

Njals Saga Anonymous

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Considered to be one of the finest of the Icelandic sagas, "Njal's Saga" (or "The Story of Burnt Njal") was written sometime in the thirteenth century by an unknown author and is the longest and most developed of the sagas. The source material for the saga was historical but probably drawn largely from oral tradition. The story relates events that took place between 960 and 1020, involving blood feuds in the Icelandic Commonwealth. It features memorable characters like the noble warrior Gunnar of Hlidarendi, the lawyer Njáll Þorgeirsson, and the mildly villainous Mord Valgardsson, whose motivations and passions are familiar to people of every age and locale. The saga is divided into three parts, which describe the friendship between Gunnar and Njal, the tragic consequences of revenge, and finally the retribution of

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Flosi and Kari. Themes of loyalty, marriage, family honor and vengeance permeate this beautifully written and timeless epic.

The Story of Burnt Njal, from the Anonymous Icelandic of the Njals Saga

Comic Sagas and Tales brings together the very finest Icelandic stories from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries, a time of civil unrest and social upheaval. With feuding families and moments of grotesque violence, the sagas see such classic mythological figures as murdered fathers, disguised beggars, corrupt chieftains and avenging sons do battle with axes, words and cunning. The tales, meanwhile, follow heroes and comical fools through dreams, voyages and religious conversions in medieval Iceland and beyond. Shaped by Iceland's oral culture and their conversion to Christianity, these stories are works of ironic humour and stylistic innovation.

Composed at the end of the fourteenth century by an unknown author, The Saga of Grettir the Strong is one of the last great Icelandic sagas. It relates the tale of Grettir, an eleventh-century warrior struggling to hold on to the values of a heroic age becoming eclipsed by Christianity and a more pastoral lifestyle. Unable to settle into a community of farmers, Grettir becomes the aggressive scourge of both honest men and evil monsters - until, following a battle with the sinister ghost Glam, he is cursed to endure a life of tortured loneliness away from civilisation, fighting giants, trolls and berserks. A mesmerising combination of pagan ideals and Christian faith, this is a profoundly moving conclusion to the Golden Age of the saga writing.

Composed in medieval Iceland, Hrolf's Saga is one of the greatest of all mythic-legendary sagas, relating half-fantastical events that were said to have occurred in fifth-century Denmark. It tells of the exploits of King Hrolf and of his famous champions, including Bodvar Bjarki, the 'bear-warrior': a powerful figure whose might and bear-like nature are inspired by the same legendary heritage as Beowulf. Depicting a world of wizards, sorceresses and 'berserker' fighters - originally members of a cult of Odin - this is a compelling tale of ancient magic. A work of timeless power and beauty, it offers both a treasury of Icelandic prose and a masterful gathering of epic, cultic memory, traditional folk tale and myths from the Viking age and far earlier.

In Lee M. Hollander's faithful translation, all of the unknown twelfth-century author's narrative genius and flair for dramatic situation and pungent characterisation is preserved. Hollander was professor emeritus of Germanic languages at the University of Texas at Austin and an authority in Nordic language and literature. His translations of the best prose and poetry of the Old North - among them Heimskringla: History of the Kings of Norway and The Poetic Edda - have also appeared under the imprint of the University of Texas Press. In A.D. 986,

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Earl Håkon, ruler of most of Norway, won a triumphant victory over an invading fleet of Danes in the great naval battle of Hjôrunga Bay. Sailing under his banner were no fewer than five Icelandic skalds, the poet-historians of the Old Norse world. Like good war correspondents of the present, they went home after the battle to relate what they had seen and heard: and, being poets as well as reporters, no doubt they seasoned their versions well with imagination. Two centuries later their accounts of the battle became the basis for one of the liveliest of the Icelandic sagas, with special emphasis on the doings of the Jômsvikings, the famed members of a warrior community that feared no one and dared all.

An Icelandic family sage, probably from the 13th century, in a modern translation.

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