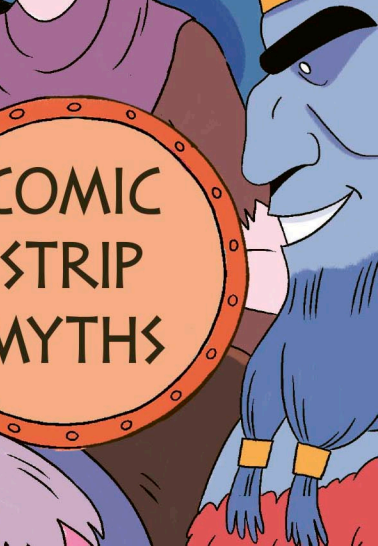


Welcome to the halls of Hel. Wanna join our band?



# NORSE MYTHS, MONSTERS AND VIKING VOYAGES

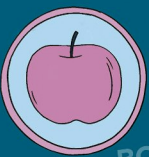
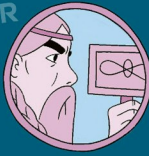
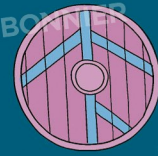
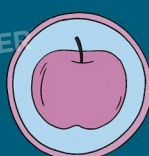
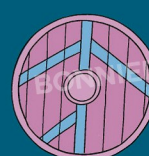
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SERERRA MILLER

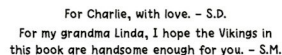


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For Charlie, with love. – S.D.  
For my grandma Linda, I hope the Vikings in  
this book are handsome enough for you. – S.M.

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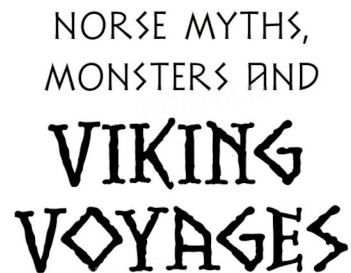
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# NORSE MYTHS, MONSTERS AND VIKING VOYAGES

BY

STEPHEN DAVIES  
SEAIRA MILLER



B P P



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## WHO WERE THE NORSE?

Around a thousand years ago, northern Europe was inhabited by fierce, proud tribes called Norsemen, or Norse people. The region is now called Scandinavia and includes Norway, Sweden and Denmark. At home, the Norse lived peacefully as farmers. But many of them believed that their destiny was to cross the sea, exploring new lands and conquering new territories.

Norse people  
saw their lives as  
strands of wool being  
spun into threads by three  
witches called the Norns. If  
the Norns decided to snap your  
thread, that meant your time on  
earth was up!

SNAP

Oops!  
My  
bad!

The Norse were excellent craftspeople who worked with metal, wood and leather. They made fearsome weapons, superfast ships and beautiful clothes. Most Norse houses contained a huge loom for weaving wool into cloth. Once the cloth was woven and dyed, it was made into brightly coloured trousers, tunics and dresses.

Norse people told wonderful stories about gods, humans and mythical creatures. Some were funny, like how the god Loki tried to beat a giant in an eating contest. Some were exciting, like when prince Sigurd slayed the dragon Fafnir. Some were scary, like the story of Ragnarok, the end of the world. Norse myths were passed down from generation to generation, and they are still among the greatest stories in the world.

Fifteen  
ours till land.  
Anyone got  
a story?

Fierce warriors and mighty sailors, the Norse carried out violent and ruthless raids in Britain and other countries. They became known as 'Vikings' meaning pirates or raiders.

The Vikings were the most skillful ship builders in the world. Their longboats were extremely light, and could travel as fast as a modern racing yacht.

The Vikings did not believe that it was wrong to kill and steal. They thought only about their own fearsome reputations, and about the marvellous gifts that they would give to their families back home.

Coming  
whether

Despite what you may have heard, Viking helmets never had horns on them!

Not all Viking warriors were men. Women sometimes joined these raiding expeditions, too.

Vikings did not spend all of their time sailing and fighting. There was a season for raiding and a season for returning to the family farm.

Ooh, shiny

Even on their travels across Europe, the Vikings were not always in a bloodthirsty mood. Sometimes they would arrive in a new land peacefully, to make friends and to engage in trade. They brought with them animal products such as honey, wool and fish, and they sold these to buy luxury goods such as silver, silk and spices.

Y-y-y-yes,  
please.



# THE CREATION STORY

A creation myth is a story about how the world began. Ancient civilisations had all sorts of weird and wonderful ideas about how the world formed, and this is the Norse creation story. Warning: there are lots of giants!

Once there was a gap – a magical void of nothingness called Ginnungagap.



To the south of Ginnungagap lay Muspelheim, a land of fire, lava and smoke. Surt the Giant lived there, stroking his flaming beard and swinging his blazing sword.



To the north lay freezing Nifheim, a land of ice, frost and fog.



Over thousands of years, the Nifheim ice spread into the Ginnungagap. As the warm air from Muspelheim swirled in, the frost began to thaw.



The frost thawed and froze, cracked and growled, shifted and grew.



Until, at last, something came out of the ice...



Ymir the Frost Giant was rather... sweety.



While Ymir slept, small droplets of sweat oozed from his armpits and the droplets formed themselves into two smaller giants.



Meanwhile, the sweat on Ymir's legs formed a six-headed giant called Thrudgelmir.



Audumla the Cow also emerged out of the ice. As there was no grass to eat, Audumla survived by licking the ice. She licked and licked, until something strange – and hairy – appeared...



On the third day of licking, the god Buri popped out of the ice.



In time, Buri married a frost giant and had a son called Bor. When Bor was grown, he married a frost giant himself and had three children called Vili, Odin and Ve.



Growing up, Odin, Vili and Ve loved their giant mother, but they hated all of the other frost giants, especially Ymir. The brothers plotted amongst themselves.



One night, the brothers attacked and killed the great giant Ymir. A torrent of blood flowed from Ymir's wounds and drowned all of the other frost giants – except for Ymir's grandson, Bergelmir, and his wife, Noi, who surfed to safety on a tree trunk.



