl, and thrall. Thralls are those who have no freedoms in Scandinavia. They are slaves, locals who fell into debt, and criminals. Karls are freemen; generally farmers, they are allowed to own land, participate in all mercantile activities, and join the Viking raids. Jarls are equivalent to tribal chieftains. They own multiple properties and are responsible for organizing the freemen into fighting bands when necessary (like a militia).

A stark contrast existed in the monetary divisions between social castes. While most thralls effectively had nothing, karls had what they could make and what little they could buy (or trade for). Meanwhile jarls had some of the best items in the territory. When it came time to join a raid, karls wore leather and cloth protection while carrying shields, spears, and axes. Jarls were able to afford much better equipment and had chain mail, helmets, shields, spears, axes, and swords. During the course of raiding, weapons and armor may have been confiscated, but most freemen were not armed in the same manner as the jarls. They simply couldn't afford to.

As the Viking Age continued, new social divisions began to form with the advent of royalty and the formation of standing armies. Kings rose above the rank of jarl, but were really just great (or despicable) leaders capable of making other jarls pay fealty to them. They weren't so much royalty as they were dicta-

tors, but they were the only ones successful at unifying the many tribes that comprised a nation (whether they liked it or not).

Even the freemen took on different roles such as merchants (with the creation of trade villages), hersir (middle-rank warriors, like low-ranking nobles), hird-men (professional bodyguards), tinglithmen (royal bodyguards), berserkirs (the crazy ones who wore little more than animal-skin to protect them), and skalds (the Scandinavian version of the bard). Some thralls were even set free, becoming freemen who must follow the laws of the Norse people. Other freemen used their warrior prowess and desire for wages to become mercenaries locally and abroad (going as far as the Byzantine Empire to form the Varangian Guard).

Regardless of rank or class, all freemen were governed by the laws established by the local Thing. The Thing was a public forum for all freemen in the area to establish and enforce laws and resolve disputes. These laws were not written, but were memorized. At the beginning of each meeting, the law reader would recite the laws before the meeting began. All laws were based on honor and a code of ethics. Unfortunately, violence was an integral part of life and most disputes (often long-lasting feuds) were resolved through violence; even violence sanctioned by the Thing.

Although the people were eventually unified by kings, there was no royalty in Scandinavia. Kings were effectively self-appointed and gained their power due to military and political strength. The king that could amass the most support from the local jarls was the one seen that rose to power. He could then act as the military leader (should the nation need it) and a leader of religious beliefs. This last concept was paramount in the conversion from traditional beliefs to Christianity.

LONGHOUSE

Life in the miniature hamlets that formed the backbone of Norse society was partially made possible by the design of the longhouse. The longhouse, which is literally a long, box-shaped house, provided space for everything a family and extended family needed. This is important as winters could be quite cold and animals left outside could die, food not properly tended could go bad, and the people could starve without a cache of food and supplies.

Most longhouses had a common design to accommodate survival. They were up to 100ft long, built near running water, and built on a slope or high ground to allow for proper drainage. The floor was dug below ground-level, ideal for cold winters, and the walls including wood, stone, or blocks of turf depending on what supplies were available in the region.

The longhouse was typically one large open space inside (sometimes sections were walled-off for privacy). Space was provided for animal stalls (ideal for sheltering from the cold), benches for sitting, a workshop for building tools, storage for food, a fire pit for cooking, loom for weaving, and benches for sleeping



on. The extended family included parents, children, grandparents, and the family's slaves. Space was necessary to keep everyone safe in the winter and during attacks. In fact, even the design of having a single front and rear door was meant for safety (during attacks that is).

Many longhouses included outbuildings such as stables, storage sheds, workshops, boathouses, storage huts, covered toilets, and even bathhouses. Beyond that was the jarl's or karl's farm, which included fields for growing and pastures for grazing. Sometimes these longhouses and the surrounding land were all that was available as far as the eye can see. Others were clustered into areas resembling something of a village. Location of a longhouse was just as important as building technique. Due to the lack of centralized common areas (such as a marketplace), each family had to be self-sufficient and capable of feeding the entire extended family of what they could raise, farm, fish, and forage.

MEN & WOMEN

Life in Scandinavia centered on the longhouse and its ability to support the family and extended family that depended on it. This could be an incredibly daunting task; one that required more than just a single pair of hands.

Men and women in Scandinavia were equally important, especially when it came to affairs of the longhouse. The men were responsible for all activities

outside the longhouse including hunting, fishing, farming, blacksmithing, husbandry, maintenance, trade, and going out on a Viking raid. The women were responsible for all activities inside the longhouse such as preparing food, milking cows, making cheese, brewing ale, grinding grain, cooking, cleaning, storing food, weaving, embroidery, medicine. They could even join a Viking raid, though this was a rare occasion. Some men even viewed women as being half of the strength of the household. (This was in stark contrast to many cultures during the Dark Ages that viewed women as subservient to men.) When the men were away on a Viking raid, the jobs of farming, hunting, fishing, and trading became part of a woman's regular tasks.

The micro-hamlet of the longhouse and farmland was clearly run by a husband and wife team, working together for everyone's benefit. However, the husband had expectations that provided the wife some freedoms in the long-run. If the man was abusive to her or the children or failed to run the farm, she had the right to divorce him, women could inherit property, and women could reclaim their presents if their marriage ended. (Again, this is in stark contrast to many Dark Ages' cultures that viewed women as subservient to men.) Of course, there was the expectation that the wife tended to the needs of the household, leading back to the concept of the longhouse being run by a husband and wife team.

MERCHANTS

Not all Scandinavian men stuck to the farming life. Some ventured out to become successful traders and merchants either at one of the few actual Scandinavian towns or plying their trade on foreign soil (such as Britain, Kiev, and beyond). These merchants became the conduit for which all other Scandinavians could purchase (using looted goods) items from distant lands. Imported goods included glass, silk, spices, wool, and wine. Common exports included furs, beeswax, honey, amber, walrus ivory, and slaves.

SLAVES

Slaves were a regular part of life during the Viking Age. Other than trading for slaves in the marketplaces, most slaves were taken from locations attacked during a raid and could even result from other slaves procreating (unfortunate Scandinavians labeled as criminals or owing large debts could also become slaves). Referred to as thralls, slaves were the menial labor that often kept farms going. They performed many basic tasks such as tending the farm fields, cutting peat, collecting wood, fertilizing the fields, making fences, digging turf, breeding pigs, and making rope.

Slaves were owned by their "master," in the same manner that one could own an animal. They were not protected under any laws and a master could actually one of his slaves and not be considered as a murderer. If one were to kill someone else's slave, he must replace the dead one with a new slave. If a slave birthed a

VIKINGS

child, that child became a slave to the same master. The slaves could marry, but they had no other rights.

As the centuries passed, slaves gained something of a foothold in Scandinavian society. The social title of *loysing* was given to a slave set free by his or her owner, becoming a freeman; their children were also born into freedom. A *loysing* and a *loysing's* son still ranked socially beneath farmers, but they were considered freemen (no longer a slave) and likely still dependent on their owner in some ways.

ENTERTAINMENT

Life as a Scandinavian wasn't all raiding and farming. As with many cultures, periods of downtime, times for celebration, and the hours or days between other more important things contained various methods of entertainment.

BOARD GAMES

Historical evidence has shown Scandinavians frequently played board games. One of the most popular is a game known as *Hnefatafl*. Although the exact rules of the game are not truly known, *Hnefatafl* was a strategy game pitting one player as the attacker against the other player as the defender. The attacker's goal was to capture the king; the defender's goal was to allow the king to escape. (The attacker had twice as many pieces as the defender.)

During the Viking Age, the popularity of *Hnefatafl* was widespread in Scandinavia. It featured in several Norse Sagas and some men even boasted of their ability to win the game. Eventually, they brought the game to new settlements abroad including England, Ireland, and Iceland.

SPORTS

Sagas and illustrations depict a number of sport-like games popular in Scandinavia. This included swimming, wrestling, tug-of-war, horse fights, and even games that included balls (although their purpose is not known). The details of most sport-like entertainment are vague, sketchy, or non-existent, but it's possible many of them mirror the sports played in the modern day.

SNOW ACTIVITIES

Living in Scandinavia afforded the people regular access to snow-covered land and ice-covered bodies of water for a portion of the year. Besides the practical use of ice skates and skis, these items could be used for recreational purposes. Ice skates consisted of shaped bones attached to leather thongs. The skater would then use an iron-tipped wooden pole to propel himself across the ice. Skiing (with evidence that it had existed for thousands of years before the Viking Age) was a regular part of living in the cold Scandinavian country. Wood was split to make

the skis which were then attached to a shoe using leather straps. Again the user was propelled using a wooden pole.

STORYTELLING

Scandinavian history was an oral history. Although markers and icons may have words on them, their stories weren't written down in books. Some of their stories were quite grand, colloquially called sagas, and were passed down from generation to generation orally before finally be written down when the Christians came along. Besides Viking raiders sitting around and swapping stories about their latest antics, Scandinavians had a class of storytellers and poets called skalds. These professional orators held the history, sagas, and mythology of the Scandinavian people tightly in their heads. One would do well to keep the skalds on their side; they wouldn't want false stories to be spread, ruining ones' reputation.

MUSIC

Scandinavians may not have been known for their musical talents, but music was yet another part of their entertainment. Skalds often told their stories to music and jesters entertained with whatever talent they had. Instruments included the pan flute, horn pipe, and something akin to a lyre. While a Viking raider may never play an instrument, there's a chance he sang along.

WARRIORS

Scandinavian men, and sometimes women, were expected to be self-sufficient. Whatever they could not farm, or whenever they needed to supplement their farming, they were expected to acquire through other means. Trading was one method another was purchasing it. However, since the Scandinavians had no monetary system, they needed goods to barter with (not goods they produced which could be sold or traded).

Viking raids produced a source of "income" that could be used to purchase whatever the men and women wanted. However, Viking raids were not performed by soldiers or elite infantry; they were performed by warriors. Warriors are little more than Scandinavian farmers in possession of and skilled enough with weapons to travel abroad in the hopes of pillaging distant lands. Although an "army" did eventually grow from the Viking raiders into something resembling soldiers, it was the Scandinavian warrior at the heart of it all.

SHIPBUILDING

Scandinavians had been honing their shipbuilding skills for centuries. By the time of the Viking Age, they had developed shipbuilding methods that allowed them to travel far and wide, beach their ships, launch a Viking raid, and get away quickly before the pillaged truly had an opportunity to respond. Additionally,

VIKINGS

they were able to take these same ships down long rivers (as opposed to sea travel) and set-up trade with distant civilizations.

One of the most well-known ships of the Scandinavians is the longship. Many historians have reflected the importance of the longship in the success of the many Viking raids that occurred. While naval fleets had existed for many centuries before the Viking raids began, it is the design of the longship that makes them so different.

First, longships were built with a shallow-draft hull. This provided the ship with great speed on open waters, allowed it to be easily sailed down rivers (that may be unnavigable otherwise), and allowed the boats to be easily beached. The Viking raiders could thus sail quickly to an unsuspecting destination, land right on the shoreline, jump out of the boats to attack and plunder the town, and be back into the boats before the target could muster a proper defense.

Second, longships were built using overlapping planks known as clinker-built. This made the ships stronger than traditional boats. These planks were held together by iron rivets and stuffed with wool or animal hair soaked in pine tar to create a seal between the planks.

Third, longships were oar-powered with a single mast in the center to allow for one large sail to propel the boat during longer journeys. Oars allowed for improved handling when necessary while the work of the rowers can be replaced by the sail in open waters.

Fourth, longships had a symmetrical bow and stern allowing them to be propelled forwards or backwards without any change in capability. After beaching the longships to attack, the boats could be pushed out into the water without having to be turned around, allowing for a faster escape.

Other longship features may have improved the success of the Viking raids, such as the intimidation afforded from a dragon carved into the bow and stern, but these are likely the most measureable features. Combined, these aspects of the longboats provided centuries of pirate-like raids to occur all across Europe, well beyond Scandinavia.

RAID PARTIES

Viking raiding parties were more like loosely organized war bands. Warriors who partook in the raids were expected to supply their own armor and weapons. Most were modestly armored and generally carried the most common weapons for their culture – (battle) axes, spears, and shields. Some of them may have carried a knife and those who could afford it or already plundered one also carried a sword. Bows and arrows were used, but not often. There are stories that Viking warriors looked down upon missile attacks and stuck to melee.

Each raiding party was led by at least one chieftain or lord. This leader would have more wealth than the average Viking warrior and thus often wore chainmail and helmets and carried a sword. In the earlier decades, there was no standing army and thus Viking warriors looked like a hodge-podge of equipment.

DAILY LIFE

A third warrior existed to join many raiding parties – the berserkir. Berserkir warriors, said to be fueled by spiritual powers, wore wolf or bear skins and charged heedlessly into battle. Some historians state these berserkir warriors would work themselves into a frenzy before engaging in battle.

BEYOND SCANDINAVIA

Scandinavian warriors typically ventured out for a Viking raid and would then return with the loot they collected. After many decades, some of them stayed in the areas they plundered to set-up Scandinavian settlements beyond Scandinavia. Some of the settlements were new; some were captured by the Scandinavians and ruled by one of their leaders. In the end, however, they were repelled and the settlement or land was reclaimed.

DUBLIN

Scandinavian warriors performed Viking raids on coastal Gaelic Irish settlements starting in the late 8th century. After decades of raids, naval encampments began to appear, allowing the warriors to raid farther inland. Around 839, the first Scandinavian stronghold was built in the area of modern-day Dublin, known as *Dyflin* by the Scandinavians.



VIKINGS

The Gaelic Irish launched numerous attacks on the invading Scandinavians, attempting to take control of Dyflin. Power over Dyflin went back and forth between the Gaelic Irish and the Scandinavians for almost a century. During this time, Scandinavian warriors used Dyflin as their central power from which many campaigns were launched against the Gaelic Irish of Ireland and the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms of Britain.

After being expelled in the first few years of the 10th century, the Scandinavians returned to combat the Gaelic Irish not even two decades later. They were unable to reclaim the power over the land that they once had and were eventually defeated by the Irish. During this time, the ruling Scandinavians may have come and gone, but many people from the Norse culture remained and were assimilated into the Gaelic Irish culture.

JÓRVIK

Britain was a regular target for Viking raids. One of the targets captured by the Scandinavians was Anglo-Saxon town *Eoforwic*. Known by historians as *Jórvik*, it was located the southern area of Northumbria (in modern-day Yorkshire). The town was captured by Ivar the Boneless in 866. Years later, Scandinavian monarchs vied for control over it, claiming it as one of their own settlements, until 954 when control of the area returned to the Anglo-Saxons.

At the time, Britain was a land of fractured kingdoms with waxing and waning alliances. The Scandinavians were first bought off to stop the attacks, but their greed eventually took over and they set their sights on the rest of Britain. Multiple attacks were launched from Jórvik as well as attacks by the Anglo-Saxons in the hopes of reclaiming the town.

After the Anglo-Saxons regained control, they assimilated Jórvik into the Kingdom of Northumbria and created a political title known as the Earl of York. Although Scandinavian control was removed (i.e. control from Denmark, Sweden, or Norway), Nordic control did not. The Earls of York were Scandinavian, eventually being succeeded by the Scandinavians that established Normandy (called the Normans). As with Dyflin, the Scandinavian population in Jórvik settled in the area and became assimilated into the local population.

DANELAW

The Danelaw (the modern spelling) was an area in Britain conquered and dominated by Scandinavians. It came about after Viking raids and attacks harassed the leaders of Britain until a treaty was written to establish a territory ruled by the Scandinavians. The Treaty of Alfred and Guthrum was formalized in 886, establishing what effectively was a Scandinavian kingdom in Britain.

The Danelaw could be simply divided into thirds: Guthrum Kingdom in the south, Danish Mercia in the center, and Danish Northumbria in the north. Multiple major towns appeared within these areas including Jórvik, Lincoln, Nottingham, Derby, Leicester, Stamford, and Northampton. The Anglo-Saxons still controlled territories to the west and north of the Danelaw, and peaceful rela-

tions between the two cultures were attempted. However, the Anglo-Saxons paid a “Danegeld” regularly (like a tax) as a tribute for avoiding war.

Many Scandinavians settled within the Danelaw and many were assimilated into the local cultures. Unfortunately, settling into a new land did not extend a feeling of kinship between those in the Danelaw and those in Scandinavia. Viking raids occurred and alliances were quick to form. Some backed their Scandinavian kin; some backed their Anglo-Saxon kings. War was rather commonplace throughout the centuries after the formation of the Danelaw, effectively ending when William the Conqueror, a Norman, becomes king of England after the Battle of Hastings. This marked the Norman Conquest of Britain and coincided with the end of Viking raids.

SETTLEMENTS

The Norse people live throughout much of Scandinavia. Their farmsteads were spread far and wide, typically clustered nearest the resources they needed the most. The concept of a settlement was not like it was in the rest of Europe; farms nearest to each other could be considered a settlement, but each one was more like a miniature hamlet adjacent to another miniature hamlet.

After decades of Viking raids and the acquisition of goods from beyond Scandinavia, merchant settlements began to appear. These were not towns such as the rest of Europe where people lived near their feudal lord, king, emperor, or the like and the population spread out from a town center. Instead, these settlements served as places for trade where merchants brought goods from all over to sell in the marketplace.

