



ODIN'S
RETURN

by
Ragnar
Storyteller

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In a little Northern European village in the 15th century, a young Viking Warrior comes of age. His mother is horribly killed by a vile priest of the new slave-making religion that has over run his world.

While making a pilgrimage to his mother's grave he meets a tall dark, one-eyed stranger dressed in a long dark cloak. What the stranger tells young Thorolfr not only changes his life and the lives of his younger brother and sister, but it starts the revival of the religion of the Old Gods, who once ruled the North.

Follow Thorolfr on his vision quest into his rites of passage which change him from a teenage villager with no destiny to a Viking Warrior with the fate of his kindred in his hands.



ODIN'S RETURN

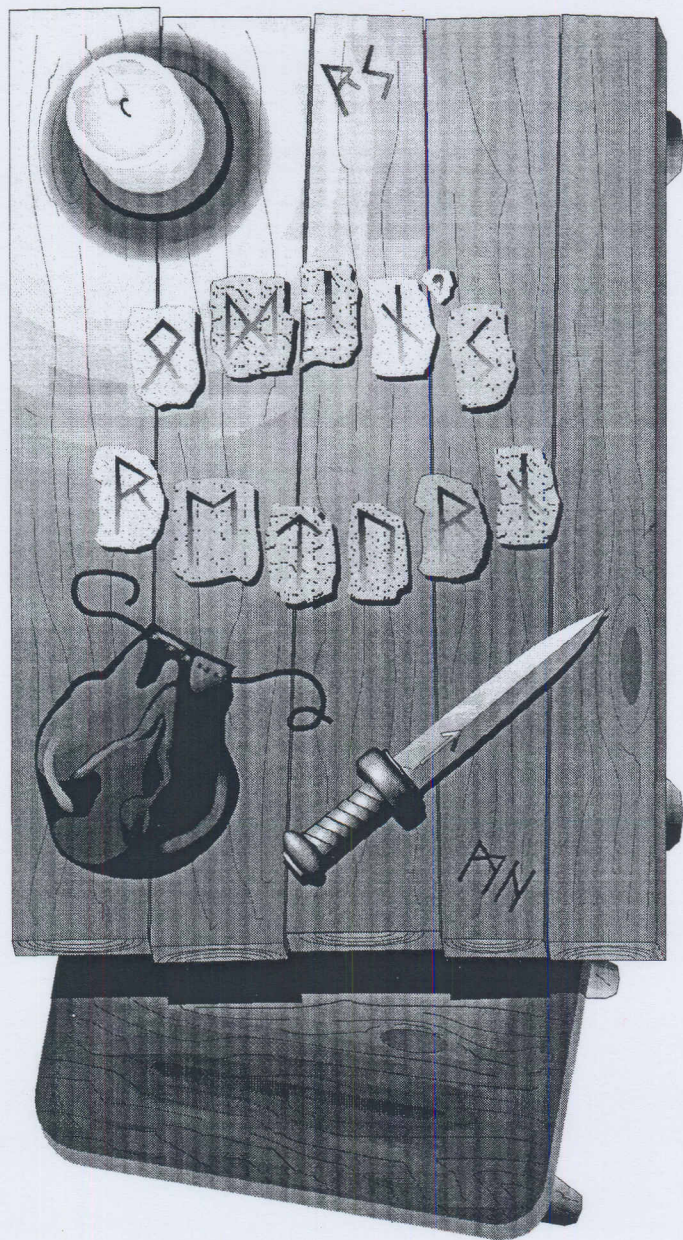


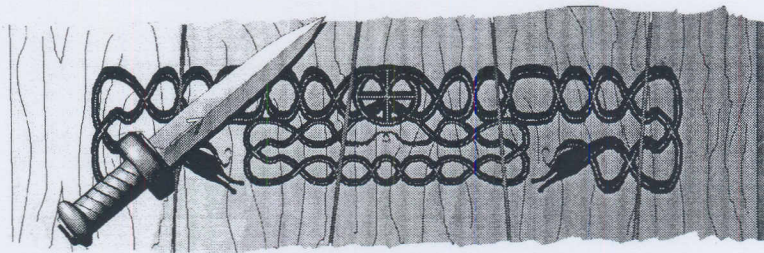
by
Ragnar Storyteller

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In a village of mud and thatch huts, during the beginning of the fifteenth century, an event took place that was to effect the direction that civilization would travel for the next millennia.

For hundreds of years during those dark times the power of the new organized religion had covered the earth, sweeping all the older primordial religions before it. With flame, sword, bigotry and slander its priests destroyed the pagan religions of the North. But now the tide was about to turn!

Ona lit the little candle on the roughly made table and shook her eldest son Thorolfr from his sleep.

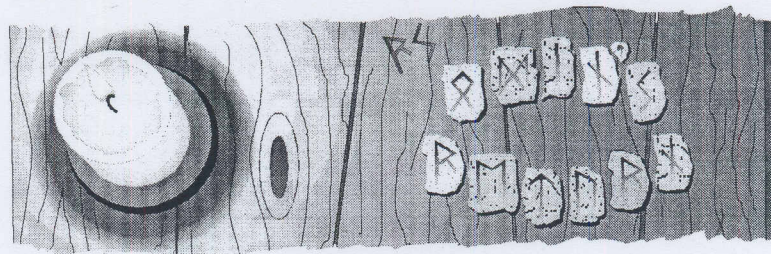
"It is time for me and little Ona to go to the grotto and gather the sacred sky water," she said. "You watch over your younger brother Eric and we will return shortly."

"Mother, when will I be able to help?" Thorolfr asked. "I am almost thirteen."

"In do time, my son," the smiling young mother said. "These are very dangerous times and I do not want you to be harmed by the venomous priest who hates our religion with a black passion! Soon it will be time for you to be a man, and then I will tell you all you need to know. Now watch your brother and we will return soon."

"Be careful mother," Thorolfr said, "he is always watching you."

"I will be careful my son," the young widowed mother said as she picked up her sleepy daughter in her arms and took the two wooden bowls from the shelf.



Slowly and carefully the young mother made her way to the old grotto. The grotto where her ancestors worshipped Odin and the Old Gods of the North. She looked around many times as she walked. What she was about to do was very dangerous, not only to herself but her children.

The huge, deformed priest of her village had profaned and all but annihilated the temples of her religion. Only this hidden grotto remained. If she was caught? Her young body shook with the horrors of the thought of being caught.

But none the less she went forward, just before dawn with her wooden bowls and her young daughter.

When she reached the grotto, she took one more long look around and decided that she was indeed alone.

Little Ona, rubbed the sleep out of her eyes, "Mommy is it time?"

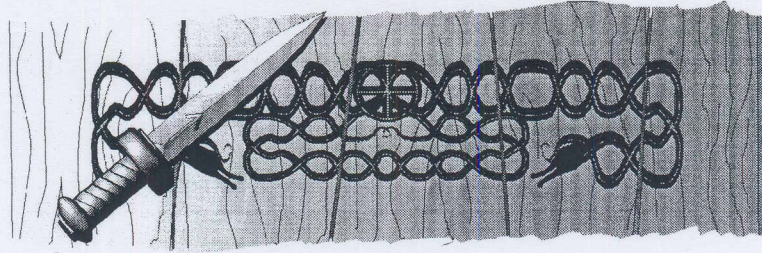
"Yes my dear," the young widow said.

"And I can help?" the precious blonde haired, blue eyed child asked.

"Oh, for sure you can help," the mother said. "It is part of our heritage that we woman of the North collect the sacred sky water. And if we are fortunate maybe Thor will bless the water with his thunder and lightening."

"Then the water will be stronger?" little Ona asked.

"Yes, my dear," the widow smiled, "it will be stronger. Now come along and help me."



The young widow searched till she found a fallen branch of the right size. Then taking the little girl in one hand she held the branch in the other hand and drew a seven foot circle in the soft ground around her. When the circle was finished, she reached for the hem of her linen robe and was about to pull it over her head when a cold fear grasped her heart.

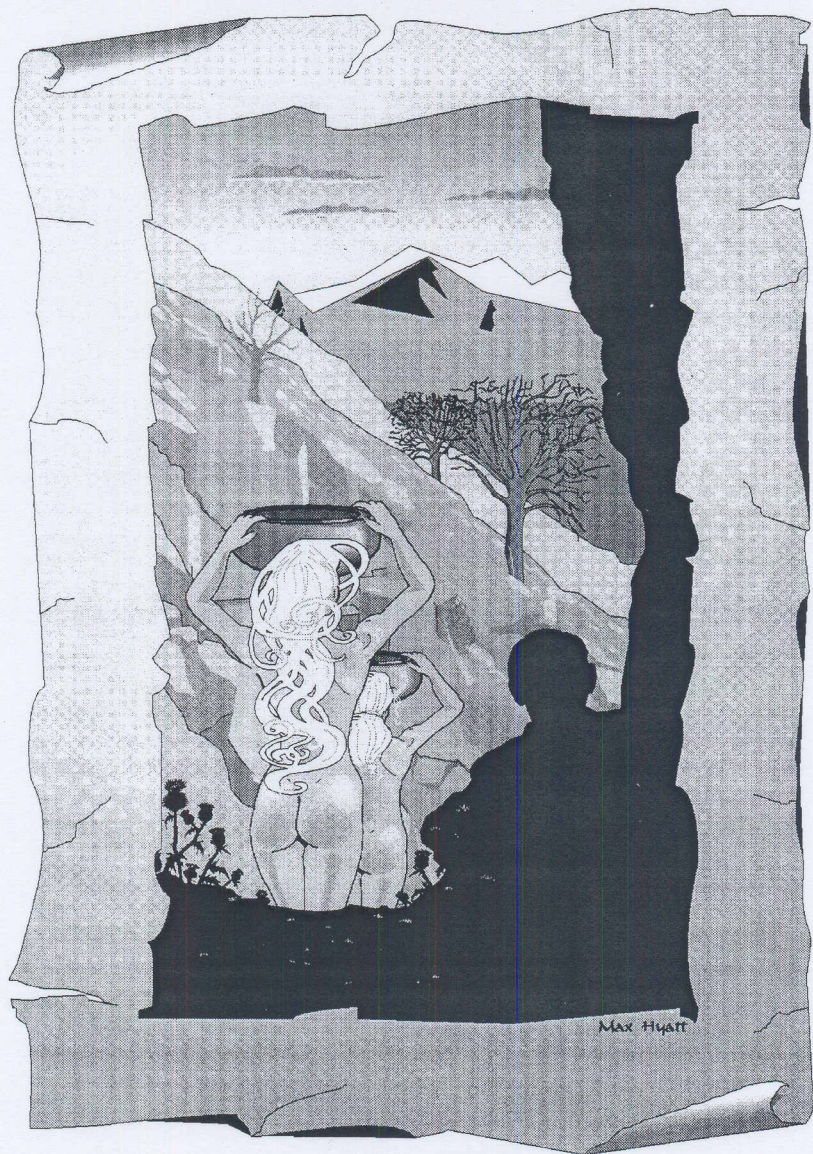
She stopped and looked around. There was no one there, that she could see. She took several deep breaths and thought that it was just the fear that she felt towards that horrible misshapen priest.

