

CHILDREN OF PLEIADES

Rise of the Henge

Legends of ethereal realms and visitations from star men have existed since time began. The first inhabitants of ancient Briton crossed over from the Northern Isles and journeyed southward through the English Midlands to settle the Salisbury Plain of Southwest England. It was there the building of the Great Henge came to be.

Chapter 1

c. 2,600 BC, Briton and the Northern Isles

The short summer season had surrendered to autumn's decay, leaving its sparse vegetation to wane on the cruel winds that now ravaged the barren central uplands. A few deciduous trees broke the monotony of the rolling landscape where a hopeful clan of travelers plodded towards the promise of a new life in a warmer clime. Windswept branches clad in a glum display of withered leaves hung on to their last days of life before they would eventually fall onto the desolate tundra of ancient middle England. Broken clouds covered most of the sky, and the brisk onshore breeze carried with it a damp chill that urged the six wanderers and a newborn to continue their trek despite the fatigue that had taken hold after walking non-stop since dawn. The nomadic tribe had traversed the barren tundra of the midlands, trekking towards the midday sun since leaving the forested high country of Cumbria in early spring. Exhausted and hungry, they had not tasted meat since the fateful night that had preceded the summer solstice.

The mists that had hidden the barren landscape since arriving on the central uplands had finally lifted, exposing the gentle rolling hills of a distant horizon for as far as the eye could see. Even though the weak rays that fell on the sunlit vista told of the approaching winter, it lifted the spirits of the weary travelers. During the warm summer season, winds and gentle rains had offered an abundance of blackberries and hazelnuts, but now the changing fall weather posed a threat to their survival. The coming winter would soon be upon them and they desperately needed to find woodlands to hunt deer and wild boar without which starvation would be imminent. Their only hope was that the many rivers that flowed to the sea in the direction of their trek would also lead to a gentler climate and wild game to sustain them.

The small group, led by Horst of Skerrabra, consisted of his woman, their newborn and a young son, as well as a recently adopted family of two girls and their mother. Thousands of years earlier, his ancestors arrived on the shores of the Orkney Islands from Norseland by sailing the westerly flow of tidal waters fed by melting glaciers left behind by the Ice Age. The hearty blond-haired, blue-eyed people of his lineage gave Horst striking features and the heavily muscled physique of a fierce warrior. His almost transparent white skin and translucent blue eyes were spellbinding to those who came upon him.

The secrets of his family's origin had remained deeply buried within the vault of ancestral memory for over 100 generations. The legend was said to have begun in a mysterious flash of light that descended over the dark forest near the frigid waters of a deep-sea inlet known as Stjernevann Fjord on the western shores of Norseland. The strange events that emerged thereafter remained as folklore, passed down from generation to generation through the storytellers of its people. Although it was embellished over time, many people of Norse descent heard their elders recount the story as clan members sat around campfires during dark winter nights on the shores of the homeland.

“The star man was more majestic than even the most feared and powerful Norse warrior with eyes that shone like the full moon in the midnight sky—deep, black and still. His face had no lines, like that of a newborn, and he had a shock of hair as dark as the black wolf. His frame was so powerful that he could move a fallen tree with his bare hands. When he came upon a young sibyl in the dark of the forest, he shared with her the ecstasy of the celestial plane and implanted her with star seed. He was named Døell-Stjarna-Jötunn by the great chieftain Freydis, who was honored to become the grandfather of a star child born of the union between the gentle celestial giant and his daughter, Astrid. We are told by the seers that in far distant times, offspring with the dark eyes and black hair of the star man will be born onto the Earth to fulfil the destiny written in the heavens. We are also warned of the evil workings of a dark one who would cast his shadow over the Earth to end the sacred bloodline, so it must remain a secret until the stars of the Seven Sisters beckon its coming.”

The identity of the children said to have been born of sacred blood was lost over the passing millennia and no one—not even those with the hallowed lifeblood coursing through their veins—remembered their heritage.

Generations of migrant Norsemen lived on the remote islands at the northern tip of Briton after traveling in wooden boats across the shallow waters of the open ocean that separated the northerly

archipelago from the Norse mainland. Ceaselessly battered by winter winds and violent storm surf, Orkney's Mainland Isle had been the home of Horst's hearty ancestors for centuries. Living off the sea's bounty and wandering the barren rocky shores, they took refuge from the weather, protected by stone shelters built into the earth. While earlier settlers lived on fish as well as the abundant seabirds and seals that inhabited the shores of the Isle, farming became a primary source of food as time passed into the agricultural age.

Like many of the people who lived in Briton's ancient times, those who lived on the Orkneys were among the first to build stone henges where they would gather to worship the forces of nature. It was a deep sense of awe within them—an instinctual mystical feeling of connection to the heavens—that inspired their reverence for the celestial, and gave rise to their belief in the Otherworld.

