

The Saga of Hrolf Kraki and his Champions

Translation by Peter Tunstall, 2003

Part One: Frodi's Thread

1. Of Halfdan and Frodi

There was a man called Halfdan, and another called Frodi, two brothers, kings' sons, and each ruled a realm of his own. King Halfdan was friendly and easy-going and good-natured, but King Frodi was a great savage. King Halfdan had three children, two sons and a daughter. She was called Signy. She was the eldest and given in marriage to Jarl Saevil. What is told here happened when his sons were young. One was called Hroar, the other Helgi. Regin was their foster-father, and he loved them very much.

An island lay not far from the stronghold. A man lived there, called Vivil. He was a lifelong friend of King Halfdan. Vivil had two dogs, Hopp and Ho. The man was comfortably off, and knew plenty of the old wisdom, if push came to shove.

Now it's to be told, that King Frodi sits in his kingdom, and he bitterly envies his brother, King Halfdan. And the way things have gone, he wasn't too happy with his lot, and it seemed to him that he alone should rule Denmark. So he gets up a mob and a multitude and makes for Denmark, and comes in the dead of night, burns and raises all to the ground. King Halfdan can do little to defend himself. He's taken and killed, and those who can, flee. And the rabble of the town all swear loyalty to King Frodi, or else he had them tortured in various ways.

Regin, foster-father of Helgi and Hroar, got them away and out to the island to yeoman Vivil. They grieved much about their loss. Regin said there'd be "snow in most shelters", a sorry state of affairs, if Vivil couldn't keep them safe from King Frodi.

Vivil says, "We're playing tug-o-war with a tough one here," but he said he was under a great obligation to help the boys.

So he took them and put them underground in an earth-house, and they mostly spent the nights there, but by day they came out to get some fresh air in the woods, as half the island was wooded, and that's where Regin left them. Regin had big estates in Denmark, wife and children too, and he saw nothing else for it but to go and swear allegiance to Frodi. King Frodi now laid all Denmark under his rule, with taxes and tributes. Most went over to him only because they were forced, since King Frodi was hated by all. And he taxed Jarl Saevil the same way too.

After achieving all this, King Frodi feels a little easier about not finding the boys, Helgi and Hroar. He now has a lookout kept for them on all sides, near and far, north and south, east and west, promises huge rewards for whoever who can bring any news of them, but all sorts of torments to anyone who hides them, if that ever comes to light - but no-one can think of anything to tell the king. So he has seers fetched, volvas, witches and wisemen, from all over the land, and has the country searched top to bottom, up and down, islands and out-skeries, but they aren't found. And now he has wizards brought, real galdermen, priors and scriers, who can rune out any secret they want, and they tell him that the boys aren't being raised anywhere in the land, but all the same, they're not far off.

King Frodi says, "We've searched for them far and wide, so it seems highly unlikely that they're near here, but there is an island close by, where we haven't made a big effort, but no-one lives there, well, except some poor wretch of a peasant."

"Look there first," said the galdermen, "because a great veil of mist lies over the island, and we can't see very well round that fellow's farm, and we think he's a smart one, and he isn't all that he seems."

The king said, "It'll be searched again then, but it seems incredible to me that some poor fisherman would be keeping these boys, and dare to shelter people from us, like that."

2. Vivil Hid the King's Sons

Early one morning, Vivil wakes up and says, "Much and strange is now afoot, on wing and way, and great spirits have come to the island, and mighty fetches are here. Get up, sons of Halfdan, Hroar and Helgi, and keep yourselves in my woods today."

They ran into the forest. Now it happened just as the cotter had guessed. King Frodi's agents came to the island and they look all over for them, wherever they can think of, and find them nowhere. The owner strikes them as rather suspicious, but they leave it at that and go away, and tell the king they can't seem to find them.

"You can't have looked well," says the king, "but this carl's a canny man, full of magic, so get back there now, go right back the way you came while he's not expecting, so he won't have time to whisk them off, if they are there..."

They can but do as the king commanded, so they go back a second time to the island.

Vivil said to the boys, "This isn't the time for sitting around, you two. Get to the forest, as fast as you can."

The boys do just that. At which, the king's men burst in and demanded a search, and Vivil opens everywhere up to them, but they find them nowhere on the island, no matter where they look, so they leave it at that, and go back and tell the king.

King Frodi says, "Down with the leaf-sail, no more pussy-footing with this churl. I'll go myself to the island, first thing tomorrow," and that's just what happened now, the king went himself.

Vivil wakes, rather distraught, and sees that yet again they need to think of something fast. He said to the brothers, "Remember this: If I call out loud to my dogs, Hopp and Ho, that means you. Run to your earth-house then, that's your signal for danger, so hide there, because your Uncle Frodi has joined the search, and he'll come after your lives with tricks and wiles, and now I can't see if I'll manage to save you."

Then Vivil goes to the shore, and the king's ship has arrived. He pretends not to have seen it, and makes as if he's looking all round for his flock, so preoccupied that he never spots the king or his men. The king orders them to seize the carl, and that was done, and he was led before the king.

The king said, "You're a tricky one, you sly old rascal. Tell me where the king's sons are, because you know."

Vivil says, "And greetings to you too, my lord, but please don't hold me or the wolf will rip my flock to bits." Then he calls out loud, "Hopp! Ho! Help the flock, I can't save them."

The king says, "What are you calling now?"

He says, "My dogs, that's what they're called. Look where you want, lord, but I doubt the princes will turn up here, and it really amazes me that you think I might shelter people from you."

The king said, "You really are a sly old dog, but even so, they can't be hid here after this, even if you've had them till now, and it would be only proper if you were put to death."

The yeoman says, "It's in your hands, sire. At least you'll have accomplished something on the island then, instead of just leaving it at that."

The king said, "No, I don't want you killed, although I suspect that's a mistake."

The king goes home now, leaving it at that. Vivil finds the boys and says that they can't stay there any longer. "I'll send you to Saevil, your brother-in-law, and you two will be famous men, if you live that long."

3. Of Hroar and Helgi

Hroar was twelve then, and Helgi ten, although he was the bigger and braver one. Off they go now, and Hroar calls himself Hrani, and Helgi calls himself Ham, wherever they went, or found folks to talk to. These boys came to Jarl Saevil and were there a week before they spoke to the jarl about staying.

He said, "I'm hardly taking on great men here with you two, but I'll not grudge you food for now."

They're there a while, and rather bothersome. No-one can find out what men they were or whose kin. The jarl doesn't suspect them, and they give him no clue about themselves. Some men say that they must have been born with scurf, and teased them because they were always wearing cowls and never took their hoods off, and many reckoned they had lice. They're there till the third winter.

And it happens one time that King Frodi invited Jarl Saevil to a feast, and the king rather suspects that he's harbouring the boys, as they were related. The jarl gets ready for the journey now, with a big following. The boys got ready to go with him. The jarl said no, they couldn't go. Signy, the jarl's wife, was also coming. Ham, really Helgi, gets himself an unbroken colt to ride, charged after the company, back to front, face to the tail, and acts like a complete nutter. Hrani, his brother, gets himself another such steed but faces the right way. The jarl saw them coming, and that they had no control over their horses. The shaggy colts bolt back and forth under them, and Hrani's hood falls off.

This, their sister Signy spots, and knows them at once, and cries bitterly. The jarl asks why she's crying. Then she said a verse:

"That's all that's left of the Lords of Lund,
of Skjoldung kin scattered branches.
I saw my brothers bareback riding,
while Saevil's heroes sat in saddles."

The jarl says, "This is serious news - don't let it out."

He rode back and told them to clear off home, says they were a disgrace and not fit for polite company. Then both boys get off and walk. But he spoke like this because he was watching what he said, so that no-one would realise from his words who these boys were. They scamper about now on the edge of the company and aren't any keener to go back, so they tag along behind. Now they come to the banquet and race up and down the hall.

And one time, they come to where their sister Signy was. She whispered to them, "Don't stay in the hall, you're not very big yet."

They take no heed of that. King Frodi starts up about how he'll go after Halfdan's sons, and he says he'll grant great favours to whoever can bring word of them.

A certain seeress was there, a volva called Heid. Frodi asked her to have a go with her skills and see if she could find out anything about the boys. He had a magnificent feast prepared for her and set her up on a high seid-stand.

Then the king asks if she could see anything of note, "because," he said, "I know that many things will now appear before you, and I see now great luck upon you, I have a good feeling about this, so answer me quick, seid-woman."

She flings open her jaws and gives a great yawn, and then a verse came to lips:

There's two inside,
(I trust neither),
sitting by the fire,
fine fellows both.

The king said, "Is that the boys, or those who harboured them?"

She answers:

"Those lads who concealed themselves on the island,
Weevil's hounds, Hopp and Ho."

And at that moment, Signy tossed her a gold ring. She liked the present, and wants to break off now. "How did that happen?" she said, "This is just lies, what I'm saying, and now all my powers are getting very confused."

The king said, "You'll be tortured till you speak, if you don't get it right. I know no more now than before, in this pack of people, what you're trying to say, and why is Signy not in her seat? Can it be that wolves are plotting with wargs here?"

The king was told that Signy had felt ill from the smoke that hung over the hearth.

Jarl Saevil begged her to sit up and act brave, "as it could well save the boys lives, if that's what will be. So let no-one see what you're thinking, because we can't lift a finger to help them, as things stand."

King Frodi urges on the seeress now, and demands she tell the truth, if she doesn't want to be tortured. She gapes wide, but the vision is hard, but eventually she says a verse:

"Sitting there, I saw them, sons of Halfdan,
Hroar and Helgi, hale and well.
Now Frodi's life lies theirs for the taking..."

"...unless they're quickly thwarted, but that can't happen," she said. And after this, she skips down off the seid-platform and said:

"Baleful the gaze of Ham and Hrani;
warlords the both, wondrously brave."

After that, the boys ran out to the forest, deadly afraid. Regin, their foster-father, recognised them, and really felt for them. And the volva gave them this sound advice, "Save yourselves!", as she ran from the hall. And now the king tells his men to be up and after them. Regin snuffs all the lights in the hall, and some men grab hold of others, because some wanted them to get away, and so they made it to the wood.

The king said, "They came close then, but I'll warrant there's many in here plotting and conspiring with them, and that will be grimly avenged as soon as there's time. But now we can drink all evening, as they'll be so glad to have got away, and their first thought will be to save themselves.

Regin goes to serve the drinks, and he poured the ale with a vengeance, and many others with him, his friends, so that the king's men dropped down one on top of another, fast asleep.

4. Regin Incites the Brothers

Those brothers lie low in the forest now, as we said, and when they'd been there a while, they spot a man riding towards them from the direction of the hall. They recognise him without a shadow of a doubt, it's Regin their foster-father who's come. They're overjoyed and welcome him with open arms. He ignores their greeting, and just turns his horse back towards the hall. This puzzles them and they ask each other what it could mean. Now Regin turns his horse back to them again and looks at them so unpleasantly, as if he might even attack them.

Helgi says, "I think I know what he wants."

Regin went home to the hall now, and they followed.

"My foster-father," says Helgi, "is acting like this so he won't break his oath to King Frodi, and that's why he won't talk to us, although he certainly wants to help."

The King owned a grove near the hall, and when they came there, Regin spoke to himself, saying, "If I had a bone to pick with King Frodi, I'd burnt this grove down." He said no more.

Hroar said, "What's that all about?"

"What he wants," said Helgi, "is for us to go to the hall and set fire everywhere, except for one exit."

"How can we do something like that, two young men like us, with such overwhelming odds as there are against us?"

"We'll do it anyway," said Helgi, "and we'll have to chance it sometime, if we're going to get avenged for our grief."

And so that's what they do. Next thing they know, Jarl Svaevil is coming out and all his men. He said then, "Let's lend these boys a hand and stoke up the fire. I owe King Frodi nothing."

King Frodi had two smiths, who were veritable Volunds of their craft, and both called Var - that's Wary. Regin herded his people out the hall door, his friends and relatives.

5. The Killing of King Frodi

King Frodi wakes in the hall now, gasping for air: "I dreamt a dream, boys, and not a nice one. I'll tell it to you. I dreamt someone was calling to us, and the voice said, 'You're home now, king, and your men too.' I seemed to answer, and rather sharply, 'Home where?' Then the voice came back so close I could feel the blast of his breath, from the one who called. 'Home to hell, home to hell!' the voice said, and with that I awoke."

And at that moment they heard Regin outside the door speaking a verse:

"There's Rain out here and Halfdan's riders,
fierce foes let Frodi know.
Var struck the nails and Var the heads,
Wary for Wary hammered out warnings."

"Big deal," said the king's men who were inside, "So what if it's raining out there, or the royal smiths are hammering away, be it nails or whatever they're making."

The king said, "You think that's no big deal? We disagree. Now Regin's told us of some danger, and he's given me some words of warning, and most likely he's being sly and tricky with us."

Then the king goes to the hall door and sees that enemies are outside. Now the whole hall is ablaze. King Frodi asks who ordered the fire. They said that it was Helgi and his brother Hroar. The king offers a deal to the boys and asks them to set the terms for themselves, "And it's not right, this feuding among family, or for one kinsman to wish death on another."

Helgi says, "No-one can trust you. Are you going to betray us any less than you did our father? And now you'll pay for that."

Then King Frodi turned from the hall door and made for the entrance to his underground tunnel, hoping to escape down there to the wood. But when he enters the tunnel, there's Regin waiting for him, and not looking too friendly. The king turns back then and burns inside with many of his followers. Sigrid burnt in there too, the boys' mother, Helgi's and Hroar's, because she wouldn't come out.

The brothers thanked their kinsman Jarl Saevil well for his help, and Regin their foster-father too, and all their followers, and gave many good gifts and took command of the whole kingdom, and with it much wealth which had been King Frodi's, lands and riches. They were quite different in mood, those brothers. Hroar was easy-going and good-natured, but Helgi a great warrior, and generally seemed the greater of the two. And that's how it was, for a while.

And here ends the Thread of Frodi, and the Thread of Hroar and Helgi, Halfdan's sons begins.

Part Two: Helgi's Thread

6. Hroar Weds Ogn, Nordri's Daughter

There was a king called Nordri. He ruled parts of England. His daughter was called Ogn. Hroar spent long years with King Nordri, defending his realm, and they were the closest of friends, and in time Hroar came to marry Ogn and settled down there in England with his father-in-law King Nordri, but Helgi ruled over Denmark, their inheritance from their father. Jarl Saevil ruled a realm of his own with Signy. Their son was called Hrok. Helgi was unmarried. Regin took sick and died. That was considered a great loss, as he was well loved.

7. Queen Olof Fools King Helgi

In Saxland at that time, there ruled a queen by the name of Olaf. She had the ways of a warrior king. She went with shield and byrnie, a sword at her side and a helm on her head. This is what she was like: fair in looks, but grim in mood, and haughty. They said she was the best match known at that time in the whole of the north, but she wanted no man. Now King Helgi hears of this queen's imperiousness, and thought he'd add much to his reputation if he could win this woman, willing or no.

So one day, he set out with a great army. He came to the land which this mighty queen ruled over, and comes unawares. He sent his men to her hall and bids them tell her that he and they would accept her invitation to a feast. And this took her by surprise, and there was no chance of mustering forces. She took the sensible option, and invited King Helgi to a feast with all his men.

So King Helgi comes to the feast now and took the high-seat beside the queen. They drink the evening together, and nothing was lacking, and he could detect no gloom in Queen Olof.

King Helgi said to the queen, "This is what I'm thinking," he said, "I want us to drink our wedding feast here this evening. There's plenty of company here for that, and we'll share one bed together tonight."

She said, "Too fast, my lord, that seems to me, but I don't know anyone more courteous and noble than you, if I do have to take a husband now, and I'm sure you're not intending to act dishonourably here."

The king said that what she deserved, for her pride and haughtiness, "is that we're together just as long as I like."

She said, "I'd rather have more of my friends here, if I had a choice, but I don't, so it's for you to say, but I'm sure you will treat our person with due respect."