When she was convinced that there was no one watching, she again reached down and pulled the rough home made linen dress over her head. Then she helped her little daughter do the same.

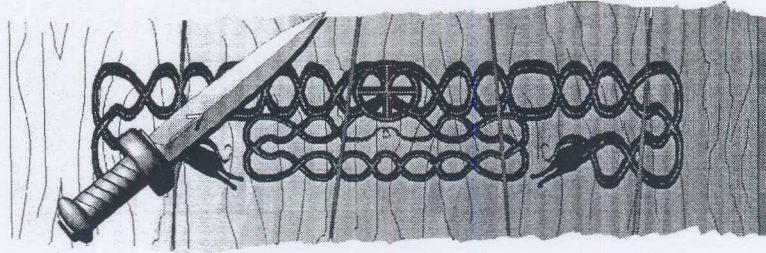
The two of them stood in the center of the circle in all their magnificent naked splendor. Anyone who was watching would have thought that indeed two goddesses were present in the grotto.

And indeed someone was watching. He had waited all night in the shadows of his church. Waiting for the young widow to awake and leave her hut and head towards the grotto. He knew full well all the rituals and sacred days of the young widows religion. Hadn't he been instrumental in destroying it?

He hid there in the bushes, just out of sight, breathing heavily and slobbering at the mouth. He knew for a long time of the young widows continuous worshipping of her Gods. But his lust and desire for her ruled over his hatred of her religion. He had to possess her or destroy her. Today would be the day that he would finally force the issue to a conclusion.



Max Hyatt



He watched and waited and when the young widow disrobed, it took all of his evil control to keep from rushing out of the bushes and ravaging her and her little fair daughter on the spot.

Unaware of the hidden evil danger behind her, the young widow went about her 'sky water ritual.'

"Stand in front of me Little Ona," she said to her daughter, "and be ready with the bowl."

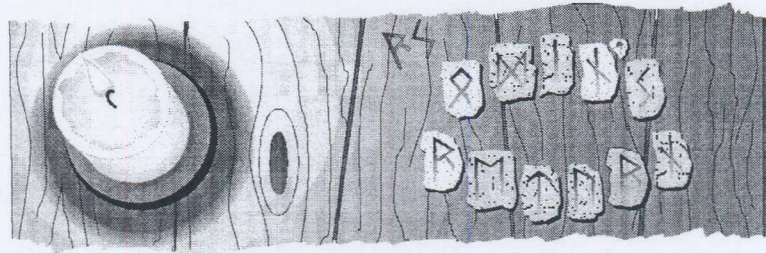
Then she stood very still and raised her beautiful white arms towards the heavens, holding her wooden bowl carefully in her upraised hands. Little Ona stood in front of her mother with her wooden bowl.

They stood there silently for several minutes with eyes closed. The young widow praying silently to the Gods of her ancestors and the little girl waiting quietly and expectantly.

The evil priest could not control his vile lust any more and started to rise from his hiding place, when all of a sudden the sky filled with the sound of roaring thunder. A huge lightning bolt flashed off to the right.

The fearful and superstitious priest, froze in his tracks. What could his God, a God of turning the other cheek, a God of sheep, do in the face of the wrath of a stronger and more ancient God? He stood transfixed to the spot, his evil plotting of rapine and dishonor were nipped in the bud.

The young widow opened her eyes and whispered to her little daughter, "the great God Thorr is going to honor us with thunder and lightning for our sacred water. What a wonderful



thing to have Gods who respond to our needs. Remember this Little Ona.

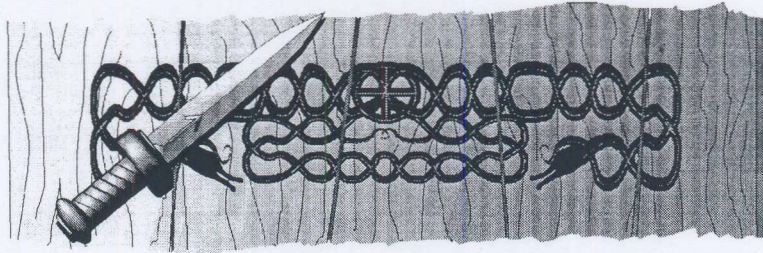
Yes the God of thunder did respond but in more ways than one as his second and third lightning bolts forced the evil priest to his knees with slobbering lips and quivering body.

Off to the east of the Grotto, the sun was just starting to peek its head up over the horizon. The young widow waited and watched for the exact moment when she would turn the wooden bowl upward to catch the rain water that was about to come. All was in readiness and she marveled at how her Gods could arrange nature so that all of the pieces needed for the water gathering ritual would be in place at the same time.

It was only once before that she had witnessed such a combination of elements. Long ago, before the evil priest and his minions came to her village and destroyed her religion. Long ago before her husband had been killed in the defense of his kin and kindred. Long ago, when she too stood between the legs of her mother and waited as Little Ona is now waiting.

She didn't understand why the memories of that long ago past stirred so strongly in her breasts these last weeks. Strong enough for her to openly defy the priest and come to the sacred grotto to once again invoke her Gods. She only knew deep down that she needed the sacred sky water to share with her children. To bring health and strength to her oldest son who would soon be entering manhood. She stood in awe as the Gods of her ancestors responded fully to her needs.

With one last thunderous roar, Thor filled the



grotto and all the surrounding lands with peals of lightning and thunder. Ona could feel the first drops of rain on her face and her naked body.

Then at the same moment that the rain started to fall, far to the east, the sun peeked over the horizon. The widow stood ready, for her timing had to be perfect.

The beautiful light rays of the rising sun, moved towards her through the rain drops. They came at the speed of light, but to the raised consciousness of the thrilled widow it seemed as if she could watch them come towards her slowly and steadily. Then at the exact instant that the golden rays of the sun reached her and her daughter, she turned the bowl upward and it filled with the powerful water of Thor. Then just as the bowl filled to the brim and started to spill over towards the waiting bowl of the little girl below the sun beams impregnated each drop with magical life powers.

The lower bowl filled slowly and steadily with light impregnated water and when it was filled the rain mysteriously stopped.

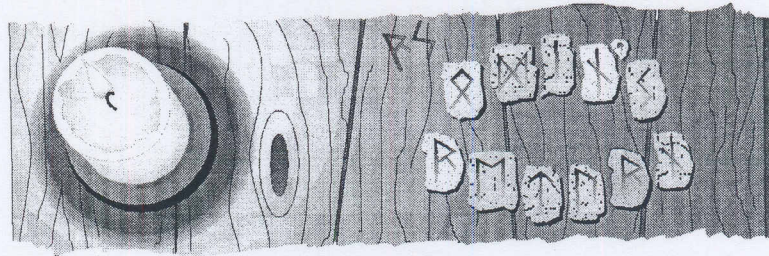
"Be careful," the young widow said to her little daughter, "don't spill any of the sky water."

"Oh, I won't mommy," the little girl responded. "Was that really the God Thor who caused the rain and the thunder?"

"Yes, my love," the mother responded. "You have witnessed a great event today. One that you will remember for the rest of your life. Did you see what mommy did? And what you did?"

"Yes, mommy."

"Good, my dear, remember it always for it



will be up to you to teach it to the girl children of your own!"

"Does my brother Thorolfr know about this?" the little girl inquired.

"No, this is the secret of the women and only women are to know about it," the mother said. "There are things that will be taught to your brother that you will have no need to know. We women have our secrets and the men have their own. But, sometimes I think that our secrets are a little more important."

This pleased the little girl and she giggled in delight. The young widow took the bowl from her little daughter and placed it carefully on the ground. She then helped her daughter get dressed and finally pulled her linen dress over her young and vibrant body.

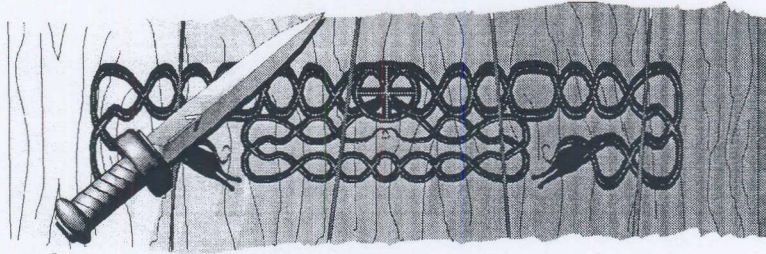
No Sooner had she dressed when through the bushes to her right, the evil priest, who had been held in check by the natural powers of the Old Gods, rushed forth.

"Now I have you, you fiendish witch. I have caught you in the act of worshipping your pagan gods and murmuring heathenish incantations," he yelled.

The fear instilled in him by the storm had cooled his lustful appetites, but the black hate and fury of his demented soul cried out for vengeance.

He took several steps towards the scared and startled woman when his foot got tangled in some roots. He fell forward on his face into a pool of mud and water.

The young widow, picked up the bowl and with her little daughters hand in hers, rushed from



the grotto towards her little shack.

"You'll not get away from me, you Pagan Witch, I will seek you and those brats of yours out. You will pay for your blasphemies," he shouted after her.

