

Chapter 1

The clouds gathered offshore. Uolga wondered how many times more he would have to stop and wipe the sweat from his face. Beads of perspiration danced on his forehead, sliding down his creased brow and stinging his eyes. While his was not a task requiring keen eyesight, it was necessary for him to visually measure the dirt embankment gradually increasing in height from ground level to the tops of the stones already placed securely vertical in the soft earth.

And it was no meager mound. Even with forty families investing their time in the project, it had taken the better part of the spring and summer months to near completion. Only when the capstone was dragged into place and the remainder of the exposed rock covered with earth could they return to their lives of meager existence.

Uolga did not know, nor would he have cared had he been told, that archaeologists would later name these stone, earth-encased structures *dolmens*. He would have merited that term as a level of importance no greater than that later men gave to his culture: *megalithic*. Indeed, what would fascinate generations to come held little consideration for his band, if they deliberated on it at all. For in his time, the construction was important only for its purpose, not for future revelations.

Too, while archaeologists would place great stock on the naming of their culture (*megalithic* for their construction or *beaker* for their pottery), Uolga and his group were satisfied to identify themselves with the pronouns *we* and *us*, occasionally dealing with the abstract possessive *our*, but usually in association with a clan affiliated with them. Those who did not reside with the band were *they* or *them* or simply the *others*. Theirs was an uncomplicated world and needed no further expansion of belonging outside of a few simple words. Simple too was his understanding of the seas, forests, land and the people who surrounded him.

For Uolga, the seas dominated his food chain. Although the phrase *Ertebolle culture* would label those in generations to come, he could understand that the *peoples'* diet had changed from red meat obtained from elk, aurochs and an occasional bear. As it was, he used his flint knife to open the shelled delicacy of the oyster and pop its contents into his mouth, satisfying his hunger as those around him satiated theirs.

His was a communal society. Oysters were harvested and eaten by the band in a small area. This too would be given a name, *Kitchen Midden*, which was far too formal a title for what it really was - a refuse heap.

For the bounty the waters provided, he showed great respect for its power. When the sea lashed at the small cove contained within the larger bay, they saw the waters not as a friend contributing to their well-being, but as an adversary of substantial force. Their ancestors had learned by trial and error how to deal with the waters. It required a brave man to stand on a protruding ledge over the cove and cast small pieces of oyster shell back into the raging waters to make them friendly once again within a day or two. It took a fearless leader to stand exposed before the whipping rain to toss just the right amount of shells on the boiling surf. His band prized such a man; revered actually - if only such a description existed.

Uolga treasured the forest as much as his band valued him. There were three dominant species of trees from which to choose for the needs of the *people*: elm, lime and oak, depending on the task at hand. The elm had proven as suitable for the fires maintained within the huts as the lime had for providing the framework for the huts' walls. Oak was always used when strength and durability were necessary, but only then, because of the difficulty fashioning tools from it. So sturdy was this wood that many hand axes would be dulled before a project could be completed. Although he knew what they were, his band had yet to formally name them. Instead,

they were referred to by the type of task for which they were used. The sturdiest, he had decided to use to move the boulder atop the mound.

There had been other trees in other times. Huge birch, pines, dryas, aspen, mountain ash, and arctic willow had populated Uolga's land in their turn. Each may have been superior in some way and for some purpose than those which followed them. But Uolga was a pragmatic man who made do with what he had, and with this wisdom he conducted his life, and the lives of his band.

Uolga was well acquainted with his land, the length of which he could walk in two days, the breadth in one. He understood that no matter in what direction he journeyed, he would constantly be forced to exchange solid earth for the ripple of the sea if he were to continue in a straight line. He was not foolish enough to believe his was the only band inhabiting the land or that there was naught but the emptiness of the ocean beyond his horizon.

In the *peoples'* memory, many *others* had traveled to their home: Most friendly. Some hostile. All unique. All contributing to his society. When Uolga had been a youth, the visitors from the west had been a rare treat for the children. Generally, those who ventured onto the *peoples'* land came across the narrow waterway to the east. Some were quickly assimilated into the tribe as worthy additions, others were driven away as undesirable encumbrances. A few were killed outright as they were judged to be potentially dangerous. In recent years, visitors from the west had become more and more numerous. Uolga shrewdly surmised that the sea, stretched tight to the earth by the horizon in the east and west, kept many more from traveling to his cove. Each new immigrant relayed the same story of a very strong band that approached from the south, each member riding astride a steed of some note, all of which Uolga felt to be an exaggeration told by the frightened.

