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Modern Day Norse

Fantasy as a genre generally means the skys the limit with whatever an imagination can come up with, however most people stick to the tried and true stories. Most fantasy genres exist in the medieval ages where magic and monsters should be existing, and those that exist in the modern day tend to dial down the level of fantasy that's being dealt with. Jim Butcher does none of these things and takes the grand scale of a high fantasy world and slaps it down into the modern day, and thus these stories become the *Dresden Files*. Not only this but he incorporates multiple different mythologies, creatures, and religions into one coherent system. It is because of this merger of technology, magic, and mythologies in the *Dresden Files*, that Odin, and in extension his Valkyries and the Einherjar, are given both a modern flair through Monoc Securities, and specific changes to their characteristics to ensure certain holes were filled within his stories.

Odin is one of the most important figures in Norse mythology and it would make sense that he would be at the forefront of Butcher’s inclusion of the Norse pantheon into his story. While the name Odin is only mentioned in the story once, Donar Vadderung is very much Odin in every sense of the word. With the disguise Donar Vadderung as “Thunder’s Father,” (Butcher, The Dresden Files, Book 12, p. 205) Vadderung is in charge of Monoc Securities and has many of the aspects that make Odin, Odin. In the Norse stories Odin’s entire character is based around the prevention of his death at Ragnarok. He gains knowledge, power and soldier, often at the cost and or deception of others, all to prevent his death. In fact he is often an omen of death on the battlefield often changing the course of a battle giving victory to the faint-hearted in order to get the best warriors in Valhalla. There are also multiple times where Odin kills in a test of knowledge after not being able to guess his ace in the hole question that only he knows the answer to. Overall Odin isn’t exactly a benevolent king or good leader. Butcher on the other hand takes a lot of characteristics of Odin and makes an entirely new character, Vadderung. Vadderung shares Odin’s characteristics of a gatherer of both knowledge and power. He claims that “I know things, Dresden. And if I don’t know something, I can find out. Like yourself, it is what I do” (Butcher, The Dresden Files, Book 12, p. 202). In *Cold Days* the reader realizes that Vadderung has taken over the mantle of Kringle, a very powerful Faerie noble. The fact Vadderung also uses an alias instead of going by Odin is a very Odinnic thing to do as there are many stories of Odin disguising himself and going by different names in the mythology. Vadderung also shows a large similarity in appearance, with the classic ruined eye and a small beard. He also frequently sports Gungnir as a weapon in the series, “I realized that the metal head of the staff was a blade, and that the tall man was holding a spear,” (Butcher, The Dresden Files, Book 12, p. 530) instead of resulting to more modern weapons. However this is where the majority of the similarities end. The very first thing a reader will note is that Vadderung gets a modern day upgrade to his ancient era counterpart. First and foremost, instead of Valhalla, Vadderung is now in charge of a modern day company, Monoc Industries, with the logo being described as “the blind eye that sees all” (Butcher, The Dresden Files, Book 12, p. 197). The building itself houses everything an old god might need in a modern world: armories of every kind of weapon, a legal firm, prison, gym, chemical laboratory, ect. Appearances have also changed throughout. Vadderung himself has lost the gray cloak and pointy hat in favor of a “dark grey business suit, an immaculate European number of some kind, obviously custom-made” (Butcher, The Dresden Files, Book 14, p. 208). Hunnin and Munnin, his two ravens, have been given an upgrade and are now his secretaries being described as “identical twins. Both had raven dark hair cut in close-fitting caps, and it matched the exact shade of their identical black suits. Both had dark eyes that sparkled with intensity and intelligence… They stood there, inhumanly motionless. Both wore headsets” (Butcher, The Dresden Files, Book 12, p. 197). Overall this gives Vadderung an imposing and powerful feel to him and his company. In today’s day and age the true power of the world comes from Apple, Google, Microsoft, ect. The CEO’s of large companies are the most powerful and dangerous people in the world. Giving Vadderung a company like this makes the reader realize just how powerful and dangerous the person is. However the most important differences are perhaps how Vadderung acts as a character. Odin often kills powerful mortals to gain new soldiers in Valhalla hence Odin was more of a bad omen in the mythology. However in Butcher’s series Vadderung is a helpful character and frequent ally to Dresden, the main character, claiming, “I’m on your side, boy, ” (Butcher, The Dresden Files, Book 12, p. 202). He also frequently helps Dresden fight his battles in both *Battle Ground* and *Changes*. This is a major departure from the Norse myth. The books explain that Vadderung “doesn’t throw in often. When he does, he goes to the wall. And in my experience, it means things are about to get bad” (Butcher, The Dresden Files, Book 12, p. 530). It’s possible that by helping Dresden it prevents Butcher’s version of Ragnarok, which would make sense for the character to do, however it's more likely that Butcher wanted a more heroic or ‘good’ character in the series, an ally for Dresden to lean on. It’s boring for a book to always have bad characters, and as such Vadderung might just fill a good character role for Butcher. Either way, Butcher takes the core attributes of the Norse Odin and turns them into a character he can use in his series, Vadderung.

