

Hnefatafl playset "Odin" - handmade wood carving



This handmade of natural wooden material **Hnefatafl** playset (also known as "Viking Chess") features a detailed wood carving of the playing field (board) and 37 warrior figurines (24 dark figures known as attackers, 12 light figures known as defenders and their leader - the 13th warrior or king). It is made of well-dried wood and has a playing field size of 75x75x3.5 cm. The figures are 7x3.5 cm. and 10.5x3.5 cm. for the central figure - hövding, warlord or king. The board and dark figures are made of walnut (*Juglans regia*), and the light figures are made of meadow/field maple (*Acer campestre*).

The set is owned by the Hnefatafl Sports Club "Odin" – Kyustendil, Republic of Bulgaria, and more specifically by its creator and chairman Lachezar "Lucho" Panchev – a hnefatafl competitor and champion, a pioneer in the popularization of the game in Bulgaria, an enthusiast and an amateur woodcarver. In short – myself. And since I am writing this text myself, I consider it more polite to tell the story of the creation of "Odin" playset personally, in singular.

"Odin" has been in the making for over 3 years, encompassing all the steps – from the earlier birth of the idea for its creation in my mind in the summer of 2020, to its implementation through each individual stage to its completed entirety, down to the last detail, including even this booklet. The project is a series of different episodes, ideas, innovations and changes, which have become an adventure and a mission to popularize this medieval Scandinavian strategy game not only in my homeland Bulgaria, but also worldwide. Hnefatafl represents the "Viking Mind Battle", a game of asymmetry in symmetry, tactics in strategy and a real challenge for the players controlling the two warring armies, each pursuing its own goal.

The rules of the game in its various variants (varying in size of the playing fields, number of pieces and other elements) can be found in various sources on the Internet. Some of the most popular worldwide variants and strategies for playing hnefatafl for beginners can be found in a separate booklet of the „Odin“ club, prepared for the purpose of popularization. The present set was created primarily for playing the competitive variant of hnefatafl "Copenhagen", developed by the World Hnefatafl Federation in 2012, as well as the original earlier "Fetlar" variant, according to the wishes of the players.

The Hnefatafl Set "Odin" is my life's work, if not my only one, then at least one of the most important to me, and combines the functional elements of the game with rich Scandinavian mythology and symbolism. The names of the individual figures, the short imaginary stories of their lives and their specific characteristics of character and behavior, were composed by me to breathe life into the set and make the experience of playing with it even more realistic, powerful and intriguing.

The set was created step by step, from the birth of the idea in the summer of 2020, through many different stages – providing well-dried wood and preparing it for the manufacture of the playing field and figures to their creation itself, making leather pouches and a bag-case for storing the individual components, filming a presentation video, including writing this booklet, an integral part of it. Due to difficulties of various nature and lack of sufficient free time, truly serious work on the project began in the fall of 2023, when, driven by an irresistible desire and determination, I decided to test my abilities to make the wooden figurines for the set by myself. I had never done woodcarving before, I had not studied this craft, I did not even have tools available – chisels and whittling knives. I only had a strong ambition and a thirst to make my dream come true. So, little by little I started to acquire the necessary tools and asked a woodcarver friend of mine to show me some basic techniques for carving the figures. I quickly grasped the main points and began to develop independently, and my first figures turned out to be quite crude and archaic in appearance, and after a while I had to remake them several times in order to somewhat equalize the increasingly obvious and intrusive difference with the newer, more sophisticated, detailed and precise figures that I was making.

The board itself was assembled by a master carpenter from the town of Kyustendil according to the dimensions and shape I had set and with previously provided dry walnut material.



In the summer of 2024, after creating the design, I placed an order for its carving with a professional master woodcarver from the town of Kyustendil named Vasil Ivanov, a long-time artist and specialist in the so-called micro-woodcarving. In less than a month, Vasko made the woodcarving on the board, but due to the seriously increasing price of the service, we both decided to leave the back of the board in a rough and unprocessed form.

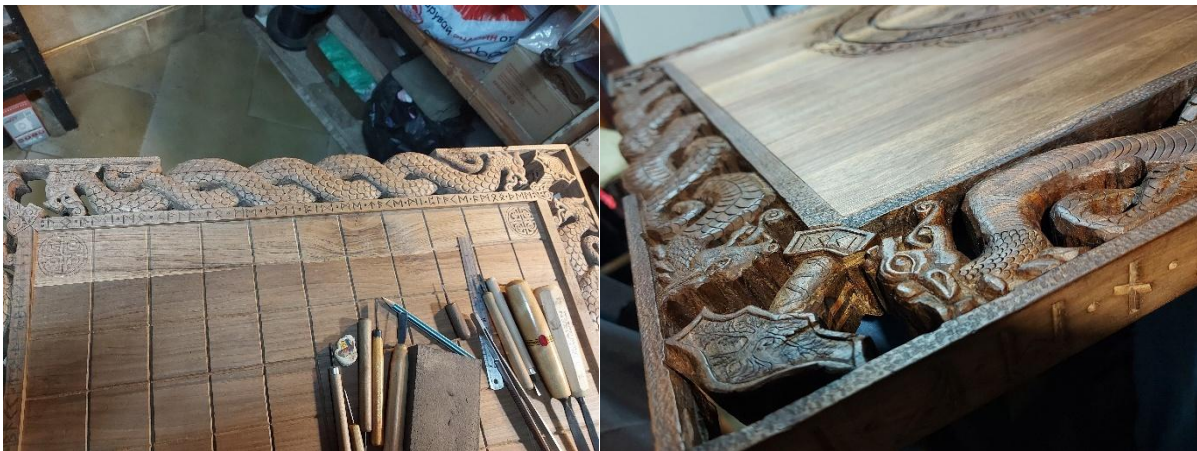


In the fall of 2024, having gained courage and enough confidence in my increasingly successful development in carving figures, I decided to take a risk and test my abilities on improving the board and adding new details, mainly on its back and side boards. Equipped with even larger chisels and hammers, I began to draw, carve and whittle it and in about a month I managed to completely finish it. I practically finished what Vasko started with my own hands and shaped the following elements – the runic inscription on the board of the front part, surrounding the playing field, the knurling

on the outer edges of the board, the runic signs meaning Hnefatafl in Latin and the symbol valknut on the side boards, the carving of the two channels between the three separate circular elements on the central part of the back of the board, as well as its entire back board – the scaly bellies of the dragons/Jormungandr, their heads, faces and necks, the images, braids and inscriptions of the four hammers Mjölhnir, as well as the knurling on the inner and outer edges of the board.



When the wood carving on the playing field was completely finished, I polished the board, then applied a coating of only natural colorless oil to preserve the wood for years to come.



After the final completion of the work on the game board, I returned to making the remaining about 28 warrior figurines at that time. Due to the lack of enough free time, the entire project became a hobby for me, which lasted for months and years.

After the last figure, namely the king, was completed sometime around mid-May 2026, I also smeared the figures with natural oil. In the process of working on the project, I placed an order with a professional to sew three leather pouches and a leather bag/case made of natural calfskin, in which to store the entire set. As a final touch, I came up with names for each figure, initially writing them in Latin, then replacing each letter with its runic version. I carved the inscriptions/names on the base of the figures, thus giving them an identity. With this, the work on making the set itself was completed, but the project continued with other actions to popularize the game in Bulgaria and worldwide.

I drew ideas for the appearance of each figure from my own imagination, striving for them to be different and to encompass to the maximum extent all aspects of the medieval Vikings and the northern Germanic peoples in general, their armament and clothing. For the design of the details themselves such as helmets, shields, weapons and armor/clothes, I borrowed ideas from visual images on the Internet, striving not to copy them in order to preserve the authenticity of my original intentions. In the process of making the figures themselves, it often happened that my original vision changed depending on how the figure was shaped in reality, and I often had to remove, change or add details. Each figure and each element of the set were created by me with a lot of love, patience and hard work, you could say that I really put a piece of myself into every carving, stroke, detail, by spiritualizing them with my own thought, energy and love, just as according to Scandinavian mythology the three brother gods Odin, Vili and Ve, create and breathe life into the first "wooden" people Ask and Embla.

I think that it will be a pleasure for the reader and art lover to get acquainted in detail with the ideas, symbols, signs and their meanings, with the imagination and creativity invested by me in the creation of the set. Here are the secrets that each element and warrior figurine from the "Odin" hnefatafl game set reveals to us:



1. The central square of the game board

Marked with the "Triskelion" symbol, it represents the "**King's Throne**" (in Old Norse, King is "*Konungr*" or "*Hnefi*"). This is the most important cell on the entire playing field. Its symbolic and practical significance includes:

- ***The Throne (Konangstafl):*** This is the square where the figure of King Hnef is placed at the beginning of the game. Around him are arranged his loyal defenders. In the context of the legend of the creation of the game Hnefatafal, it is more appropriate to call Hnef a warlord, the leader of a hird of men loyal to him, sworn swords, a chieftain, or even a prince, since he is a king's son. However, for convenience in general use and due to the several similarities of the game with classical Persian chess, it is more understandable to call this central and most important figure a king.
- ***Forbidden Zone:*** According to the classic rules and more specifically the Copenhagen version, the Throne is a sacred place and no other piece (neither defender nor attacker) is allowed to step on it or stay there. Pieces can only pass through it if it is empty. Only the King can stand/sit on it, leave it and return to the throne again.
- ***Key to capturing the King:*** Since the King is extremely strong, whether on or off his throne, he cannot be captured from just two sides like regular pieces. In order to capture him, attackers must besiege him **from all four sides** (completely surround him), entirely blocking the power of the Throne.

The symbol in the center of the throne itself, also known as the horned triskelion, is the "Triple Horn of Odin" in Norse mythology. It consists of three intertwined drinking horns and is closely associated with the supreme god in the Norse pantheon. This symbol carries a deep mythological meaning:

- ***Mead of Poetry (Mythological Origin):*** The symbol directly references the myth of how the god Odin stole the "**Mead of Poetry**" (a magical drink that grants anyone who drinks it supreme wisdom, eloquence, and the gift of a skald/poet). Odin used cunning to spend three nights with the giantess Gunnlöð, the keeper of the mead. Each night he drank a whole huge horn of the magical liquid. The three horns have their own names: Óðrærir, Boðn, and Són.
- ***Meaning of the symbol:***
 - ❖ ***Wisdom and Inspiration:*** The triple horn represents the pursuit of knowledge, divine inspiration, and intellectual power.

❖ **Cunning and Strategy:** It is reminiscent of the sacrifices and cunning that Odin employed to gain secret knowledge. This makes it a perfect symbol for the center field in a strategy game like Hnefatafl.

- **Connection to the Hnefatafl game:** The placement of Odin's Triple Horn right on the central "**King's Throne**" has strong thematic significance. As the supreme god and "All-Father" (Alföðr), Odin is a symbol of the ruler, wielding supreme power and wisdom. The throne is where the King's rule and tactical battle begins to defend his kingdom against besieging enemies.

2. The four corner fields (Shelters or Sanctuaries)

On the playing field, the four extreme right, left, top and bottom corners are marked with special symbols in a circle (in the shape of Celtic/Viking knots or "shields").

- **Meaning:** In the Hnefatafl rules, these four corners are called "**Exits**" (or **Refuges**). They are accessible only to the King's piece. The defenders' goal is to move their King to one of these corner squares to win the game, while the attackers try to bar his path, block and besiege him before he gets there. In the "Copenhagen" version, another option for victory is provided for the King and the defenders, the construction of so-called "Exit Forts" on the last line of the battlefield, resembling fortresses-refugees for the king, where he is fully protected by his warriors, is safe and cannot be captured, which brings him freedom and glory.

