

SAGAS
of the
ICELANDERS

A roleplaying game about the lives
of Icelandic settlers in the saga period

by Gregor Vuga



TEXT

Gregor Vuga

ILLUSTRATIONS

Eva Mlinar

LAYOUT & COVER DESIGN & COVER ILLUSTRATION

Veronika Klanjšček

TYPEFACES

Chantelli Antiqua & Crimson

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PLAYING THE SAGAS

“What vengeance or help will I get from you?” she said:

*“Hauskuld would have taken up a blood feud and avenged you
if you had been the one to die.” [...]*

*She took out the cloak in which Huskuld had been slain and threw
it over Flosi and blood trickled down on him.*

-The Saga of Burnt Njall



INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS THIS BOOK?

This book contains the rules and instructions for a tabletop roleplaying game about Viking settlers in Iceland. You will need one or more friends with you in order to play. I recommend four or five people altogether for the best experience. You will also need some paper, pencils and at least two regular dice (ideally, you should have a pair of dice for each player minus one). This chapter will explain how to play the game.

WHAT IS THE GAME ABOUT?

The game is about the trials, tribulations and adventures of the first settlers of Iceland, as described in the Icelandic Sagas. The so-called Saga Period lasted roughly from 875, when the first permanent Norse settlers arrived, until 1085, when the first local bishop established a church in the south of Iceland. In truth, the majority of the family sagas take place in the hundred years between 930 (the year of the first national assembly) and 1030. If you want to know more about Iceland and its inhabitants in that period, you can read the chapter titled *Iceland*.

WHAT ARE THE SAGAS?

Sagas were a form of early Nordic prose. The word translates simply as “story” or “history”. While other sagas concern themselves with kings or mythical events, Icelandic sagas are primarily family histories, recounting the lives of whole generations of settlers, often starting with the family’s ancestors in mainland Scandinavia. The chapter *The People* discusses the characters you will be playing in the game.

WHY DO WE PLAY?

Although the game is rooted in both history and the prose of the Sagas, it is not your job to recreate either of those. While I strove to make the information in this book as factual as possible, it is not your place to fret about “historical accuracy” or worry whether you’re following the actual narrative of the sagas. The game gives you a starting point defined by the sagas, but we play it to discover and be surprised, not to retell.

We also play the game, because the characters are cool, mysterious, fallible, badass, despicable, and inspiring human beings. We want to follow their lives, see what they do and what happens to them, just like the characters we love to see in the best kind of fiction.

The chapter *Going Forward* talks about long-term expanding of the game.

ON PRONUNCIATION

For authenticity purposes you will find the Icelandic characters Eth (Ð,ð) and Thorn (Þ,þ) at some points in this text. They are Icelandic dental fricatives (voiced and voiceless, respectively). You can pronounce Eth like the English “th” in the word father and Thorn like “th” in the English word thick. No fuss about it.

THE BASICS OF THE GAME

Imagine sitting down around a table with a couple of friends. We're going to play Sagas of the Icelanders, a game about the lives of the early settlers in Iceland. You're going to play a character – take on his or her role. You don't have to stand up and act like in the theatre. You can speak in "their" voice if you like, but it's not necessary either. You just have to imagine them in their situation, consider what they would do in situations they find themselves in and tell us what they say and do. You shouldn't think too much about it, just go with the flow and trust your character and the other players.

You need at least two players to play this game, but a group of four or five is the sweet spot for most people. I wouldn't recommend more than seven people at once. One of us will take on the job of the Master of Ceremonies – MC for short. The MC describes the world and the situation to the other players. Instead of portraying a single character, they have specific responsibilities to take on in the game.

Each other player will take on the role of one or more characters in the Saga that we will be creating together. Each player should have a pair of dice. You should also have some paper and pencils and printed rolebooks and play sheets. In this chapter you will see how the game is played and what your respective responsibilities are, while the next chapter (*The People*) describes the individual roles that players can take on.

THE CONVERSATION

The game is played as a conversation. We talk back and forth, describing, adding and asking questions. We take turns in this conversation. It's not like turns in a board game, but like the way you pause and listen to others in a conversation, without talking all over the other person. Taking turns is a reminder that everyone should be able to contribute. We're always talking one over another, shouting, laughing, and sharing. Even though the MC is generally the person in charge of controlling the spotlight (saying whose "turn" it is), all the players are responsible for each other. Remember to let everyone be heard.

THE FICTION

The action of the game happens in our shared imagination. When we play, we describe fictional characters in fictional situations, the things that happen in our imagination, to each other. We share the contents of our private imagination with others through the conversation. We call the contents of this conversation the fiction. The players describe their characters, their actions, thoughts and emotions, while the MC describes the world and the other people in it. Players should usually speak in first person when they speak for their characters, although some people might feel more comfortable with describing things from an external perspective and that's ok too.

THE LINE

It is the MC's place to say things about the world, the weather, the crops, the animals, all the things and all the people in the world except the player characters. Only the players can say what their characters think, say, feel or do (or have done in the past). You can suggest things to the other players, offer possibilities and collaborate with them, but ultimately that's where the line of authority rests. The players own their characters, the MC owns the rest.

THE MOVES

At certain points in the conversation, things you say about the fiction will engage the rules. When a player character does or undergoes something that engages the rules, we call this a move.

Moves will tell you what to do when that happens. Each move has a trigger in the fiction of the game. If that trigger is activated during your conversation, the move happens. The opposite is also true: a move cannot happen without its trigger occurring in the narrative.

All characters have access to Common moves and can also get special moves of their own, based on their role. You don't need a move in order to say what your character does, though. Anyone can throw down the rune-carved bones and try to find meaning in them, but only someone with the Völva move can trigger the move and read the "actual" future in them as defined by the move and the game's rules.

THE STRUCTURE OF MOVES

Each move has a trigger that tells you when it comes into play. These are typically phrased as ‘when...’, ‘anytime...’, ‘at the end of session...’, ‘whenever...’, followed by the fictional event and action that triggers that move. After the trigger, the move will describe its procedure and possible results. In some cases, a move will simply tell you what happens, no roll required and no choices to make: when x occurs, y follows. Most moves, however, will ask you to roll some dice or give you some choices to pick from a list, or some points to manage.

ROLLING THE DICE

Many moves will tell you to ‘roll plus something’. Whenever a move tells you to roll, take two six-sided dice, roll them, and sum the result together with the value of the “something”. In most cases this will be a stat. For example, if a move tells you to roll ‘plus young’, roll two dice and add your character’s Young value, then sum them all up.

When you roll a total result of six or less it is considered a “miss”, which entails bad consequences for your character (and possibly others too). A result of 7 to 9 is a “weak hit”, meaning you get what you want with added complications or at least part of what you want. A result of 10 or more is a “hit” meaning you get what you want, no problem.

HOLD AND MAKING CHOICES

Sometimes a move will ask you to pick from several choices to determine your result. If a move gives you Hold, this means you don’t have to choose between your options right there and then, but can spend your

hold to make choices over time, as long as it's applicable to the situation at hand. Unless specified otherwise, an unspent hold never carries over to the next session.

TAKING FORWARD AND TAKING ONGOING

If a move tells you to take +1 forward, it means you add +1 to your next roll and then you lose that bonus. If it tells you to take +1 ongoing, you retain that bonus indefinitely or until some condition ends.

DOING THINGS WITHOUT A MOVE

You don't need a move to do something. If your character doesn't have a move for jumping from one ship to another, or hitting someone in the face, they can still jump and hit someone in the face. You simply need to say they are doing so, and not worry whether the mechanics allow you to do something. In tabletop board games, your actions are restricted by the board and other rules. In this game, characters can do anything that they're capable of, according to common sense and the understanding and agreement of everyone at the table.

The mechanics will trigger only when the things you say count as a move, and the normal course of play is simply describing what your character is doing. Moves exist to add to the conversation, and put twists on it. They're not there to stop your character from doing things.

THE MC AND MOVES

The MC never rolls any dice and his characters don't have moves. Instead, the MC has his own set of rules that affect what he adds to the conversation. These will be discussed in the MC section of this chapter.

THE PLAYERS

EXPECTATIONS

Each player in the game will take on the role of a character in the saga-period Iceland. As the game goes on, you might have more than one character under your control, but you start with one.

All your characters start out by living on the same farmstead or in its immediate vicinity. Your characters can become rivals or even mortal enemies as the game goes on, but they should start out as allies at the very least. The only exceptions to this are the Wanderer, who is an unknown outsider, recently arrived, and the Monster, who is an outcast and a mystery.

Play your characters in a way that they seem like real people with internal consistency, with things they care about, with all their human ugliness and beauty.

WHAT IS THE WORLD OF THE SAGAS LIKE?

Although they are not purely fictitious, some people might find it difficult to imagine what the stories of the sagas are like, especially if they haven't heard them before. It's easier to relate to stories of vampires, robots or elves, written with us in mind, than to stories of real people written for a distant audience. Even though a lot of the media we consume today has been inspired by these texts, they were written for a different culture centuries ago (and the past is a foreign country). Here are a few pitches that can get you in the right mindset:

It's like a western, because there is a vast frontier, ready to be settled, an internal pressure among the free settlers to establish a society with rules and laws, and an external pressure from the East to accept leadership and become "civilised". It's very much not like a western, because there are no natives and no gold rush (or other riches that would draw people here, other than free land).

It's like post-apocalyptic fiction, because there are small communities of people trying to survive in a harsh environment, building a new society without the structures of their old world, but fiercely holding on to their ancestral traditions. It's very much not like post-apocalyptic fiction, because there was no catastrophe and the rest of the world is still there and extending its influence onto many aspects of people's lives.

It's like fantasy fiction, because there are brave female warriors, prophecies, lost heirs and bloody romances. Tolkien borrowed heavily from the various sagas. It's very much not like fantasy, because it concerns itself with real people in the real world and there is no explicit supernatural (or fantastical) element.

Of course the sagas are not any of those things. They are not a fantasy story or a western or a post-apocalyptic story. But they are similar to those stories, if you find that helpful.

What do I need to know about Iceland in 900 A.D.?

- the country was empty and unpopulated before the settlers arrived
- there are no great natural resources here, except free land
- the settlers are mainly refugees and political dissidents, fleeing the unification of Norway under one king
- there are no towns or villages, only scattered farms
- there is no ruling class or standing army, just a caste of priest-judges

HOW TO CREATE YOUR CHARACTER

Each player will begin playing with one character (a Player Character or PC for short).

Here's how you create your own.

Character creation checklist:

- choose gender
- choose role (and appropriate rolebook)
- determine the name and appearance
- choose stats, relationships and possessions
- choose rolebook moves

The first thing you do when creating a character should be choosing their gender. Based on their gender you can pick from several roles for your character, determining their position in society. Your role will give you suggestions for their appearance and name, as well as a choice of stats, relationships, possessions and moves.

Moves were described in the introduction. Stats determine where your character's fortes lie, while relationships tie you to other characters. Appearance, name and possessions are exactly what they sound like: your character's appearance, the name they are known by and the things they own.

YOUR CHARACTERS' STATS

The characters are described as being **Young**, **Versed**, **Gendered** and **Wyrd**. The higher the number in a stat, the more it's true of your character.

Young means full of life: fierce, hotheaded, strong, quick and healthy.

Versed means skilled: someone hardened and honed by life experience.

Gendered means in-line: how well you fit in the role society expects of your gender.

Wyrd means fated: someone lucky, odd, out of the norm or set apart.

You add your stat to a roll when a move tells you so. The higher your stat, the better things will go for you when you do things associated with it. Stats are measured on a range from -1 (lowest possible) to +3 (highest possible).

RELATIONSHIPS

Each player must establish a few Relationships for their character at the start of the game, as determined by their rolebook. Each Relationship determines your connection to one other character and will be the focus of your play for the next couple of sessions. Players can assign them either to characters belonging to other players or characters belonging to the MC. In general, Relationships belong into three categories: familial relationships (blood-relations, foster-relations, sworn-brotherhoods...), attitudes (love, hate, concern...) and social (geographical proximity, debts, business transactions...).

An important thing to remember is that at the beginning of every session, you receive one Bond with each character in your Relationships.

BONDS

Bonds give your relationships and social connections mechanical weight. There are different ways to gain bonds during the game. For now, just remember that for each relationship you have with a character, you gain a bond with them at the beginning of a session.

The more bonds you have with someone, the more leverage you have over them, the more they're an open book to you and the more a precarious balance of trust between you. You can gain Bonds as a result of a move and you can spend bonds to fuel certain moves. These are explained in detail in the next chapter.

Gudrun spoke, "Kjartan may well do things as boldly as it pleases him, for it is proven that for whatever insult he may pay others, there is none who dares even to shoot a shaft at him."

-The Saga of the people of Laxardal

THE PLAYERS' MOVES

THE COMMON MOVES

All player characters have and interact with these moves.

When you tempt fate, roll +wyrð. On a 10+ you pull it off. On 7-9 you pull it off, but the Fates gain a bond with you and the MC can spend it on their behalf at any time. On a miss, misfortune strikes.

Tempting fate means to do anything exceptionally dangerous, risky, taboo or out of your league.

When you endure grave harm, roll +young. On 10+ pick two, on 7-9 pick one:

- it will get better on its own (otherwise you will need assistance)
- it doesn't leave a permanent mark (otherwise take a scar)
- it gives you purpose (gain two bonds with whomever you consider responsible)

On a miss it's fatal, beyond help and the MC will say how and when.

Grave harm is anything potentially fatal to a human being like weapon injuries, traumatic wounds, serious burns, prolonged starvation, deadly disease, extreme cold or similar.

When you take a scar, pick one of the following:

Crippled: -1 young

Addled: -1 versed

Changed: -1 gendered

Doomed: -1 wyrð

You can pick each mark multiple times, until your stat reaches the minimum of -1.

When you give someone a gift, gain 1 bond with them.

Let the recipient judge what constitutes as a gift. Generally it should be something valuable and it should not be exchanged for something else – a trade is a trade, not a gift (although you can give and accept gifts in return). Worthless, cheap or mocking gifts can be considered insults instead.

When you look into someone's heart, spend bonds you have with them and ask their player one question per bond spent:

- is your character speaking the truth?
- what does your character wish I would do?
- what does your character intend to do?
- how does your character feel about this?
- how could I get your character to...?

To look into someone's heart, you need to be able to discern any signs, expressions, words or gestures that could give that information away.

When you assist or hinder someone's actions, you can spend your bonds with them, 1-for-1 to give them either a -1 or +1 forward.

The assisting or hindering player should say how they're helping or interfering with the other person's actions.

At the beginning of a session, you can change up to two relationships and then gain a bond with each person you have a relationship with.

When you change a relationship you can either write down a new name instead of the old one (for example write “I don’t trust Olaf.” instead of “I don’t trust Greta.” or you can change the nature of a relationship (for example “Olaf is my trusted ally.” instead of “I don’t trust Olaf.”). These changes can be based on the Relationships already present in your rolebook or you can create your own.

When one of your moves targets a character that you have a relationship with, mark that relationship. When you mark four different relationships, erase your marks and pick an advancement from your rolebook.

When your character survives a winter in Iceland, you can add one of the following options to their Advancement list:

- gain an additional relationship
- change your character’s role
- create a new character to play
- retire this character from play

When you gain an additional Relationship, simply pick one from your rolebook or create a new one. It can be with a new character or one you already have a Relationship with. If you have two Relationships with the same person, you gain two bonds with them at the beginning of a session.

When you change your character's role, pick a new playbook of the same gender. Your character keeps their appearance, name, possessions and moves and gains the starting moves of the new playbook, as well as assuming the new position in society. The transition can happen “off screen” in between sessions or gradually through play, either way, describe how it comes about.

When you create a new character to play, simply pick a new, possibly unused rolebook, and create a new character, just like you would during the first session.

When you retire a character from play, they either leave Iceland for good or die of old age.

GENDER MOVES

While more equal and liberal than most of the rest of Europe at the time, the Norse society had strong expectations of how men and women were supposed to behave and what roles they could take on in society. This game was written with that knowledge in mind, both to reflect the source material (to see how their community's expectations shape the characters' behaviour) and give the players a way to play with gender stereotypes, whether they are similar or different from those we have to deal with today, or not.

FEMALE MOVES

In addition to the Common moves, all female characters have these moves.

When you entice a man, roll +young.

On 10+ hold 3 over them, on 7-9 hold one.

You can spend your hold 1-for-1 at any time to give them -1 forward on any of their rolls. They can spend your hold by:

- truthfully answering your questions
- giving you worthy gifts
- acting in your name and favour

Women were considered crafty and alluring creatures, in addition, romance and falling in love is a strong theme in some of the sagas. This move was purposefully given to female characters so that male characters can be made to act less-than-reasonably.

When you lie with a man to conceive a child, you gain a bond with him and roll +gendered.

On a hit, you're pregnant. On 7-9 also chose one:

- it is the last child you will bear
- you will endure grave harm during pregnancy
- the child will be born strange, sickly or marked

Family lines, inheritance and these children are a key theme in the sagas. This move keys off gendered to stress that bearing children is a socially imposed role, and not any essential female function.

When you raise your voice and talk sense, roll +versed.

On 10+ hold 3, on 7-9 hold 1.

Spend your hold 1-for-1 to give advice on a favourable course of action or warnings against a course of action to those present. They gain +1 forward for following each of your pieces of advice, or -1 forward for doing any of the things you warned against.

Women are often a source of wisdom in the sagas. This move allows you to stand up and speak reasonably while the men are squabbling.

When you goad a man to action, roll +gendered.

On 10+ he's got no other choice, on 7-9 he'll do it as long as you promise something in return. For PCs it's always his choice but on 7-9 you can offer him one, on 10+ both:

- he gains a bond with you if he does it
- his honour is in question if he refuses

Goadng was a woman's main weapon in those times. Perceived as a passive gender, they could apply pressure to the men's rigid sense of honour and act through them.

MALE MOVES

In addition to Common moves, all male characters have access to these moves.

When you consider an uneasy situation, roll +versed.

On a 10+ ask two, on 7-9 ask one:

- what is the most I can make out of this situation?
- what snares have been set for me?
- what is a honourable way out?
- what is the safest position I can take?

When you act on one of the MC's answers, take +1 forward.

While courage and boldness were highly praised and glorified, they also lead to an early death. For the most part, people lived far more pragmatic lives and knew full well the value of cunning and caution, which were in constant conflict with what was considered honourable.

When you accept a physical challenge, roll +young.

On 10+, you're faster or stronger than them when it matters and win the challenge. On 7-9 chose two:

- you don't tempt fate while doing it
- your actions are honourable and admirable
- you win the challenge

A man's physical prowess was of great importance, whether at sea, in battle or in the fields. But along with it came the burden of proving oneself and measuring up to the expectations of others.

When you throw an insult at another man, say what they lack and roll +gendered.

On 10+ they choose one:

- they bear the insult, confirming its truth in everyone's eyes
- they act to prove otherwise

On 7-9 they can instead choose one of these:

- they attack you there and then
- they challenge you to a duel later
- they demand apology (refusing them is a further insult)

On a miss, you come across as a fool or they turn the insult back on you, their choice.

If you're insulting a PC it's always his choice how he reacts, but not responding to insults means his honour is in question. Non-lethal attacks, particularly ones that soil the victim, count as insults.

Male characters only have this method of effectively influencing the behavior of others, leaving them unable to talk honestly or express their real feelings among each other, an enduring male stereotype.

When your honour is in question, roll +gendered.

On 10+ you rebuke them without trouble, on 7-9 your word is not enough but they will offer you a way to prove it. On a miss, you're dishonoured and treated as such.

The Norse concept of honour was the main measuring stick and regulating principle of male behaviour. Losing honour was in some ways worse than death, because it meant people weren't willing to deal with you as a reliable person anymore.

And because the men were brave, and Fate had ordained them
longer lives, they got across the river and climbed on the ice
on the other side.

-The Saga of the people of Laxardal

THE MASTER OF CEREMONIES

This chapter deals with what it means to be a MC. You should read it if you plan on being the Master of Ceremonies for Sagas. If you're a player you can skip it if you want. So, what does an MC do?

THE FRAMEWORK

To put it simply, your most basic job as the MC is to describe the situation, the concrete circumstances that the player's characters find themselves in. Sounds simple enough, right? But if you want to create a captivating saga together with your players, you don't want to just describe anything. This chapter will provide you with a framework so you won't feel at loss for what to say when it's your turn to speak.

This framework consists of:

- your Agenda
- your Principles
- your and the players' moves
- your preparation (Fronts and Threats)

Your Agenda is the big-picture goal or overall direction that you're aiming for. Your Principles are your guidelines on the way there, they will tell you what you should be saying in general. Your moves will tell you what to say specifically; they are the actual, concrete motions that you make to get to your goal as outlined by your Agenda. To distinguish them from player moves we'll call them Ceremonial moves. Your Fronts and Threats are a collection of additional Ceremonial moves that you prepare between sessions that inspires your sense of what's going on in the world.