Odin, Vili and Ve decided to use Ymir's giant body to create the world. They made the land from Ymir's flesh and the sea from Ymir's blood. They fashioned mountains from bones, clouds from brain, rocks from his teeth and trees from his hair.



The universe was starting to take shape. As sparks flew up into Ginnungagap from the fires of Muspelheim, Odin grabbed them and arranged them high in the sky.



To show their humility, the brothers marked off a region of land where the surviving giants could live together in the new world.



Next, the brothers created a realm called Midgard and filled it with beautiful meadows and clear waters.



To keep the giants at bay, the brothers made a wall from Ymir's eyelashes and used it to surround Midgard.



There was no one to enjoy the beautiful land of Midgard, so Odin breathed life into two logs. Next, Vili gave the logs thoughts and feelings.



Lastly, Ve carved the logs into the shape of people, creating the first man and woman of Midgard: Ask and Embla.



Finally, the gods built themselves a golden fortress called Asgard. They connected it to the rest of the world by the Bifrost, a glorious rainbow bridge. From Asgard, the gods watched over the adventures of humans and giants.





# MEET THE GODS

Norse people worshipped dozens of gods and goddesses – some say sixty-six! These divine beings each had their own role and personality. They were super-powerful, but very far from perfect.



ODIN

Odin 'Allfather' created humans and also many of the gods. The ravens on his shoulders are called Huginn (Thought) and Muninn (Memory). Arrogant and often cruel, Odin is a god to be feared above all others.



THOR

Strong, loveable and a teeny bit dim, Thor rides in a chariot pulled by two goats, Snarler and Grinder. He uses his incredible strength and mighty hammer to protect Asgard from giants and monsters.



FRIGG

The most important of all the goddesses, Frigg is the wife of Odin and the mother of Balder and Hod. She can see into other realms and even tell the future.



LOKI

Mischievous trickster Loki is always getting himself and others into trouble. He uses powerful shapeshifting magic to turn himself into a fly, a fish or even a giant.



SIF

Thor's wife Sif is famous for her long, silky blonde hair. Of all the gods and goddesses in Asgard, she is by far the vainest. Her son Ull is a fantastic archer and a superfast skier.



TYR

Tyr is the brave but reckless god of war. His hand was bitten off by a monstrous wolf called Fenrir.



FREYR

Freyr is the god of fertility and growth. He is the one to thank for plentiful harvests and healthy children.



FREYA

Beautiful Freya is the goddess of battle. She rides in a chariot pulled by cats and owns a falcon skin that enables her to fly.



HONIR

Honir loves accompanying Odin and Loki on their adventures. He is very indecisive, though, and he will usually answer with a vague grunt!



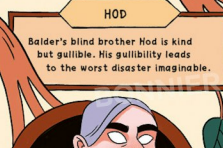
HEIMDALL

Heimdall, watchman of the gods, guards the Bifrost bridge day and night. His eyes and ears are so sharp, he can spot grasshoppers on the distant horizon and hear the wool growing on a sheep!



BALDER

With his handsome face, wise speech and generous character, Balder is the best of all the gods. In fact, his goodness makes him literally glow.



HOD

Balder's blind brother Hod is kind but gullible. His gullibility leads to the worst disaster imaginable.



IDUN

Idun is a cheerful, carefree goddess whose apples contain the secret to eternal youth. Whenever a god begins to grow old, one bite will make them young again.





One crisp, cold morning, Odin, Hönir and Loki crossed the Bifrost bridge from their home in Asgard and went hiking in the world of humans.

After a long day Odin built a fire and the gods grilled three ox steaks over the flames. The steaks sizzled and sizzled and sizzled, but somehow did not cook.



The steaks had been on the fire for hours, but they were still raw.



Perched in the oak tree above their heads was an enormous eagle. An enormous talking eagle.



The magical eagle swooped down from the branches. It snatched up two steaks in its claws and another in its beak.



Loki was the quickest to react.



The eagle squawked another spell, causing the branch to stick to its talons... and to Loki's hands.

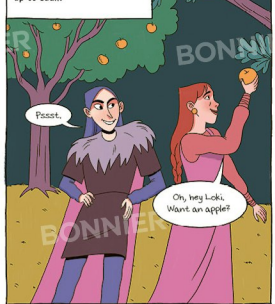


## IN AN ORCHARD FAR, FAR AWAY...

The goddess Idun was sitting in her sun-dappled orchard, living her best life. Her apples were sacred in Asgard because they restored youth to whoever ate them. Needless to say, she was very popular with everyone.



Loki crept into the orchard and sidled up to Idun.



The cunning sorcerer told Idun that he had found another golden apple tree. It was in Midgard, just beyond the Bifrost bridge, and its apples looked exactly like Idun's apples.



Idun was worried about what this would mean for her brand. She picked all of the golden apples on her tree, then followed Loki out of the orchard and across the flaming Bifrost bridge.





As they entered Midgard, Loki led the way. Little did Idun realise the terrible danger she was in.



Loki had promised the eagle that he would bring Idun to this exact spot... and the eagle was right on time.



The eagle carried Idun over the Utgard Sea, all the way to Jotunheim, home of the giants.



High on a mountain peak in the middle of giant country, the eagle deposited its captive and shifted back into its true form.



Thiazi the Giant leered down at his captive, gloating. He knew that the gods and goddesses back in Asgard would grow horribly old without Idun and her golden apples, while he himself would seem younger and more handsome every day.



Thiazi rubbed his hands together and began to make a list of recipe ideas.



## THE NEXT DAY, BACK IN ASGARD...

The first rays of dawn shone gently on the dwelling place of the gods. Odin lay on his bed in blissful slumber when suddenly—



Asgard was under the shadow of a terrible curse.



Odin quickly called a council of the gods. When he saw them, he realised that the golden apple shortage was having dreadful consequences.



