



From Ancient  
Story ...

*Ref and Princess Hilda*

# Gautreks Saga

... to Current  
Generation

*Erik Applegate*



[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gautreks\\_saga](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gautreks_saga)

## Gautreks saga

**Gautreks saga** (**Gautrek's Saga**) is a Scandinavian [legendary saga](#) put to text towards the end of the 13th century which survives only in much later manuscripts. It seems to have been intended as a compilation of traditional stories, often humorous, about a legendary King [Gautrek](#) of [West Götaland](#), to serve as a kind of prequel to the already existing [Hrólf's saga Gautrekssonar](#) (*Saga of Hrólf son of Gautrek*).

The tale begins with one explanation of Gautrek's strangeness, relating how Gautrek's father-to-be, King [Gauti](#) of West Götaland, became lost while hunting and spent the night in an isolated homestead of strange, arguably insane, backwoods bumpkins: a stingy farmer named Skafnörtung 'Skinflint', his equally stingy wife Tötra 'Tatters', and their three sons and three daughters. That night Gauti fathered Gautrek on Snotra who was the eldest of the farmer's daughters and supposedly the most intelligent of the bunch. The account bristles with grisly humor as it relates how one by one the members of this family of boobies committed suicide over the most trivial losses until at last only Snotra and her child survived. At that point Snotra took the child Gautrek to Gauti's court and King Gauti, years later on his deathbed, made Gautrek his heir.

## Gautrekr

**Gautrekr** was a [legendary Geatish king](#) who appears in several sources, such as [Gautreks saga](#), [Hrólf's saga Gautrekssonar](#), [Bósa saga ok Herrauðs](#), [Ynglinga saga](#), [Nafnapulur](#) (part of the [Prose Edda](#)) and [Af Upplendinga konungum](#).

He appears in different temporal settings, and he could represent different kings named Gautrekr, as the name simply means "Geatish ruler". In the various settings, he also has different offspring. However, all settings present him as the son of a [Gaut](#) or [Gauti](#), and in one of the later settings, his father Gaut gave his name to [Götaland](#) (Geatland).

[Gautreks saga](#) tells that Gautrekr was born out of the meeting between Gauti, the king of [Västergötland](#), and Snotra who was the most intelligent of a family of backwoods skinflints. Her family committed suicide for having lost too much food supporting Gauti as their guest. Snotra took the child Gautrek to Gauti's court and King Gauti, years later on his deathbed, made Gautrek his heir.

Gautrekr married [Álfhildr](#), the daughter of king Harald of [Wendland](#). When she died, Gautrekr went somewhat out of his mind, ignored all matters of state, and spent all his time on Álfhildr's burial mound, flying his hawk.

Through trickery and the advice of Neri, one of Gautrek's earls, a man named Ref gained the hand of Gautrek's daughter Helga. He also gained the earldom that Neri held from King Gautrekr.

Here is an abbreviated version of **Gautreks saga** and the genealogical connection to us. The full saga is at <http://aj69.tripod.com/ancestry/gautreksaga.html>, which ties into other stories about such as about **Alrek** and **Eirik**, described in (page 48) [Swedish Royal Ancestry Book 1 Mythical to 1250](#).

Lars Granholm, July 2012

**Descendants of: Skarfnörtung Skinflint As Related to: Erik Woods Applegate**

**1 Skarfnörtung Skinflint** (46th great grandfather)  
m. Töttra Tatters

**2 Snotra Gaut** b. 594 (45th great grandmother)  
m. Gauti King of West Götaland b. 595 d. 618

**3 Gautrek "The Mild" Gautsson King of West Götaland** b. 605 d. 639 (44th great grandfather)  
m. Alfild Haraldsdatter Princess of Wendland b. 620 d. 639

**4 Algautr Gautreksson King Of Sweden** b. Abt 546 (43rd great grandfather)  
m. Alov Olofsdotter Princess Of Närke b. 555  
[daughter of Olof The Clear-Sighted King of Närke]

**5 Gauthild Algautsdotter Queen Of Sweden** b. 610 d. 640 (42nd great grandmother)  
m. Ingjald The Ill-Ruler King Of Sweden b. Abt 600 d. 655  
[son of Anund Ingvarsson King Of Sweden (Myth)]

**6 Olof Trätälja King Of Norway (Vestfold)** b. 630 d. 710 (41st great grandfather)  
m. Solva (Solveig) Halfdansdotter b. 610  
[daughter of Halfdan Guldtand Solfasson]

**7 Halfdan Hvitbeinn King Of Uppsala** b. 685 d. 715 (40th great grandfather)  
m. Åsa Eysteinsdotter Princess of Oppland  
[daughter of Eystein Hardråde King Of Oppland And Hedmark and Solveig Halfdansdottir]