BIRKA

Birka (actually a Latin name as its original name has been lost to time) was founded during the 8th century, due west from modern-day Stockholm, Sweden. Established as a trading town, it sat on the island of Björkö in Lake Mälaren. Abandoned during the 10th century, it served as the regional location for the Thing (the political gathering of the local Scandinavian people) and offered goods from Scandinavia and greater Europe.

Birka served as the Baltic Sea point in the trading route that ran from Scandinavia through Novgorod and down to the Byzantine Empire. Although this trade route required travel across seas, rivers, and portage routes, Scandinavian boats were able to accommodate the vast network.

Birka was also home to the first Christian congregation in Scandinavia, where Saint Ansgar performed his missionary work to unsuccessfully convert the people to Christianity. It is also home to the burial grounds of Archbishop Unni, who died at Birka in 936.

VIKINGS

Evidence has not been found as to why Birka was abandoned. During its operation, it served as a port settlement for trade (with the port being very important to the Norse people). It's theorized that the water level dropped and cut Birka off from the Baltic Sea, possibly forcing the settlement to move elsewhere.

HEDEBY

Hedeby (the modern spelling, not the original Scandinavian spelling anglicized as *Heithabyr*) was a trading town located along the eastern coast of Denmark. Likely founded in the 8th century, it's located just east of modern-day Busdorf, Germany. It sits at the head of a series of straits (at the end of the Schlei Fjord) that lead to the Baltic Sea. These straits were often trolled by pirates, forcing most traders to travel in convoys.

Hedeby is another important marketplace and became part of the trade route between Scandinavia and the Frankish Empire and between the Baltic Sea and the North Sea. It grew to be a very large town for its day with a port to service its marketplace.

Unfortunately, life in Hedeby was not a comfortable one. Archaeological research has shown many diseases thrived there, houses were small, and the town was rather crowded. Many inhabitants only lived to be around 40; in 1050, the town was razed by King Harald Hardrada with the town being fully devastated by Slavs in 1066.

Although living conditions may not have been ideal, Hedeby was protected from outside incursions by a 1300m long city rampart (earthwork wall) that formed a half circle around the city proper. At some points, that wall was 10m high. The rampart protected the land side while the port was essentially protected by the water. Despite this large rampart, the town was attacked multiple times, possibly due to its importance, wealth, or marketplace.

KAUPANG

Kaupang (not likely the actual name of the town; it's just the term used today; *kaupangr* is actually an Old Norse term for 'marketplace') was a trading town located along Viksfjord in Norway. Founded in the 8th century, it's located southwest of modern-day Larvik. Although why this location was chosen has been lost to time, Kaupang was the first Norwegian marketplace and appeared to be a busy commercial center. Archaeological evidence shows it housed a diverse market that included items from foreign territories.

Historical evidence shows Kaupang was abandoned in the 10th century. Although the reason why is not known, theories include control of the city being seized by another Scandinavian group who destroyed the place in the process. Unfortunately, very little is known about Kaupang as most of the city has not been excavated. So far, evidence points toward a busy marketplace, but not why the town was abandoned.

RIBE

Ribe, located in southwest Denmark, was established some time during the 8th century. It quickly became part of Scandinavia's trade network and served as an important trade town connecting Scandinavia to Western Europe. Built along the coastline like the other marketplace towns, it has survived into the modern day and serves as Denmark's oldest town.

Ribe served as a bustling trade town where merchants made their own wares and foreigners came to trade with the Scandinavians. Coins were the payment of choice and the people of Ribe minted their own coins, the Ribe coin. However, the town was a residence for many as farms lie just on the other side of the market area, allowing the town to be self-sufficient for periods of time.

Some time around 860, Ribe became the location of a Scandinavian Christian church, established by Archbishop Ansgar of Hamburg-Bremen, for missionary purposes. Archaeological evidence shows a large Christian population existing in Ribe, but it's unclear whether these were Norse converts or European Christians who settled in Ribe. The Christian church was built on the south side of the river (Ribe River) that formed a natural border for the Ribe trading town.

NOVGOROD

At some point in the 9th century, Scandinavians set their sights south and eventually established a trade route between them and Byzantium (the Byzantine Empire). The trip south was not a simple one; starting from the Baltic Sea, it lead through the Gulf of Finland and Lake Ladoga, then a trek along the Volkhov River and into Lake Ilmen (Novgorod sits along the north shore). Trading along the waters was preferred to traveling farther inland as merchants were targeted by bandits and thieves and Byzantine merchants already used this route for trade.

History is unclear about why the Scandinavians (called Varangians by the local population) were drawn to Novgorod, but there seems to be a consensus that they were welcomed with open arms. One side is that the local Slavic population invited the Varangians to act as mercenaries to defend Novgorod. Another side is that the Scandinavians traveled the route and upon confronting the local population, were asked to stay. Regardless of exactly how it happened, the Slavic lands were experiencing a period of chaos due to inter-tribal fighting and raids from the nearby steppes. When the Varangians arrived, they became the new rulers of the territory, protecting it from outsiders.

A new culture, called the Rus, developed from the German Scandinavians integrating with the Slavic population. After conquering the area, the capital city of Kiev became the center of the new Kievan Rus' state and Novgorod became a powerful center of trade.

Prior to the establishment of Kievan Rus', Christianity had traction throughout the area, being brought to the Slavic people by Andrew the Apostle. Missionaries among the Slavic people continued throughout the centuries and the seeds of Christianization began in Kievan' Rus around 867 thanks to efforts out of Constantinople. The full Christianization of Kievan Rus' is noted around 988.

VIKINGS

It should be noted that when the Scandinavians first arrived in Novgorod, the Slavic tribes were not united and the territory lacked a ruler. Unlike other settlements that were taken by force, the Scandinavians were welcomed to the area and the eventual Kievan Rus' created a somewhat united collection of East Slavic tribes under the new Scandinavian rulers.

ICELAND

At the dawn of the Viking Age, Iceland was only filled with its indigenous flora and fauna. After many decades of expansion throughout Scandinavia, arable land became sparse and new settlements often weren't possible. Although many Scandinavians had taken to the sea and migrated to captured land in Britain, many yearned for a settlement with space and resources and the occasional freedom from an unsettled debt or other existing conflict. In typical Scandinavian fashion, the people took to the seas and sailed west.

According to oral tradition, Iceland was first discovered by Gardar the Swede after his ship was blown off course while passing near the Orkney Islands. Gardar spotted Iceland's mountainous coast and soon circumnavigated each, discovering it was an uninhabited island. He spent several months there before leaving for Norway to tell everyone about the uninhabited island.

Other Scandinavian explorers sailed to Iceland, either inadvertently or by choice, before the first real attempt to settle Iceland began in 874. Norwegian foster-brother, Ingolf and Hjorleif, migrated to Iceland in 874 after making a reconnaissance trip years before and liking what they saw. The two Norwegians had nothing to their name due to compensation paid for killing a jarl's sons. Hjorleif eventually made some poor decisions and was killed by his slaves, but Ingolf settled and was able to survive through three winters before establishing the first Icelandic settlement of Reykjavik.

Ingolf settled his followers and slaves on the land and soon other settlers came to the open space of Iceland. After roughly 50 years of migration, 25,000 people lived in Iceland and the best land for grazing had been claimed. This effectively ended much of the migration to Iceland. Around this time, Iceland remained a free island, being governed by its own local chieftains and the Althing.

GREENLAND

Unlike Iceland, Greenland had a tumultuous past of migration and settlements for thousands of years. Historical evidence shows numerous waves of inhabitants migrating to Greenland only to disappear and be replaced by a new wave of inhabitants centuries later. Like Iceland, a Scandinavian blown off course inadvertently discovered Greenland, only for it to be fully explored decades later.

From the standpoint of the Scandinavians who settled in the south of Greenland, because another culture was actually residing in the northwest, Erik the Red led the way (after being exiled from Iceland for committing murder), leaving

from Iceland and reaching the coast of Greenland, finding it uninhabited. He settled there and named the island Greenland in the hopes of enticing other settlers to migrate there.

Fortunately for the Scandinavian settlers, Greenland was experiencing the Medieval Warm Period where its Fjords were able to accommodate settlements and provide trees for building houses. This period lasted around 300 years and the Scandinavian population rose to a few thousand before the Little Ice Age effectively ran them out of the country around 1300. (This theory is up for debate, but for now it's a convenient one for building a setting, adventure, or campaign. In all honesty, it's currently an unsolved mystery as to why the Scandinavians left.) It's possible the Scandinavians came into contact with the Inuit living in the northwest at some point in this timeline, but there is no historical evidence to really support that.

At one point in the year 1000, Leif Eriksson, the son of Erik the Red, set sail from Greenland and landed in North America, a land he called Vinland (modern day Newfoundland). This never resulted in a settlement or migration, and rumors have it any Scandinavians there were met with resistance from the native population.

NORMANDY

The region of Normandy already had a chaotic history before the Scandinavians arrived. In standard Scandinavian fashion, Viking raids were launched against the Franks along their western coast. Each summer the Scandinavians would launch a raid down the rivers deep into Frankish lands, attacking vulnerable monasteries and towns. After a few decades, they began to over-winter along the northwest region and launched attacks against the farther-inland Paris.

The Carolingian dynasty, ruling at the time, signed away the Cotentin Peninsula to the Breton King Salomon in exchange for an alliance against the attacking Scandinavians (which they called Normans meaning 'men of the North'). After being defeated at the Battle of Chartres in 911, the Frankish king, Charles the Simple and the Norwegian jarl, Hrólfr, signed the Treaty of Saint-Clair-sur-Epte, granting part of the lands of Normandy to the Scandinavians, establishing what would eventually become the Duchy of Normandy (the name Normandy came from the Frankish name of Normans).

From their granted land, the Normans expanded over the following decades through military campaigning. They colonized the region and created what is effectively a new Norman culture. The House of Normandy, the ruling body over Normandy, would go on to include William the Conqueror, who became king of England after the Battle of Hastings, and Henry I, also king of England and the fourth son of William the Conqueror. After the Normans became English kings, Normandy became a source of rivalry between England and France.

RELIGION

During the course of the Viking Age, the Norse people went through a major religious transformation. At the dawn of this era, the Scandinavians followed the Norse Germanic polytheistic religion. By the end of the era, the vast majority had been converted to Christianity. The process of Christianizing the Norse people was not quick, nor was it likely painless. It was a slow process that took approximately 200 years, seeing a waxing and waning of influence during this time.

NORSE POLYTHEISM

Scandinavians were Germanic and shared an ethnic religious culture with other Germanic peoples. Variances within those beliefs were present, but the very basics of the religion had a lot of similarities throughout.

The Scandinavian people were a sect of the Germanic religion referred to herein as the Norse polytheism. It goes by other names throughout history, such as Paganism in an almost derogatory way and Norse Mythology.

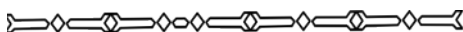
Norse polytheism was not a written religion, nor did it have perfect consistency throughout the various Scandinavian countries. It was an oral folk religion passed along from generation to generation with each culture having slightly different variances on the normal beliefs (in addition to variances with other Germanic religions). Unfortunately, due to the religion being an oral tradition, very little is known historically outside of the poems and sagas about the Norse gods, goddesses, and supernatural beings.

As with most religions, these beliefs started with a myth of creation (this is a fairly abstract creation myth).

CREATION

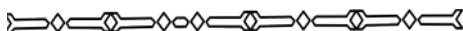
In the beginning there was the world of *Múspellsheimr* [MOO-spel-haym] to the south, the realm of fire and home of the fire giants. At the edge of *Múspellsheimr* lies *Ginnungagap*, a vast chasm that separates the realms of fire and ice. Beyond *Ginnungagap* is *Niflheimr* to the north, the realm of cold and mist. The cold winds and frost emanate from *Niflheimr* meet the warm winds emanating from *Múspellsheimr* in *Ginnungagap*. When the two met, the ice thawed and dripped, becoming the first frost giant, Ymir.

Ymir fell into a deep sleep, and as he slept, he sweated. From the sweat beneath his left armpit, a man and a woman were born, marking the beginning of the frost giants. The cold from *Niflheimr* continued to drip, forming a cow named Aud-



Norse Polytheism is not always consistent from source to source.

What's presented here is a compilation of the most predominant interpretations of the religion and the story of creation.



humla. Milk ran from Audhumla, nourishing Ymir, while she fed off the ice. As she licked the ice, a block slowly became the shape of a man, who later became animated. The man's name was Buri.

Buri birthed a son, named Bor, who married one of the giant's daughters, named Bestla. Bor and Bestla produced three sons, Odin (Óðinn in the Old Norse language), Vili, and Vé. The three brothers did not like the evil giants and killed Ymir. Blood gushed from Ymir's body, killing all other giants except two, Bergelmir and his wife, who escaped in a hollowed-out tree trunk. From them came the families of frost giants, though that was later. The three brothers then carried Ymir's body to the center of Ginnungagap to create a new world.

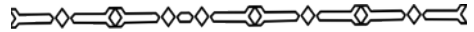
The brothers used Ymir's blood to create the lakes and seas, his bones for mountains, his hair for trees, his skull for the sky, his brains for the clouds, and his teeth and broken bones for rocks and stones. Glowing embers from Múspellsheimr were thrown into the sky to make the stars. Lands were created for the giants near the sea, calling it *Jötunheimr*. Ymir's eyebrows were used to create a fortification that kept the hostile giants out of the world. They called the fortification Midgard.

While walking along the shore, the three brothers came across two uprooted trees, one an ash and the other an elm. They fashioned these trees into the first man and woman. Odin gave them spirit and life, Vili gave them understanding and feeling, and Vé gave them hearing and sight. They named the man Ask and the woman Embla and were given Midgard in which to live. From the maggots that crawled under the flesh of the dead Ymir's body, they created the dwarves, who appear much like men but live under the earth in caves.

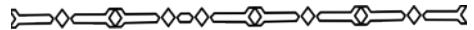
In the middle of this world, the brothers built a giant stronghold they called Asgard. Asgard was a place for all gods and goddesses to live. Odin built a great hall there where he could sit on his high seat and look over the entire world. To reach Asgard from Midgard, they build a rainbow bridge called *Bifröst*.

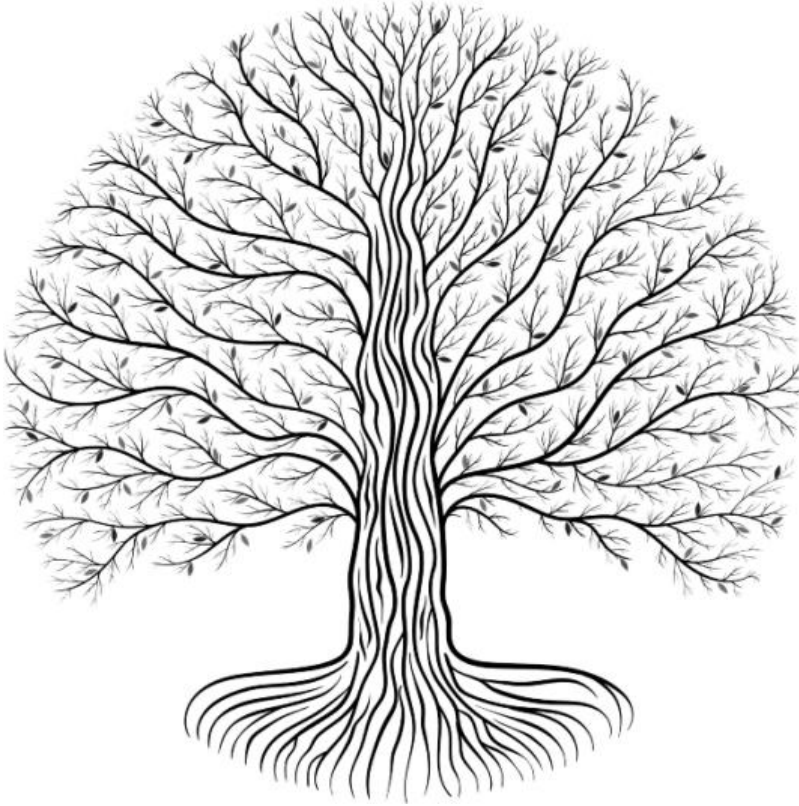
PLACES

In the greater cosmos of Norse Polytheism, there are actually locations not listed in the creation myth that appear in various poems and sagas from the Viking Age. Even if they only appear a couple times and are possibly only recognized by a portion of the Scandinavian population, they comprise the locations



Ultimate Dark Ages Guide: Vikings uses a combination of Old Norse spellings and Anglicized forms of Old Norse spellings. Part of this is because some of the letters in Old Norse don't always translate the same from source to source or they're not easily recognizable to know how they're pronounced. Sometimes examples are used to denote the Old Norse spelling. Where necessary, Anglicized spellings have been chosen to simplify the text and when the Anglicized spelling is more commonly known.





either important to the Norse religion or important to beings that are part of the Norse folklore.

YGGDRASIL

Norse Polytheism has a cosmology that comprises nine realms. Unifying these nine realms is a cosmic ash tree known as Yggdrasil, also known as the World Tree or Tree of Life. The roots of Yggdrasil reach into the three homeworlds – Asgard, Jötunheimr, and Niflheimr. The first root ends in Asgard, reaching into the Well of Urd, also called the Well of Fate. It is guarded by the three Norns (female beings who control the fate of men, gods, and goddesses). The second root ends in Jötunheimr, reaching into the Well of Mimir, also known as the Well of Wisdom. The third root ends in Niflheimr, reaching into the Well of Hvergelmir. This well is guarded by the dragon Nidhogg who gnaws on the root of the tree.