The young widow rushed home. Her heart was filled with terror. She was not so much afraid for her life, for now she knew that it was forfeit and soon she would join her husband in Valhall. But what about the children? Surely they could not die, not now. She would not allow it. But how could she avert it? What could she say or do to prevent them from being put to death along with her?

She raced into her hut and Thorolfr quickly noticed the state she was in.

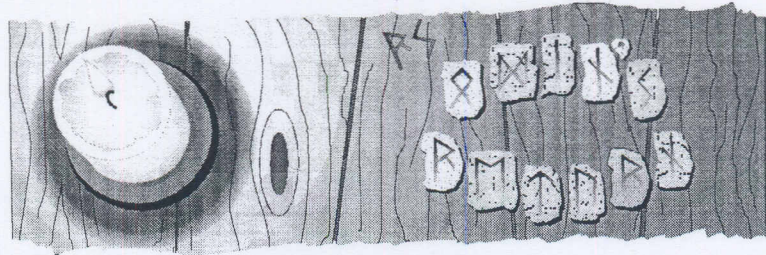
"What happened, mother," he asked. "Who is after you? Is it that grotesque priest?"

With that Thorolfr picked up the chopping axe and placed himself in front of the door. Little Eric grabbed a twig from the wood pile and stood bravely alongside of his big brother.

"Oh no, my brave children," the young widow said. "That is exactly what you must not do. Not now."

"But, but, mother," Thorolfr cried, "I cannot allow anyone to hurt you. It is my duty to protect you, if I can."

The young widow looked at her son and her eyes filled with tears. She grabbed him in her arms, and the two younger children held onto her legs. She could control herself no longer and the tears and sobs flooded out from her. In an instant all four of the kindred of the persecuted Olden Gods were



crying and sobbing.

When the young widow finally composed herself she took the children to the cot and sat them down.

"Now, Thorolfr, you must listen carefully to me. This is what you must do. They will be coming soon," she said in a composed voice. "I am doomed, but you must live."

"Mommy," cried little Ona, "mommy..."

"No, no," Thorolfr shouted, "I won't let them."

"Me neither," piped in little Eric.

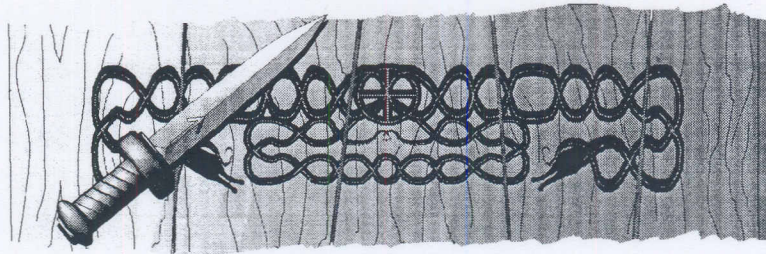
"No," the young widow gasped, "you must not resist them. You must live. You must avenge me and our people. You must, you must."

She broke down again and all of them cried.

"Now, Thorolfr, listen to me. What you must do is much harder than what I must do. Soon, I will be in Valhall with your father. The pain and suffering that I will feel will be short lived. But, oh you my son, it may last a long time. But, ...but it is the way of our people to make sacrifices. I must sacrifice my life and you must sacrifice even greater things. You must promise me that you will sacrifice your desire to interfere. You must not try to stop them. Swear to me."

"But, mother," Thorolfr cried, "mother..."

"Swear to me," she begged. "Your life and the lives of your brother and sister are more dear to me than my life. Swear to me and I go happy and content."



Thorolfr looked at his young and beautiful mother and through tear soaked eyes managed to say in an almost inaudible voice, "I swear, mother. I swear."

"Good," she said, "now take the hands of little Ona and Eric and I will tell you a very important thing."

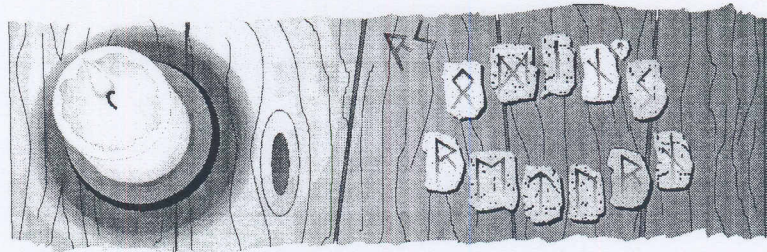
Thorolfr took the little hands of his brother and sister and the three of them waited for their mother to speak.

"Your father told me that you, Thorolfr were a very special child and that you had a very special destiny to fulfill. But before he could tell me all he died trying to protect us from the evil that took over our lands. Oh, he died, alright," she said with a gleam in her eye. "And I was there. You should have seen him all dressed in his battle gear with helm pulled down over his eyes. He looked like a God, and he fought like Tyr himself.

"The soldiers of the evil ones fell before him and the other warriors of the village like so much wheat falls before the scythe of the farmer. They fought from morning till night. Many were the blows that landed on his shield and helm. And many were the blows that I and the other women of the village took upon our shields while we protected their backs..."

"You were there mother," Thorolfr asked, "in the middle of the battle?"

"Oh, yes, my son, you were there also, but the three of you were too young to remember. We, the women of our race, did not let our men fight alone. No, we took up spears and shields and protected their backs as well as we could. We were



their eyes from behind. Oh, you would have loved to have seen your father's death. It was indeed magnificent to behold.

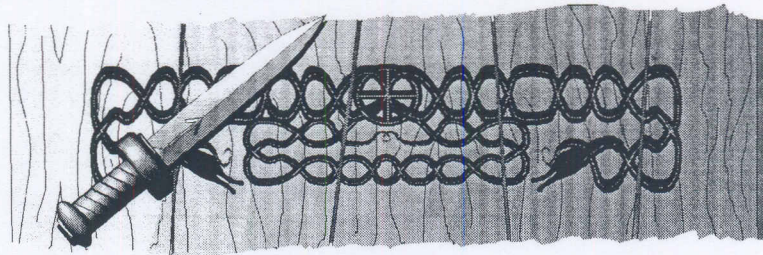
"He was the last of the warriors left standing. Myself and the other women had been dragged away by the soldiers and he stood there magnificently defiant, bleeding from a hundred wounds. He was all alone when they asked him to surrender. In answer he laughed, held his bloody arms in the air and shouted, 'Odinnnnnnnnnnnnnn!!'

"He then climbed over the heap of dead bodies, the bodies of the fallen enemy that he had slain with his own hands, and charged for the group of soldiers who held us women captive. His last act was one in defense of the women, of heroic defiance. By this time he was bone weary and he was cut down only two feet from where my stretched out hands reached for him. But as he fell to the ground, he looked into my eyes and smiled. I knew that even then the valkyries had come for him and he was already on the way to Valhall.

"We, the women and children of the village, were locked together in the long house. And oh how the Gods cried that night. The sky filled with thunder and lightening and the world was shook to its foundations by a tremendous storm. Never has there been such a storm. It was as if mighty Thor tried to cleanse the planet of all the evil ones in one night.

"The more the storm raged the more we, the remaining women drew strength, knowing that our Gods had indeed not forsaken us."

"Then why did the All Father, not save our father," Thorolfr asked.



"Who knows the mind of the All Father?" she answered "He has the fate of the whole kindred to be concerned with. The life and death and the fate of one warrior is for him to know, not us."

They sat quietly for awhile as the young widow allowed her words to sink deep into the hearts and minds of her children.

"What is it that I am to do?" Thorolfr asked.

The young widow looked at him and said, "I am not sure my son. It is a secret that your father took to Vahall with him. That is why you must let me die. I must go to him and get you the answer."

"Then how will you tell me, if you die?" Thorolfr asked.

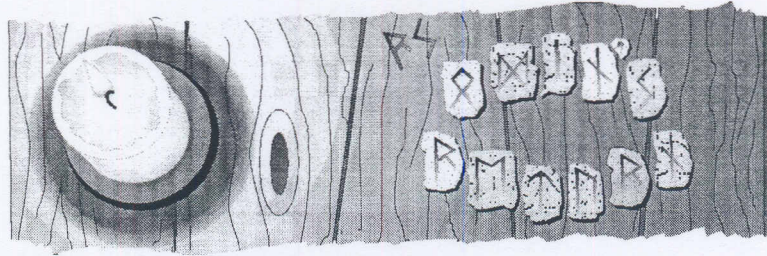
"There is a way," she said. "The old legends say that if you come to my grave in the beginning of winter and write runes on a leaden plate, you will be able to communicate with me. I will know what it is that you have written. So, my son, you must write the words, 'mother, what is it that I am to do?' Then I will find a way to answer you."

"Will you come back from the dead to tell me?" Thorolfr asked.

"That I do not know," she answered. "The legends say that it is easier for the living to speak to the dead across the veil, than it is for the dead to speak to the living. But whatever it is that I must do, I will tell you."

She paused and the four of them held each other tightly. "Now do you see why you must let me die and not interfere?"

Thorolfr hesitated and said, "yes, mother. I

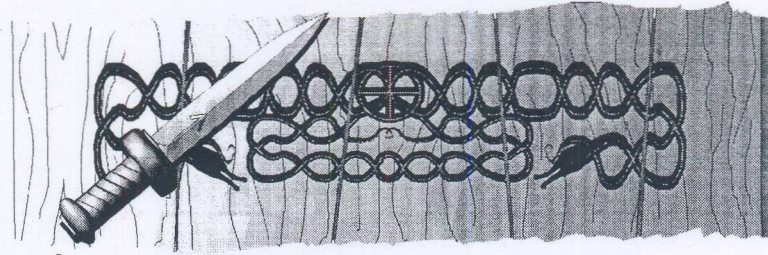


do not want to, but I will."

"That is my good son," she smiled. "What I ask you to do is far harder than what I must do. You must survive. At all costs you must survive. You must save the children. Do what ever it takes to survive, say what ever you must say to those who slay me. Stay alive, for you have a destiny to fulfill. I do not know what it is. But it has more to do than just you or I. Our whole race will be affected by what you are to do. Stay alive my son..."

