



The Settlers, An Axe of Iron Novel

Excerpt, Chapter 3:

Halfdan closed his eyes briefly as the ship sailed from the bay, threw his head back, and took a deep draft of the heavy salt air. Scattered clouds scudded under a brilliant blue sky. His eyes swept the shoreline of the rocky headland and the open sea beyond.

“Head north, Gorm!” Halfdan shouted. He pointed with an outstretched arm out into the open sea.

The ship took the heavy swells full on the bow as Gorm turned her to a northerly heading to gain sea room from the bay’s western headland where it jutted into the strait. Windblown spray and spume drenched Halfdan and those near him in the bows as the ship pounded into the head sea.

“By Thor, it is rough out here!” Halfdan grinned and wiped the spray from his face.

“Here, I brought you a dry vest.” Thora lurched up onto the bow platform. She grabbed the ship’s rail for support.

“Thanks.” Halfdan made eye contact with her as he shrugged out of his wet vest and handed it to her.

She nodded and turned to the other men with him.

“We have more dry clothing if the rest of you want to change.” There were no takers, so she made her way aft, hand-over-hand along the rail to maintain her balance.

Two men watched her every move until she dropped from sight behind the foot of the sail.

“Did you see her nipples sticking out? By the gods I could use some of that,” Helge said to the other man.

“Go right ahead. You can have my share of her. I have had enough of her sharp tongue,” Vilhjalm said.

“It might be worth an occasional tongue-lashing.” Helge grinned at his companion.

“Not to me. Moreover, it will be a continuous tongue-lashing, not an occasional one. She will also make you clean-up before you can have any. It is not worth the trouble.”

“I do not blame her for that, my friend. You smell a little gamey to me.”

The two men laughed together and returned to their duties as Halfdan ordered a course change and the ship shouldered her way around to a westerly course, coming up close hauled on the steerboard tack.

“Come on, Vilhjalm.” Helge grabbed the man’s upper arm. “Halfdan will want the sail boomed out, so let us be about it.”

As the ship steadied on the steerboard tack, the two men helped boom the steerboard foot of the sail outboard and then sheeted the port foot tightly inboard. Spars, or boom poles, of various lengths for different angles secured one bottom corner of the loose-footed sail and a socket cut in the mast step held the other end. The crew sheeted in the loose corner and trimmed the sail to the wind. The new angle at the sail foot allowed the ship to sail close to the eye-of-the-wind on either upwind tack.

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The sea mist cleared and the headland fell astern.

“Two sails, broad on the steerboard beam!” Gauk hailed from the masthead.

Halfdan’s eyes swept the distant horizon. He saw no sign of them from the deck. “Where away?”

“There!” Gauk pointed into the distance, back over the ship’s steerboard side.

Halfdan leaped up on the rail, both hands held tight to the forestay while his eyes swept the misty

distance. He strained to pierce the mist and finally caught a flash of sail as one of the ships crested a swell. “I have them in sight!” He jumped down from his perch.

Both were still a long distance away and making slow progress to the west, close-hauled as they were in the stiff west-northwest wind. Tostig’s small boat must be having a rough time in these boisterous seas, Halfdan mused.

Halfdan looked for Snorri’s boat. He caught sight of the small square of sail some distance ahead and inshore of his position. Conditions would be somewhat better than offshore due to the dampening effect of the back eddies from the surf. The boat was almost invisible in the mist created by the surf. It appeared briefly when it crested a swell and quickly disappeared as it swooped into the next trough.

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Halfdan stood on the foredeck. He tilted his head back and savored the last swallow of cold broth from the drinking horn. He looked aft to study the trim of the sail as it vibrated like a live thing in the wind. The ship alternately soared and plunged under him. “Pull the port sheet in tighter, the sail luffs! Let her fall off a little, Gorm, and get help at the tiller!” He watched the helmsman struggle to hold the ship’s head as close to the wind as possible. Conditions today in the open sea required the concerted efforts of two men at the tiller bar to hold the course so close to the eye-of-the-wind. The slight course change stopped the flutter of the sail, and it hardened with a full grip on the wind.