3. Runic inscriptions (On the inner board of the game)

The inner ridge of the board separates the playing field from the outer frame and is analogous to the border of Midgard (the Middle Earth of humans) and that of the other outer worlds inhabited by gods, monsters, and other creatures such as dwarves, elves, giants...

- **Meaning:** Runes from the Viking alphabet (**Futhark**) are carved around the playing field. They are a slightly modified adaptation of the iconic Viking prayer from the movie "**The 13th Warrior**", inspired by ancient Scandinavian traditions. It describes the warrior's deathbed vision as he prepares to pass into the afterlife with honor. Here are the highlights of this moment:
- ❖ **Context:** The scene is the climax of the film. Buliwyf and his warriors recite these words before entering their final, suicidal battle.
- ❖ **Valhalla:** According to myth, this is the great hall of the god Odin in Asgard. Only warriors who have died gloriously in battle go there.

- ❖ **Idea of immortality:** The text emphasizes the connection with the ancestors and the belief that death on the battlefield is not the end, but an honorable return home. In the film, the words have a strong psychological effect. They transform the fear of death into absolute fearlessness.
- **The adapted text on the board itself:**

Lo, there do I see my father, my mother, my sisters and my brothers!

Lo, there do I see the line of my people, back to the beginning!

Lo, they do call to me! They bid me take my place among them, in the halls of Valhalla, where the brave may live forever!

4. Serpents/Dragons in the ornamentation (Carving on the frame/outer board)

The outer frame of the board depicts intertwined dragon bodies, which can also be seen as serpents, as well as four „Mjöltnir“ hammers with ornaments in them:

- **Meaning:** The two intertwined dragons on each of the four boards depict the Scandinavian way of decoration inspired by the "Urnes" or "Mammen" styles. In mythology, this refers to **Jormungandr (the World Serpent)** – the giant creature that envelops the entire world (Midgard) and bites its own tail. Her presence suggests a battle on a cosmic scale, which corresponds to the nature of the strategy game itself – siege and survival.
- **Dragons:** In Norse mythology, dragons (in Old Norse: dreki, plural: drekar) are not just fire-breathing lizards from the sagas. They are ancient, cosmic forces of chaos, destruction and greed. Unlike medieval European dragons, Scandinavian dragons are often described as giant, wingless serpents (*ormr*) that crawl on the ground or inhabit the depths. Here are the most important aspects of dragons from an Old Norse and mythological perspective:
- **The Three Great Dragons in Mythology:** In the texts of the *Poetic and Prose Eddas*, three main creatures stand out that embody the dragon essence:
 - **Níðhöggr – “He who bites with malice”:** The primordial cosmic dragon. He lives in the underworld of Niflheim and constantly gnaws at the roots of the world tree Yggdrasil. His goal is to topple the tree and collapse the cosmic order. During Ragnarök (the end of the world), Níðhöggr will break free and fly over the battlefield, carrying corpses in his wings.
 - **Jörmungandr – „The Great Monster“:** Also called the World Serpent (Midgardsorm). He is the son of Loki and the giantess Angrboda. Odin throws him into the ocean surrounding the world of men. The serpent grows so large

that it bites its own tail and encircles the entire earth. He is Thor's eternal enemy.

- **Fáfnir:** The most famous example of a dragon that was once a man (or more precisely a dwarf/gnome). Fáfnir is overcome with insane greed because of his father's cursed gold, whom he kills. He subsequently physically transforms into a monstrous dragon to guard his treasure. He is killed by the hero Sigurd (Siegfried).
- **Psychological transformation – Greed gives birth to the dragon:** For the Vikings, the dragon was a symbol of the “sin of retention”. In a society where the most respected leader was the “ring-dealer” (the king who shared the spoils with his warriors), stinginess was the greatest vice. *The story of Fáfnir* shows that **the dragon is an internal state**. If a person accumulates wealth and refuses to share it with the community, he loses his humanity and becomes a dragon. The dragon lies on his gold, but does not use it – he simply isolates it from the world.
- **The dragon as a symbol of the Viking ship (Knarr and Skeid):** In Old Norse culture, the dragon was also a symbol of power, used to intimidate enemies. The largest Viking warships were called **Drakkar**, because a wooden head of a roaring dragon was mounted on their bow.
- **Religious law:** According to ancient Icelandic laws (Grágás), when Viking ships approached their homeland, they were obliged to remove the dragon's head from the bow. It was believed that the monster's fearsome appearance could frighten and anger the local earth spirits (Landvættir) and bring misfortune to the harvest.
- **Dragon's blood and heart – a source of magic:** In the Scandinavian sagas, the anatomy of the dragon has supernatural properties: When Sigurd kills Fáfnir, he accidentally tastes his blood while roasting it. At that moment, he gains the ability to **understand the language of birds**, which warn him of betrayal. Eating the dragon's heart gave the warrior inhuman courage, wisdom and strength.

5. Mjöltnir – Thor's hammer (In the four corners of the frame)

A carving of *Mjöltnir* (Thor's Hammer) is clearly visible in the corners of the outer wooden frame.

- **Meaning:** This is one of the most powerful symbols of protection, strength and consecration in the Scandinavian world. It protects the players and the battlefield itself (the board) from evil forces.

Mjölnir (in Old Norse: Mjöllnir – probably meaning “Crusher” or “Lightning”) is the emblematic hammer of the thunder god Thor. According to Scandinavian mythology, it is not just a weapon, but the most powerful artifact in Asgard, which guarantees the survival of the gods against the giants (jotuns).

Here are the most important mythological facts about Mjölnir, its properties and creation:

- **The creation of the hammer – Loki’s Wager:** The story of the forging of Mjölnir is described in the *Prose Edda*. It all starts with another mischief of Loki, who cuts off the golden hair of Sif (Thor’s wife). To avoid the god’s wrath, Loki goes to the dwarves (the black elves), master blacksmiths, and organizes a competition for the greatest gifts for the gods.
- **The Blacksmiths:** The hammer is forged by the dwarf brothers **Brock and Sindri (Eitri)**.
- **The Flaw with the Handle:** While Sindri is forging the hammer in the furnace, Loki transforms into a horsefly and stings Brock above the eye to ruin the work. The blood blinds Brock for a second and he stops blowing the bellows. As a result, **Mjölnir’s handle remains too short** and the hammer must be swung and held with only one hand.
- **Mjölnir’s magical properties:** When the gods evaluate the gifts, Mjölnir is declared the best weapon because it possesses four absolute magics:
 - **Indestructible:** It can strike anything with all of Thor’s strength without being damaged.
 - **Never misses:** When thrown at a target, it never misses.
 - **“Boomerang” effect:** After hitting an enemy, the hammer always returns to Thor’s right hand.
 - **Size change:** Thor can shrink it so much that he can hide it in his bosom as a small amulet.

The mythological Thor cannot use Mjölnir just like that. The hammer is so powerful and red-hot that the god needs two other artifacts to wield it:

1. **JárnGREIPR** – Iron gloves, without which Thor cannot grip the red-hot handle of the hammer.
 2. **Megingjörð** – A magical belt that doubles Thor's inhuman strength so that he can even lift Mjölner.
- **Ritual role – More than a Weapon:** For the Vikings, Mjölner had a deep religious meaning. Thor was a protector of the common man, so his hammer was used for:
 - **Blessing of marriages:** The hammer (or a copy of it) was placed in the bride's lap for fertility.
 - **Consecration:** Thor used it to resurrect his goats (Tanngnjóstr and Tannggrisnir) after he had eaten them. The hammer was also used to bless funeral pyres.
 - **Mjölner during Ragnarök:** During the end of the world, Thor kills the World Serpent Jormungandr with Mjölner, but manages to walk only nine steps before falling dead from her poison. The hammer does not disappear - it is inherited by his sons **Modi and Magni**, who survive the apocalypse and use it to build the new world.

In the "Odin" set, the front of each hammer is shaped by the heads of two stylized wolves, facing in opposite directions with open jaws. In mythology, these are **Geri and Freki** (Odin's faithful wolves) or the fearsome wolf **Fenrir**, a symbol of raw power. The symbol located exactly in the center of the head of each of the four corner hammers of Mjölner (depicted between the two stylized wolf heads) is **Vegvísir**, also known as the **Viking Compass**.

- **Meaning:** Its name literally means "*that which shows the way*". It is considered a magical Icelandic symbol (galdrastav) that ensures that its owner will not get lost during a storm or bad weather, even if the path is completely unknown. It is often associated with Viking seafarers.

6. Runic inscriptions (On the sides)

The runes spell out the name of the game itself, Hnefatafl, and here again the technique of replacing the Latin letters HNEFATAFL with their runic analogues **H+M+P+T+T+P+T** is used. For the Vikings, the runes were not just letters, but symbols carrying magical protection and power.

Next to the inscription "Hnefatafl" is carved the **Valknut** symbol. It consists of three intertwined triangles and carries a very strong mythological meaning in Scandinavian culture:

- **Connection with Odin and Valhalla:** Valknut is the symbol of the supreme god Odin. Its name literally means "*knot of the fallen in battle*" (from *valr* - slain warriors, and *knut* - knot). It marks the brave warriors whose souls are chosen by Odin and the Valkyries to go to Valhalla.
- **Intertwining of fate:** The three triangles with their nine points are often interpreted as a symbol for the nine worlds in Scandinavian cosmology, anchored in the tree Yggdrasil, as well as for the intertwining of past, present and future by the Three Norns (goddesses of fate).
- **Symbolism on the corners:** Since the four corners in the game Hnefatafl represent the **King's refuges**, placing Valknut there (in combination with Thor's protective hammer and the guardian wolves) symbolizes divine protection over the ruler. These are sacred and inviolable areas of the board.



7. Meaning of the symbols on the back (Back part of the board)

The entire back of the board is also carved in detail:

- ***The Vegvisir Symbol (In the center):*** This Icelandic symbol consists of eight rays, each ending in a different directional sign. Its meaning is deeply protective. According to legend, whoever carries this sign **will not lose his way in a storm or bad weather**, even when the direction is completely unknown.
- ***The runic circle:*** Around the compass (inner circle) is placed a full ring of runes from the **Elder Futhark** (the ancient Scandinavian runic alphabet). These runes enhance the magical power of the symbol in the center, bringing blessing, protection and cosmic order, depicting the nine noble virtues associated with Viking culture: Courage, Truth, Honor, Faithfulness/Loyalty, Discipline, Hospitality, Hard Work, Independence, Perseverance. The words are written in Latin, with each letter again replaced by its runic analogue.
- ***The stamp of authentic craftsmanship:*** Due to lack of space, the word “Fidelity” (Loyalty/Faithfulness) was shortened to “Fide” by master woodcarver Vasko Ivanov, which adds to the uniqueness of the set in several ways:

➤ The abbreviation of “**Fidelity**” to “**Fide**” is an extremely interesting nuance that reveals a lot about the nature of craftsmanship. When a master woodcarver creates by hand on the limited space of a wooden surface, he is often faced with the challenge of balancing complex ornamentation and written characters. In the era of mass factory production and laser engraving, everything is calculated by software down to the millimeter. However, with hand-carving, the creative process is alive. When the master finds that the space between the intertwined snakes and runes is too narrow to fit the entire word, he makes a strategic decision. This turns the mistake or limitation into an **authorial detail**. Such specific features are the most definitive proof that you are looking at a unique piece made by human hands, and not a conveyor belt product.

➤ The Latin root and the play on words: The word *Fidelity* means “faithfulness”, “devotion” and “loyalty” (from the Latin *Fidelitas*). Its abbreviation to **Fide** actually works perfectly on several levels:

✓ ***"Fide" in Latin:*** The word *Fide* itself (ablative of *fides*) means “**with faith**” or “**through trust**”. This gives the board an additional noble, almost chivalric connotation.