**8 Eystein Fart King Of Norway (Vestfold)** b. 736 d. 755 (39th great grandfather)  
m. Hildur Eriksdotter Princess Of Vestfold b. 730 d. 755  
[daughter of Erik Agnarsson King Of Vestfold]

**9 Harald II Eysteinsson King Of Denmark** b. 750 d. 804 (38th great grandfather)  
m. Imhild av Sachsen Queen of Jylland b. 750 d. 780  
[daughter of Warnechin (Werner) Duke Of Saxony and Gunhilde av Allemanien]

**6 Åsa Ingjaldsdotter "The Wicked" Princess Of Sweden** (42nd great-aunt)  
m. Gudröd Haraldsson King in Skåne b. 592  
[son of Harald Valldarsson the Old King Of Denmark and Hildur Heidreksdatter]

**4 Helga Gautreksdotter Princess** (44th great-aunt)  
m. Ref "Gift-Ref"





## *GAUTREK'S SAGA*

### **1. IN THE BACK WOODS**

This is the start of an amusing story about a certain King Gauti. He was a shrewd sort of man, very quiet, but generous and outspoken. King Gauti ruled over West Götaland, lying east of the Kjolen Mountains between Norway and Sweden; the Göta River separates Götaland from the Uplands. In that part of the world there are immense forests, very difficult to get about in except when the ground is frozen.

This king we're talking about, Gauti, used to go into these forests with his hawks and hounds, for he was keen on hunting and got a great deal of pleasure from it.

At this time there were plenty of people living deep in the forests, as a good many settlers had cleared the land to make their homes right away from the world. A number of these backwoodsmen had turned from society because of some misdeed or other, or else had cleared out to avoid the consequences of youthful escapades or adventures; they thought the best way of protecting themselves against people's scoffing and sneering was to get completely away from it all, and so they lived out the rest of their lives without seeing another human being apart from their own companions. As these men had gone to live right off the beaten track, hardly anybody ever came to visit them, unless from time to time someone who happened to lose his way in the forest might stumble on their homes, and even so, he would often wish that he'd never set foot there.

This King Gauti we've been talking about started out with his retainers and his finest hounds to hunt deer in the forest. The king sighted a fine stag and set his heart on getting it, so he unleashed his hounds and began chasing hard after it. This went on all day, and by evening he had lost all his fellow huntsmen and was deep into the forest. He realized that he wouldn't be able to get back to them, as it was already dark and he'd covered so much ground during the day. Besides this, he'd hit the stag with his spear, and it had stuck fast in the wound. He didn't want on any account to lose the spear if he could possibly help it, since it seemed to him a great humiliation to surrender one's weapon. Gauti had been hunting so hard that he'd thrown off all his clothes except for his underwear. He'd lost his socks and shoes, and his legs and feet were badly torn by stones and branches, but still he had not caught up with the stag. By now it was night and dark, and he had no idea where he was going, so he stopped to listen if he could hear anything, and after a little while he heard the bark of a dog. It seemed most likely that where a dog barked there would be people about, so he walked on in the direction of the sound.

Shortly afterwards he saw a small farmstead, and standing outside was a man with a woodcutter's axe. When he saw the king coming closer, the man pounced on the dog and killed it.

'This is the last time you'll show a stranger the way to our house,' he said. 'It's obvious, this man's so big he'll eat up all the farmer has once he gets inside. Well, that won't ever happen if I can help it.'

The king heard what the man said and smiled to himself. It occurred to him that he wasn't at all suitably dressed for sleeping out; on the other hand, he wasn't certain what sort of hospitality he would be offered if he waited for an invitation, so he walked boldly up to the door. The other man ran into the doorway with the idea of keeping him out, but the king forced his way past him into the house. He came into the living-room, where he saw four men and four women, but there wasn't a word of welcome for King Gauti. So he sat down.

One of them, evidently the master of the house, spoke up. 'Why did you let this man in?' he asked the slave at the door.

'I wasn't a match for him,' said the slave, 'he was so powerful.'

'What did you do when that dog started barking?' said the farmer.

'I killed the dog,' said the slave, 'I didn't want it to lead any more roughs like this to the house.'

'You're a faithful servant,' said the farmer, 'and I can't blame you for this awkward situation that's cropped up. It's difficult to find the proper reward for the trouble you've taken, but tomorrow I'll repay you by taking you along with me.'

It was a well-furnished house and the people were good looking but not particularly big. It struck the king that they were frightened of him. The farmer ordered the table to be laid, and food was served. When the king saw that he wasn't going to be invited to share in the meal, he sat down at the table next to the farmer, picked up some food and settled down to eat. When the farmer saw this, he stopped eating himself and pulled his hat down over his eyes. Nobody said a word. After the king had finished eating, the farmer pushed up his hat and ordered the platters to be cleared from the table....'since there's no food left there now,' he said.

The king lay down to sleep, and a little later on one of the women came up to him and said, 'Wouldn't you like me to give you a bit of hospitality?'

