

THE HUNGER OF THE GODS

"VISCERAL,
HEARTBREAKING,
UNPUTDOWNABLE."

—JAY KRISTOFF
ON *THE SHADOW
OF THE GODS*



JOHN GWYNNE



THE HUNGER OF THE GODS

BOOK TWO OF
THE BLOODSWORN TRILOGY

JOHN GWYNNE



orbitbooks.net

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Orbit

Hachette Book Group

1290 Avenue of the Americas

New York, NY 10104

orbitbooks.net

First Edition: April 2022

Simultaneously published in Great Britain by Orbit

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Library of Congress Control Number: 2021949500

ISBNs: 9780316539920 (trade paperback), 9780316539937 (ebook)

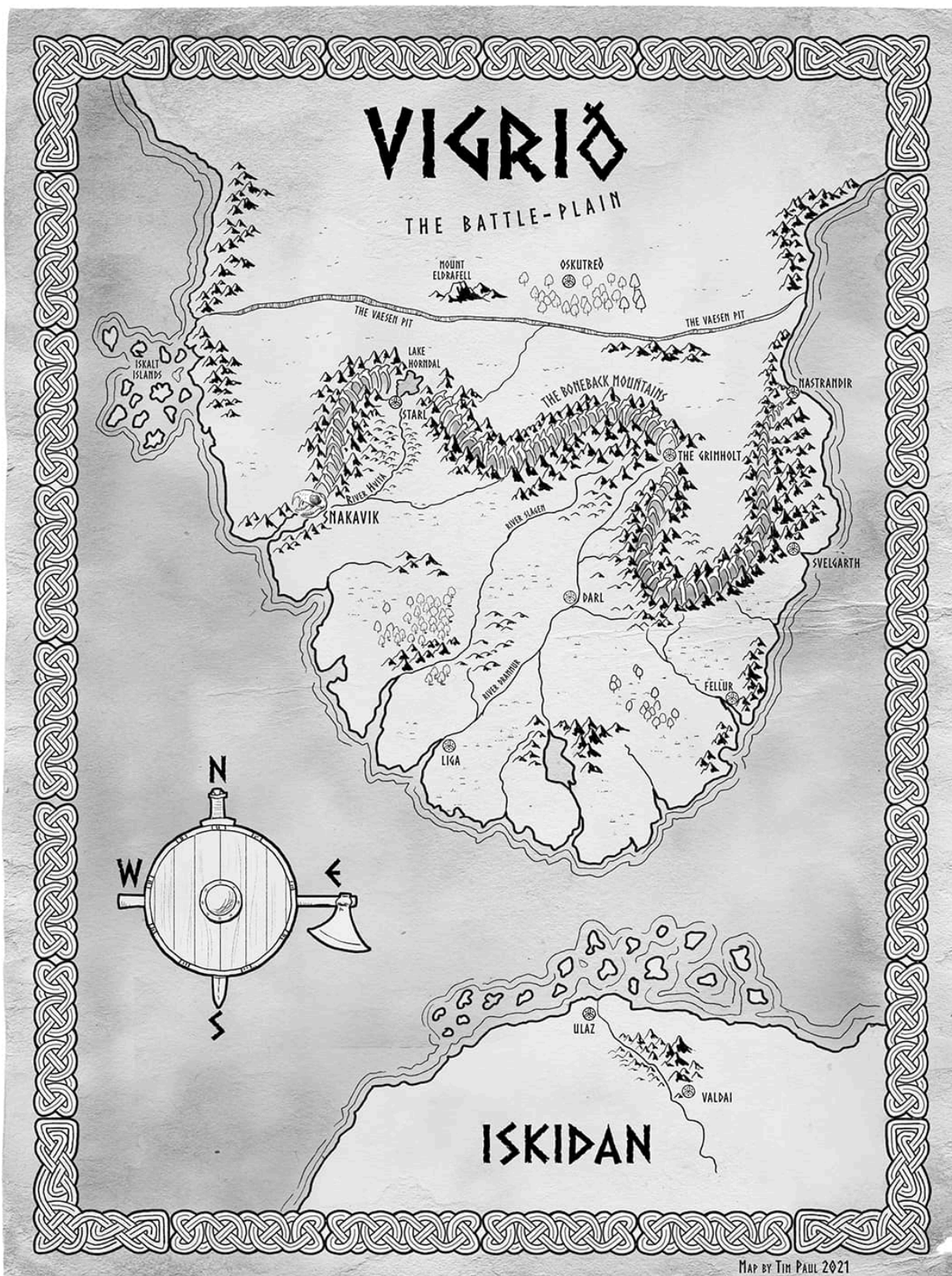
E3-20220310-JV-NF-ORI

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surely there can be no more tears left in all the
world,
for we have wept them all over you.*

