

ONUND'S SAGA

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- INTRODUCTION -

What do you picture when I say Viking? Do you see a great big hairy creature, rushing into battle with a horned hat to pillage and conquer? You wouldn't be wrong most of the time, but that's not all there is to these incredible people. 'Viking' was not all they were, merely a job description, and it is when you look at the actual people behind it do you realise there is a lot more to them than bloodshed.

Onund Ofeigsson, born approximately 960 A.D., was a fearsome Viking raider, commander of five Norwegian ships, and one of the many heroes in the battle of Hafrsfjord. He ticks all the boxes for classic Viking stereotypes so far, but halfway through his tale he suffers a crippling injury that shapes the rest of his life. It is a story about accepting and overcoming a disability that threatens who you think you are, as well as one of friendship, revenge, and of course epic battles. Taken and adapted from a small section of the Icelandic Saga Grettis Saga written between the twelfth and thirteenth century, Onund's Saga documents this story.







CHAPTER 1

Those who had heard of the feared Onund Ofeigsson would have expected more, a giant unmatched in size and skill with fire red hair that blazed across the battlefield. The reality was that he was not an overly large man, nor disappointingly small, but somewhere in the middle. He did indeed have red hair, wiry and pushed back as best it could be, though it wasn't the fabled fiery red, more of a gingery hue. His skin was rough, but still handsome, in that classic broody Viking kind of way, but there was kindness of complexion there too, hidden behind all that hair. He was the commander of five Norwegian raiding ships, accompanied on his voyages by his trusted friends Balki of Sotanes, Orm the Wealthy, and Hallvard the Norwegian.



BARRA ISLES

NORWAY

With these ships, he raided the Northern tip of Scotland, pillaging the monasteries and taking all that they had. Onund, although the hero of this story, was a Viking, and Vikings tended to have, how should I put it... violent tendencies? Once he gathered all that he could from Scotland he moved onto the Hebrides, and the same things happened: Pillage, raid, fight, pillage, raid, fight, with nobody standing in his way. That was until he sailed all the way down and reached the Barra Isles in the south.

Here he was met by the king of the Hebrides, King Kjarval, who was understandably annoyed at Onund.



Their conversation went something like this:

stop it





no

Unable to reach an understanding King Kjarval attacked Onund with seven of his own ships, a fight that looked heavily in Kjarval's favour. Onund was a fearsome warrior however, and so were his men, and none of them shied away from a good fight. They were the type of Vikings that fought first, thought later, might over mind in almost all matters. They brought his ships up alongside King Kjarval's, and his men leaped over the gunwales into their decks. The battle was fierce, and many fell on each side, but Onund eventually defeated Kjaval's men.

The battle was won, and all Kjaval could do was run away on his last remaining ship, tail between his legs.



Onund was victorious. He gathered up all of Kjarval's ships and set himself up in the Barra Isles, nice and comfortable on a pile of his spoils. He stayed there for three summers, every now and then sailing to Scotland and Ireland for the occasional raid.



you're mean



A close-up photograph of a sand maze. The maze is composed of numerous interconnected, winding paths carved into the sand. The lighting is dramatic, coming from the side, which creates deep shadows and bright highlights on the ridges of the sand, emphasizing the texture and depth of the maze. In the center of the maze, a small, rectangular, light-colored wooden sign is placed. The sign has the words "CHAPTER II" written on it in a simple, hand-drawn font. The background is dark, making the sand and the sign stand out prominently.

CHAPTER II

Those of you who know a thing or two about Scandinavian history will have heard about King Harald Hålfðansson. Those who haven't, well, you're in for a treat. Throughout Norway there were a scattering of different kings and earls who controlled their own lands. King Harald however wanted to unite these lands under one king, can you guess who? He vowed never to cut his hair until all in Scandinavia called him king, gaining the nickname "The Unshorn". Suffice to say, a task like that took some time, and thus Harald's hair grew and grew, looking more and more like a fairy-tale princess than a fearsome ruler.



HORDALAND

He was, despite my description of him, quite a good conqueror, and was slowly creeping his way down from the north. He had won almost every battle, and it was at this point the remaining rulers in the south started to panic.

NORWAY

SWEDEN



In Hordland gathered Kjetvi the Wealthy, Thorir Longchin, Soti, King Sulki, and many other earls and kings from the south, to organise an opposition to King Harald The Unshorn.