In other words: when you speak, you aim for the Agenda by following your Principles and each thing you say is a move. Or to put it the other way around: everything you say should be a move, following your Principles and furthering your Agenda.

These things are all creative goals, creative constraints and inspiration keys to help you do your fundamental job (which is describing the character's circumstances).

Since turns aren't actual turns, how do you know when to speak in the game? Above all, remember, it's a conversation, so treat it like one. But as a rule of thumb, you make Ceremonial moves:

- when the players look to you to say something
- when a player rolls six or less on the dice

Your Agenda should inform the overall direction that you're aiming for, giving you orientation. Your Principles will tell you what you should be saying in general. Your moves tell you what you should be saying specifically. Player moves will sometimes ask you to answer questions for the players or make a choice for your NPCs. And finally the prep work that you do in between sessions, encapsulated in the Fronts and Threats, will inform you what's going on in the world and what you should keep in mind.

THE AGENDA

As the MC, always strive to:

- paint a believable picture of saga-period Iceland
- make the players' characters' circumstances worthy of a saga
- play to find out what happens

Note that I use the word ‘believable’ and not ‘realistic’ or ‘accurate’. Our shared goal is to create gripping fiction in the historical context, not recreate it. This leaves you some room to play with. The game does not assume supernatural elements, but if your group considers trolls or ghosts believable, bring them on! They may be just people and natural phenomena painted by superstition, but they are in every sense real to the people of Iceland. Remember to keep it believable and consistent. Make it seem real, but don’t be too locked down by history.

When I say the characters’ circumstances, I do mean their circumstances and not their actions. As the MC you’re in charge of the world and everything in it, except the PCs, which are solely the domain of the players. It is the players’ job to make their characters’ actions, words and lives worthy of a saga, yours is to make their circumstances interesting and ripe with conflict. You do this by following your principles and moves.

Playing to find out what happens means that you should never plan a story or set events in stone. Leave yourself to wonder about things, put questions forward. Your characters can make plans for themselves but what happens is up in air. Don’t try to anticipate the players’ judgement or guide it. Don’t plan ahead. Don’t commit to scenes, lessons, morals or outcomes. Don’t have expectations about how things will turn out and definitely don’t decide how things will turn out. Play your world and your characters and let yourself be surprised just as much as everyone else at the table. You have a destination, but its discovery is not something you decide in advance.

PRINCIPLES

Whenever you take part in the conversation, follow these principles.

- put your heart and brain on the table
- let everything flow from the fiction
- address the characters, not the players
- be a fan of the players' characters
- aim at the characters and their moves
- think about the larger world
- give everyone a history
- throw it under the grinding stone of time
- make the world cold
- give them the sun, make them fight for the moon
- sometimes, pass the reins

Put your heart and brain on the table: You should be an open book. Be clear and honest. Don't hide or misrepresent things to the other players. Follow your honest judgement when adjudicating the fiction and speak plainly about it. If you think something is possible or not possible, give your honest opinion on it. Be clear about your motivations and feelings about the game and where it's going.

Let everything flow from the fiction: Always let situations and consequences grow and follow naturally from what's already there and established in our shared imaginations. Don't make things happen without in-game justification. When you make a move, don't say that you're using a move or which one, only de-

scribe its effects in the fiction. Don't say: "I'm suggesting future calamity." Say: "As you look over the bay, you see a band of men descending from the ship."

The fictional situation, its consistency and coherence, comes first. If it's not clear, clarify it with questions and answers. Once the situation is clear, whatever comes next should follow from there.

Address the characters, not the players: Say "Eirik, what do you do?" not "Jane, what does Eirik do?". When you turn to a player, and you're talking about the fiction, talk directly to their character. Don't say "John, Runa notices a white sail on the horizon." say "Runa, you notice a white sail on the horizon."

Be a fan of the player's characters: Simply remember you're not playing against them, but with them. You're not trying to beat the players; you're not trying to screw their characters over. You want to see what their characters will do and cheer them on while they're doing it.

Sure, you want to make their lives interesting and difficult and full of strife, but only to root for them. Just like when you're reading a book or watching a show and you say to yourself: "Oh, man, I wonder what's up with that guy!". You'll laugh with them, curse them, shake your head and hope for them. They're the protagonists, but they need antagonists and obstacles to show that. Be a fan of their saga.

Aim at the characters and their moves: The PC's moves are all about the culture they were raised in, the world they inhabit, the relationships and dealings and conflicts with other people in this context. The moves the players pick are things they are interested in and excited about. Not everything revolves around the characters but everything that happens in the world affects them somehow, directly or indirectly – otherwise why would we care? Don't lose sight of their moves and keep the game aimed at them. The majority

of play will be just talking, but don't forget to seek out situations where moves will trigger and project the situation into unpredictable consequences.

Think about the larger world: There are things that are happening beyond what's going on right here and now. How does something that happened here impact something far away? How will something that happened far away impact what's going on here? There's a world beyond the characters and many things are happening in it all the time, don't forget about those. Has anything been going on that should become evident now? Thinking about the larger world may include affecting the fiction and making moves "off-screen", because the world keeps moving on even when the players aren't there.

Give everyone a history: Everyone comes from somewhere. They have a past, they have their roots and scars. They have parents and relatives, titles and names to go along with that. That girl isn't just any girl. She's Sigríður Aldisdóttir, the daughter of Aldis the bloody. And they don't call her Bloody for nothing - she did things to deserve that name. Give your characters roots, but don't plot it all out, plant a seed with a name or nickname and let it grow from there. Just remember your characters aren't the stars of the show. Speaking of which...

Throw it under the grinding stone of time: Take something that you own. Now let it die, crumble, fall apart. Nothing lasts. All things pass. Take something you own and throw it under the grinding stone of time. People, buildings, things. They get ground up and forgotten, gone. Bury them. Scatter their remains to the wind. It's not about them. Let them go. When you see one of your characters can die, let them die. When some status quo is established, ruin it. When a tradition is crumbling, push it. Don't get attached to your stuff, and keep time and the world turning.

Make it cold: Wrap your descriptions and moves in the harsh, bitter cloak of winter. Make people's hearts cold. Make their words cold. Extinguish fires, freeze the ground, the crops, the livestock. Freeze the water. Cover the fields in snow. Blast with biting winds and rime with frost. Fire, heat and warmth, both real and metaphorical are rare and precious commodities. The characters are special because they provide human warmth, heat up situations, burn with inner passion and strike sparks wherever they go. That's their job. Your job is to paint a hard and cold world where provisions are rare and warmth is rarer.

Give them the sun, make them fight for the moon: To give them the sun means that every so often, you give them exactly what they wanted and more. Present them with unexpected riches or fortune, grant them their desires. Most of the time, however, make it hard for them. Make them fight for every little thing, complicate things, throw spanners in the works, present obstacles and twists. Don't deny them, just make it difficult. To quote Vincent in Apocalypse World: "fuck with, not fuck over". Saying "no" is boring and stops the action. Instead, say "yes, but...", whenever you can.

Sometimes, pass the reins: Don't make a decision, don't make a judgement. Instead, there are a number of things you can do. You can pass the question to another player. You can let the NPCs speak for themselves. You can make it a question; write it down to be resolved at some other conjunction. Or instead of making it happen, you can make it possible for people to meddle with it. Put a countdown on it, so it doesn't happen immediately.

CEREMONIAL MOVES

Unlike player moves, Ceremonial moves are simply things that you say during the game. As the MC, you make a move under two conditions:

- the players look to you to say something
- a player rolls a 6 or less on one of their moves

You always make soft moves first, setting up situations ripe for serious consequences, teetering on the brink. When a player fails to respond to that setup or fails a roll, make a hard move, with sudden and irreversible consequences. A soft move is something that a player can respond to. A hard move is something decided and done.

After every move, always ask the players “What do you do?”. In the case of a soft move, this means they can react to the situation, in the case of a hard move they get to respond to the new, changed situation instead.

You have a set of moves that you should be able to use pretty much all the time. You also have special Threat moves that depend on what characters you own and the themes present in your game. We will talk about those a bit later. For now, let’s look at your basic moves.

- | | |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------|
| • suggest future calamity | • separate them |
| • inflict harm as established | • offer an opportunity |
| • put a price on it | • make honour and shame real |
| • put them in the middle | • change the seasons |
| • put them together | |

The moves have flavourful names but they're not mechanical terms. You don't say "I'm suggesting future calamity", you think of something bad that is probably going to happen and you tell them about the signs that precede it. Then ask them what they want to do.

Always follow your principles when you do so. Always choose a move that can follow logically from what has already happened, speak to the characters, not the players, think what's happening elsewhere. Your moves are guided by your Principles and ultimately serve your Agenda.

In general, make a move that sets you up for future moves or gives the players an opportunity to react. When they fail to react or give you an obvious opportunity, by failing a roll for example, make a move that's harsh and irrevocable. Don't be mean and remember to be a fan of the players' characters, but don't pull your punches either. Sometimes you can combine moves. Offering an opportunity together with a price is a great MC combo for example. Below, all the Framing moves are described in more detail.

Suggest future calamity: Think of how things could get worse, how they can go wrong, think of things that have gone wrong elsewhere and are now reaching the players. Show their warning signs, announce their coming, the smoke on the horizon, the writing on the wall. What are they going to do about it?

Inflict harm as established: When a PC endures grave harm, tell them so. When they jump into freezing waters, get struck by an axe, fall off a horse...if it's grave, tell them to roll their move. When your NPCs would suffer harm, show the harm's effects. If the harm is small, show them losing something (some dignity, a thing they're carrying, something they're keeping track of, their balance or something else). Or you can always make it grave harm instead. When a NPC endures grave harm, it's always fatal (throw them under the grinding stone of time). They will die either immediately or soon, unless the PCs or someone

else provides extraordinary treatment. Remember to make harm flow from the fiction, believably and as a consequence.

Put a price on it: When the PCs want something, tell them what they will have to pay or sacrifice for it. When they want to do something, tell them what the likely consequences will be. Tell them “yes, but...” and then the cost. Ask them if they’re willing to pay the price to do what they want and achieve what they want. The price may sometimes be applied retroactively. You want to kill the jarl’s emissary? Sure, no problem, but you can be sure that’s going to come up again.

Put them in the middle: Put a PC between two NPCs, so they have to decide between one side and the other. Put a NPC between two PCs, to create conflicting loyalties. Put a PC in the middle of a conflict. Put them somewhere where they don’t want to be, where they’re weak or out of control. Put them somewhere where they have to make a tough decision. Put them somewhere where they have to react instantaneously. In short, put someone in the middle of things, where decisions must be made.

Pull them together: The characters are at their best when they’re together, either with each other or against one another. Find situations where they can come together, where they can have an intimate conversation or a fiery confrontation. Give them a moment alone, cross their paths, let sparks fly.

Separate them: Put distance or obstacles between them, physical or otherwise. Do it when they would best like to be in the same place (but not necessarily always). It can mean removing someone physically, by kidnapping, force, accident or natural occurrence, but it can also mean cutting the scene away to someone else when they cannot be together.

Offer an opportunity: When you know they want something or are tempted by something, give them an opportunity, however slight, to reach for that thing, to seize the moment. This move can be easily combined with others, you can offer an opportunity but put a price on it, for example. Pulling them together or separating them also provides opportunities.

Make honour and shame real: When a man is insulted and fails to respond, or when one doesn't show up for a duel, or when a shaming-pole is erected against someone, it has serious, tangible consequences. Losing honour, breaking promises, acting in a way that your neighbours perceive as "unmanly"...these things can and will end with a complete and utter loss of status in a community. People may refuse to deal with you, won't trust you, will try to avoid you. Losing honour and failing to respond to insults marks you as níðingr, a villain, a person of lower rank and can cause one to be outlawed. If a PC shames a NPC or a PC is shamed, have your characters react accordingly and treat it as a serious matter.

Change the seasons: We usually follow the characters moment-to-moment, day-to-day. But the sagas cover years and generations. Every now and then, move time aggressively forward, especially when things are quiet or after larger conflicts are resolved. This is a good move to use at the beginning or end of a session. The time skipped could only be days or weeks, but months or seasons are usually more appropriate. In rare cases you may even skip years if it doesn't disturb the flow of the game. Make sure the players (or their characters) aren't in the middle of something when you do so.

OTHER THINGS TO DO

As the MC, keep a few other things in mind. The following things aren't Principles or moves, but practical advice for running the game.

- ask questions and build on the answers
- draw maps
- remember a session is not an evening
- take your time

Ask questions, build on the answers: Always ask questions, all the time. The most important question is the one that you ask after your every MC move: “What do you do?”. But you should also ask things about the players’ characters’ lives, their possessions, and their feelings. “Where do you get your food?”, “Where did you get those boots?”, “Is your sword special in some way?”. Then, as they give you answers, use that information to build new situations in play.

Make it clear that you’re not asking to question or undermine, but to share and make richer. Ask provocative questions when you can. Remember that the players’ characters’ have been around for at least a few years – ask about that. They have hopes and futures, they have a position in the world, they have previous knowledge, and they have perspectives. Ask them about all those things.

Draw maps: These can be maps of the land, of the farmstead, of the house, of the battlefield. Also draw relationship maps, with family ties, grudges, feuds, economic transactions and similar relationships connect the PCs to the world and your characters as well as everyone between themselves

A session is not an evening: when you get together with your friends to play and you’ve got enough time, there’s nothing in the world stopping you from playing more than one session in an evening (or morning or afternoon or whichever time of day you’re playing). Sometimes you’ve only got a couple of hours, some-

times you've got four or six or more. You don't have to play one session during all the time that's available to you. Cut a session short, maybe take a break if you need it, then play another. Remember that there are some moves that trigger at the beginning of a session!

Take your time: Take it easy, take your time. Remember to take breaks when someone needs one. Take a moment to think about consequences and options before you say something. Take a moment to consider what happens next. Take a moment to linger on some detail, colouring the world with a description of something otherwise unimportant. One way or another, take a moment and let the game and the players (including yourself) breathe.

THINGS TO DO BEFORE THE FIRST SESSION

Sagas of the Icelanders do not require a lot of MC preparation. If this is your first session, make sure you've read the whole MC chapter and, if you can, the players' chapter as well. Try to internalize your moves and definitely get a sense of what the various rolebooks are all about. If you have time, read the Iceland chapter again, maybe watch a movie or read a comic or novel with Norse themes or read some of the original sagas.

You should also:

- print out the character rolebooks
- print out the MC sheets
- get some pencils and scrap paper for yourself
- get some pencils and dice for the players, unless you're sure they have their own

In my humble opinion the best way to prepare for being a MC is to daydream, try to get a good mental picture of the landscape and of the world the settlers live in. Think about the physical space they inhabit

and the culture they practice. Cultivate a tone and imagery so you'll be able to spill it all out at the table. Take some notes, but don't settle down on anything in particular, remember that you're playing to find out what happens.

Above all, don't panic. You'll have your fair share of work once the game starts but the game and the other players are there to help you. It's a communal effort.

THINGS TO DO DURING THE FIRST SESSION

The first session of *Sagas of the Icelanders* is usually a bit different than the others. During the first session, the group will mostly follow the PCs around their daily routine, discovering who they are, where and how they live. You need to establish the world and set things up. Tell the players their job is easy, they only need to make the character creation choices presented in their rolebooks and then play their characters. Tell them your job is a bit more broad and chaotic and that you will be taking it easy.

So, once you sit down and you've introduced yourselves and talked about the game, help the players as they choose their rolebooks and create their characters. Give suggestions and answer questions they have. Oversee the setting of the characters' Relationships and take note of them. In general, take inspiration in what they give you through character creation. Their Relationships and other moves are full of potential and juicy details, as are their possessions and appearance or stats. Capitalize on what the players bring into the game through character creation.

Your primary tool for doing this during the first session is to ask questions like crazy and build on the answers. Flesh out the world and get to know the PCs. If you want to make their circumstances worthy of a saga, you want to know as much about them as possible. Ask them where they got their sword, ask them

how they feel about a NPC, ask them what made them come to Iceland. Keep asking until you get something good.

Keep the spotlight circulating and give everyone their share of screen time. Give them time both together and apart to see what they're like in private and how they interact with others.

Introduce your NPCs, with names and histories (if the PCs have reasons to know about them). Use the MC playsheet and keep notes, writing down the PC's names in the centre of the sheet. During the game write the names of places and NPCs around them, like they're surrounding the PCs. Draw lines and maps, establishing the characters' known world. Draw a sketch of a family tree if you can, tracing the character's familial relationships and ancestry. Note bonds your NPCs may have on the PCs.

Push things a bit. Nudge the characters into a situation where they have to use moves. If you see a situation where they're not in control, seize on it. Who do they depend on, who or what do they have no power over, who do they owe?

Try to avoid introducing stable situations. You don't want the game to be in a status quo, not tilting this or that way. You want a dynamic, complicated situation, full of fragile alliances, tense relationships, conflicting interests and obstacles.

Some time into the game, you will form a pretty good idea of what the characters have, what their position is, what their relationships are and what they care about. Once you have a good sense of that, you can slowly let the session reach some natural ending point or end it with some cliffhanger. If you're playing another session immediately afterwards, take a break.

If you can, hit your players with one or more problematic situations right out of the gate. They should give you enough material to work with simply by creating their characters, choosing their roles, relationships, moves. Think about what impacts their position in the world, what threats or opportunities present themselves. A beached whale could belong to either you or a family living nearby, who's going to seize the priceless treasure of the sea? A neighbour is harassing your slaves, but then again he's also a powerful man who you owe money to. What are you going to do about it? Moving a boulder might open a better way to a good pasture, but spirits live there and may take offence - how will you proceed? Someone has been stealing livestock and walking around in the night - what do you do? Neighbours come to the goði and ask him to judge a case with no clear solution - how will he decide? A terrible storm sinks a boat, leaving a lot of unclear inheritance claims to attend to - who will you argue for? A sickness seizes the livestock - what will you do to help them?

However, this is the first session and you have enough work to do overseeing character creation, asking questions, taking notes and trying to keep abreast of everything that's happening. Don't fret.

AFTER THE FIRST SESSION AND BEYOND

Before the next session you should figure out who or what is threatening the PCs and their things. The game provides you with a framework to achieve that and prepare yourself for further sessions. Your prep consists of creating Fronts (in the sense of "fighting on two fronts") with related Threats. You can find the method for creating fronts outlined below.

THE MC PLAYSHEET

Take your MC playsheet that you used during your previous session. In the middle of the sheet you should have the PC's names. Around the edge you will see the names of Norse gods, representing various impulses and attitudes. These are your Fronts.

Written in the space between the PCs and the Fronts, you should have the names of places and NPCs. Everything and everyone between the PCs and the Fronts is technically a Threat. We call them that because they potentially threaten the PCs and their possessions (remember what we said about unstable situations).

Between sessions you have a little housekeeping to do. You'll organize these Fronts and Threats for your next session. From there on, when it's your turn to speak, instead of using just your Ceremonial moves (that we have explained previously), you can also look at your Fronts and their moves.

The Fronts are named after Norse gods, but they neither constitute a full pantheon, nor are they an entirely accurate representation of Norse myth. They're not actual gods or concrete characters within the game (even though you may choose to make them such). They are to be used as an inspiration and thematic guidance for what is going on in your game. They are overarching attitudes and driving forces of your world. Fronts are about the whys and the hows, while Threats are about the actual events and actions.

THE FRONTS SHEET

Between sessions, take a moment to organize your Threats and Fronts from the playsheet on your fronts sheet. The hexagonal area on the main MC playsheet is intended for taking notes during the game, while the Fronts sheets are for in-between session upkeep.

You will use the gods (or Fronts) to thematically link Threats together. Each god provides a few moves that can be used in relation to the places and people under their influence, but instead of being direct moves in the fiction, they are more like meta-moves, telling you what to do with a threat that belong under a that specific Front's influence.

Use the Fronts to colour your threats. An upstart neighbour under the influence of Odin or one under the influence of Freya, can be two quite different people. Combine the Front with the moves of each specific threat under its influence to create problems for the PCs, following your agenda and principles.

To do so, simply write the name of the god on top of an individual Front and list the Threats that it is influencing below it. You should have two or three Fronts ongoing at any given time.

Each Front can come with three additional features besides Threats: Countdowns, Custom Moves and Stakes.

COUNTDOWNS

Countdowns are used to keep track of things over time, to remind you that things don't stay the same. They can be of any scale, typically days, weeks, months or seasons. When you create a Countdown for your Front, choose a timescale and think about what will happen when the next phase comes if the player characters don't do anything about it. Write it down and then adhere to it in play unless the situation changes or the characters stop or change the course of events related to the countdown.