'Things are looking up now you're willing to talk to me,' said the king. 'Your household seems a pretty dull one.'

'Don't be surprised at that,' said the girl. 'In all our lives, we've never had a single visitor before. I don't think the master is too pleased to have you as a guest.'

'I can easily compensate him for all that he spends on my account,' said the king, 'as soon as I get back to my own house.'

'I'm afraid this queer business will bring us something more from you than compensation,' said the woman.

'I'd like you to tell me what you and your family are called,' said the king.

'My father's called Skinflint,' she said, 'and the reason is, he's so mean he can't bear to watch his food stocks dwindle or anything else he owns. My mother's known as Totra because she'll never wear any clothes unless they're already in tatters. She was the idea that this is very sound economics.'

'What are your brothers called?' asked the king.

'One's called Fjolmod, another Imsigull, and the third Gilling,' she said.

'What about you and your sisters?' asked the king.

'I'm called Snotra, because I'm the most intelligent. My sisters are called Hjotra and Fjotra,' she said. 'There's a precipice called Gillings Bluff near the farm, and we call its peak Family Cliff. The drop's so great there's not a living creature could ever survive it. It's called Family Cliff simply because we use it to cut down the size of our family whenever something extraordinary happens, and in this way our elders are allowed to die straight off without having to suffer any illnesses. And then they can go straight to Odin, while their children are spared all the trouble and expense of having to take care of them. Every member of our family is free to use this facility offered by the cliff, so there's no need for any of us to live in famine or poverty, or put up with other misfortunes that might happen to us.'

'I hope you realize, my father thinks it quite extraordinary, you're coming to our house. It would have been remarkable enough for any stranger to take a meal with us, but this really is a marvel, that a king, cold and naked, should have been to our house. There's no precedent for it, so my father and mother have decided to share out the inheritance tomorrow between me and my brothers and sisters. After that they're going to take the slave with them and pass on over Family Cliff on the way to Valhalla. My father feels that's the least reward he could give the slave for trying to bar your way into the house, to let the fellow share this bliss with him. Besides, he's quite sure Odin won't ever receive the slave unless he goes with him.'

'I can see that you're the most eloquent member of your family,' said the king, 'and you can depend on me. I take it you're still a virgin, so you'd better sleep with me tonight.'

She said that was entirely up to him.

In the morning when the king woke up, he said, 'I'd like to remind you, Skinflint, that I was barefoot when I came to your house, so I wouldn't mind accepting a pair of shoes from you.'

Skinflint made no reply but gave him a pair of shoes. All the same he pulled out the laces first. The king said:

'Skinflint gave me

a pair of shoes,

but held the laces back.

I tell you a miser

can never give

a gift without a snag.'

After that the king got ready to go, and Snotra came to see him off. 'I'd like to ask you to come with me,' said King Gauti, 'I've an idea our meeting may have certain consequences. If you have a boy, call him Gautrek; it'll remind you of me and all the trouble I've caused your family.'

'I think you're pretty near the mark,' she said. 'But I shan't be able to go along with you now, as it's today my parents divide their property between me and my brothers and sisters. When that's done my father and mother intend to move on over Family Cliff.'

The king said good-bye to her and told her to come and see him whenever she felt like it. Then he went on his way until he came up with his men, and now he took it easy.

## **2. OVER THE CLIFF**

But to get on with the story, when Snotra came back to the house, there was her father squatting over his possessions.

'What an extraordinary thing to happen,' he said, 'a king has paid us a visit, eaten us out of house and home and then taken away what we could least afford to lose. It's clear to me that we won't be able to stay together any longer as one family since we're reduced to poverty. That's why I've gathered together all my things. And now I'm going to divide them up between my sons. I'm going to take my wife along to Valhalla, and my slave as well, since it's the least I can do to repay him for his faithful service, to let him go there with me.'

'Gilling is to have my fine ox, to share with his sister Snotra. Fjolmod and his sister Hjotra are to have my bars of gold, Imsigull and his sister Fjotra all my cornfields. And now I want to implore you, my children, not to add to the family, so that you'll be able to preserve what you've inherited.'

When Skinflint had said all he wanted, the family climbed up to Gillings Bluff. After that the young people helped their parents to pass on over Family Cliff, and off they went, merry and bright, on the way to Odin.

Now that the young people had taken over the property, they decided they'd better set things right. So they cut some wooden pegs and used them to pin pieces of cloth round their bodies so they couldn't touch each other. They felt this was the safest method of controlling their numbers.

When Snotra realized she was going to have a baby, she loosened the wooden pins that held her dress together, so that her body could be touched. She was pretending to be asleep when Gilling woke or stirred in his sleep. He stretched out his hand and happened to touch her cheek.

Once he was properly awake, he said 'Something terrible has happened, I'm afraid that I've got you into trouble. You seem to be much stouter now than you used to be.'

