

LEVELED Book • V

Stories from Asgard: Norse Myths



MULTI
level
S•V•Y

Written by Keith and
Sarah Kortemartin
Illustrated by
Matthew Forsyth

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www.readinga-z.com

Focus Question

What are some common elements
in Norse myths?

Words to Know

agony
disguise
forge
lair
marvels
mythology

Norse
pranks
signature
taunted
trickster
Vikings

Page 3: Iceland, Finland, and the Faeroe Islands are sometimes considered part of Scandinavia.

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Level V Leveled Book
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Correlation

LEVEL V	
Fountas & Pinnell	R
Reading Recovery	40
DRA	40

Modern Scandinavia



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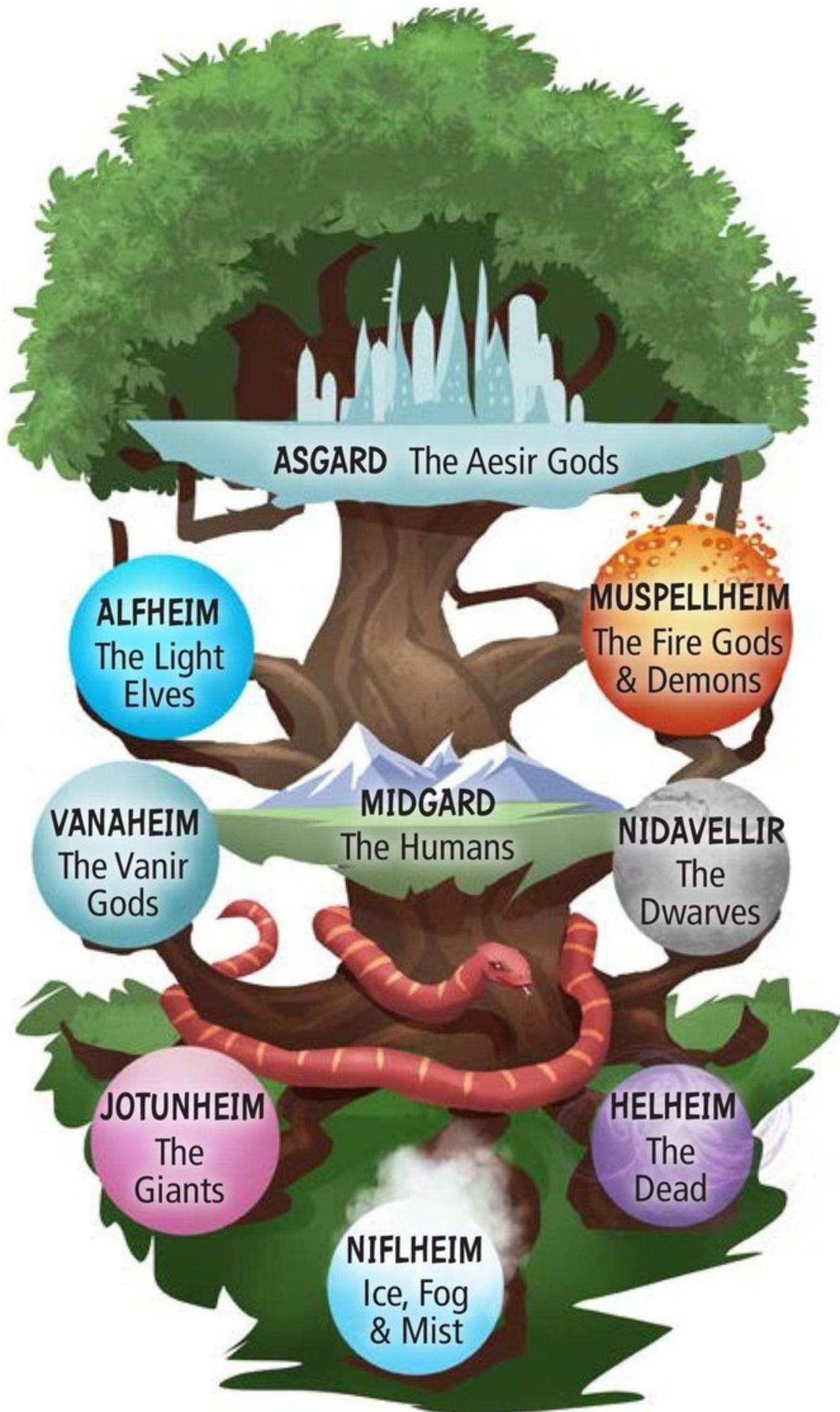
Introduction

Norse people lived between 700 and 1100 CE in Scandinavia, an area of northern Europe. During this period, fierce Norse warriors known as **Vikings** made many brutal raids on neighboring lands. Norse **mythology** is full of tales about how the Norse gods fought an ongoing battle against giants. Many tales of these battles exist.