The countdowns are both prescriptive and descriptive. When something you've listed happens, advance the clock and then make the listed thing happen. Countdowns should mostly be about things that the characters can't influence or control directly, unless they make some specific effort to do so. A few examples of countdowns might be:

POWERFUL ENEMIES:

autumn – the king learns of the murder of his nephew

winter – the king gathers his loyal huscarls

spring – news of an armed expedition reaches the shores of Iceland

summer – the king's men attack

A FESTERING WOUND:

day 1 – the wound becomes infected and begins to swell

day 2 – the wound fills with pus and smells bad

day 3 – the discharge becomes noticeably worse, the limb beyond repair

day 4 – death becomes inevitable

CUSTOM MOVES

Every once in a while you will feel that the existing moves and tools at your disposal don't quite cover what you had in mind for your game. The NPCs or places that you've created as your Threats will call for a custom move for occasions when the players interact with them. Simply follow the general template, as laid out in the Structure of Moves section in the first chapter. As Vincent puts in *Apocalypse World*: "When a player character does [specify], roll +[specify]. On 10+ [specify]. On 7-9 [specify]. On a miss [specify]." 10+ results are good, misses are painful and 7-9 are a mixed bag. Not all moves work this way, of course. Some might not require a roll, some will give you hold, but the basic template should serve you fine for most cases.

Here are a few examples of Custom Moves:

When you move the elven stone off your fields, roll +wyrd. On 10+ the elves will find a new home and leave you alone, on 7-9 they will leave, but not before messing with your tools, family or livestock in revenge. On a miss there will be hell to pay from the landspirits.

When you are a visitor in Bolli's home, roll +versed. On 10+ you avoid his games and provocations, on 7-9 he gets under your skin and gains a bond with you. On a miss, he's got you in his pocket and gains 3 bonds with you.

When you eat the poisoned meat, roll +young. On 10+ you're ok after throwing up a bit, on 7-9 you endure grave harm but roll with +1 forward. On a miss, you endure grave harm and roll with -2 forward.

When you entice Olaf, roll +versed instead of +young. He likes his women with a sharp tongue.

STAKES

Stakes are big overarching questions about the NPCs' fates that you leave yourself to wonder about. It's a way for you to postpone judgment, to pass the reins, leave yourself things to wonder about and play to find out. To write a stakes question, you need to give up your ability to choose what will happen. Let the answer to the question emerge in play, either through the players' actions or whatever comes naturally through the fiction.

Write a few questions about the futures of the NPCs you're interested in. The stakes should be about serious, irreversible consequences. They should change people's lives in an obvious and concrete manner. Once the questions are answered, things should be noticeably, definitively different.

Examples:

Will Olaf keep his word to Snorri, no matter what?

Will Vigdis stay in love with Bolli when she learns of his past?

Will Thora become a follower of the priest of the White Christ?

Who will get Unn's inheritance?

CREATING FRONTS

Fronts are a way to help you prepare for the game, by keeping things, people and places thematically linked and aimed at the PCs. To create a Front, consult your playsheet from the first session and choose two or three gods that you're most interested in. Once you've picked a god, determine which Threats fall under its influence. Each god "manifests" itself through its threats by making moves through them. The moves may be read either as consequences of each other, or simply to give groups of people contextual color.

Following is a list of the gods and their moves.

ODIN

- display great ambition
- subvert gender roles
- uncover secrets and hidden things

Displaying great ambition means that a NPC sets a very high goal for themselves, regardless of the price or sacrifice it presents. This NPC will reach beyond their station and probably beyond their reach as well – what will be the price and who will pay?

Subverting gender roles means that NPCs in this front behave in an unusual or forbidden manner for their gender. Women pick up weapons, men practice magic, girls refuse to marry, boys refuse to work the fields and craft pretty objects instead, Vikings stop raiding, women get bloodthirsty.

Uncovering secrets and hidden things means that dangerous, shameful, uncomfortable, devastating, powerful or valuable stuff comes to light. Lies are unravelled, histories revealed, old buried gold dug out, weaknesses and failings put on display, knowledge gained, lessons learned, new truths put forth.

THOR

- display stubborn pride
- brew up storms
- wreck and tear apart

Displaying stubborn pride means that someone is too hard-headed and unyielding to adapt to a situation or back down when it would be the smart thing to do so. They power through, keep on making the same mistake or following up on some brash judgement with great consequences to themselves or others.

Brewing up storms means that situations escalate (insults are thrown, regrettable actions are taken), making things darker, more chaotic, more threatening. Resentment and vengeance take root and thunder is heard from afar. In some cases storms can also be physical, not just metaphorical.

Wrecking and tearing apart is the result of unbound violence and destruction present in nature or relationships once they break down. A house or ship may be torn apart by a landslide of rocks just like a friendship or alliance may be wrecked by reckless words, broken promises or betrayed trust.

FREYA

- display heedless lust
- carry away
- offer priceless gifts

Displaying heedless lust means that someone is hopelessly and selfishly taken by someone or something, desiring it for themselves, without really taking in account the other parties involved. They will pursue that person or thing with abandon, breaking rules and codes of conduct in the process and lust easily turning into hate if the desire is denied.

Carrying away means that someone is either physically kidnapped or perhaps becomes lost through their own actions, wallowing in reverie and abandoning their responsibilities or wandering away in search or something. Either way, they are gone.

Offering priceless gifts means that an opportunity to acquire something very valuable presents itself. However, valuable things are always coveted by many, breeding competition and conflict, as several people all try to get the same thing and fight over it. At the same time, priceless gifts are never really price-less.

LOKI

- display jealousy and resentment
- act with cowardice and deceit
- shake the foundations

Displaying jealousy and resentment means someone feels excluded, cut out. They don't feel they have been given enough attention or were unjustly shorted out. Perhaps it's even true. Either way, jealousy and resentment are a slippery slope leading into passive-aggressive blaming, malice and attempts to take revenge for perceived wrongs. They will show them all.

Acting with cowardice and deceit means obscuring one's motives and goals, eschewing direct action, lying, obscuring, obfuscating and generally not being honest and direct. A deceitful person will try to get what they want by manipulating people, making secret alliances and acting in secret. They will also cautiously pick their fights, preferring to strike from behind or take out a weaker enemy than picking someone their own size.

Shaking their foundations means that one's pillars of belief may be shattered or their well-placed trust might suddenly find itself on shaky ground. What you thought true might suddenly turn out false, what you thought secure might suddenly be treacherous. Just like anything else, this might also be physical, not just metaphorical. Earthquakes were a well-known phenomenon to the Norse.

HEL

- display greed and hunger
- spread disease and decay
- present a bleak fate

Displaying greed and hunger is a two-sided coin. Hunger is an ever-present danger and often a reality of the settlers as the land is hard and yields little in the way of nourishment. Greed, on the other hand, is the exaggeration of being ready for hunger – it is hoarding and keeping to oneself, often in an irrational and counter-productive (but most of all anti-social) way.

Spreading disease and decay means that life and man-made order are short and fragile. People and the livestock get sick, wood rots, weapons rust, sails tear. Plagues are spread, wounds get infected, tools break. Everything tends towards destruction.

Presenting a bleak fate means that sometimes, just sometimes, there is simply no light at the end of the tunnel; that there is no good solution or a happy end. That giving up, or doing something tragic and pointless is the only option. That some good things must end because of fate or historical necessity or human failings.

FREYR

- display royal arrogance
- make promises
- exalt and distinguish

Displaying royal arrogance means that some people take themselves to be above everyone else, to be chosen by the gods or circumstance or their own superiority. And when they deem themselves as such, they become arrogant and think everyone should bow to their will and that all things are theirs for the taking. And if someone disagrees, they are just wrong.

Making promises means suggesting that doing something now may yield profit in days to come. This can be the planting of seeds, a financial loan, the request to swear loyalty, a marriage vow. It's always aimed at the future, a bargain. If you do this, then you will get this. Promise. Of course, the future is uncertain.

Exalt and distinguish means that someone is elevated above everyone else, usually through a third party's influence. A king may make someone his right hand man, a child becomes the favourite, a slave is made the member of a family, a skald is praised as the finest poet in the land. Of course such a position comes bundled with problems. The person has to deal with new responsibilities, tread carefully when dealing with their benefactors, avoid envy and jealousy from their former equals, restrain arrogance and so on.

THREATS

Once you have chosen two or three Fronts, you need to link specific Threats to them. Look at the NPCs and places you have written down – which ones fit? This fitting can be retroactive (you realize only after the session that someone has been under the influence of Odin) or it can be prescriptive (you consider what Front they fall under even as you create that NPC). Each Threat falls under one of the five categories that will be detailed below.

Choose two or three Threats for each Front. An individual and their allies or followers. A place and the people who live there. Sublime locations inhabited by spirits. These are all good combinations. After you have chosen your Threats, determined their categories and linked them with Fronts, you'll have four to nine Threats written out with thematic guidance, Stakes questions, Countdowns and maybe Custom moves. You should rely on the information contained within this prep when running the next session.

Alternately, if you feel confident, you can just improvise most of your sessions. Just read through the Fronts and Threats lists a few times until you've internalized them, and then just roll with it and keep building on whatever comes up in play.

THREAT MOVES

Below, you will find the specific threat categories and their related moves. You can use these moves in addition to your basic Ceremonial moves and the Front moves when taking your part in the game's conversation.

THE LAND & THE SEA

- get in the way
- lead astray
- trap or ensnare
- refuse to yield
- throw up something
- consume something

The natural features, the weather, the rocks, forests, streams, storms, fjords, the fog...these are all part of the Land & Sea. They get in the way when they prevent passage, but also when they obscure the view or do annoying things, uncaring for the goals of men. They lead astray when they get you lost or in the wrong place, making you take the longer road. They trap and ensnare, when they hold you and don't let you go, whether it's a tree falling on your leg or the strong current of the river clutching you in its grip. They refuse to yield when they're too big, heavy, sublime, hard to move, break, chop down or comprehend, they don't follow orders. They throw up something when they bring something up from the deep, maybe an old corpse disgorged by a landslide or a beached whale washed up on the shore. They consume something when the waves swallow up a drowning man, the frost nibbles at the crops or a sheep doesn't return from the rocky outcrops.

POWERFUL MEN & WOMEN

- send messengers
- make demands
- convert to their cause
- make a show of power
- punish with mercy
- strike out to conquer

Powerful men and women are foreign kings, queens and nobles, bishops, goðis and others who consider themselves special and raised above the rest. They send messengers whenever they want their existence

to be acknowledged or their will carried out. They make demands to show their entitlement, asking for women, money, poetry or other gifts. They convert to their cause by showing the benefits of being allied with someone powerful. They make a show of power when people ignore or disobey them, but also when they want to impress, giving priceless gifts or showing their prowess or military power. They punish with mercy when they don't want only to retaliate, but also to humiliate and give a second chance to bow down. They strike out to conquer whenever victory seems certain or insolence too great.

NEIGHBOURS & FAMILIES

- act as one
- contest ownership
- dwindle and leave behind
- seek vengeance
- grow and prosper
- bring to court

All the ordinary people living in Iceland are either someone's neighbours or someone's family. They act as one when they close ranks, agree and show that one member is part of the whole and you can't mess with individuals. They dwindle and leave behind when they're struck by misfortune or old age, leaving empty land, homeless children, indebted spouses, unfinished businesses. They grow and prosper when their number, renown and wealth increases, and as time goes on, they want more and more for themselves. They contest ownership based on hereditary laws, unclear borders, displaced milestones, either way, they think something is theirs before it's yours. They seek vengeance when they have been done wrong or those close to them, they never let things lie, unless it's to serve a cold dish. They bring to court when they're too cunning, civil or poor to deal with disputes otherwise, claiming this and that misconduct and demand fines to be paid.

OUTLAWS & OUTCASTS

- act in secret
- move into an area
- provoke and challenge
- steal or kidnap
- act without honour
- bring misfortune

Those banished or escaped from abroad sometimes come to Iceland and sometimes those outlawed here refuse to leave. They act in secret when they don't show their identity and stay in hidden places, making their move when no one is watching. They move into an area when they cannot stay elsewhere, inevitably bringing trouble with them or stirring up new trouble. They provoke and challenge metaphorically and practically – their ways challenge the established order and they often challenge for profit, acting with malice, desperation or abandon. They steal and kidnap when they see no other way, or when they desire what they cannot have. They act without honour, ready to sink to various lows, for they have no honour, having been cut away from their communities where it counts for something. They bring misfortune because they are cursed, maledicted individuals, some with blood on their hands, some with fates conspiring against them, some too dumb to care.

FATES & SPIRITS

- send dreams and portents
- reveal past wrongs
- fulfil a prophecy
- haunt
- employ tricks and make mischief
- offer a bargain

Fates and spirits are things beyond the visible world, interfering with the affairs of men as they see fit, for selfish or incomprehensible reasons. They send dreams and portents when they want to communicate

something, usually their displeasure or a friendly warning about the future. They reveal past mistakes to show all actions have consequences and display the long threads of fate interweaving over years and generations. They fulfil a prophecy when they make a vision or announcement of the future come true, usually bringing about a tragic resolution. They haunt when they raise echoes, spectres and revenants of tragic or horrible events that had transpired in a place. They employ tricks and make mischief when they make unlikely or unexplained things happen, usually when no one is around, messing up plans and projects. They offer a bargain when they give an indication or leave a message they may leave or cease their activity if certain actions are taken.

He went into the fire-hall, and walked up to the man who was the overseer for Skallagrim and managed his money, and was most dear to him. Egil dealt him a deadly blow, then went to his seat.

-Egil's saga

ICELAND

Then Skallagrim explored the land, which stretched a long way from the shore to the mountains and had a great marshland and wide woods, and plenty of seals to hunt and good fishing. [...]

The following spring he brought his ship south into the bay closest to where Kveldulf had been washed ashore, built a farmstead there and called it Borg.

- Egil's Saga



NOW...

The year is 900 AD. Around twenty-five years ago, the first Nordic settlers arrived. The oldest people around still remember how it happened.

THE KING IN THE EAST

On the mainland, King Harald the Fair-haired has waged a bloody war to conquer all of Norway. People fleeing to Iceland are refugees, outlaws, dispossessed nobles, political dissidents, or simply farmers trying to start a new life in a new, peaceful land.

THE PEOPLE

Before the Norse, Iceland was empty. Irish monks seeking solitude were the first to discover it, but decided not to stay. Most settlers come directly from Norway, but many are returning from raids and conquests in the British Isles. The Northlanders brought with them families as well as slaves (many of them of Gaelic descent), the population now numbering perhaps a few thousand souls. What the settlers all seem to share is a disdain for centralised authority that drove them from their previous homeland. They have no kings, only a legal code in its infancy. Their honour and tradition is what really matters and what directs their lives. Iceland is a social and a geographical frontier.

People are spread out across a vast, empty land. There are no villages or towns and there won't be any for centuries to come. Everyone lives on farmsteads and the family is the foundation of one's life and identity. With the exception of the slaves, people are all free men and women, farmers, craftsmen and warriors who have settled this land to live as they will, and not subject themselves to rulers.

THE LAND

A large portion of Iceland is a craggy and barren Arctic landscape of rocks and lichen, punctuated by picturesque valleys, mountains, glaciers, volcanoes, lakes and waterfalls. Moss, grass, birch and shrubs grow in areas that are not covered by ice or deserted lava fields. The Northlanders are destroying a lot of the trees due to the need for grazing for their animals and wood to feed their fires. The trees are small and crooked; as a result, timber suitable for building and shipbuilding has to be imported. It's a hard land.

THE WILD THINGS

The seas are rich in fish and the coasts are home to countless birds. In the interior, Arctic foxes hunt rabbits and rodents. There are no larger mammals and no reptiles whatsoever. Once in a while, polar bears may drift in on ice floes or whales will come ashore; the latter are an invaluable source of food, oil and bone. The Northlanders have brought some farm animals (mostly sheep, goats and cattle) as well as horses and dogs with them.

HOMES

People live in longhouses built mainly of stone and turf. A typical house has a common single room some six meters wide and twenty meters long, although the largest ones can be twice that size. There are no windows, only doors at one or both end and smoke holes in the roof. Wooden posts support the roof; benches line the walls, where people eat and work. The benches are covered with straw and animal skins when people go to sleep. There's an elongated central fire pit for light, warmth and cooking. Shields, weapons, tools and decorations hang on the walls and other valuables are kept in chests. There is rarely any other furniture. In some houses parts of the common room are fenced off for other purposes, such as food storage or sheltering animals. Otherwise, these are kept in smaller, adjacent buildings.

FOOD

People eat twice a day: mid-morning and at day's end. They mostly rely on dairy products, fish and meat, supplemented by cereals (barley, oats and rye) and vegetables (carrots, parsnips, turnips), the latter cultivated with great difficulty, especially.

Grains are ground by hand between two round stones. Bird eggs and edible seaweed may be collected along the shores. A beached or caught whale may feed a family for a very long time. Fruit is appreciated, but needs to be imported for the most part. Wild berries and edible weeds can be found and preserved for winter when fresh food is lacking. People drink water, milk, mead and ale. Ale is weak and cloudy and often sweetened with herbs. Wooden plates, cups and drinking horns are used at mealtime.

CLOTHES AND GROOMING

Most clothes are made from locally produced wool (other cloth has to be imported). Men wear loose tunics and trousers wrapped with cloth from foot to knee. Women wear long socks and wool gowns, often with an apron-skirt over that. Both use under-tunics made of linen, while the outer clothes are usually made of wool. Clothes are fastened with sashes, brooches and belts and some feature buttons. Ankle-high leather shoes are worn most of the time, higher and sturdier boots for winter, if they can be afforded. Cloaks, scarves, mittens, hoods and hats are used to keep warm. Possessions are kept in pouches and apron pockets, sometimes hung on belts or strings around the neck. People like to keep clean and use a variety of accessories including combs, ear spoons and tweezers for grooming. They bathe inside or in thermal springs. Men wear their hair short or shoulder-length and facial hair is a matter of pride.

TOOLS AND WEAPONS

The Northlanders use a great amount of various tools, from simple hammers, axes and saws to combs and scissors and specialised shipbuilding equipment. Ploughs and hoes are used to work the land and augers and chisels for wood. Timber (whether for construction or furniture) is held together by pegs, or mortise and tenon joints, rarely by metal nails. Fire is started with drills or flint and steel. They are also excellent metalworkers, although good ore is really hard to come by.

Almost everyone owns a knife of some kind; many men carry a big machete-like knife known as the seax, used for chopping wood as well as flesh. The spear and the axe are the most common weapons, with bows and the glaive-like aetgir being more rare. Regular axes are useful on the farm, too, but the throwing francisca or the huge two-handed dane axes are purely an instrument of destruction.

Swords require a lot of good metal and a lot of work and are thus very valuable and a sign of importance and prestige, being worth as much as sixteen cows. Layers of leather and cloth provide protection in combat, with professional soldiers having access to mail shirts or lamellar armour. Helmets have a nose guard, and sometimes a spectacle guard that covers the whole upper face. They don't have horns. Shields are big, round, bound in iron and reach from the shoulder to the knee.

MEDICINE

Norse medicine is simple and straightforward. Wounds are cleaned with warm water, anointed with herbs and bound. Broken bones are straightened and bound. Those skilled in the art of healing know various herbs that may relieve pain or help with recovery from disease. In desperate cases people may turn to spells and charms or pray the gods, but they don't usually fight their fate once they see it coming.

TRAVEL AND TRANSPORT

Most travelling is done on foot or by riding ponies, although people will also use wood skis or bone skates to cross snow and ice in winter. Wagons or sledges are rare but useful. Horses travel much faster than people over short distances but over longer distances they're about as fast, if more resilient. On water, small boats are used for fishing and hunting. Drakkar are bigger, shallow longships used for warfare that can float far up rivers or shores, while knarr are deeper and wider boats used for trade.

FAITH AND FATE

The Northlanders believe that a person's time of death is determined at birth by the Norns, three sisters that watch over a man's fate also known as Wyrd. This makes them profoundly fatalist and pragmatic, even the gods can't escape the future that was foretold. Dísir or fylgja are companion spirits that personify one's fate and may act as guardian spirits of houses and families. If a person dies a worthy death in battle, they may enter Valhalla to drink with the gods, while everyone else goes to a dull, grey place called Hel. The restless dead may come back as revenant draugr, usually in physical form, to annoy the living.

Seeing the future and working magic (seiðr) is seen as the domain of women, who will then be known as a seiðkona (sorceress, witch) or völva (seeress). It is considered unmanly to practice magic and there is scarcely a greater offence to a man other than being known as ergi, or effeminate.