Just then the shouting of many angry voices could be heard coming towards their little hut. The young widow turned pale, but the strength in her Northern heart not allow her to show to her children the fear and terror that she felt. She stood in front of the three of them as the flimsy thatch door of her little home was bashed in by several axes.

"There you are, harlot and blasphemer," came the vile words out of the lips of the mouth of the contorted face of the deformed priest. He was the first one who rushed in and defiled the sanctuary of her home. Behind him came three burly men of the village. The ancestral soul of the Northern ancestors inside of them was dead. It had been replaced by the foul lies of the new religion and all compassion and honor had long since left them. In order to curry favors with the evil priest, they now did his dirty work. They had become his internal police force. There was nothing that they would not do for their new masters. Many of the other villagers had been forced into submission and only went along with the priest and his evil ways, for they felt that their ancestors had failed them. But deep within their breasts the small spark of the ancestral soul still glowed.



But not strong enough for them to come forward and stop the horrible deeds that were about to take place. The nobility and honor of the hearts had been put to sleep and they stood outside passively as the priest and his three traitorous henchmen led the widow and her three children out of the hut.

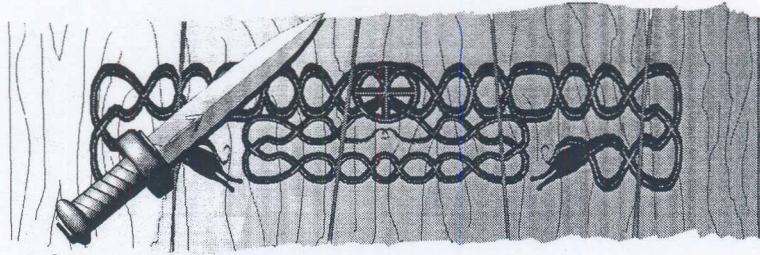
The priests' fury was boundless and when he saw the mob of sleeping sheep like people he shouted, "here is the blasphemer and her evil offspring. Let what is about to happen be a lesson for all to see. What happens to those who worship the devil and his heathen gods."

Several of the men and women in the mob were instantly inflamed by his vehemence and shouted insults at the young widow, who stood there defiantly glaring back at them. She looked around at each of them, face to face and eye to eye. Even in the final moments of her short life, her strong heart poured out her defiance at them.

Several of the men and women dropped their eyes for they could not with good conscience look into the face of the doomed young woman. It was easier to drop their eyes and pretend that they did not see what they saw, then to reach down into the depths of their own captive hearts and bring forth the fury and courage to stop this dastardly deed. The scene was as it has ever been. The true and honorable being martyred by the stronger evil while the mob of luke warm souls watched in quiet acceptance, lest they be asked to change places with the doomed.

Ah, if only the fire of courage would be lit in the hearts of all who watched, then the deeds of





horror that were about to take place could be aborted.

The huge priest dragged the young widow, who neither cow-towed to him nor resisted his brutal tugging, towards the center of the village. Each of the three traitorous henchmen dragged or carried one of the children.

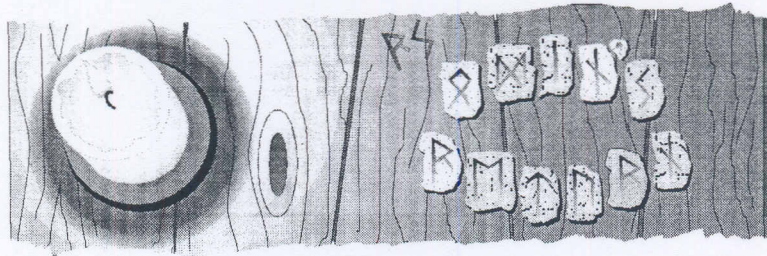
At the center of the village a single wooden pole stood straight and tall in it's newly dug hole. The priest and his henchmen had prepared well for the evil deeds that they were about to do.

The priest dragged the helpless widow to the pole and roughly tied her hands behind it. Then he wrapped loop after loop of the rough rope around her young body, and with each turn, unseen by those who watched from the distance, his foul and lecherous hands fouled her breasts and loins. She closed her eyes and endured. Her only thoughts in these moments of deep shame, were not for her but for her children. She knew that if she cried out or even showed signs of resistance, her oldest son would not be able to endure it and would strike out and be killed himself. No, she had to endure this cruel and foul death, just as Thorolfr would have to endure his life amongst these foul creatures.

So she stood there majestically with eyes flaming defiance at the misshapen servant of an evil god and awaited her fate.

When the priest was finished tying her to the post and when he had his lecherous fill of pawing and mawing at her body, he stepped back and signaled for one of the henchman.

The henchman who was holding little Eric let



him go and walked to the priest. Thorolfr grabbed his younger brother and held him tightly in front of him. He too, like his mother stood there defiantly with clenched teeth and flaming eyes. There was nothing that he could do now, but his young eyes took in all. The future would be his turn. He would measure out blow for blow to each of those who took part in these ghastly deeds. His heart was frozen and he would not allow it to show through his breast and give satisfaction to those around him. No, if his mother could meet her fate in a proud and defiant manner, then he too would mirror her.

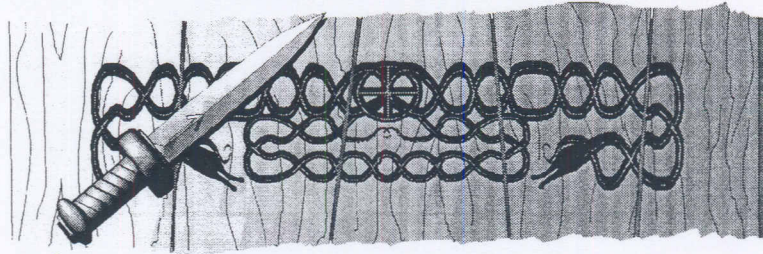
The henchman piled green wood around the pyre of the young widow.

The priest took up a torch and walked towards the young widow. He turned towards the children to make sure that they were watching, then he poked the torch in amongst the green wood.

In a very few moments the quiet of the village was pierced by the screams of the young widow as the green wood slowly took flame and attacked her body.

Young Ona broke free from her henchman and ran and buried her young sobbing face in her brothers chest. Thorolfr held his brother and sister to him as he watched the horrible death of his mother. She was being murdered for wanting to worship the Gods of her ancestors, by an evil priest, whose religion was so intolerant that it destroyed and murdered all who did not believe in it.

The priest in his sick moment of glory ran towards Thorolfr and shrieked, "hear her scream? Soon she will be screaming in the depths of hell with her false gods. If you do not



become part of the true church and learn how to bow your head and bend your knees, to believe and obey, then one day the same fate awaits you."

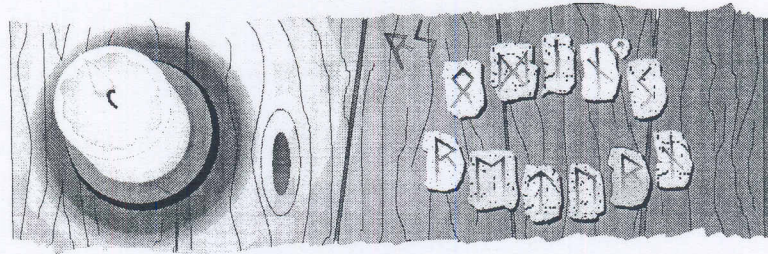
Thorolfr looked into the demonic face of the priest. He was not afraid of the false supernatural terrors that the priest tried to conjure up with his words. He did not fear a fictional hell, nor a make believe devil. He knew that the evil priest could not harm his soul or the soul of his brother and sister. But he did know that he could torment their bodies and torture them. To save their lives from this religious menace, he pretended to acquiesce.

For the next several months, Thorolfr was tested to his limits. Under the constant stare of the misshapen priest he worked hard in the fields all day. In the evenings he cooked and took care of his brother and sister. On Sunday's when the little bell called the village to mass, he and his siblings attended. And while the priest spewed forth his lies about peace, love and the salvation of man in one breath, while in the next breath, brought down the damnation of his own man made hell against all pagan ideas and beliefs, Thorolfr sat there and stared straight ahead.

The priest in his unholy pride thought that the quiet obedience of the older boy and his brother and sister meant that he had trapped another convert to his perverted religion.

But if he had the powers to look into the mind of Thorolfr, the crooked smile that he smiled when he patted the boy on the head would have turned to fear and worry.

For although Thorolfr sat there and pretended to be



listening, in the secret place of his mind and heart, he plotted and he waited.

Finally the cold winds swept down from the North and the day that Thorolfr had patiently waited for came. He roused the children early from their sleep. Then he pulled over one of the crude chairs and reached up into the thatch work of the ceiling and pulled down a small leaden tablet, wrapped carefully in linen.

"Is today the day?" little Ona asked.

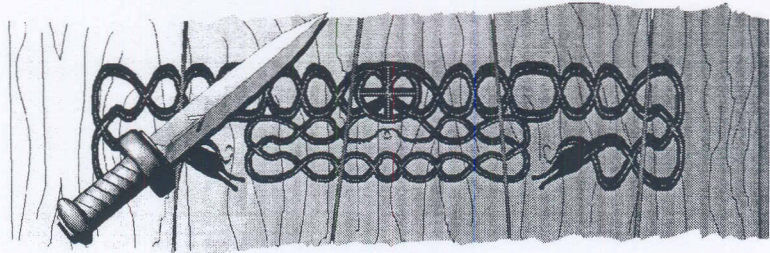
"Yes," Thorolfr said. "Today is the day that we go to see Mommy and leave her our message."

"Why did we have to wait so long?" little Eric asked as he rubbed the sleep from his eyes.

"Because it is only in winter, the time when death is all around, when the trees and the plants have all gone to sleep. When nature has died for the season. This is the only time to communicate with the dead."

They dressed hurriedly and Thorolfr quietly opened the door and looked around. They were fortunate that their hut was one of the farthest ones from the church and the center of the village. It was quite easy to slip out the front door and around the back and off into the woods.