As well, all claimed the strangers carried axes. Not the hand implements used by them to clear the forests in preparation for planting, rather these were attached to stout wooden handles. Instead of the finely tooled flint the artisans of his band crafted for their axes, these weapons were crudely carved granite bound tightly to the mallet by thongs of leather. In all, a ferocious weapon, one from which they would well be advised to distance themselves, or so the others had warned.

In the last five winters the number of others fleeing before those with the great axes increased far more rapidly than they could be absorbed by them. Eventually, an agreement was reached allowing *ours*, as they were casually called, to create their own villages on the *peoples'* land to the south. Together they formed a loose confederation, cooperative when convenient, but generally more for the common good of society than mutual defense.

The circumstances of these different tribes being brought together begs two questions to be answered by modern man: How did *ours* cross to the island? Would not a difference in language hamper the construction of any agreement, formal or instinctive?

The first interrogative is much simpler to analyze than the second. Uolga had not traveled beyond the *peoples'* land - he had no need. He correctly assumed, however, that there was another region over the southern horizon, but would have been astonished to know that it was part of a large land mass which lay in all directions of the compass. His band was separated from the original home of *ours* by a large body of water which never froze, even during the coldest of winters.

He also correctly believed there was another land to the west, but he had no way of knowing this too was an island as large as his, intervening between the *people's* and the mainland. Unlike the water to the east, the channel here froze perhaps once in every eight or ten

winters, easily supporting the weight of a man on horseback. Uolga himself had crossed to the nearby islands in search of game during this time of year. None of them gave much thought to the possibility that the channel separating the next island from the contiguous lands froze solid most years forming a natural causeway which was traveled in both directions.

That was simply the most convenient manner of travel between the lands, but certainly did not preclude the obvious. Small vessels were common to them long before Uolga's leadership. These often carried them to small islands visible from shore to harvest the abundance of seafood found there. Once a brave, or unlucky, soul drifted far enough toward the distant horizon in any direction, he could "discover" another land. Considering that a human, at sea level, could see eleven miles in all directions on a good day, a man from the western island, Funen, could see Uolga's homeland, Zealand, while remaining oriented to his own harbor.

The second problem, language, would have seemed much more difficult to resolve than the method of transportation between the mainland and the islands; but in reality, it was a matter of easy adaptability. A root vocabulary of some three hundred nouns, sprinkled sparingly with verbs, if not universal, was far more efficient and adaptable than any modern language. Consider the fact that once the nouns were learned, two verbs *do* and *make* along with a few others denoting action, a being could effectively communicate with another. There was no need to dress the language further in adverbs, articles, pronouns or prepositions. Changes of tense indicating time were almost completely unnecessary because they lived in the present. Lessons learned in the past to be applied to the future were addressed as if they were occurring at that time. Compared to a modern, complex language dependent on thousands of combinations of words and phrases, not including regional idioms, their task then was far easier.

To refer to them as unsophisticated would allow today's man to wrap himself smugly in his modernity. They were simple only in terms of our technology. Forty-five hundred years ago, man was sophisticated enough to form a cohesive political system, worship a common deity, sustain an agrarian life, and work in harmony with neighbors in order to achieve a mutually desired goal—something which eludes twenty-first century society.

It was that last of the elements of civilization which brought Uolga's band south to work in cooperation with *ours* before the winter came . . . perhaps, before the great ax savages from the south crossed over to the *people's* land. There was something of a sense of urgency in the air along with the telltale signs of an early winter that year as Uolga brushed the dirt from his knees and walked over to the boulder now perched atop the man-made mound.

