

# **Wargames FACTORY**

# **BATTLE TROLL**

**Man-to-Man Combat as Depicted in the Icelandic Sagas**

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# "BATTLE-TROLL"

## **Man-to-Man combat as depicted in the Icelandic Sagas**

*"Svart fell forward after his thrust, and Brodd Helgi cut a his leg so that it was taken right off.*

*'This shows how different are our fortunes' said Svart--"*

### **The Vapnfjord Men**

*"Let's strike with a sword-flash  
To shatter the shield:  
To batter the blade  
Till the enemy bleeds ---"*

### **Egil's Saga**

Towards the end of the Eighth Century the annals of the Christian kingdoms of Europe begin to tell of savage raiding by wild heathen men from the north. Over the next three hundred years these warriors, known as the Vikings, burst out of their Scandinavian homelands to reach the gates of Constantinople, to trade for Arab silver, to settle the far western lands of Iceland, Greenland and the legendary Vinland the Good. In so doing they cast down kingdoms and raised their own.

This game isn't really about that. It isn't about kings and fleets and envoys and armies. It's about poorly-behaved men with touchy tempers and big axes, and how their bad manners as tourists are matched by an astonishing inability to get along with the neighbours. It's about blood-feuds, and raid,s and quarrels, and blood-feuds, and stealing other people's stuff and taking one another to the rowdiest courts in the world, and blood-feuds, and being exiled to the far-flung reaches of the world and behaving just as badly there, and sailing about in longships, and lurking around the fjords for a chance of pirating. It's about visiting other lands, and meeting interesting people, and hacking them about with ironmongery before taking the more attractive younger members off into slavery, and looting churches because that's where the gold and silver are kept. It's about you and me and Onund the dog-faced and his foster father Sven and that fellow who looks after the cows going over to see the farmer across the river to tell him exactly what we think of him.

These are not what you'd call nice people.

The warfare we are going to look at in this game is that of small groups of men, from single combats to gatherings of a few dozen men. It's about individuals who see themselves, and are viewed by their culture, as heroes. We don't have to agree with them on this. The rules permit simple 'fight' games, with scope to expand into broader game-cycles (what we tend to call 'campaigns', though this isn't always an accurate description) which demand more characterisation and more rules about the wider Norse culture. As such it has aspects of the Role-Playing Game, though mercifully not the endless charts and pointless personal attributes (roll 3D6 against your indigestion factor to prevent belching --) that bedevil that genre. The rules are as simple as I can reasonably make them while capturing a sense of the spirit of these people and their world. I have deliberately taken the Icelandic Sagas as my model for 'how things work', accepting that precise accuracy backed by archaeological evidence and comparative research (blah blah blah) may not accord with the devil-may-care leaping about reflected in the Sagas. You don't have to agree with me on this. Perhaps we should arm wrestle ---

Personal combat in the Norse sagas is notable for its combination of grim humour, gymnastic violence and a graphic interest in the details of wounds, especially those with fatal consequences. Blows result in smashed shields or heads; limbs fly off with astonishing regularity, to the wry amusement of the saga-teller and the considerable chagrin of their erstwhile owners, whose life expectancy has suddenly dropped considerably. Minor wounds are seldom mentioned, except in terms of multiple accumulation; it is with Great Men, Great Deeds and, of course, Great Blows that the sagas are concerned. This short set of rules presents some basic mechanisms for modelling this sort of combat, where pithy taunts and well planned insults play their part alongside acts of the most grievous bodily harm. This is not a 'complete skirmish system', as if such a thing were possible, but simply a vicariously amusing look at these appallingly bloodthirsty times, conducted in the warmth and comfort of our own homes. I've added some scenarios and other material that may be of some interest to budding sagamen. If something isn't covered by the rules, make up your own.

## **THE WORLD OF THE SAGAS - THOSE ROOTIN' TOOTIN' NORSE SAGAS**

The world of the sagas is very much the 'wild west' of the Viking experience, a world of proud and irascible stockbreeders, quarrels over land rights and turbulent single men who are good with weapons. In many ways this is the easiest way for a modern reader to look at the family sagas, connecting them with the Code of the West that we all know from western novels and movies. Here are some similarities:

The feud is common to both cultures, including range wars over land use.

Hunts for outlaws in wilderness hideouts.

Wandering killers who bully respectable citizens and seek out notable warriors to duel with.

The kind of family relationships in which the words 'you killed ma paw' are the hallmark of things. Everyone supports their kinfolk against outsiders, which makes it complicated when your uncle just carved up your brother-in-law, whose cousin is your foster-son ---

Landscapes where hostile wilderness (deserts and badlands versus glaciers and volcanic wastelands) make those scarce areas of pleasant pasturelands worth killing for.

Rules of daily conduct that apply to friends, neighbours and people like yourself, that are in complete abeyance when dealing with outsiders (Indians and Mexicans or foreigners in general and especially the subjects of viking raids)

A respect for law as an idea, but a very rough and ready attitude to its application.

Differences, aside from the obvious, include:

Law in the viking world was very formal, with much respect given to men who were gifted lawyers. There's no simply 'hangin' the horse thief' without proper notification and legal process, even if the deed is already done.

No law enforcement personnel outside the royal household warriors of the Scandinavian kings. Justice is in the hands of posses and vigilantes, but, again, they are subject to formal law rather than simple frontier justice.

## *IT'S TIME TO HACK AND SLAY ----*

**GAME REQUIREMENTS:** You will need -

At least two, and up to several dozen toy soldiers, individually mounted, of your chosen scale. Starting with four or six per side is sensible. I presently use 25mm figures, but have used 15s as well - halve all distances with small scale figures. Those wonderful 40mm plastic Elastolin figures would be good, as would 54mms if you can find some that represent vikings.

Some kind of battlefield, which can be as small as a postcard or as large as Greenland, as simple or as detailed as you like.

Either the Ace, two and Three cards from each suit of a deck of cards, plus one joker, or a number of index cards, (three per player) each inscribed with the name of a character or faction in the scenario, and a joker.

Several six sided dice, and something to measure with.

Record cards if you feel inclined to use such things.

Two sets of 'Combat Cards', one marked 'Attack' and one 'Defence', for each player. We'll come back to this last point.

### **CHARACTERS AND KARLS -THE PROTAGONISTS**

Each player takes the role of a selected character, who we will dub a 'Hero'; these individuals and their actions form the chief subject of the game. Other men will also appear. Most of these are little more than axe-fodder to the heroes, and are known as 'Karls'. They have their own rules for combat, which depict them as (in decreasing order of complexity and respect) as secondary cast members, spear-carriers and just plain extras. However, there may be an intermediate group of special interest, such as close kinsmen of the hero, or others who are treated with at least a modicum of respect as the game goes on; some, indeed, may become heroes in their own right. We'll call these 'Huskarls'; they are heroes, but, as 'non-player characters' as our fantasy brethren term it, they select combat cards at random rather than by player choice. As a rough guide, a player may operate half a dozen secondary characters as well as the hero, more if we keep the rules for the karls especially simple (see 'especially simple rules').

### **ARMS AND EQUIPMENT**

Our hero will be equipped with weapons and armour according to the situation. An Icelandic farmer would have sword (if wealthy, dagger if less so) at all times, and probably a spear, axe and shield if there was any chance of

meeting trouble. He might use a bow for hunting. He might wear a leather jerkin or cap as everyday apparel. He would not wear a mail shirt to herd sheep, or a spangenhelm helmet to visit his sister. Those things would be only for when actual battle, or at least serious intimidation, were expected. Many of the saga characters go on viking raids, or serve in the retinues of kings, in which case the full panoply of mailshirt, helmet and weapons would be employed, but a man who showed up to discuss his neighbour's livestock straying onto his pasture in full Varangian Guards kit would probably have a few insulting poems made up about him (probably win the argument with his neighbour, though ---) Karls will be much less likely to have armour of any kind, but most men of any position will have shield, axe or spear, a knife, and some protective clothing. The lowest rank of man - shepherds, servants, humble begging types - may have clubs, rude spears, but not much else. Generally speaking, we won't worry much about specific weapons. Probably one in three or four would be an archer or javelinman, while most others would have the odd javelin to throw prior to the main fisticuffs. I usually allow them one each.

## **STARTING OUT:**

To begin the game, set up the figures in a 'starting position'. This may be part of a planned scenario of considerable exactitude and historical research, or simply "You lot stand at that end of the meadow!"

Each faction - for fights in sagas often feature more than two active parties - has 3 cards, depending on the scenario and number of players. The cycle of cards is not precisely related to any real time scale, Norsemen having no watches. When a card is drawn, any and all members of the band can move a few paces, shoot an arrow or throw a spear, say a few really memorable words, or smack somebody hard with a sharp iron thingy ---

The joker card indicates the end of the cycle, and all cards used and unused are shuffled again. This means nobody can guarantee that all their cards will emerge from the deck in a given cycle. Additionally, an optional rule for those who think there aren't enough random acts of buffoonery already: the player who immediately follows the joker has to roll on the accident chart as if his hero has somehow been chosen by the Gods for special attention.

## **REPUTATION**

*" 'Had I thought you might live for ever' she said, ' I'd have raised you in my wool-basket. But lifetimes are shaped by what will be, not by where you are.' "*

### **Orkneyingasaga**

Reputation is the central element in the Viking heroic ethos. Pride in one's good name is more important than life itself, and death preferable to humiliation. This

being said, it's acceptable to give in when the circumstances permit without it being totally shameful. Characters gain Reputation Points (RPs) for bold acts of speech, and successful acts of violence. They may lose them when shamed in combat, or when something embarrassing happens to them as a result of an accident.

