

The Northlands Saga

Adventures

~ Introduction ~

A Note from the Author

Game development is not always the glamorous life it may appear to be, and we are rarely as omniscient as we pretend. The *Northlands Saga* began with one adventure that was ultimately split in two for publication due to its length. Those became *NS1: Vengeance of the Long Serpent* and *NS2: Beyond the Wailing Mountains*. Later, *Frog God Games* decided they wanted to do an entire series and, later still, a campaign guide. This meant there was no easy entrance into the saga, for the first adventures were designed for characters of levels 5–6. Some readers wanted to start their journey through the *Northlands Saga* at 1st level, and with the creation of the *The Lost Lands: The Northlands Saga Complete*, the decision was made to add two introductory adventures — prequels if you will — that would lead into *NS1: Vengeance of the Long Serpent* and allow the saga to begin at a lower level. As always, it is your game; make of it what you will.

Haglaz! And welcome to *The Northlands Saga Adventure Path*.

Getting Started

The Northlands Saga Adventure Path assumes that the characters begin in service of some kind to Olaf Henrikson, the Jarl of Halfstead. If any of the adventurers is not a member of the household, then the character should be associated to it in some way, possibly as a seasonal hanger-on (which is especially appropriate to wanderers from outside the Northlands). The Northlands are not like other fantasy settings. Rulers and others in positions of authority simply do not hire adventurers to solve their problems; they either take care of things themselves or send members of their household to see to the situation.

Having the characters all in the service to the same jarl allows for the party to have a solid foundation. Not only do they have similar goals and directives, but they also will likely know each other, if not since childhood, then at least from the mead hall of their jarl. Even outsiders would have had time to fraternize with the locals before the adventure begins. Being in the service of a jarl is not a lifelong commitment: the Northlands culture does not operate in that way. Moreover, events in *NS1: Vengeance of the Long Serpent* are likely to change the situation greatly and allow the characters to stretch out on their own in the dangerous world of the Northlands.

In the Jarl's House

Jarl Olaf Henrikson is one of the most powerful men in the North. He is not a member of one of the great families such as the Gats or the Hrolfs, nor is he a resident of Storstrøm Vale where dwells the true old blood of the Northlander peoples. But he is nevertheless jarl of the most populace and cosmopolitan settlement in the Northlands and, as such, commands a great deal of respect and power. He is not even the ruler of Hordaland wherein his city of Halfstead lies, but even the *køenig* of Hordaland (the closest Northlands equivalent to a king) respects and listens to the words that Jarl Olaf speaks in the mead hall or at the Thing.

It is well known that Olaf Henrikson began his career as a sellsword in the Southlands, where he gained his reputation as a leader of men and as a generous ring-giver. He also amassed his fortune with plunder from his days of fighting for foreign lords before attaining command of his own ships and reaving against the settlements of those same lords. Upon returning to the North at the head of his own fleet of sixteen ships, he landed at Halfstead, at that time a stockaded port town known more for its surly jarl and acerbic residents than anything else, and put the place to the torch. Those residents who did not yield or flee were put to the sword, and a new banner raised over Halfstead — the boar and rings of Olaf Henrikson. That *Køenig Ragi Steinson* raised no hand against the newcomer brought forth more than a few suspicions as to whether or not the crafty ruler had not paid Olaf to raze Halfstead in the first place. Regardless of any real or imagined collusion, the result was a port rebuilt by Henrikson into a large and prosperous settlement open to trade from abroad and a powerful jarl loyal to the *køenig* and with a fleet of ships at his command that only grew as his reputation spread.

Today, twenty years later, Jarl Olaf is a settled man raising a family, and Halfstead is a booming Northlands port largely left to its own devices. The local Thing makes most of the decision for the town, though Jarl Olaf does keep a hall within the city from where he holds court and feast twice a month in which to hear complaints and settle legal cases and give rings to the worthy. This also allows him to claim his sizable share of the duties collected from the many visiting merchant ships. The fleet of longships Jarl Olaf maintains is down to four, and these are more prone to patrolling the waters off the peninsula for raiders than going a-viking on their own. But many rightfully expect that should the need arise, the jarl could raise the call and gather a fleet of loyal ships twice as large as what he had before.

A self-made man, Jarl Olaf is enjoying his quiet semi-retirement despite even the recent turmoil for the crown of Hordaland. He remains loyal to

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Leif Ragison, the young kœnig, but holds Halfstead carefully neutral in the current political machinations to keep the port open and prosperous. In his mind, a healthy Halfstead is good for all of Hordaland and the North, regardless of who rules the country. As such, he and his family spend most of their time at his personal hall of Silvermeade, which is situated on the coast halfway between Halfstead and Galvë. It is here that they winter and here that the PCs begin their careers in his service.

Silvermeade Hall

As with the rest of the Northlands as explained in *The Northlands Saga Campaign Guide*, hiring NPCs in town is not a matter of money, especially for outsiders. Arcane magic is hard to come by in these lands; even divine casters are few and far between. Any attempt to simply hire the services of a godi or cunning woman is met with scorn. These powerful individuals serve their community first and foremost; strangers are not welcome. On the other hand, those in dire need may find that the services are suddenly offered for free, though repayment is expected and should be done through barter or, better yet, through the offer of aid. Characters in the Northlands may find that the cunning woman who healed them expects them to help bring in the harvest for some farmers who are shorthanded, guard her as she procures rare herbs in the deep woods, or simply spend a month or entire season working for her.

Silvermeade Hall

Neutral small town

Corruption +2; **Crime** -3; **Economy** +1; **Law** +3; **Lore** +1;

Society -1

Qualities insular, prosperous

Danger +0

Government overlord

Population 420 (367 humans [Northlanders]; 38 human thralls [Seagestrelanders]; 12 dwarves; 2 giant-blooded; 1 Nûklander)

Notable NPCs

Olaf Henrikson, Jarl of Halfstead (Neutral (good) male human fighter 9)

Hallbjorn Bolverkson, huscarl (Neutral male human fighter 5)

One-Eyed Sven, semi-retired huscarl (Lawful male old human fighter 8)

Aase, huscarl (Lawful female human paladin 5)

Kraki Hallason, huscarl (Neutral (good) male human ranger 4)

Sigfastr Wyrnhammer, trader (Lawful male dwarf fighter 3)

Hauk Arinbjornson, Vastaviklander mercenary (Neutral male human fighter 7)

Graf, godi/blacksmith (Lawful male human cleric 3)

Grimr Wisetooth, skald (N male middle-aged human fighter 4)

Odi, cunning woman (Neutral female old human MU 8)

Maximum Clerical Spell Level Law 2, Neutral -, Chaos -

Purchase Maximum/Month 7,500 gp



Life in the Hall

It is presumed that the characters are either members of the jarl's household (servants, friends, distant relatives, etc.), or have at least wintered there and made acquaintances with the rest of the characters and the other members of the household.

During the winter, there is a great deal of boredom. Snows are deep and travel is largely cut off. Few merchants or other travelers make it through, and cabin fever is not uncommon. Other than feasting and drinking, there is often little to do over the harsh winter months of the North. As a result, when there are days good enough to go outdoors, all manner of brash contests and dares are set forth and participated in with alacrity — even if the occasional knocked skull or broken bone is the inevitable result. In addition to these physical contests or wrestling, hunting, and general feats of strength (or idiocy), there are also riddling contests, singing or chanting the sagas by skalds and would-be skalds, and games of hnefatafl.

When the characters have been created and the players are introduced to Silvermeade Hall as a base of operations, proceed with the adventure *NS0: Part 1 - Spring Rites*.