The ships of Athils and Gudrod, shrouded in the sea mist, were on their own as Snorri changed course for the narrow entrance to his fjord.

Halfdan tossed the empty drinking horn in the direction of a group of women clustered aft of the mast and looked aloft to the masthead. He cupped his hands and shouted at the lookout perched atop the yard with his legs wrapped around the vibrating mast. “Hold on, Gauk! We are going to run into the fjord!”

Gauk gave Halfdan his wide, gap-toothed grin and waved that he understood. He seemed unaffected by the lively antics of the plunging ship. Heeled over as she was, the top of the mast hung out over the water beyond the side of the ship. Had Gauk fallen from his lofty perch into the sea he would have drowned. Like the rest of them, he could not swim. No matter, the icy water would suck the life from his body in a short

time anyway. To preclude a fatal fall, lookouts fashioned a safety line or harness that allowed them the free use of their hands. Gauk had fashioned his harness from a piece of old sail. It fit him loosely like a vest and included a stout walrus hide rope to loop round the mast. Oftentimes he could be seen relaxed against his harness; arms crossed comfortably over the safety lines as his eyes swept the sea.

Halfdan smiled and shook his head at the man's nonchalant acceptance of danger. He cupped his hands to shout the course change to the helmsmen. "Port full! Follow Snorri into the fjord entrance." He grabbed at the forestay to maintain his own balance and dignity as the ship plunged into a swell.

The helmsmen brought Steed of the Sea around to port. The course change made steering easier as the hull came up level and the ship surged downwind.

"Thanks for the help, Thorgill," Gorm said to the big man. Thorgill nodded and walked forward to help reset the sail to the new course.

Passengers and crew forward of the mast, warned of the turn to port, ducked as the sail's foot slashed out on the opposite side of the mast as it filled with wind. The crew stowed the booming spar and sheeted the sail foot and top-yard home to trim both to the downwind course.

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Free to run now, the four ships, still in line astern, quickly passed Snorri and his crew. Foam creamed from their plunging bows as they surged toward the fjord entrance.

"Watch the rocks on the east side of the entrance! The deepest channel is on the west side next to the highest cliff!" Snorri shouted at Halfdan, as the great ship surged by the small boat.

Halfdan waved in acknowledgement. He grinned from ear to ear as several of those aboard shouted and whooped at the sheer exhilaration of the ride as the ship surfed rapidly toward the entrance of the fjord. Sheer cliffs marked both sides of the narrow entrance, but there was ample room to maneuver.

As boisterous as the wind and sea were on the outside, conditions past the entrance were exactly the opposite. The sail flapped and banged in the variable wind and the ship slowed as if grasped in the hand of a giant. The wind continued to decrease to a light breeze and the ship moved slowly into the fjord.

"Sheet home the sail, she luffs!" Halfdan called. Crewmembers re-trimmed the sheet lines to take

advantage of what wind remained. Once through the entrance, the fjord opened into a wide bay. It continued south far enough that features of the shoreline were indistinct in the distance.

Everyone aboard lined both rails as they gazed at the beauty of the fjord that unfolded before them.

“This will be a good place for us to restock and rest the people.” Helge stepped up on the bow platform beside Halfdan. “Snorri found the only pebble beach in this fjord. The rest of the shoreline appears to be jagged rocks.”

“Yes. This is a land of rolling hills, with large, lichen-covered rocks and low brush as far as the eye can see. There appears to be little forage grass among the lichen but the livestock will make do. The narrow fjord entrance will protect us from the north wind and that is a good thing.” Halfdan gestured inland. “Did you see the reindeer herd before that ridge blocked them from view?”

