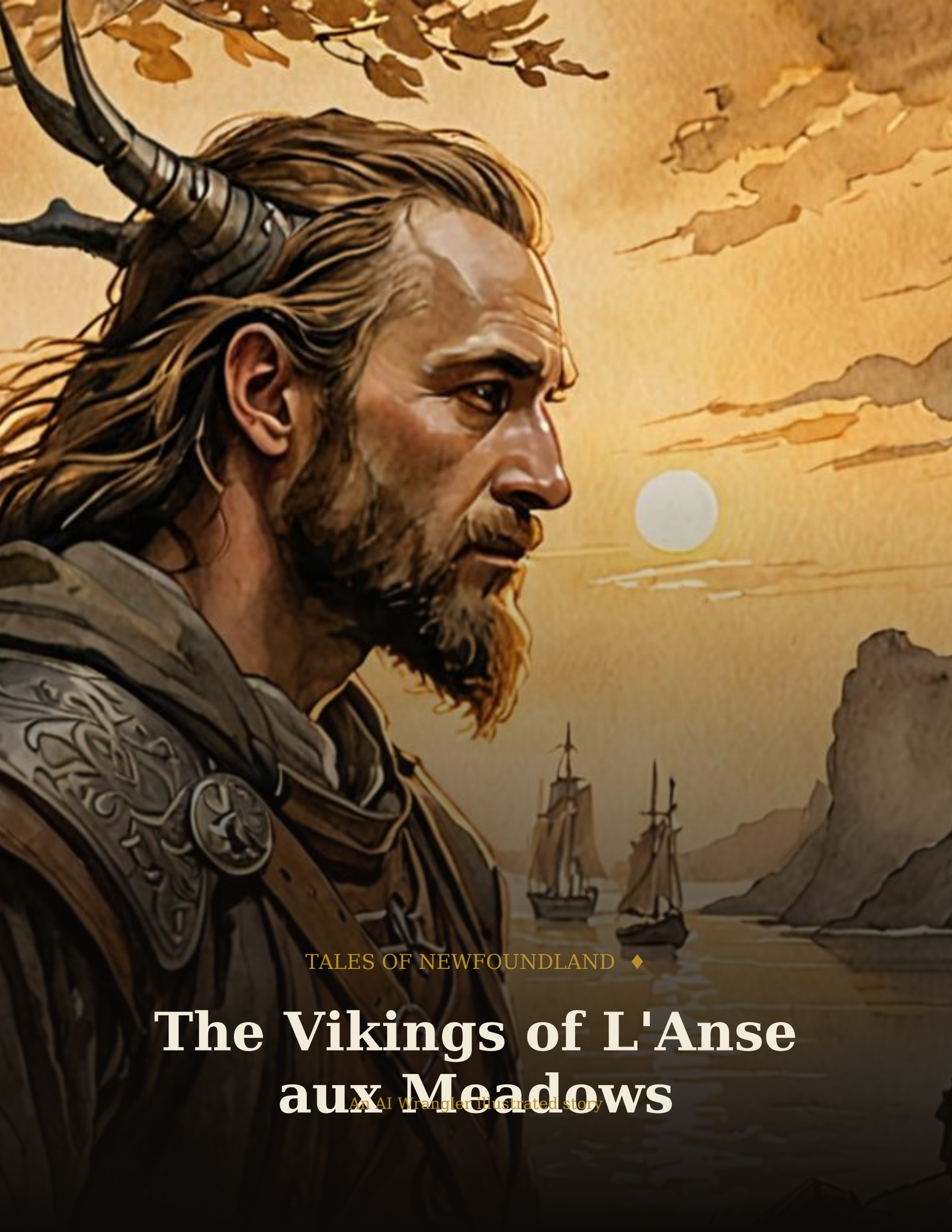




TALES OF NEWFOUNDLAND ♦

The Vikings of L'Anse aux Meadows

An AI Wrangler illustrated story



From the film

MARTY

Welcome back to the fire, friends. Tonight's Newfoundland tale carries us back a thousand years, to a windswept meadow at the far northern tip of the island, and to a secret that Newfoundland kept in the ground for ten centuries. Because long, long before Columbus, before John Cabot, before any of the fishing fleets, other Europeans came to the shores of the Rock. They came in longships. They were the Norse. The Vikings landed in Newfoundland, and for a thousand years, almost nobody believed it.



CAROL

The Vikings, Marty. In Newfoundland. A thousand years ago. I have heard whispers of this and always half thought it a fairy tale. It is true?



