

The novel follows fictional Norse leader Halfdan Ingolfsson and the more than 300 settlers who made the journey from Greenland to Vinland in North America. Though raised in a violent and combative culture, Halfdan and his lieutenant Gudbjartur realize that if this new society is going to thrive, they must be as friendly as possible to the native people. In addition to worrying about these indigenous Skraelings, the settlers must contend with an unfamiliar land, wildlife attacks, their own brutal temperaments and the typical jealousies that arise in any community.

Axe of Iron is populated with strong, vivid personalities, which mitigates some of the choppiness of the stilted dialogue. Key among these characters is Frida, first the

nemesis of and then the lover of Halfdan. The novel avoids the trap of some historical fiction by limiting dry facts—depictions of the Norse people's penchant for fighting and healthy sexual appetites also keep the tale from becoming too staid.

Although clearly a fan of these early settlers, Hunsinger does not ignore their negative traits. They have slaves, are quick to settle disputes with violence, and while they pay lip service to allowing each freeman in the society a say, most are loathe to take a stand against their leader.

While the scarcity of extant Norse artifacts in North America makes it impossible to know for certain how the early Norse settlers lived, this book offers a plausible account.

A descriptive and intriguing, if sometimes plodding, narrative.

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