In the beginning, according to Norse legend, the universe was divided into a world of fire and a world of ice. Where the two worlds met, the ice thawed into frost, and the frost ran together to create an enormous giant. The giant battled Odin, chief of the Norse gods, and his brothers. After defeating the giant, Odin and his brothers built the oceans, the skies, and the earth from the giant's body.



The gods created the first humans and gave them a world to inhabit called Midgard. The giants were banished to a world of frost and snow. The gods themselves lived in a sky-world called Asgard. There were nine worlds in total, all held in the leaves and branches of a great ash tree at the center of the universe.



Stories about the continual war waged between Norse gods and the giants are still popular today. Here are three of the most well known Norse myths.



Odin's Search for Wisdom

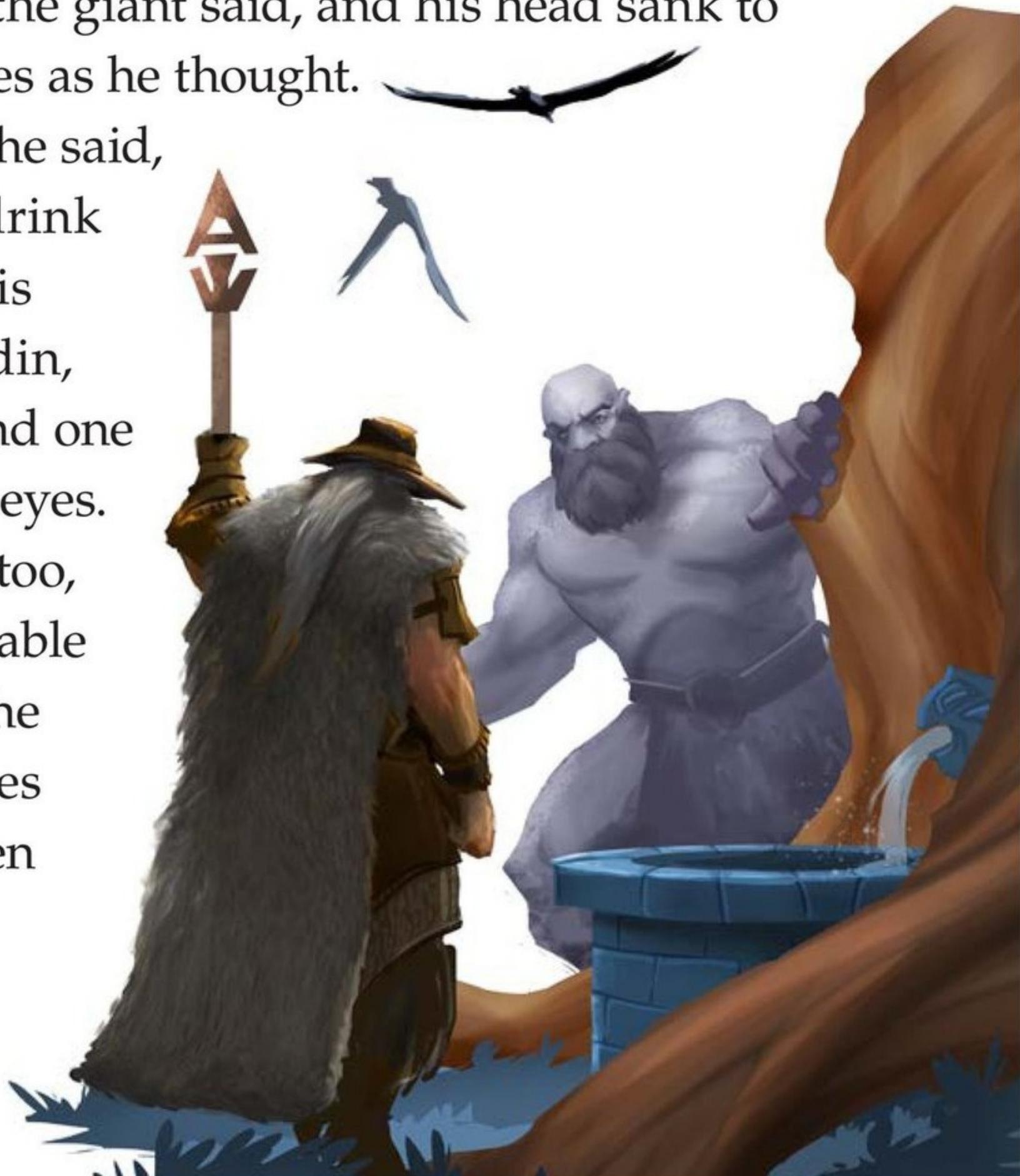
Odin prized wisdom above all things. One day he sent forth his two ravens, Thought and Memory, commanding them to bring him word of new **marvels**. When they returned, the ravens told him of a miraculous well at the roots of the great ash tree. Whoever drank from this well would have all the knowledge of the universe. A giant named Mimir, who knew more of the secrets in the universe than any other living being, guarded the well.