The shamans, wizards and elders of the day had access to analeptic memory—the deep well of the mysterium that was the source of ancestral knowledge—where there existed direct communion within the spirit realm of angels, faeries and pixies. It was during key dates such as the winter and summer solstice that they would remind their people of the truth of their celestial home in the Otherworld. In the still of the evening, under a canopy of stars, the people of the Orkneys would gather around stone edifices that were said to hold great power. They would listen in awe to the words of the shaman as he transmitted messages from the heavens that could change the weather and heal the sick. Standing at the center of the stone circle, the shaman would raise his hands to the stars of the Seven Sisters and speak.

“I am a child of the land and the Otherworld
Of spirit, Earth and wind, stone and fire
With true origins in the void of the stars
Lead us to drink from the well of remembrance
As we thirst for the truth that is ours”

Great celebration would follow his incantation, and the people would dance and chant until the rising of the morning sun. Abundance and prosperity for the land were the shaman's calling, and his access to alchemic powers that came from the Otherworld, his gift.

Horst was born in the early hours of the morning in a stone house overlooking the sea at the settlement of Skerrabra on the western shores of the biggest isle of the Orkney chain. The sturdy shelter was among several others built into grass covered earthen banks consisting of midden—animal dung, seashells and excrement—mixed with native soil. The large stone houses nestled into the earth provided insulation against the brutal winter weather that battered the Northern Isles.

A terrible gale had been blowing throughout the night, threatening to destroy the roof made of whale bone, driftwood and seaweed. Rainwater dripped from the ceiling, and the wind outside was howling, as the birthing began. His father had been up all night with the village midwife doing his best to keep the fire going in the smoky one room house. Finally, just before dawn, the boy child was born but not without a terrible price. Immediately after delivering the baby, his mother became unresponsive.

“Helga is not breathing,” the midwife stated, after placing the infant to its mother’s breast. “Go and awaken the shaman and bring him here quickly before she passes.”

Alarmed, his father, Edmund rushed through the narrow opening that led outside into the terrible storm. The midwife held the infant steady with her hands for fear he would slip off his mother’s lifeless body as she anxiously awaited their return.

Finally, Edmund arrived back at the house with the shaman. The aged holy man whose long grey hair hung to his shoulders, kneeled beside the woman who had not taken a breath since delivering the child. He motioned for the midwife to take the newborn and stand aside. Edmund watched as the shaman laid his hands on his woman’s forehead and belly. Closing his eyes, he spoke the ancient Norse tongue of his ancestors in an almost musical chant that drowned out the cries of the infant.

“I call upon the mysterium of the Otherworld for the powers that can return this woman’s spirit from the Netherworld.”

A brilliant flash of light filled the room, and a shimmering angelic image appeared above the bed upon which the lifeless mother lay.

The shaman, who was still in a trance, spoke in a prosodic voice.

“This child has a destiny to fulfil. It is neither his nor his mother’s time to join the realm of the dead. The spirit of this woman shall be sent back from the Netherworld, *now!*”

Suddenly, Helga began breathing as the apparition vanished.

Wide-eyed, she sat up and looked over at the midwife.

“I shall take my child now,” she said softly.

The midwife walked over and placed the baby boy in her arms, and he began suckling at his mother’s breast.

“We shall name him Horst,” Helga stated, as she looked over at Edmund.

Edmund fell to his knees and bowed his head in gratitude to the shaman whose attunement with the Otherworld had brought his woman back to life.

The shaman got to his feet and smiled.

“He must have fate on his side to have called upon the spirit mother of Pleiades,” he said, as he blessed the family before leaving.

The first year of life was joyful as little Horst learned to walk, talk and test his parents with his strong-willed personality. His father knew that he had brought a warrior into the world and that he would be a handful as he grew into a man.

Horst was adored by his mother who nicknamed him Smár Fischings Maðr (Tiny Wandering

Warrior) because he was always getting into trouble, wandering off and fighting with the other youngsters in the village. It was his 10th summer when he and another boy went missing. They had secretly built a wooden raft, and were spotted by a villager half submerged in the bay near the settlement. They came close to losing their lives but were rescued by a man who brought the boys back by the scruff of their necks to Horst's worried parents.

"I found these two in the waters of the bay. Lucky a gale didn't come up or they would have been washed into the open sea," the villager said, clearly annoyed, before leaving them with Edmun.

The boys hung their heads in shame as Helga came running out to her son to embrace him.

"Where were you, you little rascal? We have looked everywhere!"

"They were found in the bay on a wooden raft," Edmun exclaimed.

"Horst, where did you think you were going?" Helga asked.

Horst looked over at his friend Bjorn before giving his parents a challenging look.