Odin asked the assembled gods and goddesses whether anyone had seen Idun. Heimdall's servant stepped forward.



The gods split up and hunted everywhere for the crafty sorcerer.







Odin threatened Loki with all sorts of dreadful punishments.



Loki borrowed Freya's falcon skin and took off from her balcony. He soared over sparkling lakes and lofty mountaintops.



As the sun dipped low in the sky, Loki came in sight of Thrymheim. He slowed down as he neared the mountain peak - he had no idea what he would do if Thiazi was home.



As luck would have it, Thiazi was about to go fishing...



Idun was all alone - it was now or never!



The sorcerer used his magic to turn Idun into a little nut. He grabbed the Idun-nut and changed back into a bird to make his escape.



Unfortunately for Loki, Thiazi had forgotten his lucky fishing hat. At that moment, Thiazi returned. He saw the falcon - and the nut - and realized what had happened. In a fit of rage, he transformed into an eagle and set off in hot pursuit.



As the sun set, the gods of Asgard spotted Loki the falcon zooming through the evening sky, followed by Thiazi the eagle.



Loki swooped down over the walls of Asgard.



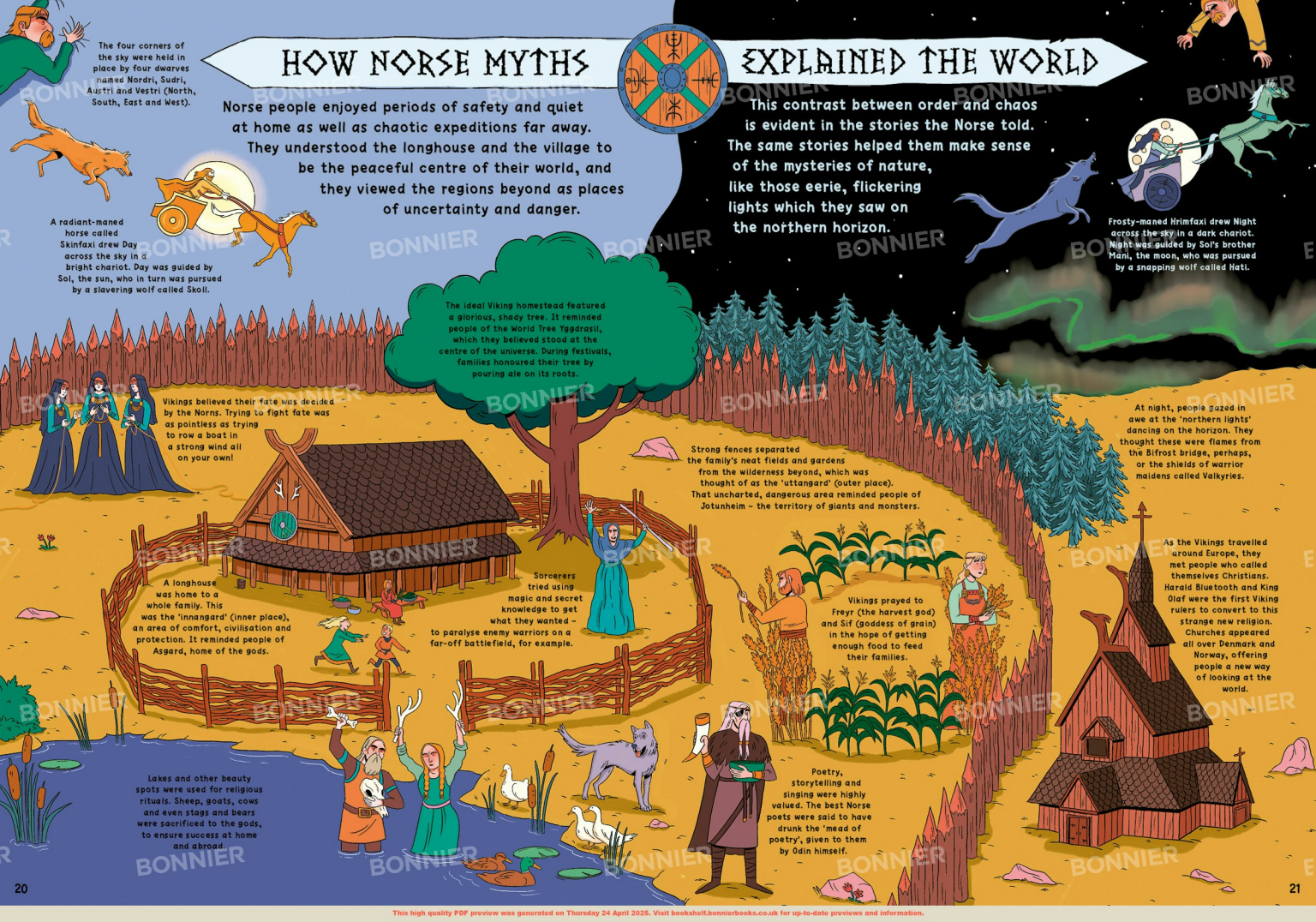
Loki shrugged off the falcon skin and stood triumphant before the assembly of gods and goddesses. He muttered a spell and the nut began to open.



The gods and goddesses surged forward, eager for Idun's yummy, crunchy apples to make them young again.







## HOW NORSE MYTHS

## EXPLAINED THE WORLD

Norse people enjoyed periods of safety and quiet at home as well as chaotic expeditions far away. They understood the longhouse and the village to be the peaceful centre of their world, and they viewed the regions beyond as places of uncertainty and danger.

This contrast between order and chaos is evident in the stories the Norse told. The same stories helped them make sense of the mysteries of nature, like those eerie, flickering lights which they saw on the northern horizon.

The ideal Viking homestead featured a glorious, shady tree. It reminded people of the World Tree Yggdrasil, which they believed stood at the centre of the universe. During festivals, families honoured their tree by pouring ale on its roots.