There was hard drinking then, through the evening and long into the night, and the queen is all smiles, and no-one sees anything in her demeanour to suggest that she isn't perfectly happy with the arrangement. And finally the king is led to bed, and there she was, waiting. The king had been drinking so hard that he immediately fell fast asleep on the bed. The queen made use of this opportunity to stick him with a sleep-thorn.

And once everyone has gone, the queen gets up. She shaves off all his hair and covered him in tar. Next she took a sleeping-bag and packed a load of clothes into it. After that, she gets the king and ties him up in the sack, swaddled like a baby. Then she got some men to bundle him back to his ships. She wakes up his men and tells them the king's gone back to the ships and wants to sail, as there's a good wind now. They jumped up, as quick as they could, but they were drunk and hardly know what they were doing. And that's how they were when they came to the ships and the king was nowhere to be seen, but they did see a huge sleeping-sack, that someone had brought. They were very curious now to know what was in it, and they wait for the king, thinking he'd probably be along a bit later. But when they undo it, there they found their king. Someone had played a shameful trick on him. Then the sleep-thorn drops out, and the king starts up from a dream, and not a nice one, and he's in a foul mood now at the queen.

Meanwhile, it must be told, that Queen Olof musters her men in the night, and she's not short of soldiers, and King Helgi sees no way to get to her now. Suddenly from the hinterland, they hear the rasp of lure-horns and the war-blast being blown. The king sees that the best thing now is to get away as fast as they can. There's a good wind, anyway. King Helgi sails home now to his kingdom with this shame and disgrace and seethed with resentment and often wonders how he might get revenge on the queen.

8. Helgi Pays Back the Queen

Queen Olof sits a while in her realm now, and her pride and overbearing have never been greater. She's had a strong guard round her, since the feast she made for King Helgi. News of this spread far and wide. Everyone thinks it's an incredible thing, unheard of, that she should have made a fool of such a king.

And not long after, Helgi puts out to sea in his ship, and comes ashore in Saxland, right where Queen Olof has her residence. She's got a lot of her followers there. He lays anchor in a hidden cove and tells his warriors to wait there for him till the third day, then be on their way, if he didn't come back. He had two chests with him, full of gold and silver. He got himself some rags to wear on top of his clothes.

He makes his way to the wood and hides the treasure there, then went off towards the queen's hall. He meets one of her thralls and asks what's new in the land. Thrall says good peace, and asks who might he be.

He said he was a tramp, "mind you, I've come across this huge find of treasure in the forest, and the sensible thing I would think, would be to show you where that treasure is."

So they go back to the wood and he shows him the treasure, and the thrall thinks this is big luck that's come his way.

"How much does your queen like treasure?" asks the tramp. The thrall says she's the most treasure-loving queen there is.

"Then she'll like this," says the tramp, "and she'll no doubt think she owns this treasure that I've found here, since this is meant to be her land. Well, good luck won't turn to bad here, I'm not going to hide this haul. The queen will give me whatever share of it she thinks fit, and what'll suit me best. But will she want to come here to get it?"

"I reckon so," says the thrall, "if it's done on the quiet."

"Here's a necklace and a ring," says the tramp. "I want you to have them. They're yours if you come out here with the queen to the wood, just you and her. But if she's mad at you, I'll deal with her." This they agree, and the bargain is struck.

The thrall goes home now and says to the queen that he's found a great haul of treasure in the wood, big enough to make a dozen fortunes, and begs her to come quick and follow him to the gold.

She says, "If this is true, what you're saying, you'll be well rewarded for telling me, otherwise I'll have your head, and yet you've always been a reliable man till now, so I'll believe you in this."

She shows just how greedy for gold she was now, and goes with him in secret under cover of darkness, so that none but the two of them knows. And when they come to the wood, Helgi's there waiting, and says what a lucky meeting this is, and what an excellent time to avenge his shame.

The queen admitted she's treated him badly, "but I want to make it all up to you now, and you can wed me with honour."

"No," said Helgi, "that's not an option to you anymore. You're coming to the ships with me for a bit, till I say you can go. But because of my pride, I'm not in the mood to pay you back in kind, however badly I was humiliated.

"That's in your hands," she said, "for now."

The king lay with the queen many nights. And after that the queen goes home, and that's how she was paid back, and she's all too resentful of the state she's in now.

9. Helgi Married Yrsa

After that, King Helgi sets to raiding, and he was a famous man. And as time went on, Olaf has a baby. It was a girl. She had no time for that child. She had a dog which was called Yrsa, and she named the girl after it, so she was called Yrsa too. She was pretty to look at. And when she was twelve years old, she had to watch the flocks, and never knew she was anything other than a daughter of peasants, since the queen had dealt with this matter in such secrecy that few knew she'd been with child and had a baby.

It went on like this till she was thirteen. Then this happened: King Helgi came to the land, and is curious for tidings. He has on beggar's gear. He sees a big flock on the edge of some wood, and a woman was keeping watch, young in years, and so fair that he doesn't think he's he seen a fairer woman. He asks what she's called, or of which family she might be.

She says, "I'm a shepherd's daughter, and I'm called Yrsa."

"You don't have thrall's eyes," he said, and that moment his love ran out to her, and he said that it was only fair a beggar should have her, if she was a peasant's daughter. She asked him not to do that, but he takes her to the ships, just as he'd done once before to a woman there, and then sails home to his kingdom.

Queen Olof was crafty and didn't let on, when she knew. She pretended not to know what was happening, and it came to her that this would bring down grief and disgrace on King Helgi, instead of fame and joy. But King Helgi weds Yrsa and he loved her very much.

10. Helgi Gave Hroar the Good Ring

King Helgi owned a ring, a very famous one, and both brothers wanted it, and Signy their sister too. One day, King Hroar came to the realm of King Helgi. Helgi arranged a magnificent feast for him.

King Hroar said, "I guess you're the greater man out of us two, and since I've settled down in Northumbria, I'll gladly grant you this whole kingdom, which we both own, if you will share a bit of treasure with me. I want that ring, the one that's the best of all your treasures and we both want to have."

Helgi said, "You deserve no less, kinsman, certainly you can have the ring."

This talk pleased them both. So King Helgi gave the ring to his brother King Hroar. Now Hroar goes away home to his lands and stays peacefully there.

11. Hrok Killed King Hroar

News came that Saevil, their sister's husband, had died, and his son Hrok succeeded him. He was a vicious man and very greedy.

His mother tells him all about the ring, which those brothers owned, "and it would seem to me," she said, "only fair, that those brothers remember us with some gift of lands, since we backed them in their vengeance for our father, and yet they've not remembered us, not for our father's sake, or for mine."

Hrok said, "It's plain as day, what you say, and quite disgraceful, so now I must go and see what favour they're willing to grant us."

Next, he goes to see King Helgi and demands a third of the Danish kingdom or else the good ring, because he didn't know that Hroar had it now.

The king said, "You talk big, and arrogantly too. We won this realm with our courage, by staking our lives, and with the support of your father and other good men who wanted to help. Now we certainly wish to reward you, for the sake of our kinship, if it will please you to accept that, but this kingdom has cost me so much that I won't give it up for anyone. Besides which, King Hroar has now got the ring, and I doubt it'll be coming your way."

With this, Hrok leaves and a foul mood he's in, and he sets out now to see King Hroar. He greets him nicely and respectfully, and stays a while with him.

And one day, as they go sailing out from land and lay in some firth, Hrok said, "It would seem to me, kinsman, that it would reflect well on you if you remembered our kinship and gave me that good ring."

The king said, "I gave up such a lot to get this ring, that I won't let it go for anything."

Hrok says, "But you'll let me see it, won't you? Because I'm very curious to know if it's such a great treasure as they all say."

"That's not much to ask," says Hroar, "I'll grant you that, sure," and handed him the ring.

Now Hrok considered the ring for a while and admitted that it really couldn't be overpraised, "and I've not seen a treasure like it, and it's all too clear why you think it's such a wonderful ring. The best thing now, would be for neither of you to enjoy it, and no-one else," he says, promptly hurling the ring as far out to sea as he can.

King Hroar said, "You are a very bad man."

He had Hrok's feet lopped off and sent him back home to his land like that. He soon recovered, to the point where his stumps healed over.

Then he gathered an army to avenge his shame. He goes with a big army and comes suddenly to Northumbria, where Hroar is feasting with just a few men. Hrok attacks at once, and a vicious battle ensued, and the difference in numbers between them is great. There King Hroar falls, and Hrok lays the whole land under his rule. He took the title of king. Afterwards, he asked for the hand of Ogn, King Nordri's daughter, who had previously been married to King Hroar, his kinsman.

King Nordri now found himself in a fix, because he was an old man by now and not much use for fighting. He told his daughter Ogn how things stood, but assured her that he wouldn't refuse to fight, even though he was old, if this marriage wasn't to her liking.

With great sorrow she said, "It certainly is against my will, and yet I see that your life is at stake, so I won't turn him down, on one condition: that a bit of time is granted, as I'm with child, and that needs to be sorted out first, and that's King Hroar's child, that he had with me."

So this message is brought to Hrok, and he agrees to grant a postponement, if that meant he could get the kingdom more easily, and the marriage. Hrok reckons he's done well for himself on this expedition, killing such a famous king and gaining a kingdom.

But at this very moment, Ogn is sending men to meet with King Helgi and she asked them to tell him that she would not end up in Hrok's bed, not willingly, if she had anything to say about it, "for this reason: I am carrying King Hroar's child."

The messengers went and said just what they were commanded.

King Helgi said, "This is wisely spoken on her part, as I want to avenge my brother Hroar."

But Hrok suspected nothing of this.

12. Helgi's Vengeance and Agnar

Queen Ogn has a son now, and he's called Agnar. He was soon big and strong.

And when King Helgi hears this, he gathers an army and goes to meet Hrok. There's a battle fought, and the result is that Hrok is taken captive.

Then King Helgi says, "You are a despicable lord, but I'm not going to kill you, because it'll demean you more to live on in agony."

So he had his arms and legs smashed and sent him back to his lands like that, good now for nothing.

But when Agnar Hroarsson was twelve years old, people thought they'd never seen his like, and in every respect he outshone other men. He became a warrior so great and famous that he's spoken of widely in all the old sagas, how he'd been the biggest champion, then or now. He asked about where that firth was where Hrok had tossed the ring overboard. Many had searched for it with all kinds of tricks, and no-one got it.

And the story goes that Agnar comes in his ship to this firth and said, "It would seem to me the smart thing to do, to have a look for that ring, if anyone's got a good bearing on it?"

They told him where it had been thrown in the sea. Agnar gets ready then and dives and comes up, and he doesn't have the ring. Down he went a second time, and he hasn't got it when he comes up.

So now he says, "We've not been looking very hard till now," and so down he goes a third time and then came up with the ring.

For this, he became widely famously, more famous than King Hroar his father even, and he stays over winter in his kingdom now, and goes raiding by summer and becomes a famous man, greater than his father.

King Helgi and Yrsa loved each other a lot and had a son who was called Hrolf, who afterwards became a man of note.

13. Yrsa's Family Revealed

Queen Olof hears that Helgi and Yrsa are so much in love and enjoying their life. She isn't too happy about that and goes to see them. And when she came to that land, she sends word to Queen Yrsa. And when they meet, Yrsa invites her home to the hall with her. Olof said she didn't want to come, said she didn't have any honour to repay King Helgi with.

Yrsa said, "You treated me wretchedly when I was with you. But anyway, can you tell me anything of my kin, who they are, or why I have this suspicion that I'm not who I think I am, a daughter of peasants?"

Olof said, "It's not unlikely that I might be able to tell you something about that. It was the main reason I came here, to tell you all about that - how's the marriage, by the way, are you happy?"

"Yes," she says, "and I've got cause to be happy, as I have the most respected king in the world, and the most famous."

"It's not as good cause as you think," says Olof, "because he's your father, and you are my daughter."

Yrsa said, "I think I have the worst and grimmest mother in the world, for this abomination will never be forgotten."

"You've paid for Helgi's sins here," says Olof, "and my wrath, but now I will invite you to live with me in all honour and respect and treat you as well as I know how in every way."

Yrsa says, "I don't know what would come of that, but I can't stay here, not now I know this abomination that rests on me."

She goes to meet King Helgi then and tells him this grave news.

The king said, "You've a cruel enough mother, but I'd say let's leave it like this."

She said it couldn't stay like that, living together after this. So Yrsa goes with Queen Olof now and stays in Saxland for a time. It bit King Helgi so much, this grief, that he lay in bed and lost all joy. No-one thought there was a better match than Yrsa, but the kings were slow to ask for her, and the main thing was, they could never be sure Helgi wouldn't come after her and show his displeasure, if she was given to another.

14. King Adils Married Yrsa

There was a king called Adils, mighty and full of greed. He ruled over Sweden and his royal seat was the capital Uppsala. He heard of this woman Yrsa, and readied his ships. He goes to meet Olof and Yrsa. Olof prepares a feast for King Adils and receives him with every courtesy and courtly art. He asks for Queen Yrsa to be his wife.

Olof answered, "You must have heard how things stand with her, but we won't object so long as she agrees."

The news was brought to Yrsa. She spoke thus, saying it wouldn't go well, "for you are not a popular king."

It goes ahead though, whatever she said, and Adils went away with her, and nothing was said to King Helgi, for Adils thought himself the greater king. King Helgi didn't hear about that till they came home to Sweden. Then Adils made a worthy wedding feast for her.

And now King Helgi gets word of this and he feels twice as bad again as he did before. He slept alone in one of the outbuildings. Olof is now out of the saga. It went on like this for a while.

15. An Elf-Woman Visited Helgi

But one Yule-eve, so it's said, when King Helgi has gone to bed, and there's bad weather outside, there was a knock at the door, rather faint. It occurred to him that it wouldn't be very kingly to leave some poor wretch out there, when he might as well offer them shelter. So he goes and opens the door.

He sees this poor ragged thing has come. It said, "You've acted well, king," and then it comes inside.

The king said, "Get this straw and bearskin over you, so you don't freeze."

It said, "Let me into your bed, lord, and I'll lie with you. My life depends on it."

The king says, "My gorge rises at you, but if it's as you say, then lie here at the edge in your clothes, and it won't hurt me."

So that's what she does. The king turns his back on her. Light shone in the house. And after a while, he glances over his shoulder at her. Then he sees a woman lying there so fair, he thinks he's never seen the like of her. She was wearing a silk gown. He then turns quickly towards her, full of joy.

She spoke: "Now I want to go away," she says, "and you've saved me from a terrible curse, because this was what my stepmother did to me, and I've visited many kings in their homes, so don't sink to shamefulness now. I don't want to be here any longer."

"No," said the king, "that's not an option. You won't get away that fast, and we shan't part like this. It'll have to be a quick wedding, I'm afraid, because I like you very much."

"That's up to you," she said, and so they slept together that night.

But when morning comes, she says these words: "You've had your way with me, but know this: we'll have a child. Do as I say, king, come and see our child this time next winter at your boatsheds, or you'll pay, if you don't do as I say." After this, she went away.

King Helgi is now a bit happier than before. Time passes and he forgets all about it. And after three years, so they say, there came three riders to the building which the king sleeps in. It was midnight. They came with a girl-child and set her down beside the building.

The woman who brought the child spoke these words: "Know this, king," she said, "your kin will pay because you failed to do as I told you. But you'll benefit, for releasing me from that curse, and know this: the girl is called Skuld. She is our daughter."

After which, these riders went away. It had been an elf-woman. The king never heard of her again. Skuld grew up there and she's soon vicious at heart.

It's said that one time, King Helgi gets ready to go abroad and forget his cares in that way. His son Hrolf is left behind. He harries far and wide, and accomplished many great deeds.

16. Adils Tricked King Helgi

King Adils is at Uppsala now. He had twelve berserks and their job was to defend the realm from all danger and enemies. Now King Helgi sets course for Uppsala to seize Yrsa. He comes ashore there. And when King Adils hears that, that King Helgi has arrived in the land, he asks Queen Yrsa whether she wants Helgi welcoming.

She says, "It's up to you, but you already know that there's no man more closely related to me than him."