✓ ***Connection with chess:*** In the modern world, **FIDE** (*Fédération Internationale des Échecs*) is an abbreviation for the International Chess Federation. Since Hnefatafl is popular around the world precisely as “Viking Chess”, this abbreviation becomes a fun, intelligent and completely intentional (or accidental) reference to chess traditions. This small “compromise” with the location actually breathes soul into the tree.

- ***Intertwined Serpents (Outer Circle):*** Around the runes there is a final, outer circle with the motif of the world serpent Jormungandr, which repeats the theme of the carved frame and closes the composition in perfect integrity. It is a **complex zoomorphic (animal) interweaving** and is a specific decorative motif:
 - ***Intertwined Serpents:*** It is composed of two long, bending bodies of serpents that intersect, twist and overlap in the form of endless knots.
 - ***Dragon Heads:*** Right at the top of the circular composition (and also entangled along the entire circle) are seen detailed carved heads of serpents or dragons with open jaws.
 - ***Traditional Viking Style:*** This type of ornamentation copies the authentic Scandinavian animal style, known as the **“Urnes style”**. In it, the bodies of the mythical creatures are highly elongated, graceful and intertwined in calligraphic contours.

In a mythological sense, this closed circle of serpents around the runes again refers to **Jormungandr (the World Serpent)**. She bites her tail and forms a perfect magical ring, which symbolizes the eternal cycle and seals the protective power of Vegvisir in the center.

- ***The other face of the dragons in the frame:*** On the back of the board, the bellies of the Dragons/Jormungandr are depicted, which is why they have different scales.
- ***The other face of the hammers in the frame:*** On the back of the Mjölknir hammers, there is a combination of several key components, which together form a complete Scandinavian composition:
 - ***The shape of the Mjölknir hammer itself:*** The entire wooden structure in the four corners represents the emblematic hammer of the god Thor. It is carved with its characteristic short handle and massive striking head. A different braid-like decoration is made on each of the handles.
 - ***Runic signs and images on the hammers:***

- The first hammer I made has a carved image of a raven (Huginn or Muninn) with outstretched wings and a runic inscription with the name of the supreme

Scandinavian god Odin – god of war, victory, wisdom, poetry, magic (seiðr) and writing (runes). **Huginn** and **Muninn** in Old Norse are the two ravens from Scandinavian mythology, which belong to the supreme god Odin. Their names mean “Thought” and “Memory” respectively. According to legends, they circle over the worlds (Asgard and Midgard), observe everything and return every night to whisper the news in his ears.

- The second hammer has an image of a floating Viking dragon ship Drakkar and a runic inscription with the name of the Scandinavian god Thor – the god of thunder, storms, strength and fertility. He is the eldest son of Odin and is perhaps the most beloved god among ordinary Vikings, as he was their direct protector against the forces of chaos.

Drakkar is the name of the **long and narrow Viking warships**, which had a characteristic carved dragon head on their bow. The name comes from the Scandinavian words for dragon (*Drage*) and ship (*Kar*).

✓ **Main characteristics:**

- **Construction:** Made of oak, ash or pine, with a length of between 35 and 60 meters.
 - **Symmetry:** Completely identical bow and stern, which allowed forward and backward movement without turning maneuvers.
 - **Propulsion:** A combination of one large square sail and up to 35 pairs of oars for rowing.
 - **Speed:** They developed an enviable for the era 10-12 knots.
 - **Capacity:** They gathered between 100 and 150 fighters along with their provisions.
- ✓ **Symbolism of the dragon head:** Placing the ominous dragon head on the bow had two main purposes. On the one hand, it demonstrated the high social status and wealth of the ship's owner. On the other hand, according to Viking beliefs, it was supposed to scare away sea monsters and enemies during raids.
- On the third hammer there is an image of the world tree – the ash tree Yggdrasil and a runic inscription with the name of the Scandinavian trickster among the gods Loki – born into a family of giants (jotuns), but thanks to his sharp mind and charm he became Odin’s twin brother through an ancient blood-mixing ritual.

- ***Yggdrasil*** is the **sacred world tree** in Scandinavian mythology, which connects all nine worlds in the cosmos. It is a huge evergreen ash tree, whose branches stretch above the heavens, and its roots support the universe itself.
- ***The three roots and the nine worlds:*** The roots of Yggdrasil descend to three different springs, around which the worlds are located:
 - ***Asgard:*** The world of the gods Aesir (Odin, Thor), where the spring of Urd is located.
 - ***Jotunheim:*** The land of the giants, where the stream of Mimir (the source of wisdom) flows.
 - ***Niflheim:*** The world of ice and darkness, home to the spring Hvergelmir and the monstrous dragon Nidhogg, who gnaws at the tree's roots.
- ***Key symbols and creatures:***
 - ***Odin:*** The supreme god hangs himself on Yggdrasil and hangs upside down for nine nights, pierced by his own spear, to gain the secret of the runes and their wisdom.
 - ***Ratatösk the squirrel:*** Runs up and down the stem, carrying insults and gossip between the dragon Nidhogg (at the roots) and the eagle (at the top of the tree).
 - ***The four deer:*** They circle the branches of the tree and feed on its leaves, symbolizing the forces of nature and time.

Yggdrasil is a symbol of life, knowledge, and the eternal cycle. Even during Ragnarök (the end of the world), the tree will shake, but it will survive to give birth to the new world.

- On the last, fourth hammer, there is a carved image of Viking weapons – a shield and crossed battle axes, as well as a runic inscription with the name of the Scandinavian god Njord – the god of the sea, wind and wealth.

The combination of **crossed Viking axes on a shield** is one of the most powerful and recognizable visual motifs, symbolizing **absolute readiness for battle, synergy between defense and attack, as well as the indomitable warrior spirit.**

- ***Decoding the symbolism:***

- ***The shield (Protection, honor and community):*** The round Viking shield is a symbol of defense, survival and loyalty to the clan. It personifies the ability of the warrior to withstand the storms of life and enemy strikes.
- ***Axes (Strength, power, and hard work):*** Unlike expensive swords, the axe was available to every Viking. It symbolized both a deadly weapon and a tool used to build houses and ships. It was a sign of leadership, pragmatism, and hard work.
- ***Crossing (Readiness and alliance):*** The crossed position of the weapons indicates that battle is inevitable or that the warrior is in constant combat readiness. The shape of a cross also refers to the **balance between mind and physical strength**.
- ***Mythological connection:*** Although the thunder god Thor uses his hammer Mjölner, in later interpretations the axe is often associated with his **divine protection and physical superiority**. Placing axes on the shield symbolizes the invocation of the power of the gods to make the warrior invincible on the battlefield. This symbol is extremely popular among people who want to express their **resilience in the face of difficulties, strong character, and loyalty to family**.

8. The legend of the creation of Hnefatafl (Or the Finsburg fragment of the Epic "Beowulf")

And now let's dive into the mystical world of hnefatafl, into the legend of the game's creation in the early Middle Ages, somewhere in the foggy and cold mountains of the Scandinavian Peninsula...

...The legend tells of the Danish warrior Hnef Halfdan, leader of hird and prince, son of the king of the Danes Hock, heir to the heraldic Skildings and ruler of the Hockings, and his 60 men, sworn swordsmen, warriors of the mighty Danes and the warlike Jutes.

In late autumn Hnef and his men landed with their ship in the lands of the king of the Frisians Finn, son of Falkwalden, ruler of the fortress of Finnsburg, to pay homage to his queen Hildeburh, Hnef's sister.

The distinguished guests were accorded due respect and were accommodated to spend the winter in one of the great halls of the fortress. But soon a smoldering hatred between the Jutes loyal to Hnef, led by the warrior Hengist, and their compatriots, driven from their homeland by the warlike Danes who were advancing

from the north into their lands, who had found shelter in Finn's palace, ignited enmity and a thirst for revenge, and a quarrel broke out between them.

At night, the great hall of the Danish leader was surrounded and attacked by the united forces of the Frisians and Jutes. For five days, Hnef and his men defended the entrances to the hall and successfully repelled the attacks without giving a single victim, until finally the attackers managed to break through their defenses and stormed the hall.

The numerically superior attackers prevailed in the battle and advanced until finally the warlord Hnef fell slain. His nephew Friduvulf, son of Finn and Hildeburh, also died in the battle, and this double tragedy was too much for the queen. Therefore, a truce was made and the remaining warriors were allowed to remain in Finnsburg until spring, when they sailed back north.

A few months later, Hengist, carrying Hnef's sword, "Hunlaving", returned to Finnsburg at the head of an army of Danes, and together they avenged the death of their chieftain by slaughtering the people of ruler Finn and the king himself, plundering Finnsburg and taking Hildeburh back to Denmark.

And so the idea of creating of hnefatafl was born...

❖ *Symbolism:*

That is why the starting position of the figures in Hnefatafl is like this – the light/white warriors (a herd of Danes and Jutes) and their leader/warlord (the king) start arranged in the center of the large hall, which represents the battlefield of the board, and are in a besieged position. The king's sworn warriors have tightly surrounded him with their bodies, armed to the teeth and ready to defend him to the last drop of blood. That is why they are called defenders in the game. With selflessness and sacrifice in battle, they strive to break through the enemy's siege and help their king reach one of the four exits of the hall and escape to his freedom. None of them is important, their lives are doomed to Hnef, their only goal is for him to be saved.

The dark/black figures represent the attacking Frisians and Jutes, who have strategically surrounded all the entrances/exits of the hall. Their mission is to slaughter the defenders of Hnef and capture and kill him. Therefore, they try to block the exits and tighten the siege ring. They are twice as numerous as the defenders, which gives them additional confidence. They fight for their king, but he does not participate in the battle.

To give the game maximum military authenticity, I have designated four of the 24 dark figures as leaders of squads or battle groups, each of 6 warriors, located on the four sides of the playing field. Each of the four leaders stands at the forefront of the group – this is the warrior figure standing on the second inner row of the playing field.



9. The warriors (Heroes in the battle)

And now let's move on to the last, but not least, element of the set, scilicet the names, nicknames, life stories and characteristic features of the heroes of the battle, the Danish Vikings and their Germanic brethren from the folks of Jutes and Frisians:

1. ***The Danes*** (Old Norse: *Danir*) were an **ancient North Germanic tribe that inhabited the Jutland Peninsula and islands of present-day Denmark**. They are among the direct ancestors of the modern Danes and are one of the main peoples that made up the Viking culture.

Here are the key mythological and historical facts about them:

- ***Legendary origin:*** According to medieval chronicles (such as the *Gesta Danorum*), the tribe gets its name from its first mythical king – **Dan (Danr)**. According to the myths, he was the son of King Imp and united the local tribes into a single nation.
- ***Connection with the Æsir:*** Some Scandinavian sagas mention that the first kings of the Danes were direct descendants of the god Odin, which was supposed to legitimize their right to rule their lands through a divine line.

- **Historical significance:** Around 500 AD. The Danes moved from what is now southern Sweden to the Jutland peninsula, displacing other tribes (such as the Jutes and Angles). Later, during the Viking Age, they made large-scale raids and conquered northeastern England (an area known as *Danlo* - "Land of Danish Law").
- 2. **The Jutes** (Old Norse: *Jótar*) were a powerful ancient Germanic tribe who originally inhabited the northern and central parts of the **Jutland** peninsula (present-day Denmark). They played a huge role in the reorganisation of early medieval Europe, being neighbours and rivals of the Danes mentioned earlier.

