



## 'Halatafl -- The Fox Game' Help Contents: Version 1.0s

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**Version Change Log:**

Version 1.0s -- Initial Release, November 1996.

## Prolog . . .



1063 AD\*.

They were only half-a-day out of Vinland when the storm struck. Massive waves and winds buffeted and tossed the sturdy but open Viking vessel. Then came the rain. Loftur and Helga did what they could to protect their sick daughter from the elements and prayed mightily to Odin to save her, but it was not to be.

Gudrun, who had brightened their hearth for 11 years, died during the night.

Unable to bear the thought of burying their loved one at sea, the heartbroken parents waited until later the next day when they found a small, approachable island, with a short gravel beach on which to land the ship. Loftur dug a simple grave as the other men gathered and planted rocks around it in the traditional ship-like shape. Helga lovingly wrapped her daughter's cold body in a soft cloak and fastened it with one of a pair of prized brooches from her own dress -- a final bond of love. Then she held the bundle tightly in a last embrace, and Loftur lowered it into the grave. Inside the grave were placed the prized game board\*\* and all of little Gudrun's possessions that could be spared -- it was the best they could do. Sobbing, Helga was helped into the ship as Loftur and the other men shoved the vessel back into the open sea. Oarsmen strained and the wind caught the sail. Helga and Loftur, looking back, bid a last farewell, and soon the little island disappeared into the gray distance and into the ocean of time . . .

1000 years later -- 1996 AD. Nova Scotia's southern coast.

You slide your kayak up on the island's rocky beach. "Looks like a good place to stop for lunch," you decide as you look things over. The island, a short distance away from the mainland, is only one of the many, many small Islands dotting the coast. After securing your craft, you haul your pack up to the overlook above the beach. It is a very, very pretty little Island, peaceful, and covered with grass and wild flowers. At the top you stop. Surprised. "What's this?" A strange, almost boat-shaped grouping of rocks is on the overlook. "For a campfire maybe -- a pretty large one?," you muse, although you can see no recent charcoal. "Hmm?" You turn to look out to sea and the sunlight glints off something in the grass. "Litter! Probably an aluminum can from a careless camper -- a shame to spoil such a pretty place," you fume as you investigate.

But it is not aluminum at all.

Digging a little, you soon hold what appears to be a silver ornament, a kind of brooch perhaps.

"Treasure!"

Dreams of avarice race through your mind as you turn the brooch over and over in your hands. Excitedly you begin an earnest exploration of the rest of the little island but find nothing else of interest. Soon the sun starts to sink in the sky and your 'stop for lunch' becomes a 'stop for the night'. "Time to set-up camp," you realize. You slip the brooch into your pack, and ponder the ocean as you eat your supper. Later, dead tired, you fall off to sleep while promising yourself that "Tomorrow I may have to do some digging . . ."

Suddenly you are awake! Someone is weeping!

Fear grips you. You gingerly crawl out of your sleeping bag and tent only to be confronted by an apparition, a pale translucent figure of a young girl, weeping in the fiercely lit boat shaped rock 'circle'. Aghast, you try to stifle your panic and watch carefully, making yourself as 'small' as possible. But after a while of watching, she seems harmless -- certainly in great distress.

Carefully you approach. "Ahem . . . Uh . . . Can I help?," you ask. "Why are you crying? Is there something I can do?" you continue.

The girl looks up, tears in her ghostly eyes. "My mother's brooch -- it's gone!", she cries. "Can you help me find it?" she implores. You gulp, realizing that you have been a thief, and that greed has led you to hurt another. "Yes . . . Yes, I . . . I have it. I'm very, very sorry I took it", you apologize. "I had no idea it was owned by anyone. I will return it of course," you promise, "But will you tell me who you are and why you are here?" "Sit then", says the girl, "and we will play a game -- The Fox Game -- its been so long since I had anyone to play it with me. I will tell you many things while we play." You sit beside the 'boat' and the girl brings out a beautiful playing board. "Here, let me show you how to play.", she says, " But you do promise to return the brooch? "Yes, of course", you confirm as you begin to listen to her tales and learn her game

. . .

\*The date, 1063 AD., used here and the placing of Vinland half a day or more from a non-specific small island off of southern Nova Scotia are vague enough to keep me away from controversy. The location of Vinland is a very controversial subject. The only physical evidence is the Viking settlement at L'Anse-aux-Meadows, discovered in the 1960s at the northernmost tip of Newfoundland, but most agree that Vinland must lie to the south of this . . . somewhere. There have been highly controversial 'finds' that attempt to place Vinland and the Vikings further to the south -- the Kensington Rune Stone for example -- but none of these is officially recognized by researchers and most are out and out hoaxes\*\*.

But it is quite possible that on some little island to the south of Newfoundland there is the grave of a small Viking girl waiting to be discovered . . .

\*\*While doing research for this game and my next game, which I hope to be an ancient Anasazi game, I was surprised to learn that the Cree and Chippewa Indians played a game -exactly- like the version of Halatafl presented here (see. "Games of the North American Indians" by Stewert Cullin, University of Nebraska Press, 1992). Cullin quoted J. A. Mitchell who wrote in the late 1800's 'The game is one which has been long known to the Indians and is much admired by them'. The Cree and Chippewa's earliest hunting grounds were much further north than in the 1800's -- up far into Canada and east to the tip of the Saint Lawrence Seaway. Could they have gotten this game from Viking settlers at Vinland? You laugh! We'll maybe it is a little crazy, but there -is- a slight possibility that when Vinland died out, the survivors may have been taken into local Indian tribes as captives or perhaps refugees (as seems to have actually happened in the case of the dying out of the Greenland Viking settlements). Just maybe . . . . . ;-)

## What is 'Halatafl -- The Fox Game'?

Erected Aug. 1, 1938

First Settlement of Icelanders in the United States.

Leif Erickson, an Icelander, discovered America in 1000 A.D. Eight centuries later, 1855 - 1860, sixteen pioneers from Iceland established in Spanish Fork the first permanent Icelandic settlement in the United States. They were Samuel Bjarnason & wife Margret; Thordur Didriksson & wife Helga; Gudmundur Gudmundsson; Loftur Jonsson & wife Gudrun; Jon Jonsson & wife Anna; Gudrun Jonsdottir; Magnus Bjarnason & wife Thuridur; Vigdis Bjarnadottir (Holt); Gudny E. Hafudiason; Ragnhildur S. Hanson; and Mary H. Sherwood.