“No. I missed them. The sail needed attention about then. After the camp is set up we can go on a hunt.” The two men glanced at each other, the beginnings of a smile on their faces.

“I will look forward to that, Helge.”

“Consider it done then.”

They lapsed into silence as a flurry of activity off the steerboard bow got their attention.

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Sunning seals dove into the water or lunged in their comical gait across a well-worn, rocky ledge some distance from the fjord entrance as the intruders disturbed their slumber.

“Look at them. There must be a hundred seals.” Gorm shouted and gestured in their direction.

The dogs began barking and running about before many of the people lining the port rail saw the seals. Their excited barking soon had everyone aboard laughing at their antics and coaxing them on.

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Halfdan caught sight of the beach Snorri had described, along the west shore of the fjord and beside a river. He turned to his crew. “Loose the sheets and halyards!”

Crewmembers loosed the halyards and sheets, the sail slid down the mast, helped along by the weight of the top-yard and the lookout still perched on top. They swung the yard around to trim it fore and aft and

lowered it onto its t-support aft of the mast. An ornately carved prop fit into a hole in the mast step and secured the other end. The furled sail, gathered around the yard and secured with the reefing point lines, was shipshape and out of the way. During this frantic bustle, the ship gradually lost way.

Halfdan waited until his men had the sail secured and out of the way before giving the order. “Out sweeps!”

Idle passengers congregated amidships while the crewmembers deployed the sweeps. Halfdan’s ship carried 12-sweeps to the side.

“Steer for the beach to the left of the river mouth, Gorm.” Halfdan guided the ships progress with hand signals as they made the straight-in approach to the beach. The bottom gradually shelved to the shoreline and a beach covered with small smooth stones provided the safe bottom conditions necessary to beach the ships.

“Hold the stroke! Toss your sweeps!” Halfdan called. The oarsmen stopped rowing, withdrew the sweeps, and held them in an upright position, waiting for orders to stow them.

The ship’s momentum carried her forward slowly as the way went off. She rose up the slope of the bottom and ground to a halt on the beach. Just before the keel contacted the bottom, the helmsman pulled the leather strap loose from its slot and the steerboard pivoted up out of the way.

“Stow the sweeps and secure the ship.” Halfdan called. He leaped from the upswept bow onto dry ground, followed by others of the crew as they secured the ship beam-to the beach. Conditions near the river’s mouth proved ideal for their purposes and Halfdan waved the other three ships in.

All three nosed into the beach beside Halfdan’s ship, far enough apart so they could be swung beam-to the beach to unload.

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Gudbjartur arrived from Sweyn’s ship in time to organize a large group of men to rig gangplanks from each ship’s side to the beach, making movements back and forth safer and easier. Cross cleats on each gangplank ensured secure footing and the planks, all part of the ships loose decking and walkways, came in random lengths to accommodate all the anticipated uses.

With the ships secured at bow and stern, every unemployed person, including older children, pitched in to unload the ships' deck cargo. There were many round trips before the decks were clear of supplies and equipment.

"Thorgill!" Gudbjartur motioned the man on board ship down to the beach with a wave of his arm. "While the cargo is being offloaded walk inland a ways and check the forage situation, then report back to me."

"Asgrim comes, Gudbj." Thorgill pointed inland to a figure winding his way through the jumble of rocks and low brush. "He looks for bog-iron and he will know."

Gudbjartur nodded, and walked to meet Asgrim. "Did you find any iron?" Gudbjartur asked as he glanced in the bucket the man carried.

"A few lumps. About half a bucket I guess." The smithy examined the contents of his bucket. "Haakon and Sigmund are still looking. Maybe they will have more luck. There are so many rocks here it is hard to get the sod loose to look for bog-iron lumps among the roots."

"That is what I want to talk to you about. How is the forage out there?"

"Sparse. The goats and sheep will like the thick brush but there is not much grass for the horses and cattle. Thick lichen covers the rocks and they can eat that after the grass is gone."