Here are the most important historical and mythological facts about them:

- **The Great Migration to Britain:** The Jutes are historically best known for their large-scale migration in the 5th century. According to the early medieval chronicler Bede the Venerable, they were one of the **three most powerful Germanic tribes** (along with the Angles and Saxons) who invaded Britain after the withdrawal of the Roman legions.
 - The Jutes settled south-east England – mainly the regions of **Kent, the Isle of Wight** and parts of Hampshire.
 - They founded the **Kingdom of Kent**, which became the first Anglo-Saxon kingdom to adopt Christianity.
- **The clash and assimilation by the Danes at home:** While most of the Jutes migrated to the British Isles, the remaining ones along the Jutland coast were drawn into conflict with the **Danes** advancing from southern Sweden.
 - By the 6th–8th centuries, the Danes had completely conquered and assimilated the local population of the peninsula.
 - Although the tribe disappeared as an independent entity, it left its name to the region itself – **Jutland** (in Danish: *Jylland* – Land of the Jutes).
- **The Jutes in the epic “Beowulf”:** In the famous Anglo-Saxon epic “Beowulf”, the Jutes are mentioned under the name **Eotenas**. In the poem, they are presented in a dark light – involved in a bloody and treacherous feud with the Frisians and Danes, which reflects the real tribal wars in the North Sea before the Viking Age.
- **Connection with Norse mythology:** In myths, the term "*Jótl*" is sometimes similar in sound to the word **Jötunn** – the huge ice and stone giants, enemies of the gods *Æsir*. Although the etymology of the two words is different, in later Icelandic folklore the boundaries are blurred and in some tales the ancient

inhabitants of Jutland (the Jutes) are described as people of gigantic stature and superhuman strength, who disappeared after the advent of Christianity.

3. ***The Frisians*** are an ancient West Germanic people whose fate, language and culture are deeply intertwined with shipping, trade and constant coexistence with the North Sea. Historically, they inhabited the coastal strip of today's Netherlands, northwestern Germany and southwestern Denmark - an area known as **Frisia**.

In the context of Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon migrations, the Frisians occupy a central place. Here are the most important historical facts about them:

- ***Close relatives of the Anglo-Saxons:*** The Frisians are ethnically and linguistically the closest relatives of the Angles and Saxons. The Old Frisian language was so similar to Old English that, according to chronicles, missionaries from Britain preached among the Frisians without the need for an interpreter.
- ***During the Great Migration:*** In the 5th century, when the Jutes, Angles, and Saxons invaded Britain, a **large group of Frisians joined them** and helped settle the island.
- ***Marsh Survivors (Terpen):*** The Frisian coast was originally extremely hostile – a low-lying land regularly inundated by the tides and the rough North Sea. Before the invention of dykes, to save themselves from drowning, the Frisians built huge **artificial mounds of earth and debris, called terpen**. On these isolated islands, they built their houses and raised livestock, becoming a tough and resilient people.
- ***Northern traders and the clash in “Beowulf”:*** While their neighbors (the Vikings to the north and the Saxons to the east) often relied on piracy, the Frisians were the **economic superpower of the North Sea** during the Early Middle Ages. They controlled the most important trade routes and ports (such as the famous city of Dorestad).
- ✓ In the epic poem "*Beowulf*", the Frisians are presented as powerful opponents. The legendary Battle of Finsburg is described, in which the Danes and the Frisians entered into a bloody feud, which ended in tragedy for both sides.
- ***Great Frisia and King Redbad:*** In the 7th–8th centuries, their state reached its apogee under the name **Magna Frisia (Great Frisia)**, stretching from present-day Belgium to the Elbe River in Germany. Their most famous ruler was the pagan **King Redbad**. He waged fierce wars against the Frankish Empire, defending the independence of his people and the cult of the

Germanic gods Thor and Odin against the advancing Christianity. Legend has it that Redbad was ready to be baptized, but just before entering the water, he asked the priest where his deceased ancestors were. When they replied that they were in Hell because they were pagans, the king pulled his foot back and declared, *"I would rather spend eternity in Hell with my brave ancestors than in Heaven with a handful of your saints"*.

10. Names and nicknames of the warrior figures in the "Odin" set, as well as their characteristics, temperaments, and life stories

❖ The Whites /Danish Vikings/:

1. HƿfMƿ - Hnæf "The Dane"/"Odin" Hælfthane – king, leader of hird
2. HMǣlſt - Hengist „The Jutlander"/"The Straight Blade" – his trusted champion
3. RFXƿFR - Ragnar „The Fierce“
4. XǣRM - Gorm „Veringjar“/„The Varangian“
5. ÞǣRƿFFM - Thorvald „The Wolf“/„Ulfsark“
6. MFXƿNſ - Magnus „The Strong“
7. ſlXNRM - Sigurd „The Young“
8. HRǣƿFR - Hrothgar „The Bowman“/„The Arrow“
9. lǣFR - Ingvar „The Thunderous“/"The Stormbringer"
10. ſƿFR - Einar „The Viking“
11. ƿNſ - Knut „The Raven“
12. BǣǣRſ - Bjorn „Ironsides“

13. XN††FR - Gunnar „Two Knives“

Due to the nature and rules of the game, the number of figures in henfatafl is understandably smaller than the number of warriors who participated in the Finnsburg Massacre.

❖ The blacks /Frsians and Jutes/:

The first battle squad:

1. N†XMR - Utger “Grim” – leader, veteran (both huge round shield and Viking sword)
2. MIS&IÞ - Eisolf “The Northerner” – warrior (huge double-edged battle axe, leather cloak with hood)
3. MRNIÞ - Erulf “The Twin” – brother of Godulf (a huge round shield and a large sword)
4. X&MNIÞ - Godulf “The Twin” – brother of Erulf (large round shield, massive Viking sword)
5. F&S - Ajs „The Tough One“ – veteran from North Jutland (Breton shield and spear)
6. F&XRIM - “Badass” Asgrim – Norwegian warrior (two seaxes and armor)

The second battle squad:

1. SPMI† - “Two-Handed” Swein “Zweihänder” – commander and leader, Jute from Jutland (two-handed sword, scabbard on the back, no shield)
2. PIMRI< - Wildrik “Loud-mouthed” – warrior (large elliptical shield over shoulder, massive Nordic sword, small throwing axe, huge battle horn)

3. **ᚠᚱᚱᚱᚱᚱᚱ** - Landrik “Black” – warrior (helmet, battle axe and war horn)
4. **ᚠᚱᚱᚱᚱᚱᚱ** - Torkil “The Weirdo” – warrior (no helmet, no shield, large war hammer and massive plate armor)
5. **ᚠᚱᚱᚱᚱᚱᚱ** - “Silent” Nothgrim – warrior (bow and quiver of arrows)
6. **ᚠᚱᚱᚱ** - „One-Eyed“ Uwe – warrior (helmet, sword, round shield)

The third battle squad:

1. **ᚱᚱᚱᚱᚱᚱ** - Rothulf “Bloodaxe” – leader (long battle axe, kite shield, seax and mead drinking horn on belt)
2. **ᚱᚱᚱᚱᚱᚱ** - Arnulf “The Barbarian” – warrior (huge sword and huge metal shield)
3. **ᚱᚱᚱᚱᚱᚱᚱᚱ** - Hildigrim “The Berserker” – warrior (battle axe and hidden seaxes, bearskin on head and back)
4. **ᚱᚱᚱᚱ** - Ywer “Long-Haired” – warrior (small round shield, battle axe)
5. **ᚱᚱᚱᚱ** - Visti „The Handsome“ – veteran, Jute (kite shield and mace)
6. **ᚱᚱᚱᚱᚱᚱᚱᚱ** - Jorren “Spatha”/”The Roman” – Jutland mercenary (Roman Spatha sword, no shield)

The fourth battle squad:

1. **ᚱᚱᚱᚱ** - Ubba “The Faithful”/”The Loyal” – leader, veteran (round shield, great sword and spear)
2. **ᚱᚱᚱᚱ** – “Whitebeard” Fris „The Old One“ – veteran (Norman round shield and spear)

3. **IXOMFR** - Ingomar “The Huge” – warrior (huge sword, elliptical shield over shoulder and on back, hidden under cloak seax)

4. **OXF** - Oka “The Varlet”/”The Shield Bearer” – warrior (large shield in front, short sword)

5. **XNDIFF** - “Scarred” Guthlaf – warrior, archer (bow, quiver of arrows, shield on the back)

6. **THM** - “Bloody” Tile “Red” – warrior (no helmet, leather cloak with hood, no shield, with a girded sword and a massive, heavy rounded war hammer)

11. Images of the warriors



1. **Hnef Halsdan** "The Dane"/"Odin"

Son of Hock Halfdan, who is the heir of the heraldic Skildings and ruler of the Hawkings, king of the Danes. Hnef is a prince, chieftain and leader of a hird, a crew of Vikings who swore allegiance to him, to serve him and follow him in victory or death. Known as a fearless Viking leader, Hnef has sworn to protect his people and fight in the name of Denmark. As a chieftain, he has proven himself in battles and has brought rich booty and glory to his men, he has become famous for his bravery and strength on the battlefield. Hnef is a fair-skinned man with medium-length light brown hair, a well-groomed braided beard and mustache, large in stature, well-built, muscular and handsome. He fights with a large spear and carries a heavy sword named “Hunlafing” hidden under his shield. He protects himself with a huge round shield, massive steel mail and wears a richly inlaid helmet decorated with raven wings. He is dressed in a long fur mantle over the armor, which emphasizes his noble origin. In one of his fiercest battles, he lost his right eye and has ever since worn a bandage to hide the scar, and his appearance closely resembles that of the supreme god Odin, which is why his people secretly call him by this nickname. Hnef is intelligent and clever, charming and respectful, able to speak inspiringly in front of his people, being a man with true ambitions and believing in his own strength and abilities to achieve them. Among his favorite activities are riding, hunting and poetry, but his greatest passion remains conquest and the art of war.



2. Hengist "The Jutlander"/"The Straight Blade"

A warrior from Jutland in the service of Hnef, his most trusted man and the first among his men. He is loyal to Hnef until the grave and is ready to meet death to protect his hōvding. The king knows that Hengist will never surrender, so he has bequeathed to him the leadership of his people in case he dies. Hengist is a very fast and cunning warrior, sly and treacherous in battle, an unsurpassed master of the sword. He has short brown hair, beardless, athletic and well-built, relatively tall man, he fights with a huge sword and a rectangular Roman shield, wears a helmet with a kamil, steel mail and a leather cloak over it. He is called "The Straight Blade" because of the strict military code that he observes. Hengist is one of the few in the hird who can fight equally well with any type and purpose of weapon. He perfectly masters combat techniques and tactics, organizes fierce attacks and solid defenses, treacherous ambushes and effective retreats. He is a master manipulator of warring parties, a negotiator and mediator, an initiator of secret huddles, blackmail, espionage and contract killings, as well as conspiracies and their implementation. However, his weak point is ambition – Hengist was born and raised by a Jutland mother, a minor noblewoman, two years after she became a widow, which makes him a bastard, as his father remains unknown to this day. To call Hengist a bastard in his face, means certain death for the one who utters the words.



3. Ragnar "The Fierce"

An experienced warrior, a typical representative of the northern race, known for his cruelty on the battlefield. Everyone fears him, mostly because of his

wild gaze and unpredictable behavior. Ragnar is of enormous height, white skin and blue eyes, has long light blond hair and beard, fights in heavy and massive armor, without a helmet, with a long spear, a huge sword and a large elliptical shield, and his ferocity during battle surpasses that of the berserkers. Besides killing, the other passion that Ragnar can never satisfy, is his thirst for mead. At feasts, this huge northerner would swallow half a barrel of his favorite drink alone, before collapsing to the ground unconscious. "The Fierce" is also a champion javelin thrower. In addition to being able to throw spears of all shapes, sizes, and weights with amazing force, he is also renowned for his exceptional accuracy, driving them straight into the target with such precision that he can hit a silver coin from 30 steps. Ragnar is also a renowned wrestler, having in the past earned money by fighting at fairs and festivals, often hired by merchants to attract audiences and customers.