The Northlanders tell a great many stories about creatures that dwell in the hidden places of the world or beyond it, such as giants, trolls, deep elves, light elves and the walking dead, although they might not necessarily believe those stories. Landvættir (land-wights) or Huldufólk (hidden-people) are elf-like spirits of the land who live in waterfalls, rock formations, tree groves and other landmarks, which can be distinguished

by their sublime nature. Being at good terms with these spirits may be paramount to one's prosperity, especially in terms of farming and exploiting the land.

While there is no proper organised religion in Iceland and worship is mostly pragmatic, personal and practical, the Northlanders put a lot of stock in their old gods. Thor, the thunderer, is their favourite and rules over the weather, and is therefore important for both sailing and farming. Odin, the allfather, the wise king of the gods who sacrificed himself to gain the secret of the runes, is a close second and welcomes the fallen warriors in Valhall. The pair of Freyr and Freya, related to fertility, farming, livestock and crops are also held in high regard. Hel is the cold and scary personification of the underworld, while Loki, a shapeshifting half-giant is both a jovial prankster and resentful schemer.

For now, Christianity is distrusted and seen as abominable by many. Chieftain-priests called *goðar* (singular *goði*) are tasked with presiding over oaths, and conduct marriages, burial rites and seasonal celebrations. A sacrificial feast known as *blót* is traditionally performed before winter, in mid-winter and in spring.

Hrafnkell settled the whole of the valley, bestowing lands
on other people, on condition of being their chief;
and thus he assumed priesthood over them.

-the Saga of Hrafnkell, Frey's *Goði*

WRITING

Northlanders use the runic alphabet or futhark (named so after the first six letters) to preserve memories of people and events, to write curses or blessings and name places and things. Most people can't write, but they will recognize inscriptions or certain words.

Words are usually carved in standing stones or on wooden staves or poles, over entrances, or on weapons. This is often done for religious or other spiritual purposes. Two common uses are memorial stones to commemorate great people or rather their opposite, the níðingr (shaming) poles, raised to insult and challenge someone.

PASTIMES

People love games and competitions. They will race on ice or horseback, compete in swimming, poetry or drinking. They will make horses fight for sport, like people do with chickens in other countries. They play ball games and wrestle. Children play with wooden toys, including wooden weapons and role-play a lot. When people are gathered inside they tell stories, play the flute and harp and sing.

Good strategy in table games is held in high regard, as much as any other noble skill. The best-known table game is chess, but there is also the more local hnefatafl in which one player must defend a king pawn against invaders on a chess-like board.

GENDER AND CULTURE

Norse men and women are largely treated with equal respect, but their roles in society are strict and narrowly defined. Mothers and fathers pass their skills onto children of respective gender from a very early age. In spite of this a woman may sometimes run a farm or go into battle, while a man might take on the

practice of seiðr or magic. For women, taking on male roles is often not an issue, but the transgressions of men are often seen as dishonourable. A man who is perceived to be effeminate, taking the passive or submissive role in (homosexual) relationships is considered *argr* (unmanly, noun form of *ergi*) and not acceptable in Norse society.

Without honour, an Icelander is next to nothing, which is why most men will zealously protect their public image, their good standing and reputation. For a man being honourable and respected means being brave, acting one's gender, respecting one's elders and hosts, following etiquette but perhaps most importantly being a man of his word. Women are not concerned with such personal honour, but a single person can bring dishonour to a whole family, and that is very much their business.

Insults, whether delivered physically, with scornful nicknames or through more subtle and cunning schemes, are often taken deadly seriously. Similarly, oaths and curses are considered more than mere words – a spoken thing may cut as deep as any blade or bind as hard as any chain. If a man has been insulted or wronged, it's only honourable to call for a duel or demand material compensation. Since these affairs often end with death, the cycles of revenge may continue for generations in the form of blood feuds.

LAW

For now, there is no fully established common law in Iceland yet, nor anyone to enforce it. People's behaviour is governed by traditions of hospitality and expectations of honourable conduct. Despite this, a person may be marked an outlaw by the community, meaning they are excluded from society and may even be killed, being outside the protection of the law. Disputes and other legal matters are usually brought before the local þing or assembly.

TRADING AND PILLAGING

The Northlanders have been pillaging England, Scotland, Ireland and France for years, and have well established trade routes all around Europe, travelling as far as Byzantium. Iceland doesn't have much to offer to the people on the mainland but locals export fish, animal fat and skins, wool, sulfur and falcons. Traders may bring in metal, cloth, slaves, food and luxuries from lands as far as the Middle East and beyond, although the Icelanders will usually do all the trading themselves, sailing overseas to buy (or take) what they need.

THE FUTURE

In the next thirty years, Icelanders will begin organizing. The þings will grow, laws will be made and disputes settled. One of the earliest forms of democracy will develop. In 930, the first national assembly or Alþingi (Althing) will lay a foundation of national sovereignty. By the year 1000, due to various economical and political pressures Christianity will be declared the official religion and the following centuries will see a civil war between various clans, which will ultimately lead to Iceland falling under the rule of the Norwegian crown.

Or will it?

Unn the Deep-minded was in Caithness when her son Thorstein fell. When she heard that Thorstein was dead, and her father had breathed his last, she deemed she would have no prospering in store there. She had a knorr built secretly in the forest. When it was finished, she made the ship ready and set out with substantial wealth. [] She set sail and had a smooth journey, making land at Vikrarskeid on the south shore. The ship was wrecked upon landing but all those aboard survived and managed to save their property.

-The Saga of the people of Laxardal

THE PEOPLE

Ulf was so big and strong that no man was a match for him. He is said to have been a very clever farmer. He was shrewd and always ready to make useful suggestions. But every day towards the evening he would grow so bad-tempered that few people dared even address him. People claimed he was a shape-shifter and they called him Kveldulf (Night Wolf).

-Egil's Saga



HOW TO CHOOSE YOUR ROLEBOOKS

This chapter presents the various roles that the players' characters can fill in the world, or more accurately, the various roles the players can take on through their characters. Each role comes with its own "rolebook" in which you are presented with all the information you need to play your character.

There are eleven rolebooks in total, four female (the matriarch, the seiðkona, the shield-maiden and the woman), four male (the goði, the huscarl, the man and the wanderer) and three gender-neutral (the child, the monster and the thrall). I would suggest you pick a good mix of male and female rolebooks and make the gender-neutral playbooks available only once those roles have been filed. Male roles are more physically active, but not pro-active. The women are socially and physically less active on the surface, but they're the ones that prod men to action, as well as sometimes completely taking over a male role.

In general, **The Man** and **The Woman** should take precedence before the other rolebooks in most games: try to have at least one of those two in play at any given time. This is not a rule, but some of the other playbooks are better suited for more marginal roles, while those two are the baseline. The man is a settler and farmer, representing the majority of the population. Men will generally be in charge of the outside work and workforce - managing the farm, fishing, hunting, going Viking; whereas women will generally be in charge of the inside work and workforce - cooking, cleaning, sewing, although they can and do take on the outside management in the absence of their men-folk. Play a woman or man if you want to see what it was like being an ordinary person settling a new land and operating under hard conditions, and ask why someone would do this and whether it was worth it, and what concessions have to be made.

The Goði is a leader-figure, a mix of an attorney, lawyer, chieftain and priest. The goðar are the closest Iceland has to a high class. They wield a lot of authority, but also carry the burden of many social duties and obligations. As a goði you're in excellent position to broker both peace and violence. As a keeper of the old religion, you're also ultimately responsible for deciding whether Christianity will take a hold in the land or not. Play a goði if you want to be a community figure, a leader and judge, someone who has the final word in most matters and can change the course of many lives.

The Huscarl is a straightforward character. Huscarls are technically menservants, although they are free men and don't perform labour. They are employed by a family or powerful individual to provide protection (or aggression) when needed. Play a huscarl if you want to be a friend, butler, bodyguard and a hired killer all in one.

The Matriarch is a role taken on by women, who through age and experience take a leading role in their family, probably after they choose not to remarry after the death of their husband. They are very good at navigating the social landscape, having a lot of insight into people's motivations and desires. Play a matriarch if you want to be the boss of a family, maintaining a precarious balance of power over the people you know and meet.

The Seiðkona is the most "supernatural" of the rolebooks. The Norse took magic seriously and considered it a real force in the world, something to be reckoned with. Women who wielded that power were both an important and feared element of society because of the blessings and curses were thought to weave. Play a seiðkona if you want to play someone with the liberty to walk on the edge of society, with the power to intervene in it significantly, but also the risk that power entails.

The Shield-maiden is a female warrior, a common sight in pre-medieval times; during the saga period they became more of a rare curiosity. While not explicitly forbidden, bearing arms and going into battles was simply not seen as a woman's job. Nevertheless, women often picked up swords or spears when it was necessary, often driving fear into the hearts of their enemies. Play the Shield-maiden if you want to explore the blurry line between the gender roles and embody a badass woman warrior.

The Wanderer is not a recommended character unless you already have a few others in the game. They are outsiders, strangers, travellers and thus not part of the usual tightly knit group of relatives and neighbours that the other rolebooks represent. Their main thing is hanging out on the edge and looking in, until they find the right moment to unleash their whole potential. Play a wanderer if you want to be more of a spectator than an actor, and have the ability to add a twist or new meaning to the situation once you figure out your agenda.

The Monster, Thrall and Child are to be seen more as support characters.

The Child is all about growing up, about the expectations people have of you and how you'll actually turn out. The Child's moves allow the player to play the character as someone who avoids the adults, preserving their childhood or someone who claims excellence for oneself, showing he is equal or better than his elders. Eventually, the Child must grow up and decide what path are they going to follow in life, as well as come to terms (or reject) the expectations of their gender. Play as a child if you want to deal with those questions.

The Thrall is a slave. While they were numerous, they don't feature greatly in the sagas. The thrall rolebook gives you a few different ways to go about playing an enslaved servant. Either as a loyal and valuable member of a family, a proud rebel, or hidden factor, acting behind the scenes or as a go-between. Play a

thrall if you want to see what it feels like to be enslaved in an uncharacteristically free society (for the period).

The Monster is exactly what the name implies, but also not a monster at all. It might be someone truly monstrous or a person whom society has deemed simply too different and strange, they no longer consider them truly human. The monster can be very antagonistic and thus difficult to consider as a protagonist. If you want to play the monster you can make it the heart of your game and play them as an anti-hero, alternatively you can use the rolebook as a second character and run it as a source of trouble for the other PCs, as a sort of co-MC.

They had a daughter named Gudrun. She was the most beautiful woman ever to have grown up in Iceland, and no less clever than she was good-looking. She was the shrewdest of women, highly articulate, and generous as well.

-The Saga of the people of Laxardal

NAMES

Here you will find lists of names that you can choose from to name your characters (or choose a name from a book or movie that you like).

FEMALE NAMES

Asgerd, Asgeir, Aslaug, Asny, Bera, Dalla, Freydis, Geirlaug, Geirny, Gjaflaug, Grimhild, Groa, Gudrid, Gudrun, Gunnhild, Gyda, Hallbera, Halldis, Hallfrid, Hallveig, Helga, Herdis, Hildrid, Hrafnhild, Hrodny, Ingibjorg, Ingrid, Ingunn, Isgerd, Jofrid, Jorunn, Kadlin, Ljufa, Mjoll, Moeid, Nereid, Olof, Osk, Ragnhild, Rannveig, Saeunn, Sigrid, Solveig, Thora, Thorarna, Thordis, Thorlaug, Thorunn, Thurid, Unn, Valgerd, Vermund, Vigdis, Yngvild

MALE NAMES

Aki, Ari, Arinbjorn, Atli, Bard, Bjalfi, Bjarni, Bjorn, Bolli, Brynjolf, Egil, Einar, Eyvind, Finn, Frodi, Geir, Gellir, Grim, Halfdan, Hallbjorn, Harek, Helgi, Hegg, Hogni, Hrafn, Hrolf, Illugi, Ingolf, Jorund, Ketill, Koll, Lambi, Ljot, Njal, Oddleif, Olaf, Olvir, Orm, Ottar, Ref, Sigurd, Skallagrim, Skeggi, Skum, Skuli, Snorri, Solvi, Stein, Steinar, Stuf, Surt, Thorkel, Thorir, Thorolf, Ulf, Vali, Vandrads, Vebjorn, Yngvar

NICKNAMES

the Beardless, the Berserk, the Black, Blood-axe, Boomer, Bow-bender, Braggart, the Broad, Chopper, Dark-skin, Deep-minded, the Fair, Fart, Flat-nose, the Giant, the Godless, Grey-cloak, Half-troll, Hobbler, Hump, the Lame, the Lean, the Learned, Long-chin, Night wolf, the Pale, the Peacock, Pock-marked, Raven, Red-cloak, Sarcastic, Serpent-tongue, Shaggy-breeches, the Short, the Slayer, the Sly, Squinter, Snooze, the Tall, Tangle-hair, Thin-hair, Travel-quick, the White, White-leg, the Wise

PATRONYMS AND MATRONYMS

If you add - dóttir or -son at the end of a name it means “daughter of” and “son of” respectively. For example: Einarson and Saeunnsdóttir are Einar’s son and Saeunn’s daughter. These titles were used similarly to how we use surnames today.

POSSESSIONS AND SILVER

All the characters start with some possessions and some silver. Below you will find some rough estimates of the value of such things – silver is not a mechanic. Follow your gut and the guidelines presented here. Your people have to create their own economy.

The Icelanders had a commodity-based economy, coupled with a monetary system based on the weight of the silver (using coins from all over the world). The basic unit of trade was the vaðmál, a measure of home-spun wool, roughly around six meters long, which was worth one ounce of silver. Eight silver ounces were equal to one silver mark and three marks were equal to one young, healthy cow, cows being a third basic unit of trade (besides cloth and silver).

Beyond there things get a little hazy. Prices fluctuated depending on supply and demand, as well as on the desperation of the buyer. In one saga, a hungry traveller gives away half his worldly possessions for a simple meal. Prices on the mainland were different from Iceland and sources about prices of goods are often sparse and contradictory.

For the purposes of the game, value and trade are conducted through an abstracted system of silver coins. There are four measures of silver: a bit, a handful, a pouch and a chest. Each measure is likely to be a mix-

ture of coins of various sizes and denominations. You can have one, a few or many of each measure. Many measures equal one larger measure. So, one chest is many pouches, a pouch is many handfuls and a handful is many bits. Many chests of silver is fabulously rich. This creates 8 levels of wealth, detailed below.

1: a bit of silver pays for

enough homespun wool for a complete set of clothes, enough common furs to make a piece of clothing, a good metal tool, a month of food for a family, the fee to land a ship

2: a few bits of silver pay for

a finished piece of clothing (like a cloak), a small farm animal (like a pig), a weight of bog iron, a quality spear or axe, once-off skilled or professional work

3: many bits or a handful of silver pay for

an ounce of gold, a season of labour, a minor fine, a falcon or dog, a small feast, the fine for a minor offence, an unremarkable slave, the bride price to make a marriage legal

4: a few handfuls of silver pay for

a larger metal tool, weapon or implement (like a cauldron, helmet or mail shirt), a regular slave

5: many handfuls or a pouch of silver pays for

a healthy cow or horse, a sow with many piglets, a small flock of sheep or goats, the fine for lesser outlawry or a serious offence

6: a few pouches of silver pay for

an exceptional slave, the fine for lying in court, a common sword, a plot of land, a golden arm ring

7: many pouches or a chest of silver pays for

eight cows, a free man's weregeld

8: a few chests of silver pay for

the weregeld of an important man, like a goði, bishop, foreign prince or nobleman, a legendary sword or great treasure



THE CHILD

You're a new soul in a new country, future personified in a land of opportunity. Will you take on the roles of your ancestors, and do what is expected of you, or shape your own future? Everyone places their hopes and ambitions in you...but you're just a child.

To create a Child, pick a name from the names list, and then decide on your appearance, stats, possessions, moves and relationships.

APPEARANCE

Pick or make up your own:

- hair: shaggy, curly, fiery, unwieldy, raven or soft
- face: bright, round, freckled, dull, dark or gentle
- body: tall, twigggy, full, weak, ravenous or average

STATS

Pick one set and then increase one stat by 1 point:

- +0 versed, +1 young, +0 gendered, -1 wyrd
- -1 versed, +1 young, +0 gendered, +0 wyrd

POSSESSIONS

Warm woolen clothes and two of: a fur blanket, a wooden sword, a straw doll.

MOVES

You get all the basic moves but you don't get any male or female moves.

You get two of these:

Play: When you play with the other kids, roll +gendered. On 10+ you become the leader of the pack, hold 3, on 7-9 you're part of the group, hold 1. Spend your hold 1-for-1 to get the other kids to do what you want, as long as it's considered a game. If the other children are PCs they don't have to follow your lead but they gain 1 bond with you if they do.

Rough world: When you do an adult's job, choose a move from another rolebook and roll +versed. On 10+ you get a 7-9 result, on 7-9 you can attempt to get the same, but you're tempting fate if you try.

Small and quiet: When you do something in secret, roll +young. On 10+ no one notices you, on 7-9 you pull it off, but something unrelated goes wrong.

Strong fate: At the beginning of the session, roll +wyrd. On 10+ hold 3, on 7-9 hold 1. Spend your hold 1-for-1 to give yourself +1 on rolls when tempting fate.

Wee lamb: When you show an adult that you're dependent or vulnerable, gain 1 bond with them.

The next time you pick a move, you can also pick this one:

Growing fast: Gain +1 in one stat of your choice (the highest a stat can be is +3).

ADULTHOOD:

Transfer your character to another rolebook.

- You lose all your Child moves.
- Gain the new rolebook's moves, and pick a set of basic male or female moves.
- Keep everything else including Possessions, Stats and Relationships.

RELATIONSHIPS:

Pick four and name the PCs or NPCs to whom they apply. Gain one bond with each.

- this person is my father
- this person is my mother
- this adult is the scariest
- this is my favourite sibling
- when I grow up, I want to be like this adult
- this person is my favourite playmate
- this person is the stupidest

ADVANCEMENTS:

When you get an advancement, pick one below and erase it from the list.

- pick a new move from your rolebook
- pick a new move from your rolebook
- pick a new move from your rolebook
- pick a new rolebook and create a new character as your second PC



THE WOMAN

You're one of the free women of Iceland, farmers, daughters, wives, mothers. When your neighbours think of what a woman is like (or should be like), they think of someone like you. Maybe you chose this life, maybe it was chosen for you. Either way, you're the standard that other women are compared to.

To create a Woman, pick a name from the names list, and then decide on your appearance, stats, possessions, moves and relationships.

APPEARANCE

Pick or make up your own:

- hair: flowing, shining, red, elaborate, blonde or combed
- face: angular, moon, melancholy, cunning, gentle or stoic
- body: wide, curvy, starved, willowy, wiry or elfin

STATS

Pick one set and then increase one stat by 1 point:

- +0 versed, +1 young, +1 gendered, -1 wyrd
- +1 versed, +0 young, +1 gendered, -1 wyrd

POSSESSIONS

Warm woollen clothes or rich linen clothes, a cloak, sewing kit or a small knife, a box with jewelry worth a handful of silver.

MOVES

You get all the basic moves as well as all the female moves.

You get this move:

Running the house: At the beginning of a session, roll +gendered. On 10+ the house is in order and you hold a bit of silver in excess from managing the inventory. On 7-9 you don't get the excess silver OR the house is lacking:

- drinks (milk or ale)
- food (meat or flour)
- a tool (like a hammer or scissors)
- fabric (wool or linen)

And pick one more:

Family chest: When you scrounge the bottom of your chest in dire need, say what you're looking for and roll +gendered. On a hit it's there, on a 7-9 it's there but there's something wrong with it; ask the MC what is wrong with it.

Kin first: When you put the welfare of a member of your family before your own, gain a bond with them.

Pleasantries: When you act in a kind and friendly manner with someone, gain a bond with them.

Scrutinising eye: When you size someone up, roll +versed. On 10+ ask two, on 7-9 ask one:

- is your character hiding something?
- is your character going to act honourably in the matter of...?
- what is your character most obviously in need of?
- can I trust your character not to...?

She-wolf: When you defend something you hold dear from violence, roll +young. On a 10+ pick two, on 7-9 pick one:

- they back down (if it's a PC it's their choice but you gain a bond with them if they don't)
- they endure grave harm
- nobody else endures grave harm

Skilled hands: When you make or prepare something and you want it to be special, roll +versed. On a hit it's beautiful, pleasing or functional, according to your intention. Additionally, on 10+ pick two, on 7-9 pick one:

- someone desires it, or more of it
- it doesn't cost you too much to make it
- it's durable or long-lasting

Strong-headed: When you set your mind on something, roll +young. On 10+ you gain +1 ongoing, on 7-9 you gain +1 forward to all actions that are in pursuit of that thing, until you get it or it becomes impossible.

RELATIONSHIPS

Pick four and name the PCs or NPCs to whom they apply. Gain one bond with each at the beginning of a session.