Strong fences separated the family's neat fields and gardens from the wilderness beyond, which was thought of as the 'uttangard' (outer place). That uncharted, dangerous area reminded people of Jotunheim – the territory of giants and monsters.

At night, people gazed in awe at the 'northern lights' dancing on the horizon. They thought these were flames from the Bifrost bridge, perhaps, or the shields of warrior maidens called Valkyries.

As the Vikings travelled around Europe, they met people who called themselves Christians. Harald Bluetooth and King Olaf were the first Viking rulers to convert to this strange new religion. Churches appeared all over Denmark and Norway, offering people a new way of looking at the world.

A longhouse was home to a whole family. This was the 'innangard' (inner place), an area of comfort, civilisation and protection. It reminded people of Asgard, home of the gods.

Sorcerers tried using magic and secret knowledge to get what they wanted – to paralyse enemy warriors on a far-off battlefield, for example.

Vikings prayed to Freyr (the harvest god) and Sif (goddess of grain) in the hope of getting enough food to feed their families.

Poetry, storytelling and singing were highly valued. The best Norse poets were said to have drunk the 'mead of poetry', given to them by Odin himself.

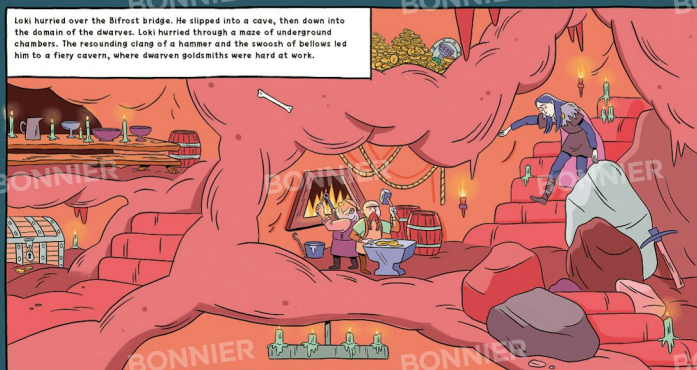
Lakes and other beauty spots were used for religious rituals. Sheep, goats, cows and even stags and bears were sacrificed to the gods, to ensure success at home and abroad.

The four corners of the sky were held in place by four dwarves named Nordri, Sudri, Austri and Vestri (North, South, East and West).

A radiant-maned horse called Skinfaxi drew Day across the sky in a bright chariot. Day was guided by Sol, the sun, who in turn was pursued by a slaving wolf called Skoll.

Frosty-maned Hrimfaxi drew Night across the sky in a dark chariot. Night was guided by Sol's brother Mani, the moon, who was pursued by a snapping wolf called Hati.







On Loki's return to Asgard, all of the gods gathered in the assembly hall to receive their special dwarven gifts. Loki smirked, thinking of the trick he had played on Brokk and Eitri.



An excited murmur ran around the hall as Loki distributed the gifts from the sons of Ivaldi. There was new hair for Sif, a ship for Freyr and a spear for Odin.



Soon, it was Brokk and Eitri's turn to be the gift-givers. First, Freyr received the golden boar Gullinbursti. The boar was faster than a horse and he glowed in the dark.



Next, Odin was given the golden arm-ring Draupnir. It would multiply eightfold every nine days!



Finally, Brokk gave Thor the golden hammer Mjolnir. No matter how far Thor threw it, the hammer would always return to his hand!



The gods were grateful for the gifts from the sons of Ivaldi, but they were THRILLED with the gifts from Brokk and Eitri. They proclaimed Brokk and Eitri the winners of the Greatest Golden Gifts rosette.



Brokk and Eitri revealed to the gods that a goblin had attacked them while they were making the gifts.



Eitri's triumphant smile twisted into a menacing grin as he turned to face Loki.



The trickster Loki cursed his own rashness for ever agreeing to a bet.



From then on, the dwarves' golden gifts made Asgard a safer place to live. With Thor's hammer, any frost giant would have to be very brave - or very stupid - to venture across the Bifrost bridge.



So when the hammer went missing one day, Thor was distraught.



Loki volunteered to go and search for Thor's missing hammer.



It didn't take much for Thor to agree.



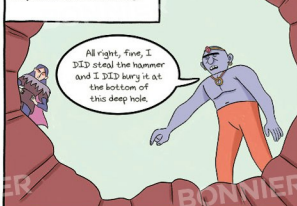
Loki flew across the Utgard Sea, all the way to Sotunheim. Looking down, he saw a giant filling in a freshly dug hole.



Loki swooped down and landed beside the giant.



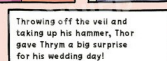
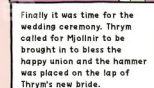
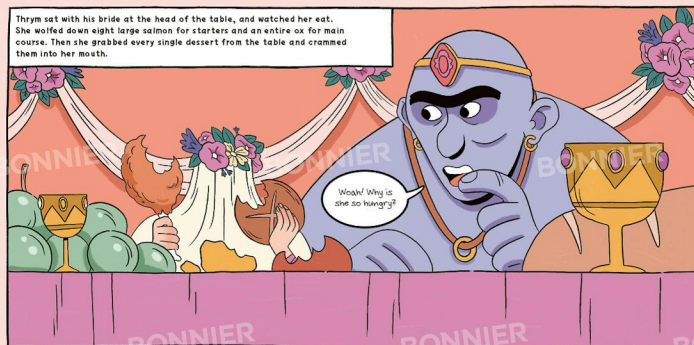
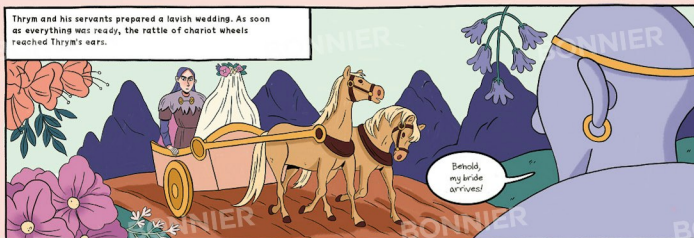
Thrym's lies did not last long.