### **STARTING POINTS:**

For a 'one off' game you can assume everyone starts with an equal number, since it's today that counts. However, we know that not all Vikings are equal, so here are some suggested Reputation levels.

Huh! Add this –

### **MOVEMENT.**

*"-- there was a head-on meeting at the river, where Odd's men sprang from their horses and guarded the crossing, so that Thord's party could make no headway --"*

#### **Hen-Thorir**

*"--the Skraelings were all yelling aloud, so Karlsefni and his men took red shields and held them out against them. The skraelings ran from their boats and they clashed together and fought."*

#### **Eirik the Red.**

So how do we move these little fellows around? I'm not much bothered by groundscale at this level, so let's assume it is literal for the scale of the figures and simply move in inches: 2 D6 at a walk, 3 D6 at a run. Roll for each group, rather than each individual in it. You can only run in a straight line, and can throw a spear but not fire a bow or a sling while running. If 2 '1's are rolled when walking or running, our gallant hero falls over at the 2" point of his move! (and roll on the Accident Table) His friends, of course, gather round and chortle (lose 1 reputation point!) Deduct one die for turning around / getting up / drawing a weapon etc, or for crossing rough ground. Be reasonable about this. On reaching a stream or river, roll for depth; D6 x feet, -2 for small streams. Up to 1 foot deep costs nothing for our doughty warriors to cross, 2' costs 1d6 movement, 3' takes the whole move, 4' takes two turns, beyond this is for strong swimmers without weapons and armour only. Go up- or downstream 12" and check the depth there.

Horsemen can move at 3 D6 walking, 4 at a trot, 5 at a gallop, speeding up and slowing down one gait per turn, though heroes can leap into the saddle and

off again at a gallop (lose 1 D6). Nobody else can. Norsemen do not fight on horseback in the sagas, and, since the horses are only rough mountain ponies, get no advantages over men on foot if they insist on doing so. Rough terrain loses 1 D6 for these sure-footed mounts; crossing water is as for men on foot, but 'one grade better', i.e. 2' deep costs nothing, 3' costs 1D6 etc.

Egil is moving at a run through rough country. He rolls 6, 5 and 4. He loses the high die for the broken country.  $4 + 5 = 9$ , as you quite possibly knew, so Egil and his followers move 9", though his archer cannot fire this turn because he is running.

## MISSILE COMBAT

*"Einar shot an arrow at Jarl Eirik, which hit the tiller-end just above the jarl's head so hard that it entered the wood up to the arrow-shaft."*

### Olaf Trygvesson's Saga

Missile use plays a fairly minor role in saga combat, though some characters - such as Gunnar of Hlidarend in Njal's Saga - are noted for skill at archery. A character can have a bow or three javelins beside his main melee weapon, a karl only one of each. A figure may take an aimed shot with a bow by halting to aim on his first card and shooting on the next. Other shots are 'hurried', but bow shots are more effective from the halt than walking (not running). Javelins, rocks, spears, axes etc can be flung while walking and even running. Roll a D6 per shot, one per turn.

#### RANGE IN INCHES

	1-4	4-12	12-24	24-48	
Bow (aimed)	1 +	2+	3+	4+	Die scores needed to hit
Bow (hurried)	2+	3+	4+	5+	
Javelin	2+	3+	5+	-	
spear, rock	2+	4+	-	-	
flung sword/axe	3+	4+	6	-	

## MODIFIERS:

Karl shooting / shooter walking / target in light cover -1 from die roll

Shooter running / target in hard cover -2

Heroes and huskarls who find themselves the targets with shields may deflect a missile by rolling a D6: 4-6 if from the front or shielded left side, 5-6 from the right or rear. On a roll of 1 the missile passes straight through the shield, giving 1 RP to the shooter, and a nasty wound to the recipient. Men without shields can knock a missile out of the air with their own spear, sword or axe for a 6.

An archer who rolls a natural '1' breaks his bowstring; it takes a turn to restring and, if he is the famous Gunnar, he won't have another and will need to beg a length of his wife's hair ---- roll again, on a '1' there's no spare string.

EXAMPLE: Egil's archer, a karl, stops to fire a hurried shot on his next turn. The target is Thidrandi, a huskarl, standing 14" away. The archer needs a '5' to hit (-1 for karl shooting) and gets a '6'. Thidrandi raises his shield, but rolls a '2' and fails to stop the arrow. He must now go to the damage chart to see what happens.

HITS: If the victim is a heroic type (or we are treating the karls as actual human beings), roll on the 'Damage Table', adding 1 to the die roll for arrows /stones etc, 2 for javelins and 3 for spears, axes, swords, anvils etc. Probably 4 for anvils --- to keep it simple here's an optional rule:

If the victim is a mere karl, don't worry about the weapon type. roll 1 D6: 1,2 = no effect; 3,4 = fall back 3"; 5,6 = dead, or as close as we care about.

EXAMPLE: Thidrandi has been hit by an arrow. This counts as '1' to the die roll. He rolls to see where he has been hit - a '2', the shoulder - and rolls for damage, a '5', modified to '6' for the arrow ( a more powerful missile would have increased this). Not good for Thidrandi --- except that he had the good sense to wear a thick leather jerkin, which deducts '1'. Still, the total is '5', which means a slight wound.

An archer who is attacked while using his bow counts as unarmed until he has a chance to draw his own sidearm.

## **HAND TO HAND FIGHTING:**

*"Berg-Onund began to find the shield heavy to carry, and tried to draw his sword, but before he could pull it half way out of the scabbard, Egil had run him through. Onund staggered at the blow, and Egil tugged his sword out sharply, then struck at Onund, nearly slicing off his head."*

### **Egil's Saga**

Hand-to-hand fighting is very much the central activity in Saga warfare. Our heroes may move swiftly and shoot superbly, but it's the sword-swinging limb-lopping that keeps the audience listening to the story. So, in BattleTroll, we spend a good deal more time and effort on close combat than on anything else.

The melee sequence is as follows: It's not as difficult as it sounds -

- 1) Select cards for attack
- 2) Compare the cards to see how many dice you get. Add any extra dice.
- 3) Roll the dice, looking for the highest numbers.
- 4) If permitted, make Re-Rolls of own worst dice or demand opponent re-roll his best.
- 5) If a hit is scored, note the difference between attacker's best die and defender's.
- 6) Add this score to that of 1D6. This tells you how hard you hit. High is good.
- 7) Roll to see where you hit him.
- 8) Modify the score by any armour or shield that may lessen the blow.
- 9) Read off what the wound grade is.
- 10) Victim makes groans of pain, notes wounds if he can't remember details of such things.
- 11) Winner notes his gain in RPs, crows about it in pathetic display of bravado.

Close combat occurs when two figures meet hand to hand. The initiating player picks a card from his "Attack Deck", the defender one from his "Defence Deck". The Attack cards are:

- 1) SWING; a good strong swipe at the foe. Often risky.
- 2) CUT or JAB; a dependable attack, without much risk of disaster.
- 3) LUNGE; a fierce thrust.
- 4) JEST; no armed attack at all, but a pithy insult to taunt the enemy.
- 5) !#%&!!!; accidentally failing to make any attack, and possibly making a fool of yourself in the process. Not usually a deliberate choice.

- 1) PARRY; the safest way of fending off an assault, with shield or with weapon.
- 2) COUNTER-BLOW; hitting the other fellow before he strikes you! Risky!
- 3) LEAP ASIDE; dodge that blow and show off your agility.
- 4) JUMP BACK; see him swing at thin air!
- 5) !\*&!!!&; accidentally failing to offer any defence at all. Usually not a deliberate choice.

**COMPARE OPTIONS ACCORDING TO THE TABLE BELOW:**

		D E F E N C E				
		PARRY	C/BLOW	L/ASIDE	J/BACK	#^&!!
A	SWING	2/1	1/2	3/1 (AA)	1/3 (AA)	4/1(AD)
T	CUT	1/1	2/1	2/1	1/2	3/1
T	LUNGE	1/2	3/1	1/2(AA)	2/1 (AD)	4/1 (AD)
A	JEST	N s	N 1/3	Nss	Nsss	Ns
C	!\$%&!!	Nd	Nd 1/4	Nds	Nds	Nd
K						

What does this mean? The first number is the number of dice the attacker gets; the second refers to the defender. Each rolls and chooses their highest die; these are then compared. If the attacker wins by one point, the defender falls back 1-3" (player choice). If the attacker wins by 2 or more points, he has inflicted a hit. Take that difference in die rolls and add it to a second die roll --- A man who, like Kjartan at the end of his last fight, simply refuses to defend

himself, gets no die roll. The opponent will hit him for a roll of 2+, and add that score to the second die roll.

**EXTRA DICE!** Modify the number of dice as follows -

Berserker +1                      Terrain advantage +1 (uphill, behind a wall etc)

Hero / Huskarl vs karl +1      Each supporting figure (up to three) +1

*But wait! There's more!*

'(AA)' means an accident may occur to the attacker, if he fails to hit.

'(AD)' means an accident may occur to the defender, if he loses the roll.