Odin had a continuous thirst for knowledge. He immediately determined to possess the wisdom of the well for himself. He traveled to the well to see if he could gain its knowledge.

Odin greeted the giant and requested a drink from the well. "For I can see what happens in heaven or on earth," he explained, "but I cannot see everything. I will pay any price you name for a drink from your well."

"I will ask a great price indeed for such a gift," the giant said, and his head sank to his knees as he thought.

At last, he said, "For a drink from this well, Odin, I demand one of your eyes. Then I, too, will be able to see the mysteries of heaven and of earth."



Odin hesitated, for he knew that the price would be **agony**. He also knew that he must have Mimir's wisdom for his own. "Very well," he said, "I promise you my eye in exchange for one drink of water from your well."

With heavy reservations, Mimir slowly filled a cup to the brim with clear water from the well. As soon as it was full, Odin snatched the cup and drained it.

Ah! Now he saw into the depths of the ocean and the height of the sky; nothing was hidden, and everything was known.

But the transaction was not over. The god grasped the knife at his belt. Before he rode away, he left one of his eyes at the bottom of the well.

From that day forward, Odin pulled his hat down over his one-eyed face so that no one could recognize him. He became the wisest being in the entire universe—except for Mimir himself.





The Making of Thor's Hammer

The **trickster** god Loki was well known for his **pranks**. On the day he cut off all the golden hair of the goddess Sif, the wife of the thunder-god Thor, he went too far. When Thor confronted him, Loki promised to obtain new hair for Sif from the dwarves, who were master artists.

In addition to new hair for Sif, the dwarves also made other gifts for Loki to give to the gods and goddesses of Asgard. These included the world's deadliest spear and a magical ship that could be folded and stowed inside a pocket.

Loki's greed overcame him. He took his treasures to another group of dwarves. Loki **taunted** them, saying, "Do you see this hair, this spear, and this ship? I'm sure they're the greatest marvels ever made. I know you're great craftsmen, but I'll wager my head that you can never make anything equal to this."