"I was going to Hoy and then to the big land across the water," he replied.

"Bjorn, it is time for you to go home now," Edmun said, dismissing the boy, who turned and walked away.

"Edmun, you had better put some sense into your son," Helga said, as she looked over at him.

The small-boned, blond-haired woman watched as Edmun grabbed Horst by the arm and walked him up onto the grass slope above their house. Horst took after his father who was a ruggedly built, blue-eyed Norseman with long blond hair and pale skin. The two of them stood atop the grasses as Edmun pointed southward towards the Isle of Hoy.

"Now listen closely. Those waters have evil in them—a witch who makes Svelga that will swallow you up and take you into the depths of the Underworld where there are wicked monsters. Do you understand?" Edmun admonished.

His father's words conjured up terrible visions in Horst's impressionable mind.

"What kind of monsters?" Horst asked, the fear in his voice palpable.

Realizing he had terrified his young son, Edmun tried to change the subject.

"Never mind, just promise me you will never do such a thing again," Edmun said sternly.

Horst squinted as the midday sun shone on his face.

"I promise, Father," Horst replied.

"Let this be the last of your seafaring adventures. It is time I taught you to respect the ocean and

its bounty. You will come with me to fish and hunt seals so you can understand that this land and these waters are the blessing you have been born into—your destiny,” Edmund stated. “Now, let us return to our home where you will apologize to your mother.”

From that day onward, Horst accompanied his father to fish and hunt with the men of the village.

Chapter 2

It was during the spring fishing season several years later that Horst and his father waded out into the shallow waters of the bay to catch cod with limpet bait. Horst was baiting a whalebone fashioned into a hook when a seal feeding on the precious cod breached close to where many of the villagers were standing in knee deep water. Always armed with his bow across his shoulder and a quiver of arrows, Horst dropped the hook and took his bow from his shoulder.

“Leave him be son,” Edmund said, as he watched Horst take an arrow from his quiver and line up a shot aimed at the unsuspecting seal.

Ignoring his father, Horst focused on the seal as fellow fishermen cursed the marauding animal

for taking the cod. He let go a shot that hit the small female directly in the head, killing it instantly. Rousing cheers from the other fishermen erupted as Horst waded out, retrieved his arrow and grabbed the seal by its fins, pulling it to shore through a thick barrier of seaweed.

Several men and a few youngsters gathered around the seal as it bled out on the sandy beach. Pulling a sharp flint sickle from his belt, Horst leaned down and aggressively cut off the seal's head which he tossed at one of the young boys who was watching. He then turned the seal upside down, hanging it from its tail to allow the rest of the blood to drain from its body.

"Where are you taking it?" one of the youngsters asked.

"To the grass midden by my father's house," Horst replied, as the heavily built teenager slung the animal over his shoulder and walked up towards the houses above the beach.

One of the onlookers was a boy named Jonn. He followed Horst as the others returned to fishing. Once he arrived at the midden, Horst dropped the seal to the ground and turned it belly up before noticing that Jonn was standing over him, watching.

"Do you know how to do it? I've cleaned many seals," the equally tall and heavily built Jonn said, with a mocking grin.

Horst ignored the provocative taunt, using his flint sickle to slice open the seal's belly. Glancing up at Jonn, Horst began to pull out the bloody entrails, tossing them into an open hole in the grass. His hands were covered in blood as he cut blubber and skin from the ribcage, taking care as he sliced it away from the valuable hide.

"I can braid the guts while you do that," Jonn said, offering to help.

Horst ignored him as he finished butchering the animal. Jonn leaned down and picked up the intestine and began squeezing out the contents. In a sudden move, Horst tackled the boy, taking him to the ground just as his father approached along with two of the other villagers and their children. Jonn, who was as strong as Horst, rolled away and stood up to face his attacker. They began beating each other with their fists. The blood from Horst's hand left red blotches on Jonn's face with each blow.

"Stop this," his father commanded as he ran towards them, intent on breaking them up.

Before Edmund could reach the two combatants, Horst gripped Jonn by the neck and pulled him to the ground while reaching for his flint sickle. Pinning the big teenager with his full weight, Horst held the blade to Jonn's throat, his face red with rage.

"Enough!" Edmund admonished, loudly.

Horst looked up for a moment before releasing the boy he likely would have killed.

"Off with you, Jonn," Edmund said with a wave of his hand.

Jonn got to his feet and backed away.

“You’ll pay for your murderous temper someday, Horst,” he said, as he walked off.

“What was that all about?” his father asked, as he moved towards Horst and grabbed the flint sickle.

Horst stood with his head bowed and his bloodied hands to his sides.

“Go to the water and clean yourself. I will deal with your kill,” his father replied, visibly upset at Horst’s actions.

Horst’s reputation as a feared combatant predisposed him as a sullen loner.