

## **Axe of Iron – The Settlers Book Reviews**

“A World of Adventure and Exploration!

Discover a world of adventure and exploration in "Axe of Iron: The Settlers" by J. A. Hunsinger.

Long before Christopher Columbus set sail, Northmen (also known as Vikings), settled in North America. In this first book of a planned series, Halfdan Ingolfsson, Gudbjartur Einarsson and their band seek a new home where they can live and prosper. Hoping to avoid the mistakes of those who traveled before them, Halfdan and Gudbjartur decide not to journey to their original destination, but to establish a home where there is plentiful game to hunt, fish to capture, and a bounty of natural resources. Earlier expeditions have been thwarted by tense relations with the Skraelings (Native Americans). As their leaders, Halfdan and his trusted advisor Gudbjartur, must make sure that all goes smoothly with the Skraelings, while also resolving conflicts among their own people. Can this new colony survive against such odds?

Having read nothing about Northmen since high school, I was excited to dig into J.A. Hunsinger's "Axe of Iron: The Settlers". In this thoroughly researched novel, Hunsinger takes the reader on an adventure-filled journey back to a time when ships ruled the world. The author's passion for this subject and his extensive knowledge of Norse history are evident from the very first page. The reader is swept up into Halfdan and Gudbjartur's exploration, the establishment of new homes, and the day-to-day struggles of the new colony. Gaining insight into the customs and culture of the Northmen, the reader is also rewarded with an exciting adventure.

In addition to Halfdan and Gudbjartur, the author has created a cast of multi-dimensional characters; men and women whose struggles truly make this story all that it is. Perhaps the most complex is Frida, who is happy to cause trouble for trouble's sake, yet is extremely useful in communicating with the natives and happily settles into a life no one might expect.

At times the dialogue communicates details that the characters should already have been aware of, but this does not affect the pace of the story. And while the graphic description of sexual relations might not be everyone's cup of tea, these moments are not the center of the story and are few and far between.

This hand-drawn cover is stunning up close, and was one of the reasons I wanted to review the book.

Hunsinger includes an historical perspective at the beginning and a glossary of terms at the end--which adds a great deal to the wealth of knowledge to be gained--and also an excerpt from the next book in this series, "Confrontation".

Historical fiction fans, history lovers, and those interested in Norse history may want to start their journey with "Axe of Iron: The Settlers".

Review by Cheryl C. Malandrinos "johnnycat15" (Western Mass) May 28, 2009

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**“Hunsinger sings a legendary saga!**

A full millennium before the current time and half that period before Columbus sailed for North America, Norsemen had established settlements on that continent, then vanished. "Axe of Iron; The Settlers," by J.A. Hunsinger, is the first of six historical novels that tell the story of one such band that ventured forth from Greenland and settled in the southern regions of what is now Hudson Bay in Canada.

This band has left the Norse settlements of Iceland and Greenland because the climate and soil of those lands were far too harsh and marginal to support their burgeoning population, as were those of their homelands in Scandinavia. Their quest initially follows the paths of the well-known Tenth Century explorers, Eric the Red and Leif Ericsson, but bad weather forces them to alter their course into previously unexplored lands. Their exploration leads them to what appears to be a nearly ideal location on the coast of modern day James Bay and they settle into the grueling work to establish their settlement and to prepare for the harsh winter ahead.

Knowing fully well that earlier expeditions had suffered from conflicts with the native tribes of the coastal regions, the leader of this band determines that they might better succeed by establishing respectful and cooperative trading relationships with these natives than to attempt naked conquest. Conflict inevitably arises and the settlers must maintain constant vigilance against attack. Domestic matters make things even worse due to a need for more marriageable women in what is mostly a male warrior band.

Will this colony endure its birth pangs and survive to grow and prosper? Can these pioneers adapt to the hardships of their new life?

Author Hunsinger weaves his story line into a magnificently researched and crafted literary work that takes us into the lives of these Medieval Norse, whose culture has brought them to the leading edge of Iron Age Technology. His writing paints the details of their skills as sailors and watermen, farmers and trades people. A prime example of their ability to convert raw materials into essential products is their blacksmithing. Using bog iron from the muskeg swamps and charcoal from the forests, they are able to manufacture steel for weapons, armor and tools. This technological advantage along with their warrior skills might balance the numerical inferiority they suffer against the native peoples.

The saga of these Norse lasts for over four hundred years and ends in the mystery of their disappearance. Throughout "The Settlers," Hunsinger strives in historical fiction to

document their struggle for survival. In doing so, he draws striking parallels with our present world. It is obvious that the volume of detailed onsite research Mr. Hunsinger has invested in this project far outweighs that of this volume and of those to follow.