'Keep it to yourself as long as you can,' she said.

'I'll do no such thing,' he said, 'once there's been an addition to our family there wouldn't be a hope of hiding it.'

Not long after, Snotra gave birth to a beautiful boy. She chose a name for him and called him Gautrek.

'What a queer thing to happen,' said Gilling, 'there's no hiding this any longer. I'm going to tell my brothers.'

'Our whole way of life is being threatened by this remarkable event,' they declared. 'This is indeed a serious violation of our rule.'

Gilling said:

'How stupid of me

to move my hand

and touch the woman's cheek.

It doesn't take much

to make a son

if that's how Gautrek was got.'

They said it wasn't his fault, particularly since he'd repented and was wishing it had never happened. He said he'd willingly pass on over Family Cliff, and added that this little affair might only be a beginning. His brothers told him to wait and see whether anything else would happen.

Fjolmod used to herd his sheep all day, carrying the gold bars with him wherever he went. One day he fell asleep and was woken up by two black snails crawling over the gold. He got the idea that the gold had been dented where it was really only blackened, and he thought it greatly diminished.

'It's a terrible thing,' he said, 'to suffer such a loss. If this should happen once more I'll be penniless when I go to see Odin. So I'd better pass on over Family Cliff just to cover myself in case it happens again. Things have never looked so black, not since my father handed me out all this money.'



He told his brothers about his remarkable experience, and asked them to share his part of the property. Then he added:

'Scrawny snails  
have swallowed my gold,  
everything goes against me.  
Stripped of my wealth,  
I snivel and sulk,  
now all my gold's been gobbled.'

Then he and his wife went up to Gillings Bluff and passed on over Family Cliff.

One day Imsigull was inspecting his cornfields. He saw a bird called the sparrow---it's about the size of a tit. He thought the bird might have caused some serious damage, so he walked round the fields till he saw where the bird had picked a single grain from one of the ears. Then he said:

'The sparrow's done  
dire devastation  
to Imsigull's field of corn.  
He ravaged an ear  
and gobbled a grain;  
What grief to the kin of Totra!'

Then he and his wife passed joyfully on over Family Cliff, unable to risk such another loss.

One day, Gautrek happened to be outside when he noticed the fine ox---the boy was seven years old at the time. It so happened that he stabbed the ox to death with a spear. Gilling was watching and said:

'The young boy has killed  
that ox of mine,  
a deadly sinister omen.  
Never again  
shall such treasure be mine,  
no matter how old I grow.'

'This has really gone too far,' he added. And then he climbed up Gillings Bluff and passed on over Family Cliff.

Now there were only two of them left, Snotra and her son Gautrek. She made them both ready for a journey, and off they went all the way to King Gauti who gave his son good welcome.

So from then on Gautrek was brought up at his father's court. He matured early in every way, and it only took him a few years to reach full manhood. Then it so happened that King Gauti fell ill and called his friends around him.

'You've always proved obedient and loyal to me,' he said, 'but now it looks as if this illness of mine is going to put an end to our friendship. I've decided to hand over my authority to my son Gautrek, and with it the title of King.'

His friends were all in favor of this, and after King Gauti's death Gautrek was made King over Götaland. He's mentioned in many of the old sagas.

At this point we must shift our story north to Norway for a while and tell you something about the provincial Kings who were ruling there at the time and also about their progeny. After this, our story will come back to King Gautrek of Götaland and his sons.

This story is the same that's told in Sweden as well as in a good many other lands.

## **6. THE FARMERS BOY**

There was a wealthy farmer called Rennir who lived on what came to be called Rennis Island, off Jæderen in Norway. He had been a great viking before he settled down on his farm. Rennir was married and had one son, called Ref.

When he was young Ref used to lie in the kitchen and eat twigs and tree bark. He was an exceptionally big man, but never bothered to wash the filth off his body, nor would he ever give anyone a helping hand. His father was a very thrifty man and took a very poor view of his son's shiftless behavior. So Ref didn't earn his fame by any wisdom or bravery but rather by making himself the laughing stock of all his sturdy kinsmen. His father thought it unlikely that Ref would ever do anything worthwhile, as was expected at that time of other young men.

Rennir had one treasured possession which he valued more than anything else he owned, a big ox with very elegant horns. Both horns had been incised and laid with gold and silver, and the point of the horn was also decorated with gold. There was a silver chain stretched between the horns, with three gold rings on it. This ox was the finest of its kind in the whole land, both for its size and magnificence. Rennir made such a fuss of this ox that it was never allowed to go about unattended.

Rennir took part in many of King Vikar's battles, and they were good friends.

## **8. KING GAUTREK'S RULE**

Now there are two series of events which have been taking place at the same time, so we must go back to the point at which we broke off earlier, when King Gautrek had become the ruler of Götaland and established himself as an outstanding leader and fighting man. Still, the king felt it was a great flaw in his splendour that he had no wife, so he decided to look out for one.