The evil giant promised to return the hammer - on one condition...









# MYTHICAL MONSTERS

Norse mythology and folklore are full of monsters and otherworldly beings. Some, like giants, trolls and dragons, were the sworn enemies of gods and humans. Others, such as Odin's eight-legged horse, could be friendly or even useful.

## GIANTS

The word 'Jotun' in ancient Norse is often translated as 'giants', because a few of the myths suggested that these magical beings were colossal. After all, Thor once spent a night inside a giant's glove! Frost giants lived in Jotunheim, while fire giants lived in Muspelheim. Ever since Odin and his brothers murdered Frigg, an intense hatred festered between the gods and the giants.

## SLEIPNIR

Shapeshifter Loki once took the form of a mare and gave birth to an eight-legged horse called Sleipnir, which he presented to Odin as a gift. The swiftest horse in all nine realms, Sleipnir could gallop not just on land but also in the sea and sky.

## DWARVES

Odin created the dwarves out of the maggots that he found wriggling in Mimir's flesh. These greedy creatures lived in rocky caverns underground, and many of them were skilled craftsmen, making iron tools and gold or silver treasures.

## DRAGONS

Norse dragons or 'vyrns' came in all shapes and sizes. Some breathed fire, others spewed poison. Some could fly, others slithered on their bellies.

## ELVES

In the earliest Norse myths, the elves lived in a realm called Alfheim and kept to themselves. In later folklore, they were mischievous, invisible creatures who loved playing tricks on humans.

## HUGINN AND MUNINN

Every morning, Odin sent his talking ravens to fly over Midgard, collecting information. When they came back in the evening, the ravens perched on his shoulders and told him all of the day's gossip. Because of Huginn and Muninn, Odin is sometimes known as the raven god.

## HAFGURFA

This whale-like creature was so gargantuan, it looked more like an island than a living creature. The havgufa had a clever method for luring in prey: it would vomit into the sea to create a feeding frenzy of little fish.

## FENRIR

A fierce, colossal wolf, was the eldest child of the giants Angrboda. The gods tried to control him, but he broke every chain they bound him with. In the end, they managed to bind Fenrir with the silky ribbon Gleipnir, with bits from nine ingredients.

## ANGRBODA

The goddess was known as the 'mother of monsters'. She had three children with Loki: Fenrir, Jormungand and Hel.

## HEL

Angrboda's youngest child, was the staff of nightmares. Odin sent this ghastly creature to rule over the dead. Because of her, the place itself also became known as Hel. Her face and body (down to her hips) are pink, but below that the loins decayed and purplish.

## JORMUNGAND

was a serpent that was thrown into the sea by Odin. It grew so enormous that it wrapped itself all the way around Midgard until it bit its own tail.

- SLEIPNIR RECIPE**
- THE BREATH OF A FISH
  - THE SPITTLE OF A BIRD
  - THE SNIWES OF A BEER
  - THE TEARD OF A WOMAN
  - THE ROOTS OF A MOUNTAIN
  - THE SOUND OF A TIPPOING CAT

## MARRA

The marra was an old Norse monster known for riding on its victims' chests and planting scary dreams into their minds. In Norwegian and many other languages, the word for nightmare literally means 'marra ride'.



# THOR AND THE GIANTS

One bright summer morning, Thor leapt out of bed and seized his mighty hammer. It was giant-hunting season!

I love the sounds of summer. The rum of battlewheels, the bellow of fleeing giants...

Thor and Loki held on tight as the golden chariot zoomed across the Bifrost bridge to Midgard, the world of humans.



Thor did what needed to be done, and the whole family feasted on goat meat. But Thor set just one condition for the meal.



The next morning, Thor went outside and raised his hammer over the goat bones. Suddenly, the bones began to reassemble themselves!



While Thor was harnessing his battle goats Snarler and Grinder to his chariot, his brother Loki turned up, asking to join the hunt.

You'll be needing a sharp-witted travelling companion.

FINE! Come with me if you want to.



At sunset, the brothers came to a farm, where they were welcomed nervously by a farmer, his wife, their son Thiafi and their daughter Roskva. The farmer invited the gods to join them for a bowl of vegetable stew.



Loki saw an opportunity to play a trick on the farmer's son, Thiafi.



But as Thor hitched his goats to his chariot, he noticed that one of his goats had a broken leg.



Thiafi shakily raised his hand.



As a punishment, Thor demanded that Thiafi and Roskva accompany him as his servants.



Thor and Loki left the goats behind, bringing along Thiafi and Roskva instead, and set sail in a boat across the great ocean that separates Midgard from Utgard.



We're going this way, that way. Forwards, backwards, Over the Utgard Sea.

Upon arriving on the shore of Utgard, the travellers continued their journey on foot - up the stony beach, across a freezing plain and into a gloomy forest.

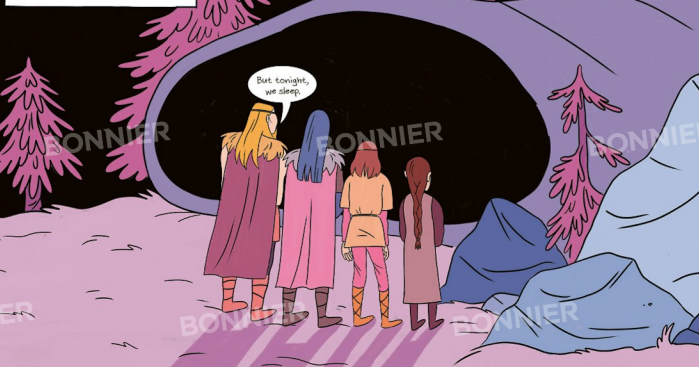


I'm so o-o-o-ld, even my goosekumps have goosekumps.