I have been personally interested in the factual and legendary tale of the Norse in America for many years and I believe this author may be the first to do it justice. This first volume has hooked me on this series and I eagerly await the continuation.

Review by John R. Ulbinsky, President Caddis Publishing, Colorado Springs, 2009  
The Target: Love, Death and Airline Deregulation  
May 4, 2009

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**“A smashing read!**

The year is 1008. A group of Northmen led by Halfdan Ingolfsson and accompanied by his second in command, Gudbjartur Einarsoon. Together they and their group leave their homes in Greenland and set out for the undiscovered, unpopulated land of Vinland. A place that will later be known as North America. Along the way, Halfdan and the rest of the Northmen come in contact with a group of people who call themselves Thalmiut of The People of the Deer. Though communication between the two civilizations is difficult at first, they eventually figure out a way to get along with each other. They teach each other how they live and survive. Will the Northmen be able to apply this new found knowledge and survive in this new land or will they give up and head back to Greenland?

Let me first start off by saying that when I read the summary for this book I thought it was interesting but still had my concerns about whether I would really like it. I can say with one hundred percent total satisfaction that I truly enjoyed *Axe of Iron: The Settlers*. It is not often that I come across a book that will amaze and surprise me in a good way but when it does happen I love those moments. I read and finished this book over the weekend. Mr. Hunsinger is a wonderful and talented author. He really knows how to tell a good story. It was like I could experience everything from the swaying of the ships to the hard labor of cutting up and preparing meat for the winter months to come. So my last words to you the reader is to pick your self up a copy of this book today and you will see what I am talking about.

Reviewed by Cheryl K (CO) April 27, 2009

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**“What a great novel!**

One of the fun parts of a well-written historical novel is that in addition to being swept away to another place and time, the reader actually picks up some historical knowledge about a culture or time period that might otherwise have gone unnoticed.

J.A. Hunsinger's novel, *Axe of Iron: The Settlers*, is one of those enjoyable novels that teaches much as it entertains. This is the story of the Northmen (often erroneously referred to as Vikings) who settled on the coast of North America more than 500 years before Columbus "discovered" the Americas.

Hunsinger's knowledge of Norse history is extensive and the novel is rich in details describing the Northmen's customs and culture. Thankfully, however, this does not bog down the actual story. The characters are strong and three-dimensional: the struggles of leader Halfdan Ingolfsson are engrossing as he and his fellow settlers strive to carve a new life for themselves in this new and hostile land.

Despite a life-long obsession with history, I managed to miss out on this culture and time frame. Thanks to Hunsinger, I'm now ready to strike out and settle some strange land (or at the very least start reading more Norse history).

Reviewed by M. Jacobsen "Stop the Spelling and Grammatica.(Southeast of Disorder)  
April 9, 2009

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**“Delightful and hard to put down!**

I have to say that before I read *Axe of Iron*, I knew next to nothing about the Norse and Viking Age. Not for lack of interest, I just never really thought about it, I guess (a bit of a contradiction, perhaps?! lol) In any case, when I read that this book pertained to this time period and the exploration of unknown regions, I was highly intrigued! Though the names were a bit difficult for me to figure out - such examples are Halfdan Ingolfsson, the leader of crew and settlers, Gubjartur, the second in command, as well as other characters such as Vilhjalm, Ulfar, and Athils, just to name a few. The names are very much of that heritage, but me being ignorant of that, just kind of made up my own names to go along with the true names, lol.

All kidding aside, *Axe of Iron* is both an entertaining read, as well as educational. I found many intriguing areas within the story that left me with a sense of awe that I had learned something new. One instance is the following passage taken from page 64....

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Two thralls placed soapstone pots directly in the coals of the fire pit to boil saltwater for the salt it contained. As the water boiled away they scraped out the accumulated salt, refilled the pots with seawater, and the process began anew. The two women tended the salt pots and gathered edible seaweed that the previous low tide had left on the beach in scattered piles. They filled two baskets for immediate use, and spread the rest out to dry above the high-water line on the stony beach. When dry enough they would rake it into piles and burn it to ash. This ash contained a very high concentration of salt. It also provided another source of salt to cure dried meat and fish and to flavor other foods.

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I, for one, never had a clue that seaweed could be of such use. It is examples such as this that really make the reader fall into the story and bring about fascination of a long ago time that is really not that widely talked about or explored (or at least not to my knowledge).