The smooth, oblong capstone originated as a dominant section of a mountain range in northern, modern-day Norway and had a history the leader could not begin to fathom. When man first walked the region later known as Denmark 150,000 years ago, the detritus was part of a greater whole in northern Norway. The successive periods of hot and cold forced a sprinkle of spider web cracks, which later formed a fissure to grow along the face of the largest mountain of the range. Within a few, short thousand years of continued freezing and thawing of the region, the water running inside the cracks, and the loosening and weathering away of small, supporting stones caused not only Uolga's rock, but the entire eastern slope of the mountain to give way and roar thunderously down the grade into the valley below.

At that time, the rock would have been much too large for the clan's purpose even if they had existed a hundred thousand years prior and if it were not hundreds of miles to the north. Around the size of Kronborg Castle in Helsingor, that is to say enormous, the rock bathed in the

valley stream below the new face of the cliff, actually damming a portion of the flow in the narrow valley and causing a small lake to expand upstream.

Here, the rock and others remained for only a few hundred years before they were swept downstream by a flash flood one spring. Toward the end of its tumbling journey in the flowing waters, the rock's spine broke and a piece a third of its original immense size was carried off in the undertow of the swelling river. It continued to move slowly in a southwesterly direction, pausing occasionally at some outcropping of rocks, seldom for longer than a decade or so, but at one point resting for several centuries in the river's bend until the side of the bank eroded and provided easier passage. With each movement of its great bulk in the river passing over unyielding, protruding slabs of stone, gouges were made and chunks were removed from the rock's surface.

At long last, the rock's journey came to an end. The delta of the river upon which it rode emptied into a fresh-water lake and it came to rest as sentinel to the right of the mouth of the river, where along with other rocks, it gave definition to the end of the distended tributary, actually assisting in the control of the water, encouraging it into the correct pathway. Here it stayed. For tens of thousands of years before Jesus of Nazareth walked the face of the earth, it remained a guardian at the river's exit, weathering a little more with each passing moment of time, but standing erect and stately, watching as the stream spilled itself into the maturing lake.

For several millenniums there had been a constant change in the climate. Though the rock had no sensory system, cold temperatures caused fine cracks to appear in its surface. For several hundred years, a white mass to the north had been moved closer with each passing cycle of the moon. Five hundred years it took for the mass to surround the rock, but finally its cold

clutches began to pry it relentlessly from the soil in which it rested. Within several years, it was no longer held fast by the earth, but had become once again a part of a larger, moving body.

The boulder rode the summit of the moving mountain for several centuries until enough snow and ice formed atop it that it no longer crested the mass, but traveled encased within the glacier. The slow, constant movement of the ice mass occasionally brought it into contact with others of its kind. Sometimes they would ride together for decades in grave silence before one or the other spurred off in different directions. Although it retained its former composition, it now included several additional chips and scars and one long gash which nicked the northern third of its great bulk, the result of lying in too close proximity to a neighbor traveling south.

It became lost to time. The centuries creaked by, as did the rumble of the glacier until an illumination caught it one day. It wasn't actually light, but a change in color several shades brighter than the dense darkness in which it had reposed for millenniums. Decade by decade the color kindled until one year a dazzling brightness broke through the ice and painted its eastern side with warmth not experienced for time immemorial. The diversity in temperature between that part of the bolder still trapped by the glacier and the comparative warmth of the open air caused its outer crust to weaken further.

Years passed. As it emerged completely from its icy shroud, it was not alone. Carpets of flowers spread before it to the west interrupted only by the ash, aspen, and birch which grew in great stands around its valley. Occasionally, tiny little creatures sought shelter on its lee side when the storms were fierce in the region. Their soft fur nuzzled its flat surface and it gained some sense of pride that it was able to offer a small serving of protection to her flock.

The rock would be given rare glimpses of another animal a short distance to the north. From those white hills they seemed to intently search for something only known to them. The

creatures scurried around the cliffs of chalk digging with their crude, wooden sticks, until they loosened an oval-shaped rock with a knobby, irregular surface. Sometimes, they would carry their finds to her base and used harder stones to strike slivers from the cone-shaped rocks. At first, the rock could not comprehend their purpose until they brought a captured animal from her flock to her location. They used long slivers of stone to separate the flesh of the little animal from its fur, afterwards tossing pieces of the creature's body into the fire. The horns of the tiny animal were broken from the skull and taken away with them after they consumed the blackened meat from the fire, leaving only the smoldering embers and the fetid odor of burnt flesh to testify to their presence.