'N' means that the attacker has no intended strike. On 'Counterblow' he rolls to save himself from the defender's assault, but will inflict a hit if he should win; luck, surely?

's' means that the opponent is shamed by this taunt, and loses a Reputation Point. ss means lose two RPs, and sss means three.

'd' is pretty much the opposite, standing for 'duhh!' or 'doofus' or something like that. Lose an RP yourself for being an idiot.

Sometimes there is a combination of these. Work it out for yourself.

**RE-ROLLS:** If the opponent has lost his shield, or is slightly wounded, you can demand he roll one die again, no doubt hoping for a lower result. If he has lost his weapon, or is wounded, you can demand he re-roll twice. In theory, a man with several wounds who has lost both shield and weapon could be made to re-roll an incredible number of times, but if he rolls 6 after 6 after 6, you'll never touch him. Remember a re-roll can be better or worse than the initial roll, and that you are stuck with the consequences. If you have two wounded men facing one another with a number of re-rolls, subtract one from the other; if you have a fighter with six re-rolls against him (it's possible, especially with a man whose armour has protected him against a series of blows) against a man with three re-rolls against him, you could be rolling all day until all the scores were '1's. Count the fellow with six as having three, the man with three as having none. Does that make sense?

A tied die roll means no hit except when the attacker makes a cut, thrust or swing and the defender makes a counterblow. In this case they, er, smite one another and both inflict wounds - add half the score they rolled (odds up) to the second die roll to improve the chances of both gallant Norsemen sending their opponent to Valhalla.

If you outnumber your opponent, get an extra die for extra men, up to three. Characters in the sagas are incredibly agile, and cannot be surprised from behind. I know this isn't your experience of real life ---

### **MULTIPLE FIGHTS.**

Quite often you'll have several figures on one side contending against a group of bold foemen on the other. The attackers may, on their turn, set up their men in the most advantageous way against the enemy, picking on one unlucky figure while wholly ignoring another opponent. It will have to wait for the defender's turn before he has a chance to even up the fight. However, friendly figures in base-to-base contact are considered mutually supporting, and must be taken on together; they must either be attacked by separate opponents, or the unengaged warrior will count as an extra die for his partner. A figure who is attacked by enemies must continue the fight against all of them on his own turn unless A) he has been pushed back on the last turn, and so has become separated from the combat - in which case he can throw himself in wherever he wants; B) he is reinforced by his own side, with fresh men to take on those who were picking on him so unfairly last round of combat, or C) is pushing forward so that men ganging up on him from the rear are left a step behind. What he can't do is wantonly dodge out of the way of several perfectly agile vikings who have just attacked him in favour of jumping on some solitary figure ( an aged karl with a bad leg and stomach ache, no doubt) three inches away. Basically, if you are in a fight, you are in a fight. I suppose you could run away ---

I don't think I need to tell you that heroes always take on the highest ranking foeman he can reasonably reach. They fight, with the karls as support - not the other way round. I suppose an elderly character might have a bodyguard to fight in his place, but let's not make this a usual thing.

A little common sense and a reasonable spirit of give and take should prevail in deciding who fights who. You know what I mean.

## DAMAGE, VIOLENCE, HORRIBLE WOUNDS etc

*"Hrolf struck at Orn, but as he tried to ward off the blow with his shield, the sword sliced through, and the point ripped open the whole of his belly so that his guts poured out ---still Hrolf managed to turn on Ulf and thrust at him with the sword. the mail-coat failed, and the sword went right through him."*

### Gongu-Hrolf's Saga

Roll twice when a blow is landed: once to see where the blow lands, and once to see how hard. For this, add a D6 to the difference between attack and defence die rolls;

	3	4	5	6	7	8	9+
1) HEAD	stunned	s/wound	wound	g/wound	killed	killed	G/Blow
2) SHOULDER	scratch	s/wound	s/wound	wound	g/wound	killed	G/Blow
3) BODY	scratch	s/wound	s/wound	wound	g/wound	killed	G/Blow
4) RT ARM	scratch	s/wound	s/wound	wound	g/wound	Great Blow----	
5) LT ARM	scratch	s/wound	s/wound	wound	g/wound	Great Blow----	
6) LEGS	scratch	s/wound	s/wound	wound	g/wound	Great Blow----	

Thus, if you win a melee by a roll of 6 to 1, creating a difference of five, and roll a four or more, somebody's body parts are going to fly messily through the air ---

Stunned: Lose a die from next combat phase, while groggy.

Scratch: Pah!

Slight Wound: opponent can demand you re-roll one die in melee. Attacker gets 1 RP.

Wound: opponent can demand you re-roll two dice in melee. Attacker gets 2 RPs.

Grave Wound: this puts you down on the ground and out of the fight. Good luck! Attacker gets 3 RPs.

Killed. Off to Valhalla. Attacker gets 4 RPs.

Great Blow. Horribly violent blow. You have ten seconds to gain RPs according to umpire discretion by making a good dying speech. A quick one, you understand. Attacker gets 6 RPs for this praiseworthy deed. If the victim has a friendly karl

within 1", the karl dies too as the spear spits him / axe takes his head off / whatever fits the bill ----

Obviously, you get more prestige for hacking up men of consequence rather than some grimy goat boy, so halve the RPs for damaged Karls.

## **ARMOUR & WEAPONS**

*"He was well armed; had a fine helmet, and ring armour; a red shield; a superb sword in his belt; and in his hand a gold-mounted spear, the shaft of it so thick that it was a handful to grasp."*

### **Arnliote Gelline in St Olaf's Saga**

ARMOUR may offer some protection. Deduct 1 from the die total for quilt or leather, 2 for mail, scale or other metal armour. A byrnie would cover body and shoulders, with arm protection for a long sleeved item. Helmets protect the head, obviously. A die roll of '6' on the damage chart smashes the helmet or armour in addition to any wounds inflicted, so it's no use from now on.

SHIELDS protect the left arm (-4 from die roll) from hits, and also - when the defensive choice was 'parry' - the body and legs (-2). In any other defence, the gymnastics involve preclude proper use of the shield. If the attacker's damage die roll is a '6', the defender's shield is smashed, whether or not a blow is landed on the defender himself. In Viking duels up to three shields may be used. Obviously most people aren't wandering around with a whole stack of shields on an everyday basis.

BROKEN WEAPONS: If the attacker's best die roll is a '1', he breaks his sword, axe, whatever (1 -2 if it's a spear, if you like) and will have to find something else to fight with next turn. Be like Egil Skallagrimsson, and carry two named swords in case you break one - flash git!

DROPPING WEAPONS: Men who receive a slight wound will drop their weapons for a roll of 6, or 3+ if it's a right arm hit. For a wound, it's 5-6, 2+ for right arm hurt. They will spend their next attack turn looking for it, or a sidearm, counting as 'lost weapon' if attacked, and will make no attack themselves. On a roll of 1-2, they can't retrieve it (or find their sidearm is a dinner knife) and count as 'lost weapon' until they can remedy the situation without somebody trying to kill them. Otherwise, they are once again Girded for War.

DOUBLE-HANDED WEAPONS: Very dangerous! Always a big Viking favourite. The problem is that you can't use a shield while wielding them. Therefore, a warrior with such a weapon can add +2 to his attacks, but cannot count as using a shield while defending, parrying with the blade and handle of his axe or sword.

## KARLS IN COMBAT.

If the game is a small one, with less than perhaps half a dozen per side, you can treat the karls as fully fledged human beings. The key things here are that A) if fighting a hero or huskarl, he concedes one extra die to his social better, and B) they choose their attack and defence options not by careful selection as per out heroes, but by a random draw from the deck. This means that they pick the questionable #&#! choice every so often.(This applies to our 'assistant heroes', the Huskarls as well - they fight as heroes but you can't control what they do in a fight!) Also karls shoot worse and don't always do what you'd like. They can, however, get reputation points and move up towards hero status, or at least 'loyal retainer' level. If, however, you've got a couple of dozen of these ugly, poorly groomed types cluttering the place up - or just want a faster game which keeps the focus on the heroes - let's simplify things.

1) In combat with a hero, any hit that lands on a karl effectively puts them out of the game. We don't care about their wounds, reputations, or wives and children, do we now?

2) In fighting one another, face them off one to one, with extras going as 2-1 or 3-1 where appropriate. The attack and defence cards are drawn at random and the results of this going directly to a simple casualty chart. When one side outnumbered the other pick two or three cards as needed, and choose the best.

		DEFENCE				
		PARRY	C/BLOW	L/ASIDE	J/BACK	#^&#!
A	SWING	DF	AF	DK	AF	DK
T	CUT	N	DF	DF	AF	DK
T	LUNGE	AF	DK	AF	DF	DK
A	JEST	N	AK	N	N	N
C	#&%&#!	N	AK	N	N	N
K						

WHICH MEANS - - -

AF : attacker falls back 3"      AK: attacker is killed  
 DF: defender falls back 3"      DK: defender is killed  
 N: nothing happens that we care to remember.

## **MASS COMBATS: BOLD WARBANDS AND SHIELD WALLS**

For even quicker results - at a cost in personality - make up a few dice from plain wooden cubes, marked AF, AK, DF, DK, N, N. The attacker would roll one (or more, if outnumbering the putative victim, selecting the most advantageous) and that would be the result.. Dead simple.