The story is smooth and the characters realistic and enjoyable. Beware - there is a bit of "ick" graphicness" such as the following from page 41...

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The cloying smell of fresh blood was everywhere but the people welcomed it as a measure of success of the hunt. Almost everyone near at hand stuffed chunks of bloody blubber and skin into their mouths, chewed contentedly, and leered at others not fortunate enough, or close enough to partake.

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There is action and adventure and something for everyone. *Axe of Iron: The Settlers* is the first in a wonderful historical series, which promises many delights to come. If you enjoy being whisked away to another time and place with amazing historical accuracy, you will adore this novel. I look forward to the great talent that lies ahead from Mr. Hunsinger.

Reviewed by A. Pohren (IA United States) March 3, 2009

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**“Axe of Iron - The Settlers:**

In his novel, *Axe of Iron*, author J.A. Hunsinger takes readers back to the year 1008 and tells a Viking tale of exploration and adventure. The story centers on two Northmen explorers, Halfdan Ingolfsson and his second in command, Gudbjartur Einarsson, who lead an expedition to explore and establish a settlement along the coast of North America. Their journey takes them from Greenland to what is now known as Baffin Island, Canada, and then entering Hudson Bay, via the Hudson Strait. Their voyage terminated on the east coast of James Bay, at the extreme south end of Hudson Bay, where the settlement, Halfdansfjord, was built.

The plot of the story concentrates on the trials and tribulations facing the settlers as they try to make a life in the new world. The journey is filled with many deadly challenges such as the brutal force of nature, encounters with the native peoples of North America, as well as social struggles among the settlers. Themes that develop include: the role of family and women, loyalty, betrayal, slavery, religious practices, as well as learning to work with the Native peoples instead of fighting them

As historical fiction, the author successfully captures a glimpse of the life of the Norsemen. It becomes quite clear that a great deal of research went into creating the story. The attention to detail is quite remarkable. That is, the author's descriptions of Norse ships, Norse customs, dress, the day to day struggles to survive that include hunting techniques, food preparation, weapons, and tools. As well, Hunsinger provides a detailed historical perspective of the time period, a glossary, and a map to assist readers in following the journey. The author clearly shows his knowledge and expertise on the subject.

For readers who enjoy the historical fiction genre, *Axe of Iron* is a must-have. The descriptive writing makes you feel as though you are a part of the journey. The novel is an entertaining story that will give readers an appreciation of the brutal life endured by the Norsemen.

Reviewed by Tracy Roberts "Write Field Services" (Nova Scotia, Canada) December 29, 2008

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### **“History At Its Best!**

**In the story:** Halfdan Ingolfsson and the ships accompanying him left Greenland with their minds filled with the stories told by other Northmen. Northmen who had been successful is helping to build two settlements on the eastern coast of North America long before Columbus was born. Halfdan understood the hardships of carving a living space out of virgin territory. He knew about the fights with the area's inhabitants known as Skraelings (thought to have been Indians). As a result, Halfdan wants to go to a different place, hoping to make contact with different Skraelings and try to live peaceably amongst them.

With five ships in the fleet, all loaded with women, children, the crews, tools and domestic animals the people would need, Halfdan set sail to the west of Greenland. Five days after setting sail, they arrive at a beach where they spend several days building up their stores of food. Here they meet and trade with the Indians called Tornit.

As the flotilla sets sail once again, they head west and then south, following the coastline traveling a couple of days before taking to another beach where they meet the Thalmiut. The next morning Halfdan takes a few women and part of the fighting men to visit the Thalmiut village where they trade many items and learn many new things. While Halfdan is gone, the settlers face the first real battle in the new land. Other Indians from another tribe start the battle, but they are no match for the Northmen. After taking a prisoner and Halfdan returns after his trading adventure, they set sail south still following the coastline. With the help of the captured Indian, the Northmen find a wonderful spot just off a fjord, with high ground, plenty of trees and food for the hunting. Here they decide to make their village. `Here' is present day Hudson Bay, at the southern beach.

The story ends with a premonition of a future battle with the Naskapi Indians. Look for its sequel--Axe of Iron: Confrontation. The student of history and the reader who loves historical romances and accounts of explorations of new lands will love this book. Good descriptions, although a little slow reading at first, gives the reader a fair idea of the Northmen's way of life, their tools, their dreams and their labors. The thrill of facing the unknown and the courage of these pioneer men and women make this book a good read. I recommend this book to them and to those who have been attracted to the stories of the Vikings of old.

Reviewed by Lucille P. Robinson (Rayne, LA USA) July 7, 2008

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“Adventure-packed History Lesson!