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Pronunciation Guide

ð: sounds like “th” in “they”; Guðvarr is pronounced “Guthvarr”

j: sound like “y” in “yellow”; Brynja is pronounced “Brynya”

ø: sounds like “ir” in “bird”; Røkia is pronounced “Rirkia”

CAST OF CHARACTERS

The Battle-Grim

Agnar Broksson – chief of the Battle-Grim, slain in an act of betrayal by Biórr on the ash-plain of Oskut্রেð

Elvar Fire-Fist – daughter of Jarl Stórr. She has sworn the blood oath to find Bjarn, son of Uspa the Seiðr-witch, to rescue him from Ilska the Cruel and her Ravven-Feeders, in return for Uspa guiding the Battle-Grim to fabled Oskut্রেð, the heart of where the gods fought and died

Grend – companion and guardian of Elvar. Has also sworn the blood oath to find Bjarn

Huld – youngest of the Battle-Grim after Elvar. She grew up on the hard streets of Svelgarth

Sighvat the Fat – second to Agnar, a fierce warrior, though more interested in food than making decisions. Swore the blood oath to rescue Bjarn from Ilska's Raven-Feeders

Sólin Spittle – one of the longest-serving of the Battle-Grim, she lost some teeth during a fight with a swarm of tennúr

Urt the Unwashed – warrior of the Battle-Grim, bynamed because of his aversion to cleanliness

Orv the Sneak – the only archer in the Battle-Grim, a scout and hunter. Bynamed because of his stealth

Uspa – a Seiðr-witch. Captured by the Battle-Grim on Iskalt Island (along with her husband, Berak, and child, Bjarn) where she was destroying the Galdrabok, the *Graskinna*. She swears a pact with Agnar and Elvar, where she will lead the Battle-Grim to Oskut্রেð if they swear to do all they can to rescue her son, Bjarn, from the clutches of Ilska the Cruel. The blood oath seals their pact

The Bloodsworn

Æsa – a member of the Bloodsworn with a worrying disregard for pain or life. The blood of Fjalla the mountain goat is in her vein

Edel – chief scout and huntswoman of the Bloodsworn. The blood of Hundur the hound is in her veins. Old, shrewd, guarded. Two hounds are her companions

Einar Half-Troll – big as a tree, strongest of the Bloodsworn. A lover of food and well-told tales. Also a *Berserkir*

Glornir Shield-Breaker – chief of the Bloodsworn. A *Berserkir*, with the bear-god's blood in his veins. Husband of Vol and older brother of Thorkel

Gunnar Prow – so-named on account of his nose, which fills most of his face and is curved like a prow-beast on a *drakkar*. The blood of Gröfu the badger is in his veins

Halja Flat-Nose – the blood of Orna the eagle-god is in her veins. Sister of Vali Horse-Breath, who was slain by a troll during the battle at Rota's chamber

Revna Hare-Legs – named Hare-Legs because of her speed in battle, she has the blood of Státa the stoat in her veins

Ingmar Ice – a *Berserkir*

Jökul Hammer-Hand – blacksmith and warrior. Has the blood of Gröfu the badger in his veins

Røkia – *Úlfhéðnar*, the blood of Ulfrir the wolf in her veins. Given the task of training Varg in weapons craft

Svik Tangle-Hair – the blood of Refur the fox is in his veins. Chief skáld/storyteller of the Bloodsworn. He has a particular fondness for cheese

Varg No-Sense – once a thrall of Kolskegg, a wealthy farmer and landowner. Killed Kolskegg when he was betrayed by him, and fled, searching for the killers of his sister, Frøya. Joined the Bloodsworn to gain access to their Seiðr-witch, Vol, in order for her to perform an akáll, a magical invocation that will allow Varg to see the last moments of his sister's life, and so reveal how she died. Since joining the Bloodsworn he has discovered that he is Tainted, an *Úlfhéðnar* with the blood of Ulfrir in

his veins

Vol – a Seiðr-witch, wife of Glornir

The Raven-Feeders and their companions

Lik-Rifa – dragon-god, caged for hundreds of years in a chamber among the roots of Oskut্রেð, the Ash Tree. She has now been freed by a magical ceremony performed by her Tainted offspring, the dragon-born

Rotta – the rat-god. Imprisoned and tortured by Ulfrir and Orna for his part in the slaying of their daughter

Biórr – Tainted, with the blood of Rotta the rat in his veins. He infiltrated the Battle-Grim, slew Agnar Battle-Grim and led Ilska to Oskut্রেð, so instrumental in the release of Lik-Rifa from her chamber beneath Oskut্রেð. He is now back with the Raven-Feeders

Brák Trolls-Bane – Tainted, with the blood of Státa the Stoat god in his veins, one of Drekr's crew, a huntsman and trapper

Drekr – Tainted, a dragon-born, brother of Ilska and Myrk. Abducted Breca and slew Thorkel