I should have an image of an ancient Halatafl board here, but I don't have one to show you ;-) What I do have is an image that explains my connection with the Icelanders -- I grew up with them! "Sure," you say, "isn't Utah a fairly long way from Iceland?" "Yes," I answer, "but the Icelanders really got around!"

The image at the left is of the Icelandic Monument, high on the east bench of Spanish Fork City, Utah. It was a landmark in my childhood and still is. The plaque and monument, made by the 'Daughters of the Utah Pioneers -- the Mt. Flonette Camp' and The Icelandic Association, reads as above.

'Halatafl -- The Fox Game'\* is the most ancient form of 'Fox and Geese', one of the most popular 'Hunt' games\*\* of ancient Europe.

It appears to be an Icelandic Viking, or at least a Scandinavian game, that spread to Northern Europe and then all of Europe before 1000 AD. It was known as 'Fuchs im Huhnerhof' in Germany, 'Schaap en wolf' in the Netherlands, 'Voli i ovtsy' in Russia, and 'lupo e pecore' in Italy.

It is mentioned in the Icelandic Sagas as 'Halatafl' which means 'The Fox Game'. Some Historians believe it is also the game called 'Freystafl' mentioned in the later Sagas. In the accounts of the royal household of Edward IV of England (around 1460 AD., the time of 'The War of Roses') is recorded that 'two foxis and 26 hounds of silver overgilt' were purchased to form two sets of 'Marells'. This is probably the same form of 'Fox and Geese' as found here.

The most ancient form of the game used 13 geese pitted against a single fox -- exactly the configuration used here. But 'Fox and Geese' is known to be an unbalanced game with the strength on the 'Geese' side (a competent player can lose one or two Geese and still win handily\*\*\*). Different board configurations -- 15 Geese, which cannot move backwards, against one fox, 18 Geese against 1 fox on a 46 cell board, 24 Geese against 2 foxes, etc. -- were used in latter centuries, perhaps in attempts to more closely balance the game. The game can be 'exactly' balanced, however, by using the concept of simultaneous games (see Schmittberger, p. 34). By playing two games at once, with each player taking the Fox position in one game and the Geese position in the other, the task becomes to win as quickly as possible with the Geese while holding out as long as possible

with the Fox -- a challenging and complex task.

'Halatafl -- The Fox Game' was played in ancient Europe since at least before 1000 AD. Now it is here again in the present, re-created through the magic of electrons and phosphorus, for you to play. Welcome to a game of the ancient Vikings -- Harold the Ruthless, Eric the Red, Leif the Lucky, and now you!

\*Halatafl is the name most historians and archaeologists give for Icelandic 'Fox and Geese', but there are dissenters and there is some question. Why? Because there are so many 'tafl's (meaning 'table', which is Viking for 'board game') mentioned in the sagas and literature of the time that we don't know with absolute certainty which is which. As a partial list consider the following: brannantafl, halatafl, hnettafl, hnottafl, hraetafl, kvatrutafl, and skaktafl -- and that's just some of them! Halatafl is the current 'best guess', but who knows -- I may have to rename this game in the future if archaeological and literary evidence forces me to. :-)

\*\*A similar Hunt Game played on an Alquerque board, De Cercar La Liebre (Catch the Hare), is recorded in Alfonso X's Libro de Juegos in 1283. This game is called 'Quirkat' in a 976 AD. Arabic work titled Kitab-al Aghani and thus 'The Fox Game' may be an adaptation of an ancient Moorish game. Of Course, the Moors probably got their game from Egypt since examples of Alquerque are found cut into the roofing slabs of the temple of Kurna, Egypt, built around 1400 BC. So, 'The Fox Game' may be an ancient Egyptian game played by the Vikings -- strange isn't it!

\*\*\* A note (added to impress my father ;-): Halatafl, Fox and Geese, as presented here is decidedly a non-trivial game. Based on 'State-space complexity' and 'Game-tree complexity', two standard measures of game complexity for computers, it ranks higher than checkers at least. But these two measures don't capture all aspects of a game, however, and it is true that between players of equal ability, the geese have the advantage. How much of an advantage? Well, it is an advantage that geese cannot squander and still expect to win because the loss of even two geese balances the game considerably. But lose geese you may be forced to do since, ironically, losing geese is often part of a winning strategy. Why? Because Halatafl is a noble game: It is often necessary for one goose to sacrifice itself so that the others may live -- something that seems to have been missed in all the descriptions of the game that I have read. The logic of 'Gudrun', your computer opponent, uses a minimax search tree ('Gagnrad' = 1 ply, 'Vafthrudnir' = 3 ply, and 'Ragnarok' = 5 ply ) with alpha-beta cutoff, some pattern matching, iterative deepening, and some rudimentary move ordering. If I could have figured out how to apply the 'Killer Heuristic' here I would have, but I couldn't. The fact that the fox can jump multiple geese complicates the tree. It is also easy to reach an 'impass' in the game where unless something is done, the Fox and Geese will continue to repeat the same pattern of lock-step moves. It is the Geese's responsibility to break these impasses, often by making a sub-optimal move, since they are the ones trying to trap the Fox. Avoiding an impass complicated the programming and testing considerably. The game also uses a complicated 'evaluation function' -- too complicated for its own good. Unfortunately, the most natural evaluation function -- the size of the fox's reachable domain -- is not a very good guide because it is so 'discontinuous'. By this I mean that the stable positions where the geese command an area unassailable by the fox are separated by a number of moves greater than the search tree depth (I estimate a needed search tree depth of around 15, which is impossibly deep even for the largest computer) -- but I have done the best I can.

## What do the items on the menu do?

The menu items are very simple. The top-level menu consists of only three real menu items plus the 'game status' area. See below:

Options Help Exit OK Gold, move your Geese.

### The Options sub-menu

|                                       |
|---------------------------------------|
| <b><u>G</u>ame Sounds?</b>            |
| <b><u>M</u>IDI Background Music?</b>  |
| <b><u>V</u>ikingFacts?</b>            |
| ✓ <b><u>S</u>ingle Game?</b>          |
| <b><u>S</u>imultaneous Games?</b>     |
| ✓ <b><u>P</u>lay Gudrun?</b>          |
| <b><u>S</u>witchSides?</b>            |
| <b><u>P</u>lay Level (Ragnarok) ▶</b> |
| <b><u>N</u>ew Game?</b>               |
| <b><u>H</u>int?</b>                   |

The first section of this sub-menu allows you to control some basic options of the game -- do you want game sounds?, do you want background music?, and do you want VikingFacts, from time to time, to pop-up in the upper center of the screen. VikingFacts are interesting facts about the ancient Vikings that will pop-up every couple of minutes or so if this option is checked.

