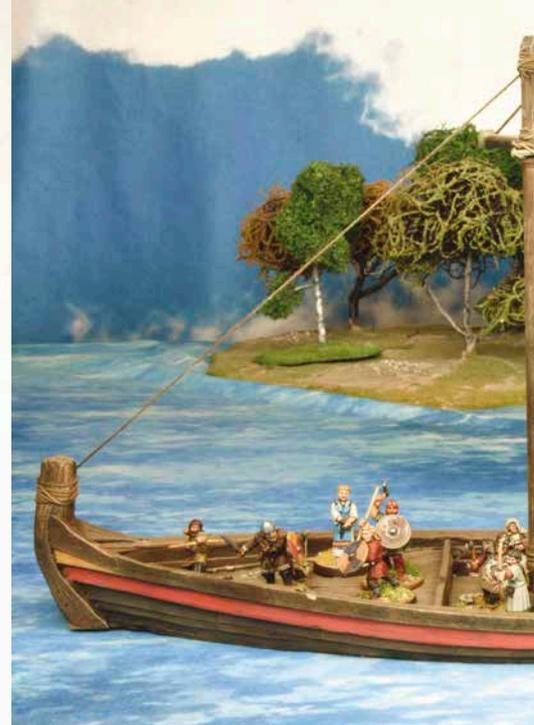


GO WEST YOUNG VIKING, GO WEST!

THE BATTLE FOR VINLAND

A thousand years ago, some of the strangest battles of the Middle Ages were fought not in Europe, North Africa, or the Middle East, but rather on the east coast of North America between complete strangers – native North American people and the Vikings.

By Brian Burfield



The Vikings first met native Americans on Greenland, whom they called Skraelings (the word is still in use today). When the Vikings travelled further to the northeastern coast of North America, they used the same name for the people they encountered, peacefully and otherwise. Some of their adventures are told in the 13th century *Graenlendinga Saga*, the *Saga of the Greenlanders*.

PLAYING VINLAND BATTLES

These two scenarios are designed to be playable with any system, with SAGA an obvious choice. Its rules for Skraelings can be downloaded from Studio Tomahawk (<https://bit.ly/2BWew5Q>).

Here are some general notes:

Skraelings – The main weapon is the bow with fletched arrows tipped with flint points. They should be proficient archers. Spears and slings are also used at a distance. Clubs and weapons embedded with beavers' teeth, stone splinters, and other sharp objects are for close combat. Skraelings do not wear any type of protection, nor do they carry shields, but they do cover their bodies and clothing with red ochre paint.

Vikings – While familiar with swords, arrows, and round shields, the axe and spear are the main Viking weap-

← After a long voyage by sea, the Vikings arrive in the new world, eager to explore...

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Thorvald and his men explore along the coast.

ons. While some Viking warriors would be armoured, the majority are settlers, so use a mix of unarmoured men and women in your force.

THE BATTLE ON THE WATER

"A great swarm of skin-boats was then heading towards them down the fiord. Thorvald said, "We shall set up breastworks on the gunwales and defend ourselves as best we can..."

– *Graenlendinga Saga*

The Vikings are exploring Vinland. They have moored their ship and have stumbled on three moose-skin boats, turned upside down. Underneath, they discover nine Skraeling men trying to hide. They capture and kill eight of them, while the ninth manages to escape in a skin-boat back to a village some distance away.

A short time later the Vikings are startled by "great swarm of skin-boats" coming towards them. Clearly, the escaped Skraeling had reached his village and raised the alarm amongst the warriors. They make for their longship as quickly as they can.

The Skraeling skin-boat is a much smaller craft than the Viking ship. They were usually fifteen feet in length and constructed with the sides of the boat creating an inverted v-shaped hump in the centre. Each one can carry several men but is quite manageable with just one man paddling.



The Skraelings suddenly attack and board the Viking ship.

Playing the scenario

The Vikings adopt a familiar defense to begin with, setting up shields to defend themselves as best they can. There are some thirty Vikings while the Skraeling force is double that in size.

Assume half the Skraelings must paddle and the other half can shoot. The Vikings should get some advantage for being shielded (+1 armour). They do not have an excess of missile weapons and are loath to waste them unnecessarily; they do, however, have stones and rocks, used as ballast.

The Vikings have nowhere to go, so fight to the last man. The Skraelings will fight until they lose half their number.

