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Hadrvik under Siege

Freyr and the Gifts of the Gods



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Relief is three days away. Gullinbursti can bring supplies to Hadrvik's coastal tower and carry the wounded out, if the party can keep his golden bristles from giving away the route.

Gullinbursti at the table

This is my system-neutral version for tabletop play. Gullinbursti can carry people and their gear past obstacles they couldn't ordinarily cross. Once he agrees to a journey, the group can count on his abilities. The hard decisions come from how many people can travel with him, where they can go and who sees his light. His use as a mount and draught animal comes from the sources. The numbers, his habits and the rules for playing him are my additions. [1] [2]

A loan for a specific task is one way to introduce him. A ruler, a senior priestess, a dwarf lord or Freyr himself could entrust the group with Gullinbursti's help. Whoever lends him to them already knows him and can explain his habits. At the handover, agree on the task and the terms of his return. Give the characters time to get to know him and try the cart. Bringing him back unharmed is part of the job.

For a more open campaign, the group could meet a boar who's been travelling with someone for years. They might find him beside his last companion's grave or with an old ferrywoman who's only ever asked him to make short crossings. On a route he knows, let his reactions tell some of the story. He stops at a deserted landing because someone used to wait for him there. The characters can learn what he remembers long before they ask him for a journey of their own.

Carrying people and supplies

Gullinbursti can carry two adults and their personal gear on his back. In harness, he can pull a light cart with up to four adults, including the driver, or an equivalent load. His travel magic extends to a properly harnessed cart and its load within that limit. He can pull it through the air or over water. A small group can travel together. Anything on the scale of a heavy wagon train takes multiple trips.

On a clear route, he covers in one hour the distance an ordinary riding horse would cover in a day's travel. Before the group sets out, the GM gives them the expected travel time and describes any difficulties they can see. Gullinbursti can use the air as a road. He can cross a stretch of water or clear a ridge, and the group still has to open a locked room to get inside. To put his speed to use, the characters need a known destination or someone who can show the way.

Gullinbursti remembers routes he's travelled before. With clear arrangements he can go between familiar places without a driver. A place name by itself gives him nothing to go on. If the journey takes his passengers beneath the surface, they need their own way to breathe. They also have to protect themselves from any dangers along the way.

In combat, use your system's rules for a fast flying mount. His speed over long distances gives him no extra attacks. He can defend himself with his tusks, and wounds need care or healing.

Start with the stats for a large supernatural mount in your system. He can be in real danger when the situation calls for it, while a routine roadblock remains a routine roadblock.

He also needs food and rest. On longer outings, apply your system's fatigue rules as you would for any mount with good endurance. A rescue that runs through the night can tire him even if each leg is short. The party can plan breaks and have feed and water ready at the stops. They're looking after the creature that carries them.

Who sees the light

The bristles shed enough light for people to find their bearings and work together within thirty paces. On a clear night people can see the glow from much farther away. Distance depends on terrain and weather. A watchman on a tower might spot it early across an open valley. A dense stand of trees might hide it altogether. At first, a distant observer may know only that a light is moving.

Gullinbursti can't put the light out at will. A thick enough cloth can screen the bristles if it's fastened securely and leaves him free to see, breathe and move. The group can make and test a cover before the journey. Once it works, it keeps working until something happens to it, such as a tear or a loosened fastening. A reliable cover takes no new roll at each watch post.

The time of day matters. In bright daylight the glow is less conspicuous. An approach out of the low sun can make the cart hard to see from particular posts, provided the flight path, sun and observer line up. From another post the same cart may be plainly visible or show up as a silhouette. The GM describes the conditions the characters can judge so they can pick a good time to go. A sheltered daytime approach can be the better bet.

Before the flight, tell the players which observation posts their characters can identify. They can fly straight there, stay low behind a ridge or wait for the weather to change. Enemies who notice something can watch likely landing places and pass word along. Each sighting gives them only what someone actually saw. The party and the people watching decide what comes of it through what they do next.

His own mind

Gullinbursti understands simple requests and can agree to a journey or refuse it. Watch what he does. He stands ready for the harness, turns towards someone he knows or plants his feet at the entrance to a stall that can be locked. In this version I give him a strong dislike of confinement, and the group learns his habits early. Once he agrees to an ordinary journey, there's no need to roll for his consent again at every obstacle.

A gift or sale can transfer a human claim of ownership. His old companion can help him come to trust someone new by having them both travel with him for a while. A new owner can also earn his affection on their own. What matters is how people treat him. He keeps his powers when he changes hands, and the transfer itself brings no doom upon anyone.

When he's on loan, the agreed task sets the terms. The group may not sell him, give him away or keep him for another expedition without asking. Returning him unharmed means bringing him back healthy and free of lasting injury. If he's exhausted, give him proper rest and care before the handover. If he's wounded, treat him and tell whoever lent him to you. Lasting harm

or a broken promise about his return has the agreed consequences for trust and future help. The consequences come from the agreement and how people respond to what happened.

Anyone who steals him has to deal with an animal that remembers things and can resist. If he knows the way home and gets free, he may return to people he trusts. Someone who can hold him can kidnap him. A locked cage keeps him in even though he can run through the air. Getting him out may take some work. Getting away once he's free could be the easy part.

His golden bristles are worth nothing as a material. He'll fight anyone who tries to pull them out or shave them. Anything that comes away from his coat immediately loses its golden colour and glow, whether it falls out on its own or breaks off when he's injured. What's left is ordinary steel filings with no value in the game. The same rule applies however a piece came off. There's no gold to sell and no magic ingredient to harvest.