- this is my betrothed
- this is my brother
- I know gossip about this one (what is it?)
- this one shares my bed
- this one has wronged my family
- I trust this one completely
- this is my son

ADVANCEMENTS

When you gain an advancement, pick one of these and erase it from the list:

- pick a new move from your rolebook
- pick a new move from your rolebook
- pick a new move from your rolebook
- pick a new move from another female rolebook
- pick a new move from another female rolebook



THE MAN

In Iceland, there's plenty land and it is free. Settling that land it is what one does here. As a free man, that's what your whole life revolves around. People, men, who aren't here to settle, who aren't here to farm – they are outliers, exceptions. In Iceland, you're simply what a man is.

To create a Man, pick a name from the names list, then decide on your appearance, stats, possessions, moves and relationships.

APPEARANCE

Pick or make up your own:

- beard: scruffy, unimpressive, well-groomed, long, bushy or greying
- face: tired, scarred, kind, guarded, dull or cheerful
- body: princely, lean, plump, sturdy, sagging or stocky

STATS

Pick one set and then increase one stat by 1 point:

- +0 versed, +1 young, +1 gendered, -1 wyrd
- +1 versed, +0 young, +1 gendered, -1 wyrd

POSSESSIONS

Warm woolen clothes and a fur cloak. A seax knife or a hatchet. A handful of silver. An old weapon.

MOVES

You get all the basic moves and male moves. You also get these three moves:

Man's work: At the beginning of the session, roll +gendered. On 10+ hold 3 labour, on 7-9 choose one:

- you hold 1 labour
- you hold 3 labour but it's backbreaking and counts as accepting a physical challenge

On a miss, some part of your farmstead is depleted, goes into decay, disrepair or becomes otherwise unusable until you work on fixing the problem.

Farmstead: You own a longhouse and some land on which you live and toil. When you supply the longhouse, spend 1 food and 1 wood to:

- keep its residents warm and fed for a season
- entertain guests
- throw a feast

And choose two adjacent land features:

Fields: When you prepare hay in spring, spend 1 labour to collect 1 hay.

Marshland: When you go digging for peat or bog iron in summer, spend 1 labour to collect 1 wood or 1 ore.

Water: When you go fishing in spring, spend 1 labour to collect 1 food.

Seaside: When you scour the coast for birds, seals or driftwood in summer, spend 1 labour to collect 1 wood or 1 food.

Wilderness: When you go chopping trees and branches, spend 1 labour to collect 1 wood.

1 fabric, 1 food, 1 hay, 1 labour, 1 ore or 1 wood are all worth a few bits of silver each to buy or sell

Husbandry: At the beginning of the game, roll -1. You hold that many head of livestock (cattle, goats and sheep).

Any time from spring to autumn, when you milk or shear your animals, spend 1 head of livestock and 1 labour to collect 1 food or 1 fabric from them.

In winter, roll +hay spent. You hold that many head of livestock for the following year. If you have leftover livestock from the previous year you can immediately collect 1 food or 1 fabric from them but take -1 forward to your roll.

Later on, you can also choose these moves:

Expansion: If you want to add another land feature to your farmstead or add more buildings or animals to your farm, tell the MC. The MC will tell you yes, but will also include two or more things it will cost to obtain it: time, silver, labour, bargains or worse.

Smithy: You have a forge and blacksmith's workshop near your house. When you work on a project there, roll +versed. On a hit you can make a tool or weapon. On 10+ it costs 1 ore and 1 labour, on 7-9 choose one:

- it costs +1 ore
- it costs +1 labour
- it is a weaker, inferior version of what you wanted

Plough: You transform some of your fields into arable land. When you plough and sow at the end of winter, spend 1 labour to hold 1 crop. When you harvest in autumn, roll +crops. On 10+ you collect 3 food, on 7-9 you collect 1 food.

Slaveowner: You own some slaves (perhaps their names are Caoimhe, Weylin and Shylah). At the beginning of a session, roll +food spent on them. On 10+ hold 3 labour, on 7-9 hold 1 labour. On a miss the MC chooses whether they are exhausted, rebellious, starving, sick or several of those.

RELATIONSHIPS

Pick four and name the PCs or NPCs to whom they apply to. Gain one bond with each at the beginning of a session.

- this is my wife
- this is my child
- this is my neighbour
- this is an old friend
- this one will bring nothing but bad luck
- this one is my elder
- I covet something they have

ADVANCEMENTS

When you gain an advancement, pick one from below and erase it from the list:

- pick a new move from your rolebook
- pick a new move from your rolebook
- pick a new move from another male rolebook
- pick a new move from another male rolebook
- pick a new move from another male rolebook



THE MATRIARCH

Once a woman has lived through a few winters, perhaps outlived a few husbands, it's not uncommon that she remains the eldest and most influential member of her family. The inheritor of many fortunes and many tragedies. A woman in that situation usually takes matters in her own hands.

To create a Matriarch, pick a name from the names list, then decide on your appearance, stats, possessions, moves and relationships.

APPEARANCE

Pick or make up your own:

- hair: snow-white, long, concealed, grey, plain, or massive
- face: weathered, angular, warm, lively, scowling or proud
- body: enormous, hard, small, shrouded, frail or stooped

STATS

Pick one set and then increase one stat by 1 point:

- +1 versed, +0 young, +1 gendered, -1 wyrd
- +1 versed, +0 young, -1 gendered, +1 wyrd

POSSESSIONS

Old but rich and well-kept woolen clothes, lots of blankets and animal skins, a key to a hidden chest containing a pouch of silver, a gnarly stick or cooking knife.

MOVES

You get all the basic moves and the female moves and pick two of these:

Beer-giver: When you act as a host for someone, you gain a bond with them.

Common good: When you propose an alliance or collaboration and they accept, you all gain a bond with each other.

Driving a hard bargain: When you bargain with someone, spend a bond with them to reduce their price (measured in silver) by one level, up to getting it for free.

Sturdy as an oak: When you endure grave harm, roll +versed instead of +young.

Storyteller: When you tell a story that is an allegory aimed at someone present, it counts as raising your voice even if it's just myths and tales.

These old eyes: At the beginning of a session, roll +versed. On 10+ hold 3, on 7-9 hold 1. Spend your hold, 1 at a time, to:

- tell someone you've seen and heard it all before and shut them up
- tell someone you've seen it all before and give them -1 forward against you
- tell someone you know their type and gain one bond with them

Wide branches: You gain an additional Relationship.

Wide roots: When you meet someone new, you can tell them how you're related through someone dead, absent or lost and you gain a bond with each other.

RELATIONSHIPS

Pick four and name the PCs or NPCs to whom they apply. Gain one bond with each at the beginning of a session.

- this is my youngest child
- this is my eldest child
- this is my favourite child
- this one is my grandchild
- this one is my great-grandchild
- this one knows nothing
- this one I place my hopes in

ADVANCEMENTS

When you gain an advancement, pick one of these and erase it from the list:

- pick a new move from your role
- pick a new move from your role
- pick a new move from The Woman rolebook
- pick a new move from another female rolebook
- pick a new move from another female rolebook



THE GOÐI

You're one of the goðar, a leader of the community, someone people approach when they need representation, but you're not a noble, your title can be sold away and people can always take their business elsewhere. Your title comes from keeping one of the temples built by the early settlers and acting as one of their religious leaders. These functions gain you wealth and respect, from the fees you charge and the judgements you deliver.

To create a Goði, pick a name from the names list, then decide on your appearance, stats, possessions, moves and relationships.

APPEARANCE

Pick or make up your own:

- beard: massive, white, long, crazy, groomed or beardless
- face: gloomy, hard, feminine, red, solemn or generous
- body: strong, old, spidery, wide, stiff or soft

STATS

Pick one set and then increase one stat by 1 point:

- +1 versed, +0 young, -1 gendered, +1 wyrd
- +1 versed, -1 young, +1 gendered, +0 wyrd

POSSESSIONS

Rich comfortable clothes, warm furs, a ritual arm ring, a handful of hidden silver.

MOVES

You gain all the basic moves, the male moves and this one:

Temple: You have claim to some consecrated ground, maybe just a grove of trees or a small field with a worship pole or perhaps a small building, providing you with the title of goði, a religious and judicial position. You can pass this title on to your heirs or sell it off for a good price. When you're in your temple you take +1 ongoing against any interlopers, enemies or undesirables.

Then pick one more:

Elder: When someone comes to you for advice and you give them the answer they need, gain 1 bond with them and they gain +1 forward when acting upon your advice.

Forbidden seiðr: When you pick this move, gain any female move from the basic moves or from a role-book. If it uses Gendered, you use Wyrð instead.

Hersir: You can send word to your constituents to arm themselves and prepare for battle. Roll +versed. On 10+ they are ready and willing, on 7-9 they have their doubts and demands and want to sit in council first. On a miss, your leadership is put into question and support withdrawn.

Legal Council: When you are asked to pass judgement on a legal dispute, roll +versed. On 10+ your word is taken as law, on 7-9 someone demands a concession, compromise or amendment. Write your judgement down as a precedent for future cases.

Master of Blót: When you call the people forward to sacrifice, roll +versed. On a hit they come. On 10+ they bring sacrifice equal to a handful of silver, on 7-9 they bring sacrifice equal to a bit of silver. For PCs it's always their choice, but their honour may be called into question if they don't attend the ceremony.

Ring of Oaths: When an oath is sworn beneath your ring, both parties gain a bond with each other.

Rites: You can convert your and other people's possessions into sacrifice. Hold sacrifice equal to their level in silver. While conducting a rite you can , spend sacrifice, 1-for-1 to:

- gain a bond with the gods
- give the gods a bond with you
- make it disappear and fill your coffers with an equal level of silver

RELATIONSHIPS

Pick four and name the PCs or NPCs to whom they apply. Gain one bond with each at the beginning of a session.

- this one owes me
- this one has been touched by the gods
- this one has grown apart from me
- this is someone I cannot trust
- I want this one to be part of my family
- I place my ambitions in this one
- this one is a trusted ally

ADVANCEMENTS

When you gain an advancement, pick one of these and erase it from the list:

- pick a new move from your role
- pick a new move from your role
- pick a new move from your role
- pick a new move from your role
- pick a new move from another male role



THE SEIÐKONA

Sorceress, witch, seeress...the skills and powers the people attribute to you are both a powerful and useful tool for the community and a feared and shunned practice. You can foretell the future, mend bones and influence outcomes of battles and arguments. It's up to you how you're going to use those powers.

To create a Seiðkona, pick a name from the names list, and then decide on appearance, stats, possessions, moves and relationships.

APPEARANCE

Pick or make up your own:

- hair: dank, stringy, wild, raven, white or cropped
- face: pale, beautiful, ravaged, disfigured, spiteful, guarded
- body: crooked, sensual, willowy, bony, elfin, sturdy

STATS

Pick one set and then increase one stat by 1 point:

- +1 versed, +0 young, -1 gendered, +1 wyrd
- +1 versed, -1 young, +0 gendered, +1 wyrd

POSSESSIONS

Tattered rags or a rich gown, a warm cloak, a weaving wand (distaff), sheep knucklebones carved with runes, a pouch of herbs, a bit of silver.

MOVES

You gain all the basic moves, the female moves and two of these:

Child of Fate: When you seek something you need, roll +wyrd. On 10+ you will find it or it will be brought to you, on 7-9 it will come to you, but with strings attached.

Curses and Poison: When someone tries to hurt or harm you in some way, roll +wyrd. On 10+ you get both, on 7-9 pick one:

- they're tempting fate as they do so
- when they next endure grave harm, they cannot pick the option that it will get better by itself

Midwife: When you spend bonds to assist a woman, they take +2 forward instead.

Peace-weaver: When you witness a scene of violence, roll +wyrd. On 10+ choose 3, on 7-9 choose 2.

- they will lay down their weapons
- no more harm is done to others
- no harm comes to you
- they don't ask for compensation or restitution

Secret remedies: When you treat someone who has previously endured grave harm, roll +versed. Ignore the outcome of their original roll take your result as their roll, but make all the choices yourself.

Völva: When you roll the rune-carved bones to read the future, roll +wyrd. On 10+ ask the MC one question and answer the rest yourself, on 7-9 ask the MC two questions but the rest is hidden. On a miss the bones predict a terrible misfortune.

- who do I see?
- what circumstance are they in?
- what do I see happening to them?

Spellweaver: When someone asks you to help them with your magic and you agree, gain 3 bonds with them. You can spend those bonds to assist or hinder their actions even at a distance.

RELATIONSHIPS

Pick four and name the PCs or NPCs to whom they apply. Gain one bond with each at the beginning of a session.

- I have foreseen this one's future (what was it)
- this one has wronged me
- I share a secret with this one
- I have shared this one's bed
- this one fears me
- I have a soft spot for this one
- I am bound to this one by fate

ADVANCEMENTS

When you gain an advancement, pick one of these and erase it from the list:

- pick a new move from your role
- pick a new move from your role
- pick a new move from your role
- pick a new move from another female role
- pick a new move from another female role



THE WANDERER

You're not a local. While people are bound by the tradition of hospitality to welcome you under their roof as a stranger you're not necessarily trusted. Either way, you're here for a reason, you have something to do here, something only you are privy to. Are you going to carry out your mission and how will it change the lives of those that live here?

To create a Wanderer, pick a name from the names list, and then decide on your appearance, stats, possessions, moves and relationships.

APPEARANCE

Pick or come up with your own:

- beard: shaved, fuzzy, red, unkempt, unimpressive or dirty
- face: hidden, young, tense, expressionless, bony or dark-skinned
- body: wiry, muscular, skinny, starved, weary or wounded

STATS

Pick one set then increase one stat by 1 point:

- +1 versed, -1 young, +0 gendered, +1 wyrd
- +1 versed, +0 young, -1 gendered, +1 wyrd

POSSESSIONS

Travelling clothes, a tattered cloak, a walking stick, an empty purse, a hidden knife.

MOVES

You gain all the basic moves, the male moves and this one:

Secret: You have a secret, which is the reason why you're here. When you reveal your motivation at an opportune moment, take +1 ongoing until it is resolved.

Then pick one more:

Cunning: When you reveal that you had planned for this all along, roll +versed. On 10+ yes you did and all the details of your plan are in place, on 7-9 you set it up but there is some hitch, delay or unforeseen consequence. On a miss your plan goes horribly wrong.

Disguise: When you present yourself as someone else, roll +versed. On a 10+ they treat you like whoever you pretend to be and they don't see through your disguise. On 7-9 they choose one of these:

- they treat you like whoever you pretend to be
- they don't see through your disguise

Stranger: Increase your Wyrd by 1 point, to a maximum of +3.

Gestur: When someone takes you under their roof as a guest, roll +wyrd. On 10+ they treat you with all the appropriate respect, on 7-9 you get all the formalities, but they won't suffer you for long. If they're a PC it's their choice but their honour is in question if they refuse you.

Odin's own: When you look beyond the world for an answer, roll +wyrd. On a hit you will get an impression or feeling about it. On 7-9 the gods also gain a bond with you.

Raven-eye: When you have time to observe someone unnoticed, roll +wyrd. On 10+ you gain 3 bonds with them, on 7-9 gain 1 bond.

RELATIONSHIPS

When everyone is establishing bonds at the beginning of a session, tell them they cannot name you as a relationship or gain bonds with you in that way. During the first session, when you use a move that targets another character for the first time, create a Relationship with them, and immediately mark it, until you have four Relationships.

ADVANCEMENTS

When you gain an advancement, pick one of these and erase it from the list:

- pick a new move from your role
- pick a new move from your role
- pick a new move from your role
- pick a new move from another male role
- pick a new move from another male role



THE SHIELD-MAIDEN

You're a woman who took up weapons, perhaps because your household lacked men, perhaps just because you wanted to. You take what is seen as a male role, protecting and fighting for your family or the people you serve. While your way of life is not forbidden by society, you nevertheless have to deal with the prejudice and conflicting expectations of many who think they know better.

To create a Shield-maiden, pick a name from the names list, and then decide on your appearance, stats, possessions, moves and relationships.

APPEARANCE

Pick or make up your own:

- hair: short, beautiful, braided, untamed, dull or messy
- face: bright, wide, manly, honest, fierce or angry
- body: curvy, tall, slight, powerful, feminine or squat

STATS

Pick one set then increase one stat by 1 point:

- +0 versed, +1 young, -1 gendered, +1 wyrd
- -1 versed, +1 young, +0 gendered, +1 wyrd

POSSESSIONS

Warm woolen clothes, a cloak or animal skin, a shield, a spear or sword, a few bits of silver.

MOVES

You gain all the basic moves, the female moves and two of these:

Brave: When you tempt fate, gain +1 forward.

Freya's light: If you reveal your gender to an unsuspecting enemy, roll +young. On 10+ they are stunned and unable to react. On 7-9 they can instead choose one:

- flee to safety
- offer a truce

Full of life: Increase your Young by 1 point, to a maximum of +3.

Picker of the slain: When you go through the corpses after a battle, roll +wyrd. On a hit, pick someone who was seemingly dead and they're alive instead. On 7-9 they're alive but also permanently disfigured, maimed or disabled.

Rebelious: When do something that challenges the established order, roll +young.

On 10+, you do it and the order will no longer be the same, on 7-9 you do it this once but the interdiction remains. On a miss, you are put back into your place, perhaps with further consequences.

The company you keep: You can pick a male move from one of their rolebooks. If it uses Gendered, you use Wyrð instead.

True heart: When you put yourself between someone and grave harm, roll +young. On 10+ neither of you come to any harm. On 7-9 you endure the harm instead of them. On a miss, you both endure grave harm.

RELATIONSHIPS

Pick four and name the PCs or NPCs to whom they apply. Gain one bond with each at the beginning of a session.

- I share their blood
- I saved their life
- I have spurned them
- I love them
- I could never betray them
- I am wary of them
- they need my help

ADVANCEMENTS

When you gain an advancement, pick one of these and erase it from the list:

- pick a new move from your role
- pick a new move from your role
- pick a new move from your role
- pick a new move from another female role
- pick a new move from another female role



THE HUSCARL

You're a free man but you don't own any land. Instead, you make a living as a free servant, a house-man, usually acting as a right-hand man and household guard for the family or master that you serve.

To create a Huscarl, pick a name from the names list, and then decide on your appearance, stats, possessions, moves and relationships.

APPEARANCE

Pick or make up your own:

- beard: braided, tangled, dirty, burned, greying or stubby
- face: cruel, calculating, dumb, proud, merry or scarred
- body: bulky, wiry, unassuming, agile, hulking or lean

STATS

Pick one set and then increase one stat by 1 point:

- +1 versed, +0 young, +1 gendered, -1 wyrd
- +0 versed, +1 young, +1 gendered, -1 wyrd

POSSESSIONS

Clothes made of wool & animal furs, a drinking horn, a shirt of mail plus one set of weapons:

- bow, spear and seax
- dane axe and throwing axe
- sword and shield

MOVES

You gain all the basic moves, the male moves and pick two of these:

Belligerent: When you join a fight, invited or no, take a bond with someone present if you both survive.

Berserker: When you charge the enemy without regard for personal safety, yelling and howling, roll +young. On 10+ they all back the hell away or endure grave harm. On 7-9 the same, but only if you choose to press forward and endure harm yourself.

Boasting: When you exalt the reputation of someone present (including yourself), roll +versed. On a hit, that person takes +1 forward when they act on what you said, true or otherwise. On 7-9 that person takes +1 but also tempts fate.

Confidante: When you tell them what you think, whether they ask you or no, roll +versed. On 10+ they pick two, on 7-9 they pick one.

- they erase a bond with you
- you gain a bond with them
- they do what you want

On a miss they shut you out.

No mercy: When someone endures grave harm because of you, on a hit, they can pick one option less than normal.

Raw strength: Gain +1 young, to a maximum of +3.

Viking: You own both a small shallow ship, suitable for raids and have the service of a few men willing to sail with you and follow you into battle. These both come at a cost, either you have to maintain them yourself, for a bit of silver a season, or someone else pays for them, in return for your services.

When you go a-viking in the summer, roll +versed. On a hit, your ship is safe, your crew paid and satisfied and you have a handful of silver worth of goods to show for it. On 10+ choose two, on 7-9 choose one:

- you bring back another handful of silver worth of goods
- you come back before the winter and don't tempt fate on your journey

RELATIONSHIPS

Pick four and name the PCs or NPCs to whom they apply. Gain one bond with each at the beginning of a session.