It's the details that grab the reader's attention in J. A. Hunsinger's historical novel, *Axe of Iron: The Settlers*. The book is the first installment in a planned series of stories about the migration of Norsemen Greenlanders to North America. From the introduction, which provides background information, to the brutal ending, Hunsinger uses his extensive knowledge of the history and culture of Norsemen to craft a story that exposes the lives of an ancient people with an admirable sense of adventure and value for community.

In the spring of 1008, three hundred and fifteen Greenlanders and Icelanders board a fleet of six ships and leave Greenland for North America. Halfdan Ingolfsson is the chieftain on this expedition and Gudbjartur (Gudbj) Einarsson is his dedicated second-in-command. There are men, women, and children on these ships, as well as a variety of livestock and supplies. The leaders of this expedition are known champions of their people, warriors who will furiously fight against outside enemies and just as strongly mete out justice on their own people when deemed necessary.

The destination is Leisfsbudir, Vinland. It is an area that has already been explored and settled, but not without problems. Early on in the journey, Halfden desires a change of plans because of the trouble previous settlers from Greenland have had with the natives they call Skraelings. The Norsemen that came before this group were harsh in their dealings with the natives. Halfdan plans a different approach: "The key to our attempt at settlement here, and the only chance of success we will have, is to settle where the Skraelings do not live. When first contact is finally made, as it will be eventually, they will be treated fairly." The group heads to Snorrisfjord and ultimately settles on land they name Halfdansfjord.

Hunsinger teaches with the details that he infuses into this story. The reader will learn what the Norsemen ate; how they set-up temporary camps and permanent residents; how they conducted themselves in battle; and the manner in which men and women fell into intimate relationships. The importance of respect and loyalty in the culture is represented by the relationship between Halfdan and Gudj. Their bond is stronger than that often seen between blood brothers. There is an intense trust between them that provides the level of

security needed to lead their followers while exploring a new land, surviving severe storms at sea, and battling against natives. The love and admiration between the two men is so overwhelming it frequently makes Gudbj uncomfortable. But their feelings for each other do not diminish them as men. Halfdan and Gudbj are secure in their masculinity and, as a result, are not intimidated by the strength of their women who work as hard and love as strongly as they do.

Axe of Iron: The Settlers is a hearty, adventure-packed history lesson. I highly recommend it.

Reviewed by Melissa B. Levine "Independent Book Reviewer" July 6, 2008

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**“Excellent Historical Fiction!**

Halfdan Ingolfsson is a brave, intelligent leader of men. His second in command, Gudbjartur Einarsson is loyal, invaluable and ruthless. He does what must be done. The two men lead a group of Greenlanders, sometime between the year 997 and 1003, to a new and exciting land. A land filled with game, fish, fresh vegetation and North American natives. Can the two men discover the perfect home for this diversified group of men, women and children? Will Halfdan decide to take a wife from amongst the women traveling with them? How will they coexist with the natives?

Author, J. A. Hunsinger is an expert in the mores and customs of the Northmen, the Vikings and the Norse in general. His research is beyond reproach and he provides an educational, yet attention getting plot. The characters are believable, filled with faults and foibles, most realistic. The descriptions of ancient North American shores are vivid, and in depth. Readers can picture the landscape, the animals and the settlement of the settlers.

The use of fiction to develop a story around a most informative history lesson is a talent, and this author definitely excels here. The book is filled with technical descriptions of tools, ships and interesting facts of their day-to-day existence. Sometimes brutal and violent, their lives were filled with adventure. The pagan customs and the mix of early Christianity are well explained in fictitious settings.

As one who has visited L'Anse-aux-Meadows in Newfoundland's northern tip, I found this book very interesting, exciting and a great read. Perhaps this was the land of Halfdan and Freda? I look forward to the rest of the series.

Highly Recommended by Reviewer: Shirley Roe, Allbooks Review on July 6, 2008

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**“Hunsinger is Descriptive, Exciting and.....**

**Axe of Iron:** The Settlers, is a thrilling Norse adventure. Hunsinger shows his knowledge of history and specifically the Norse in North America. It was exciting to follow Halfdan Ingolfsson as he and over 300 adventurers explored new lands! Every turn of the page brought a new experience filled with extremely accurate portrayals of the challenging life these people led. It was interesting to learn about daily Viking life and to debate Hunsinger's ideas on what happened to these people that have been lost to history.

I recommend this book to anyone with a passion for any type of history. It speaks volumes about how man must learn to live with nature or risk being conquered!

Reviewed by Ronald W. Harrison on July 1, 2008

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