i don't
like him

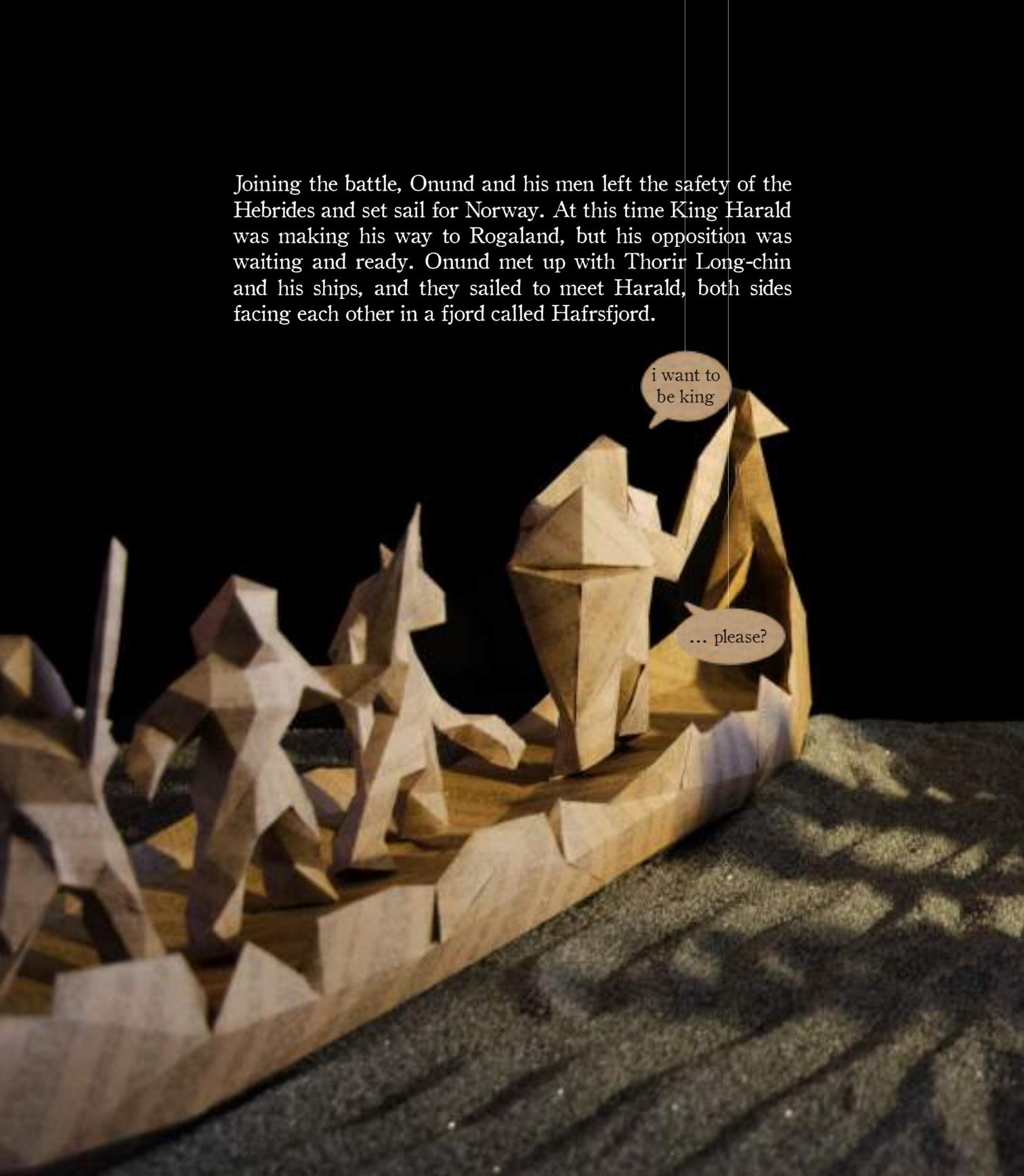
let's kill
him

okay



Each had many men who fought in their name, but Harald The Unshorn had more. They needed to gather some of Norway's strongest warriors, anyone come to mind? They asked Onund and his men. Onund had gotten quite bored of all his wealth and easy raiding, and wanted a chance to prove himself again, so he agreed.

Joining the battle, Onund and his men left the safety of the Hebrides and set sail for Norway. At this time King Harald was making his way to Rogaland, but his opposition was waiting and ready. Onund met up with Thorir Long-chin and his ships, and they sailed to meet Harald, both sides facing each other in a fjord called Hafrsfjord.

A paper boat made of brown paper, with a small figure inside. The boat is on a dark, textured surface. Two speech bubbles are attached to the boat. The background is black.

i want to
be king

... please?

And with that the historic battle of Hafrsfjord had started.

we don't
like u



Now, Harald had a slight advantage. He had Berserkers on his side. They were fearsome Viking warriors, and it is said that no weapon could harm them.



Instead of wearing bear pelts like most Berserkers, they wore the pelts of wolves in battle, and were unstoppable. They were known as Wolfskins.

They stood like statues all along the gunwales of Harald's ship, poised and ready to pounce.



With the battle fully underway Harald made straight for Thorir Long-chin's ship, which had Onund's alongside it. He arrived with a crash, and Onund watched as Harald sent his Wolfskins like a wave onto Thorir's ship, sweeping away his men.

Thorir and his men fought them off as best they could, but Harald's pack of Wolfskins were too strong. It wasn't long before they cleared the deck, and soon the ship started to sink. Thorir went out fighting, but only managed to kill one of the Wolfskins before they jumped back onto Harald's ship.

Now, Onund wasn't a man to run away from a fight. He had seen what the berserkers had done within minutes, but over the wreckage of Thorir's ship he brought his ship over towards Harald's, determined to end the battle. Another ship joined him, lead by a man called Thrand, who bought his ship alongside Onund's.



Onund jumped up onto the gunwales, and with his sword fought back the wave of Wolfskins trying to flood his ship. He managed to keep them back, dodging blows and slashes from axes and swords. From the corner of his eye he saw one of Harald's men pull back and release a spear, which came flying through the air towards Onund. He leaned back as it narrowly missed his head, and laughed out loud. This was what he was good at.

The laugh didn't last long, as in learning back he revealed his leg completely unprotected. A warrior by the name of Vigbjod, seized this opportunity and swung hard at his leg with his sword, severing it completely. Onund fell back onto the deck of his ship and opened the gates to the torrent of Berserkers he was holding back.

This could have been the end of this story, but Onund wasn't quite done yet. His fall was seen by Thrand, who jumped up and ran towards Onund. While the Wolfskins were busy killing left right and centre he managed to grab Onund and pull him across the deck, and onto his ship. He propped him up against the prow and ordered his men to flee.

As the ship set sail away from the battle Onund did what was probably the coolest thing in Viking history. He propped himself up on a barrel and reached for a nearby bucket full of boiling pitch, a tar like substance, and thrust his stump in. The pitch cauterised the wound, and stopped the bleeding. Without blinking once or uttering a single cry Onund looked back at the carnage caused by Harald, at Vigbjod thrusting his sword in the air in victory, and vowed to seek his revenge.