- I am their servant
- they give me a roof over my head
- I have fought alongside them
- they have insulted me
- I would not trust them with a weapon
- I covet their affection
- I want something of theirs

ADVANCEMENTS

When you gain an advancement, pick one of these and erase it from the list:

- pick a new move from your role
- pick a new move from your role
- pick a new move from your role
- pick a new move from your role
- pick a new move from another male role



THE THRALL

You're a slave, forced into servility through debt or conquest in war. You might be a northlander for whom the only option of survival was to enter serfdom or someone from abroad who was captured in raids. You might see freedom again if you manage to pay off your debts or purchase price to the owner, but it's a long hard road from here to there.

To create a Thrall, pick a name from the names list, and then decide on your appearance, stats, possessions, moves and relationships.

APPEARANCE

Pick or make up your own:

- face: pale, scarred, honest, mournful, delicate or scowling
- body: fit, eye-catching, underfed, growing, prowling or towering
- hair: shaven, red, curly, greasy, balding or black

STATS

Pick one set and then increase one stat by 1 point:

- +1 versed, +1 young, +0 gendered, -1 wyrd
- +1 versed, +1 young, -1 gendered, +0 wyrd

POSSESSIONS

The clothes on your back.

MOVES

You gain all the common moves and choose whether you get male or female moves. Then choose two more:

Gaelic heritage: You are not a Northlander but were brought over from Éire or Scotland. When you share or reveal your shared ancestry to someone through story, language, custom or song, gain a bond with them.

Pay me no mind: When you are in the presence of free people, roll +versed. On a hit, they unsee you, as if you're not there. On 7-9 you're tempting fate if you wish to remain unnoticed. On a miss you get in their way or attract their attention in an unfortunate way.

Strong will: When you defy your owner's commands, roll +young. On 10+ they choose 2, on 7-9 they choose 1:

- erase a bond with you
- give you a bond with them
- ease on their demands

Not a tool: When you act on your own goals, roll +versed. On 10+ choose 3, on 7-9 choose 2:

- you get what you wanted
- gain up to two bonds with someone involved
- erase up to two bonds someone involved has with you
- any transgressions are not noticed

Display of loyalty: When you carry out someone's request, gain 1 bond with them and you can give them a bond with you, if you want. If you put yourself in harm's way while doing it, gain an additional bond.

Hidden gifts: Choose two that you are concealing: a child, a noble bloodline, a powerful secret, a precious object, a valuable skill. You don't have to define them yet. Reveal and detail one or more of your gifts to: save the day, use it as leverage or bargaining chip, turn the tables on someone, get better treatment for yourself or someone else.

Odd customs: Choose a move from any another rolebook, including rolebooks of a different gender.

RELATIONSHIPS

Pick four and name the PCs or NPCs to whom they apply. Gain one bond with each at the beginning of a session.

- they are my master
- they are my master's significant other
- they are my master's close family
- they are my kin, unknown to others
- they are a fellow slave
- they treat me badly
- I am the object of their affection

ADVANCEMENTS

When you gain an advancement, pick one of these and erase it from the list:

- pick a new move from your role
- pick a new move from your role
- pick a new move from a rolebook of your gender
- pick a new move from a rolebook of your gender
- pick a new move from a rolebook of your gender



THE MONSTER

BY SAGE LATORRA

You are... different. Marked physically or socially as an outcast, not only an outlaw, formally excluded from the community, but something else entirely. Some people might say you're not human at all, but the truth of the matter is concealed from everyone, perhaps even from you. Either way, in their eyes you don't look and act like men and women should.

To create a Monster, pick a name from the names list, and then decide on your appearance, stats, possessions, moves and relationships.

APPEARANCE

Pick or make up your own:

- hair: unkempt, fiery, crazed, matted
- face: wild, mad, dark, marked, shifty
- body: powerful, twisted, inhuman, withered

STATS

Pick one set and then increase one stat by 1 point:

- +0 versed, +1 young, -1 gendered, +1 wyrd
- +1 versed, -1 young, +0 gendered, +1 wyrd

POSSESSIONS

Strange clothes, ragged furs, a bloodied knife

MOVES

You start with the basic moves plus this one:

Enemy: When you take something from someone, gain a bond with them.

If you are female you get this move and the basic female moves:

Mother of Beasts: Any child born to you will always be strange, sickly or marked. You take +1 when you entice a man.

If you are male you get this move and the basic males moves:

Dishonoured: Your actions are never considered honourable, and your honour is never is question.

Choose one of these to start with as well:

Heartless: You don't have a heart to look into.

Meddler: When you spend a bond to hinder someone you can choose to give them a bond with you. If you do, they take -2 instead of -1.

Night-stalker: When you tempt fate in darkness, take +1.

Reviled: When you meet someone new you can state how you harmed or offended them through someone dead, absent, or lost and gain a bond with them.

Cursed: When you have a bond with someone and you meet them in combat, you may spend your bond to have them endure grave harm as part of the battle.

RELATIONSHIPS

Pick four and name PCs or NPCs to whom they apply. Gain one bond with each at the beginning of a session.

- this one lost something to me
- this one owes me
- this one has helped me
- this one was once a friend
- I have plans for this one
- this one has drawn my ire
- I blame this one

ADVANCEMENTS

- pick a new move from this rolebook
- pick a new move from this rolebook
- pick a new move from this rolebook
- pick a new move from a rolebook of your gender
- pick a new move from a rolebook of the opposite gender

One day Thord asked Gudrun what consequences it could have for a woman if she wore trousers like the men. Gudrun answered:

“Same as for men who wear shirts cut so low their nipples can be seen - both are grounds for divorce.” Thord made his way to the Law Rock, named witnesses and announced he was divorcing Aud. He rode west with eleven men to claim his share of the property.

[...]

The following summer Aud rode to the house and entered the bed closet where Thord slept. She drew her sword and struck him a grat wound on his right arm with such force that the sword lodged in the wood of the bed.

- The Saga of the people of Laxardal

GOING FORWARD

Hrut drew his sword. Thiostolf saw that, and would not be behind hand, so he cuts at Hrut at once. Hrut got out of the way of the stroke by a quick turn, and at the same time struck the back of the axe so smartly with a side-long blow of his left hand, that it flew out of Thiostolf's grasp. Then Hrut made a blow with the sword in his right hand at Thiostolf's leg, just above the knee, and cut it almost off so that it hung by a little piece, and sprang in upon him at the same time, and thrust him hard back. After that he smote him on the head, and dealt him his death-blow.

-The Saga of Burnt Njall



EXPANDING THE GAME

If you have read all about the structure of moves, the player rolebooks and the MC's framework ,you know everything you need to run and play Sagas of the Icelanders. You can sit down and play through one or more complete sessions without missing anything. You can do it right now. Go play!

However, the game doesn't necessarily stop there, and can be expanded in various ways. The main way to do this is by using an expanded list of moves.

The moves on this expanded list aren't optional in the sense that you can detach them from the game, on the contrary, they have been designed as an integral part of the system. But unlike common moves, they aren't necessary for understanding the basics or to get a game going. They wait patiently on the fringes until you can make good use of them.

The moves on this expanded list work just like regular character moves, the only difference is that they come in play only occasionally and don't reflect the everyday actions characters take throughout the sagas. If common moves are your eye of the storm, the expanded moves are the winds at the storm's edge.

This chapter presents a number of moves you can add to your game and talks about when and how you can introduce them in the game. Additionally, it gives advice on creating your own moves and on handling long-term play, generally taking the game beyond its basic expression.

RELIGION

While rarely explicit, religion is a big part of the sagas. At the time of the writing of the family sagas, Iceland had been Christian for centuries, so we don't get a lot of detail of the beliefs and practices of the author's ancestors, but it's clear that Christianity had been a matter of much consternation and tension at the time. It was a new, bold religion that preached many things, which seemed abominable or strange to the pagans, especially when interpreted without proper context. Christ was called "White", perhaps in contrast to Thor (an Icelandic favourite) who had the nickname Red, perhaps also because at the time the term "white" implied a cowardly and an effeminate character, which is probably how the Norse initially saw the celibate priests who preached love and peace. Being called *argr*, effeminate, was a deadly insult among the pagans, while swearing pagan oaths in court cases (which was paramount to the functioning of the Icelandic legal system) was unthinkable to Christians. This at the very least tore a rift between the old, traditional faith and the new, organized religion.

Eventually, the Icelanders were forced to adopt Christianity on a national level due to economic (foreign Christian powers wouldn't trade with them), political (the Norwegian kings who wanted control over Iceland anyway had been converted long ago and wanted to spread the religion), and social pressures (the increasing number of converts and the disputes with them threatened a large-scale confrontation).

The game, as written, is mostly set in the late 9th or early 10th century, when Christians were still rare and the aforementioned pressures barely noticeable. Once you've played a few sessions, or if you want to set your game a bit later in the saga period, you might want to introduce these moves:

When you accept the gospel of the White Christ, choose any three, more or all:

- must free all your Christian slaves (but not necessarily your pagan slaves)
- must call off your blood feuds
- can now say your honour is in serving Christ if they question it and that's that
- tell the Gods and Fates to erase any and all bonds they have with you
- erase any and all bonds you have with them
- cannot swear by pagan oaths
- cannot eat horseflesh
- can learn to preach the gospel yourself

When you preach the gospel of the White Christ to an audience, roll +versed.

On 10+ hold 3 on 7-9 hold one. Spend your hold 1-for-1 to convert a character present. If they're a NPC, tell the MC to erase their name from their Fronts sheet. If they're a PC it's their choice, but they gain a bond with you if they accept.

When you die a Christian, tell the MC how an aspect of Icelandic culture will change forever once you're gone. This may include the MC rewriting or changing a common move if necessary.

When you die a pagan, roll +versed or roll +3 if you died in a fight or battle.

On a hit your name lives on, affecting those that come after you. Create a token through which your memory survives: a poem, a story, a family heirloom, a runic inscription or something similar. On 10+ you gain 3 bonds, on 7-9 gain one. Spend those bonds at any time to influence those that know your memory.

VIOLENCE & WARFARE

Violence in the sagas is quick and deadly. In many cases we don't even get the description of the attack or weapon used. We are simply told that a blow was dealt and the person died, without any detail. When we do get details, they are sketchy at best. Victims aren't struck down only with weapons but also with rocks, oars, whalebones, farming implements or anything potentially deadly at hand. The vast majority of attacks mentioned in the sagas are carried out with the intent to kill, and over half of those do in fact end with death.

The moves in this game have been written to reflect that. The 'endure grave harm' and 'accept a physical challenge' moves in particular, are meant to cover these kinds of instantaneous and fatal encounters, where everything is over in an instant and the probability of a fatal wound is high.

However, Viking culture held martial skill and weapon craftsmanship in high regard. They prized their weapons greatly, gave them names and perfected the skill of single combat. Many of them lived and died by the sword. The following moves are not considered core to the game, but you can add them to give weapons and armour more significance in your play.

ARMOUR

PCs wearing armour gain this move:

When your armour saves you from grave harm, hold 1 for each following piece of armour that you're outfitted with: a helmet, a shield, leather, mail or lamellar (but not both). Spend as much of your armour hold as you want and roll +hold spent. On a hit it prevents you from enduring grave harm. On 10+ choose 1, on 7-9 choose 2:

- a piece of your armour gets irrevocably destroyed
- you stumble from the impact and lose something important (footing, grip, sight of something...)
- you are inconvenienced (a loose strap, helmet down on your eyes...) and take -1 forward

You regain the hold spent only when you have plenty of time to fix and readjust your armour.

If a NPC is wearing armour the MC can pick one of the options above instead of letting the NPC endure grave harm.

WEAPONS

In order of reach, known weapons are:

- intimate: knife or rock
- hand: hand-axe or seax (machete)
- arm: dane-axe (longaxe) or sword
- close: atgeir (glaive) or spear
- far: thrown hand-axe or thrown rock
- very far: bow or sling

All these weapons always inflict grave harm when used to purpose, but longer weapons always take precedence in terms of who is threatening whom. You cannot threaten someone with a longer weapon unless you somehow close the distance first.

Additionally, weapons have the following traits that interact with the armour move:

Shieldbreaker: When struck with a dane-axe, shields always get destroyed in addition to any other choices picked. You can't pick that the shield is destroyed twice.

Precise: When struck by a sword, PCs take -1 forward on their armour roll and NPCs can't choose to ignore grave harm.

Mail-troll: When struck with a spear or aetgir, mail always gets destroyed in addition to any other choices picked. You can't pick that the mail is destroyed twice.

BATTLES

The core moves and principles can handle intimate, personal violence. If you want some mechanical support for occasions where three or more people involved on each side (usually a dozen or so), you can give the players this move:

When you fight with many against many, pick two that are true of your side:

- you watch each other's back (spend one hold to protect many of you from harm, instead of a few)
- you fight with unmatched savagery (spend one hold to kill many of their number instead of a few)
- your side is aided by seiðr (take +1 forward to your roll)
- you are willing to fight dirty (take +1 forward to your roll)

and two that are true of the other side:

- they outmatch you in numbers or skill (take -1 to your roll)
- they have the advantage of range or high ground (you need to spend one hold to even get to them)
- the gods favour them (take -1 to your roll)
- they are stubborn (you cannot rout them)

Then roll +0 (plus bonuses from above). On 12+ hold 5, on 10+ hold 3, on 7-9 hold 1. Then spend your hold:

- 1 hold so a few of your number are not harmed
- 1 hold so a few of their number are harmed
- 3 hold to rout them
- 3 hold to kill their leader or specific character

Few is about a quarter, many is about half. So if you spend two hold to hurt a few of them twice about a half of them are harmed. After the move is done, there is a lull or break in the action with a chance for parley or demands or your side to retreat.

HÓLMGANGA DUELS

Duels were a way to resolve disputes and court cases or most commonly a way for a man to avenge his honour. If a man or their family was insulted, he could (and usually would) challenge the insulting party to a duel. Hólmganga translates as “island walk” and it might mean the duels were originally fought on islets. The more common and well-documented way is to stake out a piece of ground with a large cloak or hide (or perhaps hazel rods). The demarcated area was square and about three meters on the side. Each man had three shields they could use. If a shield broke, they could replace it until they were left without protection.

Duels were originally fought to the death, but having both feet outside the marked area (willingly or not) counted as a loss as well. Over time, the duels became more symbolic and less brutal. Berserks or professional duelists often abused the earlier, less-regulated form of duels as a kind of legalized robbery or murder, first laying claim to something and then proving their ownership through this ritual practice.

You can run a duel with the rules as they are. Use the 'accept a physical challenge' move to resolve blows and other manoeuvres and the armour move to take the three-shield rule into account. Additionally, you can tweak things a bit with the following move.

When you endure grave harm during a hólmganga duel, you can decide to step or fall back out of the square and lose the duel. You endure no harm if you do so.

THE QUARTER COURT

A legal supplement for Sagas of the Icelanders

BY JASON MORNINGSTAR

[Gregor's note: For game purposes, an ounce of silver is a few bits, a handful is about one mark or eight ounces. Three marks are either a few handfuls or many handfuls, depending on context and your judgment.]

INTRO

Icelandic law is not for the faint of heart. It is both excruciatingly exact and wildly anarchic at the same time - you can win your case by being the one with the most heavily-armed friends, but you can also win it by citing esoteric rules about which of his shipmates a dead man ate the most meals with. If you must plead for justice before a Quarter Court, you best know which approach will keep you from being outlawed - or worse.

GUIDE TO THE QUARTER COURT

There are four Quarter Courts, representing the four cardinal directions of the island, convened yearly at the grand national gathering called the Alþing. Each hears disputes that fall, generally, within its geographic domain.

When a dispute reaches the Quarter Court (fjórðungsdómur) it is a very serious matter. Individual Goði maintain their own lower courts, usually empaneling twelve men to settle local matters. Most cases are settled through arbitration before a Quarter Court is even considered. One tactic that can be used right up

until the moment a court convenes is to offer self-judgment and allow the opposing party to set whatever terms they think fair. Self-judgment can be demanded by a crushingly powerful opponent, or offered as a sign of goodwill when you are confident of your opponent's wisdom and moderation.

Anyone can bring a personal suit to be heard by a Quarter Court. Suits are typically argued by Goðis, close family members, or more rarely the aggrieved parties themselves. Suits can also be given (or even sold!) to men more likely to succeed, such as powerful Goði with strong social and political connections to other Judges - or a big war-band.

Each Quarter Court consists of 36 judges, nominated by and representing various Goði within the quarter. Judges must be free men over the age of twelve with established homes, and they must be capable of taking responsibility for their speech and actions, because they give their word of honor (no small thing) to judge well and true. The Quarter Court Judges are selected by lot and your case may be heard by qualified men from all over Iceland from every social station and profession. A few may be sympathetic, a few may be loyal to your Goði, but many may well be strangers. Judges can be challenged on grounds of kinship by blood, marriage, or spirit, legal involvement, or a lack of legal status (if they are a slave or outlawed, for example).

Everyone involved - Judges, witnesses, and litigants - is required to take a solemn oath upon a blood-reddened ring. They must swear not only to be truthful, but to also punctiliously follow the law in the prosecution of their case. The law itself is a living thing comprised of oral tradition, a slippery beast indeed. For a Christian to swear a pagan oath is unthinkable.

Witnesses are only allowed to testify on what they saw and heard personally. The penalty for perjury is Full Outlawry (see below) or death. This doesn't always stop perjurers, of course.

The decisions of a quarter court must indicate broad consensus. If more than six of the 36 judges dissent the case is deadlocked and returned to the two parties to sort out themselves - a dangerous outcome that often leads to feuds. There are strong political incentives to reach a verdict.

The Quarter Court has no enforcement powers. Once a verdict is rendered, it is up to the winner to enforce the judgment. There may be third parties who are eager to help, for a price.

PASSING JUDGMENT

Judges have unlimited latitude in handing down verdicts and associated punishments. It is not only possible but also likely that an unjust or excessively harsh sentence will be challenged - sometimes at the point of a sword. Here are some possible outcomes to legal cases:

FINES AND COMPENSATION

Fines are the most common form of punishment.

Setting the nature and amount of a fine and the terms of compensation is a tricky business. If it is too heavy for the guilty party to pay, the verdict will only lead to more problems. If it is too light the grievance will remain to fester. In addition the more sword-arms standing ready on the loser's side, the lighter the fine is likely to be.

A fine might be in marks of silver or it might be in goods, land, or even a hereditary claim (such as the right to be a Goði). In most cases the fine would seek to redress the wrong - a cattle thief might be forced to provide restitution in the form of more cattle, for example.

For a minor offense (one either too trivial to appear before a Quarter Court or one nearly balanced in culpability) the fine could be a single mark, or some meaningful bit of property like a slave, or a season of labor.

For a more serious offense, the fine could be several marks, or one or more head of livestock (“the value of a cow” is a legal term), or perhaps specific skilled services.

A very serious offense could see the guilty party forfeiting land or valuable property like a boat or sword, treasures and fine goods, or many marks of silver. Such a fine might be intended not only to hurt the coin purse, but also to shame.

It is up to the victor to collect from the guilty party.

WEREGILD

Weregild is the fine paid to satisfy the outrage of an unlawful killing. It is a way to channel righteous anger and avoid a blood feud and, as such, the paying of weregild is a political as well as moral imperative. Declining to pay the weregild is a grave insult that will inevitably spark serious reprisals, possibly for generations to come.

The price usually set to atone for the death of a free man is four silver marks, to be paid by the killer and his family, followed by an oath swearing that peace has returned and honor restored. For a Goði, foreign noble or other person of power, the price will be higher - at least four, but possibly many more. Other strings may be attached to the act of atonement.

DUELS

A duel (holmganga) can be the result of deliberation, and its outcome will be used to resolve the case. Duels are fought in a ritual space contained within a roped-off square, usually on an island in a stream. Each challenger is given three shields; when all three of one man's shields are broken the duel is over. Obviously it may end sooner if somebody yields or dies. To refuse a legal dueling challenge is effectively an admission of guilt. Professional duelists use this provision to target the weak and the old. No one likes a professional duelist.

ENSLAVEMENT

If you are in debt, you may be required to work as chattel until the debt is discharged. Such a person is known as a bound debtor (skuldarmaðr) and has few legal rights. Once the debt has been paid, you are returned to your former status. Since this is a humiliating blow, most families will come up with the money to pay the outstanding debt, rather than see one of their own temporarily enslaved. Of course this just shifts the debt to family members, which leads to other complications.

LESSER OUTLAWRY

You have three summers to leave Iceland. Each summer you must ask for passage on three outbound ships (to refuse passage will result in a 3 mark fine to the ship owner). Until you leave you are limited to three dwellings, no more than a day's journey apart. If you encounter others on the road you must remove yourself by the distance of a thrown spear. Once abroad, you must remain away for three years. To violate any of these conditions instantly makes you a full outlaw, but to fulfill them means that in as little as three years you could be a productive member of society again. With enough support, it is possible to negotiate lesser outlawry down to a hefty fine.