So King Adils sees fit to invite him to a banquet, but what he's planning is not entirely above board. King Helgi accepts, goes to the feast with a hundred men, but most of them stayed down at the ships. King Adils welcomes him with open arms. Queen Yrsa thinks she'll make peace between the kings, and she treats Helgi with all due respect.

King Helgi was so happy to see the queen that he thought of nothing else. He wanted to talk to her the whole time, every chance he got, and there they sit at the feast.

And the story goes, that King Adils' berserks came home. And the moment they'd touched land, King Adils goes to meet them, taking care that no-one else knew. He tells them to go to a particular wood that stood between the town and King Helgi's ships, and told them to spring an attack on Helgi from there, as he went to his ships. "I'll send a troop to help you, and they'll cut them off from the rear, so we'll catch them in a pincer movement, because I want to make certain that King Helgi doesn't get away, because I can tell he's so much in love with the queen, that I just can't take a chance with whatever he's planning."

Meantime King Helgi is sitting at the feast and this plot was carefully kept from him, and from the queen too. Queen Yrsa says to King Adils that she wishes to give Helgi splendid gifts, gold and treasures. He gives his word, but plans to enjoy them for himself. Then King Helgi leaves, and Adils and the queen saw him on his way, and they part company on pretty good terms.

And not long after, when King Adils had left for home, Helgi and his men saw enemies approaching, and a battle ensued. King Helgi flung himself at the enemy and fought bravely, but, thanks to overwhelming odds, he fell then, King Helgi, with good glory and many terrible wounds, and some men of Adils came behind them, and they were crushed thus between stone and sledge-hammer. Queen Yrsa knew nothing till Helgi was fallen and the battle done. There fell with Helgi all the men who'd gone up to the feast with him, and the rest fled home to Denmark. And here ends the tale of King Helgi.

17. Of Queen Yrsa

King Adils gloried in his victory and thought he'd gained much honour by killing such a renowned and widely-famed king as Helgi.

Queen Yrsa said, "You've no need to boast so much, even if you have betrayed that man who was closest to me and I loved the most, and for this very reason I'll never be loyal to you if you come up against King Helgi's kinsmen. I mean to get your berserks killed just as soon as I can, if there's anyone brave enough to do that for my sake and for their own prowess."

King Adils asked her not to threaten him or his berserks, "because it won't do you any good. But I wish to compensate you handsomely for your father's death with gifts of great wealth and good treasures, if you can find it in yourself to accept."

At this, the queen becomes calm and accepts redress from the king. But all the same, from then on her mood was grim, and she often sat working out ways to get at the berserks, to hurt or humiliate them. Since that day, no-one sees the queen glad, or ever in a good mood after the fall of King Helgi, and there was more quarrelling in the hall than there was before, and the queen didn't want to make up with King Adils, not if she had any choice.

King Adils thought he'd become very famous now, and anyone who's with his warriors is considered a great man indeed. He stays a while in his kingdom and no-one thinks to lift a finger, or raise a shield, against him and his berserks. King Adils was a great one for sacrifices and full of arcane wisdom.

Part Three: Svipdag's Thread

18. Svipdag Came to King Adils

There was a farmer named Svip. He lived in Sweden well off the beaten track. He was wealthy and had been a great fighter and not altogether what he seemed, for he was skilled in certain arts. Three of his sons are named here: Svipdag, Beigad and Hvitserk. He was the eldest. They all cut a dash, strong and fine-looking.

And when Svipdag was eighteen years old, he said to his father one day, "It's dull being up here in the mountains all the time and these out-of-the-way valleys, all deserted, and never going to see anyone, and no-one comes to see us. It'd be smarter to go to King Adils and join his retinue of warriors, if he'd take us."

Farmer Svip answers, "It doesn't seem that smart to me, as King Adils is a vicious man and not very sound, though he acts pleasant enough, but his men are full of envy, even if they do cut a dash, but sure, King Adils is a mighty man, and famous."

Svipdag says, "You've got take a chance, if you want to get on in this world, and you never know, before you try, which way you're luck will go, but one thing's for sure: I'm not staying here any longer, whatever else lies ahead."

And since his mind was made up, his father gave him a large axe, beautiful and sharp.

He said to his son then, "Don't envy others, don't puff yourself up, or you'll get a bad name. Instead, defend yourself, if anyone attacks you, because it's a great man who doesn't boast much but shows what he's made of, if push comes to shove."

He kitted him out in all lavish armour and a good horse.

So Svipdag rides off now, and comes at evening to King Adils' stronghold. He sees that they're playing games out in front of the hall, and there's Adils sitting on a great gold throne with his berserks beside him. And when Svipdag comes to the fence, the gates are locked, since it was the custom then for people to ask leave to ride in. Svipdag can't be bothered with that. He breaks down the gate and just rides on into the yard.

The king said, "This man's a careless rider, and no-one's tried that before. Could be, he's so tough he just doesn't mind."

At once the berserks started scowling, and it seems to them he's acting rather brashly. Svipdag rides up to the king and greets him nicely; he was well aware of courtly manners. King Adils asks who he might be. He tells them. The king remembers his father, and everyone guesses that the newcomer must be a great warrior, a man of no small mettle. The game hadn't finished yet. Svipdag sits himself down on a bit of wood and watches the game. The berserks glower at him, and now they say to the king that they'll test him out.

The king says, "What I think is, he won't be a push-over, but it's alright with me if you want to test him, and see if he's as good as he thinks he is."

They crowd into the hall now. The berserks walk up to Svipdag and ask if he's some sort of hero, since he's acting so big. He said he was as good as any of them. And at this, their anger and aggression only grew, but the king told them to simmer down for the evening.

The berserks scowled and howled, and they said to Svipdag, "Do you dare fight with us? Because you'll need to dredge up more than your big talk and brashness then, and we want to test you, and see what you're really made of."

He says, "I'll agree to fight you one at a time, then I'll find out if anyone else wants a try."

This was fine by the king, that they should test each other.

Queen Yrsa said, "This man is welcome here."

The berserks answered her, "We already know that you want us all in hell, but we're a bit too fit to be felled by words or ill will."

The queen said, "So what if the king wants to test and see what sort of warriors he's got in you?, since he believes in you so much."

The berserk who was their leader said, "I'll mend your manners and set you down a peg, and we'll have no fear of this man then."

19. Of Svipdag and the Berserks

And come morning, a tough island duel took place, and no shortage of hard hits there. They all saw that this newcomer could swing a sword with great strength, and knew how to make it bite, and the berserk backs off before him, and he kills the berserk. And straight-away the next one wants to avenge his death, but he goes the same way, and Svipdag doesn't stop till he's killed four.

Then King Adils said, "You've dealt me a heavy loss, and now you'll pay," and ordered his men to get up and kill him.

Meanwhile the queen gets together troops of her own to help him and says to the king, surely he can see that there was much more worth in this one than in all those berserks put together. So the queen makes peace between them, and everyone thinks Svipdag a great warrior indeed. He sits now on the bench in the place of honour opposite the king, and that's Queen Yrsa's idea.

And as it got dark, he looks around and thinks he's still been rather too light on the berserks, and wants to provoke a fight with them, and he thinks it's likely, that if they see him on his own, they'll go for him. And that's just what happened, as he expected, because they're on him in an instant.

And then when they'd been fighting for a while, the king arrives and separated them. After that the king outlawed the berserks, those that were left, as the whole lot of them together had not managed to beat one single man, and he said that he'd had no idea till now that they were so useless, just tough talkers. So they had to leave, but they swore to harry Adils' kingdom. The king appeared not to mind their threats and said that these bitches had no pluck in them. Off they went now in disgrace and shame. But really, it was King Adils who had egged them on in the first place, to attack him as he left the hall, and avenge themselves, so that the queen wouldn't know. Svipdag, however, had killed one by the time the king came to separate them.

King Adils now asks Svipdag to provide him with just as much protection as he'd got before from all the berserks, "most of all because the queen would like you in place of them." So Svipdag stayed there for a time.

20. Of the Berserks' Raid

Some time later, news reaches the king that the berserks have got together a great host and are raiding in his land. King Adils asks Svipdag to march against the berserks now and said that it was his duty and promises him as great an army as he needed. He doesn't much like the idea of being leader of the army, although he would go with the king wherever he wanted. But the king would settle for nothing less than Svipdag at the head of his troops.

Svipdag says, "Then I want you to grant me the lives of twelve men, when I say."

The king says, "I'll agree to that."

After which, Svipdag goes to this battle, but the king stays at home. He has a strong force. Svipdag had caltrops made and scattered on the ground where the battlefield had been marked out, and he got ready with many other tricks. Then battle is joined and a hard fight it is, and the raiders' army falls back some distance, and things go very badly for them when they feel the spikes of the caltrops. One of the berserks was killed there, and many men besides, but those who survived fled to their ships and so got away.

Svipdag comes home now to King Adils with a triumph to boast of. King Adils thanks him well for his daring and defence of the land.

Queen Yrsa said, "Surely that seat is better filled, when a warrior like Svipdag sits in it, than those berserks of yours."

The king admits that's true. The berserks now gather their forces, the ones who got away, and once again come raiding in King Adils' realm. And again the king calls on Svipdag to march against them and promises to give him a fine force of men. Svipdag goes to battle, and this time he has a third less men than the berserks. King Adils promised to come to meet him with the royal troops, his own retinue. Svipdag had moved faster than the berserks expected. And now they clash, and a hard battle ensues. King Adils musters his men and his plan was to take the berserks on their unshielded flank.

21. Svipdag Slew the Berserks

Now we return to Farmer Svip. One day he wakes from his sleep and sighed wearily and said to his sons, "I think your brother Svipdag needs some help now, because he's fighting a battle not far from here and they outnumber him, and he's lost one eye and has many wounds besides, but he's felled three berserks, and now there's three left."

The brothers rush to arm themselves, then head off to where the battle is, and the raiding force outnumbered them two to one. Svipdag had done great deeds, though he was now badly wounded and missing one eye. His men have been killed by the dozen, but the king isn't coming to his aid. And when the brothers come to the battle, they charge forward, fighting boldly to where the berserks are.

And when the game's over, the berserks all lie slain before the brothers. Now the slaughter quickly falls on the raiders' army, and those who chose life gave themselves up to the brothers.

And after this, they go to meet King Adils and brought him this news. The king thanks them well for that feat of arms. Svipdag had got two wounds on his arms. He had grave wounds to his head and was one-eyed from then on, for the rest of his life. He's laid up a while with these wounds and Queen Yrsa healed him.

But when he was completely well, he said to the king that he wanted to leave that place. "I've a mind to visit a king who'll show us more honour than you, majesty. You've repaid me poorly for defending your land, and for such a victory as we won for you."

King Adils begged him to stay and said he'd treat the brothers fantastically well and said he wouldn't rate anyone above them. Svipdag wants nothing else but to ride away, and mostly because King Adils hadn't joined the battle till it was over, since he wasn't sure who would win, Svipdag or the berserks, for the king had been positioned in a nearby wood, and watched their game from there, and had the choice of coming any time he wanted, but really it was all the same to him if Svipdag lost and bit the dirt.

22. Svipdag Joined King Hrolf

Now the brothers get ready to leave, and nothing could stop them. King Adils enquired where they were headed.

They said they hadn't decided, "but our ways must part for now. I want to experience the customs of other people and kings, and not get old here in Sweden."

They go now to their horses and thank the queen for the favour she's shown to Svipdag, and now mount their horses and all ride away, till they come to their father's, and ask his advice on what to do, "and where should we turn now, anyway?"

He declare that the greatest fame was with King Hrolf and his champions over in Denmark, "and that's where you're most likely to get a bit of glory to slake your pride, because I've heard for a fact that the greatest heroes in the all the north have gone there."

"What's he like?" says Svipdag.

His father says, "They tell me King Hrolf is open-handed and generous, trustworthy and looks after his friends, and his like is not to be found. He doesn't stint on gold or jewels, bestowing them on near enough anyone who'll take them. He's a small man, to look at him, but tough when tested, and tricky to beat. He's the most handsome man you could meet, hard on the wicked, but kind and sympathetic to the wretched, and with all those who don't challenge him. He's the most modest of men, talking to rich and poor alike, so excellent his name will never fade while this world is lived in. He's exacted tribute from all the kings around him, so that everyone is eager to serve him.

Svipdag says, "From what you've said, I'm minded to go and meet King Hrolf, along with all my brothers, if he'll take us."

Svip the Farmer said, "Where you go and what you get up to, that's for you to decide, but the best thing, I would have thought, would be to stay here with me."

They said it was no good asking that.

Then they wished their father farewell and a good life, and their mother too, and they go their way, all together, till they came to King Hrolf. Svipdag stepped straight up before the king and greeted him. The king asks who he might be. Svipdag says his name, and those of the others, and mentioned that he'd been with King Adils for a bit.

King Hrolf said, "Why did you come here then? There's not much friendship between Adils and our people."

Svipdag said, "I know that, lord. But still, I want to try and become your man, if that's possible, and all my brothers too, although it probably seems to you as if we don't amount to much."

The king says, "I never expected to be making friends with King Adils' men. But since you've sought me out, I'd better take you on, because I think things will go well for the man who doesn't turn you away, for I see that you are fine fellows. I've heard tell that you won much fame, killing King Adils' berserks and did plenty notable deeds besides."

"Where you want me to sit?" said Svipdag.

The king says, "Sit next to that man, he's called Bjalki, but leave room for twelve men further in from you."

Before he left, Svipdag had vowed to King Adils that one day he'd return to him. But now the brothers go to the places the king had assigned them. Svipdag asked Bjalki why that space further in from them had to stay empty. Bjalki says that's where the king's berserks sit, when come home. They were off raiding at the moment.

Skur was the name of King Hrolf's daughter, and his other one was called Drifa. Drifa was home with the king and she was the most courteous of women. Drifa looked kindly on the brothers and was generally well-inclined towards them in every way.

And so the summer passed like that, till the berserks came home that autumn to the court. And as was their custom, when they came to the hall, they walked up to each man and asked him if he reckoned he was a match for them, and the men searched around for whatever various expressions would seem most deferential to them, and it was clear from their words, that everyone thought themselves far short of being a match for them.

And now one came up to Svipdag and asks whether he thinks he's a match. Svipdag springs up and draws his sword and said he was as good as him in every way.

The berserk said, "Hit me on the helmet then."

Svipdag does so, and it doesn't bite, and after that they're ready to fight.

King Hrolf leapt between them and told them not to clash and from then on they would be called equals, "and both my friends."

And afterwards they shook hands and are always in agreement, go raiding together, and carry the day wherever they come to.

King Hrolf now sent men to Sweden to meet with Queen Yrsa, his mother, and asked her to send the goods that his father King Helgi had owned, and King Adils had taken for himself when King Helgi was killed.

Yrsa said that this was only fair, if she could but arrange it, if only it was possible for her, "but if you come after the goods yourself, then I will be true to you, my son. But Adils is so greedy for gold that he doesn't mind how he gets it," and that's what she told them to say to King Helgi, and she sent them back with fitting gifts.

23. Hrolf Subjugated King Hjorvard

King Hrolf is off raiding at the moment, and his encounter with King Adils is delayed. He gathers under him a mighty force, and all the kings he meets submit to him and pay tribute, and that was mostly because all the best heroes wanted to be with him and wouldn't serve anyone else, since he was much more generous with wealth than most other kings.

King Hrolf made his home at Hleidargard, which is called Lejre. That's in Denmark, a large and solid stronghold, and the pomp and splendour of the place was unheard of, and in every manner of magnificence it had no match.

There was a powerful king called Hjorvard. He'd married King Helgi's daughter Skuld, the sister of King Hrolf. This was done with the consent of King Adils and Queen Yrsa and of Hrolf, her brother.

And once, King Hrolf invited his brother-in-law King Hjorvard to a feast. And one day, while he was at the feast, and the two kings were stood outside, it happened that King Hrolf had to take off his trouser-belt, and he gave his sword to King Hjorvard to hold, till he was done.

