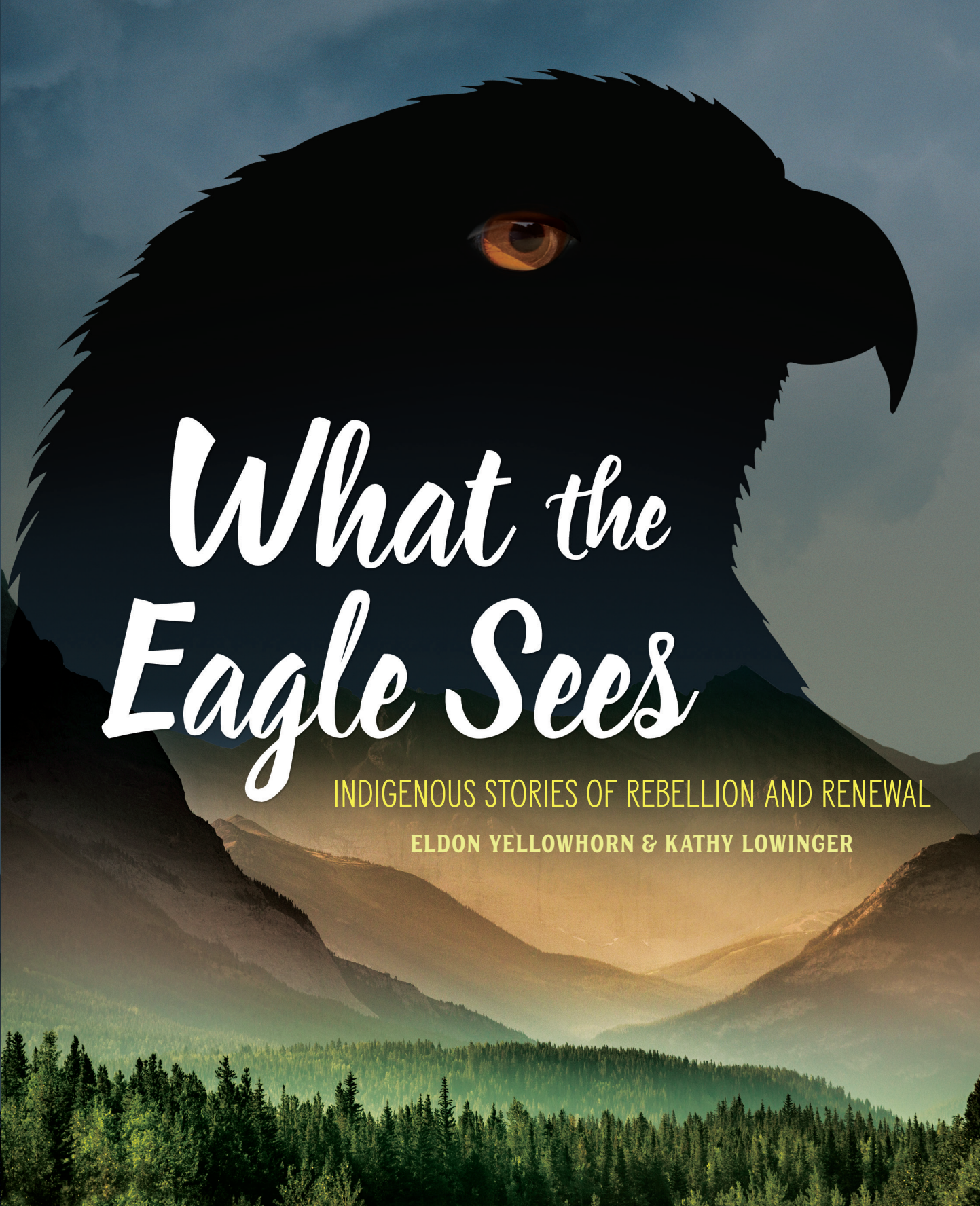




What the Eagle Sees

INDIGENOUS STORIES OF REBELLION AND RENEWAL

ELDON YELLOWHORN & KATHY LOWINGER

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To Jasper and Giovanni—EY

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CONTENTS

.....

