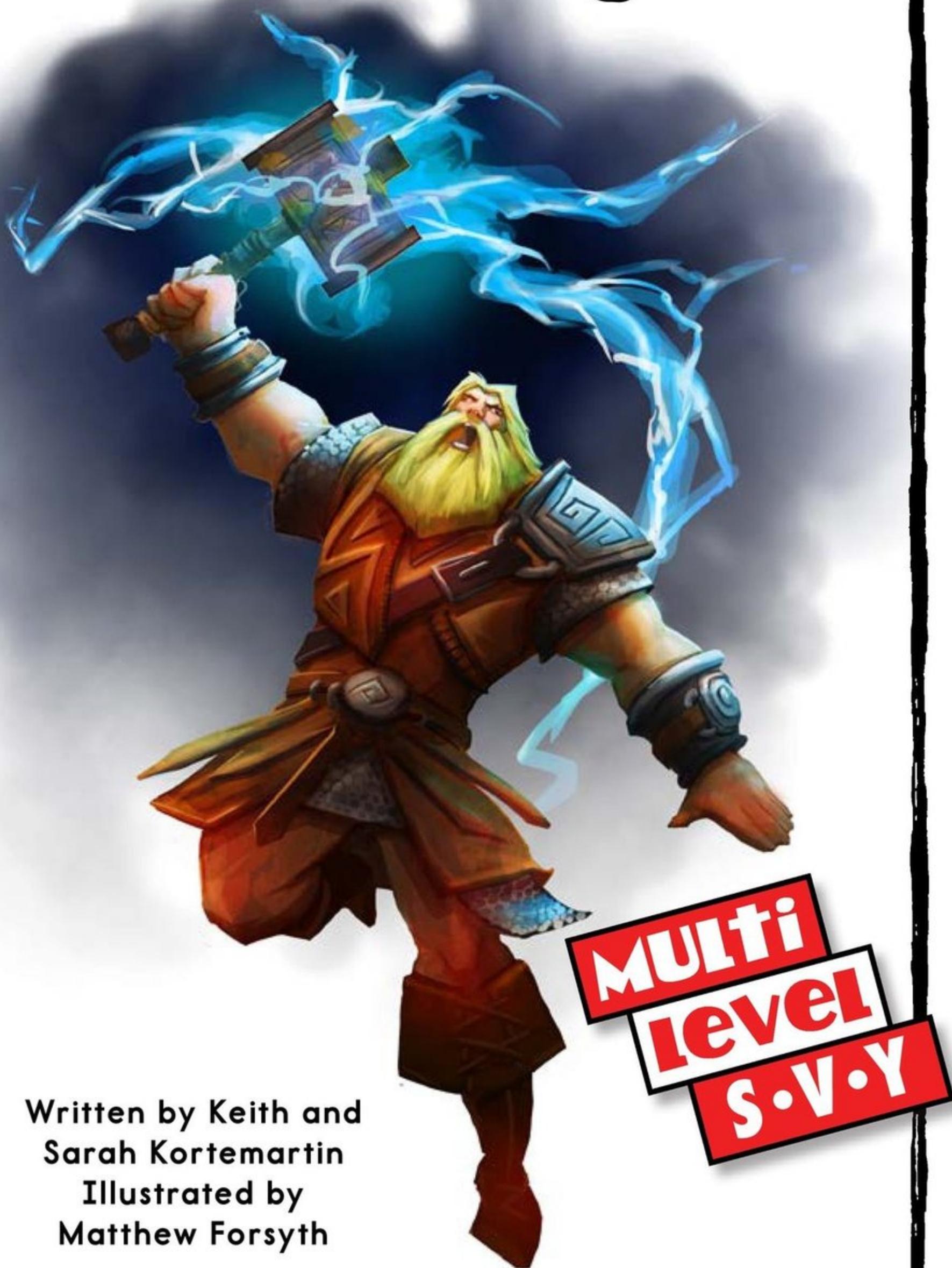


LEVELED BOOK • Y

Stories from Asgard: Norse Myths



MULTI
LEVEL
S•V•Y

Written by Keith and
Sarah Kortemartin
Illustrated by
Matthew Forsyth

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Focus Question

What are some common elements
in Norse myths?

Words to Know

agony
audacious
cognizant
devised
forfeit
mythology

Norse
signature
taunted
trickster
unquenchable
Vikings

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

Stories from Asgard: Norse Myths
Level Y Leveled Book
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Correlation

| LEVEL Y | |
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| Fountas & Pinnell | T |
| Reading Recovery | 40 |
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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 exist about these battles.

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 frost-giant. It 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 frost-giant's body.



The gods created the first humans and gave them a world called Midgard for their dwelling place. Meanwhile, the giants were banished to a world of frost and snow. The gods themselves inhabited a sky-world called Asgard. There were nine worlds in total, all held in the roots of Yggdrasil, a great ash tree located at the center of the universe.