And when King Hrolf had fastened his belt again, he took back his sword and turned to King Hjorvard, "We both know," he said, "it's an old saying, that whoever holds someone else's sword while they take off their belt is that man's servant. Now you must be my underking, and you'll have to put up with it as well as the others."

Hjorvard bridled at this. He has no choice though, but to let things stand as they were, so he heads home, leaving it at that, far from happy with his lot, and sent payment to King Hrolf, just like his other underkings who had to show homage.

And here ends Svipdag's Thread.

Part Four: Bodvar's Thread

24. Of King Hring

It's now to be told that north in Norway, in the Updales, there ruled a king by the name of Hring. His son was called Bjorn. It's said now that the queen died and that was a great loss to the king, and to many more besides. His landed men and councillors begged him to remarry, so it happens that he sends men south in search of a wife. But wild weathers came against them and dreadful storms, and they're forced now to turn the ship around to escape the weather, and the upshot is, they're driven north to Lapland and stayed the winter there.

One day they went up onto the land and came to a house. Inside sat two women, fair to look at. They welcomed them warmly and asked where they'd come from. They explained all about their journey and what their mission was. They asked who these women might be and why they'd come here all alone and so far from other people, such pretty and beautiful women.

The eldest said, "There's a reason for everything, boys. We're here because some powerful king asked for my daughter but she didn't want him, and he promised to get tough with her in return, and that's why I've got her here in secret, while her father's away, because he's off raiding."

They asked, who her father was.

The mother said, "She's the daughter of the Lapp king."

They asked what they were called.

The eldest said, "I'm called Ingibjorg, and my daughter's called Hvit. I'm the Lapp king's mistress."

There was one girl there to serve them. The king's men were much taken with them, and it was decided to ask and see whether Hvit would go with them and be married to King Hring. The man who was the head of the king's messengers took this matter up with her. She wasn't quick to answer, but instead turned the matter over to her mother's judgement.

"It's just as they say: from every trouble comes some gain," said her mother, "and it seems bad to me that her father will be the last to hear of this, but this has to be chanced if she's to get anywhere."

After this, she prepares for the journey with them. Then they go their way to King Hring, and as soon as they're there, the messengers ask whether the king wants to marry this woman or send her back the way she came. The king is quite taken with the woman and weds her there and then. He doesn't care that she'd not rich. The king is getting a bit old, and that was soon clear from the queen's behaviour.

25. Queen Hvit Lay with Bjorn

A man owned a farm there, not far from the king. He had a wife and child, a daughter called Bera. She was young in years and pretty to look at. Bjorn, the king's son, and Bera, the farmer's daughter, played together as children and they got on well. The farmer was quite well off and he'd spent a long time raiding in his younger days, and was a great hero. Bera and Bjorn loved each other a lot and were always meeting.

Time goes by now and there's nothing much to report. Bjorn grows up promisingly and he gets to be both big and strong. He was well bred and talented in every way. King Hring was often abroad on raids, but Hvit was at home and governed the land. She wasn't too popular with the people, but with Bjorn she was very friendly, but he took little notice of that.

And one time, when the king went away, the queen suggested that her son Bjorn should stay at home with her to govern the land. The king thought that was sensible enough. The queen now became imperious and haughty. The king said to his son Bjorn, that he should stay at home and look after the land with the queen. Bjorn said he wasn't much in favour of that, and that he hated the queen. The king said that he should stay. The king leaves now and goes abroad with a great troop of men.

Bjorn goes home now after this talk with his father, and each of them were mad at the other. He went to his bed and was rather glum and was red as blood. The queen goes to talk to him and wants to cheer him up and said she wanted to be friends with Bjorn. He

told her to go away. She did, for a time. She often came to talk to him though and said that it would be the perfect opportunity for them to share the one bed, while the king was away, and said they could have much more fun together than she had with an old man like King Hring. Bjorn was outraged and struck her a great blow on the cheek and told her to get lost and shoved her out.

She said she wasn't accustomed to being lashed or beaten, "and you prefer, Bjorn, to cuddle a churl's daughter, and you deserve exactly what you've got coming to you, something far more disgraceful than enjoying my love and sweetness, and it wouldn't be so far-fetched to think that something might just come and pay you back for your stubbornness and stupidity."

She hits him with a wolf-skin glove and says that he must turn into a cave-bear now, grim and grizzly, "and you'll have no other nourishment but your father's livestock. You'll have to kill sheep in unheard-of amounts, just for your food, and you'll never get out of these spells, and they're a little something to remember me by, and for you it'll be worse than anything."

26. Of Bera and Bjorn, and his Death

Bjorn vanishes, after that, and no-one knows what's become of him. And when they notice he's missing, a search is made for him, and he's nowhere to be found, of course. And now it's to be told that the king's sheep are being killed by the dozen, and a grey bear was behind it, both big and vicious.

One evening it happened that the farmer's daughter saw this grim bear. Bjorn goes to her and acts quite friendly towards her. In this bear she thinks she spots the eyes of the king's son, Bjorn, and she didn't run. The creature walks away from her then, and she follows it, all the way till it comes to this cave. And when she comes to the cave, there's a man there waiting and he greets her, Bera, the farmer's daughter. She sees that it's Bjorn Hringsson, and that was a very happy meeting. They stayed in the cave for a while, because she didn't want to leave him, not while she had a choice. He says that it's not right for her to live with him, because he was a beast by day, though a man at night.

King Hring comes home now from the raiding and he's told the news of what's happened while he's been away, his son Bjorn's disappearance, and also about that great beast which had come to the land and was laying into the king's flocks most of all. The queen urged him most insistently to have the creature killed, but they waited a while, all the same. The king kept his thoughts to himself, and it seems a strange business.

One night, as Bera and Bjorn were in bed together, Bjorn started speaking and said, "I have a feeling that tomorrow will be my dying day, and they will catch me, and anyway I don't see any pleasure in life, not with that curse that's on me, although I have that one joy, that we're together, but that will now end. I will now give you this ring which is under my left arm. In the morning, you will see the men who are coming to attack me, and when I'm dead, go to the king and ask him to give you what is under the bear's left shoulder, and he'll grant you that. The queen will suspect you, when you want to go, and she'll offer you the bear's meat to eat, but you mustn't eat that, because you are a pregnant woman, as you know, and you will give birth to three boys, who will be our children, and if you eat the bear's meat it'll be clear from them, but this queen is the worst troll. Afterwards, go home to your father and you'll raise the boys there. One will seem worst to you. And if you can't look after them there due to their wild ways and unruliness, then come here to the cave with them. Here you will see a coffer with three compartments. The runes that are beside it will say what each of them shall own. Three weapons are in the rock, and each lad will have the one that's meant for him. The son of ours who comes out first should be called Elk-Frodi, the next Thorir, the third Bodvar, and it's my guess they won't be weaklings, and their names will long be remembered."

He tells her of many things, and finally the bear-form came over him, and the bear steps out, and her after it, and she looks around, and then she sees a big band of men coming up over the shoulder of the mountain, and many massive hounds out in front of them. The bear runs from the cave now and out along the mountain. The dogs and the king's men come after him now, and he proved hard to catch. He maimed many of their men before he was taken, and killed all the dogs. In the end, they got him surrounded with a ring of men, and he paced about inside the ring and sees how the situation is, that he won't get away. He turns then to where the king is standing and grabbed the man who stood next to him, and tore him apart where he stood. Then the bear was so tired that it threw itself flat on the ground. They rushed in quick then to kill it.

The farmer's daughter sees this. She goes to the king and said, "Lord, will you give me what is under the bear's left shoulder?"

The king grants it, saying there wouldn't be anything unfit to give her under there.

The king's men had stripped a lot of the bear. Bera went up to it then and took away the ring and hid it, and the men didn't see what she took - nothing was asked about it, anyway. The king asks who she might be, as he didn't recognise her. She said what seemed best, but not the truth.

27. Bera Had Three Sons

The king goes home now and Bera among his followers. The queen was very happy and gave her a good welcome and inquired who she might be. As before, she didn't tell the truth. The queen organises a great feast and has the bear meat prepared as a special treat. The farmer's daughter is in the queen's chamber and can't get away, because the queen suspects who she must be.

And along comes the queen, sooner than expected, in fact, with a plate of bear-meat, and told her to tuck in. She didn't want to eat.

"How rude," says the queen, "You turn your nose up at this treat which the queen sees fit to offer you! So eat up quick, or else you'll end up with Something Worse." She cuts off a bite for her, and in the end, she did eat that little mouthful. The queen then carves another bit and stuffs it into her mouth, and a little bit of that went down too, but she spat out the rest and said she wouldn't eat any more, even if she tortured or killed her.

The queen said, "Maybe it's done the trick already," and laughed.

Afterwards, Bera went off home to her father. She has a difficult pregnancy. She told her father the whole story of her marriage and the way it had been.

And shortly after, she went into labour and gave birth to a baby boy, though a bit of a strange one. It was human above the navel, but an elk below. She names him Elk-Frodi. A second boy comes out, and is called Thorir. He had dog's feet from the instep down, and so he was called Thorir Houndsfoot. He was more handsome to look at than other men. The third boy appeared, and was the most beautiful of all. He's called Bodvar, and there was nothing wrong with him. She liked Bodvar best.

They're growing up now, fast as grass. And when they play games with other people they're vicious and quite unrelenting. Folks got a hard a hard time off them. Frodi savaged many of the king's followers, and some he even killed.

28. Elk-Frodi Leaves Home

So it went on for a while, until they were twelve years old. They're so strong by then that none of the king's men can cope with them, and so they can't play anymore.

Then Frodi said to his mother that he wants to go, "and I can't have a decent fight with anyone, because they're nothing but a bunch of idiots and they get hurt as soon as you touch them."

She said he wasn't cut out for human society, because of his wildness.

His mother goes with him to the cave now and shows him what wealth his father had left for him, because Bjorn had said in advance exactly what each one should have. Frodi wanted to take more, but he couldn't, since his was the smallest share. And now he sees where the weapons stuck out from the rock. He takes hold of the first handle, but the sword is stuck fast, so he can't get it out. Then he tugs at the axe-haft, and it's no looser.

Then Elk-Frodi said, "It could be that he who put these treasures here has decided that the sharing of weapons will match the sharing of the other wealth," and he tugs at the third handle now, and it came straight out. It was a short-sword.

He looked at the short-sword for a bit and then said, "Not fair, the man who had these treasures to share," and he wants to smash it, so he hacks two-handed at the rock, but the short-sword buried itself in the rock, right up to the hilt with a clang, but still it wasn't the least bit broken.

Then Elk-Frodi said, "Well anyway, however I use it, one thing's for sure: the bugger knows how to bite."

After that, he said farewell to his mother. Frodi takes some mountain road and becomes a criminal and kills men for their money and builds himself a shack and made himself at home.

29. Thorir Becomes King of Gautland

King Hring now thinks he knows what witchcraft all this must mean, but says nothing publicly and continues acting calmly just as before.

A little while later, Thorir Houndsfoot asked leave to go away, and his mother shows him to the cave and the wealth allotted to him, and tells him about the weapons and asked him to take the axe, and that's what his father had instructed, she explained. Then Thorir left, bidding his mother farewell. First he tugs on the sword-hilt, but the sword is stuck fast. Then he takes hold of the haft of the axe, and the axe is loose, because it was meant for him. Then he takes his inheritance and goes on his way.

He travels first to see his brother Elk-Frodi. He goes into his shack and sits down in the seat and pulls his hood over his face. Soon Frodi comes home and looks at the newcomer none too kindly, draws his short-sword now, and said:

"Short-sword shrieks,
from sheath leaping,
and hand recalls
hard deeds of war."

And he flung it down on the bench beside him, and grows fierce and ugly. Then Thorir said:

"But I indeed
in different wise
that axe of mine
made chime the same."

And then Thorir concealed himself no longer, and Frodi recognised his brother and offered him half of what he'd raked together, because there was no shortage of wealth there. Thorir won't accept it. He stays a while and then goes away. Elk-Frodi directed him to Gautland and told him that the king of the Gauts had just died, and suggested he go to their realm.

He told him all about it: "It's the law of the Gauts that a great assembly is summoned there, the Multitude Moot, and all the Gauts are summoned. This big throne is set up in the moot, with plenty of room for two men to sit on it, and whoever fills that seat will be king. And it seems to me you'll fill it right up."

After that they part, and wish each other well.

Now Thorir went off on his way, till he comes to Gautland to a certain jarl, and the jarl received him well, and he spent the night there. And everyone who saw Thorir said that, with his size, he could well be king of the Gauts, and they said there wouldn't be many like him there.

And when the assembly was gathered, it all went just as his brother Frodi had told him. A judge was there to settle the matter fairly. Many sat in this seat, but the judge declared none of them fit to rule. Thorir goes last, and sits himself down without further ado.

The judge said, "You are sitting most snugly, and you shall be judged best to govern."

Then the landed men give him the name of king and he is called King Thorir Houndsfoot, and there are great tales told of him. He was well-loved and fought many battles and had victory more often than not. He sits in his kingdom now, for a time.

30. Bodvar Took the Queen's Life

Bodvar is at home with his mother. She loved him a lot. He was the most able of men and fairest to look at. But not many knew him to speak to. One day he asked his mother where his father was. She told him of his father's death and of all that had happened and how he was changed by his stepmother's curses.

Bodvar said, "We badly need to repay this witch."

Then she told him how she was forced by the queen to eat some of the bear's flesh, "and that's on your brothers now, Thorir and Elk-Frodi."

Bodvar said, "I'd have thought Frodi would have no less of a duty to take vengeance on this cowardly witch than to be killing innocent men for their money, and committing crimes, and it seems just as strange to me that Thorir should go wandering off and not give this sorceress any token of our feelings, and I expect the best thing would be for me to give her something to remember us by."

Bera said, "Make sure she can't use any of her magic, and hurt you that way." He said he would.

After that, Bera and Bodvar go to see the king, and now, on Bodvar's advice, she tells the king everything, how matters stand, and shows him the ring which she took from under the shoulder of the beast, and which Bjorn, his son, had owned.

The king admitted he did indeed know the ring. "I rather suspected that this would all be due to her scheming, all this that's come to pass here, but for love of my queen I kept quiet."

Bodvar said, "Send her away now, or we will take revenge on her."

The king announced that he wanted to compensate him, in whatever way he wished, providing he kept quiet and left things as they were, and he'd give him the governorship of the realm and the title of jarl immediately, and after his death the whole kingdom, as long as no harm came to her.

Bodvar said he didn't want to be king, but rather to stay with the king and serve him. "You are so captivated by this monster that you're hardly in possession of your wits or your rightful kingship, and she will never thrive here after this."

Bodvar was so angry then, the king didn't dare stand in his way. Bodvar goes to the queen's quarters and has a leather sack in his hand. The king followed after and his mother too. But when Bodvar came to the chamber, he makes straight for Queen Hvit and puts the shrunken bag on her head and pulled it down tight around her neck. Then he boxed her on the side of the head and beat her to death with various tortures and dragged her through the streets. To many in the hall, most even, this seemed no worse than half of what she deserved, but the king took it hard, but there was nothing he could do. That's how Queen Hvit lost her miserable life. Bodvar was eighteen then, when this occurred.

Soon afterwards, King Hring takes sick and dies. After that, Bodvar has the kingdom and rules for a little while. Eventually he summons a thing, or assembly, of the landed men and tells them that he wants to leave. But he gave away his mother in marriage to a man called Valsleit - he'd been a jarl before that - and Bodvar sits at the wedding feast before he rides.

31. Bodvar Meets Elk-Frodi

After this, he rides off alone, and he didn't have a great deal of gold or silver with him, or anything else of value, although he's alright for weapons and clothes. First he rides his good horse to the cave, as his mother directed. The sword came loose when he takes it by the hilt. It was the way of that sword, that it could never be drawn without being the death of a man. It must not be laid under your head or stood on it's pommel. The blade would only be urged into action three times in its whole life, and could not be drawn a single time after that, it was such a difficult sword. All the brothers had wanted to own this rare treasure. Bodvar set out to find Elk-Frodi, his brother. He made a sheath of birch for the sword.