"Are you and Haakon going to build a forge here?"

"Aye, a small combination forge, and smelter." The smithy answered. "Or maybe just a forge. It depends on whether Haakon and Sigmund find more iron than I did."

Both men faced toward the beached ships while they talked. Thorgill, one of many people who unloaded the ship, walked down the gangplank at that moment, burdened with food bags on each shoulder. Gudbjartur nodded to Asgrim and intercepted Thorgill. As the man dropped his load on a pile of food bags on the beach, he gave his orders. "After the decks are clear, you supervise careening the ship to unload the livestock. Get the horses off first, then the cattle and the rest of the livestock. Asgrim told me the grass is sparse. There is enough other forage for the time we will be here. I will be with Halfdan to pick the perimeter guards."

“All right, Gudbj. Do you want the ships moored and secured bow-to the beach when we get them unloaded?” Thorgill asked.

“Yes. I will return before you get to that. If I am delayed you know what to do.”

Thorgill nodded his assent and walked back up the gangplank. Gudbjartur glanced over the beach area, his mind occupied with the myriad details of the encampment: unloading the ships, seeing to the livestock, and the assignment of guards for security. He went to look for Halfdan.

As equipment and supplies were unloaded, Gudbjartur handpicked the men to guard the encampment. He and Halfdan spoke to them before they took up their positions.

“You all know we have much work to do before we sail from this place.” Halfdan said. “Your vigilance is the only means we have to ensure the safety of everyone and allow them to perform their tasks without having to constantly look over their shoulders. We have all seen the great white Polar bears in the distance. There are plenty of seals for them to hunt, so they are not hungry. I do not need to tell you how dangerous they are. Stay vigilant.”

“I want the guard to change three times from sunup to sunup.” Gudbjartur looked at each of the eighteen men in turn. “There will be six of you on guard at a time and you are responsible for your own relief. Work that part out among yourselves, just so you get the job done. You all know what must be done and how to do it.”

“If you are not asleep or on guard I know you will help whoever needs help.” Halfdan added.

“Take a dog with you,” Gudbjartur said, as the first six men began to gather food, water, and weapons. He remained until the men moved inland to a point just beyond effective arrow range and formed a semi-circular security perimeter from the shoreline around the encampment.

Each guard led a tethered dog, and carried either bows and arrows or heavy spears.

Cold Coffee/Book Marketing Global Network 5 Star Review

The Viking ship called ‘Steed of the Sea’ sailing in the cold dark waters in the foreground of tall glaciers under a foreboding sky on the cover is just the beginning.

Whether you sat under the history lessons of Columbus discovering America or are more adventurous in your approach to history and have a yearning to know who was here when Columbus arrived and where did they come from, 'The Settlers' is a tale that should be on a mandatory reading list in all schools in order to provoke thought and discussion on native North America in the latter half of the tenth century. Scholars can't agree but this tale offers a new perspective about America's indigenous people, how they viewed explorers, handled settlers and coexisted on a bountiful body of land with all its beauty and treacherous environment.

It is important to read the 'Author's Note', 'Historical Perspective' and the 'Glossary Of Norse Terms' provided by the author to educate the reader. In the Author's Note you will meet Gudbjartur Einarsson who is an Icelander, a Northman or Norseman who is second in command under Halfdan Ingolfsson. Chapter one unfolds six wooden ships carrying 163 Greenlanders and 152 Icelanders (including men, women and children) set sail with horses, cows, pigs, chickens, dogs, cats, equipment (tents and parts to horse drawn carts) and supplies to explore areas of what they call Vinland (North America).

Exhaustive research, realistic characters garbed in functional layers residing in a true to life story line that allows the reader to experience the sea voyage and land exploration with exquisite writing that creates a sense of being present in the story even when this first book in 'An Axe Of Iron Novel' series has been closed on a night stand.

