

TO ALFMUND FORWINSSON,

YOUR JUDGEMENT WAS RECEIVED WELL IN THE HALL OF XUN! OURS IS A FINE AND ANCIENT HALL WITH STORIES CENTURIES IN THE TELLING, STORIES WHICH I WOULD BRING TO YOUR EARS, WOULD MY LEGS BRING ME TO ANVIL AGAIN AS THEY DID IN MY YOUTH. I FOUGHT AGAINST THE REBELS IN MY YOUTH, AND AGAINST THULE AND JOTUN BOTH IN YEARS GONE BY, AND THOUGH I LAST SAW BATTLE MANY YEARS AGO, I NOW RULE THOSE RUNE-SMITHS WHO BEND THEIR HEADS TO THE TASK OF MAKING BEAUTIFUL THINGS.

I HAVE LONG BELIEVED IT THE FOLLY OF THE STEINR, IN TIMES LIKE THESE, TO FORGET THAT THE HANDS WHICH MAKE WAR ARE THE SAME HANDS THAT FORGE BEAUTY. SO IT SEEMS NOW: ALL OUR STORIES ARE OF WAR, AND PRECIOUS FEW OF SUBTLETY, OF WISDOM, OF CLEVERNESS, OF BEAUTY. I AM A STEINR, BUT MY HALL FEEDS AND HOMES THE THREE PEOPLES ALIKE, FOR ARE WE NOT ALL KIN? I SAW NO INSULT TO MY PEOPLE IN YOUR JUDGEMENT, BUT AN ADMONISHMENT: AS IF YOUNG BRITTA'S HALL WERE NOT WELL-SET WITH JEWELLED ADORNMENTS, AS IF HER FACE WERE THE SAME SIMPLE STEEL AS HER HELM.

NO, LET MY FIRST DECLARATION BE TURNED ASIDE LIKE AN OLD MAN'S BLOW! I WILL ATTEND ANVIL, THOUGH MY HALL MUST CARRY ME, AND I WILL MEET WITH YOU AND THOSE WHO WOULD TELL TALES OF HEROISM NOT FOUGHT ON THE BATTLEFIELD! LET US ROUSE THE HEARTS OF LAID-LOW SERMERSUAQ; LET US RAISE THE GHOSTS OF THE MARSHES TO HEAR THEIR HEARTY DEEDS RECOUNTED; LET US BEND THE EARS OF THE UNRULY STEINR AS THEY WERE LUSTY YOUNG HEROES, FORGETTING THEIR PLACE IN THE SHIELD-WALL IN SEARCH OF WOUNDS TO SHOW OFF! I WILL COME, AND BRING WITH ME SCOPS AND MYSTICS, AND I WILL BRING A PRIZE FOR THE FINEST HERO I HEAR RECOUNT THEIR TALE - SO LONG AS NOT A BLOW IS STRUCK IN ANGER FROM FIRST BREATH TO LAST.

(FOR OUR CUNNING HUNTERS, I WILL DECIDE WHAT "STRUCK IN ANGER" MEANS! MY OWN DAUGHTER STRUCK THE HEAD OFF A WARLOCK OF THE THULE IN THE NIGHT WHILE SHE SLEPT, AND HER BLOOD AS COLD AS ICE ALL THE WHILE!)

I MUST ASK THAT ALL SPEAK UP, THOUGH, FOR I HEAR LITTLE THESE DAYS THAT IS NOT SHOUTED TO ME! HA! OLD AGE MOCKS, AND IT IS OUR DUTY TO KEEP OUR SKINS WELL-TIED WHILE OUR BODIES FRAG.

I LOOK FORWARD TO SEEING ANVIL AGAIN, AND TO MEETING WITH YOU, WISE ALFMUND.

CENRED XUNHAND