The Norse Polytheism cosmology can make it difficult to understand the cosmic “location” of the nine realms in regards to Yggdrasil and each other. To keep things simple, the cosmology is viewed as a spherical compass with north, east, south, west, and then what passes as “heaven” (the highest point) and the “underworld” (the lowest point). The compass’s south points to Múspellsheimr and its north points to Niflheimr.

ASGARD

Asgard, *Ásgarðr* in Old Norse, is the highest point in the cosmology (i.e. the sky). It is home to the Æsir (Anglicized as Aesir) tribe of gods and goddesses, lorded over by Odin and his wife Frigg. It is connected to Midgard via Bifröst, the rainbow bridge. Asgard is divided into twelve realms: Breidablik, Fólkvangr, Gladsheimr, Glitnir, Himinbjörg, Nóatún, Sökkvabekkr, Thrudvangr, Thrymheimr, Vidi, Valaskjálf, and Ýdalir.

Breidablik is the home of Baldr, son of Odin and Frigg, husband of Nanna, and father of Forseti. He is described as being so handsome, gracious, and cheerful that light radiates from him. Baldr dreamt of his death and his mother, Frigg, responded by securing an oath from everything in the world to not harm her son. The only overlooked item was mistletoe; Loki made a spear from mistletoe and tricked the blind god Hodr into throwing it at Baldr, killing the god.

Fólkvangr is the meadow-home of the goddess Freyja. Half of all men who die in combat are received by Freyja and spend their afterlife in her meadow.

Gladsheimr is the realm of Odin and the location of his great hall, Valhalla. It is also the inner citadel of Asgard where the gods and goddesses meet to make important decisions. Ithavollr contains thirteen high seats for the male Æsir to meet while Vingólf contains seats for the female Æsir to meet.

Glitnir is the realm of Forseti, the god of law and justice, and the hall of justice among the gods and men alike where disputes are settled. Forseti's hall symbolizes the importance of resolving matters through words rather than violence (such as the legal assembly known as the Thing).

Himinbjörg is the realm of Heimdallr, the god of foreknowledge, who tirelessly watches over the lives of all gods and goddesses and for the onset of *Ragnarök*. *It is located where the rainbow bridge Bifröst meets Asgard.*

Nóatún is the realm of Njördr, a Vanir god of the sea and seafaring who is an honorary member of the Æsir and the father of Freyr and Freyja. Its hall is a great haven for ships located on the seashore.

Sökkvabekkr is the realm of Sága, the goddess of wisdom and foresight (and possibly the goddess of history). It is a land of flowing waterfalls where Sága and Odin meet to drink every day from golden chalices.

Thrudvangr is the realm of Thor, the god of thunder, lightning, and storms and the protector of mankind. Its lands are described as fields, although what types of fields seems to be undefined; possibly a field of grass like the rolling plains.

Thrymheimr is the realm of Skadi, the goddess of winter, mountains, skiing, and hunting. She is a Jötunn (a giant) and was once married to the god Njördr, who chose to dwell in Thrymheimr before tiring of its environment. Different sources report the realm is a mountain located in Jötunheimr or Asgard. From a cosmology standpoint, maybe it straddled the two as a giant mountain.

VIKINGS

Vidi (sometimes called Landvidi) is the realm of Vidar, the god of peace and nature. It is a land of grass, flowers, and saplings with in interior that looks like a garden. It is also a silent and peaceful place.

Valaskjálf is the other realm of Odin. It contains his large dwelling where his throne, Hlidskjalf, is located, allowing him to look out over all the worlds.

Ýdalir is the realm of the Ullr, a god associated with bows, hunting, and snow-shoeing (sometimes just the god of archery). It is a forested land filled with yew trees.

ÁLFHEIMR

Álfheimr is located between Asgard and Midgard (kind of like a heavenly location). Although it doesn't feature prominently in Old Norse texts, it is given as one of the nine worlds and is home to the *ljósálfar* (light elves or just elves). It is ruled over by Freyr and the ljósálfar are viewed much like guardian angels and are believed to have magical abilities.

MIDGARD

Midgard is Earth, the realm of the humans. It sits in the very center of the Norse cosmology. In the religious eyes of Norse Polytheism, Midgard is surrounded by a great sea (also known as an impassable ocean) which separates it from Jötunheimr, the land of the giants.

JÖTUNHEIMR

On the same cosmological plane as Midgard is Jötunheimr, the realm of the giants. Jötunheimr surrounds the edges of the cosmological sphere and is separated from Midgard by the great sea. The giants who live there are often quarreling with the gods and goddesses, although sometimes love affairs occur between a giant and a god or goddess.

VANAHEIM

Vanaheim is the realm of the second tribe of gods and goddesses, the Vanir, but its cosmological location is uncertain. It may be located on the same plane as Midgard, or it may be located just above it. Regardless, it is home to the other gods and goddesses who seem to appear in the later decades of oral tradition in the Norse religion.

NIFLHEIMR

Niflheimr is the land of cold and mist; the northern-most of the nine worlds also featured in the creation story. Niflheimr is important to the cosmology in that it is said to be the source of the eleven rivers spoken of in Norse Polytheism. The rivers source from the well *Hvergelmir*, the place where all life originates and where one of the roots of Yggdrasil stretches for nourishment.

MÚSPELLSHEIMR

Múspellsheimr ("the world of *Múspell*"), Anglicized as Muspelheim, is the southern realm of the Norse cosmology. Home to the fire giants, also known as

the sons of *Múspell*, it is a land of fire and light. It will one day give birth to a fire giant, *Surt*, that leads the other fire giants during the time of *Ragnarök*. As such, the realm features in both the creation and the destruction of the world.

SVARTÁLFHEIMR

Svartálfaheimr is located beneath Midgard (i.e. underground) and is home to the *svartálfar* (also known as *dökkálfar*), also known as the black or dark elves (synonymous with dwarfs). These dark elves are known to be master smiths and craftsmen and much like the *ljósálfar*, they do not feature prominently in the Old Norse texts. However, it is believed the Norse Polytheism cosmology does not include *Svartálfaheimr* as the location appears in later texts. The name that appears in one of the Old Norse texts is *Nidavellir*, the home of a famous dwarf and his tribe. These two are believed to be one and the same.

HELHEIMR

Helheimr is the realm of *Hel*, the fearsome goddess who presides over the souls that don't go to *Valhalla* in the afterlife. Considered to be the underworld, most souls are believed to travel to *Helheimr* after death. It is thought to be a place where people do much of what they do when their alive, blurring the lines between what "life" is like after death or while still alive.

VALHALLA

Valahalla is a special place within the Norse cosmology as it is *Odin's* hall where the dead he deems worthy reside. An afterlife in *Valhalla* is something of an honor, the place where most Viking warriors wish to go after death. Those who die in battle or perform "Odin-worthy deeds" are whisked away to *Valhalla* instead of spending their afterlife in *Helheimr*. However, an eternity in *Valhalla* is not one to be taken lightly as Norse Polytheism notes these *Odin-chosen* warriors are conscripted into his war when *Ragnarök* begins.

ÆSIR DEITIES

Norse Polytheism features two tribes of deities. The first tribe, the *Æsir*, is the most prominent and features in the creation theory. It consists of a large number of gods and goddesses with the most common ones listed here.

GODS

Baldr: Baldr is the god of light, a god so handsome and gracious that he radiates light. He is the son of *Odin* and *Frigg*, married to the goddess *Nanna*, and has a son *Forseti*. His house is the most beautiful of *Asgard* and only the purest of the pure may enter it. *Odin* dreamt of Baldr's death and *Frigg*, wishing to save her precious son, set out to obtain an oath from across the cosmos that nothing will harm Baldr. However, she overlooked mistletoe thinking it "too small and innocent". Baldr was killed by his brother *Hodr*, after being tricked by *Loki*, by an arrow made from mistletoe. His death is said to be a precursor to the events of *Ragnarök*.

VIKINGS

Bragi: Bragi is the patron god of skalds. Renowned for being wise and learned, he regales tales of Odin and the other gods while welcoming new souls into the hall of Valhalla. There is conflicting information on whether Bragi was a son of Odin or a skald named Bragi invited to Valhalla to become a god.

Forseti: Forseti is the god of justice, judgment, mediation, and reconciliation. He frequently serves as judge during dispute among the deities in Asgard and spends much of his time in meditation to create a serene psyche. He is the son of Baldr and Nanna and lives in Asgard in a beautiful house named Glitnir, the Hall of Justice.

Heimdallr: Heimdallr is a watchman, serving as a sentry and guardian of the gods and goddesses of Asgard. He guards Bifröst and is the son of Odin and nine giantesses (who combined to birth a single son). He is attested to have a keen sense of sight and hearing, allowing him to watch and listen for intruders to Asgard. When intruders are spotted, he sounds his horn, Gjallarhorn, to alert the other deities.

Hodr: Hodr is the blind god of darkness and winter. He is the twin brother of Baldr, son of Odin and Frigg. He was tricked by Loki to slay his brother with an arrow fashioned from mistletoe. He was killed in an act of revenge by his brother Vali.

Loki: Loki is cunning, clever, malicious, nihilistic, and known as the trickster god. Although from Jötunheimr, he lives in Asgard and makes trouble for everyone. In addition to his love for pranking, he also possesses the ability to shapeshift. He is the son of Laufey and the giant Fárbauti (sources conflict on whether Laufey is a giantess or a goddess). With the giantess Angrboda, he is the father of Hel, the goddess of the underworld, Jormungand, the great serpent, and Fenrir, the wolf who kills Odin during *Ragnarök*.

Odin: Odin is known as the Allfather, the most powerful god and ruler of Asgard. He is the god of healing, death, royalty, wisdom, war, sorcery, poetry, and the runic alphabet. He is a patron god of many from rulers to outcasts.

Thor: Thor is a symbol of the idyllic warrior, encompassing the virtues of loyalty and honor. He is the god of thunder, lightning, storms, oak trees, strength, and protection. He is the strongest of all the deities and is the protector of all mankind in Midgard. Thor is the son of Odin and the giantess Fjörgyn. He lives in Asgard with his goddess wife Sif.

Týr: Týr is the god of war and law and the bravest of all the Æsir. Although he is a god of war, he is not associated with the physical battle of war; rather, he is associated with the “legal reasons for war” and the principles of justice. To the Norse people, war and law are somewhat synonymous.

Ullr: Ullr is the son of Sif and the stepson of Thor. He is the god of archery, hunting, skating, and skiing and his name is often invoked prior to a duel.



Odin and the wolf Fenrir

Váli: Váli is the god of retribution. Born to Odin and the giantess Rindr, on the day of his birth, after growing to full adulthood only hours later, he avenged the death of his brother Baldr by slaying his killer, Hodr.

Vidar: Born to Odin and the giantess Gridr, Vidar is the second strongest of the Æsir. He is known as the “silent god” and is at peace with nature, often sitting for hours in his garden working on a special shoe. In the stories of *Ragnarök*, *Vidar slays the wolf Fenrir after the beast devours Odin. He is able to use his special shoe combined with his strength to pry the wolf’s mouth open and tear it apart.*

GODDESSES

Eir: Eir is the goddess of healing and as the patron goddess of shamanic healers. She is a companion of the goddess Frigg, presides over childbirth, and is revered as a lifegiver.

Frigg: Frigg is the highest-ranking of the Æsir and the wife of Odin. She is the goddess of love, marriage, and destiny and is known as a “seer”, one who can see the future but cannot change it, she can only influence it. The ability of foresight is seen as a type of Norse magic, also known as seithr.

VIKINGS

Fulla: Fulla is the sister and handmaiden of Frigg. She is the goddess of fertility and the protector of magical items.

Gefjun: Gefjun is the goddess of agriculture, fertility, abundance, and prosperity. She is associated with green and growing things and is often associated with ploughing.

Gná: Gná is a handmaiden and scout of Frigg. She is the goddess of the breeze and serves as a messenger. Her horse, Hófvarpnir, allows her to travel across both air and water.

Hlín: Hlín is the goddess of compassion and consolation. She is a handmaiden of Frigg and protects those Frigg wishes to be kept safe.

Lofn: Lofn is the goddess of forbidden love. She is a gentle goddess and an arranger of marriages, even the forbidden ones.

Sága: Sága is the goddess of wisdom and sometimes referred to as the goddess of history.

Sjöfn: Sjöfn is the goddess of love and friendship. She often serves as an emotional companion to the ostracized who have no other fault than being themselves. This includes those who are considered to be too young, too old, the wrong color, or awkwardly shaped.

Snotra: Snotra is the goddess of wisdom and virtue. She focuses heavily on self-discipline and self-control.

Syn: Syn is the goddess of justice, truth, and vigilance. She is another of Frigg's handmaidens and guards Frigg's palace, refusing entrance to those who are not invited or are unworthy.

Vár: Vár is the goddess of oaths and agreements and punishes those who break an agreement. She listens to people's oaths and private agreements and then enforces them.

Vör: Vör is a goddess of wisdom and a seeress of Frigg's court. She serves as the patron of diviners and can provide clarity when attempting to divine the future.

VANIR DEITIES

There are many theories as to how the Vanir fit into the larger mythology of Norse Polytheism. One of the theories is that the Norse religion merged with Germanic beliefs to create a secondary tribe of deities, but with a focus on life and fertility. Regardless, they are presented here for completeness.

GODS

Freyr: Freyr is the god of ecological fertility and associated with prosperity, wealth, peace, and bountiful harvests. His sister is Freyja and he was a hostage

of the Æsir-Vanir War; he has since become an honorary member of the Æsir tribe.

Kvasir: Kvasir is the god of knowledge, wisdom, and education. He was created by the Æsir and Vanir gods and goddesses at the end of the Æsir-Vanir War by using the fermented spit of the gods and goddesses. He was killed by a pair of dwarves who drained his blood and mixed it with honey to create the Mead of Poetry.

Njordr: Njordr is the god of wind and the sea and is a patron deity of merchants at sea. He was given as a hostage during the Æsir-Vanir War along with his children Freyr and Freyja. He is not an honorary member of the Æsir tribe.

GODDESSES

Freyja: Freyja is the goddess of love and associated with beauty, sex, material possessions, and seithr. She is an honorary member of the Æsir tribe and presides over the realm Fólkvangr, where she chooses and accepts half of the warriors slain in battle to dwell in the afterlife.

Gullveig: Gullveig is a practitioner of seithr and a lover of wealth and indulgence. She was burned three different times by the Æsir and reborn each time. The third time she was reborn as Heidr, becoming something of a witch or a practitioner of evil magic.

Nerthus: Nerthus is the supposed wife of Njordr and mother of Freyr and Freyja. Accounts of her are somewhat vague, but she tends to be associated with ecological vitality.

CHRISTIANITY

The Norse people of Scandinavia had very little reason to act as a united group of nations. Their only true common ground was their heritage and some of their religious beliefs (which often varied from region to region). The people were effectively divided into Danes, Norwegians, and Swedes and later divided further into Normans and Rus. Although their heritage gave them a common language and similar lifestyle, it failed to give them a reason, political or otherwise, to act as a single, unified Scandinavian nation.

During the course of the Viking Age, every region saw the coming and going of local chieftains and the rise of nearby kings who “ruled” (this term is used loosely as it could have been ruling by force or ruling by convenience) the local lords that served as jarls in the scattered regions. Infighting between kings was almost as common as going out on Viking raids and power waxed and waned among different bloodlines. It wasn’t until the full embrace of Christianity that unified the Scandinavian cultures under a common belief system that further connected them to their Germanic brethren across Europe.

DENMARK

The conversion of Scandinavians from their traditional Norse Polytheistic beliefs to Christianity was a long, arduous process that stretched across four centuries. Although missionary efforts began early in the 8th century, it wasn't until the conversion of King Harald Klak of Jutland that the conversion process took hold. Prior to this, missionary efforts were welcomed into Denmark and treated as friends. They were allowed to live undisturbed and their religion was tolerated. Unfortunately, these efforts were met with little to no success.

In 826, King Harald Klak was exiled from his lands in Jutland, by King Horik I, also of Denmark, and arrived at the court of Emperor Louis the Pious. He requested Emperor Louis's help in reclaiming his lands, and Emperor Louis agreed. King Harald would be made Duke of Frisia if he agreed to give up his Norse Polytheistic beliefs and convert to Christianity. Harald agreed and allowed his family and 400 Danes who accompanied him to become baptized.

Emperor Louis actively sought the conversion of Denmark and organized missionary efforts there. The efforts were not successful until Harald Bluetooth was baptized around 960, bringing all of Denmark under Christian rule (sort of). Once again, the conversion of King Harald Bluetooth was politically-motivated as he sought to avoid conflict with the Germanic Franks, who were going to battle against the "pagans" of the north.

King Harald Bluetooth continued the spread of Christianity by ordering the rejection of all Norse Polytheistic gods and goddesses and the recognition of Christian priests. As time went on, many local jarls saw the political advantage of converting to Christianity and followed suit. However, even though the conversion was widespread, it wasn't a complete acceptance and replacement of their religious beliefs. Many traditional beliefs blended with Christian beliefs, an idea embraced by Christian priests to aid the conversion efforts, and the conversion was more of a slow transition than an abandonment of tradition.

By the rule of Canute the Holy in 1080, Denmark was fully a Christian nation.