The 2nd section of this sub-menu lets you pick the 'mode' of the game. In 'Single Game?' mode, you play a single game on the left board only. In 'Simultaneous Games?' mode, a mode for advanced players, you play both sides of the board at the same time - playing the Geese on one side and the Fox on the other. 'Single Game?' mode is the default.

The 3rd section of this sub-menu lets you play the game on manual mode (play a friend, or play against yourself) or, more commonly, against the computer. If 'Play Gudrun' is checked, you are playing against the computer. The computer always takes the current turn and piece type if this option is checked during a game in progress. In other words, if it's Gold's turn to move at the time this option is checked, then the computer will play the Golds and vice versa. You can always click the 'SwitchSides' option anytime to turn the tables on the computer and play the other side -- of course the 'SwitchSides' option is only active when your playing against Gudrun rather than yourself or a friend.

The 'Hint' entry here allows you to click for a suggested move anytime it is your turn. Hints are always given at the highest level available -- Vafthrudnir (Intermediate) in the case of this shareware version. I know a person such as you will not abuse this feature ;-)

|  |
|--|
| <b><u>G</u>agnrad (Beginner)</b>           |
| ✓ <b><u>V</u>afthrudnir (Intermediate)</b> |
| <b><u>R</u>agnarok (Advanced)</b>          |

'Play Level' allows you to choose the level of expertise of you computer opponent.

There are three levels:



### Gagnrad - Beginner mode

'Gagnrad' is actually the name Odin uses as a disguise in Norse mythology when he goes to test his knowledge against the knowledge of the frost giant Vafthrudnir. Gagnrad means 'giving helpful advice'. (See Page, p.184)

### Vafthrudnir - Intermediate mode

'Vafthrudnir' is the name of a frost giant (see above) who was of immense age and very learned in ancient history. Odin, who was god of wisdom, travels to test his knowledge against this formidable foe.

### Ragnarok - Advanced mode (only available on the registered version)

'Ragnarok' -is- the final battle in Norse mythology between Odin, the gods, and the brave slain warriors inhabiting Valhalla on the one side, and the frost giants on the other side. Heimdall will see the giants and the great wolf Fenrir coming and blow his horn, waking the gods. Then the final battle commences with victory ultimately and sadly going to the giants. Surt kills Freyr. Odin is killed by Fenrir. Thor kills the World Serpent but dies immediately after from the snake's venom. Loki and Heimdall fight to the death with both being mortally wounded. Finally Surt slings fire over the earth and burns it completely up. . . Not a pretty scene ;- ) (See almost any book on Norse mythology for more)

Clicking the 'New Game?' sub-menu option immediately resets the board and starts a new game.

### The Help sub-menu

|                                    |
|------------------------------------|
| Run Tutorial?                      |
| How to Play (and a whole lot more) |
| About                              |

Help has four sub-menu options: 'Tutorial' lets you re-run the tutorial whenever you wish, 'How do you play' lets you access the help file you're reading now 'About' lets you view the program copyright statements.

### The Exit menu item

'Exit', of course, lets you leave the game. 'Exit' is the 'normal' method of leaving the game -- two others, the space bar and the 'Esc' key, act as Boss Keys for emergency shutdown.

### The Game Feed-back menu area.

The area on the menu to the right of the 'Exit' item is the game feedback area. The feedback area offers instructions and status as the game progresses.

**Note: WAV sound file vs. MIDI sound file volume can be a problem. I've tried to set the relative volumes between the MIDI files and the WAV files at a good spot. Because of the maddening difference between the many sound cards out in the world, this might not be right for everyone. If you find your Music too loud compared to the Game Sounds, or the Game Sounds too loud compared to the music, look for and use your 'Mixer' application (it came with your sound card for sure), before playing or even during play, to adjust the relative volumes.**

## **The FG.INI file.**

Halatafl uses the information in the FG.INI file in the Windows directory to record information for start-up. This is the only file that the game creates automatically on your system. If you ever want to delete the game from your system, you should also delete FG.INI in addition to the files in your FG directory.

Yah sure! A little Viking girl, alone, forgotten, waits in the grave for a 1000 years for you to come along and play a game with her. When you finally -do- come, you steal her prized brooch, and then throw her into the 'bit bucket' to be taken out with the trash. I hope you're proud of yourself! ;-)

## **The 'Boss' Keys**

I am sensitive to the fact that you might want to play 'Halatafl -- The Fox Game' in private at times.

To that end, if you hit the 'Space Bar' or the 'Esc' anytime during play, the game will end and clear itself from the screen AS SOON as it has control back from GUDRUNS.DLL. If you are playing on the advanced level, this may not be for a few seconds.

## **How to contact the author.**

If you have comments or suggestions, you can contact me by:

**Internet: 74212.1123@compuserve.com**

or

**CompuServe E-Mail: 74212,1123**

or visit my homepage at:

**<http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/PSNeeley>**

or by letter to:

**P. S. Neeley  
248 W. 3325 N.  
North Ogden, UT 84414**

## Credits (or where did all this stuff come from anyway?).



'Halatafl -- The Fox Game' was written in Microsoft's Visual Basic for Windows 3.0.

All the background information, the raw materials for the images, and the VikingFacts(tm), came from the following sources (all 'mined' at the local Library or purchased on the 'Web' at [www.books.com](http://www.books.com)):

"Board and Table Games From Many Civilizations" by R.C. Bell, Oxford University Press, 1960.

"Board Games and Real Events" by Yuri I. Averbakh, part of the proceedings of the international colloquium 'Board Games in Academia', held in Leiden, April 9 -13, 1995 and sponsored by the Research School CNWS and the IIAS.

"Myths of the Norsemen From the Eddas and Sagas" by H. A. Guerber, Dover Publications, 1992.

"A History of the Vikings" by Gwyn Jones, Oxford University Press, 1984.

"Chronicles of the Vikings: Records, Memorials and Myths" by R. I Page, University of Toronto Press, 1995.