Author's Note 4

Eagle's Tale 5

The Story of the Old North Trail 7

CHAPTER 1

FIRST COME THE VIKINGS

WE FIGHT THEM OFF 11

CHAPTER 2

SLAVERY

REBELLION 19

CHAPTER 3

OLD NATIONS CRUMBLE

WE FORGE NEW ONES 29

CHAPTER 4

INVADERS' BATTLES

WE WALK THE WAR ROAD 41

CHAPTER 5

NEW DAYS

NEW WAYS 51

CHAPTER 6

THEY TOOK OUR LAND

VICTORY IS SURVIVAL 65

CHAPTER 7

ASSIMILATION

WE RESIST 77

CHAPTER 8

OUR DAY IS NOT OVER

WE DANCE! 89

CHAPTER 9

THE EAGLE HAS LANDED

**UNDERSTANDING THE PAST,
SOARING INTO THE FUTURE 99**

Glossary 109

Selected Sources 112

Image Credits 114

Index 116

Author's Note

What the Eagle Sees tells the story of what Indigenous people did when invaders arrived in our homelands. I don't try to tell the whole vast story, and in places I don't tell it in the order it happened. What you will find here are some of the places and people and events that have mattered to me in understanding my people's past.

A word about names. I use the word *Indigenous* to refer to the people I am writing about. In the past, names like Indian, Native, First Nations, and Aboriginal were in use. Where they are still being used, like Indian Relay, I have kept the names intact.

For hundreds of years after the Europeans' invasion, Mexico, the United States, and Canada did not exist, but I use those and other modern place names where they will make the text easier to understand. I say Turtle Island to refer to North America, as do many North American Indigenous people for whom, historically, the North American continent was the whole world; they adopted the name Turtle Island from the myth that their world was created on Turtle's back. Finally, I have tried to use individuals' Indigenous names whenever possible.



EAGLE'S TALE



If we listen, every bird and animal has a story to tell us. Of all the birds and animals, Eagle tells the most important story of all: the story of life.

Eagle flies over everything, so he sees everything: he sees daylight and darkness, summer and winter, dry land and water, snowy mountains and cool valleys. He sees beauty and ugliness, war and peace. He soars so high that he is the go-between between humans and the Chief of the Sky World.

Eagle has the gift of flight and a freedom that we humans can only dream of. Maybe that's why we tell so many stories about him, stories in which Eagle is the king of birds, or a chief who talks with humans, or a sage advisor whose insights teach us life lessons.

Eagle inspires us to go where he goes, to reach beyond our grasp. That is why John Bennett Herrington of the Chickasaw Nation, the first Indigenous astronaut, took an eagle feather into space with him on the space shuttle *Endeavour* in 2002.



A Piikani eagle trap, or *ipsstsstsij*, in the Porcupine Hills, Alberta. Because eagles are such powerful medicine creatures, there are many restrictions against hunting or killing them. A person who eats even a bite of eagle meat is said to change into a monster. On the Great Plains, anybody who wanted an eagle feather had to pluck it from a live bird, so Indigenous Peoples devised special eagle traps. In the Southeast, only hunters expert in eagle medicine could kill an eagle. In my own Piikani tradition, eagles were caught and killed only for traditional purposes.



Eagle's feathers are part light and part dark. The history in this book is like an eagle's feather. Past centuries have been full of terrible, tragic events for Indigenous people. That's the dark side of our story. The light, hopeful side is that against all odds we have survived. If you want to understand the past, keep Eagle's ways in mind. Take the long view, like Eagle does.

Artists carve images of Eagle on totem poles, talking sticks, and other kinds of art, including pottery and jewelry. Zuni carvers in the Southwest make stone Eagle amulets for protection or healing.

NEVER EAT AN EAGLE!



The English fur trader, mapmaker, and explorer David Thompson (1770–1857) was traveling to Lake Athabasca with two Cree men. They had not eaten anything in several days. In desperation, Thompson shot and killed an

eagle. One man refused to eat any of it because he had heard that anybody who eats an eagle will become a monster. He went hungry that night. Thompson and his other companion did not become monsters, but a few hours later they were racked with awful nausea and stomach cramps. The man who had gone without his dinner reminded his companions that there is a good reason nobody should eat an eagle.