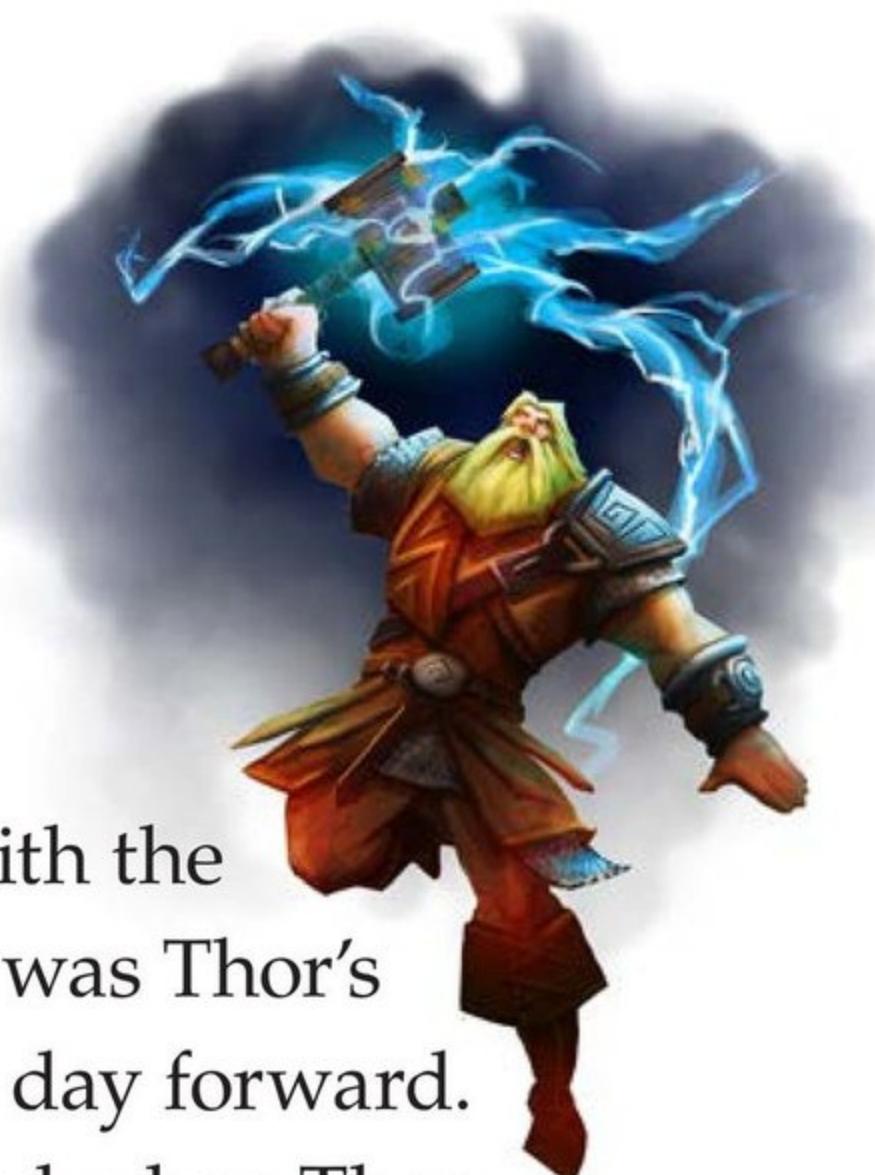


The dwarves immediately accepted the trickster's bet. They made a golden boar that could run faster than any horse. They also made a magical golden ring that produced nine new rings every nine days. As Loki saw these treasures take perfect shape, he became nervous. What if he lost the bet—and his head as well?

Finally, the dwarves began to make a war-hammer, and Loki thought of a way to win his wager. Transforming into a fly, he quickly stung a dwarf on the eyelid just as the hammer came out of the **forge**. Now the dwarf couldn't see what he was doing. When the hammer emerged, they could all see that it was the most powerful war-hammer ever made. It would always strike its target and at once fly back to the hand of its master.

However, the hammer had one imperfection. Because of Loki's trickery and the dwarf's momentary blindness, its handle was slightly too short.