SWEDEN

When initial conversion efforts failed in Denmark in the 9th century, missionaries traveled to Birka and attempted to spread their word throughout Sweden. Very little interest existed in Sweden, and another unsuccessful attempt was made some time in the 10th century. During this time, Sweden was divided into two major regions: Uppland and Västergötland. King Olof Skötkonung was the first Christian king to rise to power in Sweden, but he truly only held power over Uppland. From this point, King Olof and the various Christian bishops promoted continued missionary efforts farther into Sweden to extend the reach of Christianity.

To aid the efforts of conversion throughout Sweden, Christian kings in Sweden offered rewards to those who agreed to be baptized. Through these efforts and other influential means, the Swedish kings avoided using military power to

spread Christianity. This allowed the kings to secure the loyalty of local leaders, who could then influence their people to become Christian.

Although the conversion of Uppland was done without military means, the conversion of Västergötland was not able to. It required the rule of King Inge the Elder, a devout Christian who ruled from around 1080 to around 1100, to act out against traditional practices and replace them with Christian beliefs. Although he was able to convert the rest of Sweden (sort of), relationships with local nobles caused the unified kingdom to remain mostly unstable. It wasn't until years after his King Inge's death that the country could officially be considered converted.

NORWAY

The conversion of Norway was quite rocky compared to the slow conversion of Sweden and the political motivations of Denmark. Norway's conversion started with the ascension of King Haakon Haraldsson in 934. Raised in England, he brought Christian beliefs to Norway, although he had little success in converting the population. He was confronted by many battles, killed, and replaced by King Harald Greycloak, also a Christian, the nephew of Denmark's King Harald Bluetooth.

King Harald was quite violent and killed local rulers for the purpose of strengthening his power as king. He was also known for destroying temples dedicated to the traditional religion, but for the purpose of spreading Christianity. He was lured into a plot and subsequently killed. King Harald Bluetooth took over as the King of Norway and installed King Haakon Sigurdsson as a vassal king. He submitted to King Harald and was baptized into Christianity, although he still maintained belief in the traditional Norse deities. Before his forced baptism, he rebuilt many of the temples destroyed by King Harald Greycloak and led a revival of the traditional Norse Polytheism.

King Harald Bluetooth was exiled and the thrones of Denmark and Norway were taken over by Sweyn Forkbeard, already a Christian thanks to his father Harald Bluetooth. The throne was taken back by Norway and Olaf Trygvason was made king in 995. He had previously allowed himself to be baptized into Christianity and brought his Christian beliefs to the throne. Through force and other means, he paved the way to convert Norway to Christianity, an effort spearheaded by Olaf II Haraldsson beginning in 1015.

ICELAND

Iceland was colonized by those who followed the traditional religion. When Olaf Trygvason ascended to the throne, many settlers in Iceland converted and many more attempts were made to convert the rest (most unsuccessful). King Olaf applied pressure to Iceland and the people had very little choice. This created a divide between people of both religions, almost breaking out into a civil war. The matter was brought up at the Althing in 1000 and after a day of discussion, the law speaker declared that the people of Iceland would embrace Christianity.

NOTABLE PEOPLE

What follows is a list of notable people of Scandinavian descent during the Viking Age. They are listed herein using their Anglicized/Latinized names to aid in further research and define the name they are more commonly known as. Their actual name in Old Norse is listed in the description.

HARALD FAIRHAIR

Born Haraldr Hálfdanarson around 854, Harald Fairhair served as the first king to claim sovereignty over all of Norway. Harald was born to Hálfdanr “the Black”, king of Vestfold, the region that became Oslofjord, who died when Harald was 10 years old, forcing the child to succeed his father as king.

King Harald I began his conquest of Norway at a young age, beginning with suppressing a revolt that occurred in the Uppland region. Soon after, he formed a pact with Hákon Grjotgardsson, the first Jarl of Lade, and conquered the western regions of Norway. This culminated in the battle of Hafrsfjord around 872, although this date is debated. After declaring victory, Harald found himself as the first king of all of Norway.

As King of Norway, Harald I enacted tax laws and allowed local jarls to enforce them. This provided additional wealth to Harald and the jarls, confirming his authority. Not all jarls complied and many chose to instead flee to various islands, such as Iceland, the Shetland Islands, and the Orkney Islands. Some stories claim this subjugation of jarls and the people forced them to look elsewhere, leading to the discovery and settlement of Iceland.

During his reign, King Harald I strengthened Norway’s coastline and trade. The traditional Viking ways in Norway flourished during this time and Norway became a formidable nation in Scandinavia. Anyone who dared attempt a Viking raid on his Norway was met with stark resistance and a follow-on raid by Harald’s fleets in response.

During the latter years of life, leading up to his death around 932, King Harald’s life was filled with infighting amongst his children (which sources don’t agree on how many there were). Each one was supposedly granted a title, land, and rights to govern their appointed region. His favorite son, Eiríkr Haraldsson (Eric Bloodaxe), ruled alongside his father until his final days, taking over as King of Norway in 931.



Unfortunately, King Eric lost the support of the people of Norway when his youngest brother, Hákon Haraldsson (Haakon the Good), arrived in Norway and promised to abolish the taxation laws enacted by his father. Hákon gained the support of the landowners and all but exiled King Eric from Norway.

HARALD BLUETOOTH

Born Haraldr Gormsson around 935, Harald Bluetooth was the second king of Denmark, succeeding his father Gorm “the Old” Hardeknodsson. Though serving as the King of Denmark and the King of Norway, he is most known for bringing Christianity to Denmark and reconstruction of the Jelling runic stones (which survive today).

Gorm the Old was recognized as Denmark’s first king. He ruled from Jelling and produced the first Jelling runic stones. His sons were typical Viking raiders, but his son Cnut was shot with an arrow and died. This paved the way for Harald to become king after the death of King Gorm in 958. Although his father followed the traditional Norse Polytheistic beliefs, several years after ascending to the throne, King Harald consented to baptism and was christened as the first Christian king in Denmark. Unfortunately, his attempts to spread Christianity throughout Denmark, and later Norway, were mostly unsuccessful. It wouldn’t be until around 1076 that Denmark would be considered a Christian nation.

King Harald was driven into exile by his son, Sweyn Forkbeard, in 986, dying shortly thereafter.

SWEYN FORKBEARD

Born Sveinn Haraldsson around 960, Sweyn Forkbeard was the son of Harald Bluetooth, the second King of Denmark. Harald Bluetooth was the first Scandinavian king to fully accept Christianity and attempted to bring Denmark under Christian rule. Sweyn, however, was not known for fully embracing Christianity and remained tolerant to the traditional Norse Polytheistic beliefs.

Sweyn was a Viking through and through, choosing to be a Viking warrior. His first military conquest was against his father around 986. King Harald was driven into exile and died shortly after, allowing Sweyn to become King of Denmark and King of Norway (where



VIKINGS

Harald Bluetooth controlled the nation as a king with a local regent).

Sweyn began feuding with King Olaf I Trygvasson and soon formed a coalition against him which included the King of Sweden and the Jarl of Lade. After overthrowing King Olaf I around 1000, King Sweyn became the king of Norway, ruling alongside his allies.

Starting around 1002, King Sweyn launched a series of raids against the Kingdom of England in retaliation for the St. Brice's Day massacre where Danish inhabitants in England were slaughtered. During the raids, he was paid off using Danegeld, but his vengeance never subsided.

At one point, King Æthelred of England was able to resist King Sweyn's attack on London. After King Sweyn redirected his attention to Bath where many local rulers submitted to him, London rulers "defected" and chose to no longer resist the Scandinavian ruler. King Æthelred fled to the Isle of Wight and then followed his sons' exile to Normandy. On Christmas day in 1013, Sweyn Forkbeard declared himself King of England.

Sweyn Forkbeard died five weeks later, before being crowned king (most provinces in the Kingdom of England refused to acknowledge his rule). His son, Harald Sveinsson, assumed the throne as the King of Denmark, but the Danish in England proclaimed his other son, Cnut as the king of Denmark. King Æthelred was recalled to England and managed to drive King Cnut from his kingdom in 1014. King Harald II served as the king of Denmark until his death in 1018, paving the way for his brother, Cnut, to take over as king.

OLAF II HARALDSSON

Born around 995, Olaf II Haraldsson is possibly best known as St. Olaf, the patron saint of Norway. His father, Harald Grenske, petty king of Vestfold, was the great-grandson of Harald Fairhair, the first King of Norway. Shortly after Olaf was conceived, his father abandoned his mother, Åsta Gudbrandsdatter, and was killed trying to court Sigrid the Haughty; his mother gave birth shortly thereafter. Åsta remarried to Sigurdr Halvdansson, petty king of Ringerike, and Olaf was raised in Ringerike.

King Sigurdr accepted Christianity and was baptized in 998. However, Olaf remained faithful to the traditional Norse Polytheistic beliefs and lived his early life as a Viking raider. He raided England from approximately 1009 – 1011, but is rumored to have aided King Æthelred in his fight against King Sweyn of Denmark. When King Sweyn conquered England, Olaf left England to raid the coast of France and Spain. Shortly thereafter, he traveled to Normandy to stay the winter with Duke Richard in Rouen. After learning of Charlemagne's organized empire, he accepted Christianity and was baptized in Rouen.

By the time Olaf left Normandy in 1015, Norway was once again under the local rule of petty kings and chieftains across Norway. Olaf set out to reclaim territory being held by Denmark and Sweden, in the process ousting the rule of the regent,

Jarl Hákon. After gaining the support of the petty kings of Uppland, Olaf was able to consolidate rule throughout Norway and seat himself as King of Norway.

On his way to Norway from Normandy, Olaf had stopped in England to bring missionaries to Norway for the pursuit of Christianization. After declaring himself King of Norway, King Olaf II campaigned hard to spread Christianity throughout his new nation. Although the details are few, King Olaf II was known to use violence and coercion to pursue the acceptance of Christianity. It's possible that King Olaf II was using Christianity to mimic the empire Charlemagne built in France, but a lack of evidence fails to support that theory. Regardless, his efforts were seen in a great positive light by Christian leaders (bishops and archbishops) and King Olaf II was canonized for these efforts, becoming St. Olaf.

Unfortunately, during his time as King of Norway, Olaf II made enemies among the Norwegian jarls who then supported King Cnut's invasion of Norway. He lost the Battle of the Helgeå against King Cnut and was driven into exile, fleeing to Kievan Rus. In 1028 or 1029, King Cnut the Great of Denmark becomes the new King of Norway. Olaf attempted to reclaim his lost throne in 1030, but was killed at the Battle of Stiklestad. He was canonized in 1031 by his missionary bishop, Grimkell.

CNUT THE GREAT

Born Knútr Sveinsson around 995, Cnut the Great was at one point the King of England, Denmark, and Norway (and a Christian, although not a devout one, before ascending the throne). As the son of King Sweyn Forkbeard, Cnut was part of a Danish heritage that traces back to the first king of Denmark. As the son of King Sweyn Forkbeard, Cnut supported his father's conquest of the English thrown against King Æthelred. When Æthelred returned and ousted King Sweyn, Cnut fled to Denmark, gathered his troops a year later in 1015, and reconquered England (except for London). Æthelred died the following year, and although the people of London chose otherwise, the council of Anglo-Saxon kings elected Cnut to be the replacement for King Æthelred (who they viewed as ineffective).



VIKINGS

Æthelred's eldest son, Edmund, fought against Cnut, resulting in the Treaty of Olney being written which partitioned England into two kingdoms. Unfortunately, Edmund died shortly after the treaty was written, and all lands came under the control of Cnut.

At this time, Cnut's brother, Harald II, was King of Denmark. He died in 1018 and Cnut returned to Denmark to ascend the throne. Returning to England two years later, Cnut appointed his brother-in-law, Jarl Ulf Thorgilsson, to serve as the regent of Denmark.

In 1028, King Olaf II's jarls worked against him and invited King Cnut to Norway to take the crown. King Olaf II was unable to fight back and Cnut was declared king of Norway. He more or less handed power over to the local jarls and installed his lieutenant, Hakon, to serve as the king's deputy in Norway. Hakon died and Olaf II attempted to reclaim his throne, dying in the attempt. King Cnut and his bloodline attempted to maintain power over Norway, but were unsuccessful. King Olaf II's illegitimate son, Magnus the Good, reclaimed the throne in 1035, ousting King Cnut's son Sveinn Knútsson.

King Cnut died in 1035, allowing his illegitimate son Haraldr "Harefoot" to ascend the throne of England (as a regent of Harthaknut) and his legitimate son Harthaknut to ascend the throne of Denmark. Haraldr died in 1040, allowing Harthaknut to ascend the throne of England as well.

King Harthaknut died in 1042, and due to a political arrangement with Magnús the Good, the latter became the heir to Harthaknut's. However, Æthelred's son, Edward the Confessor, was a co-ruler of England since the previous year and extended his rule over King Harthaknut's lands (a matter contested by Magnús the Good and his heir Harald Hardrada).

MAGNÚS THE GOOD

Born Magnús Óláfsson around 1024, Magnús the Good was an illegitimate son of King Olaf II. Along with his mother, he fled Norway when his father was removed from the throne, only to return in 1035 to reclaim the throne. During that year, the Norwegian jarls revolted against King Sveinn Knútsson, installing Magnús as king at the age of 11. King Harthaknut attempted to claim the Norwegian throne as well, but soon accepted Magnús as the king, later naming him as the heir to Denmark.

Before his death, King Harthaknut had installed his cousin, Sveinn Ástríðarson, as a regent of Denmark. Sveinn opposed King Magnús's rule in Denmark, but eventually came to an agreement where Sveinn would rule as the Jarl of Denmark underneath King Magnús's rule.

King Magnús was also the nephew of Harald Hardrada, the son of a Norwegian petty king. He too opposed King Magnús and chose to ally himself with Jarl Sveinn. Instead of opposing his uncle, King Magnús appeased him and the two

became co-rulers in 1046. When King Magnús died in 1047, Denmark was handed over to Sveinn and Norway was handed over to Harald.

HARALD HARDRADA

Born Haraldr Sigurdarson around 1015, Harald Hardrada was the half-brother of King Olaf II (maternal side). He joined his half-brother in 1030 in an attempt to reclaim the throne as king of Norway. The two were defeated, and Harald escaped with injuries. After fleeing to Eastern Norway to recover, he crossed Scandinavia and made his way to Kievan Rus where he was welcomed by Grand Prince Yaroslav the Wise.

While in Kievan Rus, Harald joined Grand Prince Yaroslav's army and rose to the rank of captain. In 1034, he assembled a group of companions and set off for Constantinople to join the Varangian Guard, Norse mercenaries of the Byzantine Empire. Before arriving back in Kievan Rus in 1042, Harald engaged in many battles as one of the Varangian Guard and was paid quite well in return. He sent his wealth to Grand Prince Yaroslav for safekeeping before leaving the political world of Byzantium. He returned to Kievan Rus a wealthy man.

With his new fortune in hand, Harald ask for Grand Prince Yaroslav's daughter's hand in marriage. Given Harald's prospects, Yaroslav agreed even though Harald did not hold a noble title. Around 1044, Harald married Princess Elisaveta.

In 1045, Harald began his journey back to Norway to reclaim the throne. When he arrived in 1046, he was met with King Magnús controlling the throne. He opposed the King, and joined forces with Jarl Sveinn of Denmark. Instead of going to war, Magnús and Harald came to an agreement; Harald would become co-ruler in return for sharing his wealth with the bankrupt Magnús. When Magnús died in 1047, he became the sole ruler of Norway.

King Harald battled with King Sveinn for years until the two agreed to an unconditional peace in 1064. In 1066, King Harald allied with Tostig Godwinson, the brother of the English King Harold Godwinson, to invade England. At one point, the pair took the city of York, but eventually met King Harold at the Battle of Stamford Bridge on September 25. Both King Harald and Tostig were badly outnumbered and died in the battle.

This event is often marked as the last day of the Viking Age with King Harald being referred to as the last great Viking king. After this battle, all Viking raids ended.

ERIK THE RED

Born Eiríkr Thorvaldsson in 950, Erik the Red was an explorer from Norway known for founding the first Norse settlement in Greenland. Around 960, Erik's

VIKINGS

father was banished from Norway and fled with his family to northwestern Iceland. After his father died, Erik married, bought a farm, and settled in Iceland.

Unfortunately for Erik, in 980 his slaves triggered a landslide that buried the neighboring farm. A friend of the neighbor, Eyjolf the Foul, responded to the incident by killing Erik's slaves. Erik responded by killing Eyjolf and was banished from the settlement for doing so. He moved his family to the Iceland island of Oxney where his fate would take another downturn. At one point, Erik had entrusted a valued object to a man named Thorgest. When Erik went to retrieve that item, Thorgest refused. Erik retrieved the item, Thorgest chased him down, and then a fight ensued where Erik killed Thorgest's two sons. He was then exiled from Iceland for three years for manslaughter.

A century earlier, a Norwegian named Gunnbjorn Ulfsson had discovered Greenland. Erik decided to seek out this land due to his exile and sailed west of Iceland. He eventually made it to Greenland and lived out his exile there. After three years, he returned to Iceland to convince others to join him in colonizing Greenland. He was successful and in 985, he and more than 400 others left Iceland to colonize Greenland. Two major settlements were established and Erik established himself as a chieftain of Greenland. The colonies grew to around 3,000 inhabitants (some sources list up to 5,000 inhabitants) before dying out sometime in the 15th century.