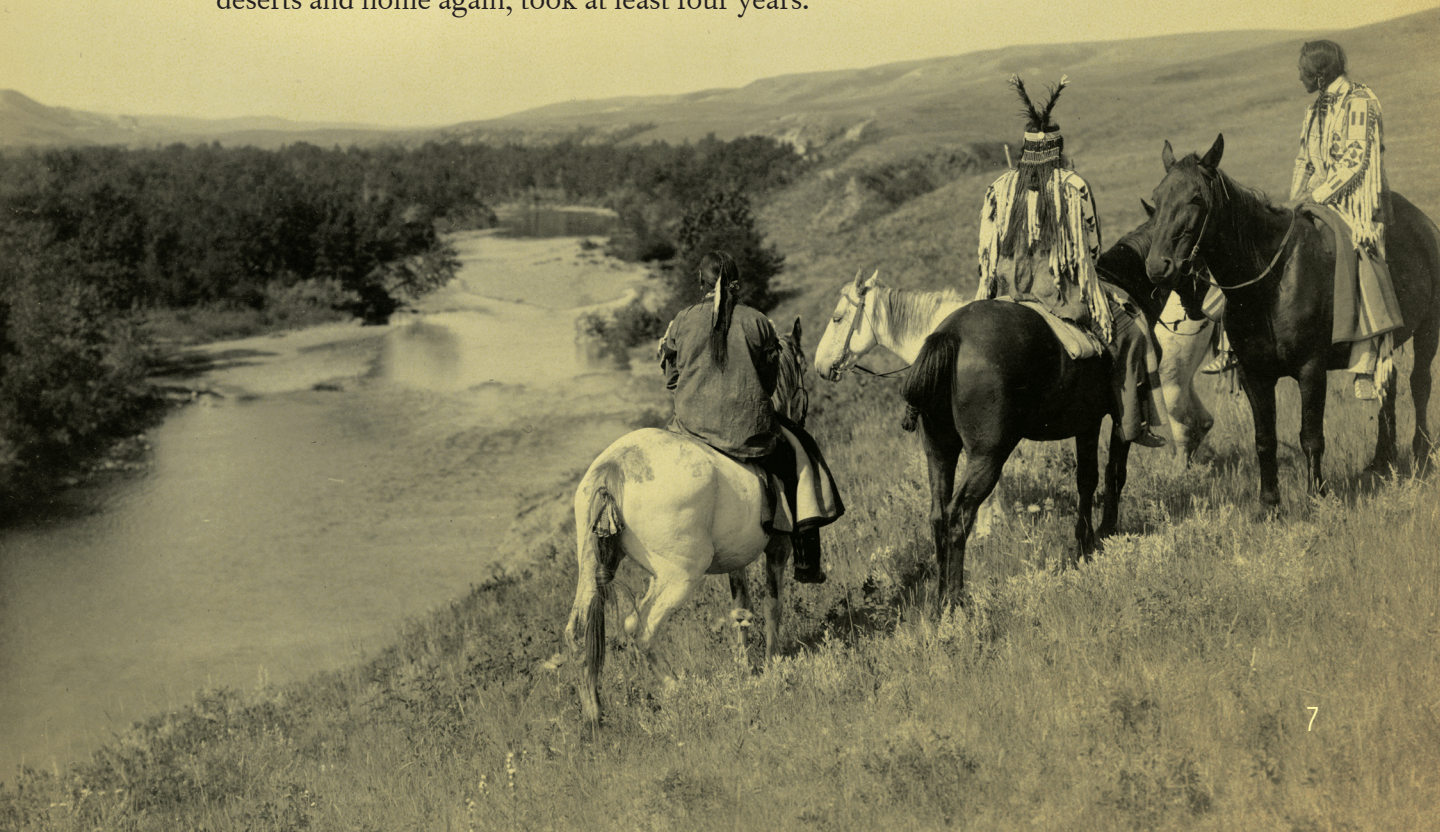
THE STORY OF THE OLD NORTH TRAIL

10,000 years ago to the present

SURVIVAL LESSONS

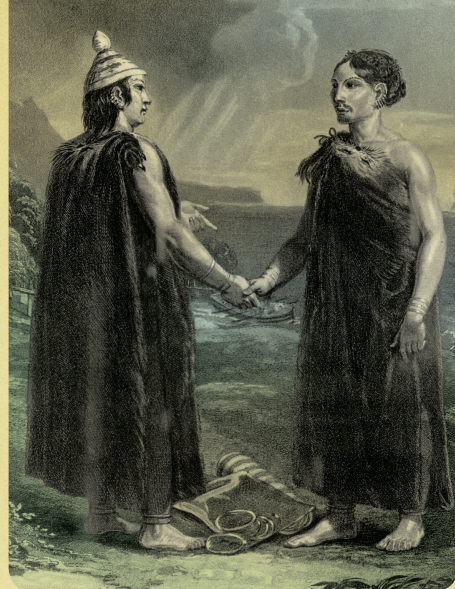
The Old North Trail is one of the oldest and longest roads in the world. A segment of the Old North Trail runs through the Piikani Nation where I grew up. It crosses the Oldman River just below Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump in southern Alberta. I have walked on the Old North Trail, jogged on it, and pedaled my mountain bike in its ruts.