4. Gorm "Veringjar"/"The Varangian"

A warrior in the prime of his powers, known for his huge battle axe and unsurpassed fighting skills. Until recently, Gorm served as a personal bodyguard in the Byzantine emperor's retinue, retaining his weapons, hence his nickname "The Varangian" or "Veringjar", that is, a sworn comrade or man of the oath. Loyal beyond doubt, Gorm is a tall, muscular and tough man, with dark tanned skin, long dark hair and beard, he fights with a closed helmet with a massive plate-shaped kamail and a metal collar, decorated with a horse's tail, a massive two-handed battle axe, a long two-handed sword and a kite shield. He wears heavy, massive infantry armor of Byzantine standard. Despite

all Gorm is also known for his passion for women, courting several at a time whenever he had the opportunity. It is said, that it was because of his dangerous lust that he was forced to leave Byzantium after secretly debauching several noble daughters. In his homeland Denmark, the former imperial bodyguard owned almost nothing – no lands, no estate, no home and family, so he didn't have much choice about his future and continued to do what he did best – serve in the hird, fight and amass booty, and tease the maidens who came across his sight.



5. Thorvald "The Wolf"/"Ulfssark"

An experienced fighter, part of the elite caste of legendary Scandinavian warriors "Ulfhednar" or "Wolfskins", close to the berserkers. Thorvald, like his fellows, believes that he acquires the strength and ferocity of a wolf in battle, falling into an uncontrollable rage called the "Berserker's Rage". Thorvald is a huge, muscular warrior, with long light brown hair and beard, braided in braids, he fights only with light mail, over which he puts on the wolf skin, a sword and an axe, without a helmet and shield, in order to be as fast and mobile as possible, unpredictable and dangerous to the enemy. He leads an ascetic and strange to understand lifestyle, without a roof over his head, living day by day, just like a wild animal. His favorite pastime is to make traps for small game and set them in the mountain, as well as to light large bonfires and to dance around them, beating his small Saami drum, with which he usually sets the rhythm when rowing the hird's Drakkar warship. Some rumors claim that at full moon Thorvald would put on his skin and howl like

a wolf against the moon, crouched and bristling, ready to pounce at any moment on an invisible enemy.



6. Magnus "The Strong"

A huge and massively built, red-haired and red-bearded Viking, known for his inhuman strength. With his bare hands, he can easily break the spine of a grown man and twist his neck. During battle, he crushes shields, crumples helmets and tramples his fallen enemies like an enraged bear. He fights with a helmet, two massive swords in every hand and a large round shield slung over his back, wears heavy and thick mail, and is quite well-armored and a very difficult opponent to wound. He has very long, well-groomed hair and beard, which he sometimes braids according to custom, but usually wears them loose and waving in the wind. Although he retains fat on his body, his muscles are clearly defined. One of the most elite and strongest warriors in the company. Apart from war and battles, Magnus thinks about almost nothing else. Closed in nature, silent and unpredictable, he prefers solitude to sharpen and clean his weapons and is not at all suitable for conversation. What Magnus seems to really enjoy doing when he's not fighting or tending to his weapons, is rowing. Some say that as a boy, Magnus was captured by Norwegian Vikings, who were plundering even the Scandinavian coasts, and sold into slavery to the Caliphate. He spent several years on a Moorish war galley in the seas around the Arab-conquered Spanland, where he rowed day and night, growing, building muscle, and surviving the harsh conditions and the relentless sea battles of the Moors and Berbers against the Visigoths, who were trying to reclaim their seized lands. It was a Christian Gothic leader who rescued

Magnus from the burning and sinking Muslim galley and returned his freedom.



7. Sigurd "The Young"

The youngest warrior in Hnef's company, a tall, but already well-developed in muscularity young man, with very long dark blond hair braided in a braid, with shaved nape and cheeks, numerous tattoos on his body and a carefully maintained beard with a mustache. He fights without a helmet, with a large round shield and a spear. He is dressed in a massive coat of mail and a leather shoulder cape. Despite his youth and lack of accumulated combat experience, Sigurd compensates with desire and great enthusiasm in battles. Well-trained in military affairs by his father and brothers, a boisterous and promising young man, he admires Hnef and tries to copy him. Fair and smooth-skinned, a likable young man, Sigurd is a minor nobleman, the youngest son of a wealthy Icelandic jarl, who left his father's home to seek fame and fortune. His favorite pastime is training and improving his martial arts skills. He also enjoys drawing with charcoal from a fire, scratching various images on stones, trees, and any other suitable surface. He gets really angry when he finds out, that behind his back one of his comrades-in-arms has once again called him "The Puppy."



8. Hrothgar "The Bowman"/"The Arrow"

A veteran warrior, known for his strict adherence to the old military orders - loyalty, valor, honor. A trusted man, whom the chieftain can count on, that he'll never betray him and that he'll protect his people in battle. His word is heard among all younger warriors, also he is deeply respected by his peers. An extremely accurate archer, Hrothgar is also an experienced tracker and master of disguise when hiding and organizing ambushes. A relatively tall, muscular and tough man, with dark tanned skin, light long hair and beard, he fights with a helmet with leather neck guard, a large Viking bow and a quiver of arrows. He is dressed in light mail and a leather cloak, so that he is fast and free in his movement. A passionate lover and the best player of hnefatafl among the warriors of the hird. He is known for his passion for woodcarving, often carving small wooden figurines that he gives to children. Hrothgar is one of the few warriors, who strictly worship the Scandinavian gods and fear their wrath, remembering almost all the stories from the Nordic mythology and being able to tell for hours ancient sagas about battles and heroes of bygone times. In addition, in the past he was also a judge in the Ting and knows the laws of the Nordic peoples by heart.



9. Ingvar "The Thunderous"/"The Stormbringer"

Together with Magnus and Ragnar, they form the core of Hnef's company. An extremely experienced and battle-hardened warrior, mastering the use of a war hammer and shield to perfection. Heavily armed with a massive mail and helmet with a kama on the neck and shoulders, a kite shield, a large Nordic sword and a seax knife, Ingvar sows destruction, death and despair among his enemies when he unleashes his huge war hammer, made in the shape of Mjölner, the mythical giant-killing hammer of the Scandinavian god Thor. Ingvar has light skin, but he has long raven-black hair and a loose beard, with a gloomy and harsh facial expression and a short-tempered character, a temperamental and unpredictable fighter, fierce and cruel in battle, with a fearsome rumbling voice, from which his nickname comes. He is known for its gluttony and is insatiable for meat, and when possible, he will devour quantities of food sufficient for three adult men at once. He is also ready to do anything to earn more silver and jewels. It is said, that he has already accumulated a solid fortune, which he has hidden in a safe place in his native estate, probably buried in the ground. The "Stormbringer" has three daughters, whom he wants to marry off to rich young men. All three are blond beauties, who have "skinned their mother's skin", and when Ingvar is not fighting and sitting on his farm, he constantly meets and sends off candidates for fiancés, without approving any of them, waiting for truly wealthy men to appear.



10. Einar "The Viking"

A warrior, known for his several Viking voyages to foreign shores, during which he participated in numerous raids and always returned with rich booty. A simple-minded and cheerful man, he often laughs loudly at anything and everything and jokes about almost everything. He says that he is not afraid of death on the battlefield and welcomes the day when he will go to feast in the halls of Valhalla and fight for the god Odin. A very tall and large man, with long blond-red hair and beard, a typical Viking, he fights with a helmet, a round shield, a Viking sword and a battle axe. Einar is a widower, but he has three sons who have inherited the same temper from their father - the eldest is a Jomsviking, the other one serves in the Danish king's hird as a bodyguard, and the third is a berserker, who lives in the Norwegian misty mountains. Einar's dream is to earn enough silver to build his own warship, a longship worthy of admiration, with which to conduct one last Viking raid of his own to foreign shores, the farther the better, so that if he would die and never return home. Einar is a skilled shipbuilder, and he expects help from his sons to make this dream come true.



11. Knut "The Raven"

The second son of an impoverished jarl, Knut is of noble birth and is a well-read man. A former priest of the old gods, "The Raven" is trained in the art of runic writing, a soothsayer, a healer and herbalist, a skald and musician, as well as a fearsome warrior, accompanying several chieftains on their campaigns around the world - from the misty mountains of Scandinavia through the empires of Gardariki, Miklagard and Grikland, through the dusty desert sands of the Saracen Sarkland and Blaland, into the lands of the Franks and Visigoths in Frankland and Spanland and back to Bretland among the wild Britons. Knut fought, healed and offered sacrifices, and at night in the warmth of the crackling fires in the great halls of the kings, he praised their feats with his harp and sang songs of their glory and greatness. Wise and loyal as a raven, he was merciless to his enemies and "feasted" on their flesh on the battlefield, hence his nickname. A muscular and tall man with long black hair and a braided beard, a fearsome gaze and fierce in battle, Knut fights intelligently and deadly. He is armed with a great two-handed sword, a huge elliptical shield and heavy armor. If you really want to anger him, you only need to call him "The Crow"... and bitterly regret your audacity.



12. Bjorn "Ironside"

One of the older warriors, a grim Viking, large and tall, with long light brown hair and beard, fights with a round shield, a sword hidden behind it, a long spear, wears a helmet with a leather neck guard, heavy steel mail and a leather cloak. Bjorn is a cruel warrior, a deadly opponent and shows no mercy in battle. A veteran, a participant in several voyages and numerous raids, "Ironside" has spent his entire life on the decks of longships and battlefields in Europe. In his youth, during an attack on a besieged fortress in Britain, while the defenders threw hot stones and tar at the Vikings led by Bjorn who were trying to climb the wall, everyone was repulsed and died, except for him, who managed to reach the goal and kill the enemies. After the capture of the fortress, his comrades-in-arms gave him the nickname "Ironside". He is known for his endurance, being able to run for hours in full combat gear across difficult terrain without stopping to rest. In his free time, Björn tries to learn the runes, but comes to the conclusion, that he's not succeeding. He always misses something, something is always not as it should be. But at least he is persistent and does not give up. As they say, there is time, life is ahead of him.



13. Gunnar "Two Knives"

Like Bjorn, Gunnar is one of the older warriors, an experienced veteran, with darker skin, long fair hair and a beard tied in tufts. He spent most of his life as King Hoc's personal bodyguard, and now serves to his son. Silent, prudent, loyal and well-trained bodyguard. "Serve and protect" has become his motto. He fights without a shield, as he prefers to be free with his hands, in which he holds two long seaxes, which look more like short swords, hence his nickname. He wears a wide cloak with a hood and a war horn slung over his back, with which he gives signals during battle. Gunnar has regular facial features and is one of the largest and tallest warriors in the company, sowing death among the enemy once he enters battle. Hnef often consults with him and respects him deeply, like a second father. This warrior is renowned for his speed and accuracy, being able to throw and stab his knives with terrifying precision and agility and from impossible positions, making him an extremely dangerous opponent. It is said, that Gunnar does not sleep. The truth is, that he sleeps like a cat, always alert and ready to protect himself or whoever he guards.