LEIF THE LUCKY

Born Leifr Eiríksson around 970, Leif the Lucky is the son of Erik the Red. Born in Iceland, he moved with his family to Greenland and the family estate. In 999, Leif and a crew traveled to Norway where Leif became a hirdman of King Olaf I of Norway. During this time, he accepted and converted to Christianity and was assigned with the task of bringing Christianity to Greenland.

Around 1000, Leif set sail for Greenland to fulfill his mission, but was blown off course on the way there. He spotted land, but was actually west of Greenland, somewhere around Newfoundland or New Brunswick in Canada. Leif rescued a couple of shipwrecked men and sailed back to Greenland.

This area of Canada had reportedly been discovered earlier by a man named Bjarni, who Leif sought out for an expedition back to. With a crew of around 35, Leif headed back to the future lands of Canada (the date is mostly unknown), came upon a rocky land, and then ventured farther to reach a forested land. After additional sailing, he came upon an area of mild climate and wintered there, naming the location Vínland. After wintering in Vínland, Leif returned to Greenland, leaving the settlement behind.

Upon returning to Greenland, Leif successfully continued his original mission of spreading Christianity to the people of Greenland.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Scandinavians, like other Germanic cultures, have a first name, last name, and sometimes an epithet. First names are given to the person, but a last name is patronymic, named after the person's father (although being named after the mother was not unheard of).

Sources don't always agree on the Latinized spelling of a name originally given in Old Norse. This may be due to dialect amongst the various regions or even a difference between cultural dialects (Norwegian vs. Danish vs. Swedish). Some names are provided herein with two spelling methods.

FIRST NAME

Here is a collection of common Scandinavian first names, given in Old Norse (where known) using a mostly Latinized alphabet:

MALE NAMES

Björn, Egill, Eiríkr, Gamli, Gormr, Grímr, Gudbrand, Gudrøðr, Guttorm, Hákon, Hálfðanr, Harald, Haraldr, Harthaknut, Haukr, Hrólfr, Ívarr, Knútr, Kveldúlf, Leifr, Magnús, Olaf, Rognvaldr, Sighvatr, Sigurd, Sigurdr, Snorri, Styrbjörn, Sveinn, Thorbjörn, Thorfinnr, Thórir, Thórsteinn, Thörvaldr, Tryggvi, Ulf

FEMALE NAMES

Ása, Ásta, Astrid, Freydís, Guðríður, Gunnhildr, Gyda, Gyrid, Helgi, Ingeborg, Ragnhild, Ragnhildr, Salbjörg, Thóra

LAST NAME

For last names, Scandinavians took their father's first name and added a suffix of "(s)son" or "(s)dóttir/dotter". Here is a collection of example patronymic Scandinavian last names, given in Old Norse (where known) using a mostly Latinized alphabet:

MALE NAMES

Agnarsson, Björnsson, Erlendsson, Gormsson, Grjotgardsson, Hálfðanarson, Haraldsson, Hardeknodsson, Knútsson, Magnússon, Olafsson, Óláfsson, Ragnvaldsson, Sigurdsson, Snorrason, Sveinsson, Thórdarson, Thorfinnsson, Thorvaldsson

FEMALE NAMES

Eiríksdóttir, Haraldsdóttir, Haraldsdóttir, Hrólfsdóttir, Ragnvaldsdóttir, Thorbjörnsdóttir, Thorgeirsdóttir

EPITHET

For the truly worthy or notable Scandinavians, their last names were replaced by an epithet that somehow described their character or a prominent physical characteristic. Here are some examples:

EXAMPLES

Bloodaxe, Fairhair, Forkbeard, Greycloak, Hardrada (Hard Ruler), The Black, The Boneless, The Hunter, The Magnificent, The Mild, The Old, The Powerful, The Red, The Sharp, The Strong, The Victorious, The Wise

VIKING TIMELINE

Ultimate Dark Ages Guide: *Vikings* breaks down the timeline of the Viking Age into two basic sections. The first is a general timeline of the internal goings on related to the leadership of Scandinavia. The second is a battle/Viking raid timeline of the external goings on related to attacks outside of Scandinavia.

GENERAL TIMELINE

- c. 864 Haraldr (Harald) “Fairhair” Hálfðanarson becomes King of Vestfold.
- c. 872 Haraldr Fairhair conquerors the rest of the petty kingdoms to become the first King of Norway.
- 931 Eiríkr (Eric) “Bloodaxe” Haraldsson becomes King of Norway.
- 934 Hákon (Haakon) “the Good” Haraldsson becomes King of Norway.
- 953 King Hákon defeats the sons of Eiríkr Bloodaxe at Avaldsnes.
- 955 King Hákon defeats the sons of Eiríkr Bloodaxe at Rastarkalv.
- 957 King Hákon defeats the sons of Eiríkr Bloodaxe.
- c. 958 King Gorm Hardeknodsson dies. His son, Haraldr (Harald) “Bluetooth” Gormsson, ascends the throne to become King of Denmark.
- 961 King Hákon defeats the sons of Eiríkr Bloodaxe at Fitjar, but suffers a serious wound and dies.
- 961 Haraldr (Harald) “Greycloak” Eiríksson, the eldest surviving son of Eiríkr Bloodaxe, ascends the throne and becomes King of Norway as Harald II, a vassal king of King Haraldr Bluetooth.
- 970 King Haraldr Greycloak is tricked and killed in Denmark.
- 970 King Haraldr Bluetooth becomes King of Norway, but supports Haakon Sigurdsson as his vassal king.
- 975 Hákon (Haakon) “the Powerful” Sigurdsson becomes a regent of Norway.
- c. 986 Sveinn (Sweyn) “Forkbeard” Haraldsson revolts against his father, King Haraldr Bluetooth, and becomes King of Norway and King of Denmark.
- 986 Haraldr Bluetooth is driven into exile and dies shortly thereafter.

VIKING TIMELINE

- c. 995 Olof “Skötkonung” Eiríksson becomes the King of Sweden, reportedly becoming the first Swedish king to be recognized as the ruler of the Swedes and the Geats.
- 995 Olaf Tryggvason, a supposed great-grandson of Haraldr Fairhair, is lured to Norway and hunts down the regent Jarl Hákon. Those revolting against Jarl Hákon side with Olaf Tryggvason and he takes over as King of Norway.
- c. 1000 King Olaf is lured into the western Baltic Sea where a battle ensues. He is supposedly killed by the sons of Jarl Hákon. Sveinn Forkbeard resumes as King of Norway.
- 1002 St. Brice’s Day massacre – Danish men, women, and children in the Kingdom of England were killed at the orders of King Æthelred the Unready.
- c. 1002 King Sveinn Forkbeard raids the Kingdom of England to avenge the St. Brice’s Day massacre.
- c. 1006 King Sveinn Forkbeard raids the Kingdom of England again to avenge the St. Brice’s Day massacre.
- c. 1009 King Sveinn Forkbeard raids the Kingdom of England again to avenge the St. Brice’s Day massacre.
- 1013 King Æthelred and his sons flee to Normandy.
- 1013 King Sveinn Forkbeard declares himself King of England.
- 1013 Olaf II Haraldsson accepts Christianity and is baptized in Rouen, Normandy.
- 1014 Five weeks after declaring himself King of England, King Sveinn Forkbeard dies.
- 1015 Olaf II Haraldsson, the great-great-great grandson of Harald Fairhair, becomes King of Norway after gaining the support of the five petty kings of the Upplands.
- 1016 King Olaf II defeats Jarl Sweyn of Lade, reuniting all of Norway under a single king.
- 1016 Knútr (Cnut) “the Great” Sveinsson is declared the King of England.
- 1018 King Knútr the Great ascends the throne of Denmark after his brother, King Harald II, dies.
- 1022 Anund Olofsson, son of King Olof Skötkonung, becomes the King of Sweden.

VIKINGS

- c. 1028 Along with the support of discontented Norwegian jarls, King Knútr the Great invades and conquers Norway, becoming the new King of Norway.
- 1030 Olaf II Haraldsson, allied with his half-brother Haraldr (Harald) “Hardrada” Sigurdarson, attempts to reclaim the throne of Norway. Olaf is killed at the Battle of Stiklestad and Harald is exiled.
- 1031 Olaf II Haraldsson is canonized as St. Olaf, the patron saint of Norway.
- 1031 Haraldr Hardrada flees to Kievan Rus and joins Grand Prince Yaroslav’s army.
- 1034 Captain Haraldr Hardrada assembles a force and travels to Constantinople, joining the Byzantium Varangian Guard.
- 1035 King Knútr the Great dies. His son, Harthaknut, ascends the thrones of England and Denmark. His half-brother, Haraldr (Harald) “Harefoot” serves as the regent to England.
- 1035 Norwegian jarls revolt and install the 11-year old Magnús as the king of Norway.
- 1041 Edward the Confessor, son of King Æthelred, becomes co-ruler of England.
- 1042 King Harthaknut dies. King Edward takes over as King of England and, through a political arrangement, King Magnús becomes king of Denmark.
- 1042 Haraldr Hardrada returns to Kievan Rus, wealthy from his years as a mercenary for the Byzantine Empire.
- 1046 Haraldr Hardrada, the uncle of King Magnús, returns from Kievan Rus and becomes co-ruler of Norway.
- 1047 King Magnús dies; Jarl Sveinn becomes king of Denmark and Haraldr Hardrada becomes king of Norway.
- c. 1050 Edmund “the Old” Olofsson, son of King Olof Skötkonung, becomes the King of Sweden.
- c. 1060 Steinkell Rögnvaldsson, son-in-law of King Edmund the Old, becomes the King of Sweden. He establishes a new episcopal see to help further the Christianization of Sweden.
- 1066 King Harald Hardrada is killed at the Battle of Stamford in England, marking the end of the Viking Age.

BATTLE TIMELINE

- c. 750 **Battle of Brávellir:** During the mid-8th century, a large region of Sweden was inhabited by a Germanic tribe called the Geats (referred to as Götaland). The Geats were effectively divided between west and east and ruled by separate kings. The Geats of West Götaland were ruled by Sigurdr Hringr, king of Sweden. The Geats of East Götaland were ruled by Sigurdr's uncle, Haraldr Wartooth, king of Denmark. The story of this battle is given over to legendary exaggeration, becoming more mythical than historical. However, the result is that Sigurdr triumphed and became the king of both Sweden and Denmark. His dynasty in Sweden lasted well into the 11th century; almost to the end of the Viking Age.
- 793 **Isle of Lindisfarne:** The Viking raid on the island of Lindisfarne was not the first raid in England, but it certainly had the most rippling effect. A force of Danish warriors landed on the island and attacked the Christian monastery, making off with many treasures and murdering the monks living there. As followers of the traditional Norse religion, the Danish were seen as "Great Heathens" that struck at the heart of the Christian religion in Northumbria. Some of the religious leaders in England saw this as a punishment sent by God for any wrongdoings.
- 795 **Isle of Iona:** Off the west coast of Scotland, the Isle of Iona is home to the Iona Abbey, a Christian abbey that dates back to a monastery founded in 563 (the area had previously served as a religious center for Celtic druids). The monks there produced the Book of Kells and The Chronicle of Ireland. It was first attacked by Viking raiders in 795 then again in 802, 806, and 825. Due to the slaughter of dozens of monks, many relocated to the Abbey of Kells in Ireland or farther abroad to the European mainland. The Iona Abbey was burned during the raid in 825.
- 799 **Abbey of Saint-Philibert de Tournus:** Located in the eastern region of the Carolingian Empire, the raid of the Abbey of Saint-Philibert in Tournus is noted as the first Viking raid on continental Europe.
- 799 **Aquitaine:** Vikings attempted to raid Aquitaine in the western region of the Carolingian Empire, ruled by King Louis, but were repelled.
- 800 **Francia:** Charlemagne establishes a series of coastal defenses to ward off the Viking raids.

VIKINGS

- 804 **Lyminge Abbey:** Located on the southern coast of Kent, this Abbey was built around 633. The nuns there were granted land in Canterbury to serve as a sanctuary after suffering from the Viking raid.
- 810 **Frisia:** Once part of its own kingdom before being taken over by the Franks, Frisia was first attacked by Norse warriors in 810 then again in 843 and 845. During the latter raids, it is believed that many Scandinavians settled in areas of Frisia, eventually trading with the Frisian people.
- 820 **Flanders:** The area that later became the County of Flanders was part of the Carolingian Empire (today it is part of France, Belgium, and the Netherlands). Around 820, the coastal defenses established by Charlemagne collapsed, allowing the Vikings to raid the mainland. One target was the city of Ghent, home to St. Peter's and St. Bavo's abbeys, attacked in 851 and 879. Another was Quentovic, first raided in 842.
- 832 **Armagh:** Armagh served as the main center of religion in Ireland, being home to the church founded by Saint Patrick. It was hit by Viking raids in 832. Historical data reports the town was plundered three times in one month during 832. That data also reports that Armagh was the victim of periodic attacks over the course of 150 years.
- 834 **Dorestad:** Dorestad was part of the Carolingian Empire. King Lothair I did not see eye-to-eye with his father, King Louis the Pious, and chose to provoke the Danish to raid the Frisian coastline. Dorestad was hit several times before the trading town was handed over to the Danish to rule. Unfortunately for the new Danish ruler, the trading town saw significant decline and was mostly abandoned by merchants. By 863, little of the town remained and by 870, the Danish appear to have abandoned it as well.
- 835 **Kingdom of Kent:** Possibly due to its location across the southeastern coastline of England, the Kingdom of Kent was a frequent target of Viking raids. Although periodic attacks were noted earlier, the mid-9th century suffered to repeated attacks. In 835, the Isle of Sheppey was attack. In 841, raids through the Romney Marsh occurred. In 842 it was Rochester and in 851 it was Canterbury and Sandwich. Attacks continued into 853 and through 865 including Norsemen overwintering in 851-52 and 854-55. Rochester was besieged in 885 until freed by an army led by Alfred the Great.

- c. 840 **Dublin:** Norwegian raids in Dublin began around 840. By the winter of 841, the Norwegians had established a permanent base in Dublin and wintered there, using it to attack farther south and west. In 842, it was bolstered by a large fleet of warriors. During this time, the Norwegians actually began to work with the local Irish, allowing them to establish their own kingdom and retain power of the region well into the 10th century (although the Norse people remained in Dublin, power in the hands of Dublin declined considerably). Control of Dublin traded hands often as attacks on Dublin, against Dublin kings (and their warriors), and allied with the Dublin kings occurred frequently.
- 844 **Galicia:** In what is now part of Spain, a Norse fleet of 70-80 ships reached the Kingdom of Galicia and Asturias, in Galicia, in 844. They raided along the coastline, but were defeated by an army from Galicia and continued along the coastline to the Umayyad Emirate of Cordoba. There they clashed with Muslim warriors and were able to raid Lisbon, Seville, and others in modern day Spain and Portugal. Viking raiders went on to return to Galicia in 951, 964, and 1015.
- 845 **Hamburg:** A very large Danish fleet sailed up the River Elbe and attacked Hamburg, in modern day Germany. The town was ravaged and the church of Archbishop Ansgar, the Apostle of the North, was burned down. Bishop Ansgar just managed to save the relics from within the church.
- 845 **Siege of Paris:** A large Danish fleet sailed up the River Seine and began raiding settlements along the river. King Charles the Bald responded by forming an army to fight the incoming fleet. Half of King Charles's army was defeated and the other half retreated. The Danish fleet reached Paris during Easter, raided the city, and occupied it. They did not retreat until King Charles paid them 7,000 livres to leave. Viking raiders returned to attack Paris periodically in the 860s and attempted another massive siege in 885. By this time, Paris had been fortified and the ransom demanded by the Scandinavian raiders (Norwegian and Danish) was denied. The Scandinavians proceeded to attack and attempted to siege Paris, but repeatedly failed. King Charles the Fat arrived a year later with his army, but chose not to engage the Scandinavians. Instead, he sent them up the River Yvonne to raid Burgundy due to revolts occurring there, which he in turn paid 700 livres for the service. Scandinavians returned to Paris in 911 intent on sacking the city. Instead, King Charles the Simple negotiated with their leader and gave

VIKINGS

them the city of Rouen, which would eventually become the Duchy of Normandy.

- 845 **Tours:** Up the River Loire from the coast of the Carolingian Empire, it was first attacked, unsuccessfully, in 845. A Danish fleet struck again in 853, ravaging the town and burning down the church where St. Martin's body was previously held (being moved to Comery and then Orleans in anticipation of the Viking raid).
- 848 **Bordeaux:** Located in the Carolingian Empire, Bordeaux was yet another Frankish target for the Scandinavian raiders. However, the city had driven back the first attack only to be attacked under the cover of night. A siege soon began and was only relieved when King Charles the Bald arrived to intervene.
- 851 **London:** A large Danish fleet entered the River Thames and sailed up to London, likely raiding lands along the way. In 871, Scandinavians once again turned their sites toward London and captured the city, installing a garrison there. By 886, Alfred the Great was able to recapture London and expel the Scandinavian invaders.
- 851 **Kingdom of Wessex:** The Kingdom of Wessex was very important during the Viking Age. While Viking raids occurred almost yearly, the King of Wessex, Æthulwulf, helped to defeat the large Danish army. In 865, the Danish combined their forces, possibly along with Norwegian and Swedish forces, into what the Anglo-Saxons referred to as the "Great Heathen Army." The Great Heathen Army successfully attacked the kingdoms of Northumbria and East Anglia before receiving reinforcements in 871 for attacks on Mercia and Wessex, now led by Æthulwulf's son, Ælfræd (Alfred the Great). Wessex forces were able to provide relief from the Danish attacks, but it wasn't enough. King Alfred paid the first "Danegeld" to bribe the Danish army to leave. The Danish returned in 878, but were defeated at the Battle of Edington. They returned again in 884, but were once again defeated by King Alfred. "Peace" (because it wasn't peace for very long) was proffered in 886, relegating the Danish to the land then called the Danelaw.
- c. 852 **Isle of Anglesey:** (Ynys Môn as it was known in Welsh) Located in the northwest region of Wales, it was one of the few areas of Wales to be continually harassed by Viking raids; it was first attacked in 852 then again in 854 and 855. Resistance to the raids was fierce and the Danish leader Gorm was killed during the raid in 855. After being driven out of Dublin in 903, the

Scandinavians returned to the island, but failed to succeed in their attack. Raids continued in 918 and throughout the latter half of the 10th century. (The name “Anglesey” is actually of Scandinavian origin.)