By nightfall they reached a clearing in the middle of the forest and looked around for somewhere to rest for the night.



They came across an enormous cave, made up of one enormous chamber and a smaller side chamber.





At midnight, Thor and Loki were woken by a deafening rumble.



Thor went outside and saw a colossal giant lying in the clearing, fast asleep. What they had felt and heard was not an earthquake – it was the giant's mighty snores!



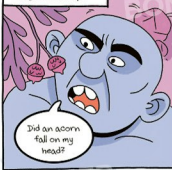
The giant stirred...



...then rolled over and went back to sleep.



The giant sat up...



...and promptly fell back asleep again.



Thor could not understand it. Mjolnir had never failed him before. He summoned all of his energy and rage for one last strike.



As the sun rose, the giant noticed Thor for the first time.



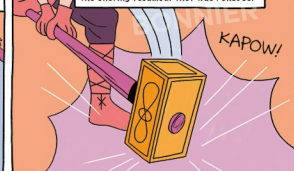
Thor's giant-slaying had got off to a bad start, but it could only get better. He asked Skrymir where the other giants lived, and Skrymir agreed to show him.



Thor took a long run-up. He raised mighty Mjolnir high in the air...



The snoring resumed. Thor was FURIOUS!



They walked all day, and at last they arrived at a magnificent fortress.



The Great Hall inside the castle was an impressive sight. That night, the giants had an event planned...



The travellers gaped at each other, realising that they were each going to have to choose a talent. Cunning Loki eyed the giants' dining table, which groaned under the weight of chopped meat.



Loki had eaten all of the meat on his half of the table and had left the bones. But Logi the Giant had eaten all the bones as well.



Loki started at one end of the table and Logi started at the other. They chomped and chewed and munched and crunched, devouring the feast before them.



Next it was Thiafi's turn to share his talent. Knees trembling, he stood before the giants.



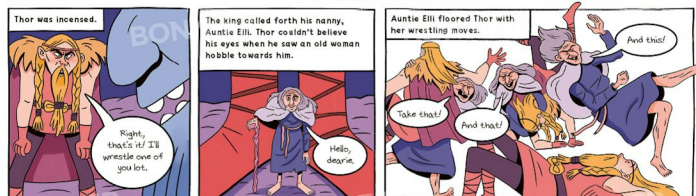
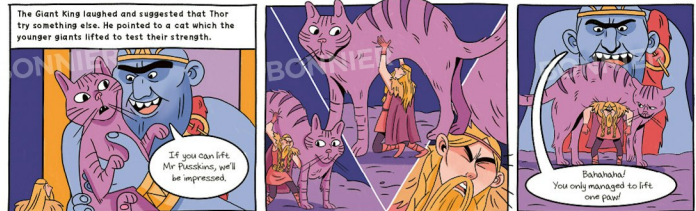
The whole assembly went outside and the Giant King marked out a race course. The runners knelt next to each other on the frosty grass, staring ahead at the finish line...



The runners flew along the course like greased lightning. Hugi was hot on Thiafi's heels.









# DEATH AND

# THE AFTERLIFE

Vikings did not fear death.

They believed in living life to the full and then dying a glorious death in battle. A Viking warrior could rest assured that he or she would enjoy a glorious afterlife – eating, drinking and battle-training in the halls of the gods. Meanwhile, the stories of his or her brave deeds would be remembered and retold by the living.

The Viking ship was essential to the life of a Viking and it was equally important in death. The same ship that had carried them across the open sea would also carry them into the afterlife.

A wooden post on top of a funeral mound showed the name of the person who was buried there.

Poor people had humble funeral ships – or just an outline made with stones.

Usually, the funeral ship was set on fire, to speed up the dead person's passage to the afterlife. But it was not cast adrift on the water. Instead, after burning, it was buried under a mound of earth and stones.

The body was placed on a funeral pyre in the middle of the boat, dressed in a set of newly made clothes and surrounded by grave goods. These were the possessions that the person might need in the afterlife, including food and drink, jewellery, tools, armour and weapons. Viking chieftains had the most lavish funerals, surrounded by piles of treasure.

A Viking funeral was a strange mixture of sadness and celebration. Families feasted and drank delicious mead. Songs were sung and epic poems were recited.

Ruled by Odin, Valhalla ('Hall of the Fallen') shone out over Asgard. Its roof and walls were golden shields, with spears for rafters and chainmail for bench coverings.

Warriors who did not reach Valhalla were welcomed by the goddess Freya to Folkvang, her field for the fallen, where they would feast and fight for eternity.

The tree Glasir stood in front of the doors of Valhalla.

The Valkyries served Odin, staking the battlefields of Midgard. The Vikings believed that warriors who fought especially bravely would be carried up to Valhalla by the powerful Valkyries. They protected their favourite humans and brought disaster on those they disliked.

Inside Valhalla, the spirits of noble warriors (known as the 'einherjar') ate meat, drank mead and practised juggling and play-fighting!

Schrimmr the unlucky boar got roasted every day and was made whole again every night.

According to Norse beliefs, not all spirits passed on to the afterlife. If a person was especially mean or nasty, their spirit would hang around in its swollen, decaying body. These frightful creatures were known as draugs.

The highway to Hel was long and difficult. Vikings loved telling stories about humans or gods travelling this road to retrieve a soul from Hel.

Norse people saw Hel as a cold and gloomy place, but certainly not a place of suffering or punishment. Remember, this was where the great god Balder went when he died. People in Hel spent their time in a similar way to those in Valhalla: eating, drinking, sleeping and fighting!

The warden Mosgaur's name means 'various batter'.

People who died at sea were taken to the underwater kingdom of the giantess Ran.



# SIGURD AND FÆRNIR THE DRAGON

A powerful magician called Hreidmar lived in Midgard with his three sons: Fafnir, Otter and Regnir.



The eldest, Regnir, was a swordsmith. He spent his days forging swords out of iron, silver or gold.