CHAPTER III

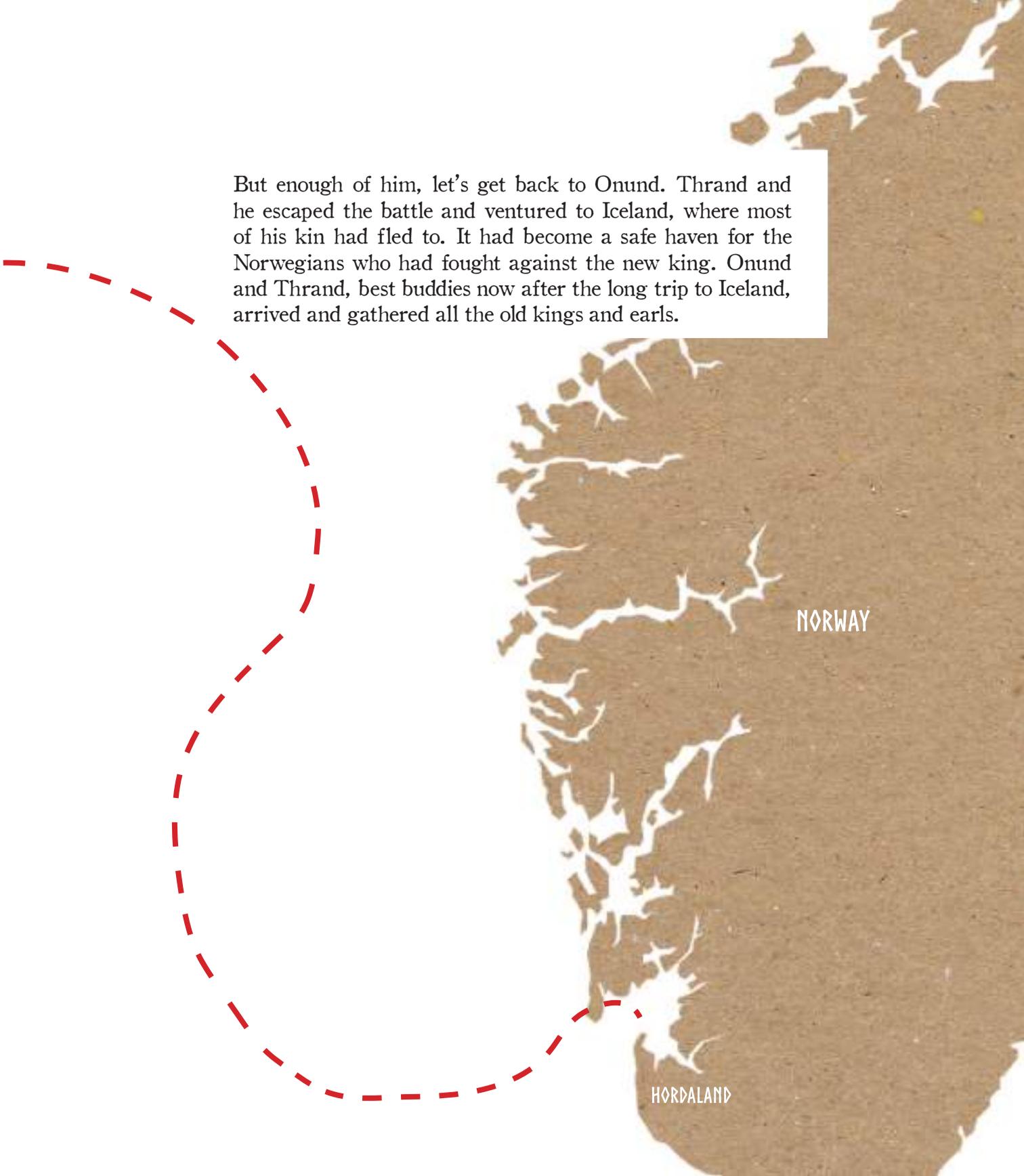


IRELAND

That was it, King Harald the Unshorn was victorious. You remember his promise? That he would cut all his hair once crowned the one true king? Well that's exactly what he did. He went to the best barber in Scandinavia and cut his luscious locks.

This isn't to say his hair wasn't just as fabulous as it was before, his golden hair still shone brightly, and looked even better with a proper crown on his head. He was known from this day onwards as King Harald Fairhair.

But enough of him, let's get back to Onund. Thrand and he escaped the battle and ventured to Iceland, where most of his kin had fled to. It had become a safe haven for the Norwegians who had fought against the new king. Onund and Thrand, best buddies now after the long trip to Iceland, arrived and gathered all the old kings and earls.