My ancestors walked the trail in ancient times. Walking its 3,200 kilometers (2,000 miles), from the barren lands of the far north all the way to southern deserts and home again, took at least four years.



They followed physical landmarks, such as the Swan's Bill just north of Banff, Alberta, and Chief Mountain in northern Montana, along the east side of the "Backbone of the World," which we now call the Rocky Mountains. Some of them were on spiritual journeys. Others just longed to see the country or river or forest beyond the next hill.

Most of those who followed the Old North Trail were traders. The heavy sacks slung from tumplines—or straps—around their foreheads were packed with dried meat and tanned animal pelts to trade for razor-sharp tools made of a volcanic glass called obsidian or for precious shells to adorn themselves with.



An engraving from the 1700s showing Nootka Chief Maguinna, who controlled the fur trade in Nootka Sound, trading with Chief Callicum. Traded goods lie at their feet.





This Shawnee village on the banks of the Ohio River is one of the many different ways people lived on Turtle Island.

The Old North Trail asked a lot of every traveler. You had to be nimble because it ran across stony riverbeds and around buttes so high you could barely see the top. You had to know how to read the wind and the sun and the stars. Your only map was the one in your head that you created from your own past travels or the stories you heard from other travelers. You had to know how to respect other people's ways, because you would be crossing the territory of one nation after another. You had to know how to communicate, even when you met somebody who spoke a different language.

MUCH OF THE OLD NORTH TRAIL is gone now, covered in grass or concrete, but trade routes like it once crisscrossed the continent. Indigenous people knew broad horizons—there were so many trade routes that it's possible every nation included at least one person who had seen either the Atlantic Ocean or the Pacific Ocean.

The trails of Turtle Island linked people who lived in many different ways. Some lived in cities. Others lived in tiny hamlets surrounded by farmland, or in homes they carried with them. Some were ruled by royalty, while their neighbors might follow a chief and make decisions as a group. All of them had their own healers and artists, athletes and architects, hunters and farmers.

Despite all their differences, the many peoples had a lot in common. The Old North Trail and other trade routes like it taught my ancestors that understanding and knowing the land was vital to safe travels. Since the different groups who used the trails often had no common spoken language, they devised a sign language that let them communicate and forge ties with one another. They understood the importance of learning from the Elders who had walked the trail before them.

I remember the Old North Trail when I think about the invasion of our land: the lessons we learned from the trail would help us survive the hard times to come.

HOW DO WE **KNOW?**

Follow That Obsidian!

the Ohio River. They knew that obsidian didn't occur naturally there; it must have come from over 1,600 kilometers (1,000 miles) away, in what is now Yellowstone National Park. How did the obsidian get from Yellowstone to the Ohio River? Did somebody travel west to get it, or did traders bring it with them when they traveled a thousand miles east? By looking at the distance between where such objects are found and where they originally came from, scientists can begin to unravel mysteries about how people traded and traveled long ago.

Archaeologists are detectives. The objects and cultural belongings they find are clues to mysteries of the past. For instance, obsidian is a volcanic glass that was very valuable because it can be shaped into razor-sharp tools. Archaeologists dug up pieces of obsidian in the two-thousand-year-old burial mound of a chieftain along