- 853 **Isle of Sheppey:** Although part of the Kingdom of Wessex, the Isle of Sheppey became occupied by Scandinavian forces and served as a permanent base for raids launched across England.
- 853 **Frankish Interior:** Using the River Loire, Norse raiders were able to travel to the interior of the Carolingian Empire to attack Poitiers, Angers, and Tours. In 854 they used the river again to plunder Blois and Orléans (although unsuccessfully). In 856 they returned to Orléans and successfully sacked it. In 857 they again used the river to attack Poitiers, Tours, and Blois. Attacks on the interior continued, via the River Loire, at least through 877.
- 859-860 **Mediterranean Sea:** After ravaging the Iberian Peninsula, Björn Ironside, the king of Sweden, led his fleet into the Mediterranean to continue raiding the coastline of Europe. He attacked the southern coastline of the Carolingian Empire and into Italy, attacking Luni, Pisa, Fiesole, and others. On his return, he was met by an Islamic Iberian navy at the Straits of Gibraltar that devastated the king’s fleet. What little of his fleet remained managed to return to Sweden.
- 865 **Fleury:** Viking raids continued their pursuit into the interior of the Carolingian Empire. An impending attack on the Fleury Abbey was thwarted by local lords as the monks there fled for safety.
- 866 **York:** Danish Vikings first attacked and captured the Northumbrian city of York in 866, a place of royal in-fighting. The fighting kings joined forces to make a go at reclaiming York in 867, only to fail. Norse armies ravaged other English kingdoms and what was left returned to Northumbria in 876. When the truce was signed with King Alfred the Great, York became part of the Danelaw.
- c. 867 **Nottingham:** While occupying York, the Norse army made its way into the Kingdom of Mercia, attacking and capturing Nottingham. It later became part of the Danelaw in an area known as the Five Burghs.
- 869 **Thetford:** Thetford was another location where the Danish army chose to winter. It later became part of the Five Burghs and was eventually settled by the Danish sometime in the late 9th century. It was raided by King Sweyn Forkbeard in 1004.

VIKINGS

- 870 **Dumbarton:** Located in Scotland, it was the site of a four-month siege before Dumbarton Castle finally submitted. The Norse came away with a large amount of treasure and many slaves were taken.
- 870 **Battle of Englefield:** Occurring at the close of 870, the battle took place near Reading in England, pitting Norse warriors from the Danelaw against the West Saxons. The Norse were defeated and driven back to Reading.
- 871 **Battle of Reading:** Four days after the Battle of Englefield, the West Saxons attacked the Danish encampment at Reading, but were defeated. This defeat allowed the Danish to advance into the Kingdom of Wessex.
- 871 **Battle of Ashdown:** Four days after the Battle of Reading, the Danish clashed with the Wessex army, led by Alfred the Great, in Berkshire, leading to another West Saxon victory.
- 871 **Battle of Basing:** Two weeks after the Battle of Ashdown, the Danish attempted another invasion of Wessex, meeting the West Saxons at Old Basing. This time, the Norse army prevailed again.



- 871 **Battle of Marton:** Two months after the Battle of Basing, the Danish again attacked the West Saxons and left victorious. This battle marked the ends of King Æthelred's stand against the Danelaw Scandinavians as he died less than a month later in April.
- c. 872 **Battle of Hafrsfjord:** Many historical resources mark this battle as the final battle fought by King Harald Fairhair in his quest to unify Norway. Occurring in the Hafrsfjord in the Stavenger Peninsula, victory brought the western coast of Norway under King Harald's rule.
- 873 **Repton:** In 873, a Norse army marched into Mercia and captured the town of Repton after a battle with Mercian and Wessex armies. They fortified their position and wintered there into 874. In 875, the army divided north and south heading toward Northumbria and Cambridge respectively.
- 877 **Battle of Strangford Lough:** The Battle of Strangford Lough was another battle between Norse armies, although this one taking place in Ireland. Here, the King of Dublin stood against the "Great Heathen Army" near Strangford Lough and prevailed.
- 878 **Battle of Edington:** In the spring of 878, Alfred the Great once again assembled his West Saxon army to battle the Danish, this time in Edington (an estimated location). This victory for Alfred the Great marked a major turn of events as he was able to drive the Danish back to the area known as the Danelaw. This helped to stabilize the English lands, bring about a relative measure of peace, and save the West Saxons from being conquered by the Danes.
- 879 **Ghent:** Some time in 879, Danish raiders came into the Frisia region of the Carolingian Empire. They captured the town of Ghent and used it as a base for attacks, utilizing the Rhine, Meuse, and Sauer Rivers to raid the region. They maintained control over Frisia until 882, when their leader, Godfrid, was recognized as having lordship over Frisia after the Siege of Asselt. Historically known as the Duke of Frisia, Godfrid served as a vassal to the Frankish King. He was assassinated in 885 and the Danish control of Frisia ended. However, historical remains show attacks throughout this region occurred through 890.
- 880 **Battle of Thimeon:** Danes from the Danelaw traveled to the Carolingian Empire and settled along the River Scheldt 879. Although signing a peace treaty with Kings Louis III and Carloman II of West Francia, King Louis the Younger of East

VIKINGS

Francia met the Norsemen in 880, marking the Battle of Thimeon. The Frankish army defeated the Danes, but this did not convince them to leave. The Danes continued raiding the region until 881.

- 881 **Battle of Saucourt-en-Vimeu:** In 881, Kings Louis III and Carloman II brought their armies to meet the remaining Danish at the Battle of Saucourt-en-Vimeu. The Danish were once again defeated
- 884 **Battle of Norditi:** During their time in the Frisia region of the Carolingian Empire, a Danish army was attacked by a Frisian army led by Archbishop Rimbert of Bremen-Hamburg. During the battle, the Danish were forced back, resulting in the complete removal of the Norse threat in East Frisia.
- 891 **Battle of Leuven:** The Battle of Leuven marked another Frankish victory and ended the Viking raids through the area known as the Low countries within the Carolingian Empire.
- 893 **Battle of Buttington:** A large force of Danes landed in the Kingdom of Kent and was reinforced by a force of Danes from the Danelaw. The combined Danish army besieged the city of Exeter; Alfred the Great responded by bringing an army to relieve the city, leaving his thegns behind to defend the rest of the kingdom. Alfred's thegns assembled an army of Saxons and Welsh and met part of the Danish army, meeting a Danish army that had fled Exeter. The Saxon-Welsh army caused the Danes to continue northwest where they were finally besieged at a fortification near present-day Buttington. The Danish were then starved out and defeated.
- c. 910 **Battle of Tettenhall:** Danes from the Danelaw had assembled and raided the Kingdom of Mercia along the River Severn. Fearing a large fleet was waiting for them to the south, they headed north. Unfortunately for them, the Saxons were ready; the Danes were caught and defeated by a combined army of West Saxons and Mercians near Tettenhall, in present-day Staffordshire. This was a pivotal battle for England as it marked the defeat of the last Danish raiding army in England. In the years after this battle, King Edward the Elder was able to fortify and strengthen England against those who remained in the Danelaw.
- 911 **Normandy:** By 911, Norse raiders had been using the lower Seine valley to launch numerous raids on the Carolingian Empire, specifically the region called Neustria. The Siege of Chartres in

911 resulted in a victory for the Franks and the Treaty of Saint-Clair-sur-Epte signed by King Charles the Simple and the Norse leader, Rollo. This treaty gave Rollo suzerainty of the territory the Norse raiders already controlled, albeit now officially. This included the city of Rouen and lands beyond it. This territory became known as the Duchy of Normandy. Rollo became a vassal to King Charles, agreed to be baptized into Christianity, and guarded his new territory from further Viking raids.

912 **Brittany:** The Kingdom of Brittany, a vassal state of the Carolingian Empire, suffered relatively little from Viking raids in the 9th century. They were often working against Frankish interests, and the Norsemen who attacked the Carolingian Empire served as a distraction, allowing Brittany to expand. This changed drastically when the Duchy of Normandy was formed and handed over to the Norsemen. Starting in 912, raids against the Kingdom of Brittany increased drastically, resulting in most coastal monasteries being abandoned. By 919, the kingdom had collapsed and captured by the Norse from Normandy, who established a capital at Nantes. In 931, the Bretons were able to rebel against the occupying Normans, whose attention was drawn toward the rest of the Carolingian Empire. Although they lost, this led to another invasion in 936 and the eventual recapturing of Nantes in 937. However, the Kingdom of Brittany failed to recover its former glory and eventually became little more than a vassal to Normandy.

914 **Vadrefjord:** At the turn of the 10th century, Scandinavian attacks were focused primarily on England and France, leaving Ireland relatively quiet. This was until 914 when the silence broke and a Scandinavian and Danelaw force sailed across the Irish Sea and attacked Vadrefjord (Waterford), marking another wave of Viking raids. However, the attack on Vadrefjord is historically reported as a recapturing of a Norse settlement, which the Irish had expelled the Norse from over 50 years earlier. Following suit, only 3 years later, the Norse re-captured Dublin, where they had been expelled from around 902.

c. 915 **Battle of Cenn Fúait:** The Battle of Cenn Fúait was one of the battles leading to the recapture of Dublin by the Scandinavians. Here, the Irish King Augaire mac Ailella fought against the Norse attempting to recapture their settlements, and reportedly died in the battle.

c. 917 **Battle of Tempsford:** The battle of Tempsford was another victory for Edward the Elder and his efforts to rid England of Danish

threats. Danes had relocated to Tempsford and built a fortification there to use against the English. When they were attacked by the Anglo-Saxon army, their hold on East Anglia began to fall apart.

- c. 920 **Limerick:** Around 920, Scandinavians began settling on the site of present-day Limerick. In 922, they began raiding along the River Shannon, maintaining Limerick as their base. Two years later, they were attacked by the Norsemen of Dublin, but succeeded in repelling the attack. In 937, they were attacked again by the Norsemen of Dublin and captured. Although historical records surrounding these events don't always agree and are possibly incomplete, it appears as though Limerick was subordinate to Dublin during the centuries following the attacks.

- 927 **York:** From originally controlling York in the 9th century, the kings of England began invading and re-capturing the city starting in 927. The English were successful in their repeated attempts up to 954 when York was fully absorbed into England.

- 968 **Battle of Sulcoit:** Taking place in Ireland, the Battle of Sulcoit was a fight against the Scandinavian expansion throughout Ireland. As the first highlight battle of King Brian Boru's military career, the Irish fought and defeated the Norse warriors of Limerick, razing the stronghold there after the battle was won.

- c. 984 **Battle of Fýrisvellir:** Located in present-day Uppsala, the Fýrisvellir plain hosted the battle for the throne of Sweden between King Eric the Victorious and his nephew Styrbjörn the Strong, leader of the Jomsvikings. In the end, King Eric prevailed, retaining the throne of Sweden.

- c. 986 **Battle of Hjörungavágr:** A well-known naval battle, the Jomsvikings attempted to overcome King Haakon of Norway in his fight to unite all of Norway. This battle marks another major defeat of the Jomsvikings.

- 991 **Battle of Maldon:** The Battle of Maldon resulted in another example of Danegeld paid to Norse raiders. The battle between the Anglo-Saxons of Essex, led by Æthelred the Unready, against a force of Norwegian warriors ended in the English defeat. To rid the land of the invasion force, they were instead bought-off to secure the protection of Essex (which didn't last for that long).

- 994 **London:** In 994, future Norwegian King Olaf and Danish King Sweyn Forkbeard made another attempt at London. They floated in 94 ships in the hopes of sacking and razing the city. They

were unsuccessful but reportedly left with 16,000lbs of silver in Danegeld.

- 1011 **Canterbury:** A Viking siege took place at Canterbury in September 1011; after three weeks, the Norse army overwhelmed the city's defenses and burned its cathedral to the ground.
- 1014 **Battle of Clontarf:** The Battle of Clontarf marked King Brian Boru's last stand against the Norse influence in Ireland. His forces squared off against a force of Norse from Dublin and Orkney alongside a force of Irish from Leinster. The Irish army prevailed, marking their freedom from the Norse expansion across Ireland.
- 1016 **Battle of Brentford:** The Battle of Brentford marks the beginning (or at least near the beginning) the time of the Danish attempt to reconquest England.
- 1016 **Battle of Assandun:** The Battle of Assandun was another clash between the Danish and English. Taking place in Essex, it marked the Danish reconquest of England.
- 1026 **Battle of Helgeå:** After the Danish reconquest of England, the two joined forces in a naval battle against a Norwegian and Swedish fleet. The English and Danish prevailed, but not until sustaining heavy losses.
- 1066 **Battle of Stamford Bridge:** The Battle of Stamford Bridge is the ultimate marker on the Norse timeline as it signifies the end of the Viking Age. After King Edward the Confessor died in 1066, the English throne was caught in a whirlwind of dispute. English nobles quickly declared the English Harold Godwinson as successor to the throne, making him king on January 5. This was immediately contested by William of Normandy and Harald Hardrada of Norway. With challenges to the throne declared, each side began to amass a fleet. Harald Hardrada made the first strike and attacked England, conquering the lands and making it to Stamford Bridge. With the news of the Norwegian attacks, King Harold took his force and fled the south, meeting Hardrada's force at Stamford Bridge. The English forces prevailed and the Norwegians were forced to abandon their efforts. During this time, William landed on the south and King Harold was forced to meet him, with depleted forces, at the Battle of Hastings. Unfortunately, King Harold's battered army was unable to hold back the Norman force and King Harold was killed. This paved the way for the Norman conquest of England and marked the end of Viking raids.

VIKING CHARACTERS

While it's easy enough to create a Viking character, there is more to the Scandinavian culture that can be incorporated into the character's background and concept. Use the content below to make your Viking character come to life.

CHARACTER CONCEPTS

Berserkir: Berserkirs are frenzied warriors who eschew real armor for wolf or bear pelts, charging heedlessly into battle. **Suggested Skills:** Fighting, Intimidation, Throwing

Hersir: Hersirs were a type of middle-ranking warrior. They were "ranked" higher than karls, but still below the jarls. They were considered minor nobles and carried much better gear than karls. They would often serve as the head warrior of a raid party. **Suggested Skills:** Fighting, Intimidation, Notice, Throwing

Hirdman: Hirdmen were "professional" Scandinavian mercenaries that served various Scandinavian Jarls or kings. **Suggested Skills:** Fighting, Notice, Persuasion, Throwing

Jarls: Jarls are local chieftains with more land and wealth than karls. They are responsible for organizing karls into raiding parties and typically join the parties as well. **Suggested Skills:** Fighting, Notice, Persuasion

Karl: Karls are freemen who farm the land and join Viking raiding parties. They own their own land and equipment and are quite self-sufficient. **Suggested Skills:** Boating, Fighting, Notice, Survival

Merchants: The Norse people made use of a very extensive trade network. Merchants were freemen who, instead of farming, chose to establish a "shop" at one of the trading towns or travel great distances to trade for foreign goods. Some of them were as good at diplomacy as they were at trading. **Suggested Skills:** Boating, Gambling, Knowledge (Foreign Goods), Notice, Persuasion, Streetwise

Skald: Skalds were the great storytellers and poets of Scandinavia. **Suggested Skills:** Gambling, Notice, Persuasion, Streetwise

Tinglith: Tinglithmen were royal bodyguards once the people were united beneath the kings. Besides being a bodyguard, they were also involved in Scandinavian politics. **Suggested Skills:** Fighting, Knowledge (Politics), Notice

VIKING CHARACTERS

JOMSVIKINGS

The Jomsvikings were a Norse band of mercenaries who became somewhat legendary due to their heroic depiction in Icelandic sagas. Although evidence of their actual existence may be lacking, they are said to have been formed as a brotherhood by King Harald Bluetooth, establishing their fortress at Jomsborg along the southern Baltic shore. According to the sagas, the Jomsvikings lived by a series of commandments, which all members must obey. They were staunchly pagan, worshipping Odin and Thor, and readily for hire by anyone who could afford them. They were reportedly in existence from the late 10th century to the early 11th century.

Varangian Guard: The Byzantine Empire employed many foreign mercenaries; their name for Scandinavians was Varangian. Varangian Guards were the Scandinavian mercenaries in the employ of the Byzantine Empire. **Suggested Skills:** Boating, Fighting, Intimidation, Knowledge (Byzantium), Persuasion

HINDRANCES

The following are ways to incorporate existing Hindrances into your Viking characters along with new Hindrances to choose from.