NORWAY

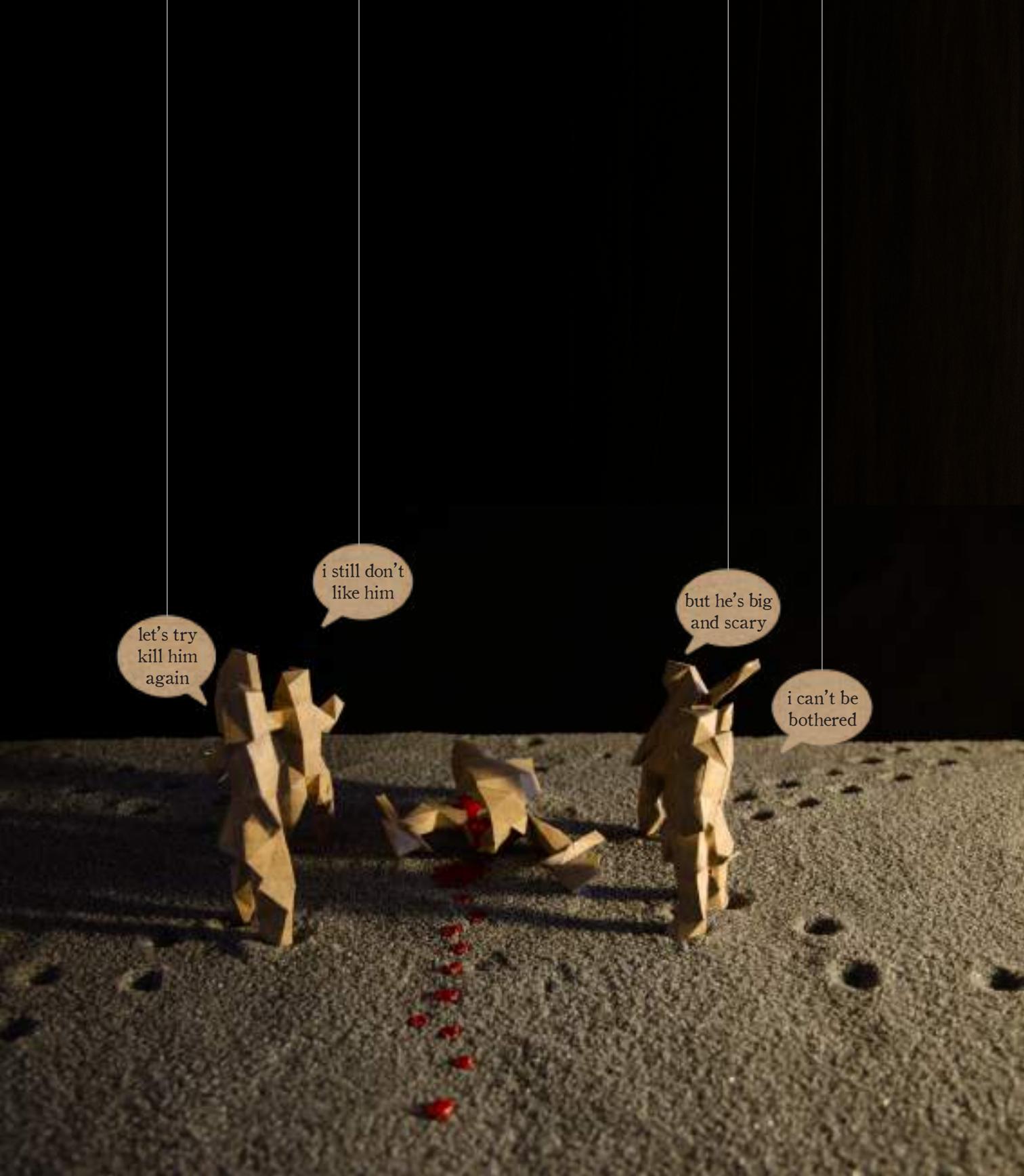
HORDALAND

let's try
kill him
again

i still don't
like him

but he's big
and scary

i can't be
bothered



Yup, that's right, everyone had lost that fighting spark they had possessed before, having already been defeated once. Some of the kings and earls there had escaped before the battle with all of their wealth, and were reluctant to lose it. Even the ones who had stayed and fought felt like they had already lost enough, and wanted to start anew in Iceland.

Disappointed, Thrand and Onund didn't quite know what to do. Both of them had lost so much, their land, their possessions, and something else... oh right, Onund's leg. He was just about managing with a crutch to get around, prosthetic limbs were several centuries away, but he was clumsy and felt completely useless. People no longer called him Onund the fearsome Viking, but Onund the half-man. He got quite depressed about it.

It was so bad that he locked himself in his room and started writing poetry.



I AM UNDONE FOR MY PART IN THE SHIELD THUNDER,
THE BATTLE GIANTS DID ME GREAT INJURY,
MY THOUGHT IS THAT NOW WARRIORS THINK ME OF LITTLE WORTH,
IT IS MY GREATEST LOSS OF HAPPINESS.



Thrand was desperate to cheer his friend up.



‘We could go raiding? You like raiding, right?’

‘No’

‘Kill some monks?’

‘No!’

‘What about a nice sail around the Hebrides?’

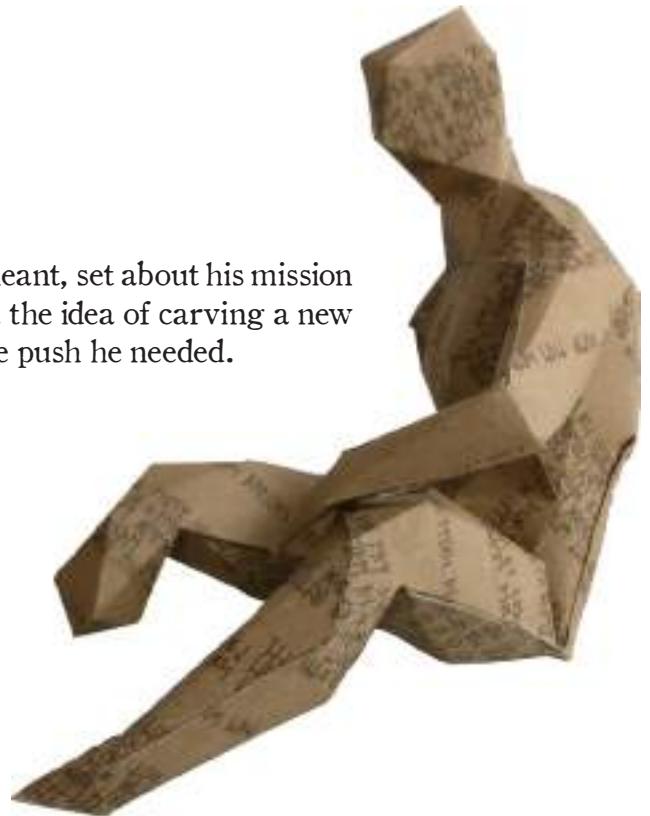
‘NO!’

Nothing worked. Then Thrand had a great idea, what if he found Onund a girlfriend?

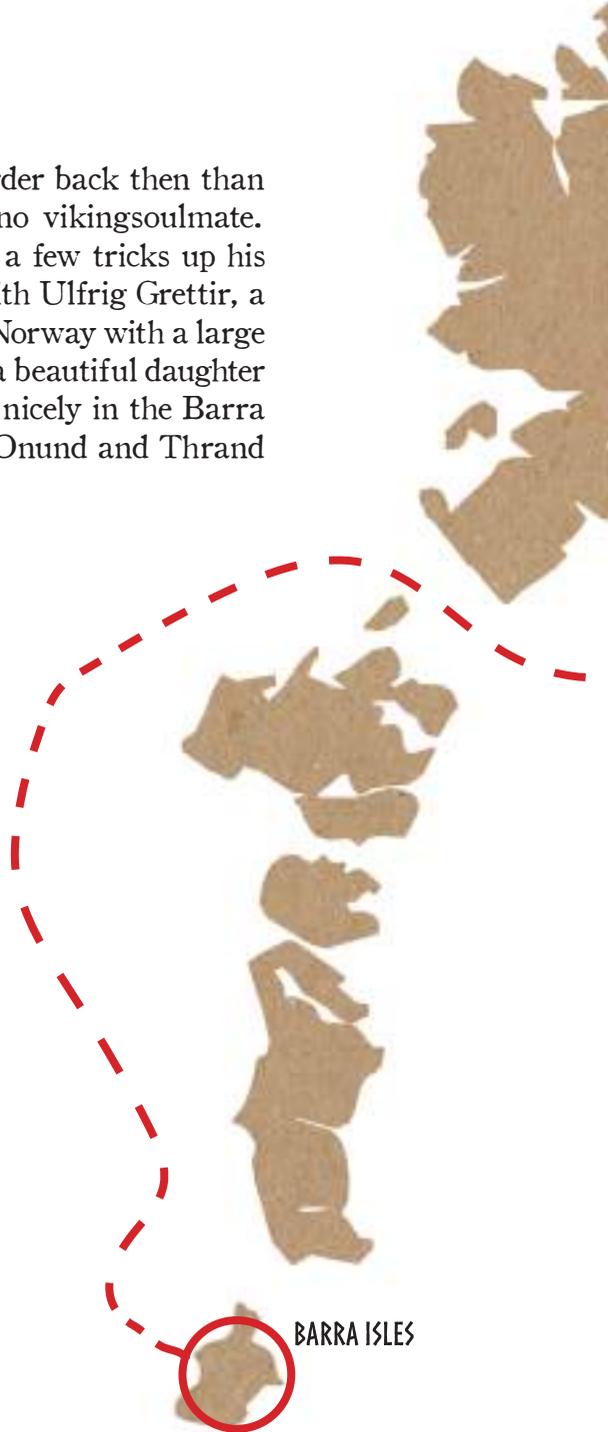
‘Onund, do you want to get married?’