The rock had no concept of its relationship with the earth and reposed upon a small knoll. She gained neither succor nor replenished the soil other than for the small particles which fell from her bulk, so it was understandable that she had no affiliation with the movement of the earth's crust if it did not directly affect her position on the ridge. It had traveled a great distance in order to stand where it did, and the truth be known, had the glacier not retreated during the Allerod Period north of Smaland and had the temperature not warmed, it would still have been trapped. The colder era of Dryas really meant little to her and she could not even relate the colder temperatures with the little men who dug the flint nodules in the direction the sun did not rise. They were great events for the world to come, but had little to do with her position in it.

Some five thousand years before Uolga's band would find use for her, indeed deifying her, the northern European Continent was still attached. During the Ancyclus, or Continental Age, far to the west of her Scotland still formed a part of the Jutland Peninsula. The Islands of Zealand, on which she rested, and Funen further to the west, were still parcels of the great northern German region.

But everything to which she had become accustomed changed during the next two thousand years. The great stands of ash, aspen, and birch were supplanted each year by pines so that by the time of the Ancyclus Period they formed the sturdiest of species. In their turn, most of the evergreens were overgrown by the oaks, elms, and limes which were themselves to be engulfed by the rising seas during the Littorina Age. The rock itself felt the waters of the seas lap at her base and once was immersed for several hundred years as the salty ocean cut new channels into the earth.

When the water subsided, she found that her bulk had diminished substantially when her weakened portions had broken away leaving her with a girth not much larger than one-fifteenth of her former self. In relation to her neighbors, she was still quite large, but no longer impressively so. That vast majority of her mass sat broken into many parts under the water ringing a cave which had been weathered away toward the dry land, its head visible during ebb, engulfed with the tide.

When she emerged from under the water, she found that the tiny animals she was so fond of had gone. In their stead, the more substantial elk and aurochs, a wild ox, dwelled. The strange little creatures that walked on two legs with such difficulty were replaced by a larger, more coordinated species.

There were many differences between these creatures and the ones she had first seen. While they still used the brown stone to cleave the flesh from their prey, they had learned to secure a piece of rock to the horns of the dead elk's antlers with thongs made from strips of the hide. Wood and flesh thus mated, they used the implement efficiently to bite deep into the trunks of the elms and limes which populated the rolling land. The harder oak, however, they

preferred to overcome with fire and her surface took on a blackened appearance from the billowing smoke which rose from the forest below.

Curiously, she watched as the land, thus cleared, was scratched open with a stick of sorts. Into the wounds, the little creatures placed something hidden in their hands and covered it back over with dirt as if to make amends for their violation. Each year, when the weather turned cooler, she was surprised to see these beings wade across the tall grass that grew where they had caused their injuries carrying a bone and stone device which looked like an extension of their gangly limbs. With a swing of their arms, the stalks of grass fell to earth, to be carted off later by the beings. *Did these creatures know only how to destroy?*

For the first time since being cast out of the glacier's bowels, the rock was concerned for her own safety. It was one thing to watch passionately as those little creatures assaulted others, the land, or themselves, but quite another when she became the focus of their attention. More and more recently, one of their numbers, a large one with hair the color of the beach behind her and eyes like that of the sea which lapped at her face in a gale, inspected her with increasing regularity. She had observed the creatures for well over a hundred thousand years and she noticed that when they began to take too great an interest in something, usually a disaster followed.

Before the cold and snows left the land the following spring, the creatures were back assaulting the earth. This time they were not satisfied to merely lacerate its surface. Instead, they dug a great trough into the ground so deep that the rock could not see the bottom. The sides of this gap they covered with her sisters, standing them erect along the sides.

Once they had the others vertical, they came at her. She resisted at first, but they cleared away the dirt from around her into which she had snuggled. Then, using strong oak poles they

pried her from earth's womb causing her to roll over and over until she stopped against the man-made mound. She was not satisfied with her new position, which denied her the lofty heights and the view of the sea. The rock took some consolation in the fact that she was as large as most of her sisters made to stand vertical together and come what may, she would at least not share that fate.

