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Book Review: "Axe of Iron; The Settlers" by J.A. Hunsinger, ISBN 9780980160109
Review by: J.R. Hauptman, Author, "The Target; Love, Death and Airline Deregulation"

A full millennium before the current time and half that period before Columbus sailed for North America; Norsemen had established settlements on that continent, and then vanished. "Axe of Iron; The Settlers," by J.A. Hunsinger, is the first of six historical novels that tell the story of one such band that ventured forth from Greenland and settled in the southern regions of what is now Hudson Bay in Canada.

This band has left the Norse settlements of Iceland and Greenland because the climate and soil of those lands were far too harsh and marginal to support their burgeoning population, as were those of their homelands in Scandinavia. Their quest initially follows the paths of the well-known Tenth Century explorers, Eric the Red and Leif Ericsson, but bad weather forces them to alter their course into previously unexplored lands. Their exploration leads them to what appears to be a nearly ideal location on the coast of modern day James Bay and they settle into the grueling work to establish their settlement and to prepare for the harsh winter ahead.

Knowing fully well that earlier expeditions had suffered from conflicts with the native tribes of the coastal regions, the leader of this band determines that they might better succeed by establishing respectful and cooperative trading relationships with these natives than to attempt naked conquest. Conflict inevitably arises and the settlers must maintain constant vigilance against attack. Domestic matters make things even worse due to a need for more marriageable women in what is mostly a male warrior band.

Will this colony endure its birth pangs and survive to grow and prosper? Can these pioneers adapt to the hardships of their new life?

Author Hunsinger weaves his story line into a magnificently researched and crafted literary work that takes us into the lives of these Medieval Norse, whose culture has brought them to the leading edge of Iron Age Technology. His writing paints the details of their skills as sailors and watermen, farmers and trades people. A prime example of their ability to convert raw materials into essential products is their blacksmithing. Using bog iron from the muskeg swamps and charcoal from the forests, they are able to manufacture steel for weapons, armor, and tools. This technological advantage along with their warrior skills might balance the numerical inferiority they suffer against the native peoples.

The saga of these Norse lasts for over four hundred years and ends in the mystery of their disappearance. Throughout "The Settlers," Hunsinger strives in historical fiction to document their struggle for survival. In doing so, he draws striking parallels with our present world. It is obvious that the volume of detailed onsite research Mr. Hunsinger has invested in this project far outweighs that of this volume and of those to follow.

I have been personally interested in the factual and legendary tale of the Norse in America for many years and I believe this author may be the first to do it justice. This first volume has hooked me on this series and I eagerly await the continuation.

J.R. Hauptman
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