The children hurried along the path towards the unmarked grave of their young mother. The priest had seen to it that she had not received a proper burial and what had remained of her body was merely tossed into a shallow pit and covered with earth. It was only through Thorolfr's cunning and stealth that he had been able to follow the henchmen who had carried his mother's remains away and buried them. The priest had not



wanted any evidence of his dastardly deed.

When the children reached the little mound which was the silent grave of their mother, Thorolfr took the leaden tablet from beneath his cloak and knelt. The other two knelt beside him. Thorolfr looked long and hard at the magical runes that he had carved onto the leaden tablet.

"What do they say?" Ona asked.

"I am not quite sure," Thorolfr said. "I asked one of the village elders and she showed me how to make the runes."

"Did she tell the priest?" little Eric asked.

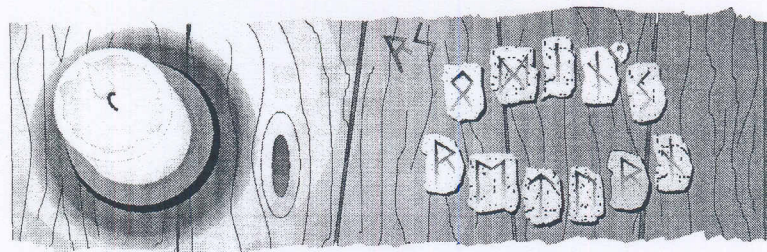
"No," Thorolfr said. "Not all of our people are cowards and traitors like the ones who killed mom. Some of them, secretly deep down in their hearts, still love and worship the old gods. But they are afraid and confused. But when we rid the village of the evil priest then I will help them."

"It is good that we are not all alone," Ona said. "Sometimes when that priest looks at me, I get real scared."

"Do not worry little one," Thorolfr said, "he will never hurt you or Eric while I draw breath."

Thorolfr took a piece of branch that was laying on the ground next to him and dug into the hard crust of the dirt that covered the remains of his mother. He worked long and hard till he finally managed to dig a hole about 12 inches deep.

"This should be enough," he said. He placed the leaden tablet into the hole and carefully covered it up. Then he stood and kicked dead branches and leaves over the spot so that



anyone who may pass by would not know that he had recently dug there.

"What will happen now?" little Eric asked.

"Will mommy come back from Valhall and speak to us?" Ona asked.

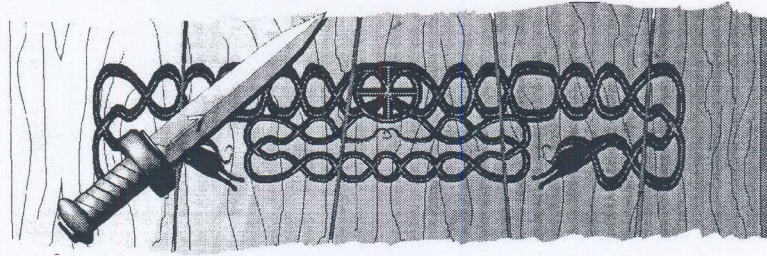
"I do not know," Thorolfr said. "I know that she will receive our message and the elder told me that it is easier for her to hear us then for us to hear her. But we are to come back every morning at this time, till a message of some kind is received."

The children then made their way back to their hut, where the two younger ones went back to bed. Thorolfr went outside and started to chop wood. With each stroke of the axe he pictured the face of the evil priest and swung the axe with such vigor that each blow built his muscles stronger and stronger. In a few weeks he would be thirteen and a man. And he could feel the blood of manhood coursing through his veins as he swung the axe in ever stronger and stronger arcs.

For the next week, Thorolfr awoke his brother and sister early in the mornings and they went and stood vigil at their mothers grave till sunrise. But for one whole week, nothing happened. No one appeared, no messages, nothing out of the ordinary.

When little Eric started to complain about getting up so early, Thorolfr decided to let them sleep and went out in the wee hours of the morning by himself.

On his second day of lonely vigilance in the cold damp hours before sunrise he got his answer. As he stood there looking down at the simple grave a shadow crossed in front of him.



A shadow made when the sun still slept in the sky.

Thorolfr gasped and turned to see an old man in a long cloak with the hood pulled down over his face walking towards him. The old man held a long strong staff.

Thorolfr backed up instinctively. Who was this ancient looking man? Was he sent by the priest?

"Do not be afraid," came the deep voice of the hooded figure as he approached closer and closer. "You are Thorolfr, son of Ragnar and Ona?"

"Yes," Thorolfr gasped. "But ... but, who are you?"

"I am called by many names, but you may call me The-Hooded-One."

"What do you want of me?" Thorolfr asked. All the fear and anticipation that he felt had melted as the Hooded-One strode closer.

"Did you not bury the leaden tablet in the ancient ways?" the Hooded-One asked.

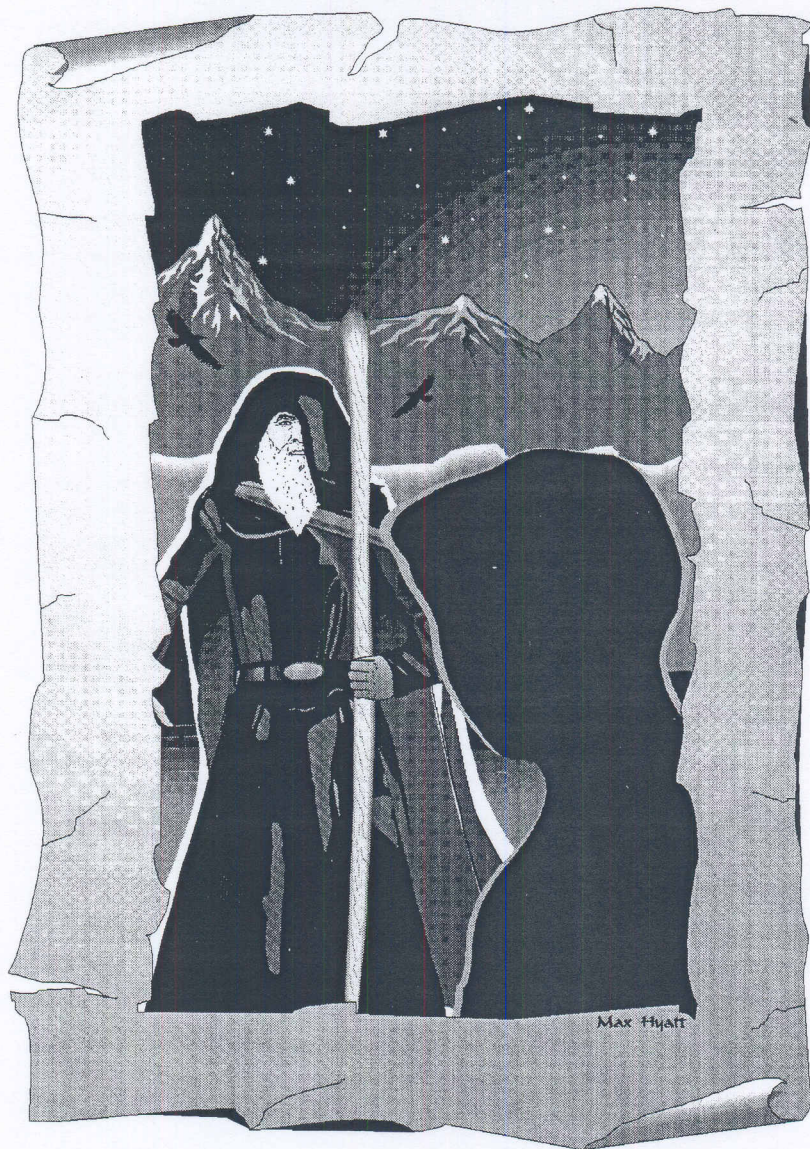
"Yes, ... yes, but ..."

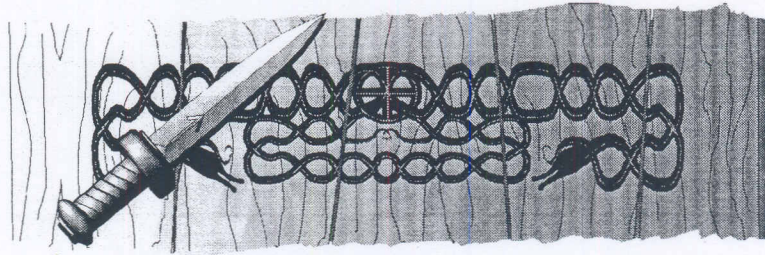
"Did you not expect an answer?" the Hooded-One demanded.

"Yes, but I thought, my mother ..."

"Oh, she knows that I am here to speak to you. But she does not have the power to break through the veil that separates you from her. I came instead," the Hooded-One said.

Thorolfr stood silently as the Hooded-One came to within two paces of him. The sun was starting to rise slowly in





the east and Thorolfr could almost make out his face.

The Hooded-One stood there and Thorolfr could feel him measuring his every thought.

Then the Hooded-One turned and Thorolfr gasped. The Hooded-One had only one eye.

"Could it be?" Thorolfr thought to himself. "Could it be the All Father has actually come to speak to me ... Could ..."

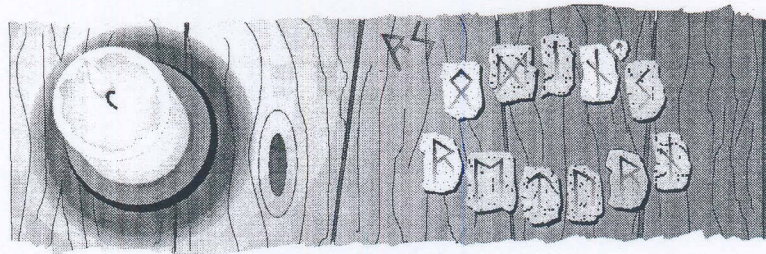
But before he could finish the thought, the Hooded-One said, "listen carefully, we do not have much time. Because of your blood line and because of the heroic valor of your parents, you have been chosen to be given very special knowledge. If you take the knowledge that I am about to impart to you and use it wisely then the Gods of your ancestors will once again walk the earth and come to the aid of the kindred. They will become the Gods of the future as well as the past."

"Do you think you are up to such a task?" the Hooded-one asked.