There's nothing to tell of his journey till late in the day when he comes to a big hall. That's where Elk-Frodi ruled. Bodvar stabled his horse and made himself at home there, helping himself to everything he thought he needed. That evening, Frodi comes home and looks on him none too kindly. Bodvar didn't react, but sat still. The horses were making a commotion, trying to shove each other out of the stall.

Then Frodi speaks: "This man has a cheek, daring to sit in here without my leave."

Bodvar let his hood hang down over his face and said nothing. Elk-Frodi stands up and draws his short-sword and slams it back so the guard clangs on the sheath. He does the same thing twice. Bodvar doesn't flinch. A third time Frodi draws his short-sword and now he goes for him, and he thinks this man must not know the meaning of fear, and aims to sort him out.

And when Bodvar sees what's afoot, he's no mind to sit still any longer. He gets up and runs under his arms. Elk-Frodi had the harder grip, and they wrestled furiously, and then Bodvar's hood falls off, and then Frodi recognises him and said, "Welcome, kinsman! We've been at this wrestling much too long."

"No harm done yet," says Bodvar.

Elk-Frodi said, "All the same, kinsman, you ought to be more careful. If we were in earnest, then you'd feel the difference in strength, if we fought for real and held nothing back."

Frodi invited him to stay there and offered him half of everything he'd got. Bodvar doesn't want it, and it seemed bad to him to kill men for their money. He went away after that. Frodi went along to see him on his way and says to him that he has let off many men who were not very strong, and that cheered Bodvar up, and he said that it was good of him to do this, "but you should let most people go in peace, even if you think you've got something against them."

Elk-Frodi says, "To me, all things are ill-given, but the thing for you would be to travel to meet King Hrolf, because all the greatest champions are supposed to be with him, because he far exceeds other kings in his generosity, splendour and valour."

Then Frodi went and shoved him. Frodi said, "You're not as strong as you should be, kinsman."

Frodi drew blood from his own calf and told him to drink, and Bodvar does. Then Frodi had a second go at him, but Bodvar stood firm in his tracks.

"You're plenty strong now, kinsman," said Elk-Frodi, "and I reckon the drink's done you good, and you'll be the best of men for strength and daring and every sort of toughness and gallantry, and this I gladly give you."

After this, Frodi stamped his hoof into the rock next to him, right up to the dewclaw. Then Frodi said, "I will come to this footprint every day and see what's in the mark. It'll be earth if you die of sickness, water if you drown, and blood if you die from weapons, and then I will avenge you, because of all men I love you the best."

32. Bodvar Found his Brother Thorir

Now they part, and Bodvar goes on his way until he comes to Gautland, and King Thorir Houndsfoot was not at home. But Bodvar and Thorir looked so much alike that no-one could tell them apart, and the people assumed that Thorir must have come home, and he was set in the high-seat and served just like a king in every respect and put to bed beside the queen, Thorir being married. Bodvar won't lie under the same bed cover as her. This seemed to her strange, because she truly thought it was her husband, but Bodvar told her everything, how things were. She kept this to herself. And so they spent each night, talking together, till Thorir came, and then people have no choice but to realise who this man is. There's a joyful meeting then between those brothers. Thorir says there's no-one else he would trust to lie next to his queen.

Thorir invites him to stay and have half of all his treasure. Bodvar says he doesn't want it. Thorir offered then to go with him wherever he wanted, or to give him soldiers. He didn't want that. Bodvar rode away, and Thorir came along a little way to see him off, and they parted in friendship, though holding something back. And nothing is told of his travels till he arrives in Denmark, not far from Hleidargard.

33. Bodvar Stays with Peasants

One day there was a massive downpour, and Bodvar gets very wet, and his horse is tiring terribly and becoming tired under him, for he was riding hard, and the ground got soggy and the going tough. It grew very dark as night came on, and rain continued to fall. And he doesn't notice till his horse hits an obstacle of some sort. Bodvar dismounts and looks around, and he makes out what seems to be a house, and he finds where the door is. He knocks. A man comes out. Bodvar asked to stay the night. The cotter said he wasn't about to turn him away in the dead of the night, even if he was a stranger. To the cotter, this man seems very imposing, from what he can see.

Bodvar stops the night there, with good cheer. He asked a lot of questions about the exploits of King Hrolf and his champions and, for that matter, whether it was far.

"No," said the old man, "not far at all now. Are you planning on going there, by any chance?"

"Yes," said Bodvar, "that's my plan."

The old man said he'd fit right in there, "as I see you are a big strong man, though they do think themselves very gallant fellows."

And at this the old woman sobbed out loud, when they mentioned King Hrolf and his champions in Hleidargard.

"You poor woman," says Bodvar, "why are you crying?"

The old woman said, "My husband and I, we had one son, who's called Hott. And one day he went to the stronghold for a lark, but they taunted him, the king's men, and he took it badly. Then they took him and stuck him in their bone-heap. But it's their custom at mealtimes that when each bone is gnawed loose, they throw it at him. He gets really badly hurt by this sometimes, if one hits him, and I don't know if he's alive or dead. And the payment I want from you, for my hospitality, is: I want you to throw smaller bones at him, instead of big ones, if he isn't dead by now."

Bodvar says, "I'll do as you ask, but it doesn't seem to me that gallant to be hitting people with bones or hurting kids or ordinary folks."

"That's very good of you," said the old woman, "because your hand looks pretty strong to me, and I know for sure, no-one would stand much chance against your blows, if you decided not to pull your punches."

34. Bodvar Came to King Hrolf's Retinue

Then Bodvar went his way to Hleidargard. He comes to the king's residence. Bodvar then, without asking anyone, stables his horse next to the king's best horse and walks on into the hall, and there weren't many people there. He sits himself down near the door, and when he's been there a little while, he hears a great din of something thrashing around in one of the corners. Bodvar looks across and sees a man's hand coming up from the big bone-heap which was there. The hand was very black. Bodvar goes over and asks who was in the bone-heap there?

An answer came back, rather timidly: "Hott's my name, buck."

"Why are you here?" says Bodvar, "And what are you doing?"

Hott says, "I'm making myself a shield-wall, buck."

Bodvar said, "You've got a pretty sorry shield-wall there."

Bodvar grabbed the man and yanked him out of the bone-heap.

Hott yelled out and said, "Don't do that - do you want to kill me? I'd just got nicely set up as well, before you came along, and now you've gone and wrecked my shield-wall, and I'd finally got it high enough around me that it protects me from all your bones, so that I haven't been hit in ages, although it still wasn't as good as I meant it to be."

Bodvar said, "You will not build that shield-wall any more."

Hott said, sobbing, "Must you kill me now, buckie?"

Bodvar told him to keep his voice down, picked him up and carried him out the hall and to a nearby pond - and few gave any heed to this - and washed him top to toe. Then Bodvar went to the same seat that he'd taken before, and led Hott after him, and he sits Hott down beside him, but Hott was so scared he was shaking all over. And yet, he has a feeling this man wants to help him.

Evening comes now, and men crowd into the hall, and Hrolf's champions see that Hott has been put up on a bench, and they think that the man who did that is brave enough. Hott doesn't look too happy, when he sees his old acquaintances, as he's had nothing but trouble from them. He's keen to stay alive and go back to his bone-heap, because he thought he wouldn't be as exposed to them as he is now, if he could just get down there - but Bodvar holds him, so that he can't get away.

Following their usual practise, the retainers now start tossing small bones across the floor at Bodvar and Hott. Bodvar pretends not to notice. Hott is so scared he can't eat or drink, and he thinks he'll be hit at any moment.

And now Hott says to Bodvar, "Buck, mate, there's a big knucklebone coming your way, and I think it's meant to hurt us."

Bodvar told him to shut up. He held out his palm and catches the knucklebone. The legbone was still joined to it. Bodvar sends the bone back, aiming for the man who threw it, and it slammed into him so hard it was the death of him. Great fear came over the retainers then.

This news comes to King Hrolf now, and his champions up in the castle, that a distinguished-looking man has come to the hall and killed one of his retainers, and they want to have the man killed. King Hrolf enquired whether the retainer had been killed for no reason.

"Near enough," they said. Then the whole truth came out.

King Hrolf said that killing him was the last thing they should do. "You've taken up a bad habit, hitting innocent men with bones. It's unworthy of me, but for you it's an absolute disgrace to be carrying on like this. I've often spoken of this before, and you've taken no notice, and I doubt he'll be a push-over, this man you've attacked, so call him to me so that I can learn who he is."

Bodvar goes before the king and addresses him in the most refined manner. The king asks him his name.

"Hottsguard, your men call me, but my name is Bodvar."

The king said, "What compensation do you offer me for my retainer."

Bodvar said, "He got what he asked for."

The king said, "Will you be my man and take his place?"

"I don't say no to being your man, but we'll stick together just as we are, me and Hott, and either we sit nearer to you than he did, or else we both go away."

The king said, "I don't see any worth in that one, but I won't begrudge him food."

Now Bodvar goes and takes the space he likes, but he won't have the seat of the man he killed. In one place he yanked out three men, and then he and Hott sat down there, further in towards the centre than they were assigned. The men thought Bodvar a tough man to deal with, and they have the greatest resentment for him.

35. Bodvar Beat the Dragon

And as Yule drew on, people grew glum. Bodvar asks Hott what this meant. He says to him that this creature has come along two years running, huge and horrible, "and it's got wings on its back and it always flies. Two autumns now it's visited here and done lots of damage. No weapon pierces it, and the king's best champions don't come home.

Bodvar said, "The hall's not as well manned as I imagined, if one animal can come here and waste the kingdom and the king's cattle."

Hott said, "It's not an animal, it's the worst sort of troll."

Now Yule-eve comes. Then the king said, "Now I want people to be still and quiet tonight, and I forbid all my men to go and take any risks with this creature. If the cattle go, the cattle go, but I will not lose any of my men."

Everyone promised faithfully to do as the king commanded.

Bodvar crept away in the night. He takes Hott with him, though Hott only goes under duress, and claimed he was being led to his death. Bodvar says it won't be that bad. They walk away from the hall, and Bodvar has to carry him, he was that scared.

Now they see the creature. And immediately Hott screams as loud as he can and said the beast would swallow him. Bodvar told him to shut up, bitch, and throws him down on the moss, and there he lies, not entirely free of fright. He daren't go home either. Now Bodvar steps up to the creature. It doesn't help that his sword is stuck fast in its scabbard when he wanted to draw it. Bodvar urges his sword strongly now, and then it stirs in the sheath, and now he manages to draw it so that the sword comes out of its sheath, and he thrusts it straight under the beast's shoulder, so hard it stuck in the heart, and the beast dropped down dead on the ground.

After that, he goes over to where Hott is lying. Bodvar picks him up and takes him to where the creature lies dead. Hott is shaking miserably.

Bodvar said, "Now you must drink the blood of the beast."

For a long time he's reluctant, but, at the same time, he daren't really do anything else. Bodvar makes him drink two big mouthfuls. He also had him eat a bit of the creature's heart. Afterwards Bodvar attacks him and they struggle for a long time.

Bodvar said, "Now you've grown plenty strong, and I doubt you'll fear King Hrolf's retainers now."

Hott said, "I will not fear them or you after this."

"It turned out well then, Hott mate. Now we'll go and raise the beast and set it all up so that other people will think it must be alive."

They do just that. Afterwards they go home and keep quiet, and no-one knows what they've done.

36. Hott Joins the Champions

In the morning, the king asks what they know of the beast, whether it visited at all that night. He was told that all the cattle was safe and sound in their pens. The king instructed men to go and find out if anyone had seen traces of it's having come. The guards did that, and came quickly back and said to the king that the beast was on its way, at a furious pace, and making straight for the stronghold. The king commanded his men to steel themselves and told each man to do as well as his courage allowed and see off this monster. And it was done as the king commanded, they prepared themselves for this.

The king looked towards the creature and eventually said, "I don't see any movement in the creature. Who will seize the chance now and go against it."

Bodvar said, "That would cure the curiosity of the stoutest man. Hott mate, time to clear yourself of that slander, that men claim there's no spunk or spirit in you. Go now and kill the creature - you can see none of the others are too keen for it."

"Yes," said Hott, "I'll give it a go."

The king said, "I don't know where this courage has come from Hott - a lot has changed in you in a short time."

Hott said, "Give me the sword Gullinhjalti, that is Goldenhilt, which you hold, and I'll fell the beast or get death trying."

King Hrolf said, "This sword is not for any man to bear unless he's a good lad and a gallant warrior."

Hott said, "That's me, you can well believe it."

The king said, "Who knows, maybe more has changed in you than can be seen. I doubt that many would recognise you as the same man. Now take my sword and it's yours, best of men, if this deed be done well."

Then Hott goes quite boldly up to the beast and hews at it as he comes in range, and the creature falls down dead.

Bodvar said, "See now, lord, what he's done."

The king says, "He's certainly changed a lot, but Hott hasn't killed the beast alone, rather you've done it."

Bodvar says, "Maybe so."

The king says, "I knew when you came here that few would be your equal, but still that seems to me your finest work, making a new champion for me, in the form of Hott, who seemed so unpromising too, and unlikely to have much luck. And now I will call him Hott no longer, but he will be called Hjalti from now on. You will be named after the sword Gullinhjalti."

And here ends this tale of Bodvar and his brothers.

Part Five: Hjalti's Thread

37. Of Berserks and the Courage of Hjalti

Now winter passes and it gets round to the time when Hrolf's berserks are expected back. Bodvar asks Hjalti what the berserks are like. He says that it's their custom, when they come home to the retinue, to go up to each man, starting with the king, and ask each one if he considers himself as brave as them: "But then the king says, 'That's hard to say, with such valiant men as you are, who have so distinguished yourselves in battles and bloodlettings among various peoples in the southern part of the world just as much as the north,' - and the king answers them this way more from courage than cowardliness, because he recognises their support, and they win great victories for the king and much wealth. From there, they then go and ask the same of every man who's in the hall, but no one thinks themselves a match for them."

Bodvar says, "It's sorry selection of warriors King Hrolf has here, if they're all scared to answer back to berserks."

They leave their talk at that, and Bodvar's been with King Hrolf for one year now. And it happens that the following Yule-eve, one time as King Hrolf sat at table, the hall door burst open and in walked twelve berserks, all grey with iron, like shattered sea-ice.

Bodvar asks Hjalti quietly, whether he dares take any of them on.

"Yes," said Hjalti, "not just one, but all of them, as I know nothing of fear, even if I am outnumbered, and none of them will make me shake."

Now first of all, the berserks march further into the hall, and they see that Hrolf's champions have grown in number, since they went away, and they consider the newcomers carefully, and one of them seems no pushover to them, and it's said that their leader was somewhat surprised at this.

Now they go according to their custom up to King Hrolf and ask him the same question as usual. And the king answers in a way that seems suitable, as usual, and they go thus up to each man in the hall, and last of all they come to those two comrades and the leader of the berserks asks Bodvar if he considers himself as brave as him."

Bodvar says that he isn't as brave, in fact he's braver, however they cared to test it, and no need to go on about it like an old sow, there, "you stinking son of a mare," and he leaps at the berserk and lunges in under him, where he stood in all his armour, and throws him down with such a baleful crack, as if his very bones were broken, and there he lay. Hjalti meanwhile does exactly the same. A huge uproar broke out in the hall then, and King Hrolf thought this is looking very dangerous, with his men knocking each other down. He springs from the high-seat and runs to Bodvar and asks him to calm things down and return everything to good order, but Bodvar says that the berserk would lose his life, unless he admits he's the lesser man. King Hrolf said that that would be easily solved, so Bodvar let the berserk stand up, and Hjalti did likewise, as the king commanded.

Everyone sat down in their own seats then, but the berserks sat with heavy thoughts. King Hrolf spoke very persuasively, of how they could now see that there wasn't a thing in the world so famous, strong or big, that its match could not be found. "I forbid you to wake any strife in my hall, and if you defy me after this, you'll pay with your lives, however fierce you may be when I have business with my enemies, and however much honour and fame you win me. I now have such a choice of champions, that I don't need to depend on you."