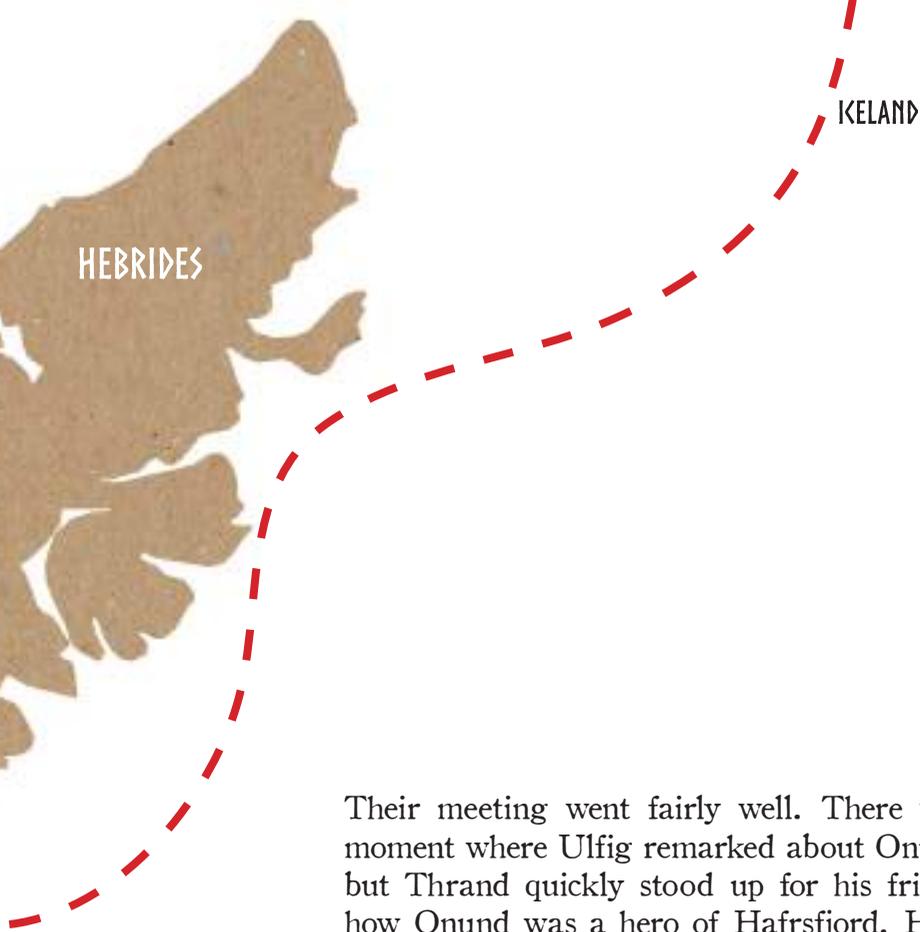
‘Oh, Thrand, I didn’t know you felt that way.’

Thrand, after clarifying what he meant, set about his mission to find Onund a bride, hoping that the idea of carving a new life for himself will give Onund the push he needed.



Finding a bride for Onund was a lot harder back then than it is now. There were no dating sites, no vikingsoulmate.com or anything like that. Thrand had a few tricks up his sleeve however, and organised to meet with Ulfrig Grettir, a powerful leader who managed to escape Norway with a large chunk of his wealth. He was said to have a beautiful daughter called Aesa. He had set himself up very nicely in the Barra Isles of all places, and it was there that Onund and Thrand set sail to.





Their meeting went fairly well. There was an awkward moment where Ulfig remarked about Onund's missing leg, but Thrand quickly stood up for his friend, pointing out how Onund was a hero of Hafrsfjord. He also didn't run away before the battle like Ulfig did, and that was it, a match made in heaven through only a small amount of guilt tripping. Onund was set to wed the beautiful Asea.

There was one slight problem however.

Aesa was only 10 years old.



hey mistal!

It is true that in old Norse culture it was common for women to be married young, but this was a bit far. The stories of her beauty may have been taken a little out of context. Onund and Thrand went back to Ulfig, dad of the year, and they settled on a lengthy engagement period for their marriage. This would be enough time for Onund to get his life in order.

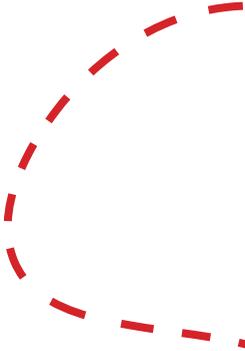
Not only was Onund due to be wed, he had also gained a rich and powerful ally. With the marriage came a large dowry, and it was with this that Onund and Thrand started to rebuild their armada of ships. They were keen to get out there and start Viking-it-up all across the land, and Onund was desperate to get a chance to prove himself again as a powerful warrior.





CHAPTER IV

Onund was starting to feel better about himself. He had risked more and suffered more than others who had fled, and this started to command respect across those who lived along the Hebrides. He still hadn't had a chance to get into a proper battle though, taking small prizes all along the Scottish coastline, but nothing that would instil the fear his name once carried. Most thought he was dead, and those that didn't saw him as no threat as he hobbled around with two wooden crutches.





Sailing to Ireland to visit Thrand's brother, Eyving the Eastman, Onund heard tales of a fleet of Viking warriors that had been terrorising the northern coast of Ireland. Upon arriving, Eyving, who was the warden of the coastal islands of Ireland, confirmed the rumours. They had apparently fled the area to the outer islands east of Scotland, and were said to be heading to the Hebrides shortly after. Now, Onund himself was perfectly happy to have raided these lands a year ago, defeating and shaming King Kjarval, but things were different now. These were his lands, and he had to protect them.

He and Thrand amassed their forces and set sail for a fight.