"Errr, yes, yes," Thorolfr almost shouted. Standing in the presence of the Hooded-One, Thorolfr felt that he could do almost anything. His heart almost burst with pride and power.

"What is it that I must do?" he asked.

"There are three things that you must start with," the Hooded-one said. "First you are to form a conspiracy of equals. Start with your brother and sister and any of the others in the village that you think still want to worship the Gods of old. Remember there will be no leaders, no followers, all must be equal to the task."



"Yes," Thorolfr said, "what else?"

"Secondly," the Hooded-One continued, "the group that you pick must start to honor the Old Gods with secret rites in deserted places. Finally, only share what you have learned with the very few that you trust. Do you understand?"

"Yes, I think so," Thorolfr said.

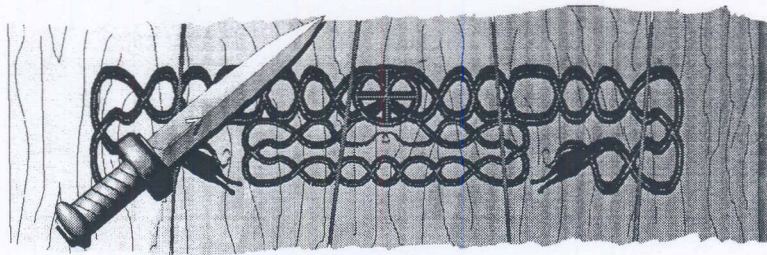
"Now, come and walk with me," the Hooded-One said, "there is more. You must prepare yourself and I will tell you what you must do. Come, my time is short."

Thorolfr stepped closer to the Hooded-One, who put one arm around his shoulder and they walked into the forest together. The Hooded-One filled Thorolfr's ears with secrets from time immortal. Then as quick as he had appeared, he vanished.

For the next few months Thorolfr lived two lives. The one that he presented to the priest was one of complete obedience. He went to mass every Sunday, brought the children, smiled and acted the part of the true convert.

The other life, the hidden and secret one was the one that filled his life with purpose and meaning. He slowly sought out the few people in the village that he felt would gladly go back to the worship of the Old Gods, if given the opportunity.

There was the old woman who helped him with his brother and sister. The smith and his wife and three of the boys his age whose fathers had died in the defense of the village. Young men whose blood raged with the desire for revenge, whose minds were filled with the stories and traditions of ages passed, told to them by the hearth during their younger days.



All in all he had picked out six of the kindred.

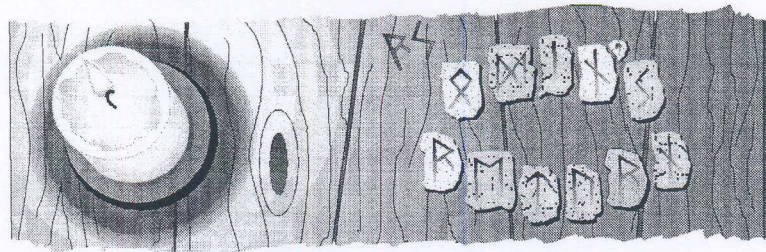
In less than three months Thorolfr had mentally divided the village into three camps. There were those converts who followed the ways of the new religion. They obeyed the priest and his henchman who openly and heavy handedly applied the tenants of the new religion. They were a small group and they would be the ones who would pay in blood.

Then there was a larger group, the sheepl as Thorolfr called them. The majority of the villagers who had lost all honor and courage. Those who went about their daily lives allowing the new false religion to dictate to them how they should think and act. To this group Thorolfr felt nothing but contempt.

During this time he had false smiles for the priest and his henchmen for it was part of his plan to keep them off guard. But for the sheepl he would not even give them the satisfaction of his gaze or his word. He ignored them completely. To him they were worse than the conquers of the false religion.

Then there was the third group that Thorolfr was shaping. The old woman who took care of his younger brother and sister. The smith who was secretly teaching Thorolfr the art of working with steel and the three young men his own age who he had confided in. The three of them had sworn themselves to secrecy and even had taken blood vows late one evening in the light of the full moon.

When Thorolfr was sure of his little band he suggested that they meet in the grotto and secretly worship the Old Gods. The old woman was very helpful that first evening, for being the oldest she remembered some of the words and the rituals of old.



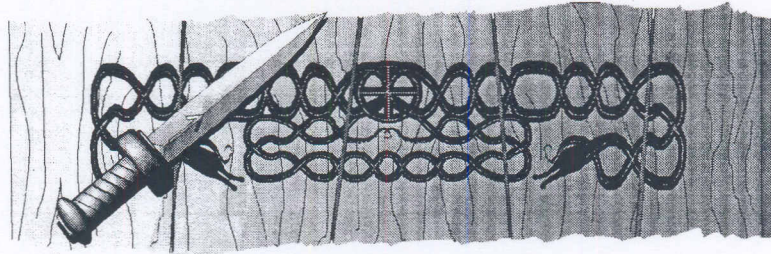
The summer solstice was fast approaching and Thorolfr had reached his thirteenth year, his year of manhood. The blood of his ancestors pumped furiously through his veins. His size though not yet full in stature, was bigger than any of the other boys in the village. He almost stood as tall as a full grown man. His muscles, through his untiring efforts with the wood chopping and the heavy chores bulged proudly through his thin linen clothes. All was ready. All he had left to do was the initiation.

The evening before the summer solstice, Thorolfr called a meeting of all the kindred. They met in the smith's shop for it was not uncommon for young men to congregate there and watch the sparks fly from the smith's anvil as he made tools of peace.

But this evening, with his brother and sister, the old woman, the smith and his wife and his three young warriors to be, Thorolfr turned the smith's shop back to its original purpose. The forging of weapons.

All night long the bellows blew and the anvil and hammer shaped weapons. Six daggers were made. One for Thorolfr, one for little Eric, one for the smith and three for the young men. When all the daggers were finished and the sun was about to rise in the east, the six men, each drew blood from their fingers and let it slowly drip onto their new blades.

Thus the first weapons for the freeing of the kindred had been forged in blood and sweat and were ready to be used. Thorolfr thanked all present and turned to the old woman and told her that he would be gone for a time and she had to take care of little Eric and Ona.



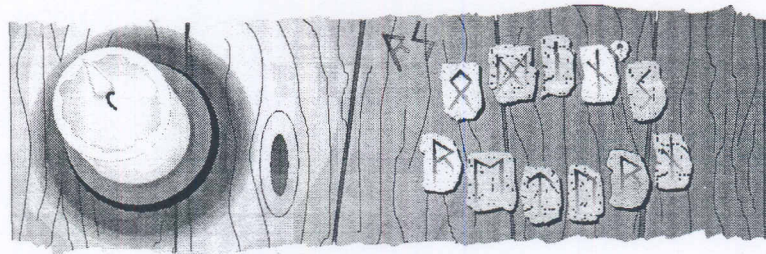
He had to go to the mountains and be initiated. He would be gone four days. He knew that the priest would react and rant and rave at his disappearance and he asked those that he left behind to watch over the children till he returned. And when he returned, well then ...

Early the next morning he left the children with the old woman and left for the mountains. It was June 22, the day of the summer solstice. All the things that he must do, the things that the Hooded-One had told him ran through his mind. He must not forget one step.

As he walked through the forest towards the distant mountain, his eyes scoured the area for a tree. It had to be a certain tree. A tree that had been struck by lightning. He needed to gather the wood from it.

He walked and walked and drew closer and closer to the mountain. His young heart felt anxiety as he could not find a lightning struck tree. Then as he was almost about to break from the forest and start his ascent to the mountain top, there it was off to his right. A giant ash tree stripped of all branches, split in the middle and blackened by the power and force of Thor's lightning which had struck it dead center through its thick bole.

Thorolf smiled as he pulled the ropes from his pack. The ropes that he had especially brought for the wood. Then slowly and carefully he broke off branches from the charred tree and placed them neatly upon the ropes. He could still feel the heat of the lightning in the charred wood. But think as he may he could not remember when the last storm had hit this part of the land. How could that be? How could the wood be still warm if there had not been a storm?

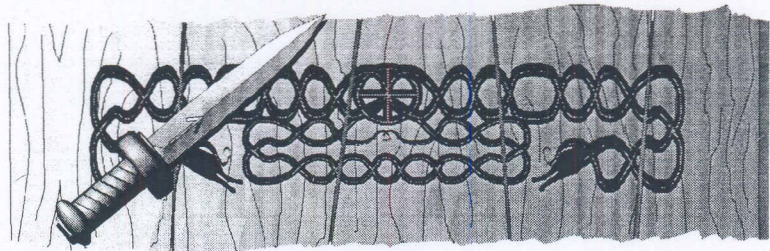


He smiled and recalled many the stories had been told by his father and the other men, around the camp fires in the evening, before the coming of the evil ones. Stories of how their Gods of the North always took a hand in the affairs of men. Thor the God of Lightening and Thunder struck this ash tree, this tree that was in his path to make sure that he would have the necessary wood for what must be done. Yes, that was it. It had to be. Thor had done it especially for him. How else could it still be warm with the sun high in the skies and no storm clouds to be seen? He smiled as he thought of this and continued to gather the wood. When he had made a bundle big enough for him to carry, he tied the ends of the ropes around it, hefted it onto his back and started off to the mountains once again.

He stopped, turned and looked at the charred ash tree and smiled. A silent thought of thanks resonated between him and the tree. Not on bent knee or with a lowered head. No, just a silent word of thanks as one warrior to another. He was doing his job and Thor the Mighty had did his. No need for bent knee between men and gods. That was for the sheepl and the practitioners of the false turn the other cheek religion. Not for the men of the North who knew what the true relationship between gods and men were really all about.

He turned again towards the mountains and the words, 'like a God you must live and like a God you must die', rang through his mind. He smiled, his thanks had been accepted.

Thorolfr climbed the mountain slowly and steadily. The weight of the bundle of wood on his back chaffed his skin and several times the load shifted and caused him to stop and



readjust it. It was getting towards late afternoon, but his slow steady progress moved him closer and closer to the mountain peak.