Everyone shouted hearty approval at this speech of the king's, and they were all fully reconciled, and this is how the men were arranged in the hall, with Bodvar most esteemed and prized, and he sat at the king's right hand next to him, and then Hjalti the Magnanimous, and the king gave him that name because he could well be called magnanimous, sitting every day with the king's retainers who had once maltreated him as has been told, but not doing them any harm, even though he had now become a much greater man than them, and the king would have thought it excusable if he'd given them something to remember him by, or even killed the odd one of them.

And on the king's left hand sat those three brothers, Svipdag, Hvitserk and Beigad, so important had they become, and then the twelve berserks and other warriors on both sides along the length of the hall, who are not named here.

The king let these men of his practice all kinds of sports and skills with every sort of game and entertainment. And Bodvar proved to be the greatest of his champions, whatever needed proving, and he achieved such honour with King Hrolf, that he got to marry his daughter Drifa. And so things stood for a time, with them in their realm, the most renowned of men.

Part Six: Of Adils the Uppsala King and the Swedish Expedition of King Hrolf and his Champions

38. Planning the Uppsala Ride

It is now said that one day King Hrolf sat in his royal hall with all his champions and great men beside him and that he held a costly banquet.

Now King Hrolf looks left and right and said, "Overwhelming strength has come together in one hall."

Then King Hrolf asked Bodvar whether he knew of any king like him with such champions at his command.

Bodvar says he doesn't, "but there is one thing that seems to me to diminish your royal dignity."

King Hrolf asked what that might be. Bodvar said, "The thing you're lacking, lord, is that you've not gone to Uppsala after your father's inheritance, which your in-law King Adils wrongly holds."

King Hrolf says it'll be hard to get that, "for Adils is not a simple man, but wise in black arts, crafty, cunning, sly and vicious, and the worst to deal with."

Bodvar says, "Still, it befits you, lord, to go after your property and call on King Adils some time and find out what answer he gives on this matter."

King Hrolf said, "This is a serious point, which you raise, for we have to seek vengeance for our father on King Adils the covetous and tricky, wherever he is, and we shall have to risk it."

"I shan't blame you," says Bodvar, "for trying out, some time, what King Adils is made of."

39. Hrolf Stays with Farmer Hrani

King Hrolf now prepares for his expedition with a hundred and twenty men together with his twelve champions and twelve berserks. Nothing is said of their journey till they come to a farm. The farmer was standing outside as they came and invited them to stay.

The king said, "You're a bold man. Do you have the means for this? Because we're not that little a party, and it's not really a task for a small farmer, to accommodate us all."

He laughed and replied. "Yes, lord," he said, "I've seen just as many men come my way, at times, and you won't lack drink or anything else you need for the night."

The king says, "Then we'll chance it."

The farmer was pleased with that. Their horses are now led away and taken care of.

"What's your name, farmer?" said the king.

"Some call me Hrani," he said.

There was such hospitality there, that they could hardly remember a place where they'd been treated better, and the farmer was very merry, and there was nothing they could ask him for which he didn't have an answer, and he seems to them to be the wisest man. They went to sleep now. And when they awoke, it was so cold the teeth chattered in their heads, and they huddled up all together, pulling on clothes and everything they could lay their hands on, all except King Hrolf's champions, who made do with what clothes they already had. They all stayed cold that night.

Then the farmer asked, "How did you sleep?"

Bodvar answers. "Well," he says.

Then the farmer said to the king, "I know your retainers found it rather cold in the hall last night, and so it was, but they can't expect to stand the trials that King Adils will try on you, if they thought that was so tough, so send them home, lord, half your company, if you want to keep your life, for it won't be by numbers that you'll beat King Adils."

"You're an outstanding man, farmer," said the king, "and I'll take your advice in this matter."

They go their way now, once they're ready, and bid the farmer farewell, and the king sends back half his troop. They ride along now, and suddenly there's another farm in front of them, just a little one. Here they think they recognise the same farmer, who they stayed with before. A strange turn of events, this, they think. Still, the farmer greeted them well and asked why they came so often.

The king answers, "We don't really know what tricks we're getting caught in, but it would be fair to say that you, farmer, are a right tricky chap."

The farmer says, "Nevertheless, you won't be badly treated."

They spend a second night there with excellent fare and went to sleep and were woken by such a powerful thirst coming on them it seemed almost unbearable, so that they could hardly move the tongues in their mouths. They stood up and went to a vat that stood full of wine, and drank from that.

In the morning Farmer Hrani said, "Once again, lord, it's time to heed me, and I sense little endurance in those men who drank in the night. You will have to endure greater challenges when you come to King Adils."

Suddenly a massive snowstorm came on, and they wait out that day, and a third night comes. But in the evening a fire was made for them, and they felt very hot on their arms, those who were sitting by the fire. Most fled from the seats Hrani had assigned them, and they all shrank from the fire except King Hrolf and his champions.

The farmer said, "Once again, lord, you can cull from your company, and it's my advice that none go except your twelve champions, and then there'll be some hope of your return, but otherwise none."

"You impress me so much, farmer," said King Hrolf, "that we will follow your advice."

They stay there three nights. The king rides off with the twelve champions, but sent back all the rest of his troop.

King Adils gets wind of this and said it was good that King Hrolf wanted to visit him, "because he'll surely have such an errand here, before we part, as will be worth the telling."

40. Of King Adils' Welcome

After this, King Hrolf rides with his champions to the hall of King Adils, and all the townsfolk crowded up into the highest towers of the stronghold to see the splendour of King Hrolf and his champions, for they were magnificently arrayed, and many were impressed to see such chivalrous knights as these. First they ride slowly and grandly, but when they neared the hall, they let their horses feel the spur and galloped to the hall, so that all fled who stood before them. King Adils gave them a fine welcome, with all good cheer, and had their horses taken.

Bodvar said, "Take care, boys, not to tangle tail or forelock on our horses, but look after them well and especially make sure they don't soil themselves."

This was promptly told to King Adils, what careful instructions they'd given for the care of the horses. He said, "Their pride and insolence know no bounds. Now hear my instructions, and do as I bid: Hack off the tails close to the rumps, right up to the arse, and shear the forelocks so the skin comes off with them, and treat them as shamefully as you know how, but leave them just clinging to life."

Then they're escorted to the hall doors, but King Adils is nowhere in sight.

Then Svipdag said, "I know this place from before, so I'll go in first, as I have the worst suspicions of how we'll be treated, and what's likely been arranged. We'll not say a word to let on who King Hrolf is, then King Adils won't be able to tell him apart from the rest of our company."

Svipdag then walked on ahead of them all, and his brothers after him, Hvitserk and Beigad, and then King Hrolf and Bodvar and the rest likewise, one after another. There were no servants left now, as those who had escorted them to the hall door had vanished. They had their hawks on their shoulders, and that was considered the height of gallantry in those days. But King Hrolf owned a hawk called Habrok.

Svipdag goes on ahead now and pays careful attention to everything. He sees great changes everywhere. They cross so many obstacles that had been set before them, that it isn't easy to describe, and it was harder the further into the hall they advanced.

And now they come so far into the hall, all the way till they see King Adils swollen with pride in his high-seat, and the moment wasn't lost on either side, the gravity of the occasion, when they looked on King Adils, and he on them. They see however that it won't be easy to get to him, even though they've come so close that they can make out one another's words.

Then King Adils spoke: "And now you've come here, Svipdag, mate, but what will the hero's business be? Or not, as it seems to me:

"There's a scrape in his nape,
an eye out his head,
a scar on the brow,
cuts on both arms.

"And the same with Beigad his brother - all crippled."

Svipdag spoke up so that all could hear: "I now want safe-conduct from you, King Adils, as we agreed, for these twelve men who've come here together."

King Adils answered, "I will grant this, so come in quick into the hall, bold and brave with minds at ease."

They think that they can make out pit-traps dug all over the hall in front of them, and it won't be safe to test exactly what lies out there, and such a great darkness was over King Adils that they could hardly see his face. They also see that the ornamental drapes which hang all round the inside of the hall, have been broken off and moved forward, as if there might be men behind them with weapons. This was true enough, for no sooner had they come over the pits, than a mail-clad man burst from under every curtain, and King Hrolf and his champions made a hard fight of it and clove the soldiers down to their teeth. So it went on for a while, and the enemy can't work out where King Hrolf is, but the soldiers fell in heaps.

King Adils swells with rage in the high-seat, when he sees Hrolf's champions cutting down his troops like dogs, and he sees that this isn't getting anywhere, so he stands up and said, "What's the meaning of this great commotion? You stinking wretches! What skulduggery is this, that you go attacking men of such distinction as have come to visit us? So stop it right now and sit down, and let's enjoy ourselves all together, eh?, kinsman Hrolf?"

Svipdag said, "You've not kept the truce too well, King Adils, and you'll get no glory for this."

They sit down after that, Svipdag furthest in towards the high-seat, then Hjalti the Magnanimous, but Bodvar sits together with the king, since they didn't want him to be recognised.

King Adils said, "I see you don't travel abroad with dignity, or why does kinsman Hrolf not have more followers."

Svipdag said, "I see you don't shrink from plotting treacherously against King Hrolf and his men, and it's no big scandal whether he rides here with few men or many."

And with that their talk was done.

41. Hrolf in the Hall of King Adils

After that, King Adils has the hall cleared. The dead were carried away, for many of King Adils' men were killed, and many wounded.

King Adils said, "Let us now make fires for our friends, the length of the hall, and let us show these men our affection, so that we shall all be pleased."

Now men are fetched to light up the fire in front of them. Hrolf's champions sat with their weapons the whole time and wouldn't let them out of their hands. The fire took quickly, as neither pitch nor dry wood were spared. King Adils and his retainers were on one side of the fire, and King Hrolf and his champions on the other, and each party sits on its own long bench, and they talk across to each other very nicely.

King Adils said, "It's no exaggeration what they say about your courage, Hrolf's champions, or your toughness, and in fact you think yourselves better than everyone else, and it's no lie what they tell of your strength. Build up the fires now," said King Adils, "for I can't quite see who's the king, and you won't flee the fire, though you might get a bit warm."

And this was now done as he said, and he wanted to find out that way for sure who King Hrolf was, because he reckoned Hrolf would not be able to stand the heat like his champions, and he thought then it would be easier to catch him, once he knew which one he was, since he truly wanted King Hrolf dead. Bodvar realised this and so they shielded him somewhat from the heat, as much as they could, but not so much that he would be noticed. And as the fire burnt its hardest at them, King Hrolf resolves to remember that he had sworn to flee neither fire nor iron, and he sees now that King Adils wishes to put this to the test, to learn whether they'll burn or break their oath. They see that King Adils' throne has been moved back all the way to the hall wall, and so have his men.

Now more fuel is going on fast, and they see that they'll burn unless something is done about it. By now their clothes are burnt all over them, and then they throw their shields on the fire. Then said Bodvar and Svipdag:

"Let's feed the fires in the fort of Adils."

Then Bodvar and Svipdag each grabbed themselves a man, from among those who had built up the fires, and flung them onto the fires and said, "Now you enjoy the warmth of the fires, for your toil and trouble, because we're baked through now. So now you can bake, seeing as you've worked so hard all this time to make a fire for us."

Hjalti grabs a third and flings him on the fire at his end, and they all go the same way, all those who fed the fires. They burn to ashes there, and no-one saves them, as nobody dared come near enough. When this was done, King Hrolf speaks:

"He flees not the blaze, who bounds over."

And at this, they all leap over the fire, and make for King Adils, meaning to capture him. And when King Adils sees this, he saves himself and ran to the tree that stood in the hall, and it was hollow inside, and so he escaped from the hall with his magic and spells.

And so he comes to the chamber of Queen Yrsa and goes to speak with her, and she receives him with disdain and says many harsh words to him: "First you had King Helgi, my husband, killed," she said, "and acted disgracefully towards him and kept property from him who owned it, and now on top of all that, you want to kill my son. And you are a man much worse than any others, and more vicious. Now I will do all I can to see that King Hrolf gets his property, and you will earn disgrace, as your deserve."

King Adils said, "That's how it'll be then, here, that neither will trust the other. I will not come into their sight again."

With that their talk was done.

42. Vogg Serves Hrolf and his Men

Queen Yrsa goes then to meet King Hrolf and gives him a most hearty welcome. He gladly returns her greeting. She sends for a man to attend to them and treat them with every hospitality.

And when this man came before King Hrolf, the man said, "He's on the thin side, this fellow, and a bit of a beanpole. He's got a face like a pole-ladder, a *kraki*, is he really your king?"

King Hrolf said, "You've given me a name that'll stick, so what naming-present have you got me?"

Vogg answered, "I have nothing, because I'm penniless."

The king said, "Then it falls to the other to give."

He takes a gold ring from his arm and gives it to this man.

Vogg said, "Of all givers you're the best, bless you sir, this is a real treasure."

And when the king saw how much worth he attached to it, he said, "It doesn't take much to make Vogg happy."

Vogg spoke and set one foot on the foot-board, "This I do solemnly swear, that I will avenge you, if I live longer, if you are defeated by men."

The king answers, "Good for you," he says, "but others might stand more chance than you there."

They see that this man will be true and trusty in so far as he can be, in what little way, but they doubt he'll be up to much, a measly man like that. From now on they keep nothing from him. Eventually, they decide to sleep, and they reckoned they could lie unafraid in those rooms the queen had given them.

Bodvar said, "We've been looked after nicely here, and the queen wishes us well, but King Adils wishes to do us all the harm he can. I'd be very much surprised if nothing else happens to us, and he leaves it at this."

Vogg tells them that King Adils is a great sacrificer, so much so, "his like is not to be found. He sacrifices to a boar, and I'm not sure if another such fiend exists, so watch out for yourselves, because he'll put all his powers into overcoming you, one way or another."

"More likely, I think," says Bodvar, "he'll remember how he had to flee his hall this evening on our account."

"You should remember," says Vogg, "that he's sly and vicious."

43. Gram Versus the Sacrifice-Boar

They go to sleep then and wake up to hear such a great din outside that the it booms everywhere and the house in which they lay seemed to shake like swill.

Vogg spoke up then, "Now the boar will have come out, and it'll have been sent by King Adils to take retribution on you, and it's such a great troll that none may stand against it."

King Hrolf had a great hound who was called Gram. He was with them. He was outstanding in courage and strength. Next thing, the troll appears in the likeness of a boar, and it groans horribly like the troll it was. Bodvar sets the hound on the boar, and the dog doesn't flinch, but goes straight for the boar. A hard struggle ensues there now. Bodvar lends the hound a hand and hacks at the boar, but his sword won't bite into its back. The hound Gram is so tough he tears the ears off the boar and, along with them, all the skin of its cheeks, and all at once, the boar shot down back whence it came, and the King Adils comes to the house with many men and immediately set fire to the house. And at this, King Hrolf and his champions know that once again there will be no lack of fuel.

Bodvar said, "This will be a poor death, if we burn in here, and I'd chose rather to fall to weapons on a level field, and it will be a sorry end for King Hrolf, if that happens. I see nothing else for it than to ram the walls so hard the planks come loose and we can break out of the house then, if that works," but that was no child's play, the house was sturdily built, "and there'll be a man waiting for each of us, when we come out, but they'll soon lose heart, just as they did before."

"This is excellent advice," says King Hrolf, "and it will serve us very well."

44. Of Queen Yrsa and King Hrolf

Now they follow this advice, running at the planks so hard and crazily that they crack apart, and so they escape. The town street was covered in mail-clad warriors. A bitter battle breaks out there, and King Hrolf and his champions go fiercely forward. The enemy proves all too pathetic. They never meet any men too haughty or proud to fall before their mighty blows.

And in the middle of this hard fight, along comes King Hrolf's hawk flying out of the fortress and sits on King Hrolf's shoulder, looking for all the world like he had a great victory to boast of.

Bodvar said, "He's acting now as if he's won some fame."

The man whose job was to look after King Adils' hawks rushed to the loft where they were kept, and it seems strange to him that King Hrolf's hawk has gone, but he finds all the hawks of King Adils dead.