Here's a few of my favorite quotes from the book:

"He whistled tunelessly to himself, the notes blown away on the wind. His eyes darted over the sea ahead and aloft at the trim of the sail and rigging. The heart of the ship pulsed through the soles of his feet, vibrated up through the steering oar and the palms of his hands, an inaudible hum that told him all was well in his world."

"Wind driven rain stung exposed skin like bees protecting their hive."

"Several kettles of whale blubber boiled over individual fires on the beach to render the valuable oil. The thick, rich oil, skimmed of the connective tissue – the crunchy fried meat and curled pieces of skin were a delicacy-had many uses. It was a valuable food source, preservative, and lamp fuel."

After the journey across treacherous seas land was a welcome sight with all of its wild game like "Grunting herds of Reindeer" not to mention the predators like wolves and bears. Women and children scour rocky cliffs for seabird eggs to add to their food supply giving the kids some stress relieving egg throwing activity.

Unforeseen and inevitable injuries, herbal treatments, Viking burial ceremony amidst deep held Christian beliefs.

Attraction and a "bed of soft, furry skins nestled in the scrub brush, well protected from the north wind'. Passion, "eyes smoldered with lust" hands explore, tongues probe, "locked bodies swayed in the throes of passion".

Hunting and cooking for survival, sewing for protective covering, animal pelts and jewelry making for trade commodity. The best and the worst of human nature revealed in a hostile new world.

Now heading into the reading of 'Confrontation: An Axe Of Iron Novel' book two of the series gives clarity as to the sequence of history, characters and events that readers should follow in order to understand and digest

the fiction history which is laid out in great detail, humanity and historical correlation regarding much debated events.

I endorse The Settlers - An Axe of Iron Novel book one in the fictional historical accounting of exploration and settlement of Vinland (North America). Review by Cold Coffee/Book Marketing Global Network.

About The Author

J. A. Hunsinger is an Author, Publisher, Amateur Archaeologist and Historian. His [Axe of Iron Series](#) Details The Settlement Of A Large Group Of Norsemen On The North American Continent Beginning In 1008 AD.

J. A. Hunsinger's Books Include Axe Of Iron: [The Settlers](#), [Confrontation](#) and [Assimilation](#).

J. A. Hunsinger lives in Colorado, USA, with his wife Phyllis. He writes and promotes full-time. His three book trilogy Axe of Iron Series can be purchased at [Vinland Publishing](#). His books are also available from [Amazon](#).

Although he has long been a writer, much of his adult life has been associated with commercial aviation, both in and out of the cockpit. As an Engineering Technical Writer for Honeywell Commercial Flight Systems Group, Phoenix, AZ, he authored two comprehensive pilots' manuals on aircraft computer guidance systems and several supplemental aircraft radar manuals. His manuals have been published and distributed worldwide to airline operators by Honeywell Engineering, Phoenix, AZ. His first published work for the general public, Flight Into Danger, appeared in Flying Magazine, (August 2002). Many of his articles have been featured in other periodicals and websites or are featured on his blog.

After his flying career ended on his 60th birthday, he found himself with time to continue his writing; this first novel was actually begun more than twenty years ago. He attended many writing classes and seminars, but couldn't sustain a head of steam as a writer. All of that changed abruptly in 2004, when he remarried. Phyllis provided the necessary push and as a result he treated writing as work, which it most certainly is.

Writing is a learned craft. In order to learn to write, you must write. Eventually the classes must be set aside; set a daily work schedule and stick to it. That is not to say you should stop taking classes altogether; learning is a lifetime experience. Sooner or later though, you must take the plunge and go at it on your own.

Have a story to tell, one that you like. Then sit down and get busy. Have your work professionally edited: rewrite, edit, rewrite, until you've gotten it as good as it can be.

That's all there is to being a writer.

J. A. Hunsinger's Websites:

<http://www.vinlandpublishing.com/>
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