- ❖ From the Frisians and Jutes in exile (in the service of King Finn, son of Falkwalden and ruler of the fortress of Finnsburg, husband of Hildeburh Halfdan, princess of the Danes, queen of the Frisians and sister of Hnef). Here the warriors are presented in the order of their creation, and not arranged by squads:



1. Ajs "The Tough One"

A large, physically very strong and durable veteran mercenary, hardened and tested in numerous battles. Armed with a massive spear, a metal helmet "Spagenhelm" and a Breton shield, protected by steel mail and a leather cloak. Ajs is a short-haired man with a long dark beard and mustache. Originally from Northern Jutland, he has served in the Frisian king's hird for many years. "The Tough One" is one of the oldest in the army, an excellent and experienced fighter, thrifty in words, but firm and unwavering in deeds. In the past, in his homeland, Ajs led a group of mercenaries who were left without an employer, but when most of them began to engage in robberies and murders to survive, he became angry and killed them to the bone, after which he fled to Frisia and entered the service of the then king. The nickname "The Tough One" was given to him by his comrades-in-arms for possessing all those qualities that make a man iron, immortal and almost legendary. Ajs is known for three things – he has extremely keen hearing, being able to hear the whistle of a flying arrow even before it appears on the horizon. He is an unsurpassed navigator, being able to pull a ship out of a raging storm or dangerous underwater currents, from treacherous shallows or from calm. And last but not least, he is able to determine distances, sizes, quantities and weights with high accuracy and without mistakes. "The Tough One" is an old breed of fighting dogs, created to survive and serve, and he is among the best specimens.



2. "Whitebeard" Fris "The Old One"

The oldest warrior among the Frisians with a long and glorious military history. Despite his age, Fris is large in growth and still commands respect. His hair and beard are braided, being very long and completely white, although in his youth their color was light. His eyes are gray in color and look cold, with his gaze alone making even tough warriors shiver. He wears an archaic "Spagenhelm" helmet that has seen many battles, a small round Norman shield and a heavy spear, and is protected by a braided chainmail. A renowned harsh warrior and experienced veteran, he certainly inspires trust and respect among the other fighters. Fris has participated in several major wars of the Frisian kings, surviving without serious injuries and continuing to serve in the army, which inspires young warriors and is worthy of admiration. Short of words, but still serious in action, "The Old One" is a legendary talisman in King Finn's hird, and all believe that as long as he fights alongside them, the battle cannot be lost. He is famous for his still beautiful, widowed daughter, who to this day unsuccessfully seeks a new husband, as all candidates are meticulously assessed and approved by her father, but they are always missing something. The daughter has already been driven to the point of despair by her father's high standards, and it is said that she has already resigned herself to her fate and does not expect to ever see the marriage bed again.



3. Visti "The Handsome"

An old, dark-skinned warrior, armed with a helmet, a massive mace and a kite shield. He is originally from Jutland, a mercenary with the Frisians. A large and physically strong warrior, with massive muscles and excellent fighting skills. He has dark, long hair and a beard. In fact, Visti is an ugly man, which makes him defensive, oppressed and annoying. To hide his ugliness, he almost constantly moves around with his helmet on his head, behaving hostilely and defiantly, always ready to smash the face of someone who decides to mock him. This has embittered him, while at the same time making him irritable and unpredictable. Someone once nicknamed him "The Handsome One", but it is not advisable for anyone to openly address him in this way. Although he is famous as a fierce and skilled warrior, proven in numerous battles, Visti is a sneaky and treacherous opponent, with whom it is difficult to disagree. With a whole repertoire of dirty tricks up his sleeve, one can expect all sorts of nasty things from him on the battlefield. Once trapped in a corner, "The Handsome" is willing to do anything to survive – he bites off ears, noses and flesh, tears faces and skin, pulls out hair, beards and mustaches, spits phlegm, blood and snot, throws dust, mud and sand into the eyes of his enemies, pokes his fingers into bleeding wounds, eyes and noses, delivers unexpected kicks in the groin, twists arms and legs, chokes throats and generally does everything that contradicts the code of a valiant warrior and an honest fight. But still, this is Visti "The Handsome", vicious and ready to do anything to save his ugly skin.



4. "One-Eyed" Uwe

A coarse warrior with a massive and muscular physique, very long, tied in a ponytail, dark brown hair and a long mustache, with a short beard. He is left-handed, fights with a round wooden Viking shield and sword, is protected by a helmet, his armor is light and sleeveless, similar to those of gladiators in Ancient Rome. Uwe has survived many battles, and in his youth, he learned to fight wildly and ferociously like a berserker, almost without armor and with scant equipment. However, this cost him his right eye, which went completely blind after being nicked with a sword during battle. Since then, it has been practically unusable and has given Uwe only an ugly scar and a terrible nickname. Uwe is not a particularly talkative man, thrifty in words and deeds, but a loyal and fearless warrior. Because of his height and musculature, "The One-Eyed" is distinguished by a slightly stooped posture. He is known for training his muscles at least once a day and is the greatest bully in hand-to-hand combat, especially brilliant in drunken brawls. Because of his blind eye, Uwe covers himself with the shield on his right, using mainly his left hand. And when he is not fighting, he also does everything with it. Whenever he gets the chance, "The One-Eyed" likes to take care of the royal horses. He does not own a horse of his own, but he patiently saves silver to buy himself a first-class specimen of his favorite breed, the "Norwegian Fjord".



5. Oka "The Varlet"/"The Shield Bearer"

A warrior with a slightly full frame, not particularly tall, with short light hair and barefaced cheeks, with a blond, fluffy mustache and lightgreen eyes. He is armed with light mail, a helmet with a steel camail and a huge Breton shield, which he always carries in front of his body to protect himself from the enemy. He keeps at least two seaxes hidden behind his shield, and he has a short sword strapped to his belt. He learned to fight in this way while in his youth he was a bodyguard of a Danish chieftain and thus earned his nickname, which he wears with pride to this day. He has mastered the art of handling his large shield in battle to such an extent, that he manages to deal with his opponents with it alone and uses his weapons only as a last resort. Oka is known for his sense of humor and with his jokes he can make even a dead man laugh, which is why he is a preferred company for table and entertainment. Moreover, if one of his comrades wakes up with a shaved beard or a shield scratched with coals, with cow dung in bed or a woman's petticoat instead of armor, it is most likely a deed of the joker Oka, who usually hides for days after some more serious mischief, so as not to fall into the hands of the enraged and cursing victim. The "Varlet/Shieldbearer" is famous for his passion for organizing crazy competitions in hoping, drinking, jumping, falling, laughing, swearing and spitting, and finally vomiting, in exactly that order. Since, on top of everything, Oka is also quite lazy, he cannot be relied on for anything serious except for battles. When there is something to do, he always covers himself, leaving the others to work, while he performs pranks and antics. This earned him the nickname "Little Loki" due to his resemblance to the most mischievous of the gods.



6. Landrik "Black"

A massive and physically powerful warrior, a veteran of countless battles, a man with dark skin and a black soul, hence his nickname. An extremely treacherous opponent, Landrik enters battle without a shield, but with a heavy steel mail, under which he keeps at least several knives hidden. He wears a helmet with leather shoulder and neck guards, a war horn and a small battle axe, which he knows how to use to perfection. Landrik has short hair and a thick, long, dark beard and eyes as black as a moonless night. It is known that in his past, "The Black One" made a living as an evil robber, but no one dares to tell him so to his face. He can throw and stab his axe with amazing accuracy, and when it comes to hidden daggers, the precision and speed of throwing become incredible. Landrik's nature is evil, he is vengeful and unscrupulous, devoid of mercy and compassion. It is said that he left so many blackened women and children, widows and orphans, that a whole new village could be settled with them. It is for this reason that someone once gave him the nickname "The Black", and Landrik continues to strengthen it with every new battle or quarrel. He is also known for having sworn a blood oath of loyalty to the Frisian king, because of the mercy he showed to a relative of his, his only son, a one-armed pickpocket, who was sentenced to death. After this pardon, for which he humbly begged on his knees, Landrik stood before the ruler, cut his left palm with his knife, clenched his fist and let the flowing blood drip into the fire of a lit brazier, swearing an oath of loyalty to serve the king faithfully and unconditionally as long as he lived, strictly observing it to this day.



7. Erulf "The Twin"

A large-built warrior, with short, fair hair and smooth-faced. He goes into battle wearing a helmet with a steel aventail, a sword and a huge round Norman shield. He is dressed in heavy ring mail covered with a matted cloth that smells of a mixture of pine resin, wet soil and horse manure. Erulf is the twin brother of Godulf, hence their nicknames. Erulf is the older of the "Twins" by only a few minutes, but he often highlights this fact to prevail over his brother in their endless squabbles and arguments. The two brothers are inseparable, but they often quarrel with each other and argue about things that are not even worth the time lost, such as how big the groom's daughter's ass is when viewed from the side, how hard it is and how many fingers the board of the chair bends when he sits on it. However, the two are extremely dangerous when they attack together, and they usually attack in this way. It can be said that Erulf is the slightly more agreeable of the two, usually speaking on his brother's behalf, taking advantage of his celebrated seniority. An unsurpassed master smith, he often personally repairs or makes weapons for himself and Godulf, but curses at others when they show up at his anvil with some errand. The most insistent usually fly out of the forge shortly before the hammer flying after them, overtakes them and knocks them into the mud.



8. "Scarred" Gutlaff

A sinewy warrior of normal physique, agile and brave. Dark-haired, with long, straight hair and a long, dark beard, Gutlaff wears a Norman helmet and a round shield slung over his back to protect him, and is armed with a German bow and a leather quiver of arrows. His shoulders are protected by a thick leather cape, worn over a steel mail that covers his entire body. In his past, Gutlaff has made his living as a contract killer, mercenary and bodyguard. It is said that during one of his missions as a contract killer, "The Scarred One" failed, was discovered and taken into custody to be interrogated and executed. However, he proved to be tough and despite the torture they inflicted on him, the interrogators still failed to reach the guarantor. Time passed, and Gutlaff did not give up until one night he managed to escape from the dungeon, crawling half-naked through a tunnel he had secretly dug. While he was escaping through the grate placed at the end of it, however, a cut and twisted steel rod tore his neck, back and left leg all the way to the heel, leaving him with an ugly and thick scar for life, as well as his blooming nickname. By nature, Gutlaff is a treacherous and merciless fighter, bitter towards everything and everyone. His bow is long-range and with it "Scarred" can fire long-range volleys, as well as fire arrows to start fires. In the king's hird, Gutlaff is appointed as a trainer of young archers, which he does every day. He and his "Boys", as he calls them, weave training targets and effigies that they pierce beyond recognition with a hurricane of arrows and a torrent of curses. His favorite pastime is making his own arrows, in which, it cannot be denied, he is an unsurpassed master. It is also rumored that it is "The Scarred One" who

knows the secret recipe for making the terrifying and devastating "Greek Fire", with the help of which any war can be won.



9. Jorren "Spatha"/"The Roman"

⚔ Jutland mercenary, a large and massive warrior in the prime of his life, with a long, thick, black beard and hair and blue eyes. He is protected by an Anglo-Saxon helmet, armed with a straight, flat and very beautiful sword of the Roman "Spatha" type, he does not carry a shield. He is dressed in light steel mail, over which he wears a heavy and thick leather cloak, made from the skinned and treated skins of various predatory animals. Jorren's ancestors were Romanized Germans from the Jute tribe, who moved north after the fall of the Western Roman Empire, to the northernmost parts of the Jutland peninsula, returning to their ancestral homeland. Jorren's sword was passed down from father to son for generations, so it is his most valuable possession, which "The Roman" guards like the apple of his eye. "Spatha" is a skilled fighter, possessing speed and strength in battle. In addition to the origin of the sword, Jorren is called "The Roman" and because of his habits in soldierly life, applying the discipline and fighting spirit of the ancient Roman legionaries from the glorious times of the empire. He prepares his own food, goes to bed and wakes up early, trains regularly and diligently takes care to maintain his weapons in perfect condition, especially his beloved Roman sword. In addition to everything, Jorren is a well-read warrior who knows Latin and Greek perfectly, both written and spoken, and is a connoisseur of art and good wine. When he drinks enough of it during feasts and celebrations, he likes to

stand up, climb onto the table and recite famous works of ancient authors and philosophers, as a result of which he is showered by his comrades with a hurricane of food scrap and curses, so that he will shut up and sit down.