Even simpler: roll a D6 per figure on either side; 5 pushes a man back, 6 kills him. This works best in the 'shieldwall' situation where we might have dozens of karls in tight formation pushing and shoving. If one side inflicts more losses (counting 'kills' as worth 2 and 'push backs' as one) than the other, the losers fall back 3" and the winners follow them up. If it inflicts double the losses, it falls back 6" and all the loser's 'push backs' are considered killed or captured. If it trebles the loser's score, the loser routs from the board, losing it's 'push backs', standards etc. If - as you'd expect - our heroes and huskarls are fighting their counterparts on the other side, count the RPs they gain in the fight towards their side's total. If their side should fall back, they will retire also, but in the case of a rout will be expected to fight a gallant last stand in heroic fashion. Maybe D6 karls will rally alongside them. Maybe not. Your choice.

## **WINNING THE GAME:**

At the end of the affray, total the RP scores of each hero, (and those of the karls if we are permitting them to improve their status). Add 1D6 to anyone who remains unscathed despite having defeated at least one foeman (but not for anyone who has avoided the fight!) As an option, allow each player to award 5 RPs, divided anyway he likes, to other characters for their efforts. Dead heroes count too, though deduct 1D6 since death is something of a drawback in life. The character with the highest score is declared the winner and is entitled to his very own saga.

## **OPTIONAL RULES:**

### **HERO ATTRIBUTES:**

Because some heroes are better than other heroes --- either base this on the scenario, or roll 4 D6 and pick an attribute for each '6' that comes up. (Or select for random attributes any way you like.)

TROLL-BLOODED: Gets extra D6 for 'swing' attack.

AGILE: gets extra D6 when using 'jump back' or 'leap aside' options.

LUCKY: Gets a one free re-roll per turn, to be used at any time.

FLEET-FOOT; 1 extra D6 movement

IRON-WON'T-BITE: -1 to all wound effects scores against him.

EAGLE EYE: Add 1 to hit with bows, always spots hidden enemies.

MIGHTY ARM: Add 1 to hit score for effects on wounds for thrown missiles.

BERSERK RAGE: Roll D6 per turn, enter rage on 5-6. See berserker rule.

RUNE-CARVED WEAPON: Roll D6: 1-4 = +1 weapon, 5-6 = +2 weapon. Name it.

CLEVER-TONGUED: double scores for shaming enemy, double loss for #^&!!

SPEAR-FEATS: If a spear is thrown at you, catch it for 1 5-6 and get free throw back!

TWO-WEAPONS: Can use two weapons at once, making two attacks per turn (no shield)

Get one of these for each '1' , or pick these for your opponents!

LAME: Loses 1D6 for movement.

ACCURSED: Opponent may demand one re-roll in any round of close combat.

FEEBLE: Add 1 to all wound effect scores against him.

CLUMSY: lose 1 D6 when using 'jump back' or 'leap aside' options.

BOASTFUL: Double all RP losses (you arrogant ----)

CRUEL: Neither gives nor receives quarter.

CRIPPLEHAND: -1 to 'swing' attacks.

HATES-HIS-FOE: Will always stay in melee with first opponent until one is dead.

FOOLISH VOW: Has stupidly sworn to never use a shield, what were you thinking ?

LIKES-HIS-MEAD: Roll for accident on any failed attack.

MISSED-THE-BARN: -1 from all archer's shots.

NOTHING: Will crave quarter after any wound , even a slight one.

USELESS SHIELD: Breaks on damage blow of 4-6.

## **BERSERKERS:**

*Wolf-skinned are they called. In battle  
They bear bloody shields.  
Red with blood are their spears when they come to fight."*

### **Thorbjorn Hornklofi, 'The Raven's Tale'**

Berserkers are generally depicted in the sagas less as terrifying armed madmen than as dimwitted thugs with poor social skills. When in a berserk rage, do not count the effects of any wound or slight wound until after the end of a melee. At this point, if the game continues, roll again; on 4-6 the berserker continues to be upset about things, and remains enraged. If not, he notices that he is bleeding, and counts the effect of them henceforth. It is considered conventional for berserkers to fight stripped to the waist, helmet-less and usually without shield, having thrown it away after chewing on the rim, as anyone might.

## **NAMED WEAPONS:**

*"Then she took from under her mantle a sword all ready for use, a valuable possession. She said: 'This was the sword of Jokull, my father's father and of the ancient Vatnsdal men, in whose hands it was blessed with victory. I give it to you; use it well'."*

### **Grettir's saga**

\*The Vikings valued their weapons, and good blades, especially, might be named, like Bolli's "Legbiter". These rare weapons, primarily swords and axes, will add +1 or +2 to damage rolls once a hit has been made.

## **DUELLING:**

*'This violent Valkyrie-maddened  
Shield-swallowing villain;  
The Glaring god-feaster  
Goes to his own death.'*

### **Egil's Saga**

One form of solution to a dispute was the duel, a holdover from the Germanic Iron Age period. It wasn't very fair, and tended to be used as a way for large, unpleasant types to bully weaker and older men out of their property or risk dismemberment in public. It often took place on a small island. How it works in Battle-Troll is thus:

An area notionally 7 1/2' square is roped off with hazel branches around a cloth or skin laid on the ground. This is too small to manoeuvre the model figures, so increase it to 2" or a bit more in size. The contenders fight until first blood, though it is held that if one man is pushed back once (to the edge of the ring) he has 'retreated' and twice in succession has put both feet out of the ring and conceded defeat. In the case of the accuser being forced out of the ring or wounded he had to redeem himself in the amount of the property at stake, or in case of his death, lose all his property. If the defender lost, he lost whatever the stake had been decided on. See the duel scenario from *Egil's Saga* in the book of scenarios, "The Raven's Tale".

## **TRADING WOUNDS FOR KARLS;**

A hero who is being supported by one or more karls in a melee may choose - if he receives a wound or slight wound - to let a hapless karl take a fatal blow rather than accept the cut himself. The poor bastards just fall in front of the foeman's blade -

## **UNPREDICTABLE UNDERLINGS:**

To make things a bit tricky, lets say that - if using the three playing card method of sequencing - when the ace is drawn, all members of a faction can do whatever their owner wishes. On a two, the hero and anyone with him can also 'follow orders', but any of the band that is operating at a distance - let's say 6"- from the hero's group cannot enter a new combat. On a three, the same applies, but the isolated Norsemen cannot advance at all, and will not begin any kind of new activity except immediate self defence.

## **COURAGE:**

*" --and then, at the same time, we'll shout a war cry at them. I daresay this will shake them. Now I come to think of it, they might even run off into the forest and save us any more trouble."*

### **Arrow Odd's Saga**

*" --the bonders had a strong army and began the battle as soon as they met; but they soon fell short, and took to flight."*

### **St Olaf's Saga**

Generally our saga heroes are absurdly brave, just the way we like 'em. Their minions may be less bold. If a karl is pushed back three times in succession while in close combat, he runs away. If a karl's best roll in a round of combat against a hero is a '1', he also runs away if he is not slain. If all the heroes are killed or captured, and no karl is working his way up to hero status to take over, then the karls will either crave quarter or runs away. Heroes do not flee, but can ask for quarter when it seems necessary; old Norse heroes are practical men not given to foolishness.

A hero will lose 1 RP for craving quarter when wounded.

A hero will lose 2RPs for craving quarter when slightly wounded.

A hero will lose 4 RPs for craving quarter when unhurt.

A hero will lose no RPs for craving quarter when gravely wounded.

An adversary who refuses to give quarter when asked will lose D6 RPs for his lack of generosity; apart from looking bad, he risks running up an enormous cost in man-price.

## **SHIPS, BOATS AND FLOATING THINGS:**

*"He sent his ships forward into the channel so that, as there was plenty of sea room behind them, they could retire by merely backing their oars"*

### **Grettir's Saga**

Battle-Troll is not intended as a set of rules to fight full scale naval actions (I wrote a set, *'The Long Serpent'*, lo these many years ago) but some small nautical combats can be covered by this game.

Without getting into the complex and difficult world of winds, tides and currents, we might suggest that a small boat, adequately crewed, can move 3D6" in favourable conditions, 2D6" upstream or against a current by rowing. It could

sail the same distance with a smaller crew with a good wind. An ocean going sailing ship would sail more swiftly with a following wind (4D6") but most merchant ships would not have enough crew to row easily against tides or currents (1D6"). The famous Viking long ships were coastal raiders of dubious seaworthiness best used in sheltered waters, and probably fast in smooth water (3D6" rowed or sailed with a side wind, 5 D6" running or quartering). They can, of course, move slower.

Viking naval combat was much like land battle in style. Ships would come alongside, grapple and board. Ramming was not really a part of this, though we may assume that a competent captain would take his chance to shear the oars of an adversary or smash into a smaller vessel to knock her off balance.

Each man available to throw a grappling hook (i.e. not rowing or steering) will succeed on a 5 or 6. The defender may try to cut grapples on his own card for the same scores. Once grappled, the boarder may hurl his whole crew onto the foe's deck on his next card, and, indeed, the grapple-ee may choose to board the attacker. Fight the combat normally, but the defender gets the 'terrain advantage' for defending the gunwhales of his ship if both vessels are about the same size. If the attacker has a larger, higher ship, disregard this (indeed, if high enough, the attacker may claim the terrain advantage himself).