There was a king called Harald ruling over Wendland, a shrewd man but not much of a fighter. He was married and had a daughter called Alfild, a fine-looking, well-mannered girl.

King Gautrek got ready for a journey and travelled to Wendland to ask for King Harald's daughter. His proposal was well received, and whatever was said, the outcome was this, that the princess was promised to King Gautrek. So he brought her with him back to Götaland and celebrated their wedding. They hadn't been married long before Alfild gave birth to a beautiful daughter. They chose a name for her and called her

Helga. She was a girl who matured early; she grew up with her father, and was thought to be the finest match in all Götaland.

King Gautrek had a number of very important men with him. One of his friends was a great viking called Hrosskel. On one occasion King Gautrek invited him to a feast, and when it was over, he gave Hrosskel some excellent parting gifts: a grey stallion and four mares, silk-pale and splendid. Hrosskel thanked the king for the presents, and they parted the best of friends.

King Gautrek ruled his kingdom in peace for a number of years. Then his wife fell ill, and got no relief till she died. King Gautrek was deeply grieved by this, and had a burial mound raised over the queen. Her death affected him so much; he paid no attention to matters of state. Every day he used to sit on her mound and from there he would fly his hawk. This was his way of amusing himself and whiling away the time.

## **9. THE PRINCE AND THE PEASANT**

Now we come to Earl Neri, the ruler of the Uplands. When he heard that his father, King Vikar, had been killed he arranged a meeting with his brother Harald, and there they discussed how they ought to divide their inheritance. They agreed that Harald, who was the elder, should take over all the kingdoms that King Vikar had ruled and have the king's title; but Earl Neri was to stay ruler of the Uplands and also get Telemark which up till then had been ruled by his brother Harald. The brothers parted on good terms. Earl Neri was so wise you could never find his equal, and all his plans turned out well, whatever the problem. He would never accept any gifts, for he was so mean he could never bring himself to give any in return.

One day the farmer Rennir, whom we've already mentioned, was passing through his kitchen and tripped over the feet of his son Ref.

'It's a terrible disgrace to have a son like you, you bring nothing but trouble,' said Rennir to his son. 'Well, you'd better get right out of my sight. And don't ever show your face here again, if you must act in this stupid way.'

'Since your throwing me out,' said Ref, 'it's only fair I should take with me the thing you love and value most.'

'There's nothing I'm not willing to give for not having to see you again,' said Rennir, 'you're the laughing stock of the family.'

Nothing more was said, but one fine day not long after, Ref rose to his feet and got ready to leave. He took the fine ox with him and led it down to the sea. Then he launched a large boat, intending to go over to the mainland. He didn't care whether or not the ox got a bit wet, so he tied it to the boat, and then he sat down on the rowing bench and rowed over to the mainland. He was wearing a short cloak and breeches down to the ankles. When he had landed he set out with the ox behind him, travelling east through Jæderen and so by the usual route to the Uplands.

Ref journeyed on without a break until he arrived at Earl Neri's residence. The retainers told the earl that Ref, Rennir's idiot son, had arrived with the famous ox. The earl told them not to make fun of the boy. When Ref came up to the door of the hall where the earl usually sat, he told the doorkeeper to call the earl to come and talk with him.

'You're still the same fool as ever,' they said. 'The earl isn't in the habit of rushing out to talk with peasants.'

'You give him the message,' said Ref. 'He'll answer for himself.'

So they went inside to the earl and told him that Ref the Fool was asking for him to come out.

'Tell Ref I'll come and see him,' said the earl. 'You can never tell what may bring you luck.'

So the earl went outside, and Ref greeted him.

'What have you come here for?' asked the earl.

'My father's thrown me out,' said Ref. 'Here's an ox of mine I'd like you to have as a present.'

'Haven't you been told that I never accept gifts, as I don't like having to give any myself?' said the earl.

'I've heard you're so mean that no one can expect a gift in return for anything he's given you,' said Ref. 'But even so, I'd still like you to accept this ox as a gift. Maybe you could help me with your advice. Never mind the money.'

'Since you put it like that, I'll accept the ox,' said the earl. 'Come inside and stay the night.'

Ref let go of the ox and went into the house. The earl asked someone to bring Ref some clothes to make him look more decent, and when Ref had washed himself, he seemed a very handsome man. Ref settled there for a while.

The earl's hall was completely lined with overlapping shields, and not an empty space between them when they were all hanging. The earl took one of the shields, heavily inlaid with gold, and gave it to Ref.

Next day when the earl went to drink in the hall, he looked at the gap where the shield had hung, and said:

'The bright shield used to glitter

on the tapestried wall,

but now it gives me pain

to watch the empty space.

This is a fearful breach:

I'll soon lose all my wealth,

if others bring me gifts

and take my shields away.'