Otter was a fisherman. He took the form of an otter by day and human by night.



The youngest, Fafnir, did not have a job – unless evildoing counts as a job.



One winter's day, Odin, Loki and Honir crossed the Bifrost bridge and went exploring in Midgard. After an exhausting walk, they reached a thunderous waterfall and decided to have a well-deserved rest.



When Odin and Honir woke from their nap, they saw that Loki had been busy.



The three gods ate their meat and fish and watched the sun go down.



When the gods awoke, they found themselves tied hand and foot with ropes and Finnish knots. Three angry men were standing over them, holding an angry skin.



The gods begged for mercy. They had no idea that Otter was a shapeshifter. They promised to pay whatever Hreidmar asked.



Loki volunteered to fetch the gold. Hreidmar let him go but he kept Odin and Honir as hostages.



Honir was wrong. Loki did return, carrying an enormous sack.



The magician watched with greedy eyes as Loki filled the otter's skin with gold and covered it over on top.



As the gods crossed the Bifrost bridge back into Asgard, Odin asked Loki about the mysterious ring. Loki told them about his visit to the super-rich dwarf Andvari.

I went to the lair of Andvari with a net from the sea gods of old. I caught Andvari neatly and demanded all his gold.



But as he looted his treasures, he began to softly sing in horrid verse a horrid curse upon that horrid ring.



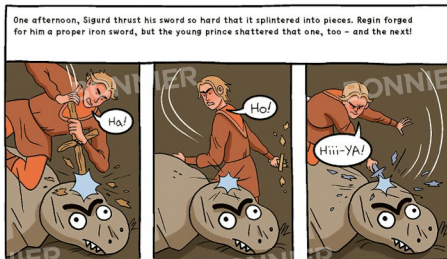
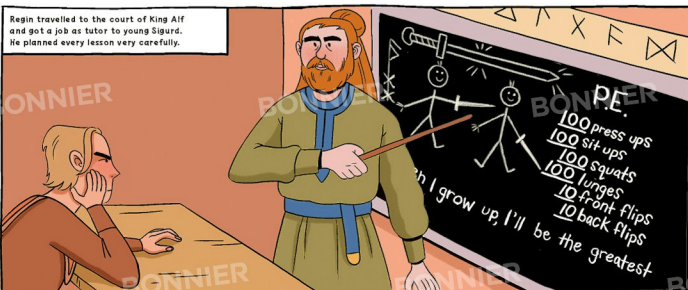
Odin and Honir gasped. As the owner of the enchanted ring, Hreidmar was now under a terrible curse.



Back at the waterfall, Fafnir gazed at the barrow of gold, feverish with greed and envy. He wanted the treasure all to himself, so he lifted his sword and lopped off Hreidmar's head. The cursed ring had begun to work its terrible magic.









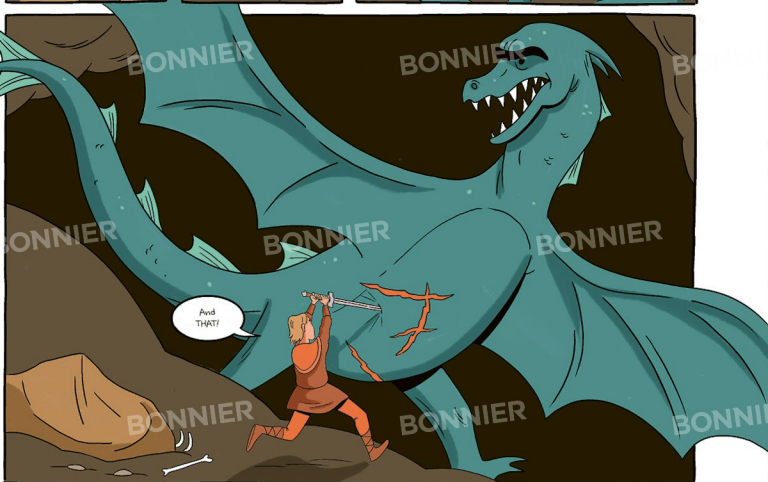
The young prince dug a hole and lay in wait.



His knees trembled and his knuckles were white on the hilt of his sword.



Along came wicked Fafnir, heading down to the lake to drink. As the worm slithered over the hole, Sigurd looked up and saw its unprotected belly. In one explosive movement, the teenager thrust Gram upwards with all his strength.



Old Regin was hiding behind a nearby bush, watching the dragon's death throes. Its thrashing tail felled mighty oaks and caused the ground to quake.



When the dust settled, Regin shook his pupil's hand and told him to roast Fafnir's heart over a fire.



Sigurd roasted the dragon's heart for Regin. After a few minutes, the boy tasted a tiny bit himself, just to see if it was ready. What happened next blew his socks off. He could suddenly hear the birds above his head talking to each other!



Sigurd ate the heart himself, then rode up to the dragon's lair. He stopped, spellbound. Even in the throne room of King Alf, he had never seen half as much gold as this!



Sigurd realised with horror that his teacher had been planning to betray him all this time. Crafty old Regin did not care about his pupil becoming the Greatest Hero of All Time. Regin had nothing on his mind but riches and revenge.



Sigurd grabbed all the gold he could. He crammed both saddlebags and all his pockets.



When he was sure he could not carry any more gold, Sigurd left the cave and galloped off in search of more adventures.



Sigurd did indeed become the Greatest Hero of All Time, and he married a very beautiful and masely woman called Brunhild.



But even the Greatest Hero of All Time could not escape the curse of the ring. Sigurd fell prey to Andvari's curse, just like Fafnir and Hreidmar before him.



And what of Loki, who had also touched the ring? Did being a god protect him from the curse? We'll see...





# FAMOUS VIKINGS

The word 'Viking' comes from an old Norse word for a long-distance sea journey in which rowers took shifts at the oars. Norse people loved travel and exploration, which they saw as a way to accumulate wealth and power.