The defence of a vessel depends on its size. Full sized vessels consist of a forecastle, main deck, and sterncastle, though there may be no real difference in the heights of these. Smaller vessels may have two sections, a stem and a stern, while boats are a single section. Taking a vessel means capturing each of its sections. To do this the attacker must fight all the defenders in a section, trying (obviously enough) to kill them or, by getting 'push backs', drive them out of the section. If the attacker either clears everyone out, or outnumbered the survivors 4-1 at the end of a turn and then gets the next turn (this is important!) so that the losers can neither fall back or be reinforced, the section is assumed to be captured and the remaining defenders either fight on heroically (heroes and huskarls) or surrender (karls). Then it's on to the next section. Fights can, of course, go to-and-fro.

Shooting rules are as per normal, though men on an enemy vessel will count as in light cover for the gunwhales of the ship unless the shooter can legitimately claim an unobstructed view of the whole man.

If the vessel is moving at 3D6" or more, the shooter counts as if he were walking rather than standing still.

No doubt there are other nautical aspects to the game that I'm not thinking of. Use your common sense.

## **UNARMED COMBAT:**

Occasionally our stalwart lads put down the ironware in favour of grappling and gripping - usually in the case of seizing a prisoner, dealing with the kind of small boy that there is no honour in hurting, or wrestling with some otherworldly being - you know, trolls, giants etc, meet 'em all the time - who intends harm.

Draw cards as usual, but assume that no weapons are being used. If you get a wound on the opponent, you have succeeded in gripping them. On their next turn their attack is an effort to get away by butting or biting etc; if they succeed, the grip is broken. They may, after that, attempt to grip you! A person who is gripped initially and held successfully is assumed to be bound securely. This doesn't apply with mythological creatures, whose agenda is different ---

## **MYTHOLOGICAL ELEMENTS**

Magical and mythic elements appear in a good deal of old Norse literature, and while Battle Troll is not primarily concerned with the legendary tales and folk stories of Gods and giants etc, there do appear in the Family Sagas a number of beings and events that are outside daily human experience. I'm not going to attempt to give rules for, say, the witchcraft in Njal's Saga or the Eyrbyggja Saga, nor to decide whether the 'uniped' that shot Thorvald Ericsson in the Greenlander's Saga was actually an Eskimo with a wooden leg. Ghosts are important supernatural beings, portrayed as warriors swollen up to enormous size and blackened (fight as a huskarl, with two extra dice, perhaps) while Grettir the Strong wrestles with a giant/troll - the lines between types are not closely defined - who wants to seize him, squeeze the wind out of him, and drag him off for dinner in his underwater lair. In both the Eyrbyggja and the Greenlander's saga there are supernatural events involving mysterious epidemics and the walking dead. Make up whatever rules you need, and send me the good ones.

## **TREASURE!**

The Norse were as avaricious as anybody, but never fully developed a cash economy. Barter was frequently used between neighbours (livestock, hay, cheese etc) while the woollen cloth of Icelandic sheep was used in prescribed lengths as a substitute for actual money. Indeed, the Norse understanding of silver and gold was purely in terms of weight value, so coins were simply small units of treasure and bigger pieces of jewelery could be hacked up ('hack-silver') into convenient pieces like a slab of beef. For our purposes we really just need to know that large sums of silver are measured in marks, small units in pennies, and that compensation for killings can get very expensive. The scenario 'Dwellers on the Sand-Spit' has a lot to do with getting and keeping treasure. Unfortunately we don't know how much anything cost, though I would assume that cows are worth more than chickens and Frankish swords more than bowls of pickled herring.

## **THE ACCIDENT CHART;**

These can occur either when an 'a' comes up in close combat, or when our gallant hero rolls two '1's among his movement dice. Or whenever you feel like it, really. Some are not really accidents, but purely random events that may have nothing to do with our hero; he's just the pretext for their incidence. Roll D6, read one as tens and one as units.

11 Our man drops his weapon and chops off a toe, lose 2 RPs, counts as Slight wound.

12 Our man drops his weapon and falls over it, losing 1RP and falling headlong.

13 Our man drops his weapon and, in doing so, sees a silver ring in the grass. Assuming he gets the chance to pick it up, it will bring good luck! Counts as 'lucky' from now on.

14 The weapon flies from our lad's right hand and hits the 1st figure within 2" who rolls a '1', starting from character's right and going anti-clockwise

15 The weapon flies from our lad's right hand and hits the 1st figure within 2" who rolls a '1', starting from character's left and going anti-clockwise

16 Glare from your opponent's blade blinds you: make no attack on your next card.

21 Our man slips on cowdung. Gets up immediately. Lose 1 RP.

22 Our stalwart Norseman steps on his own shield and destroys it. Lose 1 RP.

23 Our stalwart Norseman steps on his own shield and puts his foot through it. - 1 for all rolls connected with the use of this shield.

24 Character lets go of shield grip, lands 2" away. Pick it up next turn.

25 Character's breeches fall down. Cannot use 'leap aside' or 'jump back' defences until he has a free turn to pull them up. Lose 2 RPs'

26 Character loses a shoe in a boggy patch. Hop on one foot (1 D6") until retrieved. Lose 1 RP.

31 A passing Arctic tern craps in our man's eye - lose a D6 next melee round

32 Character drops his purse. Pick it up or lose it.

33 Character pitches headlong forward and stuns himself: lose 1D6 for each die roll next turn.

34 Character falls backward and stuns himself: lose 1D6 for each die roll next turn.

35 Character falls over own scabbard and lands on his back, stunned; lose 1D6 for each die roll next turn.

36 Helmet slips over his eyes. Halt immediately to adjust, lose 1D6 per die roll next turn.

41 It starts to rain heavily. No bowfire from now on, - 1D6 movement.

42 If raining, it stops. Sun comes out. Bowmen can re-string in 2 turns.

43 Heavy rain begins, slanting from the west. No missile fire in this direction, no bowfire at all; opponent can demand one re-roll against a man facing into the rain.

44 A rabbit runs across the field in front of the character. Any bowman aiming at a target will shoot at rabbit instead (6 to hit).

45 A deer runs across the field in front of the character. Any bowman aiming at a target will shoot at deer instead (5-6 to hit). In Iceland, where there are no deer, it's a hare.

46 Any one figure on your side within 6" of cover imagines he sees a bear (black, brown or polar) and runs 3 D6" backwards in fear. Anyone who sees him will do the same on a roll of 1. But is there really a bear?

51 If you are riding a horse, it bolts 5 D6" straight ahead, with you on it! Lose 2 RPs.

52 If you are riding a horse, it throws you, causing a slight wound to the, er, legs. Lose 1 RP

53 If you are riding a horse, it throws you - check as receiving a wound for location and damage.

54 You break wind in spectacular fashion, propelling you D6" forward!

55 A fly gets down your shirt. Or was it a wasp? Either - No movement next turn while you carefully undo your tunic or take a slight wound to the body!

56 If you are a Christian character, you are rewarded by the protection of St Columba of Iona, and gain an extra re-roll each turn against an enemy attack.

61 If you are a Christian character, you are rewarded by a bolt from heaven: pick an opponent and count a random javelin coming at him (which will hit if he fails to deflect with shield or weapon)

62 If you are a Pagan character, you are rewarded by Thor with lightning speed; add extra D6 to your movement (though not for your surprised followers!)

63 If you are a Pagan character, you are rewarded by Odin with a moment of cunning; in the next round of combat you will trip up your opponent and inflict an accident on him!

64 The wind picks up: -1 from all missile fire from now on.

65 A flatulent individual nearby breaks wind; you and all within 2" fall back 3" to catch your breath.

66 Our man stabs himself with his own dagger, carelessly unsheathed in his belt, and receives a grave wound to the stomach.

## **EPILOGUE:**

'Battle Troll' is a deliberate attempt to consider personal combat less in terms of objective reality than according to the vision of a thirteenth century story-teller recounting a tenth century event. I have made little effort to differentiate between weapons, assuming that -at least in a saga - it is perfectly possible to swing a spear and lunge with an axe. I have kept some rules as 'optional' since what they add in character they may lose in terms of a fast game, especially with new players.

'Battle-Troll' was the name of the axe belonging to Njal's eldest son, the terrible, doomed Skarp-Hedin.

*"Then Bjarni cut away Thorstein's entire shield, whereupon Thorstein hacked down Bjarni's too.*

*"A great stroke, that!" cried Bjarni ----"*

### **THE SAGA OF THORSTEIN THE STAFF-STRUCK**

*"Eldgrim now tried to get away, and spurred his horse; and when Hrut saw this he raised his spear and drove it between Eldgrim's shoulder blades so hard that the coat of mail burst open at the impact and the spear came out through his chest. Eldgrim fell dead from his horse, as was only to be expected."*

### **LAXDAELA SAGA**

*"They weren't exactly the world's brightest people."*

**ROBERT GRIFFITH on the Vikings**

## **APPENDIX 1:**

### **HAND TO HAND COMBAT: EXAMPLE**

Here's a blow-by-blow account of a disagreement between two groups of suitably irate Norsemen, showing exactly how the mechanics of combat work in practical turns. Imagine two heroes, each with two lesser men, squaring up to one another in a boggy sheep pasture.