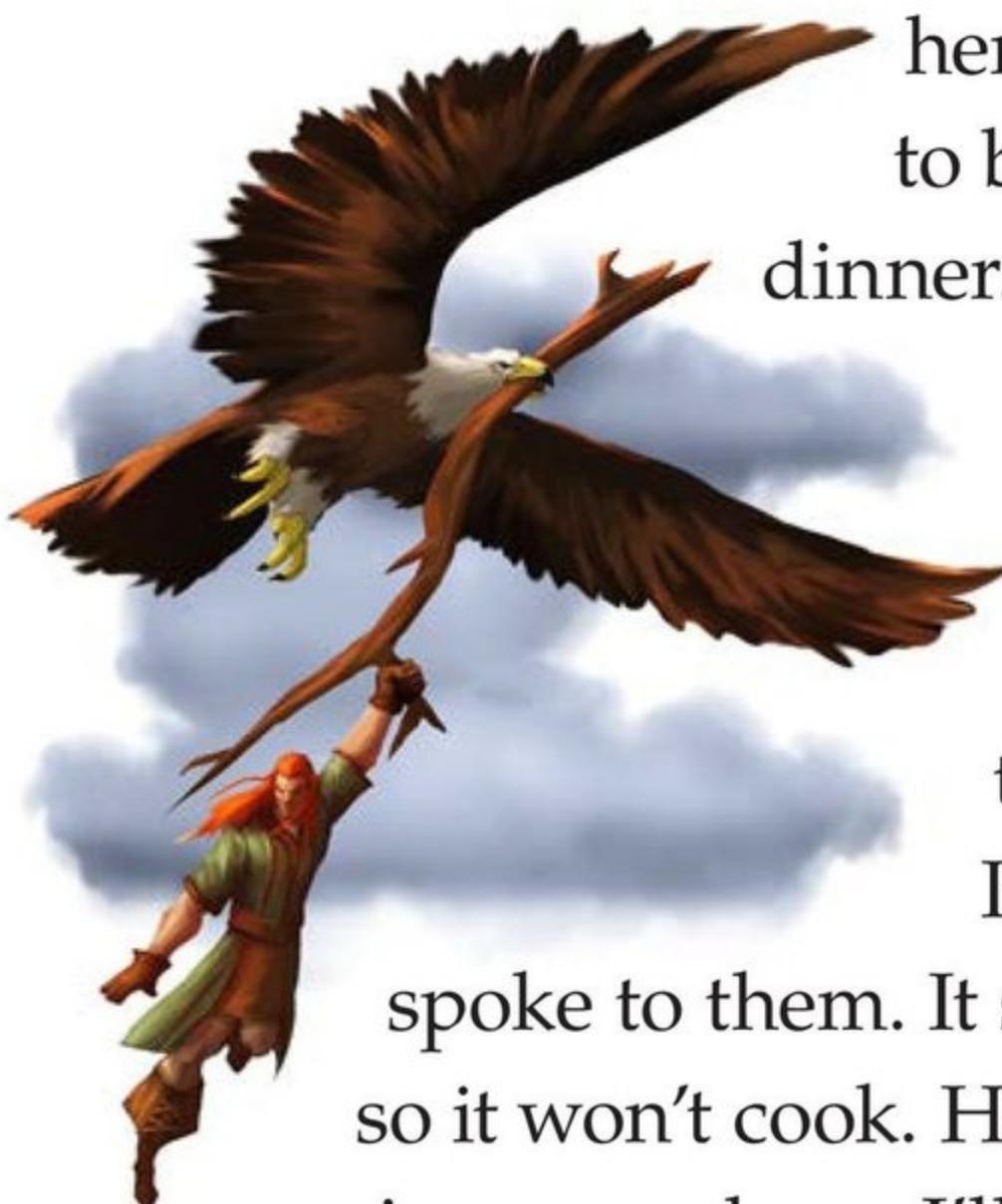
Loki took all six of his treasures and returned to Asgard. He gave each treasure to a different god. Sif's hair was restored, and Thor was especially pleased when Loki presented him with the hammer. The great hammer was Thor's **signature** weapon from that day forward. It could crush mountains, and when Thor swung it, lightning flew. Thor and his hammer became the gods' most powerful defense against the giants.



But the dwarves, confident that they had won the wager, followed Loki to Asgard to claim their reward. As the dwarves advanced on Loki to take his head, the trickster thought quickly. Dancing out of their reach, he pointed out that while the dwarves had won his head, they had no right to his neck. Realizing that they couldn't take his head without his neck, the dwarves decided instead to sew Loki's mouth shut as a punishment for his trickery. Then they left, satisfied.

Idun's Apples

One day Odin, the trickster Loki, and another god named Hoenir became hungry. Spotting a herd of oxen, they decided to butcher one for their dinner.



But when they built a fire, the ox wouldn't cook, no matter how they turned the meat.

It was then that an eagle spoke to them. It said, "I cursed your meat so it won't cook. However, if you agree to give me a share, I'll lift the spell."

The gods agreed. However, as soon as the meat was cooked, the eagle swooped down and took all the best bits. "That wasn't our bargain!" Loki cried. He seized a huge tree branch and swiped at the eagle in his anger. The eagle caught the branch in his beak and flew off with Loki still dangling from the other end.