The earl had his high-seat turned round, for it upset him very much that the shield wasn't there anymore.

When Ref realized this, he took the shield and went up to the earl.

'My lord,' he said, 'cheer up now, here's that shield you gave me. I'd like to give it back to you, for it's no use to me, I've no weapons to go with it.'

'Good luck to a generous man!' said the earl, 'now my hall will have its old splendor again, once the shield's back in its usual place. Here's a present I want to give you, and it may be you'll find it useful as long as you take my advice.'

The earl gave him a whetstone, 'but you'll probably think that this isn't a gift of very much value,' he said.

'I can't see how this can be much use to me,' said Ref.

'The fact is, I refuse to give food to any idler who hangs about doing nothing,' said the earl. 'Now I'm going to send you to King Gautrek, and you're to hand this whetstone to him.'

'This is the first time I've ever acted as an emissary between kings,' said Ref, 'and I can't see what possible use the king can have for this whetstone.'

'I'd hardly have a reputation for wisdom if I couldn't see further into the future than you,' said the earl. 'But this job won't in any way test your courage, since you're not even to talk to him. I've been told that the king often sits on the queen's burial mound, and flies his hawk from there. But as the day wears on, the hawk gets tired and then the king gropes round the chair to find something to throw at the bird. Now if it happens that the king can't find anything to throw at it, you're to put the whetstone into his hand. And if he gives you something in return you're to take it and then come back to me.'

So Ref set out as the earl had told him and travelled on till he arrived at the mound where King Gautrek was sitting. Everything turned out precisely as Earl Neri had said it would. The king threw all the objects he could lay his hands on at the hawk. Ref sat down behind the king's chair. Then he realized his turn had come, and when the king stretched his hand back, Ref put the whetstone into it, and the king hurled the stone at the hawk. The bird flew up as soon as the stone hit it. The king was so pleased with his success he didn't want his helper to go unrewarded, so without bothering to see who it was, he reached out behind him with a gold ring. Ref took it and went back to Earl Neri, who asked him how his trip had gone. Ref told him and showed him the ring.

'This is a valuable thing,' said the earl. 'It's a lot better to earn a thing like this than just sit around.'

Ref stayed there over the winter, and in the spring the earl asked him, 'What are you going to do now?'

'That shouldn't be difficult to decide,' said Ref. 'Now I can sell my ring for hard cash.'

'I'm going to take a hand in your affairs again,' said the earl. 'There's a king called Ælla who rules over England. You're to give him the ring, you won't lose by it. Come back to me in the autumn, I'll give you plenty of good food and advice even if I don't repay you for the ox any other way.'

'There's no need for you to bring that up,' said Ref.

Then he sailed over to England and went before King Ælla and greeted him courteously. On that occasion Ref was wearing fine clothes and weapons. The king wanted to know who this man was.

'I'm called Ref,' he said, 'and I'd like you to accept this gold ring as a present from me.'

Then he laid it on the table in front of the king.

The king looked at it. 'This is a great treasure,' he said. 'Who gave it you?'

'The ring was given me by King Gautrek,' said Ref.

'What had you given him?' said the king.

'A little whetstone,' said Ref.

'King Gautrek's a pretty generous man, to repay stone with gold,' said the king. 'I'm going to accept this ring, and invite you to stay with me.'

'Thank you, my lord, for your invitation. But I've decided to go back to my foster-father, Earl Neri.'

'You must stay here for a while,' said the king.

The king had a ship fitted out, and one day he asked Ref to come with him for a walk. 'Here's a ship I want to give you, with all the crew you need and a cargo of all the goods you'll find most useful,' said the king.



'Wherever you choose to go, I don't want you to be someone else's passenger any longer. But this isn't to be compared with King Gautrek's gift when he repaid you for the whetstone.'

'This is a most generous gift,' said Ref, and thanked the king for it with many well-chosen words and then made ready for the voyage.

The king said: 'Here are two little dogs I'd like to give you.'

These were exceptionally small and pretty, and Ref had never seen anything like them. They each wore a halter of gold with a gold clasp round their necks, and there were seven small rings on the chain that linked them. No one had seen any treasures quite like this before.

Then Ref put out and sailed on till he came to the land ruled by Earl Neri who went out to meet him and welcome him. 'Come with all your men and stay with me,' he said.

'I've money enough now to pay our own way,' said Ref.

'Good,' said the earl. 'But you mustn't spend your money on that. You're to eat at our table, that's not too much to pay for the ox.'

'The only thing that annoys me,' said Ref, 'is when you bring that up.'

So Ref spent the winter with the earl, and got on well with people, and plenty of men used to follow him around.

In the spring the earl said to Ref, 'What are you going to do now?'

'Wouldn't it be possible for me to go on a viking expedition or else go trading,' said Ref, 'now I've plenty of money?'