FULL OUTLAWRY

Your lands and goods will be forfeit. You may not be assisted or given sanctuary by anyone, and you may not be assisted in leaving the country. If you do manage to leave, you may never return. If you violate these conditions you will be considered rightfully killable (réttdræpur) and unprotected by law. To be a proper outlaw is to endure a lonely, short life of discomfort and uncertainty - unless something changes to end your sentence. As fair game, it is not uncommon for the winners to put a price on the head of the loser (traditionally three marks) when the legal outcome is Full Outlawry. A pregnant woman cannot suffer Full Outlawry.

HEREDITARY PRECEDENCE

Many cases before a Quarter Court will involve inheritance. As enshrined in law, the traditional precedence, from highest priority to lowest, is:

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. Legitimate son. | 7. Legitimate brother born of the same mother. |
| 2. Legitimate daughter. | 8. Legitimate sister born of the same mother. |
| 3. Father. | 9. Illegitimate son. |
| 4. Legitimate brother born of the same father. | 10. Illegitimate daughter. |
| 5. Mother. | 11. Illegitimate brother. |
| 6. Legitimate sister born of the same father. | 12. Illegitimate sister. |

Inheritance is divided equally among all heirs in the highest qualifying class. If no heirs can be identified in any of the above classes, inheritance rights continue in this order (all of whom must be legitimate):

1. Paternal and maternal grandfather, sons' son and daughter's son.
2. Paternal and maternal grandmother, son's daughter and daughter's daughter.
3. Paternal and maternal uncle, brother's son and sister's son.
4. Paternal and maternal aunt, brother's daughter and sister's daughter.
5. First cousin.
6. Closest legitimate relative.

LEGAL MOVES

If you have been nominated and accepted as a Judge in a Quarter Court, you acquire the following moves that only apply when directly related to legal proceedings:

DELAYED JUSTICE

When you convince two parties to restrain themselves and take their grievances to the Quarter Court or negotiate a binding settlement to a serious complaint before it reaches Quarter Court, gain 1 bond with each of the principals. If you manage to do both, gain two bonds with each!

BOUND BY DUTY

When you rule against your Goði or a member of your family, they gain 2 bonds with you and you will suffer their open scorn or simmering anger as appropriate.

JUDGE

When you speak your mind, roll +versed.

On a hit, the other Judges listen to you. On 10+ hold 3, on 7-9 hold 1. Spend your hold 1-for-1 to give advice on a favorable course of action (they enjoy +1 forward) or warnings against a misguided course of action (they suffer -1 forward). On a miss your honesty or wisdom is called into question.

When you are elected Lawspeaker for all of Iceland you acquire this move:

Lawspeaker

The Lawspeaker (Lögsögumaður) is an honorary position that is granted for a period of three years. Law-speakers recite a third of the law each year at the Alþing and hold no temporal power per se, but enjoy great influence due to their prestige. There is only one lawspeaker in all of Iceland at any given time.

When you speak the law before the assembled host, hold 3. Spend your holds, 1 for 1:

- add a bond between any two people present
- remove a bond between any two people present
- goad a man into action (per the female move of the same name)

OATHS

A Judge's Oath

"I name these men to witness that I swear an oath upon this blood-reddened ring, a lawful oath, and declare before the Gods that I shall give such judgment as I think to be the law."

DECLARING A TRUCE

“Now the earth upholds this truce, on high the sky bounds it, and around it is the red ocean. Within these borders that I have now described may no man nowhere thrive who breaks this truce that I have now set. And may he bind himself so heavy a burden that he never gets from under it, and that is the harshness of the Gods and the name “truce-revener”. May the Gods be gracious to he who keeps this truce but harsh to him who breaks it. Take it and prosper. Truce is given.”

DECLARING A JUST PEACE

“[A] and [B], you two are now to be men reconciled and able to keep company over beer and board, in assembly and battle, in the temple and before the Goði of the land, and you shall be as much at one as if this had never arisen between you. You shall share knife and meat and all things with each other like family and not like foe. And if matters later come up between you that are other than smooth, you shall redress them with silver and not redden the spear. Now [A] and [B] are agreed, and of one mind. Keep well this peace.”

DECLARING SOMEONE A FULL OUTLAW

“For [nature of offense] I declare [A] to be under penalty as a Full Outlaw, not to be sustained, not to be given passage, not to be given saving advice. I claim that all his property is under penalty, half to [B] and half to all the men of the Quarter to whom property under penalty is due. I name you as witnesses here in the Quarter Court of this verdict now, this summer, against [A].”

POTENTIAL COURT CASES

With suggested penalties. Typically you have until the third sunrise to claim injury.

MATTERS OF LAW

Refusing to take a lawful oath

Twelve mark fine. If the oath is to guarantee a truce, Lesser Outlawry. Note that a Christian is bound by faith not to swear an oath to false Gods upon a blood-reddened ring.

DELAYING OR DISRUPTING A LAWFUL ASSEMBLY

Lesser Outlawry

IGNORING OR BREAKING A QUARTER COURT JUDGMENT

Lesser Outlawry

BREAKING A SWORN PEACE

All compensation already paid is doubled, along with oath-breaking penalties.

PERJURY

Full Outlawry or death

LOVE AND MARRIAGE

Betrothal

The groom is expected to pay a bride price of at least one mark, usually matching the dowry. Without this a marriage is invalid and any offspring are not lawful heirs.

UNLAWFUL INTERCOURSE

A woman's husband or closest male kin is the aggrieved party. In the case of adultery, six marks or Lesser Outlawry are the usual punishments. In the case of rape, the penalty is Full Outlawry and the aggrieved party (and the woman herself) may kill the perpetrator with impunity.

In the event of attempted or actual rape, a man has the right to kill for the honor of his wife, daughter, mother, sister, foster daughter or foster mother.

BIGAMY

Lesser Outlawry

UNLAWFUL PATRIMONY

A man can be charged with both unlawful intercourse and fathering an unlawful child in two separate suits. The penalty is maintenance of the child, plus whatever fine (some flavor of Outlawry) for the unlawful intercourse. If the woman is a slave, the penalty is three marks.

INCEST

With close kin (second cousin or closer), the penalty is Full Outlawry. With more distant kin, it is Lesser Outlawry. Failing to call out and prosecute a case of incest incurs a three mark fine.

WRITING LOVE POETRY TO A MARRIED WOMAN

Lesser Outlawry

THEFT AND DISHONOR

Theft of food, regardless of value, or any item worth more than two ounces of silver

Full Outlawry or slavery, if caught in the act with the property in hand. A thief who admits his crime will still be outlawed but not shamed with a charge of thieving.

DEROGATORY SPEECH

Six mark fine if the speech can in no way be taken in a good sense, three mark fine if it could be taken in both a good and bad sense. Raising a shame-pole (niðstang) against someone is considered slander and subject to Lesser Outlawry.

WRITING AND SHARING POETRY WITH MOCKING OR SCORNFUL INTENT

Full Outlawry, even if the subject is dead. If the subject matter of the poetry implies that the target is a womanly man or has been violated by another man, the victim has the right to kill the poet or speaker.

TRANSVESTISM

Lesser Outlawry, including women who take up arms and armor and masquerade as warriors.

BURYING GOLD AND SILVER IN THE GROUND FOR SAFEKEEPING

Lesser Outlawry

CONCEALING OR MOVING BOUNDARY MARKINGS

Lesser Outlawry

CONCEALING OR DESECRATING A CORPSE

Full Outlawry

VAGRANCY (“pointless journeys within a Quarter for half a month or more, accepting charity”)

A fine, or, if the man is able-bodied and capable of work but refuses, Full Outlawry. There is no penalty for castrating lawfully recognized vagrants, even if it results in their death.

LAND, LIVESTOCK AND PROPERTY

Working another man’s land without permission or damaging livestock

Three mark fine

FAILING TO CLOSE A PASTURE GATE

One mark fine

VIOLENCE

Assault (“When a man cuts, shoots, strikes or throws at a man”)

Lesser Outlawry

MURDER

Full Outlawry unless the killer is under the age of twelve. Killing a pregnant woman means committing two murders. In the event of multiple parties committing the crime, the Judges must choose one to be considered the killer; that man’s family must pay the weregild. A slave outlawed for killing his master is to have his hands and feet cut off if later captured.

INTERFERING WITH ANOTHER MAN'S SLAVE

Beating - one mark fine. Killing - Lesser Outlawry, with a right to avenge the slave's death immediately, but not later. Rape or attempted rape - the injured party has the same rights as a free person would to seek vengeance. If a slave dies defending his master the penalty is Full outlawry for his death.

ACCIDENTAL INJURY

"It is prescribed that there are no such things as accidents. A man who holds a weapon is not under penalty if he holds it still and a man lurches against the weapon and gets scratched."

PLOTTING TO INJURE OR DISFIGURE

Lesser Outlawry, although by a legal quirk there is no penalty for plotting outside Iceland, provided no action is taken.

BURNING AN OCCUPIED BUILDING

Full Outlawry

PULLING OFF A MAN'S HELMET

Three mark fine. But! If a helmet has a chinstrap and it is pulled forward the penalty is Lesser Outlawry. If the helmet has a chinstrap and it is pulled backward, that is considered throttling and the penalty is Full Outlawry.

ABDUCTION OF A WOMAN BY FORCE

Full Outlawry for the perpetrator and anyone who assists or harbors him.

DOG AND TAME BEAR ATTACKS

If your pet draws blood, that's a three mark fine. If medical attention is needed, that's Lesser Outlawry. If your pet kills a man, it is treated as though you killed him yourself.

COOL LEGAL CONUNDRUMS

A player character could play any role in these dramas, of course.

A CONFUSING DEATH

A man is accused of murder. There are a dozen witnesses; half say he stabbed the deceased and half say the deceased tripped and fell upon the accused's sword. Their testimony splits, predictably, along clan lines.

A powerful Goði who leads the "fell on the sword" faction is called as a Judge, but his neighbor, who sympathizes with the "cold-blooded murder" faction, claims that the prospective Judge failed to close a shared pasture gate, initiates a legal case, and declares the Goði, thus enmeshed as a defendant in a legal case, is not eligible for the Quarter Court by law. The Goði counter-claims that the gate suit is frivolous and designed only to prevent him from testifying and acting as a Judge, which is a crime itself, with a penalty of Lesser Outlawry if proven.

So: Did the Goði fail to close a pasture gate? If so, his fine is one mark and he cannot be a Judge at the Quarter Court this season. If not, was the suit brought frivolously? If so, the penalty is Lesser Outlawry. Did the murder defendant kill the deceased or was the death accidental? The result probably hinges on the presence

of the powerful Gođi, who if present can argue (with several dozen strong men to back him up) that the killing was the dead man's fault.

STRONG WORDS

(This can easily be layered atop another simmering legal case)

A man recites a poem referring to another man's breath as a "hot breaker of trees", a popular kenning usually meaning the wind. To the subject of this poem, the implication is that he is a loud-mouthed braggart of little substance. The poet swears it was intended as a compliment, honoring the subject's strength and courage.

TROUBLE ON THE WHALE-ROAD

A whale-hunting fisherman harpooned a whale, but lost it. A property-owning woman, a widow with land but little else, subsequently found a dead whale washed up on her beach. She claims there was no harpoon in it, but the fisherman found his broken harpoon nearby. It was more than a bow-shot distant, which puts it out of legal range of association, but it was beneath a pile of guts that may have come from the very whale the widow was flensing.

If the whale was killed by the fisherman he is entitled to half its value, shared with the land-owner, by law. If the woman deliberately concealed the harpoon, the penalty is either Full Outlawry, or three marks plus double the whale's value at the discretion of the accuser.

THE MILK THIEF

The 12-year-old daughter of a wealthy man takes pity on some suffering and impoverished neighbors, surreptitiously bringing their baby milk from her father's cow. The family gratefully accepted it.

The father brings suit against the head of the poor family. If he knowingly accepted milk taken from his wealthy neighbor without leave, he is liable for Full Outlawry or a six mark fine. The poor man would be forced into debt slavery, which, some suggest, was the rich man's plan all along.

THE NEIGHBOR'S OUTRAGE

A finds his neighbor B consorting with A's wife. A tries to kill the man, but B's slave intercedes and is himself killed.

The husband, A, insists the two were engaged in sexual congress. B insists he was merely kissing the wife with her permission, a three-mark offense for which he is prepared to pay. Why would his slave be present if he was having intercourse? The wife insists he was kissing her without her permission, which is effectively attempted rape and deserves Lesser Outlawry.

The shamed husband goes to law. "I call you to Judge because [B] has lain with my wife [wife] and gone so far that he might expect that they might get a child if that was destined for them. For this cause I claim that he must be under penalty as a Full Outlaw, not to be sustained, not to be given passage, not to be given saving advice. I claim that all his property is under penalty, half to me and half to all the men of the Quarter to whom property under penalty is due. I name you as witnesses that I call the Quarter Court to deliver a verdict now, this summer, against him or for him."

The neighbor, B, brings counter-suit for the death of his slave. Because he died defending his master, the traditional punishment for the slave's death is Full Outlawry.

Source

Andrew Dennis, Peter Foote and Richard Perkins, translators. Laws of Early Iceland : Codex Regius of Grágás, with material from other manuscripts, volumes I and II. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1980

These books are a gold mine of story seeds for every Sagas game, chock full of cattle stealing, adultery, murder, mendacity and malfeasance - recommended!

EPISODIC AND TROUPE PLAY

If you want to mix things up in regards to how the game is played, there are two twists that may help you to get a generational saga out of the game:

When a session reaches a natural conclusion point, simply wrap up your current game, and start a new game some (or many) years later, within the same “continuity”. Explore the long-term consequences of your predecessors’ actions.

Rotate the role of MCs, each running a short campaign (1-5 sessions), each taking place later in the history of Iceland.

These are just two techniques that you can try out and combine to achieve a broader narrative similar to the Icelandic chronicles.

LONG-TERM PLAY

The entire saga period presents a three hundred years-wide window in which to place your stories. That is a very long time indeed. Most games, even the longest campaigns, usually cover just a few months or years in the lives of a few characters. But if you want to take advantage of the sagas’ epic time scale, you have a number of tools at your disposal.

The rules support games that cover longer periods of time right out of the gate. On the MC side, a number of principles and moves are already aimed at creating a sense of the passage of time and move the game forward when necessary. The MC should make liberal use of the ‘change the seasons’ move, especially during periods of downtime, lulls in the action or when a larger conflict (or front) gets resolved. Hinting at the

future, and bringing back the past creates a sense of continuity and connects events over time. Fulfilling prophecies gives the sense (so common to Norse culture) that the future is determined and inescapable.

On the players' side the first thing to note is that characters are relatively fragile and outstandingly mortal when exposed to various dangers. Expect your characters to die. Nay, embrace it. To mitigate character loss, you have several opportunities to create new or additional characters or change your old characters. You can also play children and let them grow up. I'm not suggesting you should treat your characters as entirely disposable pawns – no, treat them as human beings, get in their shoes, look through their eyes and let them get under your skin. But don't grow too attached to them either and be ready to let them go when the time comes. As time passes you can create a wide family of personages and as the MC changes the seasons and years pass you will find yourself playing descendants, heirs, friends and other people related to your original characters.

However if your group is planning on running a long term game, covering a lot of history, there is one more tool at your disposal: Campaign questions. The MC should use these questions as the focus of the game. They are similar to the Stakes that you create for your Fronts but they are questions that you try to answer over the course of the whole campaign. They don't pertain to individual or their fates, but the fate of Iceland as a whole, the fate of the Commonwealth.

Don't feel limited by history. You might come up with an alternate course of events with a different outcome than the one found in history books and that's ok. As with the stakes, answer the questions in play and through play, without settling on an answer beforehand. However, these questions have been pre-written for you. Choose a few that you find interesting and make them the core issue of your game.

- Will Iceland accept Christianity? If so, how will it come about?
- Will men's behaviour become determined by something other than tradition and honour?
- Will women's position in society shift or change? Will their rights lessen or grow?
- How will the relationship between the sexes change or adapt?
- What laws will be established? How will a legal system take form?
- What are the consequences of an honour-based society?
- What are the consequences of using blood feuds as a regulative mechanism?
- Will a ruling class emerge? How and why?

Hrut came home, and knit his brows when he heard his wife was gone, but yet kept his feelings well in hand, and stayed at home all that half-year, and spoke to no one on the matter. Next summer he rode to the Thing, with his brother Hauskuld, and they had a great following. But when he came to the Thing, he asked whether Fiddle Mord were at the Thing, and they told him he was; and all thought they would come to words at once about their matter, but it was not so. At last, one day when the brothers and others who were at the Thing went to the Hill of Laws, Mord took witness and declared that he had a money-suit against Hrut for his daughter's dower, and reckoned the amount at ninety hundreds in goods, calling on Hrut at the same time to pay and hand it over to him, and asking for a fine of three marks. He laid the suit in the Quarter Court, into which it would come by law, and gave lawful notice, so that all who stood on the Hill of Laws might hear.

-The Saga of Burnt Njall

APPENDICES

“I went to purchase a larger ship. They treated me very badly, but you’re such a coward that you will repay neither dishonour done to me nor to yourself. I am now paying the price of being so far from my home, and unless you avenge this, I will divorce you!” [...] Soon all the men had been killed.

-The Saga of the Greenlanders



I: MEDIOGRAPHY

Here's some of the stuff I was inspired by while writing the game. I haven't actually checked out a few, but they were recommended by others and I trust them.

PROSE:

- The Poetic Edda
- The Sagas of Icelanders

COMICS:

- Northlanders comic
- Vinland Saga manga

MUSIC:

- Váli: Forlat
- Tenhi: Väre
- Ulver: Kveldssanger

INTERNET PAGES:

- Hurstwic
- iceland.org
- northvegr.org
- The BBC History page
- The Viking Answer Lady
- Wikipedia articles related to Iceland and its history

MOVIES & TV:

- 13th Warrior
- Valhalla Rising
- Beowulf & Grendel
- Flight of the Raven
- History Chanel's Vikings
- In the Shadow of the Raven
- Deadwood (*different period, but similar problems*)

GAME BOOKS:

- Rune
- GURPS: Vikings
- Apocalypse World
- Runequest: Vikings
- BRP: Mythic Iceland
- Love in the time of Seið
- Ragnoarock (Agon hack)
- Ars Magica: Mythic Scandinavia

NONFICTION:

- Lonely Planet Guide – Iceland
- Tom Bloch-Nakkerud - The Vikings
- R.I. Page - Chronicles of the Vikings
- Rudolf Pörtner - Die Wikinger-Saga
- Jane Petersen - De Norske Vikingsverd
- Yves Cohat - Vikings: Lords of the Seas
- Jesse Byock – Feud in the Icelandic Saga
- Magnus Magnusson - Viking: Hammer of the North
- Julian D. Richards - The Vikings: A very short introduction
- Jesse L. Byock – Medieval Iceland: Society, Sagas and Power
- William R. Short – Icelanders in the Viking Age: The People of the Sagas
- The Northern World: The history and heritage of northern Europe, AD 400-1100
- Theodore M. Andersson – The growth of the Medieval Icelandic Sagas (1180 – 1280)

II: RECIPES

Traditional Icelandic dishes feature ingredients that are hard to get a hold of overseas as well as flavours that we foreigners aren't used to. Some examples include fermented shark meat, boiled sheep heads and puffins in milk sauce.

Here I've included some recipes for dishes that are both easy to prepare and include easy-to-find ingredients. They are not traditional Icelandic recipes, exactly. Think of them rather as "remixes", appropriate for the gaming table if you're looking to add some thematic food to your gaming sessions.

All the fundamental ingredients that you're going to need were known or regularly used by saga-period settlers in Iceland. All the recipes are rather spartan, but savoury.

PEA SOUP

roughly 1 cup (225 g) of peas
1 large onion
2 tablespoons of (salted) butter
a glass (2 dcl) of milk
a fistful (10 dag) of diced salt-cured lamb (*or pork which should be easier to find*)

If you're using dry peas, make sure you have soaked them for the time indicated on the package (typically 8 hours or overnight). If you're in a hurry, you can use canned peas instead. Add the peas to boiling water sufficient to barely cover the peas, and simmer for 20 minutes for dried peas, or 10 minutes for canned peas.

Dice the onion. Melt the butter in a pan over a low flame, taking care not to let it turn brown. Add the onion, and fry it gently, stirring all the time, until it becomes translucent. Add the meat and the peas without draining them, and cook everything together for another fifteen minutes or so. Then add the milk and cook for another five minutes. You can mash the peas into a purée or serve it as-is. If you want to pretend you're a wealthy settler, with good trading connections season to taste with black pepper, thyme and add a bay leaf while it's cooking.

This is a speedy version. If you're not in a hurry, lower the flame and let simmer for another hour or so. If you're a vegetarian, the meat is optional. Peas were one of the very few vegetables that the early settlers were able to grow due to the harsh conditions and pea soup is a common Icelandic dish today, so it's not unlikely the settlers ate something like this.