10. "Bloody" Tile "Red"

A burly man with a massive physique, well-built, tough and physically durable. Tile is a fearless warrior who enters battle without a helmet, protected only by a steel mail, with a leather cloak with a large hood over it, falling over his eyes. He is armed with a massive and heavy rounded war hammer and has a sword girded on his belt, never using a shield. Tile is able to swing his hammer with just one hand, and in heavy battles he grabs his massive Norman sword in his left hand, turning into a deadly storm. Once in battle, "The Bloody" quickly falls into a berserker-like battle rage and rages across the battlefield like a hurricane. His eyes are light gray, almost transparent, and look like glass, the color of his long hair and beard is red, and his skin is fair and covered with freckles, hence his nickname "Red". Because of his exceptional fighting skills, the many battles won and his bloodthirstiness on the battlefield, another, more fitting one, was added to this nickname - "Bloody". He is one of the fiercest fighters in the company, whom everyone fears. Tile is the son of a woodcutter and a servant, and in his youth he cut wood together with his father and brothers, gaining strength and endurance. When he's not fighting, "Red" is actually a very gentle and kind man, hardworking and helpful. He is also a good builder, often using his hammer and skills to help carpenters in the

construction of fortresses, bridges and other military facilities and fortifications.



11. Ywer "Long-Haired"

A coarse, young, handsome warrior, a Jutland mercenary with a long blond beard, fair skin, wearing waist-length, straight and beautiful copper-blond hair. Ywer is very proud of it and therefore always wears it freely loose, fastened across his forehead with a massive diadem. He enters battle without a helmet, armed only with a small, round Norman shield, a small battle axe and a light, but strong steel mail. Ywer is an exceptional lover, lustful and unrestrained in terms of female caresses, attracting women with his beauty and his thick, well-groomed hair, which earned him the nickname. As a warrior, however, "Long-Haired" is extremely dangerous, energetic and agile, fearless and well-trained. As a young man in his native Jutland, he was an excellent disciple in military affairs, winning practice fights and training warriors younger than him. It is said, that he was caught in adultery with the wife of a minor Jutland nobleman, but managed to escape by killing his bodyguards. He was subsequently arrested and brought to trial according to the law. The elderly nobleman yielded to the pleas of his young nephew to allow him to defend the family honor, and the "Thing" decreed that the dispute be resolved by a holmgang – a duel according to the rules of the law. Ywer emerged victorious, but spared the boy's life. In the end, they decided that it would be best for everyone if "Long-Haired" was declared an outlaw or "Skóggangr" and left his homeland. So he arrived in Frisia, where he entered the king's service, to the delight of

widows, maidens and wives and the horror of their relatives, parents and husbands.



12. "Badass" Asgrim

A Norwegian, hired to serve Finn, an experienced veteran, hardened in many battles, with a massive northern physique and a brutal nature. He fights without a helmet and shield, armed only with a heavy steel mail and two seaxes. Fair-skinned and red-haired, more like a ginger, with eyes as bright and transparent as glass, just like those of a poisonous snake. With a completely bald vertex, but with very long red-red hair and beard, freely flowing, Asgrim is a sneaky and extremely dangerous opponent, a cunning and combinative warrior, known for his deadly tricks and a stock of hidden knives, that he always keeps at hand. The "Badass" is able to throw and stab his seaxes from a great distance with extraordinary speed and accuracy. While they are in his hands, he handles them with such precision, that even a heavily armed opponent is not safe. Asgrim is a former berserker, to whom Norway suddenly narrowed after being outlawed for several murders and banished. A vulgar and cruel man with no scruples, he quickly reoriented himself and became involved with a crew of sea pirates led by a bloodthirsty Viking, with whom they plundered Frankish and British towns and farms for several years, until a sea storm sank and wiped them out. Except for Asgrim, who miraculously survived to continue terrorizing the world. Having perfected all his disgusting qualities during his pirate life, the "Badass" still fights as a berserker and pirate to this day and is an unwanted opponent for even the most famous fighters.

In addition to being a simpleton, a drunkard, a roughneck and a bully, Asgrim is a hardened gambler, a swindler, a waster and a scoundrel. Yes, precisely because of a lost game of dice and gambling debts, the "Badass" slaughtered a whole bunch of gamblers and quickly became a "Skóggangr", with anyone having the right to kill him, without fear of the law. Under the roof of the Frisian king, the exiled murderer once again found a field for manifestations, drinking, gambling, beatings and murders, giving away his seaxes and "loyalty" for shelter, food, women and loot of silver and gold. His laugh is like that of a raven cawing, which makes him even more repulsive and disgusting.



13. Ubba "The Faithful"/"The Loyal"

A burly warrior with a massive physique, with medium-length chestnut hair and a long, braided beard of the same color, with black eyes and a serious face. He is armed with a Norman helmet, a round medium-sized wooden shield, a long spear and a massive northern sword, and is dressed in a massive and heavy steel mail. A veteran of numerous battles, Ubba earns his nickname due to his proven loyalty to the Hirdmen, in whose companies he serves. He always supports the cause of his people, regardless of whether it is just or not. Ubba leads one of the four battle companies of the Frisians, and all under his command observe the "Code of Dreng" or the code of the warrior with the nine noble virtues – courage, truth, honor, loyalty, discipline, hospitality, hard work, independence and perseverance. Because of his unwavering loyalty, "The Faithful" is valued even by the king himself. A passionate lover of dice, but unlike most gamblers, Ubba is honest and knows how to lose with dignity.

He never leaves his debts unpaid, nor does he hate the players he loses to. His other passion is weapons. It can be said that "The Loyal" is a collector of weapons that he has won on the battlefield. Guests at his home can spend hours looking at all kinds and sizes of captured weapons, hung on the walls or piled up in large chests. Ubba takes particular pride in showing off foreign weapons, won in battles against pagans or other tribes, as well as the expensive armament of noble warriors, army leaders, and tribal chieftains.



14. Godulf "The Twin"

Erulf's twin brother, a warrior of large build, but slightly shorter than the others, with darker skin, slightly longer dark brown hair and a well-groomed, trimmed beard. An experienced fighter, armed with a Norman helmet with an aventail, a massive Nordic sword and a large round shield. He is dressed in thick, steel mail and a long, beautiful leather cloak with a fox fur collar. In his youth, Godulf was a messenger and is an impeccable rider, the only man in Finn's retinue who can ride a horse in all possible positions, even hanging under his belly, while simultaneously striking at the enemy and shooting accurately with a bow. Godulf is the younger of the two brothers, as well as the more silent, which gives Erulf the advantage of standing out and speaking on behalf of both of them. Godulf is more quick-tempered than his brother, but he is not malicious or vindictive, his character is such that he does not like vanity and idle talk. He is renowned as an excellent hunter and an excellent cook. If there is a fire and cooking ingredients, Godulf is somewhere nearby and soon begins to smell an appetizing dish, which attracts the others like flies

to honey. Godulf is also known for being an excellent scout, as well as an unpretentious guard. Once left on duty, the younger twin can stay still for hours without blinking or moving from his place. That is why he is always preferred by the leaders as a night watchman. Godulf, on the other hand, loves being a night guard – this completely suits his nature – solitude, silence, tranquility, lack of annoying people and scoundrels who can poke his ears and fill his head with their nonsense, just the sky, the stars, the moon, the wind and him. The twins are also known for drinking huge amounts of beer without getting drunk.



15. Arnulf "The Barbarian"

Close to Rothulf "Bloodaxe", Arnulf is a warrior with a huge build and gigantic height, light skin color, blue eyes and blond, medium-length hair, beardless. He wears an open, inlaid Saxon helmet with a nose guard and bull horns attached to it, for decoration and terror of enemies, holds a huge Viking round shield and a massive Nordic two-handed sword, slung over his back. He is dressed in heavy mail, over which he wears a long, thick and roughly made leather cloak from a large animal – a bear or aurochs. His face is rough and chiseled as if from stone, with numerous scars from battles. His left ear is completely missing along with part of his jaw below it, but these are not damage from battles, but from a severe, leprosy-like disease that the "Barbarian" suffered in his childhood. Despite his rough and uncouth appearance, he is an extremely disciplined fighter, having proven himself to

be a smart, calculating, cunning and combinative warrior. It can be said that Arnulf is one of the most resourceful and brave fighters in the Frisian hird. His nickname was given because he has inhuman strength and displays cruelty in battle, bordering on barbarism. He is also unpretentious to natural conditions and can ride, eat, fight, sleep and generally live in the open air and without a roof over his head, regardless of whether the sun is scorching him or a storm is raging around him. Born and raised in the southern provinces of the country, no one knows almost anything about Arnulf's past, nor about his origins. However, one thing is certain – anyone who manages to get more than two or three words out of the mouth of "The Barbarian" is worthy of admiration.



16. Utger "Grim"

A large and broad-shouldered veteran warrior, leader, a dark and sullen man, with brittle, slightly long, dark hair and a long, braided black beard, but with light eyes. He is armed with a Nordic helmet with a metal camail, a huge round Viking shield and a massive, wide Nordic sword, and is protected by heavy, steel chainmail. An extremely dangerous opponent, proven in many battles. Sullen, often hot-tempered and irritable, he speaks extremely rarely, and is also thrifty in his deeds. Utger is a strange type, an eccentric, prefers solitude and does not make friends with almost anyone, but he is devoted to king Finn to the grave and managed to earn his respect years ago when he saved his life during a battle. Therefore, he was promoted to commander of a squad in the

hird and took under his command the harshest and most difficult to tame warriors, managing to cope even with the temper of Asgrim "Badass". "The Grim" is an example to follow and is famous as an exceptional military strategist. His favorite activities in his free time are hunting, riding and military training, and to everyone's surprise, Utger is also an unsurpassed master of the jaw harp, but he always plays it when he is alone and without an audience. Some older people claim that in his youth Utger had a happy and peaceful life as a farmer, having his own homestead and a sturdy family. But as always, everything ended in a terrible way – the robbers and mercenaries from the warring armies who invaded the land of the Frisians plundered him, burned his farm, raped and killed his entire family, and Utger was forced to fight in the army of his own enemies. But not for long... Having accumulated enough fighting skills, during a dark, windy night, the young warrior killed whoever he could and rushed like a whirlwind away from the camp, seeking salvation and freedom to the enemy, where he took an oath of allegiance, which he keeps to this day. With himself, on that dark night, the young bloodied warrior with a sparkle in his eyes, brought his nickname...



17. Hildigrim "The Berserker"

A big and tall warrior, with long, dark hair and a lighter long mustache, shaved cheeks and light skin and eye color. He is armed with a heavy and sharp battle axe and a massive coat of mail, and always enters battle with a bear skin slung over his head and back. It is said that he killed and skinned the bear himself, somewhere in the Norwegian mountains in the north. On his belt, under the

skin, he always carries several seaxes and smaller hunting knives hidden, which he can throw and stab with impressive accuracy. His nickname was given because in the past, Hildigrim was part of the most elite Viking warriors – the berserkers, known for their ferocity and lack of any fear during battle. To this day, he always carries with him a small bag of dried mushrooms, poisonous fly agarics, which he boils into a potion before battle. Once he drinks it, it clouds his mind, driving him into a battle rage and utter madness known as the "Berserkerang." Hildigrim goes out onto the battlefield without a helmet or shield, spinning and swinging his huge battle axe furiously, screaming and howling like a wild beast, and in the heat of battle he throws off his skin and chainmail and fights naked to the waist, without any fear of injury or death. "The Berserker" is one of the best warriors in the hird, but he has a cruel temper and has no friends. He always wanders alone in the wilderness and roaming the forests for days, and it is said that at night, by the light of the fire and under the influence of mysterious herbal potions, he falls into a trance and speaks with the old gods, writes runes in the dirt and on the bark of trees and learns from the ancient spirits things about the past and the future, that he never shares with anyone.