'That's true,' said the earl. 'But I'm still going to take a hand in your affairs. You're to go south to Denmark and see King Hrolf Kraki and give him the dogs. They're not the thing for ordinary people. You won't lose money by it if King Hrolf's willing to accept the gift.'

'I'll take your advice,' said Ref, 'though I've plenty of money already.'

## **10. KING HROLF**

Ref made ready for a voyage and sailed over to Denmark. He went to see King Hrolf and greeted him, and the king asked him who he was. He said he was called Ref.

'Aren't you called Gift-Ref?' asked the king.

'It's true I've accepted gifts from people,' said Ref, 'and occasionally I've given presents to others.' Then he added: 'I'd like, Sir, to present you with these little dogs and their outfit.'

The king looked at them. 'These are very valuable,' he said. 'Who gave them to you?'

'King Ælla.'

'What had you given him?'

'A gold ring.'

'And who'd given you the gold ring?'

'King Gautrek.'

'And what had you given him?'

'A whetstone.'

'He's a remarkably generous man, King Gautrek, when he repays stones with gold,' said the king. 'I'd like to accept the dogs. You must stay with us.'

'I'm going back to Neri in the autumn,' said Ref.

'There's nothing to be done about it then,' said the king. So Ref stayed there for a while.

In the autumn Ref made his ship ready. Then the king said to him, 'I've decided how to repay you. Like the King of England, I'm going to present you with a ship, fully manned, and laden with the best cargo.'

'I can't thank you enough for this magnificent gift,' said Ref, and got ready to leave.

'Here are two valuable things I want to give you, Ref,' said the king, 'a helmet and a coat of mail.'

Ref took the gifts, both made of red gold, then he and King Hrolf parted good friends, and Ref went back to Earl Neri, this time in charge of two ships.

The earl welcomed him with open arms, and said his money had continued to increase.....'You'd better stay here with all your men over the winter. And even then I've only repaid you for the ox in a small way. But I'll never grudge you my good advice.'

'I'll accept your guidance in everything,' said Ref.

He stayed there over the winter enjoying fine hospitality, and getting a reputation as a famous man.

## **11. DECEPTION**

In the spring Earl Neri asked Ref, 'What are you going to do this summer?'

'I'd like your advice, Sir,' said Ref. 'Now that I've plenty of money.'

'I think you're right about that but there's still one more trip I'd like you to make,' said the earl. 'There's a king called Olaf who's always plundering. He has eighty ships and lies out at sea, inter or warm summer. You're to go and give him the helmet and the coat of mail, and if he accepts the present, I expect he'll let you choose your own reward. Then you're to tell him that in return you want to command his forces for a fortnight and be free to take them wherever you like. The king has a councilor called Ref-Nose, who's a really evil character. It's doubtful which will be the stronger, your good luck or his magic, but you have to take the risk whatever happens. You're to bring all Olaf's forces here, and then maybe I can repay you for the ox.'

'You needn't keep on about that,' said Ref. And so they parted.

Ref put out to sea in search of King Olaf and found him with his fleet. He lay alongside the king's own ship, climbed aboard and presented himself. King Olaf asked him who he was, and Ref told him.

'Are you known as Gift-Ref?' asked the king.

'Some pretty eminent people have given me gifts,' admitted Ref, 'And I've always given them something too. Here are two valuable things I'd like to present you with, a helmet and a coat of mail, both very fitting for a man like you.'

'Who gave you these precious things?' said King Olaf. 'I've never seen anything like them, nor even heard that such things existed, and yet I've been all over the world.'

'King Hrolf Kraki gave them to me,' said Ref.

'What had you given him?' asked the king.

'Two little dogs with gold halters that King Ælla had given me.'

'What had you given King Ælla?'

'A gold ring Gautrek had given me in return for a whetstone.'

'Some kings are remarkably open-handed,' said King Olaf, but King Gautrek outdoes them all in generosity. Should I accept these gifts, Ref-Nose, or should I reject them?'

'I wouldn't advise you to accept them,' said Ref-Nose, 'if you don't know how to repay them,' and with that he grabbed those precious objects and jumped overboard with them.

Ref realized that it would soon be the end of him if he failed to recover the things, so he went after him. There was a sharp skirmish between them, and the outcome was that Ref managed to get the coat of mail, but Ref-Nose held on to the helmet and dived with it down to the bottom of the sea where he went raving mad. By the time Ref managed to surface again, he was exhausted. Then someone said:

'It seems to me

Ref-Nose's advice

is a great deal worse

than Earl Neri's was.

King Gautrek the giver

of gold to Ref

didn't throw his money

into the sea.'

'You're a remarkable man,' said King Olaf.

'Well,' said Ref, 'I'd like you to accept this one treasure that's left.'

'I'm only too glad to accept it,' said King Olaf. 'I'm just as grateful to you as if I'd been given both treasures; and it was my mistake not to accept them straight away. But there's nothing surprising about that, it was an evil fellow's advice I was following. Now, I want you to choose your own reward.'