After the slaying of the frost-giant, a continual war waged between the gods and the giants. Tales of these battles, of Odin, and of the gods who were his companions, including the thunder-god Thor, the beautiful goddess Freyja, and the **trickster** Loki, remain popular stories today. Here are three of the best-known myths about the Norse gods of Asgard.



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 reported the existence of a miraculous well at the roots of the world-tree, Yggdrasil. Whoever drank from this well would possess all the knowledge of the universe. A giant named Mimir, the ravens said, guarded the well. The giant was **cognizant** of more secrets in the universe than any other living being.

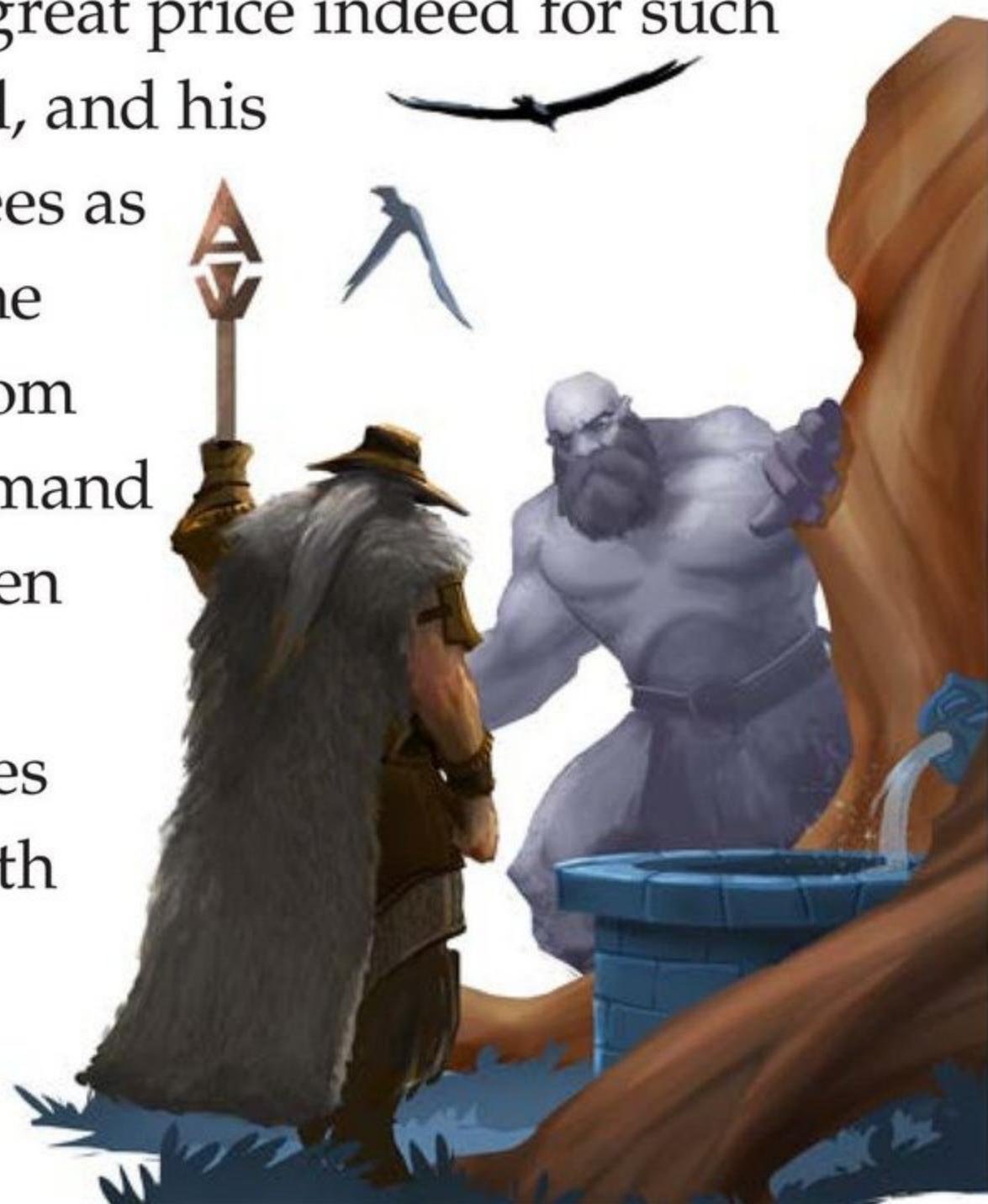
Odin had an **unquenchable** thirst for knowledge. He immediately determined to acquire the wisdom of the well for himself. After journeying to the roots of Yggdrasil, he located the well with the giant, Mimir, standing guard—just as the ravens had said.

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 observe everything. My vision cannot penetrate the depths of the oceans, and your drink would allow me to gain this wisdom, too."

Mimir was silent, for he knew that Odin was great among the gods. However, he didn't wish to share his wisdom with an enemy. "War wages between our peoples, Odin," he said at last, "and I fear the consequences should you become as wise and all-seeing as that."

"I will pay any price you name for a drink from your well," Odin responded, pleadingly.

