

# Good essay on hrafnkels saga

[Family](#), [Father](#)



The Hrafnkel saga is based on Christian ethics and morals, a view that after a period of increasing criticism has lost a great deal of its initial convincing force. Hrafnkel was the son of a Norwegian man called Hallfreor, who was one of the original settlers of Iceland. Hrafnkel, with the permission of his father established his own settlement and selected an uninhabited valley for his farm and named it ‘ Noble home’ and the valley was subsequently named after him, ‘ Hrafnkel’s valley.’ He believed in a god called Freyr and had erected a large temple, where he performed lavish sacrificial ceremonies. He dedicated the best of his livestock to his god, including his favorite horse, Freyman. He loved his horse too much and even swore to kill anyone who rode on it without permission. Because of his religious activities, he became known as Freysgodi. He longed for power and soon established himself as a chieftain by bullying people in the neighboring valleys.

He had a shepherd called Einarr and on one occasion this shepherd wanted to ride on a horse so as to perform his duties, but every horse he approached ran away from him except Freyman, which he then takes and rides him for the day. On that day, after the horse had been ridden, it ran home and started neighing. On seeing his horse dirty and wet with sweat, Hrafnkel realized what had happened and rode out with his axe and reluctantly killed Einarr to fulfill his oath. Einarr’s father was upset upon his son’s death and went to Hrafnkel to seek wergild, a value placed on every human being, also known as “ man price.” However, Hrafnkel refuses to pay the wergild saying that he pays wergild for no man. He however regretted the killing of his shepherd and was prepared to make some amends. He therefore made a favorable offer to Einarr’s father of taking care of him for the rest of his days.

Thorbjorn was the name of Einarr's father and he wanted nothing short of a formal settlement. Therefore, upon Hrafnkel's rejection to pay wergild, Thorbjorn started searching for ways to achieve satisfaction. The Icelandic laws guaranteed every free man the same rights, but since no central executive power existed, it was difficult for a common man to prosecute a chieftain. Thorbjorn therefore needed the help of another chieftain, both for the complicated legal maneuvering which was often necessary and, if successful at the assembly, for subsequently enforcing the verdict. He therefore went to seek the help of his brother, Bjarni, but his brother did not want to get involved in a dispute with the powerful Hrafnkel. He then goes to seek help from Bjarni's son, Samr. He in turn, first advises his uncle to accept Hrafnkel's offer but Thorbjorn was adamant. Therefore although Samr had no desire to join the conflict, he reluctantly agreed after his uncle got emotional. Samr accepted to take his uncle's case so that he effectively became the plaintiff.

Samr started preparing the case against Hrafnkel and summoned him to Alping the next summer; however Hrafnkel regarded the attempt as laughable. On the day of the case, on reaching the assembly, Samr and Thorbjorn discover that no major chieftain wants to aid them and this almost made Einarr's father to give up but his nephew insists that they should proceed. Coincidentally, they met Porkell, a young adventurer from West fjords, who sympathizes with their cause and offers to help them achieve the help of his brother Porgeirr who was a powerful chieftain. With his help, Samr managed to completely prosecute the case. The law found Hrafnkel guilty,

where Samr acquired the right to kill him and confiscate his property. They then, on one morning arrived at his home and surprised him by capturing him while he was sleeping.

Hrafnkel was offered two options by Samr; to be executed on the spot or to live as his subordinate, stripped of his honor and most of his property and he chooses to live. He then builds himself a new home in another valley and after a few years of hard work he again established himself as a respectable farmer. His manners improved and he became much gentler with his subordinates and this enabled him to gain popularity and loyalty. However, after six years of peace, he decided that it was time for his revenge. He received news that Samr's brother was travelling close by with a few companions. He gathered his own men and went to attack Samr's brother. When Samr got word of the battle, he immediately went with a small force to aid his brother but they arrived too late. The next morning, Hrafnkel surprised Samr with the similar choices he had offered him before, with no wergild paid for Samr's brother, and he also chose to live. Hrafnkel took up his residence, his old home and resumed the duties of a chieftain. Samr therefore lived as Hrafnkel's subordinate for the rest of his day and did not achieve revenge against him.

In my opinion, therefore, Hrafnkel is guilty of murder. This is because he takes away the life of a human being mercilessly even though he was reluctant to do it. He killed his shepherd because of an oath he had taken concerning his horse and although it could be justified that it was necessary to kill him because he was bound by the oath, it was still wrong to commit murder. Besides, in the saga, it was not the first murder he had committed in

that valley. Furthermore, he refused to pay wergild, which was a requirement by the law if a person was murdered. He however refused to pay wergild for his shepherd. It is for this reason that Einarr's father set out to seek for justice for his son's death. Because of the Iceland laws that could not just cater for all people especially the common man like Thorbjorn, he had to seek help from other people so as to achieve his goal. As much as Hrafnkel is powerful, the law eventually found him guilty of murder. He is therefore generally guilty of murder, not forgetting that he commits another murder of Samr's brother, out of revenge and this is not right. He took the lives of many people in that area and there is nothing that could justify such an act of a ruthless man. He used his power as a chieftain to manipulate people and that is why it was difficult for Einarr's father and his nephew to get justice of Einarr's death through the law of Iceland, until they had to seek the help of another powerful chieftain. Also the law found him guilty and he was supposed to be slain and taken of his property, but Samr was merciful to him and gave him two options and Hrafnkel chose to live.

## **Works Cited**

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