'I'd like to command your ships and forces for a fortnight,' said Ref, 'and take them wherever I please.'

'That's a queer choice,' said the king, 'but you're welcome to them.'

Then they sailed to Götaland to meet Earl Neri. They landed there late in the day, and Ref sent messengers in secret to Earl Neri, asking him to come and see him. The earl went to see Ref, who told him all that had happened on his travels.

'Now the time's come, my friend, to put your good luck to the test,' said the earl. 'I want you to marry King Gautrek's daughter and for a family alliance with him.'

Ref said he'd trust in the earl's judgment.

'The next time we meet,' said the earl, 'whatever I say to you, don't show any surprise, and make sure you agree to anything I suggest.'

Then the earl rode off, and didn't stop until he came to King Gautrek's residence. It was just about midnight when the earl arrived and he told the king that an invincible army had invaded his country. 'These men intend to kill you and then lay the country under their rule.'

'Who's the leader of this army?'

'A man we'd never believed would ignore my advice: my foster-son Ref.'

'Your word still carries a lot of weight with him,' said the king. 'Would it be wise to build up a force against him?'

'If you don't make peace with them,' said the earl, 'it seems pretty likely to me that they'll have caused a great deal of damage before you can muster your forces. I think it would be more sensible to make them a generous offer and find out whether you can reach a peaceful settlement. It seems to me any kingdom is on the verge of ruin when men like these start getting too close.'

'We've always been guided by your advice,' said the king.

'I'd like you, Sir, to hear what we have to say to each other,' said the earl.

The king said he'd do as the earl advised. Then they set out with a small number of men, and when they saw the enemy fleet, the king realized how many of them there were and how hard it would be to stand up against them.

The earl called out from the shore, shouting: 'Is it true that my foster-son is the leader of this army?'

'That's so,' said Ref.

'I'd never have thought, foster-son, that you'd attack either my territory or King Gautrek's. Is there anything we can offer to keep the peace?' asked the earl. 'I'm willing to do anything in my power to add to your reputation, and I'm sure King Gautrek will make the same promise on his own behalf. I'd like you to accept an honorable settlement from the king and then leave his kingdom in peace. I realize that you'll be very exacting in your demands, and that's only natural, seeing that your grandfather was a powerful earl and your father a great fighter.'

'I'll accept an honorable offer,' said Ref, 'if I get one.'

'I know you can't be bought off cheaply,' said the earl. 'I think I know the sort of thing you have in mind: you want to get my earldom, the one I've held under King Gautrek, and you'll be expecting the king to give you his daughter as well.'

'You've grasped the situation perfectly,' said Ref, 'and this is what I'll agree to as long as the king is willing.'

The earl turned to the king. 'It seems the wisest thing to accept this offer rather than risk our very lives against these killers. Anyway, it's not unlikely they'd first help themselves to your kingdom and then take your daughter captive,' he said. 'It would be perfectly honorable for you to marry your daughter to an earl's grandson. I'll help Ref with my advice if he's trusted with the government of your kingdom, assuming you'll go along with these proposals.'

'Earl Neri,' said King Gautrek, 'your advice has always been a great help to us, and I'm still willing to trust your foresight. Besides, I realize this army's too big a thing to handle.'

'My proposal is that Ref should be given a proper status so that he'll be able to strengthen your kingdom,' said the earl.

So this was agreed on and sealed with oaths, exactly as the earl had laid down the terms. Then King Gautrek went back home.

'You've given me plenty of support, King Olaf, and now you can go on your way, wherever you like,' said Ref.

'They're shrewd men who've had a hand in this affair of yours,' said King Olaf, and after that he sailed away.

And when the fleet had gone, King Gautrek said, 'I've been dealing with cunning men in this business, but I'll not break my oaths.'

The earl spoke to Ref: 'Now that you've only your own men left, you can see the value of my support. This advice was just the thing for you. It looks as though the ox has been paid off. All the same, I've been less generous than you deserve; for you gave me all you had, while I'm still left immensely rich.'

King Gautrek had a feast prepared, and there Ref married Helga, King Gautrek's daughter. The king also gave him the title of earl. Everybody thought Ref a very enterprising fellow; he was descended from men of rank, and his own father had been a great viking and champion. So Ref ruled his earldom, though he didn't live very long.

Earl Neri died suddenly, and there's nothing more to tell about him in this story. King Gautrek gave a funeral feast for him. By now the king himself was getting old and infirm. He'd won a great reputation for his generosity and bravery, but it's not said that he was a very profound thinker. However, he was well-liked and exceptionally open-handed, and was the most courteous of men.

And so we end Gift-Ref's Saga.



## Relationship Chart

Ref "Gift-Ref" is the Husband of 41st Great-Grandaunt of Erik Woods Applegate



## Relationship Chart

3