Finally, a hundred feet or so just below the top the narrow path that he had been climbing opened onto a ledge. He stopped and shifted his heavy pack for a moment and looked at the bushes that grew thickly on the ledge.

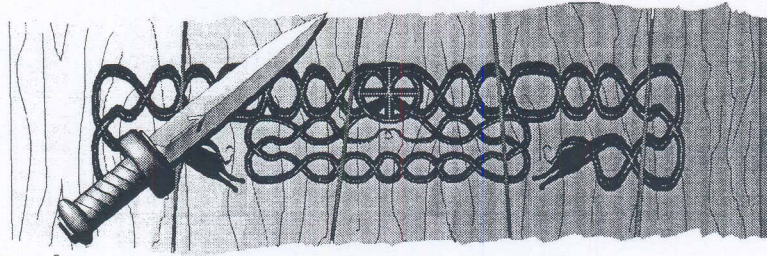
What was that? Was that an opening between the bushes? He put his pack down and pushed his way through. He smiled as he found the entrance of a cave. It was not very wide nor was the ceiling very tall. But he could bend over and crawl in. It was perfect. He could not stand but he had no trouble sitting or stretching out. It was perfect. It would be the perfect place for his three night vigil. He hurried and brought his pack and the wood inside.

That night he make a fire of the sacred wood and all alone with his thoughts he kept a vigil in the cave. He had nothing to eat or drink except bread and water. The Hooded-One had told him that he must be purged by fasting and no one could reach illumination if he were swollen with food and drink.

That night as he sat by the fire he felt a strangeness that he had never felt before. He felt the presence of beings, or higher ones, of Gods. He could not see them but he knew that the reason he was obliged to climb the high mountain was because it was at these great heights that man comes into close proximity with the Gods. He shuddered a little in fear as he thought of this closeness.

For three days and three nights Thorolfir remained in the cave sustaining himself on nothing but the bread and the





water that he had brought with him.

Then at midnight on the third day, Thorolfr rebuilt the fire with the last of the remaining wood. Midnight was significant because it is the hour that is furthest from the day.

He sat in front of the fire in a trance-like state. The three days of silence and fasting had raised his level of consciousness and his mind was sharp and eager to learn.

The fire in front of him moved back and forth and swayed to a hidden rhythm. Thorolfr watch it in quiet fascination. Little faces appeared in the flames and Thorolfr instinctively knew that the fire was alive. Did it not experience birth and death? Did it not grow as you fed it? Did it not have motion, all the attributed that he as a man possessed?

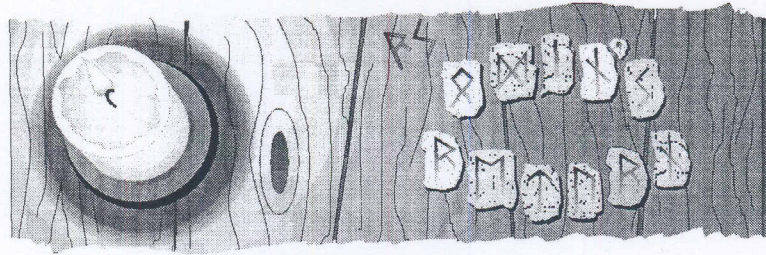
The fire was indeed a luminous entity. One that allowed man to communicate with the Gods.

Thorolfr stood up and looked deeply into the flames. The flames parted and he could see a god-like man standing at the entrance to a bridge. The bridge glowed with all the radiant colors of the rainbow. The god-like man, in battle dress and winged helm stared sternly at Thorolfr, neither giving recognition as to his presence, nor ignoring him.

Thorolfr looked straight at the guardian of the bridge and drew his dagger from his waist band.

He then said, "may this sacrifice of my blood help bring forth the Gods of my Fathers back into my world. May my blood rejuvenate the Ancestral Soul of the kindred."

Then using the dagger he made three incisions on his chest. He made them deep enough so



the blood flowed freely and there would be scars there for the rest of this life.

Thorolfr then held the point of the knife so that the dripping blood saturated it.

"With this blood, which contains my soul, I devote part of my soul to the Gods of Old. The Gods who still live."

Three times he did this and each of the three times he allowed the blood that he had gathered on the blade of the dagger to drip into the sacred flames of the fire.

When he was finished he raised both his arms into the air and shouted, "in the name of Odin, the All Father, Thor and Tyr , I dedicate my life and thrust myself into my future."

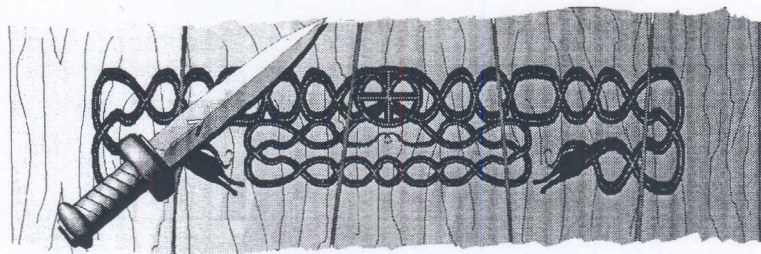
Thorolfr then sat and waited till the last vestige of life in the fire went out. He gathered his pack and started back down the mountain towards the village. The boy-man who had started up the mountain trail three days before no longer existed. The Spirit Warrior, Thorolfr had been born and it was with the steps of a warrior that the young thirteen strode in determination towards his village.

When Thorolfr arrived at the village the sun was just starting to rise. He quickly went to the hut of the old woman where his brother Eric and his sister One were.

They were still asleep when he entered, but the old woman was up and about.

"All went well?" she asked.

"Yes," Thorolfr said and moved towards the



sleeping children.

"Yes, yes it has," she smiled, "a boy left and a man has returned."

"Did the priest give you any trouble?" Thorolfr asked.

"No ... no trouble," she said. "He said good riddance to trouble. In a way, I think that he was glad that you left. But I like not how he looks at young Ona."

Thorolfr's jaw clamped shut. "Well, if all goes well, and I doubt not that it won't, we should be free of the evil priest and his henchman before the sun sets again."

"What? How? ...," the old woman started to say.

"All in good time," Thorolfr smiled. "Now go and awake the kindred and bring them here."

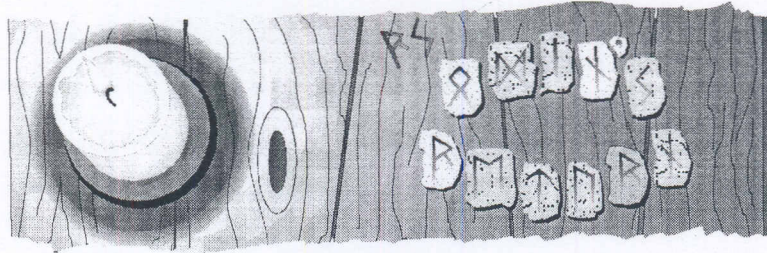
Thorolfr sat on a stool and watched the rising and falling chests of his brother and sister as they slept peacefully. "After today," he thought to himself, "never again will they wake up to fear and subjugation." He would see to that or die in the attempt.

In a short time the three young warriors and the smith and his wife squeezed into the small hut. Their presence awoke Ona and Eric.

Thorolfr hugged each of them as tears rolled down their cheeks. When he was finished with his brother and sister, he turned toward the small group that waited and watched.

"Today is our day of liberation," he said and paused, "or the day that we pass onto Valhall."

He waited till his words had sunk in and then



asked. "What say you?"

"Aye," the burly smith said with one hand holding his huge hammer and the other wrapped tightly around the waist of his wife.

"Aye ... Aye ... Aye," echoed the three youths. "Freedom or death."

"It will be freedom," the old woman said. "Who is there who can stand up against warriors from the North who have their Gods at their backs?"

They all smiled and Thorolfr bid them to sit down. "We need a plan," he said.

The little group huddled together in the small hut, when all of a sudden a loud voice from outside called out demanding, "Thorolfr, you blasphemous whelp. Show yourself."

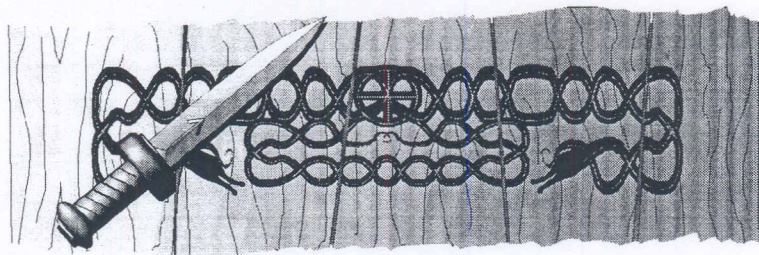
It was the misshapen priest.

"Show yourself, show yourself," came the cry of his gathered flock of sheepal.

Thorolfr looked at his small group. They had not had time to plan. He nodded his head and said, "sometimes the best plan is no plan."

The old smith managed a smile and the three young warriors grinned. Thorolfr's words broke the evil spell that had started to encircle the hut. The spell that the booming voice of the priest and the chanting of the sheepal had started to create.

"Come," Thorolfr said, "we will meet our enemies in the way that our fathers, and our fathers fathers before them did. Boldly and with the All Father at our backs."



Thorolfr picked up a long staff and quickly sharpened the end into a point.

"A spear," the old woman said, "the spear of Odin?"

Thorolfr smiled and pushed open the door to the hut. He walked out boldly. The big smith and his wife walked out and stood beside him. The three young warriors fanned out behind him and the old woman brought the two children out last and stood in the door.

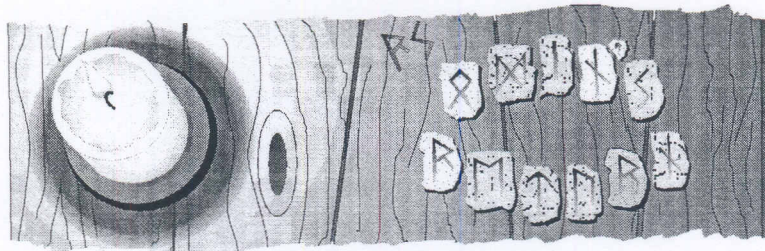
The vile priest stood a good twenty feet away. Behind him, his three traitorous henchmen with spears and swords backed him up. In a semi circle around them stood the rest of the village. Sheepal all.