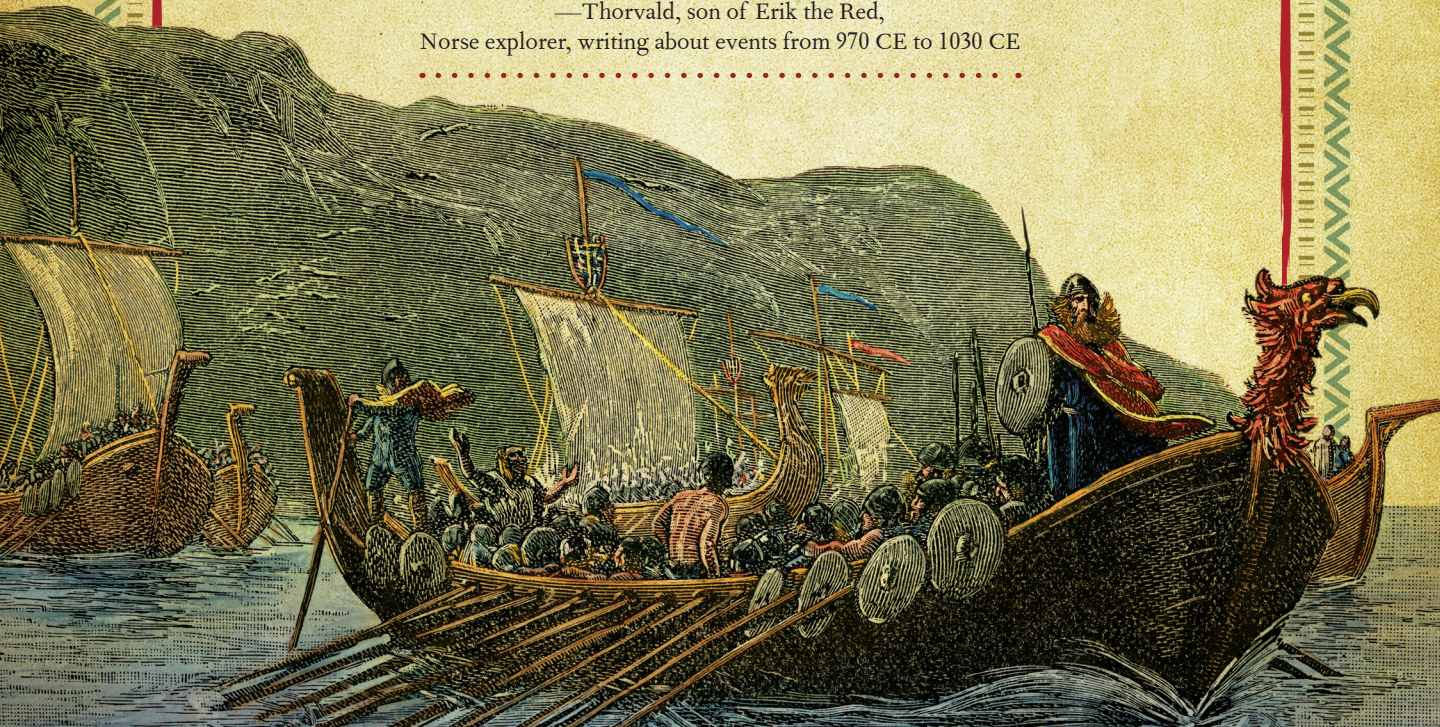
FIRST COME THE VIKINGS

WE FIGHT THEM OFF

982 CE to ca. 1400 CE

*We've found a land of fine resources,
though we'll hardly enjoy much of them.*

—Thorvald, son of Erik the Red,
Norse explorer, writing about events from 970 CE to 1030 CE



THE FIRST INVADERS

SKRAELINGS VS. VIKINGS

First contact! Fans of science fiction know this phrase well because the story that follows is told in novels, television shows, movies, and video games. Such stories usually begin with the threat created by aliens arriving on earth. The aliens have advanced technology and sinister plans. They try to enslave or destroy humans and lay claim to our planet. People seeing aliens for the first time react with fear and surprise. Then they overcome their shock and organize a resistance. They outwit the alien beings despite the aliens' superior technology. The happy ending always shows humans emerging victorious. For the Indigenous Peoples of the

Americas, first contact is more than a virtual reality experience. It is a historical fact. We are still living with its results.

How would you react if you heard the news that beings from another world had reached our planet? What language would they speak? How would we communicate? What if you had to speak for humanity? What would you say?



imagine

There are ten of you, all hunters. You have been drawn by the smell of roasting meat and the smoke rising from a camp-fire. You hope that you will find fellow hunters who will give you a warm welcome. But you have stumbled on a group of strangers with white skin and blue eyes. They draw their knives and clubs. Soon the ground is stained with blood. Nine of your hunting party lie dead, massacred. You manage to escape to warn the others in your family. The news spreads among your people. They follow you back to the invaders, armed with bows and arrows, to fight this new enemy.