"The Vikings" by Howard La Fay, National Geographic Society, 1972

"Cultural Atlas of the Viking World" by James Graham-Campbell, Colleen Batey, Helen Clarke, R. I. Page, and Neil S. Price; Andromeda, 1994

"Vikings: Raiders from the North"; Time-Life Book's Lost Civilizations Series, Time-Life, 1993

"Vikings" by Henry Pluckrose, Gloucester Press, 1982.

"Vikings" by Helen Clarke, Part of the Civilization Library published by Gloucester Press, 1979.

"The Vikings" by Hazel Mary Martell, New Discovery Books, New York, 1992.

"Living History: The Vikings", John D. Clare, editor; Random Century Publishing Company, 1992.

"West Viking: The Ancient Norse in Greenland and North America" by Farley Mowat, Little, Brown, and Company, 1965.

"New Rules for Classic Games" by R. Wayne Schmittberger; John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1992.

"The World of Games: Their Origins and History, How to Play Them, and How to Make Them" by Botermans et al., Facts on File Inc., New York and Oxford, 1989.

All these good people and their books have been my 'teachers of things Viking ' -- I have tried to learn well. Any errors are, of course, my own.

Beauty and Art were breathed into this game through superlative tools -- my Microtek-II HR scanner, Adobe Photoshop 3.0, Kai Power Tools 2.0, Andromeda series II filters, and Paint Shop Pro v3.0. Some extremely smart people made these tools to empower the 'artistically challenged' of the world (like me) to create something worthwhile in spite of 'handicaps'.

The 'Rune Stone' Halatafl game icon, and the 'Crossed Ax and Sword' icon used to denote the 'mover' in the game, are used with the kind permission of Dan Meyer of Halfdan productions, an avid Viking researcher. I am also very grateful to Dan for acting as the beta tester for the game -- a tedious and time consuming task but an extremely important one.

Some of the icons used here (some of which were subsequently converted to BMP files) were created using IconWorks -- an application furnished with Visual Basic.

This Help file was written with the aid of Craig Villalon's shareware help authoring system -- VB Automatic Help Author v.1.32 .

A number of the game sounds in this game are greatly shortened and modified versions of sound files found on Interactive's "1000 of the World's Greatest Sound Effects" CD-ROM. A couple are mixed and shortened WAV files from BeachWare Inc.'s Music Tracks CD. The rest are either from those 'collected' over the years from various BBS's and On-Line services or were recorded using the Microsoft Windows Sound Recorder Applet and my trusty Radio Shack microphone.

The background MIDI music comes from Cambium's Sound Choice Volume I and II, suitably altered to tone down the modern instrumentation a bit. I don't mean to represent the music as Viking music at all, it just seemed to appropriately represent Gudrun's joy at finally finding a game playing companion. Actually, we know little about Viking music since their instruments were made of wood which has long since rotted away. We do know, however, that they played the lyre and harp, simple flutes and panpipes, and a form of fiddle.

Many thanks to PowerBasic Inc. for their PBDLL product that allowed me to compile the VB 3.0 threaded p-code for Gudrun's computer game playing strategy to a DLL -- Gudruns.DLL. This provided the speed needed to 'bring into range' that last level -- Ragnarok -- which required about a 6X turbo-charge in computer speed.

The knowledge and interest in Mathematics and programming is due to my father Pat's influence and the fine education I received from the many Math and Science teachers and professors who taught so very well (obligating a debt I can never repay).

The time to complete this programming project was largely 'stolen' during the late evening and wee morning hours when more normal people would be asleep. However, inevitably, some of the time was donated by my wife, Barbara and my children, Jon, Melissa, Christie, Patrick, Nick, and James.

Some day they may come to understand that while other fathers were tinkering with the family car, mowing the lawn, doing woodwork in the garage, etc. -- tending to normal business -- their father, high in the dark castle tower, and bathed in the soft glow of the electron's fire, was practicing modern-day sorcery. For he was building something that would never really grow old and decay, that could be copied exactly many times with almost no effort, that could be used and enjoyed by many, many people at the same time, and that could be scattered on the electronic winds to the ends of the Earth. Yet, this something was made out of nothing but an idea, diagrams in the air, and glowing bits of

phosphorus. Can there be anything more magic than that?

## The images -- what are they?

The images used in this game are as follows

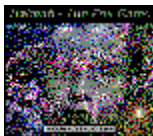


The 'Rune Stone' icon and the 'Crossed sword and battle ax' icon are used with the kind permission of Dan Meyer of Halfdan productions, an avid Viking researcher.



The Vikings fought with swords, spears, battle axes, and sometimes fighting knives and bow and arrow. The sword was the finest of weapons, single handed, double bladed, and from 70 to 80 centimeters long. Swords often had runes inscribed on them as well as intricate carvings and elaborate hilts. The sword was a status symbol and the finest warriors demanded the finest swords. The most prized swords were imported from the Frankish empire and the most famous of the Frankish swordsmiths was that of Ulfberht, whose name is inlaid on many blades.

The battle ax is probably the most famous of the Viking weapons, although it was less favored by them than the sword.



The Splash screen image is of the small, beautiful Island. You can see the boat shaped grave and near it a 'sparkle' in the grass. The image of Gudrun's face floats in the foreground. This is actually the face of my wife's grandmother -- Bessie Marie Wells -- as found in an old, and haunting, photo we have of her. Thanks grandma!

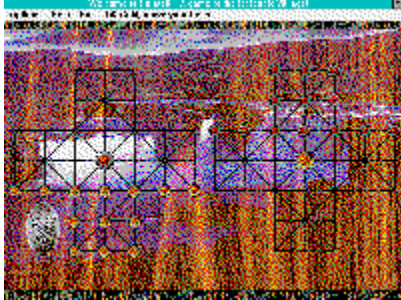
The Vikings buried their dead in various ways. The richest Vikings burials are found in great mounds where the dead were buried lying in their ships and accompanied by their rich possessions. Gudrun's burial, with its symbolic boat-shaped enclosure, is a common and much poorer burial, but cremation may have been the most common Viking burial custom of all.



The 'Gudrun crying on the ground' ' lead-in sequence and screen represents what you see as you are awakened in the middle of the night and you peer out of your sleeping bag.