"I will require 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 perceive the mysteries of heaven and of earth in exchange for the wisdom you take from my well."



Odin hesitated, for he was certain that the price would be **agony**. He also knew that he must have Mimir's wisdom for his own. "Very well," he said to Mimir, "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 wasn't over. It was time for Odin to pay the terrible price he had promised. The god grasped the knife at his belt and summoned up his resolve. Before he rode away, Odin surrendered one of his eyes at the bottom of Mimir's 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 infamous for his pranks, but one day he went too far. This was the day that he recklessly cut off all the golden hair of the goddess Sif, the wife of the thunder-god Thor. When Thor discovered what Loki had done, he was enraged. Trembling before Thor's anger, Loki promised to travel to the world of the dwarves to obtain new hair for Sif. Loki knew they were master artists, and they could create marvelous treasures with a few strokes of a hammer.

What Loki discovered in the world of the dwarves surpassed his wildest dreams. The dwarves weren't only able to make new hair for Sif—they also made the world's deadliest spear and a magical ship that could be folded and stowed inside a pocket. These they gave to Loki as gifts for the gods of Asgard.

But Loki's greed overcame him, and he became even more **audacious**. He took his treasures to another group of dwarves and **taunted** them, saying, "Do you see this hair, this spear, and this ship? I am sure they are the greatest marvels ever created. I recognize that you're great craftsmen, but I'll wager my own head that you can't make anything equivalent to this."

The dwarves, indignant at Loki's teasing, immediately accepted the trickster's bet. In swift succession, they made a golden boar that could run faster than any horse and 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. Loki conceived 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 was unable to 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. But the hammer had one imperfection: its handle was slightly too short.

Loki took all six of his treasures and returned to Asgard. He presented each treasure to a different god. Sif's hair was restored, and Thor was especially pleased when Loki offered him 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.

However, the dwarves were confident that they had won the wager, so they followed Loki to Asgard to claim their reward from the gods. When the dwarves arrived to present their case, the gods agreed that Loki had lost the bet. His head was **forfeit**.

The dwarves advanced on Loki to take his head, but 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. The dwarves, realizing that they could not take his head without his neck, decided instead to sew Loki's mouth shut as a punishment for his trickery. Then they departed, satisfied.



Idun's Apples

One day Odin, the god Hoenir, and the trickster Loki decided to butcher an ox for their dinner. After they built a fire, the meat wouldn't cook. Puzzled, the gods looked up and, to their astonishment, saw an eagle addressing them. It provoked them, saying, "I cursed your meat. However, if you give me a share, I'll lift the spell."

The gods agreed, but as soon as the meat was cooked, the eagle swooped down and took all the choicest bits.

"That wasn't our bargain!" Loki cried, seizing a huge tree branch and swiping 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 disengage himself from the branch. "Release me! Who are you?" he screamed at the eagle, terrified.

"My name is Thiassi," replied the eagle, "and I'm a giant in disguise. I won't release you unless you promise to bring me the goddess Idun and her magical apples."



Loki remained silent, for he knew that this would be nearly impossible: one of the gods' greatest treasures was Idun's cask full of magical apples. The Norse gods and goddesses each ate one of Idun's apples every day to ensure that they would remain young and beautiful. Seeing no alternative, Loki promised.

When he returned to Asgard, Loki eventually devised a plan to trick Idun. Loki told her how he had discovered apples even more marvelous than hers. Loki slyly said that he would show Idun where these other apples grew. He insisted that she must bring her own cask of 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.

When the gods discovered that she had last been seen leaving Asgard with Loki, they forced the trickster to tell them what he had done.



As soon as Loki admitted to orchestrating Idun's kidnapping, the gods became infuriated. They commanded Loki to bring Idun back to Asgard, threatening to kill him if he failed.

Loki knew that Thiassi's lair was located deep in the mountains. Loki couldn't reach it on foot, so he borrowed a magical cloak of hawk feathers from Freyja—the queen of the goddesses—transformed into a hawk, and flew to the mountains. He 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; immediately, 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, who could not stop himself, 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 legends 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, this conflict culminated in a great battle. At its end, the gods were defeated and the cosmos (including the giants) was destroyed. However, it was reborn thereafter. Some of the gods survived and returned to remake the human race. Norse mythology emphasizes 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) |
| audacious (<i>adj.</i>) | surprising or shocking; bold (p. 10) |
| cognizant (<i>adj.</i>) | aware or informed (p. 6) |
| devised (<i>v.</i>) | formed a plan with careful thought (p. 13) |
| forfeit (<i>adj.</i>) | subject to being taken away or surrendered as a punishment (p. 11) |
| 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) |
| 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. 10) |
| trickster (<i>n.</i>) | a clever, deceptive, or mischievous character who takes various forms in the mythology or folklore of many cultures (p. 5) |
| unquenchable (<i>adj.</i>) | not able to be satisfied, suppressed, or put out (p. 6) |
| 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) |

Stories from Asgard: Norse Myths

A *Reading A-Z Level Y Leveled Book*
Word Count: 1,913

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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