Onund's fleet was comprised of 5 ships. He commanded one, Thrand another, and Orm and Balki, Onund's old friends from the battle of Hafrsfjord commanded another two. Hallvard unfortunately did not survive the original battle. Under Onund's leadership he had 147 men, all fierce and eager for battle.



There were also 4 dogs.

They followed the English coastline and made their way up to a small island called Bute just off the coast of Scotland. It was here that a fleet of ships were spotted that matched Eyving's description.

SCOTLAND

BUTE

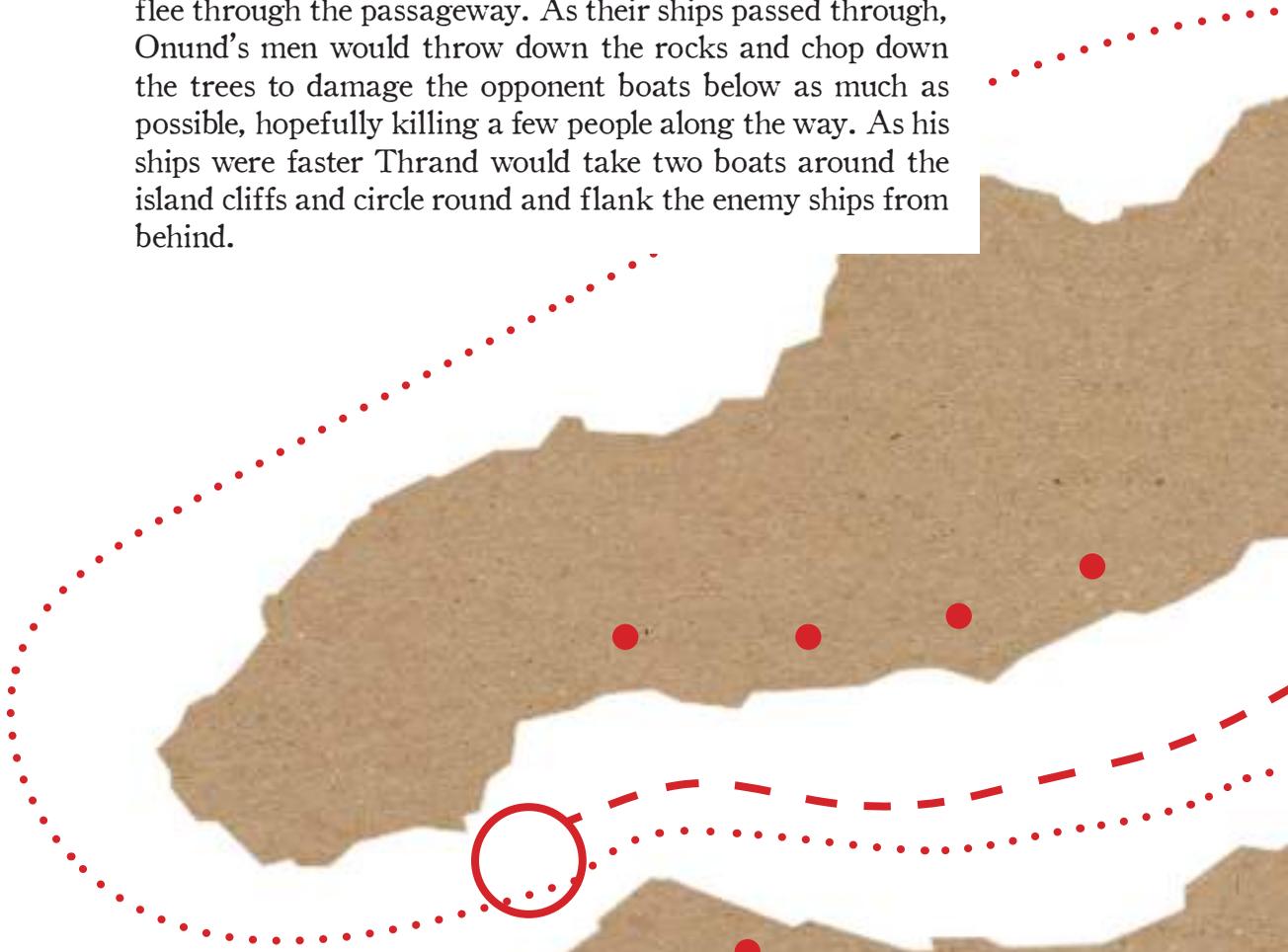
IRELAND

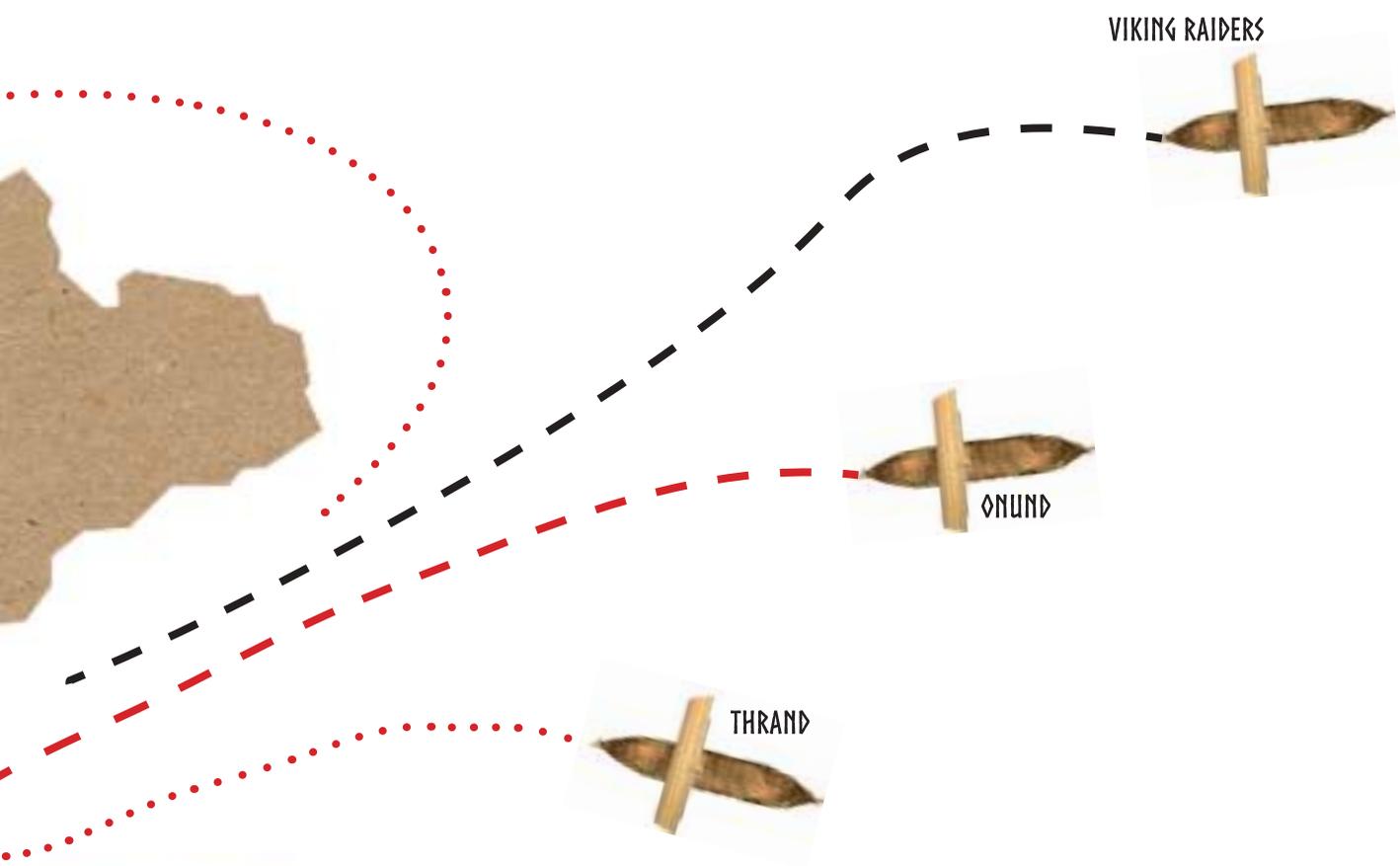


They counted thirteen ships in total. This wouldn't have been such a problem when Onund still had all his limbs, but now they were greatly outnumbered. He realised without his prowess on the battlefield he needed to think more tactically, so he hatched a plan.



They would hide a few dozen men up on the cliffs above a narrow stretch of sea, armed with heavy rocks. Their five ships would go out to meet the enemy, and then pretend to flee through the passageway. As their ships passed through, Onund's men would throw down the rocks and chop down the trees to damage the opponent boats below as much as possible, hopefully killing a few people along the way. As his ships were faster Thrand would take two boats around the island cliffs and circle round and flank the enemy ships from behind.





They hoped this would be enough to win the battle.