The concept of a dead person 'inhabiting' the grave after burial is found in many of the Viking writings and sagas. While perhaps 'strange' to us today, the idea that Gudrun, dead for a 1000 years, would miss her mother's brooch and try to recover it would have been entirely believable to a Viking.



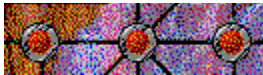
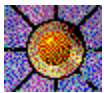


The beautiful, enchanted Halatafl board is made of fine wood with the image of Godafoss, Iceland's most famous falls, showing through. Godafoss means 'Waterfall of the Gods' and got its name when a pagan priest denounced his Viking beliefs, cast his idols and images into the river, and embraced Christianity.

At the top and bottom of the board are 'Runes' from the two main runic alphabets.

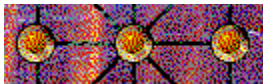
At the top are the short-twig runes (often called Common Runes) and at the bottom are the long-branch runes (often called Danish Runes). Each set, top and bottom, repeats the runic alphabet, the 'Futhark', over and over again.

Runes were made to be incised in stone or wood and thus consist of straight lines only, with no distinction between capital and lower case letters. The runic alphabets were incomplete in that some sounds of 'Old Norse' were not represented at all, while others were over-represented. Different rune writers thus represented the same word in different ways (spellings), making some of them hard to interpret precisely.



The playing grids are of aged and corroded iron. The playing pieces are made of fine silver and gold with inlays of Danish Amber -- all this courtesy of PhotoShop.

Amber was one of the most precious of Viking materials and was found 'washed up' on the southern Baltic and North Sea shores -- especially on the beaches of Denmark.



The brooch was very characteristic of women's dress during the Viking era. The most

common form being the oval, or 'tortoise shell', shape just as Gudrun's brooch. Many of these brooches were made of cast bronze while finer examples would have been gilded and made with intricate patterns. A silver brooch like Gudrun's would have been valuable indeed.

I do not know whether a Viking mother would have placed one of a fine pair of brooches in the grave with her daughter, keeping the other one as a bond of love, but it -is- a beautiful thought. :-)



The 'Game has been won' screen is an image of a Viking horde, a reward for the winner, that fades into the 'mists of time' as it continues to the right.

The 'horde' is actually an image of a small portion of the Cuerdale hoard now in the British Museum. This horde was buried in 905 AD. on the banks of the river Ribble in Lancashire, England. It is the largest horde ever found and contains over 7,500 coins and 'hack' silver and weighs about 40 kilograms. Much of the hack silver seems to be from Irish Viking settlements, but the majority of the coins were minted in York -- a former Viking stronghold.

Over the right, misty area, of this image will be displayed short skaldic verses in praise of the winner.

The verses are actually from various verses that the famous Icelandic skald Ottar the Black composed in praise of King Cnut (or Knut) (see Page, pp. 156 - 159). Cnut was King Svein Forkbeard's son and upon his father's death became king over all the Danish empire. When only 18, Cnut sailed his fleet to England (1015 AD.) to help countrymen who were under attack there by Ethelred the Redeless. Cnut was helped by his brother-in-law, the jarl Eirik of Haldir, and by Thorkel the Tall, and soon conquered all of England with his formidable forces.



The 'farewell' screen is an image of a Viking long boat, faint and hidden by the 'mists' of time. Each time the game is exited, one of a set of 12 examples of Viking era writings will be displayed. Not all of these words are those of the Vikings, per se, but they are contemporary with them -- written by people who lived in that 'Wolf Age' some 1000 years ago.

Please see the next help topic -- 'A look at the 'Farewell' verses . . .' -- for the texts of all of them and an explanation of what they are.

**. . . The splendid playing-pieces, all of gold,  
Will once again be found, in the grass,  
Those they owned in ancient times.**

From the 'Voluspa', the Norse poem of the end of the world. At the very end, where this verse appears, a new age of hope dawns, the old gods return, and the old games are found and played once again. :-)  
(see Page, p.210)

## How do you Play?

Okay now, don't be intimidated by this game -- it is really pretty simple and easy to learn.

Let's start with the Halatafl board:

\* Halatafl is played on a cross shaped grid. A very pretty one at that!



Actually we have TWO Halatafl boards here, not just one. Why? We'll get to that in a minute. But for now, just concentrate on the LEFT board.

Halatafl is a 'Hunt' game -- a very good example of one by the way.

You can look at it in either of two ways:

\* The Geese try to 'Hunt' the fox, while the Fox tries to evade the Geese.

\* The Fox 'Hunts' the Geese, and the Geese protect one another and work together to immobilize the Fox.

Either view-point will work.

There are 13 geese, but only one Fox.

Moving a piece is pretty simple in Halatafl:

\* A piece, whether Fox or Geese, can move any one grid point, in any direction -- that is as long as the grid point you want to move to is unoccupied (there is no doubling up in Halatafl).

OK, that's pretty easy. But one other thing:

\* The Fox, and only the Fox, has teeth. What we mean by this is that the Fox can also choose to 'jump' a goose that is right next to it and land in an empty grid point just beyond it. When it happens, the Goose is 'dead' and is removed from the board.

This is just like, at least for the Fox, in the game of 'Checkers'. The Fox can continue to 'jump' Geese on a given turn as long as he has 'victims' that he can legally jump. But the Fox doesn't have to continue to jump if it is not to his advantage (a very rare occurrence). During a multiple jump situation, a command button titled 'Done Jumping Geese?' will appear. The Fox can push this button and pass up jumping the next Goose if such a jump will put the Fox at a disadvantage.

To actually move a piece on the board you:

(1) 'click' on the piece you want to move

then

(2) click on the grid point you want to move to.

Simple really. When you click on the piece you want to move, a crossed Viking 'battle ax

and sword' 'marker' will appear over the piece so you know which piece you are moving (Of course, if you are playing the Fox, there is only one piece to move anyway).

If, after you've picked a piece to move, you change your mind, you can just click on another piece instead and the marker will move. But if a piece is 'marked' as the mover and you click on a legal move for that piece, the piece will move automatically for you.

Now about this thing the Fox can do that the Geese can't -- 'jump' and eat the opposition! You may be wondering what chance a poor Goose has in this game . . .

The fact is, however, that the Geese have the advantage in the game. If the Geese play right they will always win! 'What?! So 'Why play the game at all then?!'

Because:

(1) it is very easy to make a mistake and 'Cook your Goose'

and

(2) If you play simultaneous games, playing the Geese on one board and the Fox on the other, the game becomes precisely matched. That's why we have the two boards.