What his help makes possible

With Gullinbursti around, some old obstacles really do stop mattering. The characters can leave a broken bridge unrepaired or get a message through earlier than the enemy expects. Let those successes stand. If every journey runs into another invisible barrier, there's little point in having the boar. New problems come from what the characters can now do for other people. A besieged town holds far more people than the cart can carry.

If you take a healer to a remote village overnight, you can bring help to people who couldn't get it before. Once word gets out, there will be more requests. The party can make a schedule, lay in supplies, ask others for help or turn a request down. The journeys give the characters relationships with the people they help. Gullinbursti leaves them to make their own decisions about whom they can help. If he's on loan, any extra journeys have to fit the terms of his return. Which promises will the characters make, and which ones can they keep?

Rulers may take an interest too. If people know Gullinbursti belongs to Freyr, a prince might appear alongside him and claim the god's favour. A priesthood might argue that it has the right to care for the animal. The boar's presence gives them a sign everyone can see and argue over. What that sign means is up to the people in your setting.

Hadrvik under siege

The coastal tower outside Hadrvik is cut off. Inside are twelve defenders fit to fight and eight wounded. There's drinking water, but food, bandages and bolts are running low. The besiegers hold the road and watch the bay. For now they're waiting for the defenders to run out of supplies. They have ladders and troops ready to storm the tower. A relief army is due in three days. Without help, the garrison will probably have to surrender before it arrives. Ragna, the healer, has had a message smuggled out with a list of supplies and a sketch of a possible landing place.

Across the bay, the high priestess of an island sanctuary keeps Gullinbursti there under an old agreement. She asks the characters to take food and equipment to the tower and bring the wounded out on the return trips. For the job she lends them the boar and a light cart. Before the first flight, a keeper Gullinbursti knows introduces him to the party, shows them how to harness him and helps with a trial run. The cart is fitted with two padded places for people to

lie down and seats for a driver and an attendant. The party agrees to bring Gullinbursti back unharmed.

A terrace on the seaward side of the tower is large enough to land on. A rocky outcrop screens it from some of the watchers, but part of the approach is exposed. The group can scout the watch posts, check what each can see and agree on a signal with the defenders. Ragna makes sure the people in the tower can unload supplies quickly and bring the next wounded people to the terrace in time. At the sanctuary, the party can set up storage, make arrangements to tend the wounded and prepare the next loads. Before the first run, the GM tells the players what dangers their scouting revealed and how long the flight and loading should take.

On a clear route, a round trip takes forty minutes. Allow ten minutes each way and twenty minutes in total for unloading and loading at both ends. With a driver and attendant aboard, there's room for two wounded people. Four uninterrupted trips can bring all eight out and take four loads of supplies in. On the outward leg, the supplies go in the empty spaces reserved for the wounded and count towards the cart's load. Detours, patients who need extra care and a landing under threat can all add time. Tell the players the cart's capacity with their chosen crew before they set out. The times, loads and number of wounded are scenario values you can change.

The island lies to the west, so a late-afternoon flight can approach out of the setting sun. On the right flight path, some of the watchers have to look into the glare. Other posts have a clearer view, and the return flight needs its own plan. A tested, opaque cover can screen the glow on later runs. The party can leave by day, wait until dark or take a longer route behind the coastal rocks. Their scouting will tell them which time gives them the best chance. Flying high may keep them beyond the reach of ordinary missiles. It also makes the cart visible over a much greater distance.

Work from what the watchers actually see. One might notice a brief gleam. Another might recognise a cart over the bay. To report that the tower is being resupplied, someone has to see where the cart lands or put together enough clues, and the report has to reach the besiegers' commanders. If they realise supplies are getting through and the wounded are being taken out, they can order the assault to begin ahead of schedule. In this scenario the army needs about an hour from the order to the start of the attack, assuming its preparations go undisturbed. Give the party visible signs, such as a messenger on the move, ladders being brought up or troops mustering.

The characters who stay behind have work while Gullinbursti is in the air. At the tower, they can carry the wounded, distribute the supplies and secure the ways in. On the island, they can care for the people who arrive and have the next load ready when the cart gets back. Once Gullinbursti knows the route and both landing places, he can make some runs on his own. The party needs safe handovers and arrangements he can understand. Characters can then stay at either end or slip past a watch post while the deliveries continue.

If the besiegers start getting ready to storm the tower, the next trip may have a different job. Do the defenders need bolts and shields more urgently, or does someone badly wounded have to come out first? Can the cart still use the terrace, or does it have to land somewhere else? A well-concealed route may still work. Stopping a report or slowing the attack preparations can

buy time. Let a successful action change the situation. Whether the tower holds and how many people get out depends on what the players do and how the game's usual rules play out.

After the last run, the people brought out of the tower receive care at the sanctuary, and so does Gullinbursti. Treat any injuries he's sustained and tell the high priestess about them. The party brings him back as agreed and reports what they left in the tower and what help is still needed there. Any further trips need a new agreement. Ragna and the defenders know who brought them supplies and took the wounded to safety. If the party meets Gullinbursti again, they'll have these flights in common.

Sources

[1] Úlfr Uggason. "Húsdrápa." In Carmina Scaldica, edited by Finnur Jónsson, 1929.

st. 6 (Finnur Jónsson), st. 7 (Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages) · p. 3

[2] Snorri Sturluson. The Prose Edda. Translated by Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur. New York: The American-Scandinavian Foundation, 1916.

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