In the ancient *Saga of the Greenlanders*, a Norse writer describes how a warrior's arrow killed the Norse leader Thorvald. Thorvald pulled the arrow from his intestines, saying, "We've found a land of fine resources, though we'll hardly enjoy much of them."

THE FIRST CONTACT between Indigenous people and Europeans probably happened more than a thousand years ago, when two very different groups of people met on the craggy coast of Greenland.

From the west came the Thule, the ancestors of modern-day Inuit. They left their homes on the shores of what is now called Alaska and within a few centuries they had spread across the north, all the way to Greenland and Newfoundland.



Inhabitants from Greenland around 1820



From Europe on the east came Norsemen, or Vikings. The word *Vikingar* means “raiders” in Old Norse. Vikings had a reputation all over Europe for being fearsome raiders.

The Vikings referred to the people they met in Newfoundland and Greenland as “Skraelings.” It wasn’t a compliment. *Skraeling* means “little men” or “barbarians” in the Old Norse language. As far as the Vikings were concerned, they had found riches: furs, walrus ivory, and fish. They intended to stay. Surely the Skraelings would be no match for Vikings who had made all of Europe tremble.

But as it turned out, in battle, the Skraelings were so fierce and unyielding that the Vikings were convinced to pack up and go home. At L’Anse aux Meadows in Newfoundland, all that is left of the Vikings’ settlement are ninety-nine broken iron nails, a single whole iron nail, a bronze pin, a glass pin, and a knitting needle. Even their earthen houses have crumbled away to small mounds of dirt.

The Vikings had come to settle, but by around 1340, they had left Turtle Island. The first invasion by Europeans ended with them being driven back across the sea.

A historic Inuit house from the Thule culture made out of whale bones at Resolute Bay, Nunavut



THULE TECHNOLOGY

The Vikings might have lasted longer in North America if they had adapted Thule technology. No wood to burn for heat or light because there are so few trees? Burn whale and seal blubber for fuel and light instead. No wood for boat building? Stretch sealskin over driftwood

frames to build kayaks and umiaks big enough to take to sea to hunt whales.

Kayaks are just one example of great Thule innovation. They are individually customized to the paddler's size, weight, and arm strength. A kayak is actually "worn" by its owner, who uses a double-bladed paddle. Its deck above the seat attaches to his or her parka, making a barrier against ice-cold water that might splash on the paddler and flood the inside. The deck is packed with a harpoon shaft, with a spear thrower extending from the grip end, and a harpoon head. Sealskin bladders act as drags once animals are harpooned.



THE VIKING LEGACY

STORIES THAT SHAPED OUR HISTORY

The Vikings didn't have any military or technological advantage over the Indigenous Peoples in Greenland or Newfoundland, and they didn't carry any new deadly diseases to North America, so these first invaders did not bring about the end of one world and the beginning of another. Life went on for the Thule much as it had before, except for the stories they told of light-skinned, hairy strangers.

AN ARCTIC MYSTERY

Who Were the Tuniit?

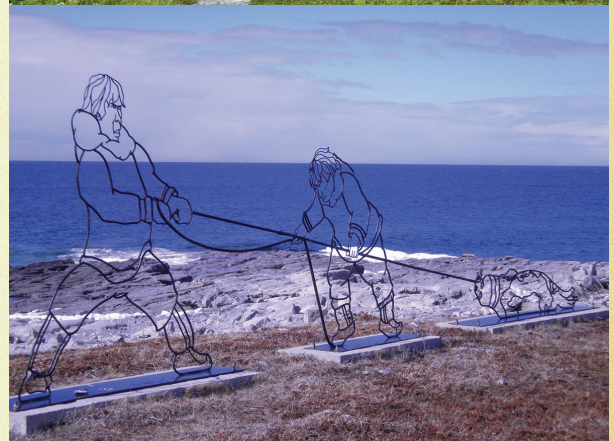
When the Thule and the Vikings met in Greenland, the land wasn't empty. The Tuniit people lived there. They are still a mystery. Archaeologists (who refer to the Tuniit as Paleo-Eskimos) think that they left Alaska on foot, about five thousand years ago. A thousand years later, they spanned the Arctic from the Bering Strait to Greenland.

We know the Tuniit lived in Newfoundland from archaeological evidence: Their largest cemetery was found at a site near the town of Port au Choix on the west coast of the Great Northern Peninsula. Their favorite quarry for making stone bowls was at a site in Fleur de Lys on the east coast of the island.