Well how do you win the game?

Actually, the Fox and the Geese have different objectives:

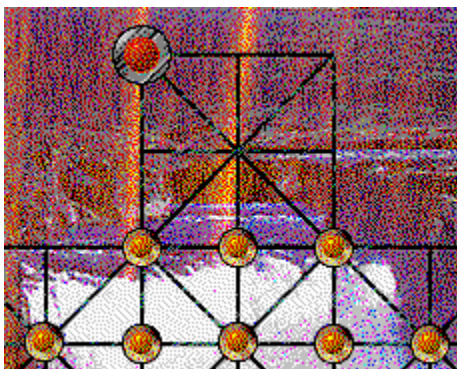
\* The Fox tries to 'eat' the geese and evade being trapped.

\* On the other hand, the geese try to trap the Fox, which of course they can't do if they are all eaten.

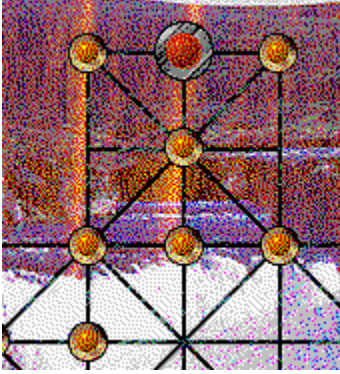
They, the Fox and the Geese, also have different ways of winning the game:

\* The Fox wins if he is able to eat more than 7 of the Geese.

\* On the other hand, the geese win if the Fox can't move. In other words, if the geese have trapped (immobilized) the Fox, then they win.



In the game 'snippet' at left, the Geese have trapped the Fox in one arm of the cross. See how the Fox has no means of escape from this confined area (as long as the Geese maintain careful vigil)?



A few well chosen moves later, the Geese have completely immobilized the Fox. The Geese have won!

If you're anything like me you will go through 4 stages in your Haltafl playing. They are:

- (1) The 'How Can the Geese ever win?' phase.
- (2) The 'Oh, the Geese can win after all!' phase.
- (3) The 'Gee, The Geese seem to always win?!' phase.

At this point, you switch to simultaneous games and you are in the final phase:

- (4) The 'Gotta have my Fox hold out on one board so I can win with my Geese on the other board' phase.

When you reach that last stage, you will be playing in simultaneous game mode -- playing two games at once. The default mode for Haltafl is one game (The left side only) but you can use the 'Options' area of the Menu to switch to 'Simultaneous Games' mode at any time.

Let's explore this final mode of playing a little.

In 'Simultaneous Games' mode, if you play the Gold Geese on the left board, you are playing the Gold Fox on the right board. By the same token, if you play the Silver Fox on the left board you are playing the Silver Geese on the right board. Thus you get to play both Fox and the Geese at the same time (on different boards of course). This makes for a very challenging game.

A simultaneous games match always begins with the Gold Geese making a move. Thereafter, each 'turn' consists of two moves, one on each board. For instance, after the Gold Geese make the first move, then Silver moves his or her Fox on the Left board and the Geese on the right board. Then Gold answers with a move of the Gold Fox on the Right board and the Gold Geese on the Left board, etc., etc.

You'll notice that this 'simultaneous games' play gives the Gold Geese a one move advantage since they moved first. Because of this, if a simultaneous games match ends with the Gold Geese winning, before they can declare victory, the Silver Geese get one more move to tie -- this makes it exactly fair.

You don't need to switch to simultaneous mode right away. My strong suggestion is that you just keep to a one game match for a while until you 'learn the ropes'.

Now with all this 'switching of turns' going on you might think you'd get confused. Not so! The 'status area' of the Menu will let you know whose turn it is. But also, GUDRUN's BROOCH will flit around the screen to show you visually. If Gudrun's brooch is in the upper half of the board, it is Silver's turn. If the brooch is on the lower half of the board it is Gold's turn.

One last thing. Gudrun plays on various levels. You can choose a harder or easier level via the 'Options' section of the menu.

Just to wrap things up. Here are the 'rules' of the game:

Note: Actually, this computerized 'Halatafl' version automatically enforces all the rules, so it's really not necessary to memorize them; you just need to be generally familiar with them so that you can understand why the game does what it does.

### **The 'object' of the game . . . How do you win?**

\* If you are the Fox: Eat more than 5 of the Geese so that it becomes impossible for them to trap you.

\* If you are the Geese: Trap the Fox so that he cannot make a move.

### **Moving pieces . . .**

\* The Geese move first.

\* In a 'Single Game' contest, the Gold Geese move first. A 'Single Game' contest is a game on the left side of the board between the Gold Geese and the Silver Fox.

\* In a 'Simultaneous Games' contest, the Gold Geese (on the left board) move first. After that each turn consists of a double move by each color. For instance after the first 'single' move by the Gold Geese, the Silver Fox moves and then the Silver Geese (on the right board) move. Then the Gold Fox (on the right board) and the Gold Geese (on the left board) answer, etc., etc.

\* All pieces move one grid point in any direction. The Fox, and only the Fox, can 'jump' a Goose if the Goose is right next to him (or her) and the grid point just beyond is empty. The Fox can keep 'jumping' in this manner as many Geese as possible on a given move (just like in the game of 'Checkers').

\* If it is possible to move, you must make a move, even if the only move left to you is a poor one. If no move is possible then you must be the Fox and you lose :-)

## **That's It! Pretty simple Huh?**

Don't be afraid to experiment -- the game isn't breakable (at least it is not supposed to be).

I hope you enjoy your electronic Halatafl game. No it's not the latest 3D, Active-X technology, nor do you shoot demons or pilot a space craft in it, BUT it was played and enjoyed by those hardy and adventurous Vikings a thousand years ago -- there must be something to it!

## VikingFacts? . . .

If the 'VikingFacts?' menu item is checked, every 2 or 3 minutes, interesting\* facts about the Vikings will appear over the game screen. All these 'facts' were mined from the references noted in the 'Credits' section of this help file. They only appear during a game while waiting for someone to move, and they will disappear as soon as the move is complete. Stop and read them once in a while.

These facts are intended to educate as well as entertain -- few people really know much about the Vikings, even though the knowledge may be readily available at the local library. If you grow tired of this feature, simply un-check the 'VikingFacts?' menu item and they will no longer bother you.