18. Eisolf "The Northerner"

A tall and burly, slightly rounded middle-aged warrior, with dark brown, long, curly hair and beard and brown eyes. He is armed only with a huge double-edged battle axe and steel mail, over which he wears a waist-length leather cloak with a hood. He does not use a helmet or shield, preferring to keep his enemies at bay with his long, heavy axe, for which he needs both hands,

protected by steel gloves. Eisolf was born and raised somewhere in the northern parts of the country, it is even rumored that he comes from the forests of the Svei or the Finns, but he himself never talks about his past and origins. Before entering battle, he always sharpens, polishes and caresses his axe, whispering something to it in an incomprehensible language, offers small sacrifices to the gods, prays to them several times a day and calls on them to protect him and help him in battle. "The Northerner" is a solitary man and avoids any conflicts, but he is nevertheless an experienced and good fighter. He is known for his beautiful, deep and bass voice, and during a feast the king asks him to sing songs of battles and greatness. Indeed, Eisolf speaks the language of the wild Finno-Ugric people and knows many of their legends. He can tell tales and adventures from the Wild North for hours, as long as he is in the mood for it. A passionate fisherman, "The Northerner" knows how to catch fish in any way, smoke and dry it, and when he prepares it for a meal, even the master chef Godulf absorbs his knowledge and learns his recipes with the passion of a rookie.



19. "Silent" Rothgrim

A relatively massive warrior, well-built, armed with a "Spangenhelm" helmet with a leather camail on neck, a large German bow and a large quiver with long arrows. He is dressed in light chainmail for archers and a heavy leather cloak sewn from the skin of small predators and large rodents, usually beavers. With a long dark beard and not very long, pulled back, dark chestnut brittle hair. If hearing more than two or three words said by Arnulf "The Barbarian"

is an achievement, then hearing even one word from the mouth of Nothgrim is tantamount to a miracle. This warrior is so silent that it is rightly known that those who do not know him consider him mute. The language of the "Silent" is whole and in place, but he simply does not use it. On the other hand, he is an extremely reliable fighter, a first-class archer, a devoted comrade, loyal to the hird and hard as a rock. It is said that as a young man Nothgrim was married to the daughter of a wealthy Frisian merchant, but shortly after she conceived a child by him, she fell ill and died prematurely. Nothgrim could never get over the death of his wife and their unborn child, and since then he has hardly spoken more than a hundred words. "The Silent One" takes care of two hunting dogs, who are like children to him. With them he roams the forests and hunts, he carves bodies for his arrows with his knife, and their plumage is made from the feathers of the forest birds he kills. Despite being a silent and reserved man, Nothgrim has a kind soul and is therefore respected by everyone.



20. Ingomar "The Huge"

A relatively young warrior in the prime of his powers, Ingomar is a huge man of gigantic height and massive physique, with long blond hair and a long beard of the same color. He enters battle armed with a huge and heavy, massive sword and an enormous elliptical metal shield. He always carries a large seax as a secondary weapon. His helmet is a Norman "Owl" type, with a steel camail to protect the shoulders and neck. He is covered with a massive and heavy, thick leather cloak, worn over a giant coat of mail. Ingomar is a fearsome

warrior because of his inhuman strength and enormous size. Once he swings his sword, he becomes almost untouchable by enemy weapons, and his shield, helmet and armor make him very difficult to wound and kill even from a distance, with weapons such as spears, bows, arrows and throwing axes. Understandably, because of his gigantic size and strength, "The Huge" is the champion of Frisia in all types of hand-to-hand combat and wrestling and has never been defeated by another opponent. He is also known for his ability to swim long distances and is renowned as a phenomenal swimmer, despite the lack of logic that such a huge body can last a long time in water without tiring. Some of his companions even joke that if they had to send a message to the Jutes or Danes on both peninsulas, they would do it through "The Huge", who would certainly swim across the North Sea faster than a raven flies.



21. Torkil "The Weirdo"

An insanely brave and self-confident veteran warrior who is not afraid of anything. That is why he enters battle without a helmet and shield, armed only with a large war hammer, which he wields equally well with both of his strong hands. Not a particularly large man, of average height, but well-built and with hands as strong as blacksmith's tongs. Torkil is completely bald, so he regularly shaves his head and keeps it perfectly smooth. "The Weirdo" compensates for the lack of hair with his incredibly long dark brown beard, which he wears loose. He is dressed in massive steel mail, assembled from large plates and crowned with an iron-braided collar. His arms are unprotected by armor so that they are mobile, with clearly pronounced sinewy muscles and enviable

strength. Torkil imitates the berserkers of the north in his behavior on the battlefield and once he enters battle, he goes wild with his huge hammer, sweeping away everyone and everything in his path. “The Weirdo” is a man with a strange sense of humor and self-irony. In his youth, he lived for some time in the north among the wilder Norwegians, where he came into contact with real berserkers, and since then he has resembled one, lives and thinks like them. The nickname “The Weirdo” was given to him by his comrades-in-arms for three reasons – his madness on the battlefield, his strange behavior outside of it, and his stubbornness to continue playing dice, even when he is about to lose even the clothes on his back. For many, Torkil is completely crazy, but one thing cannot be denied to him – he is extremely careful about his beard, which he combs daily with a heckle made of whalebone and smears it with herbal pomades, procured and prepared by himself.



22. Rothulf "Bloodaxe"

Commander of a Frisian squad, a tall and massive warrior in the prime of his life, with long light blond hair braided in front and a long beard, fair skin and a muscular build. He does not wear a helmet, he is armed with a heavy battle axe with a long handle, a large kite shield and a massive seax girded on his belt. His body is protected by a braided steel mail and a long, thick cloak of animal skins from minks, martens and pine martens, beavers and others. Rothulf is a fearsome warrior with numerous battles behind him. It can be said that almost

all of his body is tattooed with a variety of fearsome images of beasts, weapons, northern gods, runic inscriptions, symbols and signs, in general, a whole encyclopedia of terror and dread. He was once a blacksmith, but after trying his luck as a mercenary in a raiding party and a small war between two jarls in the North, he never returned to his original profession, as he found his calling in combat. In the heat of battle, with his huge axe, Rothulf literally sweeps away everything in his path, leaving behind only death, destruction and bloody corpses, hence his nickname. Because of his fighting rage, he does not wear a helmet, proving to the others that he is fearless and immortal. However, this once cost him a heavy blow with a sword to the right cheekbone in battle and a serious wound from which he almost died. "Bloodaxe" survived and has since carried an ugly scar on his cheek. He never parted with his horn for drinking mead and beer, being a proverbial reveler and never missing a feast and celebration to get drunk. When not forced to fight, Rothulf, contrary to expectations, is a peaceful and helpful farmer, livestock breeder and builder of wooden and stone buildings, as well as a skilled blacksmith. But, called to serve in the king's hird, he abandoned the peaceful life, indulging in wars and entertainment. Rothulf is also famous as a champion in drinking and belching. The warriors under his command, however, are kept short and are tutored and trained personally by the "Bloodaxe", and are excellent fighters to the last man.



23. "Two-Handed" Svein "Zweihander"

A squad commander, a tall, broad-shouldered and massive young warrior from Jutland. Armed with a "Spangenhelm" helmet with a steel aventail in

front of the face and a leather camail on the neck and shoulders, a long German two-handed sword, iron elbow pads and a massive leather cloak, under which he is protected by a strong steel mail. Swein does not carry a shield, and his long sword is in a scabbard, slung over his back. He has short, light brown hair and a well-groomed, relatively short-cut light beard. His eyes are dark blue and piercing. His nickname comes from the two-handed sword with which he fights, not because he is the only warrior who uses one, but because he is the best of all. Once he has swung the sword with both hands, Swein cannot be stopped except by spears, arrows and throwing weapons. "Two-Handed" comes from a noble family in Jutland and was trained as a royal warrior and bodyguard from an early age, but for financial reasons he took up service with the king of the Frisians. Everyone knows that Swein is courting one of Finn's nieces, a lady of noble birth, which pleases the king and he has given his consent for the young people to get engaged. Swein often takes part in fighting tournaments and always wins them easily, and due to his exceptional fighting skills and the king's sympathy, he is appointed leader of a squad. The secret that Swein hides from everyone, is that he secretly trains until he faints in the martial art of mastering the two-handed sword, usually at night while others are sleeping, truly believing that his hands are moved by Tyr, the northern god of war and courage, to whom he makes sacrifices and prays every day.



24. Wildrik "Loud-mouthed"

A middle-aged warrior, tall, large and slightly plump man, massive and with a fair complexion. His hair and beard are chestnut and brittle, almost curly, both long and loose. He fights with a massive Norman sword, a relatively small throwing axe, a large elliptical shield and carries a huge war horn on his back, which he blows continuously at the beginning and end of the battle. He is protected by an Anglo-Saxon high helmet and massive metal mail with large leather shoulder pads, padded with metal. His nickname comes from his extremely powerful and thunderous voice, with which he calls his brothers-in-arms for order and discipline during battle and terrifies his enemies. After throwing his axe at the enemy, Wildrik shifts his shield from his shoulder to the front for protection and fights with his massive sword, which he has learned to handle surprisingly well. He does not part with his large horn, following the orders of his commanders and, when necessary, giving learned signals to the other warriors. The main goal of the "Loud-mouthed" is to prove himself in battle in order to be promoted in rank or become a personal royal bodyguard. Although Wildrik has a surprisingly powerful voice, he can only use it on the battlefield or in drunken brawls and fights, as well as to shout over everyone during a feast or in the marketplace. But if he is forced to sing something, then the "Loud-mouthed" sounds like a wounded bear or a bull in breeding season, terrible and false, to the regret and shock of anyone who had hoped to hear some tear-jerking male war song. Wildrik is far from a bad person, but he is ambitious and pursues his goals by any means possible.

A fearsome warrior, a glutton at the table and a terrible singer, the "Loud-mouthed" is a loyal combat comrade and an unwanted opponent.

- ❖ ***The warrior figures*** were made in the following order – first the dark walnut figures as listed – from Ajs “The Tough One” to Wildrik “The Loud-mouthed”. Subsequently, the light maple figures were made from Hengist “The Jutlander” to Gunnar “The Two Knives” and lastly King Hnef Halfdan “Odin”. Arranged in this sequence, as they were made, one can trace the thread of my professional development – from absolute beginner to intermediate in this style of micro-woodcarving. Although most of the black and even some of the white warriors have been reworked and corrected, some even more than a few times, the differences in level and progress are still clearly visible. Of course, it is entirely possible to simply replace the first, rougher and unprofessional figures with new ones that I will make later, but this would take away the uniqueness of the set and spoil the magic of its creation. Therefore, I preferred to leave things as they are – real, original and filled with human imperfection and the pursuit of perfection. From a collector's point of view, through the prism of a connoisseur of true art, it is precisely these imperfections and the tracking of progress that make the set valuable, unique and unrepeatable.
- ❖ ***A final note of uniqueness and creativity:*** In the description of one of the figures in the set, out of all 37, I completely intentionally interwoven a piece of my own history and character. I did it as a reward for all my work and simply because I love riddles and puzzle games. I feel like I'm saying to myself "Thank you, this is your reward and let future generations remember". Which one is it – I won't reveal. For people who know me, it won't be hard to guess. For the rest, it will be a fun challenge.



"Odin" Hnefatafl Club and Lucho Vanchev wish you a pleasant experience with the unique and spiritual playset, named after the wise and warlike supreme Scandinavian god Odin!