TURN ONE; Egil (a hero), ably supported by his two karls Einarr and Eirik attacks Thorgils, who has with his his own karls Thorgeir and Thorvald. Neat, this, eh? Thorgils has thoughtlessly walked ahead of his men, so on the first round Egil can claim his two karls as supports (an extra D6 apiece) without bothering with Thorgeir and Thorvald. Egil looks through his cards, and decides on a Swing. Thorgils, a careful man, picks a Parry. That means 2D6 for Egil's attack, plus 2 more D6 for his supporters, and 1D6 for Thorgils' defence. Egil rolls '2' '4' '4' and '5', while Thorgils rolls a '6'. The '6' means the parry is successful.

TURN TWO: On Thorgils' card, his two karls launch into the attack, taking on Egil's matching retainers. They use the simple karl combat rules, drawing attack and defence cards at random. Thorvald draws a 'jest' against Einarr's parry, which would be a fine taunt were these to be Men of Note (but who cares what these lesser beings have to say?) while Thorgeir pulls a 'lunge' against Eirik who draws a '#&\*^!'" and is ignominiously slain while gawping. Thorgils himself picks a lunge against Egil's jump back, two dice to one. Thorgils scores '3' and '5', but Egil rolls '6' and avoids the thrust.

TURN THREE: Thorgils gets the next card also and follows up on his advantage, Thorgeir stepping up as support for the big man. Thorgeir doesn't mess about with jests and such; he picks a 'cut'. Egil wants to win fast, so he goes for the 'counter-blow'. Thorgils rolls '3' and '6', plus a '5' from the sterling Thorgier in support. Egil rolls '3'. His counter-stroke has failed, and he is struck by Thorgil's blow. Thorvald and Einarr continue their fight, with no result this turn.

Egil has lost by 3 points from the combat. His foeman, Thorgils rolls to see where the blow lands - '4', the body. He rolls again to see how hard he connects - '5' again, adding the '3' to make 8, potentially a killing blow. Since Egil did not choose to parry but instead made a counter-blow, he cannot count his shield as protection for the body. However, he put his chainmail shirt on this morning like his mother told him, which deducts 2 from the force of the blow. Now it's a 6, a wound, which isn't quite as bad. Had Thorgils rolled a '6' he'd have slashed a great rend in the chainmail protecting the shoulder.

TURN FOUR: Egil gets the next card. He is wounded and has one man down. He chooses a swing, while Thorgils parries (2/1). Egil rolls '4' and '6', while Thorgils

gets a '1' and his supporter Thorgeir a '2'. This is bad news, but the wound against Egil permits Thorgils (and, indeed, any other opponent of Egil, at least today) two re-rolls. Thorgils decides to make re-roll the '6', but Egil rolls a '6' once again. Thorgils could make him roll it again, or re-roll his own pathetic '1'. He does so, scoring a '4'. Even so, Egil has struck him, though not potentially as disastrously. The karls fight on, and Einarr's cut against Thorvald's leap aside causes Thorvald to fall back 3" in order to recover.

Egil has beaten Thorgils by 2 points. A roll of '3' makes it a body blow. Egil then rolls a '6' as damage, totalling 8. Thorgils shield counts as -2 as a defence to the body while parrying, but the '6' smashes it to matchwood. A roll of 3-6 is needed for the shield to protect the owner even as it is destroyed. He rolls a '3', which works. This brings the score down to 6. Thorgils is wearing a padded leather tunic, which is worth another -1. The final score is 5, a slight wound.

TURN FIVE: Egil gets the next card. He's on a roll, now. Instead of moving Einarr up to continue fighting Thorvald, he moves him against Thorgeir and prevents him from supporting his chieftain. Egil then picks a lunge against Thorgils, who chooses the worst possible option, the counterblow (actually #^&!! is worse, but only idiots select it by choice). So Egil gets three dice ('2', '2', '3') against Thorgils' single '3'. Now, Egil has a wound (2 RRs) on him, Thorgils a slight wound (1RR). The difference between them being one Re-Roll in Thorgils' favour, he chooses to see if he can improve his initial roll rather than make Egil roll - look at the numbers and see how foolish that would be. Actually he is taking a risk in choosing to re-roll at all, but he's looking for a 5 or 6.

Unfortunately he gets a '1', worse than his first roll, and takes another blow. To even things up a little, Thorgeir has drawn a parry against Einarr's lunge, and made him fall back to recover from the failed attack.

Egil has beaten Thorgils by 2 points. He rolls for location, a '5' for the left arm, no longer protected by the shield. Rolling again, he gets a '5', totalling 7. The leather tunic has short sleeves, so that doesn't help. Thorgils takes a grave wound, a horrible crippling blow, but he still has an arm attached to his body (look on the bright side--). He slumps to the ground, and does not move again except in that 'call the paramedics' sort of way. Thorgeir and Thorvald, being good lads, crave quarter to attend their fallen chieftain rather than leg it for the hills. Egil has won the battle. He can't honourably strike Thorgils again, and may, indeed, help him to safety if he feels so inclined.

HERE'S ANOTHER EXAMPLE:

*"--- Steinthor moved quickly towards them. He flung his shield over Thord as Thorleif was about to strike, and with his other hand he took a swing at Thorleif, severing the leg just below the knee. At that same moment Freystein Bofi made a thrust at Steinthor's belly, but Steinthor saw it coming and leapt into the air so that the spear went between his legs. All three things Steinthor did simultaneously, just as we've described."*

### **Eyrbyggja Saga**

Aha. So how would we do this in BattleTroll? Clearly Steinthor gets his turn in before Thorleif (possibly by using the optional 'hold card' rule, or perhaps he just gets a lucky card at the right time. He puts himself between Thorleif and Thord, and picks a 'swing' attack. We don't know what Thorleif chose, but evidently it was a complete failure at stopping the blow. Steinthor rolls a '6' for location of hit (the legs) and probably another 5 or 6 to make it a 'great blow' and lopping off the leg (but not, as we find out, fatally). Then it's Freystein Bofi's card (so it's not really simultaneous, sorry). He chooses a lunge card, but clever Steinthor chooses to leap in the air, which we have to identify as a 'leap aside' - alright, alright, but you design a game with a limited number of choices - which succeeds. There would also be a roll for an accident, though none is listed in the saga account (so we are ahead of the sagaman there, doncha think?) and then Steinthor goes on to do some more hacking ---

APPENDIX 2  
**NORSE NAMES**

Experience has shown that most modern English speakers are not well up on old Scandinavian names. After Eric and Bjorn and Olaf, most of us dry up, or come up with mock fantastical German names. Here's a list of male and female names, taken from the indices of Laxdaela, Njal's and Egil's sagas. The convention is that each person follows the given name with the father's name (very occasionally the mother's), in the form of 'son' or 'dottir' (e.g. Halldor Armodsson, Helga Olafsdottir). Sometimes, according to rules I do not myself fully understand, the father's name changes a little in the patronymic form (Bolli Bollason, not Bollisson), often adding an 'ar' between the name and the 'son' suffix. I don't worry a lot about this. Many characters have interesting descriptive additions to their names - hair colour (Olaf the White, Erik the Red, Halfdan the Black) , height, weight, and other characteristics (Geirmund the Noisy, Ketil Flat-nose and the unbeatable Eystein Foul-Fart). Some of these descriptive forms come before the given name (Killer-Glum), but most follow. A man would only be given his father's first name if the father died before the child's birth, as with Bolli Bollason, born after his father's killing. There were a fair number of Gaelic names amongst the Icelanders (Katla, Melkorka), - though not among the Norwegians - but only Njal and Kjartan listed here are Celtic in derivation. End of lesson.

**MEN'S NAMES:**

Alf	Amundi	An	Ari	Arinbjorn	Armod
Arnfinn	Arni	Arnor	Arnvid	Asgrim	Atli
Bard	Bersi	Bjarni	Bjorn	Bolli	Bork
Brynjolf	Egil	Eilif	Einar	Eirik	Eyjolf
Eyvind	losi	Frodi	Geir	Geirmund	Gellir
Gilli	Gizur	Glum	Grani	Grim	Gudlaug
Gudmund	Gunnar	Hakon	Hall	Hallbjorn	Hallkel
Harald	Harek	Hauk	Helgi	Hjalti	Hjort
Hogni	Holmstein	Hoskuld	Hrapp	Hrut	Ingjald Kari
Ketil	Kjartan	Knut	Kol	Kolskegg	Kvedulf
Lambi	Ljot	Lyting	Modolf	Mord	Njal
Odd	Olaf	Olvir	Otkel	Ozur	Rognvald
Sigmund	Sigtrygg	Sigurd	Skamkel	Skapti	Snorri
Starkad	Steinar	Svart	Svein	Thostolf	Thorarin
Thord	Thorgeir	Thorgils	Thorgrim	Thorhall	Thorkel
Thorleif	Thorolf	Thorstein	Thorvald	Thrain	Ulf
Valgard	Yngvar				

**WOMEN'S NAMES:**

Alfdis	Asgerd	Astrid	Aud	Bergthora	Freydis
Groa	Gudrid	Gudrun	Gunnhild	Gyda	Halla
Hallgerd	Helga	Herdis	Hildigunn	Ingibjorg	Ingunn
Jorunn	Olof	Rannveig	Sigrid	Thora	Thordis
Thorgerd	Thorhild	Thorhalla	Unn	Vigdis	

## APPENDIX 3: **THE SAGAS**

The Icelandic sagas, written in the 12th-15th centuries from a variety of traditional tales, poems and other oral sources, are Europe's first historical novels. Whilst their literal accuracy of events is uneven at best, the sense of place, the heroic ethos and the spirit of the Viking age revealed in these stories is unmatched. These are not precise historical documents, but exuberant, tumultuous tales of rough and prideful people - both men and women - contesting in harsh lands. You don't have to believe everything - in fact, you clearly shouldn't - but instead immerse yourself in the atmosphere. By our standards the sagas make unusual reading at first. Keep reading, they'll grip you. The prose is terse, with short words and few adjectives. The characters are introduced formally, with a great deal of personal geneology that means little to the modern reader. There is little 'interior life'; we know our characters not by what they think or feel, but what they say and do. These last are usually pretty direct and self explanatory. English translations of the sagas have been available since the mid C19th, and early versions (like Samuel Laing's 1844 *Heimskringla*, available in the Everyman's Library line) aren't easy to read. Much more accessible are the recent Penguin translations.