Approaching the fleet Thrand announced themselves.

'Hey, I'm Thrand, this is Onund, we're going to kill you'

Onund's name was replied with by a gaggle of laughter from the captain's ship. He jumped onto the Gunwale and continued laughing. It was Vigbjod.





CHAPTER V

Onund stared at the man who had cut his leg off, standing there laughing at him.

‘Where’s ya leg Onund!’

‘Har-de-har!’ a roarcus of laughter came from the enemy ships.

He wanted to jump on his ship right there and then and kill the lot of them, but Onund knew he needed to keep to the plan. Their scheme was set into motion, with Onund’s ship heading straight towards Vigbjod, while the remaining four staying slightly further back, ready to quickly turn and head for the passage. The drums had started, and with each beat both opposing ships raised their oars and plunged them into the water. With powerful strokes they propelled themselves towards each other, ready for the clash of wood and metal.

As the ships met they would normally slow down and allow for fighters to charge onto the enemy's boat, but Onund didn't slow down. They passed each other, and Onund locked eyes with a confused looking Vigbjod.

Onund let loose a small barrage of arrows, taking out a handful of men, then circled around a disorientated Vigbjod and made straight for the passage. They were prepared, rowing at full strength leaving their adversary behind. Vigbjod thought they were running away.

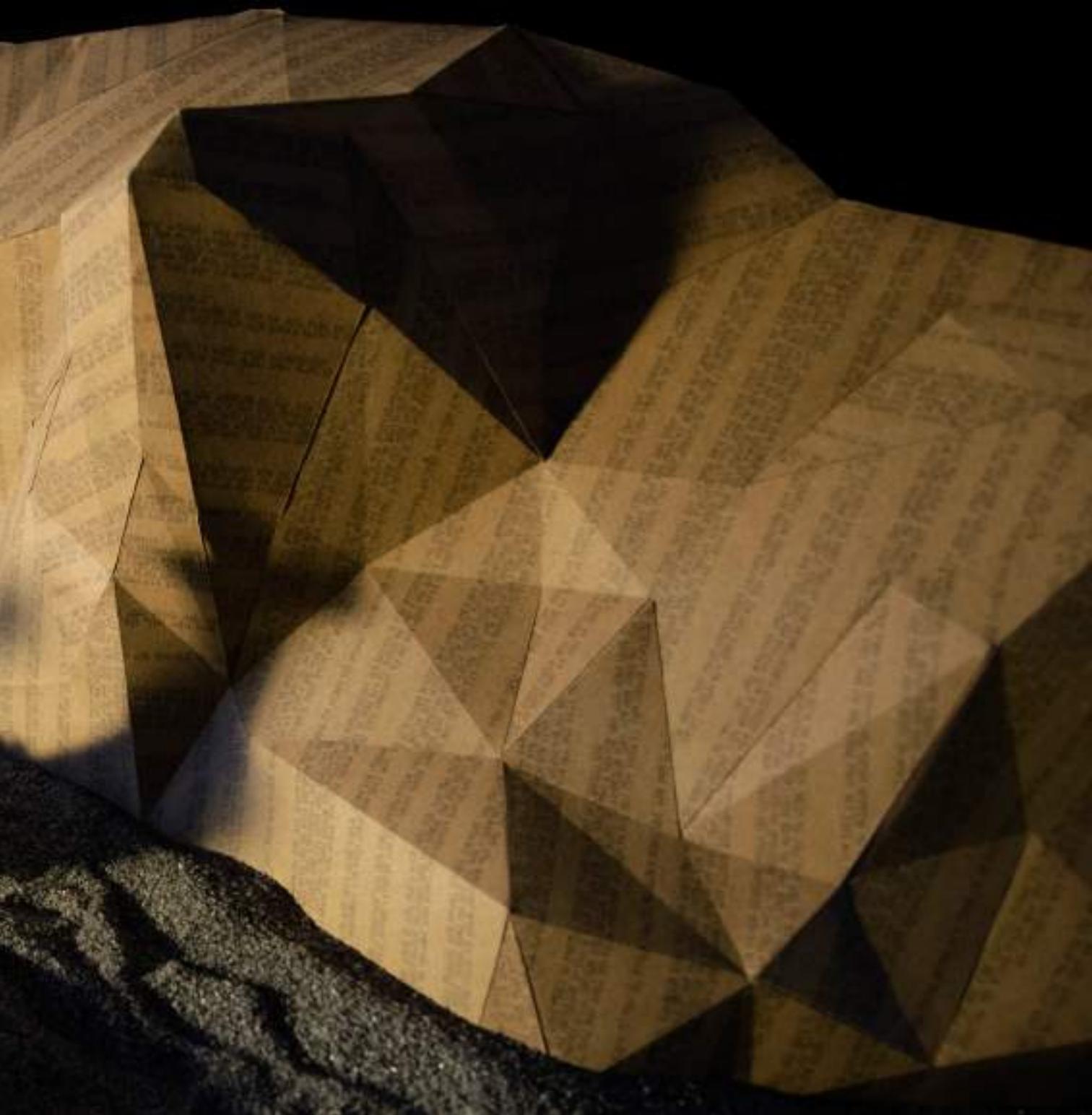
'Ya Chicken!'