According to the saga, the battle ended rather suddenly when the Skraelings

"...shot at them for a while and then turned and fled away as fast as they could." Thorvald, the Viking leader, was mortally wounded however.

THE BATTLE ON LAND

"...for I expect they will pay us a third visit, and this time with hostility and in greater numbers..."

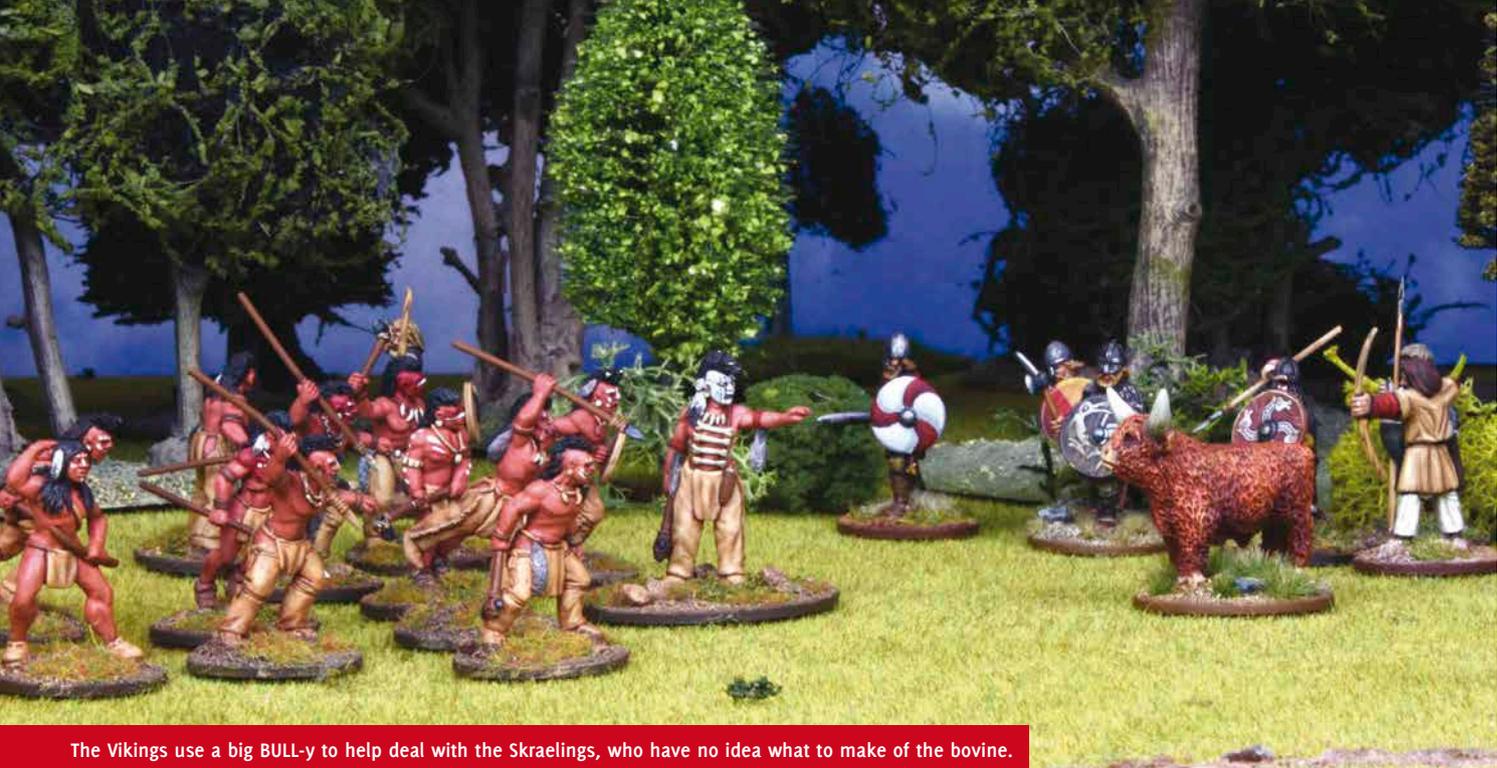
– *Graenlendinga Saga*

Some time after that first skirmish, a second battle breaks out between the two sides. The Vikings, rather unfairly, trade for some very valuable furs and pelts by offering milk to the Skraelings in exchange. The Skraelings accept the deal. However, upon returning to their villages, they begin to suffer severe gastrointestinal discomfort as they're unable to digest the lactose in the milk. As a result, they probably believe that the Vikings have tried to poison them.