The sagas fall into three broad groups.

1) The Family Sagas (AKA the Sagas of the Icelanders) are the key sources for our man-to-man combat games, with small forces of men - usually less than a dozen, never more than a hundred - engaged in blood-feuds, raids, ambushes, hall-burnings, murders, pointless quarrels and all the things we'd all like to do if we owned big pointy weapons and hadn't matured emotionally since we were about 14 --- this groups includes *Njal's*, *Egil's*, *Laxdaela*, *Eyrbyggja*, *Hrafnkel's*, *Grettir's*, *Gisli's* and a dozen others of varying lengths. *Njal's saga* is one of the finest story cycles ever written.

11) The King' Sagas are chronicles of the Kings of Norway, including Sverri's Saga, the *Heimskringla* (Sagas of the Norse Kings) and the Olaf Sagas. *Orkneyingasaga* served the same purpose for the jarls of Orkney. These sagas tend to involve fleets and armies and general kingliness, which are rather daunting to the wargamer with two dozen vikings on his painting table.

111) The mythological sagas (known sometimes, endearingly, as 'Lying Sagas') are those mixtures of ancient legend, folktale and Medieval romance which feature giants, wizards and princesses. Geography is highly suspect, weapons are all magic, and everything happens in threes. If you like a fantastic element that is consistent within a single culture, these sagas may be of interest - see *Hrolf Kraki's Saga*, *Volsungasaga*, or the Penguin collection "*Seven Viking Romances*".

APPENDIX 4:  
**ICELANDIC LAW**

*" Snorri summoned Gest for the killing of Styr, but that summer at the Althing Thorstein Gislason dismissed Snorri's case. In the autumn Snorri rode south to Borgarfjors and killed Thorstein Gislason and his son Gunnar."*

**Eyrbyggja Saga**

*"Thord Bellow gathered men from the west country, but had no very big force. All those who were leagued in the lawsuit met together; they had two hundred and forty men all told."*

**Hen-Thorir**

I bet you never expected to find a treatise on law in a set of wargame rules! But there's stuff you need to know, if only in the sense of knowing when you are breaking the law.

Old Norse law is less about actual justice and fair play than on keeping the lid on a very fractious society (this may be true everywhere). Since there are no police or prisons, and no real government authority at all, everything is devoted to coming up with a reasonable compromise that will last. Here is how it works, very simply: let's go back to the gentlemen in Appendix 1. What was it that led them to the blood-feud?

Our friends Egil and Thorgils might dispute over a horse or a dowry or a pasture or whatever. Let's say Egil shares a copse of woodland with Thorgils and takes more than his share of timber. Thorgils talks to him but gets nowhere. Thorgils then summons him to the district assembly, held every spring, charging him with the act of theft. Both sides may then talk with friends, family and neighbours to get them on their side. The most important person to have on your side is your Godi (chieftain), because, though he has no governmental power, he is a big shot with powerful connections, certain priestly powers, and (most important) a knowledge of the law in excess of most people's. Each district has a set number of chieftains but - as with modern doctors and lawyers - you can attach yourself to the chieftain of your choice within the area. At this point, with the case being so minor, it would be likely that those close to Egil and Thorgils would arrange a 'settlement', a reasonable compromise. But that doesn't make a saga, nossiree Bob! Let's say that Egil is known as an Overbearing Man, the kind of local bully who is a pain to live near. So he rebuffs Thorgils with insults. Thorgils responds by keeping a watch on the woods and wounding two slaves that Egil sends to fetch more wood. Getting more serious, now.

Egil makes a counterclaim against Thorgils for compensation for the wounds to his slaves (wounding being less serious than killing, and slaves being

worth much less than free men), also to be adjudicated at the assembly. If more violence breaks out now, we could go straight to 'feud', but probably both sides would gather all the support they can in anticipation of the assembly. At best the case will go to the assembly (where all free men may gather and possibly vote, but usually the chieftains dominate the proceedings) where both sides will put up witnesses, not to the events but to their character and to attest that all summonses have been done in correct and timely manner (very legalistic this - does the phrase 'getting off on a technicality' strike you as a modern one; it fits here). The elected official known as the Lawspeaker will preside, but a jury of chieftains will give verdict, if it goes that far. More often than not, a compromise between the less hot-tempered friends on both sides ('Men of Goodwill') will be brokered. Sometimes a defendant will offer 'self-judgement' to his opponent, which means "I'll let you render the verdict, since I believe you'll go easy on me" - which may or may not be true.

Since the jury verdict is a lot less to do with the rights and wrongs of the case than in upholding the social order and preventing rebellion, it is important to muster as much support as you can, which may eventually be applied in the form of bodies of armed men showing up to the assembly with the intention of voting themselves, preventing a vote at all, or just breaking up the whole event. Prior to that, however, it means getting the most powerful men and craftiest lawyers to take on the case. Therefore, litigants often make deals of a very underhand nature (I'll give you 50 cattle to support me. You were intending to bring all your cousins, weren't you?) to build up a base of support. Poor men charged with an offence sometimes made over their property to a rich and powerful neighbour so that the neighbour can stand against the accuser with a better chance of winning; the poor man then becomes part of his neighbour's household retainers, but avoids a worse defeat in court which might leave him penniless or outlawed.

Let's say the Egil / Thorgils case gets worse and worse, with no settlement being acceptable to either side. It goes to the assembly, and the decision is that the timber Egil took is equal to the compensation value of two wounded slaves. This would be a pretty typical compromise, and the 'Men of Goodwill' urge both sides to accept. Egil, being the Overbearing Man we've mentioned, refuses, adding a few more insults, and the meeting breaks up with no solution. A month later Thorgils' overseer is killed by three of Egil's men. Thorgils summons Egil again. Egil is liable to make compensation payment for the overseer, a free man, and it is possible that the killers may be outlawed.

Outlawry has three forms. District outlawry is a minor form; you have to leave the area for three years. Lesser outlawry means you have to leave the country for three years. Full outlawry, the extreme form, means you have to go into exile for life. There is a set day for moving, allowing enough time to sell property, then it's direct to a harbour and onto a ship. If you don't go, you can be

killed freely and your property seized by the killers, usually the family of whoever you got outlawed over. Outlaws are due no compensation if killed or wounded.

Chances are that Egil will refuse to pay compensation at all, and that he will protect his men from justice. Once a free man has been killed, things are getting genuinely serious, and there will be pressure on Egil to shape up and on Thorgils to stand up for his rights. This is where the Men of Goodwill finally force a settlement, or the serious feuding begins.

COMPENSATION amounts are not wholly clear from the sagas, but seem to have been something like this:

VICTIM	KILLING	WOUNDING
slave	12 marks	6 marks
free man	100 marks	50 marks
chieftain	400 marks	200 marks

The compensation on a chieftain is a guess, but he was clearly more than an ordinary man. Payment might be in livestock or land rather than in marks of silver, most often in bolts of woollen cloth. The defendant would not be expected to pay it all himself; family members were expected to contribute in proportion to closeness of kin, so having a violent cousin will cost less than a dangerous brother. Either way, the idea is clearly to exert a powerful peer pressure on hot-blooded relatives. After a multi-wounding fight, the settlement would probably involve some 'trading' of 'your leg wound for my brother's ear'.

Obviously there's a lot more to this. The best source, though not easy bedtime reading, is Jesse Byock's *Feud in the Icelandic Saga* (Berkeley 1982), which is available in paperback in the U.S. If this is all too much, just go on a viking raid, where there aren't any rules to follow.

#### EXAMPLE:

Let's fast forward to the aftermath of the fight between Egil and Thorgils. The latter, now known as Thorgils Cripplehand after his battle with Egil. He takes his case to the district assembly to claim compensation for his wound. Egil may contend several things in defence. He may claim that Thorgils' wound is balanced by the wound to himself and the death of his karl Eirik, a man of lesser position but, obviously, greater injury. He may claim that Thorgils attacked him, and that in doing so Thorgils was

committing an offence. he may, indeed, claim that in doing so, Thorgils had put himself outside the law and made himself an outlaw. This second line of defence is not likely to work unless Egil can produce good witnesses to his innocent intent, and even so Thorgils is unlikely to be seen as an offender himself. Probably the 'men of goodwill' would patch up a settlement, either involving an agreement that the blows equalled one another or that some money should make up the difference between them. To confirm a settlement, and prevent further bloodshed, there might be promises to foster one another's children, or even marry sons and daughters. Alternatively, if prospects of bad blood appeared to continue, or if no settlement can be made, one side might move out of the district, or gather support for a future lawsuit, or simply return to the murderous mechanisms of the feud.