Again the age old game of war presented itself. The few good facing the many evil with the countless luke warm standing around. But this was as it should be for the true warrior, the supreme form of courage was always the one against the many.

"Well you pagan whelp, ..." the priest started to say.

But Thorolfr, instead of cringing at the priest's voice, took a bold step towards him.

The priest's eyes opened wide. Who was this boy, nay it was no longer a boy, it was a man. Who was this bold man who stood in front of him now? What had happened? Had the Gods of Old come to him? Was he possessed? All these thoughts and many more passed swiftly through the mind of the evil priest, whose voice had always managed to induce complete obedience. But that was from cowards, traitors and sheepal. Now a strong hearted Warrior of the North stood face to face with him.



What was he to do?

He did what his ilk always did. He turned to his henchmen and said, "seize and bind him and scatter the others."

Two of the henchmen started to take one step forward, when Thorolfr hefted his wooden spear and flung it over their heads and the head of the priest.

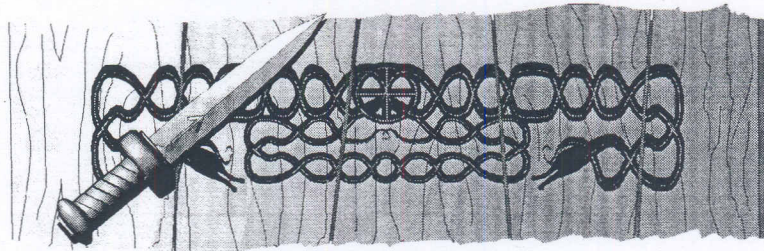
"Odinnnnnnnnnn," he shouted in a bull like throaty roar that belied his years.

The henchman stopped dead in their tracks. Even though for the past years they had given up their heritage as Northern warriors, deep in their hearts they remembered the war cry of the ancestors. Thorolfr had invoked the power of Odin, the God of War, to his side. By casting his spear over their heads, his enemies, he struck such fear into them, that they froze in their tracks.

The priest took his long staff shaped like a cross and tried to beat the three immobile henchmen into moving forward. But beat as he may, they stood there as if frozen to the ground. The All Father had them in his spell.

The priest's fear now turned to rage and fury and he turned on Thorolfr and shouted, "no heathen spell is going to stop me." He held his cross in the air and shouted and yelled for his false god to come down and break the power of these heathen pagans.

After several minutes of ranting and raving, nothing happened. A murmur went up through the sheep. The three henchmen still stood frozen. Only the three young warriors moved. They quickly ran in and snatched the spears and the weapons from the three men and then prodded them to the side.



The sheepal moved back and Thorolfr took several steps forward. Now the huge misshapen priest and the thirteen year old Thorolfr stood alone face to face.

The priest was slobbering at the lips and he looked around for help. There was none to be found. He looked around for an avenue of escape and again there was none to be found.

"You wouldn't dare strike a man of God," he shouted in mock bravery.

"Whose God?" Thorolfr asked. "Not mine. My God would not spawn such a misshapen thing as you are. Prepare to meet your god, for your time grows short."

"You ... how dare ... I am a man of peace ...," the priest tried to say.

But Thorolfr was not listening. Visions of the death of his mother clouded his mind.

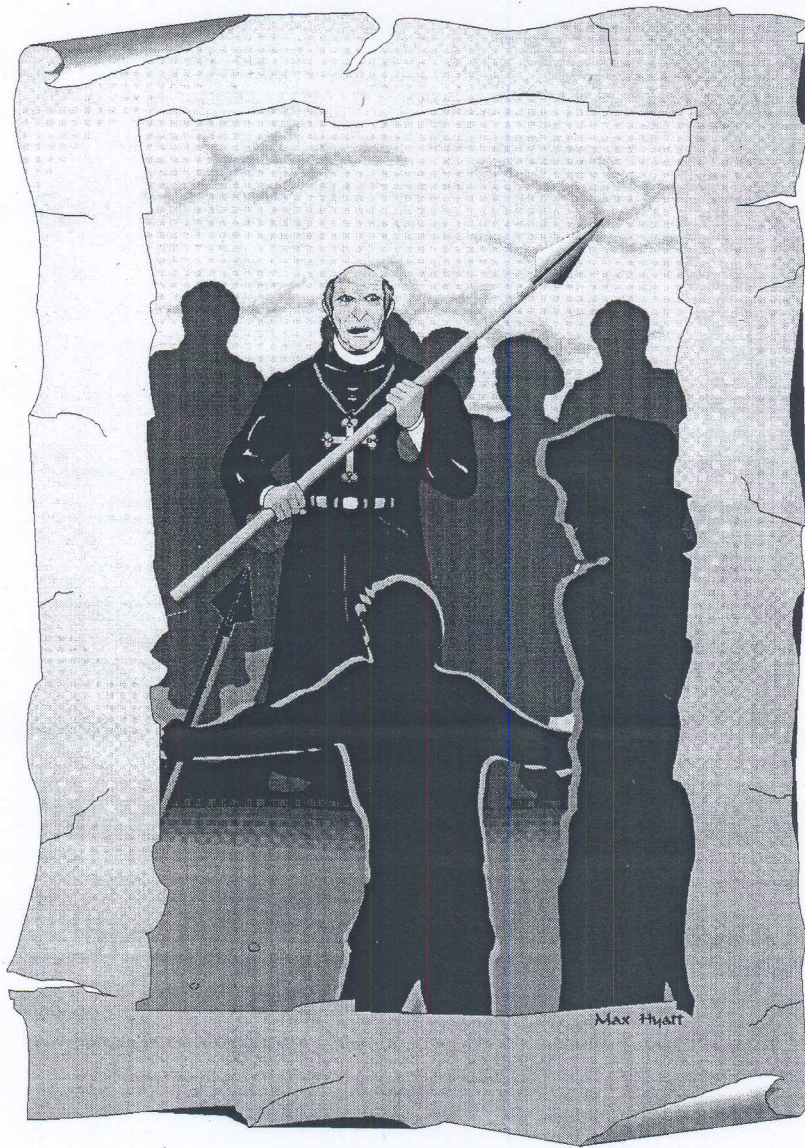
"Defend yourself," Thorolfr said and held up his arm. One of his young warriors rushed in and handed Thorolfr a spear. Another tried to hand a spear to the priest but he would not take it. It was dropped at his feet.

"Defend yourself," the smaller, younger Thorolfr said a second time to the priest.

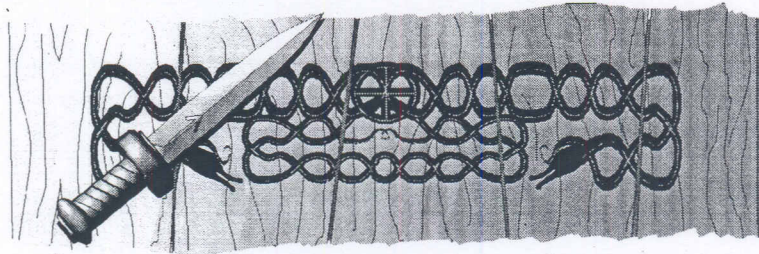
"No ... I am a man of God. I am a man of peace," the priest said.

Thorolfr shook his head. "slay him, slay him," came the cry from his three warriors.

The sheepal picked up the cry, "slay him, slay him."



Max Hyatt



Thorolfr shook his head, "no, a true warrior never fights an unworthy foe, one who is weaker. I will not slay this dog though he needs killing."

He turned his back on the priest and addressed the crowd. "Is there any of you who would avenge a loved one. Any of you who would kill this dog of a man?"

He held his spear in the air. No one answered. In disgust Thorolfr dropped his spear and walked towards his brother and sister.

He took several steps, when young Eric shouted, "look out Thorolfr!"

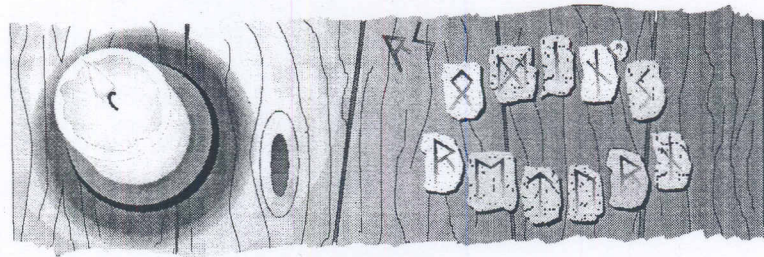
The evil priest had dropped his cross, picked up the spear and was advancing on Thorolfr to stab him in the back.

Before Thorolfr could do anything, a small blur rushed by him and picked up the spear on the ground. Eric, with one quick parry, thrust the spear from the priest's hands and drove the spear that he had picked up deep into the priest's black heart.

"Eric!" Thorolfr shouted. But it was too late. His little brother had dispatched the evil priest with one spear thrust. And what god, surely not Tyr the God of Battle, would accuse the young boy of fighting a weaker foe. The priest was dead and the ancient code of honor and battle had been preserved.

Later that day, Thorolfr said good-bye to his three warrior friends, the smith and his wife and the old woman.

"I leave this village in your hands," he said to the smith. "Remember the Old Gods. Tear down the priest's church and build the sacred grotto's anew."

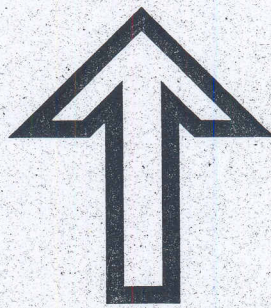


"Where will you and the children go?" the smith asked.

"Where ever the kindred need me," Thorolfr said. "Odin, the All Father, has re-established his place here once again. This village is the first of many that will be freed from the evil forces of the new religion. I go to free others. But your task is as important as mine. As long as the sacred fires of the Gods of our Ancestors burn freely here, then we will never be alone. The All Father will walk amongst us and protect us. Each of us to our own tasks."

"Good-bye," the smith and the three young warriors said.

"Strengthen the Ancestral Soul," Thorolfr said. And across the land those four words became the battle cry of the Northern Folk.



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