'Cluck Cluck Cluck!'



They gave chase and followed, entering the narrow fjord.





As they arrived into the narrow passage Onund caught sight of the hidden men on the cliff tops, ready with their barrage. He waited until almost all of Vigbjod's ships were in the passage, then blow a horn. The drummers stopped, and Onund looked back to see huge boulders and large chunks of wood crashing down upon the heads of his enemy. Vigbjod could do nothing to stop the onslaught, rocks raining down from above and crushing his men. The plan sunk 4 ships, and crippled a large portion of the unsuspecting Vikings.

Vigbjod was furious, and with his remaining ships he called for the convoy to reverse and regroup on the open sea. By this time Thrand had taken 2 ships and had circled the cluster of rocks to flank them, trapping them. With the fight on both sides Onund finally have the upper hand and sent a volley of his fighters over the gunwales and onto the first ship. It was a fierce fight, but they managed to take the ship.

Onund grabbed his crutches and swung himself over to join his men. There was no way he would let someone else take Vigbjod's life. Crossing the deck, he called out his foe.

'Where you at vigs, too scared to face me?'



A person wearing a bright yellow raincoat is partially visible on the left side of the frame, standing on a sandy beach. The background is a dark, overcast sky.

He ordered his men to stand back, and allow Vigbjod to jump down from his boat. A swarm of his men followed, but, like Onund, he told them to hold back. The two men walked towards each other. Well, one walked, the other hobbled, which caused a shimmer of laughter from Vigbjod's men. Standing in front of each other, Onund leant forward and propped up a large chunk of wood that had been thrown from the cliff, and stood it under his stump to balance himself. He threw the crutches to the side, and challenged Vigbjod to one on one combat.



A close-up photograph of a sandcastle on a beach. The sandcastle is built with intricate, concentric ridges and valleys, creating a complex, maze-like pattern. A small, rectangular, light-colored sign is placed on the sand in the center of the structure. The sign has the text "CHAPTER VI" written on it in a simple, sans-serif font. The background is a dark, solid color, likely the sky or a shadowed area of the beach, which makes the sandcastle stand out prominently. The lighting is bright, casting shadows that emphasize the texture and depth of the sandcastle's ridges.

CHAPTER VI

Vigbjod laughed. He could see how limited Onund was, rooted to the spot. He reached down and slowly unhooked his sword from his belt, and ran his finger along the edge of the blade. Onund recognised it, and felt a nostalgic stab of pain in his stump. He reached around and readied his shield and axe. The men formed a circle around the two, and it was along the edge of this that Vigbjod started to pace. He started to circle Onund, mocking him.

‘Treefoot, treefoot.’

With each word, he clashed his sword against his shield, and his men started chanting with him. Onund stood perfectly still, while his foe mocked him, his face silent and calm. Vigbjod waited until he was directly behind Onund, and then suddenly lunged forward. Onund was ready however, and, pivoting around the log, deflected the blow. Vigbjod screamed in anger and brought his sword down, but Onund raised his shield to protect himself.

‘agghhhh!!!’

Again, and again Vigbjod slammed down, splinters of wood flying through the air. Trying to get a blow in he swung low, but Onund was quick and brought his shield down to protect himself. The sword sliced clean through the shield however, and sunk deep into what lay behind.

There was a moment of silence on the deck, a manic smile painted over Vigbjod's face. Onund hadn't moved an inch, and while staring down at Vigbjod, he slowly moved what remained of his shield to show the blade resting deep within the log below his stump. Vigbjod panicked, and reached down to pull the sword loose. In this second Onund brought down his axe, with such power it cut straight through Vigbjod's arm, cutting skin, slicing tendons, and sheering bone. It was Onund's first and only blow.



Upon seeing their leader fall Vigbjod's men quickly scrambled to the gunwales, jumping back onto their own ship to escape. Thrand did a good job at clearing out most of the fleeing men, with only a handful slipping past his blockade, but without a leader they were no real threat to Onund and the Barra Isles. At least now they will know the lands are protected.

Below him Vigbjod was writhing in pain, clutching at his stump. Onund leaned down and wiped his axe on Vigbjod's shirt, and spoke softly to him.



'CAN YOU SEE HOW YOUR WOUNDS BLEED?
THE ONE-LEGGED 'TREEFOOT',
RECEIVED NO HURT FROM YOU.
YOU'VE FAILED VIGBJOD.'





They left Vigbjod there, bleeding on the deck of his sinking ship, and gathered the remaining ships and supplies. They set sail for home.



- END -

Onund returned victorious, proving that he was still a fearsome warrior, even after losing a leg. The stories of his fight spread far and wide, and people started to refer to him as Onund Treefoot, taking the nickname used once to mock him and turning it into something he could be proud of.

There is much more to Onund's story, who went on to lead an interesting life: adventuring to help reclaim his and Thrand's land in Norway from under King Herald's nose, but that is a story for another time. For now, this story ends with Onund and Thrand returning home to the Barra Isles, with Onund set to be wed. Thrand got hitched too, with the daughter of Thormod Shaft, a relation of Ulfrig, making him and Onund officially family.