

In the spring of 1008, three hundred and fifteen Greenlanders and Icelanders board a fleet of six ships and leave Greenland for North America. Halfdan Ingolfsson is the chieftain on this expedition and Gudbjartur (Gudbj) Einarsson is his dedicated second-in-command. There are men, women, and children on these ships, as well as a variety of livestock and supplies. The leaders of this expedition are known champions of their people, warriors who will furiously fight against outside enemies and just as strongly mete out justice on their own people when deemed necessary.

The destination is Leifsbudir, Vinland. It is an area that has already been explored and settled, but not without problems. Early on in the journey, Halfdan desires a change of plans because of the trouble previous settlers from Greenland have had with the natives they call Skraelings. The Norsemen that came before this group were harsh in their dealings with the natives. Halfdan plans a different approach: "The key to our attempt at settlement here, and the only chance of success we will have, is to settle where the Skraelings do not live. When first contact is finally made, as it will be eventually, they will be treated fairly." The group heads to Snorrisfjord and ultimately settles on land they name Halfdanssonsfjord.

Hunsinger teaches with the details that he infuses into this story. The reader will learn what the Norsemen ate; how they set-up temporary camps and permanent residents; how they conducted themselves in battle; and the manner in which men and women fell into intimate relationships. The importance of respect and loyalty in the culture is represented by the relationship between Halfdan and Gudj. Their bond that is stronger than that often seen between blood brothers. There is an intense trust between them that provides the level of security needed to lead their followers while exploring a new land, surviving severe storms at sea, and battling against natives. The love and admiration between the two men is so overwhelming it frequently makes Gudbj uncomfortable. But their feelings for each other do not diminish them as men. Halfdan and Gudbj are so secure in their masculinity that they are not intimidated by the strength of their women who work as hard and love as strongly as they do.

*Axe of Iron: The Settlers* is a hearty, adventure-packed history lesson. I highly recommend it.

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