The battle ends with them having killed a mass of men, and none can stand against them. But King Adils has disappeared by then, and they don't know what's become of him. They beg for mercy, those still standing out of Adils' men, and they grant them that.

After this, they walk to the hall and into the hall bravely. Then Bodvar asks which bench King Hrolf will sit on.

King Hrolf answers, "On the king's own dais, that's where we'll sit, and I will take the high-seat."

King Adils did not come to the hall, and he thought he'd suffered gravely and earned great shame, with all the tricks he'd used. They sat for a while now in peace and quiet.

Then said Hjalti the Magnanimous, "Wouldn't it be a good idea for someone to go and visit our horses and see whether they're short of anything they need?"

So that's done, and as soon as he came back he said the horses had been treated shamefully and disgracefully and told how they had been treated, as was said earlier. King Hrolf didn't react to this, except to say that everything went one way with King Adils.

Queen Yrsa comes into the hall now and walks up to King Hrolf and addressed him with grace and skill. He accepted her greeting well.

She said, "You have not been welcomed here as I would have wished, kinsman, nor as you should have been, and you mustn't stay here any longer, my son, in such an unwelcoming place, for there is a great mustering of troops all over Sweden, and King Adils aims to kill you all, as he has long wanted to, had he been able, but for now your luck is stronger than his spells. And now here is a silver horn which I want to give you, and inside are kept all of King Adils' best rings including the one called Sviagris, and which he values above all the others," and with that she gave him much gold and silver in other forms. This treasure was so great, all together, that one could hardly put a price on it.

Vogg was stood nearby and received much gold from King Hrolf for his trusty service.

The queen had twelve horses led forward, all red of hue except one, who was white as snow. He was for King Hrolf to ride. These were the best-proven out of all King Adils' horses, all of them fully armoured. She gave them shields and helms and armour and other good clothes, the best that could be found, since the fire had ruined their clothes and weapons. She kitted them out splendidly with everything they needed to have.

King Hrolf said, "Have you given me all the treasure I own by right and everything which belonged to my father?"

She says, "This is many times more than you had to claim, and you and your men have won much fame here. Now prepare yourselves as best you can, so that no-one can break through to you, for you will be tested yet."

After this, they mount their horses. King Hrolf speaks with fondness to his mother, and they part happily.

45. The Parting of Hrolf and King Adils

King Hrolf and his champions ride now on their way down from Uppsala, down to that place called Fyrisvellir Plains, and King Hrolf saw that a great golden ring shone in the road in front of them and it rattled as they ride over it.

"It's calling so loud," said King Hrolf, "because it's lonely," and he slips off a gold ring and drops it on the road beside that one and said, "it shall not be said that I pick up gold, even though it lies in my path, and let none of my men be so bold as to take it. For it has been thrown down here to delay our journey."

They promise him this. And at that moment, they hear the rasp of the lure-horns from all directions. They see an immeasurable army coming after them. This host is coming at a furious pace, each man spurring his horse on as fast as it can go. King Hrolf and his company keep riding right on at the same pace.

Bodvar said, "These fellows are following hard, and I'd certainly like to give them something to show for their mission, and they certainly want to meet us."

The king said, "Take no notice of that. They themselves will be delayed." He now reaches out his hand for the horn where the gold was, and Beigad rode alongside and held out the horn to him. The king took the horn and now he sowed gold all over the Fyrisvellir, so that the paths glowed like gold.

But when the pursuing army sees that, that gold glows all over the road, they leap from their saddles, competing to see who could pick it up quickest, and there was much snatching and scrapping, and the strongest got the most, and the pursuit was slowed.

And when King Adils sees this, he nearly goes out of his mind, and shouts at them with hard words and says they're picking up the little stuff, and letting the really big prize slip past them, and this foul dishonour will become known in every land, "that you should let twelve men escape from us, such an innumerable multitude as I've raked together from all the counties of Sweden."

King Adils races off ahead of them all now, as he was so furious, and the rabble followed after him.

Now as King Hrolf sees King Adils thundering along right near him, he takes the ring, Sviagris and casts it on the path.

And when King Adils sees the ring, he said, "Whoever gave this treasure to King Hrolf was more loyal to him than to me. But nonetheless, I shall enjoy it now, and not King Hrolf," and he reaches out with his spear-shaft to where the ring lay, and wanted to get it by any means, bends now low over his horse, as he thrust the spear down through the hole of the ring.

King Hrolf sees this now. He turns his horse round then and said, "Now I've made the greatest of the Swedes stoop like a swine."

But when King Adils tries to pull the spear-shaft towards himself along with the ring, that's when King Hrolf rushes at him and hacked off both his buttocks, right down to the bone, with the sword Skofnung, the best of all swords to have ever been borne in all the north.

King Hrolf spoke to King Adils and told him he'd have to bear this shame for a while, "and now you can recognise Hrolf Kraki and see who he is, this man you've been seeking so long."

King Adils is afflicted by a great loss of blood, so that he grows faint, and has to turn back, so much the worse for his foray, but King Hrolf took back Sviagris. They parted company there. It's not told that they met again. They also kill all the men who had ridden out furthest in front and risked the most. That lot didn't have long to wait for King Hrolf and his champions, and none of the champions thought themselves too good to serve them, and they didn't argue over turns, as soon as a chance presented itself.

46. Of Farmer Hrani

King Hrolf and his men go on their way now and ride the whole day nearly. And as night fell, they find a farm and came to the door. There before them stands Farmer Hrani, who offers them every hospitality and says things have not gone so very differently to how he expected, on their travels. The king confirms that and says there's no smoke in this man's eyes.

"Here are some weapons, I want to give you," says Farmer Hrani.

The king said, "These are monstrous weapons." It was a shield, a sword and a coat of mail. But King Hrolf would not take the weapons.

Hrani bristles at this, to the brink of losing his temper, and feels he's been done a great dishonour here. "You are not being so clever in this matter, King Hrolf, as you probably think you are," said Hrani, "and you are never as wise as you imagine." The farmer took great offence at this snub.

There was no chance of a night's lodging now, and they just want to ride on their way, even though the night is dark. The displeasure is plain to see in Hrani's face, and he thinks he's been vastly underrated, when they wouldn't accept gifts from him, and he does nothing to stop them riding off as they like. They ride away now, leaving him like that, and nothing was said by way of farewells.

And before they'd got very far, Bodvar Bjarki halts. He spoke thus: "Sense comes late to fools, and so it comes to me now. I fear we've not been terribly wise, for we turned down what we should have taken, and chances are we've turned down victory."

King Hrolf says, "I suspect the same, because this must have been old Odin, and he certainly was a one-eyed man."

"Let's turn back as fast as we can," says Svipdag, "and see."

They go back now, and by then both farm and farmer had disappeared.

"There's no point looking for him," says King Hrolf, "as he's an evil spirit."

They go on their way now, and nothing is told of their journey till they come to Denmark, to their own land, and they settle down quietly now.

Bodvar advised the king not to get into too many battles after that. It seemed more likely, to him, that they wouldn't be attacked much if they stayed put, but he said he was afraid he didn't know whether the king would be victorious from now on, if it was put to the test at all.

King Hrolf says, "Luck rules each man's life, not that evil spirit."

Bodvar said, "Leaving you is the last thing we'd do, if it's up to us, but all the same, I have a strong feeling that it won't be long before grave news comes to us all."

They leave the matter there, and from this expedition they earned great fame.

Part Seven: Of Skuld's Battle and the End of King Hrolf and his Champions

47. The Advice of Queen Skuld

Now a long time passed, with King Hrolf and his champions staying put peacefully in Denmark like this. No-one attacked them. All his tributary kings remained obedient to him and paid him tribute, and so did Hjorvard, his brother-in-law.

Now it happened one time that Queen Skuld spoke with King Hjorvard, her husband, and said, with a heavy sigh, "It doesn't seem right to me that we should pay tribute to King Hrolf and be oppressed by him, and it can't carry on like this, with you being his underling."

Hjorvard says, "It'll be best for us to bear it like the rest of them, and leave things calm as they are."

"You're a spineless weed," she said, "putting up with sorts of shames that are done to you."

He said, "It is not possible to struggle with King Hrolf, as no-one dares raise a shield against him."

"You're so spineless the lot of you," she said, "there's no pith in you, and no-one gets anywhere unless they take a chance. It won't be known till it's tried, whether King Hrolf and his champions can be hurt. But the way things have gone now," she said, "I doubt he'll have victory against us, and it doesn't seem so out of the question to have a go and see, and even if he is bound to me by the bonds of

kinship, I won't protect him, and that's why he's always at home, because he suspects it himself, that victory will elude him. I shall now propose a plan, if you'll listen, and I won't spare any tricks in trying to succeed."

Skuld was a powerful sorceress, a great galder-being, descended from elves on her mother's side, and King Hrolf and his champions would pay for that.

"First I'll send men to King Hrolf and ask him to let me pay no tribute for the next three years, and then pay up all in one go, all that I owe him. Now I think it most likely that this trick will work, and if this goes according to plan, we should sit tight."

Now the messengers go between them as the queen instructed. King Hrolf agrees to this arrangement, to delay the tribute as asked.

48. Of Skuld's Muster

At this point, Skuld gathers together all the men who were strongest, and all the scum and criminals of the neighbouring districts. The treachery was hidden though, so that King Hrolf did not become aware of it, and the champions suspected nothing of this, as it was done with the greatest spells and sorcery. Skuld deploys the most potent of seid-magic to beat her brother King Hrolf, so strong that she is accompanied by a following of elves and norms and countless other evil scum, such that human strength is helpless against them.

But King Hrolf and his champions have great larks and fun in Hleidargard, and all sorts of sports, all that were known, and they performed with skill and courtly grace. Each had a mistress for his pleasure.

And now it is told that when the army of Skuld and King Hjorvard is fully prepared, they go to Hleidargard with an immeasurable force and arrive at Yule. King Hrolf has made elaborate preparations for Yule, and his men drank hard that evening. Hjorvard and Skuld pitch their tents outside the stronghold. They were vast and long with strange and wonderful trappings. There were many wagons and all packed with weapons and armour.

King Hrolf gave no heed to this. His thoughts were now more on his pomp and splendour and giving and all the valour that lay in his breast, and on how to provide for all those who had come so that his glory would spread the furthest, and he had everything that might enhance the honour of a king in this world. But it is not recorded that King Hrolf and his champions had ever worshipped the gods. Rather, they believed in their own might and main. Because at that time the holy faith had not yet been preached here in the northern lands, and so they had little knowledge of their Maker, they who lived in the north.

49. The Preparations of King Hrolf and his Champions

Next to be told, is that Hjalti the Magnanimous goes to the house where his mistress is. He sees plainly that they haven't come in peace, those under the tents of Hjorvard and Skuld. But he stays calm and doesn't raise an eyebrow, and lies now with his mistress. She was the fairest of women.

And when he's been there a while, he sprang up and said to his mistress, "Which is better, do you think? Two twenty-two-year-olds or one man of eighty."

She answers, "Two twenty-two-year-olds strike me as better than an old man at eighty."

"You'll pay for these words, you whore," said Hjalti, and went up to her and bit off her nose. "Blame me if anyone fights over you, but I expect most will see you as no great treasure from now on."

"You've treated me badly and it's not right," she said.

"Nothing's ever altogether clear," said Hjalti.

He grabs his weapons then, as he sees that the stronghold is surrounded by mail-clad warriors and banners have been raised. He realises now that it's pointless ignoring it any longer: the enemy is at hand. He makes for the hall, to where King Hrolf sat with his champions.

Hjalti said, "Wake up, lord king, for the enemy is in the yard, and there's more need of combat than cuddling women, and I doubt your sister Skuld's tribute will add much to the gold in your hall, and she has the ferocity of the Skjoldungs. And I can tell you this much: that's no small army out there with hard swords and weapons of war, and they're circling the stronghold with drawn swords, and it doesn't look like very friendly business that King Hjorvard has come to see you on, and from this day forth, he won't be begging your leave to rule his kingdom."

"It's time now," said Hjalti, "to lead the army of our king, who begrudges us nothing. Let us now make good our solemn vows, to defend well the most famous king there is at this time in all the north, and let's see to it that word of this reaches every land, and we'll repay him now for weapons and armour and much kindness besides, for this is no wage-work we have to do. Great omens have arisen here, though we've ignored them for a long time, and I think it most likely that great events will unfold here that will be remembered. Some will claim that what I say reeks something of fear, but it may well be that King Hrolf drinks now for the last time with his champions and retainers."

"Arise now, all you champions," says Hjalti, "be quick and bid your girls farewell, for other business lies before your eyes, to get ready for what will follow. Up, all you champions, step lively, arm yourselves, every one."

Then up sprang Hromund the Hard and Hrolf the Swifthanded, Svipdag and Beigad and Hvitserk the Keen, Haklang sixth, Hardrefil seventh, Haki the Bold eighth, Vott the Mighty ninth - the tenth was called Starolf - Hjalti the Magnanimous eleventh, and Bodvar Bjarki twelfth. And he was so called because he drove away all of King Hrolf's berserks, because of their pride and arrogance, and some he killed, and none of them could lay a finger on him, because they were like women next to him, when push came to shove, although they always considered themselves better than him and were always conspiring against him.

Bodvar Bjarki stood up in an instant, pulled on his armour, and said that now King Hrolf had need of proud lads, "and heart and head must not flinch, in those who stand by King Hrolf."

King Hrolf springs to his feet then and speaks up with no fear: "Enjoy with me that drink which is best, and we shall drink first and become glad and show in that way what sort of men we are, Hrolf's champions, and let us strive for one thing only: that our valour will be remembered, for to this place have come the greatest and boldest champions from all the lands around. Tell this to Hjorvard and Skuld and their boys, that we will drink ourselves merry, before we receive our tribute."

It was done as the king had said.

Skuld answers, "My brother King Hrolf is unlike all others, and the passing of such men is a terrible loss, but things are coming to a head, for all that."

So much was King Hrolf admired that he was praised by his friends and foes alike.

50. Of the Deeds of Bodvar Bjarki

King Hrolf leapt from the high-seat, now that he'd drunk for a while with all his champions. They leave the good drink for then, and are outside in an instant, all except Bodvar Bjarki. None of them saw him, and they thought that very strange, and they supposed it not unlikely that he was somewhere else, captured or killed.

And the moment they're out, a tremendous battle breaks out. King Hrolf presses forward himself with the standards and his champions beside him on both sides together with all the garrison, which amounted to no small number, although they counted for little in a fight. Hard blows could be seen there, to helm and hauberk. Many a sword and spear could be seen in the air, and so many dead, they covered every inch of the ground.

Hjalti the Magnanimous said, "Many's the byrnie now slit and many weapons broken and many a helm destroyed and many's the brave rider dashed from his steed, and our king is in fine spirits, for he is now as glad as when he drank ale so deeply and strikes always with both hands, and he is most unlike other kings in battle, for it seems to me he has the strength of twelve kings, and many a doughty man has he killed, and now King Hjorvard can see that the sword Skofnung bites, and now it rings loud in their skulls." The nature of Skofnung was such that it sang aloud when it tasted bone.

Now the fight grows so fierce that none can withstand King Hrolf and his champions. King Hrolf strikes with Skofnung, it seemed a marvel, and they make such inroads into the army of King Hjorvard, and the enemy fall in heaps.

Then Hjorvard and his men see a huge bear going before the King Hrolf's men, always nearest to where the king was. He kills more men with his paw than any five of the king's other champions. Blows and missiles glance off him. But he bursts under him both men and horses of King Hjorvard's army; and everything that comes in his way, he crushes in his teeth, so that panic sweeps King Hjorvard's army.

Hjalti looks around now and can't see his mate Bodvar, and said to King Hrolf, "What can this mean: Bodvar sheltering himself like this, and not coming near the king, such a champion as we thought him to be, and all the times he's proved himself?"

King Hrolf says, "He'll be where he's most needed, helping us, if he has any choice. Look to your own glory and courage, and don't do him down, for none of you is his equal, and I don't blame any of you for that, for you are all doughty champions."

Hjalti sets off at a rush now and home to the king's dwelling and sees Bodvar sitting there motionless.