The relics left behind by the Tuniit give us clues about how they lived. We know they had dogs but no sleds. They hunted from the edge of the ice because they had no boats. They built inuksuit, or stone people, as markers when they were hunting caribou. They built stone fish weirs to catch arctic char. They built houses with whale ribs covered with tents made of muskox hide.

Tuniit people don't exist anymore, except for the few traces they left behind, but they live on in stories the Inuit still tell—tales of timid, easily frightened giants who were so strong they could crush a walrus's neck with one arm and carry the massive animal home.

We don't know why the Tuniit disappeared shortly after the Thule and the Vikings met. Were they killed by invaders from the east or west, or did they simply blend in with the newcomer Thule people? We may never know.





Inuit artist Abraham Anghik Ruben (born 1951) grew up in Paulatuk in Canada's Northwest Territories, where his father was a hunter and his mother was a seamstress. His work has been displayed in galleries and museums around the world. In his sculptures, he explores the lore that Norse and Inuit cultures share as Arctic people, such as a belief in shamanism, a reverence for the land, and a common history of the sea voyages that brought the Thule and the Vikings together.

The Vikings abandoned their colonies in North America around 1340. When they returned home, they told their stories about sailing to the faraway countries they called Vinland and Greenland. They shared these sagas for generations before someone wrote them down.

What the Vikings wrote about the fertile land of grassy meadows and rivers teeming with salmon that lay across the ocean likely inspired more tales. Many people in Europe already had heard tales of seven cities of gold that stood on an island called Antillia in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. Shipwrecked sailors had brought home tales of a mountain of silver. Some believed there was a fountain running with water that would grant eternal life to anybody who drank from it.

Rumors of those riches convinced Christopher Columbus and his peers to go out and find them.





QUETZALCOATL THE FEATHERED SERPENT (AZTEC)



Quetzalcoatl was a deity-king, kind-hearted (he didn't believe in human sacrifice) and wise (he was said to have invented the Aztec calendar, books, and writing). The people's affection for Quetzalcoatl made the rival gods jealous. They acted together to trick him. One day the Evil One went into Quetzalcoatl's palace holding a mirror. It was a false mirror. When Quetzalcoatl looked in it, instead of his own reflection, he saw a bearded, long-faced person. He knew that if his people saw him like that, they would be terrified. He had no choice but to leave. He went down to the seashore with his servants and made a raft of serpents. He told his servants that he would leave them, too. The servants wept, but Quetzalcoatl told them not to grieve. He promised that one day he would return and be their king again. Then he sailed away in the direction of the rising sun.

In March 1519, the Aztec king Moctezuma II heard news of bearded men who had arrived by sea from the east. He believed that Quetzalcoatl's promise had been fulfilled and that the god had come back. Instead of preparing his people to defend themselves, Moctezuma welcomed the Spaniards. When the Spaniards saw the Aztecs' elaborate buildings and beautiful jewelry, they believed that they had found the city of gold.

What resulted was a fatal misunderstanding. The powerful Aztecs could have defeated these light-skinned invaders, but they didn't because they believed their beloved god had returned. As for the Spaniards, their dreams of treasure seemed to have come true, and they believed that those treasures belonged to them, not to the Aztecs.

THE VIKING INCURSION had not changed daily life for the people of Turtle Island, but this new invasion was different. The Spaniards kidnapped and killed Moctezuma, and soon the Aztec empire fell. That was just the beginning of the violence and bloodshed that would affect Indigenous lives for centuries to come.