EXISTING HINDRANCES

ARROGANT

Arrogance was a common theme amongst Norse warriors. Often times their arrogance was only encouraged by the sagas told about them, the tales regaled by the skalds, and the place they held within the hodge-podge armies they comprised during the early centuries of the Viking Age.

BLOOD THIRSTY

Viking raids were known to result in the deaths of women, children, priests, and the elderly. The Norse raiders had no qualms about killing; except for those they took away as slaves.

ENEMY

Scandinavian temperament often resulted in feuds with neighbors or those who felt they've been wronged. Some may be hunted down by their enemies, have revenge sought against them, or ousted from their land depending on who the enemy was.

GREEDY

Norse raiders did not share; they kept what they looted and sold or traded the items they didn't want.

OVERCONFIDENT

During the first half of the Viking Age, raiding warriors were ill-prepared for any type of real battle, but they didn't really know that. Exuding an air of overconfidence, they often thought themselves unstoppable; until they came upon a well-trained, well-equipped, and prepared army. That overconfidence likely drove them to attack when the odds were clearly stacked against them.

NEW HINDRANCES

EXILED [LOCATION] (MINOR OR MAJOR)

The character has performed some type of vile deed that has angered the target of that deed (the target being another Scandinavian). The punishment for this deed depends on how severe it was.

Upon taking this Hindrance, choose a location. As a Minor Hindrance, the character's deed has caused him to be exiled from a particular region. Should he return, he will be forcibly dealt with, possibly killed. As a Major Hindrance, the character has angered a particular powerful Scandinavian who has exiled him from the country. Should he ever return, he will be hunted down and murdered.

FEUD (MINOR OR MAJOR)

The character has done something stupid, possibly in his youth, that continually annoys or angers another Scandinavian person or family. As a Minor Hindrance, whatever occurred was mostly harmless, but the character is often harassed by the person or family he has wronged. As a Major Hindrance, his act caused great damage to a person or family's home or possessions. The character is often attacked when he least suspects it, or something of great value is hunted down, stolen, or irrevocably damaged.



VIKING CHARACTERS

LOYSING (MINOR)

The character was once a slave, but was freed by his owner. He does not carry the same rights as a karl under Scandinavian laws, but he can own and farm his own land.

THRALL (MAJOR)

The character is a slave, but has proven himself as worthy to his master. His master takes him everywhere and may even rely on him as a trusted warrior. However, he is still a slave and must do as his master commands. If this Hindrance is “bought off”, it becomes the Loysing Hindrance instead.

EDGES

The following are ways to incorporate existing Edges into your Viking characters along with new Edges to choose from.

EXISTING EDGES

BERSERK

Perfect for the berserkir Viking warrior.

BRAWNY

Many who fought against a Viking raid spoke of (or wrote of second- or third-hand) the size of the Norse warriors. Some of the descriptions were possibly exaggerated, but they were reportedly larger than the average size of their targets.

FRENZY

Viking raids exhibited hit-and-run tactics. Speed was vital to overwhelming the target, looting and destroying as much as possible, and getting away before they had a chance to respond.

NOBLE

Before the unification of the Scandinavian countries, many petty kings ruled the lands and beneath them were the local chieftains, or jarls, that held sway over the immediate regions. Both of these would fall under the term noble. After the unification, some jarls grew in political strength, solidifying their place as a noble.

NEW EDGES

FARMER

Type: Background

Requirements: Novice, Survival d8+

Life in Scandinavia can be difficult. Winters tend to be a bit extreme and the lack of central-settlements means farmers have to be very self-sufficient. The character gains a +2 bonus to Survival in rural environments. Additionally, he ignores all cold weather-related penalties when properly equipped.

VIKINGS

SEAFARER

Type: Background

Requirements: Novice, Boating d8+

The character has spent much of his life on the sea and knows the ins and outs of every Fjord within 100 miles. He gains a +2 bonus to all Boating rolls, ignores the Unsteady Platform rules while on a boat, and gains a +2 bonus to all navigation-based rolls while on the water.

TRADER

Type: Professional

Requirements: Novice, Charisma 0+, Persuasion d8+

The character has assumed the life of a merchant and spends half of her life traveling abroad, bringing exotic foreign goods back to Scandinavia. She gains always gets the best price when trading for goods and she gains a +2 bonus to Persuasion when negotiating (all forms of negotiation).

VIKING

Type: Professional

Requirements: Novice, Fighting or Throwing d6+

Scandinavian warriors engage in Viking raid parties across much of Europe, particularly the British Isles. They specialize in shock attacks, especially those launched from longships beached on the coastline. The character gains a +2 bonus to Fighting and Throwing attack and damage rolls when making a Surprise attack.

WINTER TRAVELER

Type: Background

Requirements: Novice, Agility d8+

Traveling across Scandinavia in the winter requires special gear and the knowledge of how to properly use it. The character has survived many winters here and knows how to get around when the snow falls. She ignores all penalties incurred for crossing snow and ice, when properly equipped.

WRESTLER

Type: Combat

Requirements: Novice, Agility or Strength d8+, Fighting d6+

Wrestling is one popular form of entertainment while between Viking raids and when the farm doesn't need tending to. The character gains a +2 bonus to Fighting to entangle his foe when attempting to grapple, a +2 bonus to maintain the grapple (i.e. the opposed roll made by the defender to break free), and a +2 bonus to Strength when damaging the foe while grappled.

VIKING CHARACTERS

SEITHR

Seithr (pronounced say-ther), also known as seidr (both a Latinized form), is the Norse practice of magic. Directly connected to Scandinavian religious beliefs, its patron deities are Odin and Freyja; Freyja is believed to be the first patron and taught the practice to Odin.

Seithr was primarily associated with women, although male practitioners were believed to exist. While it may have been acceptable for a woman to practice the sorcerous arts, it was seen as unacceptable for men, often persecuted for doing so. Female practitioners are often referred to as völvá.

Although referred to as magic, seithr had very shaman-like practices, including divination and clairvoyance. It is said to have been performed like a group ritual – a group of spiritual women would surround the völvá while she fell into a trance. During this time, she could traverse the spiritual world (or the Nine Worlds if you take a Norse approach) to acquire knowledge from the spirits.

Little is actually known of the practice of seithr outside of the sagas that included it. Some have described the ability of the völvá as a form of meditation where her spirit leaves her body, traverses the ether, and enters the spiritual world. While there, she is able to learn valuable things from the spirits, such as the weather, misfortune, good luck, or future events.

ARCANE BACKGROUND (SEITHR)

Arcane Skill: Etherwalking (Spirit)

Starting Power Points: 10

Starting Powers: 3

The practice of seithr requires strict discipline. The practitioner must dispel the real world in order to channel their spirit so that it may be freed and allowed to walk through the ether into the spiritual world. While there, the practitioner may call upon the spirits to perform great deeds.

Evil Spirit: Entering the spiritual world can be quite dangerous. When the seithr practitioner rolls a 1 on her Etherwalking die, regardless of her Wild Die, she has encountered an evil spirit who attacks her. She automatically becomes Shaken; this can cause a Wound. On a critical failure, the evil spirit tricks her, causing her Power to backfire. If the Power causes damage or is meant to hinder, it instead targets a randomly chosen ally. If the Power is meant to aid, it instead targets a randomly chosen enemy. If the Power is used outside of combat, the response is the opposite of what the practitioner was expecting.

ROLEPLAYING OPPORTUNITIES

HISTORY

Ultimate Dark Ages Guide: Vikings is written from a historical perspective. As is, it can be used as a setting for games set in historical Scandinavia and the charac-

VIKINGS

ters can set to sea on voyages to lands the Norse frequently plundered. For religion, what we view as mythology is the religion of the people, covering many aspects of what they believed, but will need to be altered depending on the era chosen. The early decades of the Viking Age were dominated by traditional Norse beliefs; the middle decades included influences of Christianity attempting to take over, only to be repeatedly repealed; the final decades include a much greater influence from Christianity and the conversion from traditional Norse beliefs to Christian ones.

Viking Timeline presents a long list of the major events that occurred throughout the Viking Age. These events may have a substantial influence on adventures and campaigns should the party wish to travel to other areas, become part of the plundering activities, or serve in one of the many battles that took place. This can also be combined with non-Scandinavian games whereas the characters are targets during the Viking raids; the GM can use the timeline to know where these raids occur and when.

MYTHOLOGY

The entire Viking Age can be used as a backdrop for a standalone setting in a place where the Norse is the dominant race. This is a place filled with gods, goddesses, grand beasts, and epic sagas mimicking the mythology and folklore of the Scandinavian people before their conversion to Christianity. The Nine Worlds become reality and the Viking warriors can set off on grand quests to locate Yggdrasil in order to pass from Midgard to one of the other realms.

In a mythology-influenced setting, the gods of Asgard hold incredible power and influence over the Nine Worlds. Maybe they pull all the strings; maybe they determine who is good and who is evil; maybe they orchestrate epic wars simply for entertainment. The Nine Worlds are filled with humans, giants, dwarfs, elves, and all other creatures of Scandinavian lore. The only hope is that each PC can prove his or her worth, becoming a great warrior who ascends the Nine Worlds and finds eternity in Valhalla.

FANTASY

The ideals of a Viking warrior are often commonplace within fantasy settings. The entire essence of the Viking Age, without the timeline, can be plucked out of history and set into a fantasy world. These Norse warriors are yet another sub-race of humans populating the northern regions. They are fierce warriors, great sorcerers, and talented storytellers all waiting to be part of the adventures. Their gods and goddesses are as real as everyone else's and their weapons can smite even the most fantastical creatures.

VIKING GEAR

Norse warriors participating in Viking raids were expected to supply their own weapons. Wealthier Scandinavians tended to have better weapons, but that often changed after the raids. During the raids, warriors often looted weapons or goods that could be bartered for better weapons. Those who couldn't afford much more likely carried implements useful around the home – axes for cutting lumber, spears for hunting, etc. Those who could afford it used swords, larger axes, better spears, and even wore more effective armor.

Due to this difference in wealth and the weapons looted during these raids, one Norse warrior's weapons may look significantly different than the next. Players and GMs are encouraged to describe how the weapon is constructed or decorated, but ultimately each one is provided herein as a generic type.

WEAPONS

Breiðøx: This broad axe has a crescent-shaped cutting surface, a generally symmetrical head, and a long shaft. It is designed to be used two-handed.

Höggøx: This small axe is similar in shape to the broad axe, but it's the size of a hatchet and designed to be used one-handed.

Höggspjót: This is a large spear with a longer head. It's designed to be used two-handed as a thrusting weapon.

Krókspjót: This spear has a barbed head with two wing-like hooks that can be used for a variety of purposes, such as trapping an opponent's weapon.

Long sword: These long swords are double-edged and used single-handed. Long swords owned by karls are generally quite basic; those owned by jarls are possibly ornately decorated.

Longsax: A longer version of the sax, it is the size of a short sword and possibly usable with two hands.

Sax: This is a knife-like, single-edged weapon used like a machete. They are inexpensive and simple to make.

Shield Boss: This metal disk is placed in the center of the common round shield. It can be used as an off-hand weapon.

Skeggøx: Also known as a bearded axe, this small axe is asymmetrical with an elongated lower edge. It is designed to be used one-handed and the elongated edge can be used to hook an opponent's shield or weapon.

Spjót: The basic spear, it can be used single-handed for thrusting or throwing.

MELEE WEAPONS TABLE

Type	Damage	Weight	Cost	Notes
Breiðøx	Str+d8	10	25	2 hands
Höggøx	Str+d6	2	200	
Höggspjót	Str+d8	10	300	Reach 1, 2 hands
Krókspjót	Str+d6	8	100	Parry +1, Reach 1, 2 hands
Long sword	Str+d8	8	300	
Longsax	Str+d6	6	100	
Sax	Str+d4	3	25	
Shield Boss	Str+2	-	25	Off-hand use only
Skeggøx	Str+d6	2	175	Parry +1
Spjót	Str+d6	6	25	

RANGED WEAPONS TABLE

Type	Range	Damage	RoF	Shots	Wt.	Min Str	Cost
Bow	12/24/48	2d6	1	-	3	d6	250
Höggøx	3/6/12	Str+d6	1	-	2	-	200
Spjót	3/6/12	Str+d6	1	-	6	d6	25

ARMOR

Chain Shirt: This shirt is made of small metal rings linked together to form a complete shirt. It offers better protection from being cut, but not from being stabbed.

Conical Helmet: This common helmet is rounded to cover the warrior's head and often contains eyelets to cover part of the face.

Lamellar Armor: This shirt is made of small metal plates woven together. This type of armor was quite rare and likely came from Byzantium.

Padded Jerkin: The most common armor, it is a thick jacket, made from linen, hemp, wool, or animal hide, with long sleeves (although short sleeve versions are available that don't protect the arms).

Round Shield: The common shield of the Viking warrior.



VIKING GEAR

To preserve the ideals of a Viking warrior-styled game, low cost weapons are not the cost to purchase the weapon, but rather the cost to purchase the material. Norse warriors were expected to have smithing skills to create their own tools and weapons (such as an axe, spear, and shield). Higher cost items could be purchased from foreign merchants or from those who looted them during the latest raids.

ARMOR TABLE

Type	Armor	Weight	Cost	Notes
Chain Shirt	+2	10	200	Covers torso
Conical Helmet	+3	2	25	Covers head; 50% chance of protecting versus called shots to the head
Lamellar Armor	+2	6	400	Covers torso
Padded Jerkin	+1	5	25	Covers torso and arms
Round Shield	-	12	50	+1 Parry, +2 Armor versus ranged attacks

LONGSHIPS

Barði: Also known as barde, this warship has an iron studded prow useful as a battering ram for striking enemy ships.

Bússa: Also known as busse, this warship is a sea-going longship ideal for rough seas and overseas trade. It can sacrifice crew space for cargo space.

Byrðing: Also known as byrding, it is a merchant sailing ship for carrying goods along the coast.

Dreki: Also known as drake, it is a large warship decorated with dragon heads. It is meant for chieftains and kings and serves as much of a status as it does a naval vessel.

Karfi: Also known as karve, this is a small longship often used for supplies and equipment.

Knórr: Also known as knar, this sailing merchant ship is designed as a sea-going trade ship.

Longship: The average longship was one of the most effective warships.

Skeið: Also known as skeid, this long, narrow warship was better at rowing than sailing and could hold a large crew.

VIKINGS

Snekkja: Also known as snekke, it is a warship that serves to carry its crew, and little more

Stórskip: Sometimes referred to as a great ship, this large longship holds a very large crew and is very sturdy.

Súð: Also known as sud, it is an evolution of the bússa into a warship-only longship.

LONGSHIPS TABLE

Type	Acc/TS	Stab*	Toughness	Crew	Cargo*	Notes
Barði	4/12	3	12 (2)	80+80	0	Iron-studded ram
Bússa	6/18	2	12 (2)	120+120	12	Sea-going**
Byrðing	2/8	4	8 (2)	5+5	8	
Dreki	6/18	3	12 (2)	140+140	0	
Karfi	3/9	5	8 (2)	30+30	8	Flat bottom***
Knórr	4/12	2	10 (2)	5+5	12	Sea-going**
Longship	4/12	2	12 (2)	50+50	0	
Skeið	5/15	4	10 (2)	80+120	0	
Snekkja	4/12	3	12 (2)	80+80	0	
Stórskip	6/18	3	12 (2)	140+140	0	
Súð	6/18	2	12 (2)	80+120	0	

**These fields are compatible with the Pirates and Privateers book.*

***Sea-going ships cannot traverse shallow rivers.*

****Flat-bottomed ships must travel near the coastline.*



NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS

NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS

KVELDÚLFR KNÚTSSON

Kveldúlfr is a jarl in a small region of Denmark. He inherited a large amount of farmland from his father, Jarl Knút, and rules it with an iron fist. Although he is demanding of his neighboring freemen, he is also very protective of them. He fully understands the duties of being a jarl, along with the responsibilities of keeping his people safe.

Kveldúlfr is not much different from other jarls. His family earned the title due to the amount of land they own and the fertility of that land. The land has been bountiful for over a century now, forcing the family to acquire many slaves to work it.

Jarl Knút was a well-respected jarl by all those in the region and raised Kveldúlfr to follow the same principles as he did. Unfortunately, he failed to return from his last Viking raid five years ago, allowing his son to take over. At the time, most criticized Kveldúlfr as being too young to be jarl, but his demeanor quickly dispelled those thoughts. When Jarl Knút failed to return from the Viking raid, word spread quickly and a few Danish warriors moved in to take the land over by force. Kveldúlfr allied with his neighboring freemen and defended both his land and his right to serve a jarl. His ruthlessness during combat caught many of his allies off guard, but his willingness to defend those same allies earned him immediate respect.

Mannerisms: Kveldúlfr is tough, but fair. He demands his fellow Danes to act like all Danes do, taking care of themselves, their families, and their homes, but he also finds it necessary to maintain his alliances.

Distinctive Features: Kveldúlfr is tall with long hair brown hair. He walks around exuding an air of authority with his head always held high and his eyes demanding attention.