## APPENDIX 5:

### **FIGURES, BOOKS, & SCENERY**

**FIGURES:** I use 25mm figures for this game, as being a size large enough for big stubby fingers to move about singly, but small enough to feature longships, farmsteads, whole glaciers etc. Some manufacturers that I strongly approve of are as follows, in no special order.

**OLD GLORY** make a good line of Vikings, sold in bags of 30, with many different figures per bag. The ones listed as 'bondi' are largely unarmoured figures ideal for feuding farmer types. The company also makes an extensive range of other Dark Age types, from Saxons to Steppe warriors, for our lads to tangle with. Old Glory figures are good, and cheap in bulk, but available only in packs.

**GRIPPING BEAST**, a fairly new English company, have specialised in this period, making not only the standard types (mailed huskarls etc), but Viking merchants, women and children, buildings, ships etc, and specific figures (Olaf Tryggvesson, Egil Skallagrimsson etc). They also make Anglo-Saxons, Normans, Picts, Irish, and an 'El Cid' range. Figures are sold in packs of 4.

**ESSEX** have a handsome line in sturdy vikings, together with Anglo-Saxons, Franks and Normans, Rus and Byzantines.

**REDOUBT** makes a beautiful longship and rowing crew, together with a small range of about 16 Viking raiders.

**WARGAMES FOUNDRY** (now just known as **THE FOUNDRY**) make a range of vikings, together with Anglo-Saxons, Picts and Irish.

**IRREGULAR MINIATURES** have a recent line in vikings that match the popular 'large 25mms', while many of their earlier figures (including a 'mooning' viking chief) are rather smaller. But then, you'd expect those nimble Irishmen to be smaller than Norsemen, wouldn't you? Irregular also makes terrific livestock of all kinds, and a wide mix of unexpected items!

**BRITTANNIA** makes a range of obviously larger figures. I only have one, a hulking berserker somebody gave me, so I can't judge the rest of the line.

There are other manufacturers out there - I have an old (a veteran!) Minifig spearman in my box, and a few older Ral Partha figures that are notably small and slender by recent standards (take off the beards and call them youngsters). Hinchliffe figures made in the dark ages themselves (alright, the 1970s) are still available. If you have the chance to browse boxes of old figures needing new homes, there is often a likely lad; I have a few fantasy bandits, Crusading pilgrims and backdated medievals in my collection. Eastern woods Indians,

minus muskets etc, might serve to fend off the Vinland settlers, but nobody makes Eskimos, do they?

### **SCENERY:**

Rough country appears often in the sagas, and, unless you have a good custom terrain maker like, say, the famous Howard Whitehouse available, you'll have to make it yourself. Get some big chunks of styrofoam, some stones from the driveway, plaster and paint and get messy. Viking buildings are relatively easy on the whole, long halls with thatched roofs (fake fur matted down with thick coats of household paint), walls of foamcore or strip wood (I use the kind sold as 'lattice', for garden decoration). Icelandic Turf houses make involve more originality, and may also come out looking like grassy knolls.

### **SOURCES:**

The following sagas are available in the popular Penguin series in good, modern translations;

<i>Njal's</i>	<i>Egil's</i>
<i>Laxdaela</i>	<i>Eybyggja</i>
<i>Orkneyinga</i>	<i>Hrafinkel's and other stories</i>
<i>King Harald's</i>	<i>Seven Viking Romances</i>
<i>The Vinland Sagas</i>	

The 'Everyman' series published by Dent includes -

*The Sagas of the Norse Kings (Heimskringla)*  
*The Olaf Sagas (2 vols)*  
*Grettir's*  
*Gisli's*  
*The Fljotsdale Saga & the Droplaugarsons*

Several other sagas have been translated in less easily available editions, while others are accessible only to those of us with a working knowledge of Icelandic and access to the best academic libraries, which excludes your humble scribe.

The list of secondary works in English on the Vikings is long. Some books that I find most useful include -

Bertil Almgren: *The Viking*, Gothenburg 1975, 1991.  
Jesse M. Byock: *Feud in the Icelandic Saga*, Berkeley 1982  
*Medieval Iceland*, Berkeley 1988  
P.G. Foote & D.M. Wilson, *The Viking Achievement*, London 1980  
Paddy Griffith, *The Viking Art of War*, London 1995  
Mark Harrison, *Viking Hersir*, London 1993 (Osprey series)

Gwyn Jones, *A History of the Vikings*, Oxford 1968

Jacqueline Simpson, *Everyday Life in the Viking Age*, London & New York 1967

Thanks to my wargaming friends who have helped in the design and playtesting of Battle-Troll, especially my partner in many wargaming enterprises, Tim Lee, John Shaw and the estimable Gary Peavyhouse, whose contribution deserves at least a bag of silver and some nice pieces of church plate. Not that he'll get it, of course. John Merren provided useful ideas for hero traits. Paddy Griffith for his ideas on the Vikings and on wargaming in general. Ian Greenwood for his "Guthrum's Army" study group. Especially to my wife Lori for putting up with, well, everything, for these many years.

SEND IDEAS, COMMENTS, AND ESPECIALLY NICE BITS OF SILVER MONASTIC PLATE TO HOWARD WHITEHOUSE, CURRENTLY OF 265 McCARTER RD, LA FAYETTE, GEORGIA 30728, THOUGH HE MAY BE OUTLAWED BY THE DISTRICT ASSEMBLY AND BE FORCED TO LEAVE ----

## "BATTLE-TROLL" QUICK REFERENCE SHEET

MOVEMENT 2 D6 at a walk, 3 D6 at a run. Lose 1 D6 for rough terrain. See river rules.  
 MISSILE COMBAT Roll a D6 per shot, one per turn.

RANGE IN INCHES	1-4	4-12	12-24	24-48	
Bow (aimed)	1 +	2+	3+	4+	Die scores needed to hit
Bow (hurried)	2+	3+	4+	5+	
Javelin	2+	3+	5+	-	
spear, rock	2+	4+	-	-	
flung sword/axe	3+	4+	6	-	

**MODIFIERS:** Karl shooting / shooter walking / target in light cover -1 from die roll  
 Shooter running / target in hard cover -2

Heroes/huskarls deflecting with shields , roll D6: 4-6 if from the front or shielded left side, 5-6 from the right or rear. On a roll of 1 the missile passes straight through the shield, giving 1 RP to the shooter, and a nasty wound to the recipient. Men without shields can knock a missile out of the air with their own spear, sword or axe for a 6.

HITS: If the victim is a heroic type roll on the 'Damage Table', adding 1 to the die roll for arrows /stones etc, 2 for javelins and 3 for spears, axes, swords, anvils etc. Probably 4 for anvils

If the victim is a mere karl, don't worry about the weapon type. roll 1 D6: 1,2 = no effect; 3,4 = fall back 3"; 5,6 = dead, or as close as we care about.

		D E F E N C E				
		PARRY	C/BLOW	L/ASIDE	J/BACK	#^&!!
A	SWING	2/1	1/2	3/1 (AA)	1/3 (AA)	4/1(AD)
T	CUT	1/1	2/1	2/1	1/2	3/1
T	LUNGE	1/2	3/1	1/2(AA)	2/1 (AD)	4/1 (AD)
A	JEST	N s	N 1/3	Nss	Nsss	Ns
C	#\$\$%&!!	Nd	Nd _	Nds	Nds	Nd
K-						

**EXTRA DICE!** Modify the number of dice as follows; one for each of these -  
 Berserker Terrain advantage Hero / Huskarl vs karl each supporting figure (1-3)

Roll twice when a blow is landed: once to see where the blow lands, and once to see how hard. For this, add a D6 to the difference between attack and defence die rolls;

	3	4	5	6	7	8	9+
1) HEAD	stunned	s/wound	wound	g/wound	killed	killed	G/Blow
2) SHOULDER	scratch	s/wound	s/wound	wound	g/wound	killed	G/Blow
3) BODY	scratch	s/wound	s/wound	wound	g/wound	killed	G/Blow
4) RT ARM	scratch	s/wound	s/wound	wound	g/wound	Great Blow----	
5) LT ARM	scratch	s/wound	s/wound	wound	g/wound	Great Blow----	
6) LEGS	scratch	s/wound	s/wound	wound	g/wound	Great Blow----	

MODIFIERS: Armour -2 Leather or quilt -1, shield -4 to left arm, -2 to body and legs if parry option used.

Stunned: Lose a die from next combat phase, while groggy. Scratch: Pah!

Slight Wound: opponent can demand you re-roll one die in melee. Attacker gets 1 RP.

Wound: opponent can demand you re-roll two dice in melee. Attacker gets 2 RPs.

Grave Wound: this puts you down on the ground and out of the fight. Good luck! Attacker gets 3 RPs.

Killed. Off to Valhalla. Attacker gets 4 RPs.

Great Blow. Horribly violent blow. . Attacker gets 6 RPs for this praiseworthy deed. If the victim has a friendly karl within 1", the karl dies too as the spear spits him / axe takes his head off / whatever fits the bill ---

### KARLS VERSUS KARLS COMBAT:

		<i>DEFENCE</i>				
		PARRY	C/BLOW	L/ASIDE	J/BACK	#^&!!
A	SWING	DF	AF	DK	AF	DK
T	CUT	N	DF	DF	AF	DK
T	LUNGE	AF	DK	AF	DF	DK
A	JEST	N	AK	N	N	N
C	#\$%&!!	N	AK	N	N	N
K						