MARTY

It is entirely true, Carol, and it is one of the great stories of the whole New World. Around the year one thousand, the Norse had pushed west across the top of the world, from Norway to Iceland, from Iceland to Greenland, where Erik the Red made a colony. And Erik had a son, Carol, a bold one, named Leif Erikson, and Leif heard tell of lands still further west, sighted by a sailor blown off course. And Leif Erikson took a ship and a crew and sailed off into the unknown Atlantic to find them. And he did. He came to a coast of forests and meadows and wild grapes, a place the sagas call Vinland. And the northern tip of Newfoundland, Carol, is where they built.



CAROL

So the old Norse sagas told this story all along. But nobody believed the sagas were real history?



MARTY

For centuries, Carol, the Vinland sagas were treated as legend, grand old tales of Viking adventure, poetry, not fact. Everyone knew Columbus discovered America in 1492, and that was that. The idea that Norsemen had stood on North American soil five hundred years before Columbus was a lovely story, but where was the proof? A saga is not a foundation. You cannot dig up a poem. And so it stayed, a beautiful maybe, for a very long time, until a Norwegian couple decided to go and settle the question for good.



CAROL

A couple went looking. Oh, Marty, I love it already. Tell me.



MARTY

Their names were Helge Ingstad and Anne Stine Ingstad, Carol, an explorer and an archaeologist, husband and wife, and they believed the sagas. And in 1960, Helge Ingstad went to Newfoundland, to the northern peninsula, and he did the thing that had never been done. He asked the local people. There was a fishing village up there called L'Anse aux Meadows, and the fishermen there had always known of some strange old overgrown mounds and ridges in a meadow by the sea, that they figured were an old Indian camp, or nothing at all. And a local man named George Decker walked Helge Ingstad out and showed him the bumps in the grass.



CAROL

Bumps in the grass that everyone had walked past forever. Marty, and that was it?



MARTY

That was it, Carol. Because when Anne Stine Ingstad and her team dug into those bumps in the grass, over the seasons that followed, they found the outlines of buildings. Norse buildings, Carol. Turf-walled longhouses of exactly the kind the Vikings built in Greenland and Iceland. They found a forge, and iron nails and rivets, worked in a way the Indigenous peoples did not work iron. They found a bronze cloak pin, and a stone lamp, and a spindle whorl for spinning wool, a woman's tool, telling us this was no mere camp but a real settlement, with women in it. And when they dated it all, Carol, it came back to right around the year one thousand. The sagas were true. The Vikings had been there.



CAROL

The sagas were true. Marty, that gives me chills. A thousand-year-old secret, sitting in the grass, and a fishing village that had walked past it for generations. So Leif Erikson really did stand on Newfoundland.

MARTY

He and his people really did, Carol. For the first time, there was hard, undeniable proof that Europeans had reached the Americas five centuries before Columbus, and the place they proved it was a meadow in Newfoundland. It rewrote the history of the entire New World. But here is the part I love best, Carol, and it is very Newfoundland. The Norse did not stay. They were there only a few years, a decade at most. They found the land rich, but they were desperately far from home, a tiny band at the end of the world, and they met the people already living there, whom they called the Skraelings, and there was trade at first and then there was fighting, and the Norse were too few and too far away to hold on. So they packed up their longships and sailed away, back to Greenland, and left their turf houses to sink slowly into the meadow.

CAROL

They came all that way, and then they left. Marty, why does that move me so? That they were there, and it did not last.

MARTY

Because it is so human, Carol. They dared the impossible ocean, they reached a whole new world, they achieved a thing that would not be matched for five hundred years, and then, quietly, they found it was too hard and too lonely and too far, and they went home, and history forgot them for a thousand years. There is no glory in the ending, Carol, no empire, no monument they built. Just a few brave, restless people who came to Newfoundland, lived a while at the edge of everything, and left. And yet the meadow kept them. The ground remembered. And a fisherman named George Decker walked a Norwegian dreamer out to some bumps in the grass, and gave the whole world back its lost first chapter. L'Anse aux Meadows is a wonder of the world now, Carol, honoured across the earth. But it started as bumps in the grass that the local folk had always known were there. The Rock keeps its secrets, and gives them up in its own good time.

CAROL

The Rock keeps its secrets. Marty, that is a beautiful thought to end on. A thousand years, and it was waiting all along.

MARTY

Waiting all along, Carol. So the next time someone tells you Columbus discovered the New World, you can smile, and think of a meadow at the top of Newfoundland, where a thousand years ago the Norse built their houses of turf, and where the grass grew over the truth and kept it safe until we were ready to believe it. I'm Marty Shepard.

CAROL

And I'm Carol, and tonight I am marvelling at Leif Erikson and the meadow that remembered him. Honour the old daring, keep your own secrets safe, and come back to the fire.