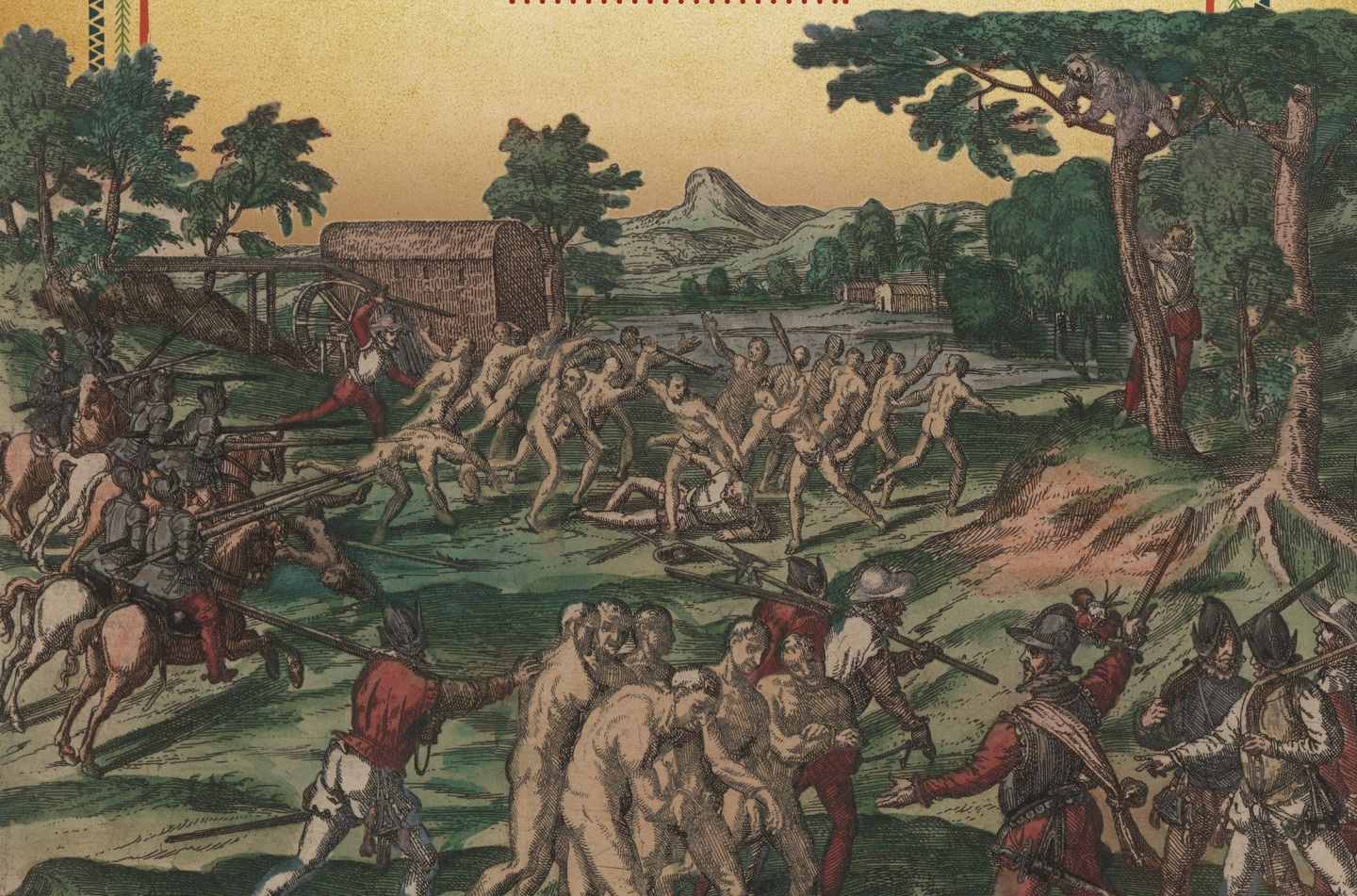
SLAVERY

REBELLION

After 1492

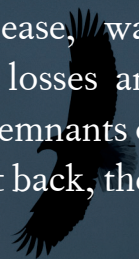
*We shall take you and your wives and your children,
and shall make slaves of them . . .*

—The Spanish Requirement of 1513



WHAT DO PEOPLE DO WHEN THEIR CIVILIZATION IS INVADED?

Indigenous Peoples across Turtle Island have faced disease, war, broken promises, and forced assimilation. Despite crushing losses and insurmountable challenges, they formed new nations from the remnants of old ones, they adopted new ideas and built on them, they fought back, they kept their cultures alive, and they survived.



In this brilliant follow-up to *Turtle Island*, esteemed academic Eldon Yellowhorn (Piikani Nation) and award-winning author Kathy Lowinger team up again, this time to tell the stories of what Indigenous Peoples did when invaders arrived on their homelands. *What the Eagle Sees* highlights key moments in Indigenous history through accounts of the people, places, and events that have mattered from pre-contact to present day. This is history as told from a vastly underrepresented perspective—an Indigenous viewpoint.

ELDON YELLOWHORN, a member of the Piikani Nation in Alberta, is a professor of First Nations studies at Simon Fraser University in Burnaby, British Columbia, and coauthor of *Turtle Island*.

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