\*Note: A few of these 'facts' and at least one of the farewell verses may be offensive to some people. I worried about this but decided to keep them as they were. They -are- authentic but very violent and callous. Remember, though, that this was a very violent and callous age -- 'a wolf age'. Just to give you more of a feel for this I quote a section from Erdoes, pp. 26-27:

"Traveling in the tenth century was perilous. Those who could avoid it did. Roads, where they existed, were atrocious, and there were no inns. The greater part of Europe was still covered with wild, undrained bogs and primeval forests in which the wanderer encountered packs of roaming, ravenous wolves, and ferocious grunting boars able to disembowel a victim with one swipe of their curving tusks. Travelers might even come face to face with an aurochs -- a wild species of oxen resembling the buffalo -- which, in those days, still foraged the countryside and survived in Poland until the fifteenth century.

One French traveler was set upon by a monstrous wolf which, he guessed, "took me for a ram." Luckily, the man was a stout fellow, well armed and protected, and he owed his life to his fine coat of mail covering not only his body but also his throat. With dagger, sword, and ax the man finally got the better of the beast. When the wolf was skinned and his belly opened "there were found in its stomach parts of human limbs."

More dangerous than wild beasts were wild humans who waylaid, robbed, or killed unwary wanderers and, in times of famine, even made meals of them.

Experienced wayfarers gave the rude castles a wide berth and hid themselves at the approach of riders, because strangers were fair game for anyone stronger who might take a liking to their wallets, clothes, or shoes, leaving them naked in the road. People set out on a journey well armed with shield and spear. According to the rule of the road, travelers walked or rode on the left to have their right hands free to wield lance or battle-ax against possible assailants."



## Tips, Tricks, and Trouble Shooting . . .

[I don't want to go through the 'Gudrun is crying . . .' prolog screen anymore . . .](#)

If you click on the prolog screen when it first comes up (or anytime really) you will quit the prolog and go right to the game.

[I don't want to wait 10 seconds for the 'farewell' screen to disappear . . .](#)

Sheesh! Its only 10 seconds! Okay, Okay. If you click on the 'farewell' screen it will immediately disappear and you will be out -- finished as it were.

[I can't get the VikingFacts to show up . . .](#)

First, make sure you have the VikingFacts menu option checked, otherwise you won't get any VikingFacts.

However, If you find that the VikingFacts menu option is 'grayed-out' then that's another matter. This means that the program could not find the VIKFAC.TXT file that holds all of the VikingFacts. The most likely cause of this is that VIKFAC.TXT is not in the working directory, and let me tell you from personal experience, it's very easy in Windows to get yourself mixed up as to what the working directory is. Here's how you make sure that Halatafl is never mixed up about it.

1st: Activate the Halatafl icon by clicking on it once from Program Manager (This will highlight its title).

2nd: Choose 'File|Properties' from the Program Manager menu and make sure the Properties box for the Halatafl icon reads:

Command Line: fg.exe

Working Directory: C:\Halatafl (or whatever is your directory)

3rd: Make sure that VIKFAC.TXT exists in the C:\Halatafl directory.

Do these three things, and everything should work fine.

[I can't get any MIDI music to play . . .](#)

You have to have a sound card that supports MIDI 'Extended' format to get the music to play -- 99.99% of them do.

First, make sure you have the 'MIDI background music?' menu option checked, otherwise you won't get any MIDI music.

Next, make sure it isn't a simple volume problem. Turn-up the volume on the speakers and see if that helps at all.

Didn't help? Okay then maybe the relative sound volumes of the WAV and MIDI files are 'out of whack'. I've tried to set the relative volumes between the MIDI file and the WAV files at a good spot. Because of the maddening difference between the many sound cards out in the world, this might not be right for everyone. Look for and adjust your 'Mixer' application ( it came with your sound card for sure), to adjust the relative volume of MIDI files upward a little to see if that helps.

Still not working? Dang! This calls for drastic measures. I hate to inform you of this,

BUT, you are most likely suffering from what the MIDI people call 'The MIDI problem from Hell!' (their words, not mine). Not to worry though -- here's what to do:

Since all three Halatafl Midis are in extended MIDI format you have to make sure that channels 1 - 10 are active. Go to the Windows Control Panel, MIDI mapper section, and choose edit on your MIDI mapper. Then make sure that channels 1 through 10 are active. If one of these channels (that hold the extended MIDI sequences) is not active, then you are essentially mapping that sequence into 'oblivion'.

## **Please consider registering . . .**

Please consider registering. 'Halatafl -- The Fox Game' is not freeware, it's shareware; even though it is not 'hobbled' in any way, nor are there pesky 'nag' screens to bother you.

**If you want to continue to legally use this software, you must register this program after 21 days. To register, send \$15 to:**

**P. S. Neeley  
248 W. 3325 N.  
North Ogden, UT 84414**

This shareware version of Halatafl was meant to be distributed on the 'electronic winds' of the Internet, BBSs, on-line services, etc., and so it was important to keep the file sizes as small as possible. In a practical sense, you do this by cutting back on color depth (16 color images instead of 256 color images) and eliminating as many game sound files as possible (.WAV files are large and not very compressible). I hated to do this but it was the only way.

However, extra bytes add nothing to the weight of a diskette.

I will send registered users the 256 color, registered version in the mail. The 16 color images you see in this shareware version are good, but the 256 color images of the registered version are breathtakingly beautiful. The registered version also features more sounds and three times as many VikingFacts (tm).

With the Registered version you get:

- \* 256 color images vs. 16 color images!
- \* More game sounds!
- \* 3 times as many VikingFacts(tm)!
- \* A third level of play -- Ragnarok (Advanced Mode)!!!

**If you enjoy 'Halatafl -- The Fox Game' at all, or have interest in the Vikings, you'll want the registered version.**

## Epilog . . .



It's morning -- a bright and beautiful dawn. The water shimmers in the early morning sun. You crawl out of your bag and stretch. Suddenly you remember -- "Last night! The girl, the grave!" You look over to see the same, now quite ordinary looking, ring of rocks -- "nothing has changed." You check your pack. "Yes, the brooch is still there!" "Was it a dream?"

For a terrible instant you consider leaving the island with the treasure . . . "Surely the brooch is worth thousands . . . it may be enchanted, but I could sell it. . .," but reason, and honor, return in a moment.