SCENARIO 1: Thorvald's ship is attacked by natives.

© Rocio Espin



The Vikings use a big BULL-y to help deal with the Skraelings, who have no idea what to make of the bovine.

Knowing that things have not gone well, the Vikings expect a large army to attack. By this time, the Vikings are in greater numbers in Vinland. A wealthy man, Thorfinn Karlsefni, has arrived with a sizeable company of men and a few women. They are aware that they will always be outnumbered, however. The Vikings need a way to compensate, and decide on surprise and a very large bull are as their secret weapons.

Earlier in the saga, we are told that the Skraelings were terribly frightened by a large bull belonging to the Norse. It was roaring and bellowing in its pen. Clearly, they had never seen such a beast.

The Vikings plan to lure the Skraelings into an area that will entrap them. In typical Norse fashion, they selected a battlefield ahead of time, even if it's without Skraeling consent. As the saga says, "The place where they intended to have their encounter with the Skraelings had a lake on one side and the woods on the other." The Vikings plan to use the forest to full advantage. They cut a clearing in the woods, into which they will channel the Skraeling warriors. The bull will be at the front of the clearing and will be the first thing that the Skraelings will see. The Vikings plan to hide themselves on the other side of the clearing that they have cut.



Ten Norse warriors have been chosen to "go out to the headland and make themselves conspicuous", as the saga notes. They will allow themselves to be chased through the forest and into the clearing and trap.

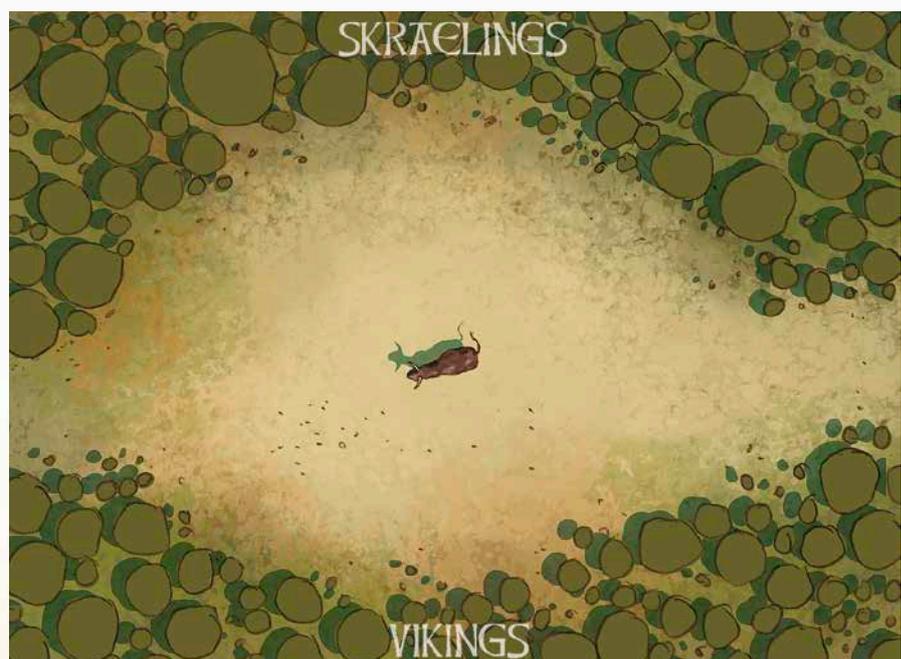
The Vikings line themselves up in their traditional shield wall, with spear throwers with a quartet of javelins at the ready for the first Skraeling to break into the clearing once the ten-man decoy is absorbed back into the Norse lines. Karlsefni is behind his own, small protective shield wall to bellow out instructions to his fighting men.

Playing the scenario

The Vikings should be outnumbered two to one in this scenario, but have the advantage of better armour, the wood cover, and the bull.

The bull should be avoided by the Skraelings and cannot be harmed until the first Viking casualty is inflicted. At this point, it should be let loose and count as four Viking berserker models for the battle until killed (treat as Berserker Hearthguard for SAGA).

Both sides will retreat if they take more than 50% casualties. The bull does not count towards Viking casualties. **WS&S**



SCENARIO 2: The Vikings distract their enemy with a large bull.