Uolga's band worked quickly now that the rain had subsided. Together with *ours* they moved first to the far side of the large boulder which abutted the mound. Here, they placed stout wooden poles under its surface and used them as levers to pry it several inches into the air. While thus suspended, the women and children of both bands pushed earth, small rocks, and fresh-cut boughs under the lip until the men were able to remove their poles without losing any of the angles they had gained. Once the far side was firmly elevated, they raised the other side in a similar manner. Thus, inch-by-inch over the next several weeks the capstone rose to a height slightly taller than the vertical stones they had placed earlier.

Hoist, wench, and pulley were as foreign a concept to them as was the wheel. Even the idea of using logs upon which to roll the stone had to be forsaken until it could be pushed downhill and into place.

Uolga conferred often with his counterpart, Runan, the leader of *ours*. He didn't really require his advice, but to ensure cooperation it was best to solicit it nevertheless. When they reached an elevation some five degrees higher than the mound, both were satisfied it was time for the next step.

Logs of oak were stretched across the top of the hole and using the poles as pry bars, the men of both tribes pushed the boulder toward its final resting place while others alternately

pulled and restrained the rock so it moved in the proper direction. When finally settled, the edges of the boulder were again lifted and the oak logs removed. The dirt used to elevate the bolder would be used to cover the entire structure and the remainder spread around it as if to provide a sense of symmetry.

Having helped to build others and having observed those erected by his ancestors, Uolga was confident that soon the grasses would cover this mound. Not that it would ever look as if it was naturally placed there, but it was the symbolism which was important.

Why did the bands of Uolga and Runan conspire to build the structure? They did not know. Collaboration, or cooperation, those were not words in their vocabulary. Instead, it was understood by both clans that the dolmen of *ours* were overcrowded and unfit for the members of the band's last journey, and that casting out forgotten ancestors was no longer a reasonable solution.

Runan had understood this as early as the spring before when he had placed his own father, Ruk, to rest in the last available space of *ours* megalith. Runan was no Copernicus, but he was able to predict that not too many generations would pass before future leaders would decide to remove his untidy sack of bones in favor of some more recently deposited figure of note. The *people* whispered it among *ours* in the shadows of the night that it was Ruk's cunning which had allowed them to escape domination many years before. Runan would have been less than a wise leader not to honor such a powerful figure, his own sentimentalism aside.

Alas, there was another concern on Runan's mind while the final oak logs were placed in position so that they might temporarily bear the weight of the capstone. The land of the dolmen was conspicuously close to the *peoples'* village, a half-day's journey from that of *ours*. When Uolga first explained this to him, he was willing to accept the fact that the necessary building

materials were much closer to the *peoples'* dwellings than their own. As well, Uolga was quick to point out, *too quickly*, that the *people* were willing to use half their number to help with the project while the others of their clan willingly worked throughout the summer to harvest not only their own crops, but those of *ours* as well.

Wasn't it right that they should not be required to travel such great distances in order to do voluntary labor? Uolga asked in his gentle, prodding way.

Yes, Runan had agreed and had meant it at the time. But the whispers on the tongues of *ours* carried by the gentle breeze of the eve said differently. *Fool!* they taunted Runan. *Do you not see Uolga wishes only to keep you subservient to him and ours to the clan of the people? When we have toiled so, what is to stop them from claiming it as their own? Foolish Runan!*

And he had listened. He had consulted. And he had reached a decision. When the last handful of dirt was patted into place, when they were tired from their labors, when Runan was confident those of the *people* who were busied harvesting *ours* crops to the south, they would strike.

It was unnecessary for *ours* to kill all of the *people* within their grasp. Indeed, it was not even desirable. The death of Uolga and four or five of his best men would be enough for *ours* to be able to dominate the *people* for generations to come, perhaps even to bind them together again. Of course, the position of *ours* would be elevated in such a new class structure.