"No," you shake your head, "the brooch is Gudrun's, not mine; a mother's gift of love; a symbol of love untarnished by time or distance . . ." Approaching what you now realize is a grave, you carefully work your shovel under a few inches of the sod, loosen this top layer from the underlying soil, and lay it aside. A large patch of bare soil marks your task. Carefully you begin digging. An hour of careful work later, and 2 feet down, you find the bundle of bones. Reverently you lay the brooch on top of them and begin to carefully fill in the hole. Finally, you lay the covering sod back over the grave site. It looks almost undisturbed. You break camp, load everything into the kayak, and the set about gathering some flowers.

Standing over the grave, sadness and compassion fill you. "Gudrun . . . I . . . I am glad to have met you," you say out loud, "and I am grateful for the game and stories . . . You have been lonely here, but you are no longer lost or unmourned. I will remember and will come back when I can." With that you place the flowers on the grave, stride to your kayak, and push out into the sea.

## A look at the 'Farewell' verses . . .

No man lives till eve  
Whom the fates doom at dawning.

A Viking proverb. (see La Fay, p.190)

I would die now  
Soon and sorrow-free  
If I knew my soul was safe --  
Young I was sharp of tongue;  
I know I grieve for nothing --  
Everyone must die --  
But I fear hell; let God  
Decide where I wear out my time.

The words of Hallfred, skald to Olaf Tryggvason of Norway, who was forced to convert to Christianity but who never really left the old gods. These are some of his last words as he lay sick and dying, longing for Valhalla but fearing Hell.

Hic terror mundi Guescardus . . .  
Here lies the Guiscard, terror of the world.

Epitaph of Robert de Hauteville, who won the name Guiscard ('the cunning one'), and who is buried beside his brothers in Salerno. (See La Fay, pp. 150-160)

There is a wicked wind tonight, wild upheaval in the sea;  
No fear now that the Viking hordes will terrify me.

The words of a monk scribbled in the margin of a manuscript. The monks were terrified of the Vikings but knew that an angry sea meant that there was very little chance of an attack during the storm and even the possibility that any would-be raiders would lose their ships and lives on the stormy seas.

I've been with sword and spear slippery with bright blood where kites wheeled, And how well we violent Vikings clashed! Red flames ate up men's roofs, raging we killed and killed, and skewered bodies sprawled sleepy in town gateways.

A 10th century Viking poem (see 'Vikings: Raiders from the North', p. 30)

What has become of the steed?  
What has become of the warrior?  
What has become of the seats of banquet?  
Where are the joys of the hall?  
O for the bright cup!  
O for the mailclad warrior!  
O for the glory of the prince!  
How that time has passed away  
And grown dark under the cover of night,  
As if it had never been.

From 'The Wanderer' an Anglo-Saxon poem.

Saksi set up this stone in memory of his comrade Asbiorn Toki's son.

He fled not at Uppsala  
But kept on fighting while he could hold a weapon.

A rune-stone inscription of medieval Denmark (Page, p. 105)

Harsh to me was the breach the wave broke  
Through the encircling dike of my father's line.  
My son's loss, the gash cut by the sea,  
Stands, as I know, open and unhealed.

A verse from the Sonatorrek of Egil Skall-Grimsson, the greatest of the medieval Icelandic poets. This poem recounts the gradual loss of his loved ones and his feelings of being alone and abandoned by Odin's favor. A few verses later he mourns his brother:

"Often for me my brother's death  
Enters the fair wind of the moon-wolf.  
When battle swells, my thoughts engage it,  
I look round for him and realize this:

What other fighting-man so valiant  
Would stand beside me in angry strife;  
One I often miss amidst my enemies?  
As my friends diminish I become a wounded bird."

In the final verse he faces the future alone but with courage:

"Now things go hard with me. On the headland  
Stands the sister of Odin's enemy.  
Yet serene, in good heart, undismayed  
Shall I meet death face to face."

Note: The 'sister of Odin's enemy' is Hel, goddess of death, and sister of the great wolf Fenrir.

In war mighty,  
in peace potent,  
in either state  
kindly was he;  
amid victories  
happy he was;  
those whom his soldier's arms  
had not subdued,  
renown of his name  
conquered enough.

Praise of Otto III, crowned May 21, 996. King of the Saxons, but also Emperor of Rome (Erdoes, p 176).

Dust are thou, man, and ashes  
to mighty deeds you aspired  
Now a few feet of earth for you are enough.  
Behold he who ruled Rome . . .  
Now lies here, small and mean.  
In splendor he sat,  
Lord and duke of the Romans,  
Whoever thou art  
Still today warmed by the sun,  
Say: 'Farewell' and know you will share his fate.

Epitaph of Crescentius, who died April 29, 998, usurper of Rome (Erdoes p.180)

An ax age, a sword age . . .  
A wind age, a wolf age,  
Ere the world sinks;  
No man spares another man.

Part of the Poetic Edda, the Voluspa, in which is recorded the end of the world (Page p.204).

A ship is made for sailing  
A shield for sheltering,  
A sword for striking,  
A girl for bedding.

A Norse proverb (Erdoes, p 141).

May you be in good health and spirits: Thor receive you, Odin possess you.

A Norse blessing found carved into a stick (Page, p.222)

You Arabs are fools! ... You take the people who are most dear to you and whom you honor most and you put them in the ground where insects and worms devour them. We burn him in a moment, so that he enters Paradise at once.

The very end of the fascinating account of a 'Rus' Viking cremation as witnessed by the Arab diplomat Ibn Fadlan in 921 AD. (see Jones, p. 425)

Minish they now who diminished  
Dawnfire of meadfoaming horn;  
Now vanish the heroes, time-vanquished,  
War's flaunters, the thingmen of Ingvi.  
Who now shower limbeck's snowsilver  
As guerdon past earth's sea-isled girdle?  
Or fill high hawkfell of my hand  
With skald's reward for skilled word?

Egil Skalla-Grimsson's, the greatest of the medieval Icelandic poets, lament for Arinbjorn, who died with Harald Greycloak of Norway at the battle by Hals in Limfjord around 974 AD.

Good woman, these dark eyes --  
Icelandic ones -- have shown me  
The long and uphill road  
Towards that glittering gold  
This foot of mine, my goddess,  
Has stepped so valiantly  
Over ancient pathways . . .

Verses from Snorri Sturluson's Heimskringla (Page, p.53)