Ilmur – Tainted, the hound-god Hundur is in his blood. Once a thrall of the Battle-Grim, freed by Biórr and now a member of the Raven-Feeders

Ilska the Cruel – chief of the Raven-Feeders, a dragon-born with Lik-Rifa's blood in her veins. Older sister of Drekr and Myrk

Kalv – Tainted, with the blood of Svin the boar in his veins. Son of Red Fain and brother of Storolf Wartooth

Kráka – Seiðr-witch, once a thrall of the Battle-Grim, but freed by Biórr and now part of the Raven-Feeders

Myrk Sharp-Claw – Tainted, dragon-born with Lik-Rifa's blood in her veins. Younger sister of Ilska and Drekr

Red Fain – Tainted, with Svin the boar's blood in his veins. Father of Kalv and Storolf Wartooth

Storolf Wartooth – Tainted, with the blood of Svin the boar in his veins, son of Red Fain and brother of Kalv. Named Wartooth because he left some teeth in an enemy's shield when he bit into it and tore it from his

opponent's grip

Oleif Gap-Tooth – Tainted, the blood of Hraeg the vulture in his veins.

One of Drekr's crew, and now part of the Raven-Feeders

Bjarn Beraksson – Tainted, son of Uspa and Berak. Abducted by Ilska and the Raven-Feeders

Breca Thorkelsson – Tainted, son of Orka and Thorkel. Abducted by Drekr

Harek Asgrimsson – Tainted, son of Asgrim and Idrun, who were slain by Drekr and his crew

Others

Orka Skullsplitter – husband of Thorkel and mother of Breca. Once chief of the Bloodsworn and known as Skullsplitter. Thorkel has been slain and her son abducted, and she has followed his trail north, leading her to the Grimholt, where she was captured by *drengs* and Skalk the Galdurman. She escaped in a bloody battle

Lif Virksson – a fisherman of Fellur village. Son of Virk, and brother of Mord. Orka rescued him from execution, and he travelled north with her. His brother Mord was slain while in chains by Guðvarr the *dreng*

Sæunn – a Tainted thrall with the blood of Hundur the hound in her veins

Gudleif Arnesson – has built a steading with his family north of the Boneback Mountains

Queen Helka – ruler of Darl and the surrounding regions. An ambitious, ruthless woman with a view to ruling all of Vigrið. She has one son, Hakon, and one daughter, Estrid

Prince Hakon Helkasson – son and eldest child of Queen Helka

Princess Estrid Helkasdottir – daughter of Queen Helka

Frek the Úlfhéðnar – Tainted, with the blood of Ulfrir the wolf-god in his veins. Thrall to Queen Helka and one of her honour-guard

Skalk the Galdurman – Galdurman of Darl, in the service of Queen Helka. Sent by Helka with the Bloodsworn to discover what is happening

on the northern borders of her realm. He steals Orna's talon and abducts Vol the Seiðr-witch

Sturla – Skalk's Galdur-apprentice

Guðvarr – a *drengr* of Fellur village and nephew to Jarl Störr. He is tasked with leading the band sent after Orka, Lif and Mord

Vilja – a whore of Darl, resident of *The Dead Dreng*

Jarl Sigrún – Jarl of Fellur village and the surrounding district. Embroiled in the political expansion of Queen Helka. Her lover slain and her face scarred by Orka, she sends her nephew Guðvarr after Orka

Yrsa – a *drengr* of Darl in the service of Skalk the Galdurman

Arild – a *drengr* of Fellur village

Skapti – a *drengr*, captain of the Grimholt. In the employ of Prince Hakon and involved in the plans of Drekr and his movement of abducted children

Hrolf – a *drengr* of the Grimholt

Jarl Glunn Iron-Grip – a petty jarl allied to Queen Helka

Jarl Svard the Scratcher – a petty jarl allied to Queen Helka

Jarl Logur of Liga – ruler of the port town of Liga. Friend to the Bloodsworn

Jarl Orlyg of Svelgarth – ruler of the town of Svelgarth and the surrounding region. Old and grizzled, a veteran of war, an enemy of Queen Helka

Prince Jaromir of Iskidan – a prince of Iskidan, one of the many sons of Kirill the Magnificent, lord of Iskidan

Ilia – a *druzhina* of Iskidan

Taras the Bull – a bruised man, Tainted with the blood of Naut the bull in his veins. Thrall into the service of Prince Jaromir of Iskidan

Iva – a Seiðr-witch and Prince Jaromir's thrall

Jarl Störr – lord of Snakavik and most of the western districts of Vigrið. Father of Thorun, Elvar and Broðir. Famed for his *Berserkir*-guard