Loki found that he had been placed under a spell and couldn't let go of the branch. "Who are you?" he asked the eagle, terrified.

"My name is Thiassi," replied the eagle, "and I'm a giant in **disguise**."



"Release me," Loki begged.

"I won't release you," responded Thiassi, "unless you promise to bring me the goddess Idun and her magical apples."

Loki was silent, for he knew that this would be nearly impossible. Idun's cask full of magical apples was one of the gods' greatest treasures. The Norse gods and goddesses each ate one of Idun's apples every day to ensure that they would remain young and beautiful.

"Promise!" Thiassi insisted. He wished to take the magical apples for himself. Seeing no alternative, Loki promised.

When he returned to Asgard, Loki approached Idun in her garden. He told her how he had discovered apples even more marvelous than hers. Loki promised to show her where these other apples grew. He insisted that she bring her own apples so that she could compare the two.

Curious to see these new apples, Idun followed Loki out of Asgard. Immediately, the eagle swooped down, seized her, and carried her off to his mountain kingdom.



The gods soon noticed Idun's absence and began searching frantically for her. When they discovered that she had last been seen leaving Asgard with Loki, they commanded him to bring Idun back to Asgard.

Loki knew that Thiassi's lair was deep in the mountains. Unable to reach it on foot, he borrowed a magical cloak of hawk feathers from Freyja, the queen of the goddesses. Transformed into a hawk, he flew to the mountains and found Idun alone in the giant's house. Thinking quickly, he turned Idun into a nut and flew away, clutching her in his talons.



When the giant returned home, he was enraged to discover Idun gone. He transformed back into an eagle and pursued Loki in his flight. As Loki drew near Asgard, the other gods saw him flying desperately, with the eagle close behind. They stacked up logs and kindling around the outer walls. As Loki flew, exhausted, into the palace, the gods lit the fire. The eagle couldn't stop himself. He flew directly into the wall of flames and was killed.

So the gods of Asgard regained their youth and defeated the giant.



Conclusion

The Nordic peoples told many stories that illustrated the wisdom of Odin, the trickery of Loki, and the might of Thor. Many stories from Norse mythology, like those told here, are tales of conflict between the gods and the giants. The giants represented the forces of darkness and winter. The gods battled them constantly to restore light, warmth, and growth.

Eventually, the gods faced the giants in a great battle. At its end, the gods were defeated and the cosmos (including the giants) was destroyed—but was reborn thereafter. Some of the gods survived and returned to remake the human race. Norse mythology treats life as a cycle: death and destruction are opportunities to begin anew.

Glossary

agony (<i>n.</i>)	extreme and intense mental or physical pain (p. 8)
disguise (<i>n.</i>)	clothes or other things a person or character wears to keep from being recognized (p. 12)
forge (<i>n.</i>)	a very hot fire where metal is melted to be shaped by a blacksmith (p. 10)
lair (<i>n.</i>)	a secret place where a person or creature can hide or be safe (p. 14)
marvels (<i>n.</i>)	surprising or wonderful things or people (p. 6)
mythology (<i>n.</i>)	the myths, or ancient stories about heroes or supernatural beings, of a culture or group (p. 4)
Norse (<i>adj.</i>)	of or relating to ancient Scandinavia or Norway (p. 4)
pranks (<i>n.</i>)	tricks or practical jokes (p. 9)
signature (<i>n.</i>)	a special trait, mark, or product that sets apart or identifies someone or something (p. 11)
taunted (<i>v.</i>)	challenged or provoked someone with insulting words (p. 9)
trickster (<i>n.</i>)	a clever, deceptive, or mischievous character who takes various forms in the mythology or folklore of many cultures (p. 9)
Vikings (<i>n.</i>)	Scandinavian explorers, traders, and pirates who raided and settled much of northwestern Europe in the eighth to eleventh centuries (p. 4)

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A *Reading A-Z Level V Leveled Book*

Word Count: 1,683

Connections

Writing

Write an acrostic poem that explains common traits of Norse mythology. Use the words *Norse Myths* as the acrostic.

Art

Research Norse myths to find a story that was not included in this collection. Create a piece of art for the myth.



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