Of course Odin wasn’t the only character that was brought into Butcher’s universe, The Valkyries also have made quite an appearance in the series. The first one the reader meets is Sigrun Gard, a consultant that was hired to provide magical security advice to Marcone, a mastermind criminal. The connection to her old Norse counterpart, Sigrún, is minimal at best. Sigrún was a Valkyrie that fell in love with a mortal and started a war over love. While there is a relationship between Gard and Hendricks, another henchmen of Marcone, detailed at the end of *Battle Ground*, Gard does not appear to have much in common with Sigrún. In fact the connections to Norse Valkyries and Butcher’s Valkyries are also minimal. Valkyries in Norse mythology play a similar role to an angel of death with their main duties to take dead warriors and put them in either Valhalla or Fólkvangr, and then feed them mead in the afterlife. While there are instances of supernatural instinct, “I figured that anytime a Valkyrie hovering over a battlefield suddenly gets real interested in a particular warrior, it ain’t good,” (Butcher, The Dresden Files, Book 10, p. 365), and a single reference to the “little sip of renewed mortality,” (Butcher, The Dresden Files, Book 12, p. 194) Gard takes on a much more active role in the story than any of the Valkyries, including Sigrún. Gard, and the other Valkyries in Butcher’s story, are mercenaries sold to various powers through Monoc Securities providing muscle, magic and advice. As well as having a slightly different purpose in the story, the abilities of the Valkyries are grealy extended in Butcher’s universe. While magic was in Norse mythology, Seiðr was a magic used mostly for telling and shaping the future, it was never a magic attributed to the Valkyries. However, Gard appears to have some magical abilities, including being able to place wards and utilize “some sort of rune[s]. It wasn’t the first time I’d seen Gard employing some kind of rune-based magic” (Butcher, The Dresden Files, Book 10, p. 205). The weapon arsenal of the Valkyries had also been expanded with Gard using both ancient weapons, such as swords, battle axes and spears, as well as modern day weapons, like assault rifles and grenades. Gard also knows how to fly a helicopter, keeping with the traditional view of Valkyries flying overhead in battle. Along with Vadderung, Gard has ditched the ancient era clothes and armor in favor of “a dark business suit” (Butcher, The Dresden Files, Book 7, p. 160). Overall these changes give Gard a much different feel than the Valkyries of old. In an age where gender equality is something greatly desired, the Valkyries are an amazing symbol of what a female warrior could be. Butcher turns that level up to eleven and makes Gard and the rest of the Valkyries in the *Dresden Files* much more powerful, scary and independent while keeping the original stories to heart. This engages female readers even more when they are able to relate themselves to a strong female character, much in the same vein males do with male characters. This kind of representation is increasingly important and greatly desired in the 21st century and thus the Valkyries are a great addition to Butcher’s story.

With Odin and the Valkyries making it into the story, it would also make sense that the Einherjar, Odin’s personal army and the souls the Valkyries take, are also in the story. Very little is known about the specifics of the Einherjar in ancient Norse mythology. They are the warriors that died and were taken to Valhalla by the Valkyries. Once there it appears they fight each other all day long then feast in the great hall every night. Butcher takes this idea and expands on it in a similar way he did with the Valkyries. Like the Valkyries they are ready for hire by the powers of the world, “Though be warned that prices may vary,” (Butcher, The Dresden Files, Book 12, p. 194) and they appear to be extremely good at their job as well, not hesitating when fighting hordes of Ghouls in *White Knight*. Their appearance has also been changed, taking up modern body armor and “biker leathers—and swords,” (Butcher, The Dresden Files, Book 13, p. 201) which follows the modernization theme that the rest of the supernatural creatures have. While they also have training with guns, they also work quite well with swords and axes to cut down the Jotnar in *Battle Ground*. Probably the greatest departure and use of creative freedom is the Einherjar’s attitude with battle. During *Battle Ground* "the goddamned madmen roared their excitement and began their own war song in answer… they started pulling out axes and swords, laughing and singing as they did.” (Butcher, The Dresden Files, Book 17) (p. 141-2). It appears that they live for and love the battle. This is a pretty common trope for undead warriors in modern society and it's not surprising to see Butcher use it in this instance. If all they have to live for is the battle, then might as well make it enjoyable. Even at their deaths the Einherjar “died, shouting and laughing and singing as they met fates more horrible than I want to think about or could easily describe” (Butcher, The Dresden Files, Book 17, p. 147). All of this makes the Einherjar seem that much more dangerous, mysterious and crazy than any other mortal warrior. In this instance Butcher uses the undead warriors to hone down how horrifying a battle truly is, especially when it's against supernatural creatures.

While keeping with the spirit of each creature Butcher incorporates into his story, he is also able to make it work without the world as a whole. Odin, the Valkyries and the Einherjar have all been given an universally modern flair to their appearance, attitudes and skills, but some specific changes were also made to each. Vadderung was given a more heroic side and made an ally of Dresden, the main character, instead of being a more sinister omen of death in the old stories. The Valkyries are turned up to eleven and given much more power, and responsibility giving a representation of women that is desperately needed in fantasy books. Finally, the Einherjar are turned into madmen and given war lust, which happens to be a pretty common interpretation of undead warriors in modern day literature. Overall each change is meant to keep in coherence with the original stories while being a useful tool for Butcher in his universe he has created.

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