Hjalti said, "How long must we wait for the most famous of champions, and this is a monstrous disgrace. Why don't you stand on your own two feet and try out those strong arms of yours that are as strong as bear's. Up now, Bodvar Bjarki, my better, or must I burn the house and you in it, and this is a crying shame, a champion like you, that the king should put himself in danger for us, and now you're ruining that great reputation of yours, that you've had all this time."

Bodvar stood up then with a sigh and said, "No point trying to scare me, Hjalti, because I'm not scared yet, but now I'm ready to go. When I was young, I fled neither fire nor iron, and fire I've seldom tried, but I've endured iron many times, and yielded to neither so far, and you shall tell truly that I want to fight to my utmost and always have King Hrolf call me champion in front of his men. I have much to repay him, first a wife and twelve estates that he gave me, together with many treasures of worth. I killed the berserk Agnar, a king no less, and that deed has been remembered."

Bodvar tells him of his many great deeds, which he has performed, how he's been the death of many men, and assured him that that he wouldn't be scared to go into battle, "and yet, I think we're dealing with something far stranger here, than we've met before. But you've not been as helpful to the king as you think, in doing this, because it had almost been decided which side would win, but this was more through ignorance on your part, than any wish to harm the king, and none of his other champions could have done this, apart from you, could have called me out, except the king, but anyone else would have been killed. Now no plan will work, and what will be, will be. I tell you truly, that now the help I can give the king is many times less than it was before you called me up from here."

Hjalti said, "It's clear that I'm concerned for you and King Hrolf, but it's hard to know what to do, when things turn out like this."

51. Of Skuld's Battle

After this urging from Hjalti, Bodvar gets up and goes out to the battle. The bear has disappeared from the army now, and the battle was starting to go against them. Queen Skuld had used none of her tricks while the bear was in the ranks of King Hrolf, sitting there in her black tent on her seid-stand. Now the situation changes as suddenly as dim night coming after a bright day. Now King Hrolf's men see coming out of King Hjorvard's ranks a monstrous boar. It looked no smaller than a three-year-old ox and was wolf-grey in colour, and an arrow flew from each of its bristles, and it went through the king's retainers like nothing on earth, felling them by the dozen.

Bodvar Bjarki ploughed into them now, hacking two handed, his only thought to do as much damage as he could before he fell. And now they fall in heaps before him, one on top of another, and both his arms are bloodied to the shoulder, and he felled so many, the dead were stacked all about him. He stormed on as if he was insane. But however many men he and Hrolf's other champions kill, from the army of Hjorvard and Skuld - it's incredible but - their numbers aren't a bit diminished, and it's as if the champions are doing nothing, and they can't recall encountering anything so strange before.

Bodvar said, "Vast is the host of Skuld, and I suspect now that the dead move here and rise up again and fight against us, and it won't be easy to fight with zombies, and however many limbs may be cloven, and shields shivered, helm and hauberk hacked apart, and however many chiefs we cut down, these dead ones are the grimmest to contend with, and we haven't the power to combat this, but where is that champion of King Hrolf, who most questioned my courage and kept challenging me to come out, till I answered him? I don't see him now, and I'm not one to criticise people."

Then said Hjalti, "You speak true, you are no slanderer. Here stands that man, Hjalti by name, and now I have some work at hand, and it's not far between us, and I'm in need of gallant lads, for all my armour is hewn away, foster-brother, although I reckon I'm bat-

ting all out, and now I'm not avenging all my blows, but this is no time to hold back, if we're going to stay in Valhall this evening, and we've certainly not seen the like of this before, though we've had enough warnings of what's now come."

Bodvar Bjarki said, "Harken to what I say: I have fought in twelve pitched battles, my daring never questioned, and never gave way to a berserk. I urged King Hrolf to visit King Adils, and we met a trick or two there, but that was nothing compared to this plight, and now there is something weighing down on my heart and I am not so eager to fight as before. I met King Hjorvard earlier, in the first encounter, and we came at one another, and neither of us cast insults at the other. We clashed with weapons for a while. He gave me a blow, which tasted to me of death, but I hewed off an arm and a leg, and landed another blow on his shoulder and sliced down through his side and back, but he reacted with not so much as a sigh, but just seemed so sleep for a bit, but I thought he was dead, and there can't be many like him, and afterwards he fought not a wit feebler than before, and I couldn't say what keeps him going. Here have many men assembled against us, nobles and commoners, who press from all sides, so that shields can hardly hold them back, but I can't spot Odin here yet. I have a strong suspicion he'll be lurking round here somewhere, dirty treacherous devil that he is, and if anyone could point him out to me, I'd squeeze him like any other miserable measly little mouse, and I'll have some none too reverent sport with that nasty venomous creature, if I get a hold of him, and who wouldn't have hate in his heart, if he saw his liege lord treated as we see ours now?"

Hjalti said, "It is not easy to bend fate, nor to stand against nature."
And with that their talk was done.

52. The Fall of King Hrolf and his Champions

King Hrolf defended himself well and warriorlike and with courage unrivalled in the tales of men. They pressed him hard, and he was encircled by elite troops of Skuld and King Hjorvard. Skuld has now come into the battle and wildly eggs on her rabble to attack King Hrolf, for she sees that the champions are not too near him, and this is what sorely grieved Bodvar Bjarki, that he was not able to help his lord, and the other champions felt this too, for they were now as ready to die with him as they had been to live with him, when they were in the bloom of their youth. Now the king's bodyguard of retainers was fallen, and not one remained standing, and most of the champions were mortally wounded, and this was to be expected.

Master Galterus said that human strength cannot withstand such fiendish power, unless with the strength of God to aid them, "and one thing stood between you and victory, King Hrolf, that you had not the knowledge of your Maker."

There came on now such a storm of spells that the champions began to fall, one on top of the other, and King Hrolf found himself outside the shield-wall and was near enough laid low with weariness. No need to spin it out with words: there fell King Hrolf and all his champions with good glory.

But what a slaughter they dealt out there, words cannot describe it. There fell King Hrolf and all his men, but for a few traitors who lived on with Skuld. In this way she took the lands of King Hrolf under her command and governed them, badly and for a short time. And Elk-Frodi avenged his brother Bodvar Bjarki, just as he promised him, as was told in Frodi's Thread, together with Thorir Hounds-foot. And they received a mighty force from Sweden from Queen Yrsa, and it is said that Vogg was the commander of them. The whole host sailed for Denmark and came on Queen Skuld unawares. They seized her so she wasn't able to bring any spells to bear, and all her rabble they killed, and tortured her in various ways, and the lands came back under the rule of King Hrolf's daughters, then everyone sailed back to their own homes.

A mound was made for King Hrolf and the sword Skofnung laid beside him, and a mound for each champion, with their weapons too.

And here ends the saga of King Hrolf Kraki and his champions.

The Chronicle of the Kings of Lejre (Chronicon Lethrense)

Preserved with the fourteenth century Latin *Annals of Lund* is an earlier record of Danish history, the Chronicle of the Kings of Lejre, of which this is an extract. *The Chronicle of the Kings of Lejre* was composed in the second half of the twelfth century. In contrast to Saxo's *Gesta Danorum* (c.1200), the Chronicle is terse, sometimes to the point of baffling, though it does include some curiosities not in Saxo, such as the Dog King of Denmark.

The translation here is based on the selection in Gordon & Taylor's *An Introduction to Old Norse*, which deals with Rolf Krage (= Hrolf Kraki), his immediate predecessors and successors, including the original Prince Hamlet (Ambløthe), and Offe (called Offa in Old English).

References to Saxo are to Oliver Elton's 1905 translation: "The Danish History, Books I - IX" - online at <http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/OMACL/DanishHistory/>

Then Haldan was king. He promptly killed his brothers Ro and Skat, and their friends, and died peacefully in his bed. Haldan had two sons: one was called Ro - though some say that he was called Haldan - and the other was called Helghe. They split the kingdom between them so that Ro got all the firm land and Helghe all the water. At that time, there was a market town in Zealand near Høgebjerg, called Høkekøpinge, and because it was a long way from the beach, King Ro made a market town near Ysefiorth, and called it Roskilde, Ro's spring, after himself. ¹

One time, Helghe came to Halland² and lay with Thore, the daughter of Ro's farmer, and had a daughter with her, called Yrse. Another time he took his own daughter without knowing it, and had a son called Rolf Krage. King Ro was buried in Lejre. Helghe killed the

king of the Wends in battle and defeated Hodbrod and won the whole of Denmark. Then, out of shame for having his daughter, he fled to the east and killed himself there.

Then King Hakon of Sweden sent the Danes a small dog for a king, with the warning that whoever was the first to say that it was dead would lose their life³. One day as Dog sat at table, and the hounds were scrapping on the floor, he sprang from the table and they tore him to death. And no-one dared tell King Hakon that. Then the giant Lee of Lee's Isle⁴ told his herdsman Snio⁵ to get himself the kingdom from King Hakon. So king Hakon asked Snio the news. Snio answered, "The bees are all dazed in Denmark."

Then King Hakon said, "Where did you sleep the night?"

Snio answered the king, "There where the sheep ate the wolves."

"How so?"

"Because the wolf was boiled and given to the sheep to drink as a cure."

"Where did you sleep the next night?"

"Where the wolf ate the cart and the horses ran off."

"How could that be?"

"Because the wolves ate the beaver-thrall, who had the wood between his legs; and the beavers who drew him, they ran away."⁶

"Where did you sleep the third night?" said the king.

Snio answered, "Where the mice ate the axe but not the haft."

"How so?"

"Because children made an axe of white cheese. The mice ate that, but not the stick the haft was made of."

Then the king asked about the news.

Then Snio answered, "The bees are all dazed."

"Then Dog is dead!"

"You said it, not me," said Snio, and so he was king in Denmark - a twisted and excessively harsh judge, vicious too, who acquired goods by dishonest means, and he oppressed everyone very much. One man he oppressed was called Roth. He stood up to him. Out of malice, the king sent him to Lee the giant to ask about his death⁷. So Roth delivered the king's greetings to Lee the giant and told him three true sayings: one, that he never saw thicker walls on a house than on Lee's; second, that he never saw a man with so many heads; and third, that if he got away from there, he would never long to be back. And so he saved his life. Then the giant Lee sent the king two gloves, and so when he presided over the assembly in Jutland and he pulled on the gloves, lice ate him to death.

Then Helghe's son, Rolf Krage, was king. He was a grand man in body and mind, and gave so gladly that that no-one asked him twice for anything. There was count in Skaane, and he was German, and was called Hartwar⁸. He paid tribute to Rolf. He married Rolf's sister against his will; but some say he gave her to him along with Sweden. One time, Hartwar came to Zealand with a great army, and bade Rolf - who was then staying at Lejre - to take his tribute, and so Hartwar killed Rolf and all his men except one; he was called Wigge, and he ran him through that same day with the same sword he was going to do him homage with. Hartwar was king from dawn till nine in the morning; his queen was called Skulda⁹. Some say that Ake, Hauborth's brother, killed Hartwar, and so became king.

Then Hodbrod's son Hother was king, the son of Hadding's daughter, since he was the nearest heir. He was king of Saxland. He killed Othen's son, Balder, in battle, and pursued Othen and Thor and their companions. They were seen as gods, even though they weren't. Later he was killed in battle by Othen's son Both¹⁰.

Then his son, Rorik Slengeborre, also called Rake, was king¹¹. He won Curland, Wendland and Sweden; they paid him tribute. He set up Orwendel and Feng as rulers in Jutland. The king gave Orwendel his sister, for the good work he'd done. With her he had a son called Amblothe¹². Then Feng killed Orwendel out of envy and took his woman to wife. The Amblothe devised a plan to save his life, and acted the fool. Then Feng was wary of Ambothe and sent him to the king of Britain with two of his servants and a letter saying Amblothe should be put to death. He scraped it off¹³ while they slept and wrote saying that the two servants should be hanged and Amblothe get the king's daughter; and that's what happened. A year to the day, as Feng drank to the memory of Amblothe, he came to Denmark and killed Feng, his father's murderer, and burned all Feng's men in a tent, and so was king of Jutland. Then he went back to Britain and killed his father-in-law who wanted to avenge Feng's death. Then he took the queen of Scotland to wife. As soon as he came home, he was killed in battle.

After Rorik Rake, his son, Wighlek was king. Nanna was the name of his queen. He had peace and calm in his days, and died in bed.

Then Wermund, his son, was king. He had good peace at first, but in his old age he was blind and his son Offe was so slow and dim that he didn't seem cut out to be a king¹⁴. Then the king of Saxland's son threatened to make himself king of Denmark, unless Wermund would fight a duel with him. Then Offe offered to go to fight against two Germans, which was his choice - previously, one German had fought against two Danes¹⁵. Then the king of Saxland's son went with a strong fighter to face Offe, and he killed them both, and after that Offe the Strong was king in Saxland and in Denmark.

Notes

1. Not a true etymology. The name is first recorded as Hröiskelda, in a poem of c. 1050 (MS. 13th century), thus Hroir's Spring, rather than Hroar's/Ro's. For a fuller version of these events and the subsequent career of Rolf, see Saxo, Book II.

2. Låland, according to the Annals of Lund and other sources, a Danish island.

3. The Swedish king is Athisl in the Annals of Lund, corresponding to Icelandic Aðils, Old English Eadgils. For other dog-king tales, see The Saga of Hakon the Good (*Hákons saga ins góða*) 13, and Saxo, Book VII.

4. The island of Læsø lies off the north-east coast of Jutland. Old Danish Læ (Ler in Saxo, where he is one of Helghe's generals) = Icelandic Hlér, also called Ægir, the giant king of the sea. See Skáldskaparmál 1 and 23. In the saga Of Fornjot & His Kin (*Frá Fornjóti ok hans ættmönnum*) 1, Hler is the son of Fornjot; his three brothers each rule over a different element, Hler's being the sea. His name is the basis of many marine kennings.

5. Snio's reign is in Saxo, Book VIII. Here he is the son of Siward, and succeeded in turn by his son Biorn. While Saxo doesn't echo the Chronicle's disapproval, he does describe a time of want in Denmark. Snio tries to counteract the grain shortage by banning beer, on pain of death, but is eventually persuaded to reverse this law, in the face of popular resistance.

6. According to the Annals of Lund: "He saw three beavers collecting wood, one of whom, who was called the servant, or "beaver-thrall", collapsed on the ground with his legs stuck out. The other beavers placed the wood between his legs and walked in front, dragging him along like oxen."

7. In the Annals of Lund, he is to ask the giant by what death King Snio will die. Snio hopes that Roth (Röth 'red') will be killed. Lee refuses to answer unless Roth tells him three true things (this triad motif is common in Saxo).

8. Properly Hiarwarth, as in the Annals of Lund.

9. Latinised form of Skuld.

10. Both = Bous in Saxo = ODan. bóe, Olc. búi. The name was sometimes Latinised as Boethius, hence Both.

11. Rørik Slængeborræ, a corruption of Slænganbøghe (= Old Icelandic Hrærekr slöngvanbaugi) 'ring-slinger', in other words "very generous with giving rings", see Saxo, Book III. Since rake 'the proud' can also mean 'dog', this may have occasioned the dog-king legends.

12. Ambløthæ = Shakespere's Hamlet, see Saxo, Books III & IV, where he is named Amleth, and his mother Gerutha. Saxo's Amleth is killed fighting Wighlek.

13. Obviously a message carved in wood, as in Saxo, who adds that this was "a kind of writing material frequent in old times." Many and diversely-intended runic messages have been discovered on strips of bark, from Bergen for example, although the wide-spread use of runes in personal communication is attested rather for the medieval period, 12th to 14th centuries, than earlier.

14. See Saxo, Book IV, where he is called Uffe, and the Old English poem Widsith, where he is Offa, and his foes Myrgings or Sweaves.

15. In Saxo, Uffe explains his decision to fight two opponents, saying that this will remove the shame of an earlier incident in which a certain King Athisl of Sweden was killed by two Danes, Ket and Wig, who thereby broke the terms of the duel. It had become a "standing reproach to the Danes."