KVELDÚLFR KNÚTSSON

Attributes: Agility d10, Smarts d6, Spirit d10, Strength d8, Vigor d8

Charisma: +2; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 9; **Toughness:** 8 (2)

Skills: Boating d8, Fighting d10, Intimidation d10, Notice d8, Persuasion d8, Streetwise d8, Survival d10

Edges: Brave, Noble, Seafarer, Viking

Hindrances: Arrogant, Stubborn, Vengeful (Minor)

Armor: Chain shirt (torso +2), conical helmet (+3, 50% vs. head shot), round shield (+1 Parry, +2 Armor vs. ranged attacks)

Weapons: Long sword (Str+d8), longsax (Str+d6), skeggøx (Str+d6, Parry +1)

TRYGGVI HÁLFÐANARSON

Tryggvi is a violent Norwegian warrior, known for the number of kills he has amassed during his countless number of Viking raids. Fairly old for a Viking warrior, he has participated in nearly 20 raids and reaped the benefit of almost every one of them. He occasionally comes away with much less loot than he prefers, but typically he's able to smash and grab large amounts of wealth and weapons to satiate his desires.

Tryggvi is not very well liked amongst his fellow Norwegians. There are rumors that Tryggvi once traveled around the seas as something of a Norse pirate during his youth, robbing unsuspecting merchants and foreign traders. Although he was never caught, he resembles the "thieving child" from years ago that many across Norway have spoken about. Although these events happened many years ago, the rumors are starting to catch up with Tryggvi as at least one merchant has vowed to hunt down the thief and reclaim his riches.

The rumors are completely true; Tryggvi was a thief during his youth after being abandoned by his family. Tryggvi had violated his father's wishes one too many times and he was exiled from the region. Tryggvi didn't care though; he already had a group of friends to take him in and the lot of them turned to piracy for a few years.

Tryggvi has spent much of his adult life fleeing the suspicious eyes that turn his way whenever he nears the merchant towns. Although he is a prosperous Viking with many great weapons to trade, he instead sells them to foreign merchants to feed his need for exotic goods. As such he is something of a loner, but his fellow Norsemen always rely on him to join a Viking raid.

Mannerisms: Tryggvi is violent and reclusive. He enjoys going on Viking raids, and is an incredibly effective warrior, but he spends little time speaking to his fellow Norwegians. He's also a bit of a hoarder, keeping much of his loot in the hopes of trading it for exotic goods.

Distinctive Features: Tryggvi has a very distinctive scar on his right cheek that goes from just below his ear to just above his chin. This scar, which he received from before turning into the "thieving child", is what singles him out when the merchants come around.



TRYGGVI HÁLFÐANARSON

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d6, Spirit d8, Strength d8, Vigor d6

Charisma: -2; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 7 (2)

Skills: Boating d10, Fighting d8, Notice d6, Streetwise d8, Throwing d8

Edges: Berserk, Luck, Viking, Wrestler

Hindrances: Enemy [Merchant] (Minor), Mean, Overconfident

Armor: Lamellar armor (torso +2), conical helmet (head +3, 50% vs. head shot), round shield (+1 Parry, +2 Armor vs. ranged attacks)

Weapons: Högga (3/6/12, Str+d6), spjót (3/6/12, Str+d6), sax (Str+d4)

NON PLAYER CHARACTERS

SVEINN SNORRASON

Sveinn Snorrason is a popular merchant who spends most of his time in Birka. Most of his wares are purchased from his fellow Norsemen after returning from a Viking raid, but he also travels to Kiev once a year. While in Kiev, he typically deals in weapons and armor, but he's also been known to bring back various spices and objects that originated elsewhere and were traded in Kiev.

Sveinn is known as a fair merchant who always offers a good price and sells only the highest quality goods. Possibly his best skill is his ability to spot the best items and purchase them before any other merchant does. Much of this he learned from his time weaponsmithing while traveling abroad (something that started as a hobby).

Sveinn's most lucrative business is taking looted weapons and turning them into "weapons made for true heroes". He does this by removing the metal, refinishing it, and placing it into a pommel that he creates. He then sells the weapons either to the greatest warriors or as honorific pieces to jarls and kings. With the money he earns this way; he can only do a few every year, he's able to travel to Kiev and bring back items from Byzantium and beyond.

Sveinn's also been known to trade in secrets. Although he's no skald and not much of a storyteller, he does hear many rumors during his time in Birka and during his travels to and from Kiev. Although the most menial rumors are spoken about while enjoying a meal, the greatest information is held back and offered in exchange for favors. By doing this, Sveinn is able to barter for the rights to be the first merchant to pick from the loot brought back from the latest Viking raid.

Mannerisms: Sveinn is something of a swindler. His ability to hold an audience's interest is only matched by his ability to listen to nearly infinite details. He can then use this as leverage against a buyer or seller to fetch the best price. In the end, he still has the best stuff, but be careful about what is said around him.

Distinctive Features: Sveinn is a very plain-faced man. He is shorter than most of his Norse brethren, but his charisma makes his presence seem important. Although the rumors that follow him make him out to be a great jarl, he is but a fast-talking merchant who will sell just about anything.



SVEINN SNORRASON

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d10, Spirit d8, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Charisma: +4; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 4; **Toughness:** 6 (1)

Skills: Boating d10, Fighting d4, Notice d10, Persuasion d10, Streetwise d10

Edges: Attractive, Charismatic, Connections (Kiev), Linguist, Trader

Hindrances: Greedy (Major), Pacifist (Minor), Quirk [Fast-Talker]

Armor: Padded jerkin (torso +1)

Weapons: [2] Longsax (Str+d6)

VIKING ADVENTURES

Here is a collection of Viking-themed adventure frameworks. Each one provides a background for the adventure, along with additional notes for the GM running it. Each framework is kept generic so that location and timeframe can be defined by the GM to fit within her adventures or campaign.

HONOR BOUND

BACKGROUND

In a culture dominated by violence, honor is extremely important. The Norse people view honor as a virtue and those who violate that virtue are dealt with accordingly. The consequences of violating this unwritten rule range from punishment, to exile, to death, depending on the severity of the violation and the consequences for the occurrence.

Sigurd Agnarsson is a Dane who often lets his greed overtake his better judgment. While Jarl Egill was away on his latest Viking raid, Sigurd failed to hold back his greed and broke into one of Jarl Egill's storage sheds. Inside, a large amount of loot from previous raids was being stored before the jarl had a chance to sell or trade it. Although he brings his most prized weapons on his Viking raids, there are numerous treasures, which could make a man quite wealthy, kept in the storage shed.

Upon returning from the raid, battered and bruised but still standing, Jarl Egill went to his storage shed to collect his treasures and bring them to the market. Winter was drawing near and the jarl was preparing to stock-up. Upon opening the door to the shed, he found his greatest treasures were missing.

Jarl Egill flew into a rage and stormed away from his farm, looking for the thief that stole his goods. Unable to find anyone or anything that pointed to who the thief was, he decided to bring up the issue at the next *thing*. The issue was brought up that Jarl Egill's storage shed fell victim to a thief who now owes the Jarl the equivalent of the treasure in silver. He demands nothing less than full payment, although he doesn't truly care if the items are returned.

At the *thing*, it was decided that should the thief be caught, he would be exiled from Denmark. Recovery of the stolen items is in the hands of Jarl Egill. The jarl quickly offers a bounty to anyone who recovers the stolen items or recovers the silver received from the thief after selling the items.

GAMEMASTER NOTES

There are several ways to approach this adventure. First, the PCs could be part of the team hunting down the thief in the hopes of returning the stolen items. Second, the characters could be part of a team that stole the items and are

VIKING ADVENTURES

fighting to get out of Denmark. Third, one of the PCs is Jarl Egill or Sigurd Agnarsson. Or even fourth, the party doesn't care about any of this and is instead looking to hunt down the thief in the hopes of stealing the goods and selling them themselves.

Jarl Egill is eager to get the wealth he is due from these stolen goods, but he doesn't care if the actual goods are returned. He can either sell the goods or take the money from someone else who stole them. He prefers the thief to be killed in the process, but the *thing* has ruled the punishment of this crime is not death. In fact, if the jarl goes so far as killing the thief after the ruling has been made, he too could be punished by the thief's family: sort of an honor conundrum. Either way, he wants the thief to disappear, but is much too busy to hunt the thief down himself. He is, after all, a jarl and there are still many more Viking raids to participate in.

A fifth possibility exists for incorporating this adventure framework. The heroes could be part of the Viking raids in which Jarl Egill participates. On the way to the next raid, they can spend time hunting down the thief, possibly encountering him somewhere along the way. The thief could then give chase and the PCs must catch him. If he has already sold the stolen items, maybe they have to track down where he's keeping the silver or bartered goods. Or perhaps he's part of a group of thieves and the PCs will have to deal with Sigurd and his brethren. If things get bad enough, a Norse vs. Norse battle may ensue.

A LOSING BATTLE

BACKGROUND

Historical records show that Viking raids occurred quite frequently on Frankish soil, only to be repeatedly defeated. During certain periods of the Carolingian Empire, the emperor's armies often repelled the various Viking raids, only for them to return a few months or years later. Emperor Charlemagne established strong defenses to ward off the Viking raids, resulting in many Scandinavian defeats. As the empire's defenses began to crumble and noble in-fighting occurred, Viking raids become more and more successful and were driven farther and farther inland.

A Losing Battle is set in the earliest years of the 9th century (800-820) when the Carolingian Empire had strong defenses due to the military intelligence of Emperor Charlemagne.

Around the turn of the 9th century, Viking raids were becoming more and more rewarding as they plundered the English and Scottish coastlines. Possibly as a show of arrogance and greed rather than strength in force, they set their sights on the Frankish coastline. However, the leaders of the Carolingian Empire were not easily defeated. They established coastal defenses, primarily defensive forts, to repel these Viking raids.

VIKINGS

The characters are part of a Viking raiding party heading to the Frankish coastline where they believe they will be a force to reckon with, plundering the coastal territories like they do in England and Scotland. Their destination: the rivers that travel inland from what is the modern-day province of Zeeland in the Netherlands.

Viking raids often traveled up the rivers to plunder locations inland. The design of their longships allowed them to travel the rivers swiftly and efficiently, bringing a large force of warriors to beach on the shores of their next target. Upon arriving, they meet a most unexpected site.

On the location of what becomes Middelburg, a large defensive fort has been erected to combat the Viking raids. The fort guards the entrance of one of the rivers and serves as one of three defensive forts built to stop the Scandinavians from pillaging the coastal and inland towns. The site of Middelburg includes a monastery being targeted by the Viking raid, but the fort serves as a serious problem.

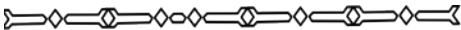
A large force of at least 400 Norse warriors beaches its longships with their sights set on the monastery and the mouth of the river. As they jump out and run toward the monastery, and any other structure surrounding it, they are quickly met by the garrison at the Middelburg fort. To make matters worse, everything valuable from the monastery has been brought into the safety of the fort: even if they reach the monastery, the Viking warriors find nothing of value.

GAMEMASTER NOTES

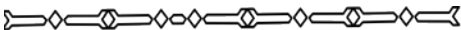
This adventure framework is meant to catch the party off-guard and admit defeat to the Frankish army; but it doesn't have to end quite so easily. Everyone will be fighting for the prize of taking the monastery clearing a path to the river, as more wealth likely waits inland, and Norse warriors aren't one to turn their backs on a fight – regardless of the odds.

It is possible to run this adventure as a Mass Battle, but that wasn't the traditional "style" of Viking raids in the early 9th century. At this point in the Viking Age, the raids were all about hit-and-run tactics; catch the target off-guard, hit them while they're "back into a corner," and get out with as much loot as you can. It's much more like piracy than it is military combat. If this is the route taken, the Frankish army should outnumber the Viking raiders at least 2-to-1 and be more effectively trained and equipped.

It would be more ideal to run this as a fight for survival. The PCs and their Norse allies think they have the upper-hand until the garrison attacks. While being repelled, they begin to



Charlemagne may have had success in repelling the Viking raids, but his bloodline did not. When the defensive system began to crumble, the sons of Charlemagne saw continued losses against the Norse attacks. If moving this adventure framework to a later date, the tides could certainly quickly turn in the Scandinavians' favor.



VIKING ADVENTURES

take serious losses and at some point must turn back to their ships and attempt to flee still alive. Heroic intervention should ensue, possibly as the PCs fight to save their Nordic brethren.

TAKE TO THE SEAS

BACKGROUND

Scandinavia was not a unified territory. It was a collection of cultures with similar heritages that all spoke a common language and observed similar traditions. Even within each country there were cultural differences that often prevented the people from being fully unified. This could result in battles between different cultures as one vies for control of the other (sometimes in the attempt to create a unified nation). Many of these battles took place in the Baltic Sea, North Sea, or Jutland Sea (the straits between Sweden, Norway, and the Jutland Peninsula).

Scandinavian naval battles were nothing like those waged in the Mediterranean Sea. Scandinavians did not make use of naval weapons and instead lashed their longships together to make a large floating platform that could reach the opposition by foot. Battle would ensue with Norse warriors on both sides embarking on the opposing ships and battling in the same fashion as if they were on land.

It is likely that many naval battles were launched in the hopes of catching a target while it traveled back from some other event. It's less likely that both sides had sailed out to the sea in the hopes of battling each other on the water. It's also likely that the battles took place near the fjords or other coastlines rather than the open sea. Due to the method in which naval battles were resolved, the open sea would be considerably less than ideal, if not impossible for this style of attack.

Their naval tactics were rather simple: board an enemy ship, clear it with hand weapons, and move on to the next ship, cutting loose the cleared ship if it was part of a platform of ships.

The heroes are part of a force devoted to either the current king or an opposing force of jarls. They are traveling across the Baltic Sea to catch their target near the mouth of one of the rivers. Their longships are equipped with rope, arrows, javelins, and large rocks to win the naval battle.

Someone spots the target in the near distance and the warriors move to lash the ships together, creating a large floating platform. They are of course spotted by the target, but they don't care as they assume they are better equipped than the target. The PCs can see the target's ships are beginning to form-up and create a platform to combat the incoming force. They do not possess nearly as much rope and most ships are loose, but now floating together. They prepare for the incoming attack.

GAMEMASTER NOTES

Take to the Seas can be resolved using Mass Battle, remembering that everyone is standing on a longship and is subject to the unstable platform rule. The attacking longships form a large floating platform properly equipped to be lashed together. The defending longships are less prepared and cannot form a large floating platform, although they can attempt to lash their boats for boarding.

Casualties during a naval battle prove problematic. Those that fall into the water keep the way clear, but those that don't end up in a heap on the deck of the ship. The "terrain" starts as the decks of the longships, but then becomes bodies of the dead that need to be traversed in order to attack the next target ship. To make matters worse, the defending ships have a few longships that aren't engaged in the naval battle and can instead harass the attackers from a distance. Arrows, javelins, and rocks can be recovered from those that missed or extracted from the dead warriors, but that takes time and the missile could be damaged.

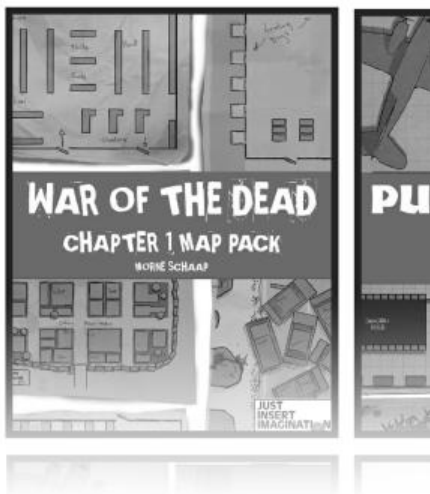
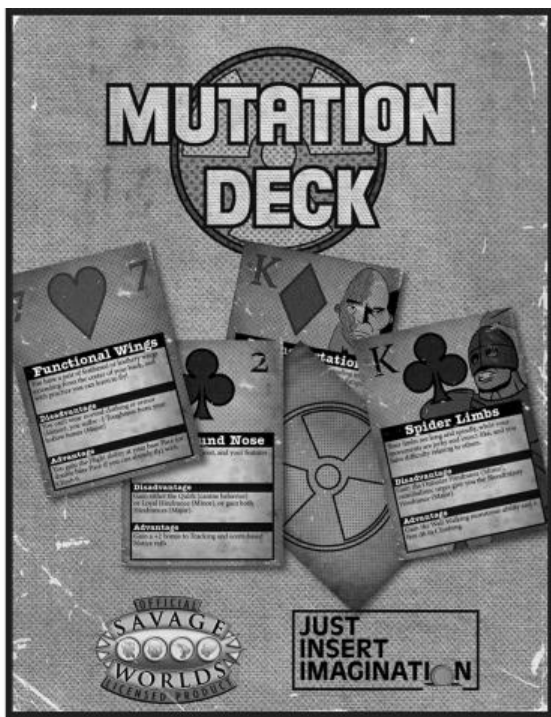
Naval battles such as this did not follow much strategy. The goal appeared to clear the enemy as best as possible, killing as many targets as you could. The victor was the one who lived. However, killing the target's leader may result in pacifying many of the remaining warriors: this shouldn't be considered surrender, just a means of making it home alive.





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There is a mass of land in the northern reaches of Europe that we've come to know as Scandinavia. Although the term is little more than a convenience for referring to multiple places and people, it is the land that comprises much of modern-day Denmark, Norway, and Sweden. It has played host to a Germanic culture for thousands of years, including the ethnic groups we refer to as Danes, Norwegians, and Swedes. Often called the Nordic countries, these lands also hosted one of the most ruthless inhabitants in history – the Vikings.

Ultimate Dark Ages Guide: Vikings is a sourcebook for **Savage Worlds** that delves into the history of the Norsemen we refer to simply as Vikings. From local chieftains to pirate raids to unifying kings, the lands of Scandinavia and the Norse people that lived there were surrounded by action and adventure.

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