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The Peace Voyage

Freyr and the Gifts of the Gods



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The Peace Voyage

Two delegations share Freyr's ship on the way to peace talks. A blocked strait leaves them a choice about what to carry over the pass and whom to trust.

Two communities on neighbouring fjords have been feuding for years. Their representatives are now to meet on a neutral island to negotiate grazing rights, compensation and the reopening of trade routes. Freyr's sanctuary lends the heroes Skíðblaðnir so they can take both delegations to the Thing together. A Thing is a public assembly where legal disputes are heard and matters of common concern are decided. This adventure is intended for a fantasy setting with Norse gods. The choice of a Thing as the setting and the mission described below are entirely our own game material.

The priestess Runa hands over the folded ship before the journey begins. Her request is clear: the delegates must arrive alive, and the ship must be returned undamaged. The heroes are responsible for both delegations, even if they come to dislike some of their passengers. The temple provides eight sailors. Forty-eight delegates, relatives and companions travel with them; only six of these passengers are armed guards. Food and water for the planned voyage are ready.

Using the ship in play

For this adventure, Skíðblaðnir has enough room for everyone travelling with the heroes and all their provisions. Its favourable wind works reliably once the crew raises the sail. An experienced helmsman sets the course. The party does not have to wait for suitable weather or struggle through a sudden calm. Reefs and blocked harbour entrances remain obstacles, to be dealt with through careful navigation, local knowledge or an alternative approach. The ship's size and its favourable wind come from the Edda. The steering arrangements and the treatment of obstacles are rules for this adventure. [1]

Before the ship can be folded, everyone must disembark and all animals and cargo must be unloaded. The ship's permanent fittings, sail and rigging fold up with it. The process will not begin while anyone or any cargo remains aboard, so nobody can accidentally be trapped inside the pouch. Folding takes ten minutes, as does unfolding. One person can carry the folded ship. To unfold it, the crew needs a clear stretch of water large enough to accommodate the vessel. The Edda gives neither a time nor a procedure for folding the ship. Unloading it first is a rule for this adventure. [1]

The travellers learn how the ship works during a demonstration in the temple harbour. It is unfolded while empty, the passengers board, and then everyone disembarks before it is folded again. The heroes can use this time to agree on responsibilities with Runa and the sailors. Who will carry the pouch ashore? Who will protect it, and who will look after the passengers while the crew prepares the ship? These decisions will matter later.

The blocked strait

Jarl Tore controls the only navigable strait between the fjords and the island where the Thing will be held. He profits from the separate trade routes and from supplying both sides of the feud. A settlement would weaken his position, so he closes the strait on the pretext of piracy. A floating timber boom, fortified positions on the shores and patrol boats make the direct route dangerous. Anyone determined to get through can negotiate passage, sabotage the barrier or attempt to force a way past.

There is another route, which Runa explains when she gives the heroes their task. A day's sailing brings them to the remote northern bay. From there, an old trail runs twelve kilometres across a pass on the peninsula to another bay. Both shores have enough room to unfold the ship. Allow six hours for the company to make the crossing on foot. From the far side, the island is another day's sailing away. Including unloading, reloading and overnight stops, this route takes about three days. The Thing begins in five days. The gamemaster establishes this geography and these travel times before play. The favourable wind is already included in the sailing times.

Getting an ordinary large ship along this narrow trail would be almost impossible. Skíðblaðnir fits inside its pouch, and the passengers can carry their own luggage. For anyone who would struggle with the walk, the sanctuary provides carrying chairs and helpers. The heroes must make practical arrangements for these travellers. They can also hire pack animals or arrange assistance from the coastal villages. The detour is known from the outset, rather than discovered by chance at the last moment.

Who guards the rear?

Trouble begins as the travellers prepare for the overland crossing. Sigrun, one of the delegates, insists that her people lead the column. Her brother was killed in the feud, and she does not trust the other side to guard the rear. Their spokesman, Egil, fears that his relatives will be the first to be abandoned if they march at the back. Both want to reach the Thing, and both have reasons to distrust their neighbours. A mixed escort or a rearguard led by the heroes could settle the dispute, provided the people involved have a say in the arrangement.

The party can begin building trust while still at sea. An injured passenger needs help. Someone might share provisions with the other delegation, or suggest that the guards stand watch together. Let these choices make a real difference later. A person who has already cared for someone from the other side will be heard differently when the next accusation comes. A single failed persuasion roll should not wipe out that progress. Use the appropriate checks from your chosen rules system.

The pouch at the pass

An informant has told Tore that the ship can be folded and that the travellers plan to take the northern route. His men know the pouch in which Runa handed it over. They have no reliable magical means of detecting the ship inside it. Twenty mercenaries are sent ahead to seize the pouch and, if possible, detain several important delegates so the Thing has to proceed without them. The jarl does not keep a permanent force on this remote trail. His men must first move into position.

Scouts sent ahead of the main party can find fresh campsites, tracks off the trail and signs of preparations at a narrow point. A local guide also knows a steeper side path that adds two hours to the journey. The heroes could lead the travellers around the ambush, use a similar pouch as a decoy or negotiate with the mercenaries. If fighting breaks out, the delegates still act for themselves. They take cover, carry away the wounded and help protect their relatives. The six guards support the heroes without deciding the encounter for them.

Even if the mercenaries steal the pouch, the adventure need not end there. They take it to Tore's waystation at the southern end of the pass. Tracks, a prisoner's testimony or information from the nearest settlement can lead the heroes there, giving them a chance to recover it. If the heroes have successfully used a decoy, the travellers may reach the next bay while the mercenaries guard what they believe to be their prize.

Unfolding the ship

At the far shore, the travellers need protection for ten minutes while the sailors unfold Skíðblaðnir. A party that has prepared for departure can bring the passengers aboard in good order and set sail immediately. If pursuers have caught up, the heroes must decide how to hold the shore, distract their enemies or negotiate. The favourable wind still works. Once they are back on the water, it helps them escape.

Reaching the island completes the first part of the task. Whether the talks lead straight to peace depends on the people involved and what happened during the journey. At first, they may agree only to exchange prisoners or undertake a joint trading voyage. The heroes have made the meeting possible, but its outcome is not theirs alone to decide. Tore's attempt to prevent it may itself become a subject of negotiation.

The loan includes the return journey. If the negotiations have secured safe passage, Skíðblaðnir can use the strait. Otherwise, the familiar trail across the pass remains available, and the party can now secure it with guides and coordinated watches. The task is complete only when the passengers are home and the folded ship is back in the sanctuary. The journey leaves behind promises, new connections and perhaps a jarl whose influence has diminished.

Sources

[1] Snorri Sturluson. Edda Snorra Sturlusonar. Guðni Jónsson bjó til prentunar. Heimskringla.no.

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