Silrið – Jarl Störr's Galdurwoman

Thorun Störrsson – eldest child of Jarl Störr

Broðir Störrsson – youngest child of Jarl Störr

Berak Bjornasson – Tainted, a *Berserkir* with the blood of Berser the

bear-god in his veins. Husband of Uspa the Seiðr-witch and father of Bjarn. Captured by Agnar and the Battle-Grim and sold as a thrall to Jarl Störr, to become one of the famed *Berserkir*-guard

Gytha – a *drengr* and champion of Jarl Störr

Syr – a *drengr* of Jarl Störr, guard of Snakavik's gate

Hjalmar Peacemaker – leader of the Fell-Hearted mercenary warband

Hrung – a giant's head, magically animated by the power of dying Snaka

Njal Olafsson – jarl of a small fishing village on the banks of the River Drammur

Terna – a thrall of Njal Olafsson, originally a thrall from Kolskegg's farm

Brimil – a slaver based in Darl

Rog – bartender of *The Dead Drengr*

Frøya – sister of Varg

Leif Kolskeggson – son of Kolskegg, he hunted Varg for his father's murder, but upon catching Varg, Glornir and the Bloodsworn took Varg into their care and saved him from Leif's vengeance

Sterkur death-in-the-eye – a warrior and chief of a mercenary band for hire, the Red-Hands

Creatures

Grok – a giant raven

Kló – a giant raven

Spert – a spertus, vaesen, and bound to Orka and her household

Vesli – a tennúr, wounded and found by Breca, she swears an oath to Breca and Spert

Norse Titles, Terms and Items

Akáll – an invocation, a magic ceremony to reveal the last moments of the dead

Althing – meeting, an assembly of free people

Berserkir – person descended from Berser the bear-god. Capable of great strength and savagery

blóð svarið – a magical blood oath

Brynja – a coat of ring mail

Byrding – coastal boat

Drakkar – a longship

Dreng – an oathsworn warrior, trained to a high level

Druzhina – elite horse-mounted warrior

Galdrabok – book of magic

Galdurman – magician, specifically rune-magic.

Graskinna – grey-skin, a book of magic scribed on flayed skin

Guðfalla – the gods-fall

Guðljós – god-lights

Hangerock – a type of dress

Hird – warriors belonging to a lord's household

Heya – agreed

Holmganga – a duel recognised by law, a way of settling disputes

Jarl – lord or earl

Knarr – a merchant/trade ship

Maður-boy – a human child

Niðing – nothing, nobody, an insult, meaning without honour

Nålbinding – to bind or weave. An early form of knitting used to make clothing

Raudskinna – red-skin, a book of magic, made from the flayed skin of a dead god

Seax – single-edged knife, often with a broken back, of varying sizes. A multi-purpose tool, from cooking/shaving to combat

Seiðr – a type of magical power, inherited from Snaka, the father of the gods

Seiðr-witch – a woman who wields magical power

Skáld – a poet, teller of tales, often employed by a jarl or chief to sing of their heroic deeds

Skál – good health

Snekke – a smaller version of a longship

Tafl – a game of strategy played upon a board with carved figures

Thrall – a slave

Úlfhéðnar – person descended from Ulfrir the wolf-god

Vaesen – creatures created by Lik-Rifa the dragon-god

Weregild – a blood-debt

Winnigas – cloth covering for the legs, from ankle to just below the knee

Whale-road – the open sea

WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE

Orka: Orka lives a solitary life in the hills with her husband Thorkel, and their ten-year-old son, Breca. They have built a home for themselves in the wild, and trade in furs and skins with a nearby village when they need supplies.

During a hunting trip they discover a homestead burned out, two people murdered and the murdered couple's son gone.

Orka reports this to the local village, to Guðvarr, a *drengr* (warrior) and nephew of the local jarl, or lord, Jarl Sigrún.

Breca, Orka's son, finds a wounded tennúr (a magical creature with a liking for teeth) in the woods and brings it home.

Orka, Thorkel and Breca attend an Althing, or meeting, as all residents of the district are summoned by Jarl Sigrún, the local lord. At this meeting they hear that Jarl Sigrún has sworn an oath of allegiance to Queen Helka, a powerful woman with ambitions to rule all Vigrið. A *holmganga* duel is also fought between Virk, a local fisherman, and Guðvarr. Virk wins the duel but breaks the *holmganga* rules and so is slain by Jarl Sigrún's Tainted warrior-thrall.

Upon returning home Orka and Thorkel decide that it is time for them to move on and build a new home elsewhere. Orka goes to consult the Froa-spirit (the powerful spirit and guardian of the Ash Tree) for guidance but finds the Froa-spirit dead, slain with fire and axes. Upon returning to her steading she finds her home in flames, her husband, Thorkel, slain, and her son, Breca, gone. She tracks the abductors, catches up with some of them and kills them, questions one and discovers that the man who took her son is called Drekr.