SALMON FLATS

10 dag of smoked salmon
butter
1 and a half cup (3 dag) of barley flour
half a cup (1 dcl) of warm water
optional:
pinch of salt
1 teaspoon honey

Mix the flour and water thoroughly until you have a firm dough. Heat up a griddle pan or skillet on the stove. With a bottle or rolling pin, flatten out walnut-sized balls of dough into thin, flat discs. One by one, place the flat loaves on the griddle and cook them for about 30 seconds on each size.

Serve while they are still hot, spread butter on them so it melts and garnish with slices of smoked salmon.

You can add the salt and honey to the dough mix for added flavour.

OATS WITH FRUIT AND NUTS

1 cup of milk or water per person

$\frac{1}{2}$ – $\frac{3}{4}$ cup of oatmeal per person

some, any or all:

cranberries,

blueberries,

diced apples,

crushed walnuts

and hazelnuts

a spoonful of honey

optional: a spoonful of butter

Leave the oatmeal soaking in water or milk, preferably overnight if you can store it in a cool place. After soaking, cook the oatmeal and remaining water or milk until it soaks up all the remaining liquid. Take it off the stove and mix in your honey and choice of nuts and fruits.

Alternatively, the cooked oatmeal can be made into a cake. Stir in some melted butter or other fatty binding ingredient, and bake it at 180°C (or 360°F) for 15-20 minutes.

LAVER WITH CHEESE AND EGGS

a few sheets of dried nori (*I'm assuming most of you can't get fresh laver where you live*)

a couple of scallions

a pinch of salt

some ground black pepper

1-2 eggs per person

Seaweed was one of the few sources of vitamins and minerals commonly available to the Icelandic settlers. A particular kind of seaweed, known as Laver is still commonly used today in the traditional dishes of Wales (and many other places along the British western coast). Laver is more commonly known as nori to the rest of the world (the kind used to make sushi).

You can quickly toast the nori over an open flame to improve the flavour if you're able to do that (be careful not to burn it) and then break it into flakes. Finely dice the scallions. Break the eggs into a bowl and beat them well. Add the spices and scallions.

Melt some butter or heat up a few drops of vegetable oil in a skillet, over a medium heat. Add the scallions and let them simmer for a few moments before you pour your egg mixture over them.

After a while, use a wooden spatula to lift up the edge of the omelette and run the spatula around, letting the liquid parts of the egg flow under it. When you're confident that the bottom is cooked, flip the omelette. When it's done on both sides, cut it in equally sized slices like a cake for all your guests. Serve with a side of some goat cheese.

III: VIKING LOVE LIFE

BY ELIN DALSTÅL

Let's dive deeper into Viking love life, because in order to tell these stories, it's important to understand the gender roles of the sagas. This chapter is about free men and women. Thralls were seen as property and very little of what is discussed in this chapter holds true for them.

MARRIAGE

Marriage was the union of two families, rather than two individuals, and was often organized by the families for economic or diplomatic reasons. Neither bride nor groom were "given away" to the other family, and after being married they were both still considered members of the respective families that raised them. Their marriage was a union of those families.

When a marriage was to be arranged, the future husband had to agree to the marriage, however male relatives made the decision for the bride. Normally the bride was asked for her opinion, but her consent was not needed. Forcing a bride into marriage was seen as ill-advised, but was nevertheless occasionally done.

However widows were an exception to these customs. A widow could not be forced to remarry, and neither could her family refuse her to remarry. Her family could refuse three suitors, but after that they had no say in whom she remarried.

In general women did agree to the marriages, because if the marriage didn't work out, they could get a divorce.

DIVORCE

During this period there was a gender imbalance on Iceland. Most of the settlers were men, and female infanticide was common during hard times. A woman of marriageable age was likely to find a new man if she divorced her husband, but only a rich man could be sure to find a new wife. This made divorce into a powerful threat for a wife to use against her husband.

Divorce was common and Vikings divorced each other much for the same reasons people do today: bitter and loveless marriages, sexual problems, economic reasons, cheating, fighting, infertility, or conflict between their families.

In addition spousal abuse was another reason for divorce. To slap your spouse was not only a personal insult, but an insult to their family as well. This was especially true if a man raised a hand against his wife, because violence against women was a taboo in itself. A man who slapped his wife could, at best, expect forgiveness, but not forgetfulness. At worst, he would suffer death at the hand of his wife or her family. That might not even be the end of it, as a single slap could result in generations of blood feuding and murder.

As far as getting a divorce is concerned, there were few formalities involved. If someone stated twice in front of witnesses that they divorced their partner and the reason why, they were divorced. Then the families had to sort out economic settlements and custody of the children. In general the woman had the right to her dowry, her morning gift and one third of any shared property. The man had his bride price returned from the bride's family and kept two thirds of the shared property. The party wanting the divorce was penalized in the economic settlement, unless the other partner was to blame for the divorce in some way, in which case the guilty party had to pay a fine.

As for custody, toddlers and babies were always given to the mother. Older children were divided between the families, taking into account their ability to support them.

LOVE

The Vikings had a concept of romantic love. True love was something that could grow once you were married and had gotten to know your spouse. A consensual relationship of respect, passion and tenderness was the stuff of poems. Some marriages were out of love, but they usually happened later in life. Since both divorce and premature death were common, many people married more than once. Sometimes, those later marriages were for love. Someone who had already been married was deemed mature enough to understand love, but also considered to have fulfilled their duty to their family through their first marriage.

SEX AND ATTRACTION

Lust and sexual needs were seen as normal and healthy in both men and women. In the marriage bed, sexual pleasure was seen as important for both partners.

Also Vikings dressed to be attractive and to display their wealth. Gold jewelry, fine clothes and impressive craftsmanship were things to be displayed if you could afford it. Grooming and cleanliness was important for both genders, and a weekly wash was customary.

Moreover both men and women displayed their bodies as sexually attractive. Women could spend days wrinkling their dresses before a feast to make them fit as skin tight as possible, and wore big brooches and rows of beads on their chests to accentuate their breasts. Men showed off their bodies through competitions and wrestling at social events.

Even though sex was a common topic to talk and joke about, sexual insults were serious offenses. Hinting at male homosexuality, bestiality or likening a man to a female animal was a deadly insult to a man's honor. Accusing a woman of incest or unfaithfulness were likewise grave insults.

SEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS OUTSIDE OF MARRIAGE

Unmarried men could have all the sex they wanted, as long as it wasn't with another man, a relative or another man's wife. Married men on the other hand could only have mistresses and bed slaves, and it was expected of their wives to tolerate this, since neither could threaten their social positions. Bed slaves were slaves, and mistresses were always women of a lower class who, due to differences in social standing, couldn't marry the man.

Women did not have the same degree of sexual freedom as men. It was a crime against the husband for another man to sleep with a married woman. Women rarely had sexual relationships before marriage. This was partly because women married in their early teens, but also because a young girl who became pregnant before marriage might fetch a lesser bride price for the family.

However, for poor women, becoming the mistress to a wealthy man was an economically advantageous position, but not a secure one. To retain her position, a mistress had to rely on the man's interest in her, and if she got with child she would have to hope that the man was willing to recognize the child as his own and support it.

Everything else was grey area for women. Sex wasn't a sin, but getting with child outside of marriage could be problematic.

IV: THE LAND WITHOUT KINGS

BY EZIO MELEGA

Hobbes, the 17th century philosopher, spoke about a “natural state” (or more accurately “the natural condition of mankind”) in which the lack of a State, of a shared government, would lead humankind to fall into a state of perennial war. Hobbes believed that States were born out of the necessity to impose a civil society and that without it, disorder and anarchy would reign.

Hobbes didn't know about the Icelandic Commonwealth, which today still shines as one of the great anarchist experiments in history.

The Icelandic Commonwealth was founded by people who had fled from the forced rule of a single king over Norway, and they did not have the slightest intention to submit again to a new sovereign.

They created a place where, according to the chroniclers of the period, “There was no King other than the Law.”. An anarchist State, which worked without an effective public organization or a real government without provoking civil wars for 290 years. To give you an idea: the United States of America had their first civil war 85 years after their foundation.

It is worthwhile to now to take a step back and explain what is meant by “Anarchy” in this article. There is a saying, a mantra among anarchists: “Anarchy is order”, which contrasts with the common perception of anarchy as disorder and chaos.

Anarchy does not mean a society in which everyone does what they prefer, at the expense of others.

No, Anarchy means, in effect, “no leaders”. It is the notion that Man doesn’t need laws to be forcefully imposed by the State, but that given the right motivation and education, one is able to create an ordered and just society, spontaneously, out of mere convenience and necessity for survival.

That’s exactly what happened in Iceland in the tenth century.

The first settlers were people very angry at authority, stubborn and fiercely independent. Real Vikings, in fact! Rather than bowing to King Harald the First, they went to live in the most remote of the islands discovered so far, and simply did not choose to have a single leader, a sovereign.

How could it work?

Simple: the Icelandic settlers organized things so that conflicts between them were not convenient. They created a body of laws and traditions, and made sure it was observed without the need for a state body that enforced them.

The central legislative body, the Althing, was not a government in the modern sense of the term, but limited itself on merely interpreting the law and pronouncing judgements. Thus everyone organized themselves in the way they preferred to enforce those laws, according to their ability. There was no police force, nor a state army. There wasn’t even an executive body, as the Althingi embodied only the legislative and judicial powers: giving advice and expressing opinions, but entrusted to the individual the responsibility for asserting their rights.

What if you didn't have the power to assert them? You could sell your right to justice to somebody who had it. Without leaders, privately.

In fact, there were "leaders". They were called Goðar (singular Goði). Originally they were settlers who had built a temple and asked for a fee to those who wished to take advantage of the temple. The Goðar were those leading the Althing, representing the interests of those who paid this tax in their pockets. They were more like lawyers than modern members of parliament. Each of them owned the position of chieftainship, the privilege of being a "boss" and this privilege could be bought and sold.

So in reality medieval Iceland was not a true anarchy? The Goði were a form of government? Not exactly.

The anarchist society usually recognizes the need to take binding decisions in an assembly. The point is that no one is obliged to follow these decisions. For the anarchist thought it is always possible to leave the community: it is the ultimate safety system to prevent the real leaders, for a State, to emerge, thereby denying these embryos of state organization any form of continuous power. You know how in modern democracies one will often vote for the "lesser of two evils"? The anarchist idea undermines this need, recognizing the right to say out loud: "Screw you, I'm out."

Icelanders did exactly that.

No farmer, no Icелander, was legally bound to a Goði. They could, at any time, stop paying any given chief and pay their fee to another.

Since the money derived from this representative function represented significant earnings for the Goði, they historically paid great attention to the satisfaction of their “subjects”. The Althingi then became a meeting in which the problems of the population were actually discussed and solved, in contrast to the air of ineffectiveness of modern parliaments.

It was also possible to move the honour of chieftainship to another person, in fact changing the Goði to refer to in case you were unable to find someone better.

The possibility of choice, always, is the core of Anarchic ethic. In the Commonwealth’s Iceland you could choose to retaliate, you could choose to bring a case to the court’s attention or to have a private retaliation through a duel, you could choose who’d represent you and truly and directly have this choice, constantly making it again and again, and this makes the Icelandic system completely different from modern representative democracies

There was, therefore, a very direct representation within the legislative organ, absolute freedom on the means used to enforce one’s rights and the ever-present possibility of saying, “Screw you all, I’m leaving.” In addition, there were none of those superstructures typical of the state organization: no red tape, no taxes, no army or police: each person was sovereign of himself (and their house). The organization served only to coordinate these free people and help them follow the laws that they themselves had established for themselves, or to act in accordance with agreements they had made in precedence and which were nevertheless constantly renegotiated in the assemblies of the Althingi.

Not a state, then, but an assembly of individuals connected by common interests, a Commonwealth of individuals united by the need to work together and survive, but without desire to impose themselves onto others.

The distinction may be subtle, but it is of great practical importance, so much so that for two centuries the Kings of Norway saw the Icelandic independence as a thorn in their royal side and tried in every way to undermine the organization of the settlers.

According to Hobbes in the absence of a state-shaped organization, society degenerates into ongoing conflicts.

How did the Icelandic Commonwealth bear its conflicts?

At the end of the tenth century, King Olaf I of Norway, in his usual effort to undermine the foundations of Icelandic independence, sent Christian missionaries who began an extremely aggressive and sometimes violent campaign of conversion, using scare tactics and going so far as to take people hostage and threaten them.

Icelanders resisted, stubborn as always, jealously protective of their anarchic freedom as always, even though Norway was vastly more powerful than their small country in both economical and military sense.

Any other country would be in crisis, perhaps in a civil war between the Christian and the pagan faction, with no real and absolute leader, a king or a president, able to mediate between the diverse needs of the population.

Icelanders did what they always managed to do best: they called for an assembly and this assembly asked a respected member of the community, a pagan with strong ties between the Christians, called Thorgeir to judge.

Thorgeir estimated that the best choice for the Icelandic community would be to accept Christianity. Icelanders were converted en masse, with very few exceptions. There was no power that forced them to do so, each of them could have chosen to remain a pagan and neither the Althingi or any other body would have a police force or an army with which to force Thorgeir's decision on them.

But the Icelanders did it anyway.

The roots of the anarchist mentality of the common good were so strong that the decision was accepted and respected. Even better: the awareness of having to commit to the good of the community without the need to have this commitment imposed by laws or governments was so present in every Icelander that they were able, as a people, to accept such a serious decision.

It is this kind of awareness of the need to pursue the common good, without the need to be forced to do it that is the core of the concept of "anarchy as order", and is something that the Icelanders of this era had developed, at such a profound level as to prevent a religious crisis.

The experiment of the Icelandic Commonwealth ended in 1100, when a new tax was introduced, apparently similar to the one owed to the Goðar. Similar to the fee that was originally paid to maintain the temple set up by the Goði, a tax was introduced to compensate the owners of the land on which the new Christian churches were being erected, the land usually belonging to the rich Goðar.

In contrast to the fee due to the Goði, however, this new tithe could not be moved: everyone paid for the church in their own district: it wasn't the citizens who could decide who their money went to, it was the Church.

Here then failed that constant choice that was fundamental to the system of chieftainship: an obligatory payment was introduced and the various chiefs no longer had to strive to achieve and maintain the continued approval of the people they represented.

The balance and the necessary communal effort had been betrayed: the Goðar had created a law that was for the exclusive benefit of their caste, rather than the community, as it had been for three centuries.

The power and wealth of some Goðar was increased without the counterbalance of the need to serve the people, and they began to buy chieftainship from minor chiefs, centralizing power into their own hands and destroying the opportunity to go to another, if you were dissatisfied with your Goði. Seeing that the total number of chieftainships was fixed by law, they found themselves in control as the only institution in the country.

Having "crushed the competition" they could set exorbitant prices for their representation in the Althingi and this destroyed the Commonwealth. That capitalist anarchy became something much more familiar: feudalism.

In the thirteenth century there remained only six major Goðar throughout Iceland and they could impose their will in the assembly without opposition.

The great families of Haukdaelir, Oddaverjar, Asbirningar, Svinfellingar and the Sturlungars began a real and proper civil war, abandoning and ignoring the tradition that had lasted for centuries and brought an end to the Icelandic Commonwealth and its three hundred years of peace. The feudal conflicts that bloodied the so-called Sturlung Period lay waste to familial and moral obligations, leaving Iceland with no law other than the power and will of the great families: anarchy ended with the blood and chaos of the civil war.

In 1262 the chiefs of Iceland signed the Gamli sàttmáli, with which they submitted to king Haakon IV of Norway.

The experiment of the Icelandic Commonwealth is strange, beautiful and powerful. Some argue that it was not a true anarchy or present it as proof that an anarchist society is fragile, because relatively little was enough to bring it down.

But surely the experiment was not fragile: it lasted almost 300 years without substantial changes, more than any modern state, and if it had a weakness it was not to be anarchic enough.

If it had been possible to expand the number of chieftainships limited by law and not let the legal limit stand, this could have prevented the centralization of power by the most powerful Goðar and the system of the Commonwealth could have been able to survive. The same is true of the ability to maintain the freedom of religion (and thus keep the tithe to the Christian Church non-obligatory).

Therefore, the crisis did not come about due to an internal crisis of the system, but was caused by an external pressure that went on to exploit the “less anarchic” aspects of the system.

Where the anarchist polycentric system proved itself quite able to handle the first religious crisis that was resolved by Thorgeir's mediation, it was precisely the monocentric and State-like aspects of the Icelandic organisation that dictated its end.

The Icelandic experience, with its quasi-anarchy is often regarded as a historical curiosity, an anomaly.

In reality this "anomaly" has generated a stability spanning three centuries, which allowed people to thrive in one of the most harsh and cruel territories that we have settled, by the sheer force of their stubborn conviction to respect their self-imposed laws because the alternative was simply unacceptable.

The Icelandic experiment shows that a world without kings is perhaps possible, but that such a utopia must be cultivated and desired, continuously and without interruption.

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THE PLAYTESTERS

In house: *Mila Rodriguez Astesiano, Katarina Kogoj, Peter Mišić, Matija Širok, Primož Pavliha*
At GnoccoCon 2012: *Claudia Cangini, Francesco Berni, Girolamo Castaldo, Lavinia Fantini, Luca Ghibardo, Luca Veluttini, Mario Bolzoni, Mauro Ghibardo, Moreno Roncucci, Paolo Cecchetto*

THE FUTHARK CREW

Flavio Mortarino – ƿ, fehu (wealth)
Keith Stetson – 𐌺, uruz (rain)
Dylan Boates – 𐌷, þurisaz (giant)
Miha Loboda – 𐌺, ansuz (a member of the Æsir)
Edoardo Baruzzo – 𐌺, reið (ride or journey)
Toshihiko Kambayashi – 𐌺, kaun (torch)
Matthew Sullivan-Barrett – 𐌺, gyfu (gift)
Stras Acimovic – 𐌺, wynn (joy)
Daniel Cetorelli – 𐌺, hagalah (hail)
Johnstone Metzger – 𐌺, nauðr (hardship)
Tim Jensen – 𐌺, isaz (ice)
James Mendez Hodes – 𐌺, ar (harvest)
Adam Koebel – 𐌺, eihwaz (yew tree)
Meguey Baker – 𐌺, peorð (game box)
Ezio Melega – 𐌺, algiz (elk)
Peter ‘TekknoTroll’ Mišić – 𐌺, sol (sun)
Mike ‘Carlson’ Davis – 𐌺, Tyr (sky god)
Will Hindmarch – 𐌺, bjarken (birch)
Jonas Möckelström – 𐌺, ehwaz (horse)
Stuart McDermid – 𐌺, maðr (man)
Noofy & Elyena – 𐌺, logr (waterfall)
Joseph Le May – 𐌺, Yngvi (another name for Freyr)
Kit La Touche – 𐌺, dag (day)
Jeremy Tidwell – 𐌺, odal (heritage)

CROWDFUNDERS

Avedan Raggio • Aaron Schrader • Adam “Chosen of the Vanir” Drew • Adam Blinkinsop • Adam Caverly • Adam Dray • Adam Rajske • Adam Surber • Adam Windsor • Adrian George • Adrian Opsahl • Adrienne Mueller • Alan Jackson • Aleksandr Ermakov • Aleksander Airaksinen • Alessandro Torri • Alex Nuzzi • Alexander Hauber • Alexander Siegelin • Anadir • Anders Bohlin • Anders Naersnes Olsen • Andrea Ungaro (Ander) • Andrew Jones • Andrew Kenrick • Andrew McHale, Alberto Muti, Michael Duxbury, James Hooper (KCL Geeksoc) • Andrew Millar • Andy Coles • Andy Kitkowski • Angela Craft • Angelo Pileggi • Anne Vinkel Hansen • anonymous • Antoine Bertier • Antoine Fournier • anunnaki • Ara Kooser • Argula Rublack • Arvid Axbrink Cedersholm • Avonelle Wing • Barac Wiley • Bastian Dornauf • Bay Chang • Becky Annison • Ben Kaser • Benjamin Hartzell • Bill Browne • Blake • Brendan G Conway • Brennan Taylor • Brennen Reece • Bret Gillan • Brett Easterbrook • Brian D Peters • Brian S Dannemiller • Brie & John Sheldon • Bruce Curd • Bryan Rennekamp • C. W. Marshall • Carl Rigney • Caroline Larwood • Girolamo Castaldo • Chris Bernhardt • Chris Chown • Chris Edwards • Chris Harvey • Christine Gertz • Christoph Schelleis • Christopher Irvine • Christopher Stone-Bush • Christopher Valore • Christopher Weeks • Colin Booth • Colin Jessup • Costantini Marco • Craig Curtis •

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