And how better to cement this new culture than to take Uolga's widow-to-be, Xard, as my own? It would show him to be a charitable man; a generous, benevolent leader who would even take his enemy's wife to his own home to spare her the agony suffered by widowed women. Certainly, such a noble gesture would stand him in good favor with the *people*. That she had raven hair as dense as the grass of the forest floor, features envied by all women; lusted after by

all men, was beside the point. She was a symbol. Runan watched as she walked gracefully among the men and women, pausing here for a brief conversation and there to refresh a thirsty workman with water. Yes, a very generous act on my part, he thought.

His bravest men had each been armed with strong flint knives as the day approached. They awaited his signal, his own attack upon Uolga, before throwing themselves upon the selected men of the *people*. As he continued to watch Xard walking among the clans he realized there was little to be gained in putting off the inevitable. The work which remained could be accomplished with or without the services of those members of the *people* who would soon have need of the dolmen.

Runan's interest shifted from Xard to her husband as she stopped to offer him the refreshment of a nearby freshwater pool. Uolga was taller than those surrounding him. Steady of hand, keen of eye, and sharp of mind, Runan could appreciate the leader's strengths even as he plotted his death. His tribe was secure because he made them feel protected, satisfied because he tended to their needs before his own, content because he sought ways to make them so. A good man, a better leader, and because of this, it was necessary that he die.

Xard moved off to tend the others, to offer them words of encouragement as they continued to toil against the mammoth rock moving it toward its final resting place. Uolga stood alone for a moment as if to survey the work accomplished and then as if satisfied, began the uphill walk toward Runan who was scrutinizing the scene from a much different perspective.

"Today, before the sun goes," Uolga pointed to the west when he reached the summit. "Today . . . if rain does not come . . . we finish," he concluded his statement by changing the direction of his finger which now pointed to the capstone which had crept to the top of the first of the logs covering the stone-lined hole.

Runan scanned the skies before he made any response. Clearly, the rain would wait until after sunset before it did more than sprinkle the earth and settle the dust. Runan believed Uolga knew this as well, but left him to make the decision to increase his own worth. "Yes, today. When night comes, rain. Not before," he responded appreciating the qualities that made this man a leader even as his hand grasped the hilt of the knife under his short vest.

"Good to be finished. The *others* come," Uolga pointed once again to the West. From his finger the power of his clan had been directed for seven years.

"Today?" Runan asked in concern.

Uolga shrugged his massive shoulders in response. *Today, tomorrow, the next, this winter, when would they come?* He shrugged again, but this time in response to his own unanswered question.

Half of Uolga's attention was focused on the men who had by now moved the stone slab more than half way across the upright stones. With the other half, he concerned himself with the future of the *people* and how they would meet the others when they came. None of his attention was focused on his counterpart who had pulled his flint knife free of its sheath. He turned slightly toward Runan, a look of utter surprise on his face, when he felt the cold stone penetrate beneath his ribs, angled up high where it would do the most damage.

Uolga fell backwards lying sprawled on the dirt, his hands clasped to the gaping wound in his chest as if protecting it from further injury. In pain, but yet unaware of the cause, Uolga thought he heard a cry of alarm wrench from Runan's mouth and then he was vaguely aware of him as he bent over to help him.

Runan struck twice more with the knife, once higher, making sure the blade of his knife went between Uolga's ribs, before pushing it completely through. He glanced below as his men

fell upon the unsuspecting *people* even as Uolga withered on the point of his knife. Not wanting his counterpart to suffer further, he withdrew the blade from his chest and slammed the knife into the stricken man's temple. The new puncture caused Uolga's death spasms to cease immediately, but at the cost of the point from Runan's knife. Still, for the leader of *ours* it was a fair trade.

He stood to view the scene below. It was as he had predicted. Perhaps six men of the *people* lay still, another four moaned loudly from where they had fallen on the ground. Of his men, he counted only three not on their feet, although that number more appeared to be wounded. It had gone well. Not too much killing, but those left among the *people* cowered before *ours*. The balance of power in this region had shifted in less time than it would take to retell the story around nightly campfires.

Runan began the descent to greet his new clan to select from among them a new woman. But before he reached the base of the small mound, the sky broke open and the flat, grassy plains were soaked in the sorrow of the heavens, or so the story would be told. From within the wet sheets of rain first one, then another and then several men emerged on horseback before Runan could reach his new clan.

The *others* had arrived.