## ERIK THE RED

With flaming red hair and a fiery temper, Erik had a habit of getting into bloody disputes with his neighbours. He was kicked out of Norway and sailed to Iceland, but Erik's temper kept getting the better of him. He once killed three people in a fight about a plank of wood! No longer welcome in Iceland, Erik continued westwards and discovered a desolate, snowy land. He named it Greenland because he thought this pleasant name would encourage other people to join him there.

## LEIF ERIKSSON

Leif was one of Erik the Red's three sons. Calmer than his father, he preferred exploration to combat. One day, his ship was blown off course towards a mysterious land of wild grapevines and magnificent oak trees. When Leif stepped ashore, he became the first European to set foot in North America – five hundred years before Christopher Columbus!



## PREYDIS ERIKSDOTTIR

Freýdis, daughter of Erik the Red, was every bit as fierce and reckless as her father. In one battle in Vinland, the Viking warriors panicked and fled, but Freýdis stood her ground and taunted the enemy, beating a sword against her bare chest. This reputation for bravery was ruined in one shameful night, however, when she flew into a rage and killed five unarmed women with an axe.



Ninth-century Europe was a cluster of weak little territories, rather than large empires, and this provided the perfect conditions for Vikings to invade and conquer. It was not just about looting and leaving, though. Many Vikings remained in the countries they invaded and lived peacefully alongside the natives.

## ROLLO

Rollo was a giant of a man, standing 2 metres tall and weighing 140 kilograms. He was born in Norway but was best known for his daring raids in France. These raids forced the king of France to make Rollo the first duke of Normandy. Due to his great size, no horse was strong enough to carry him, earning him the nickname Rolf the Walker!



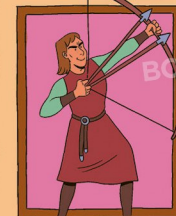
## HARALD HARDRADA

The Norse word Hardrada means 'stern ruler' and Harald was certainly that. He is best known for his 1066 invasion of England with 250 longboats and ten thousand men. Harald fought in a frenzy, wearing no armour and swinging his sword in both hands. He is often referred to as the last real Viking, and his death at the Battle of Stamford Bridge was the end of the Viking Age.



## GUNNAR HAMUNDARSSON

Gunnar was an athletic warrior, famous for his accurate throwing, powerful swimming and incredible jumping. He could hit a man on the forehead with a stone from twenty paces away and could jump his own height even when wearing armour. While Erik the Red was sailing west, Gunnar headed east to invade and conquer new lands.



## IVAR THE BONELESS

Ivar's father Ragnar Lothbrok was killed after being thrown into a pit of poisonous snakes by an English king called Aella. Ivar took revenge by invading England with a huge army and inflicting a slow and painful death on King Aella. Ivar was the leader of the Berserkers, Viking warriors who fought in a trance-like fury (hence the English word 'berserk'). Ivar's nickname, Boneless, was due to his amazing agility and flexibility in battle, dodging and striking like a snake.

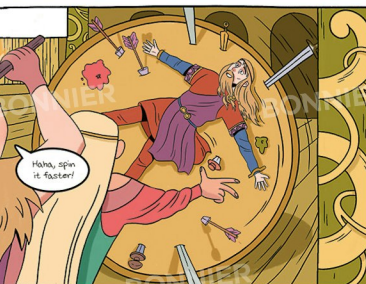
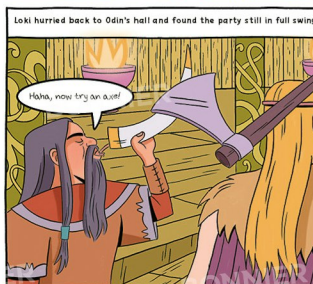
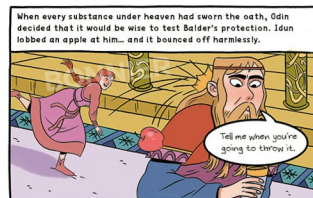
## INGVAR THE FAR-TRAVELLED

This adventurous Swedish prince travelled all the way to Asia, in search of gold and adventure. Viking stories and songs claim that Ingvar sailed a thousand miles along hazardous rivers, that he fought dragons, serpents and hostile tribes, and that he died in battle at the age of 25. Out of the 26 ships in Ingvar's expedition, only one returned.





# THE DEATH OF BALDER





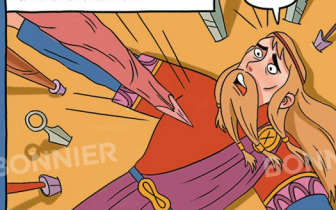
When the blind god Hod was asked to throw something at Balder, at first he said no.



I wouldn't know where to throw.

Don't worry! I'll guide your arm.

Unlike the spears and arrows, the mistletoe dart did not veer off course.



Yikes!

Loxi slipped the mistletoe dart into Hod's hand, and guided Hod's arm to throw it hard and fast.



Hod!

Hod!

And, unlike the apples and stones, the dart did not bounce off Balder's godly protection. Instead, it pierced his heart.



Hod! Bal! god!

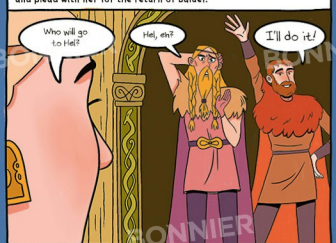
What have I done?

The brilliant Balder was dead. His once bright light had been snuffed out. The assembly soon realised who was to blame. But the evil mastermind had already slipped away.



See ya!

Frigg rose to her feet with fire in her eyes. She declared that one of the gods should go and see Hel, Mistress of the Dead, and plead with her for the return of Balder.



Who will go to Hel?

Hel, eh?

I'll do it!

Hermud, Odin's son, was strong of arm and fleet of foot. He leapt onto Sleipnir's back and galloped off across the Bifrost bridge.



I'm on the highway to Hel!

The gods built a funeral pyre in Balder's ship, Ringhorn. They wept and waved goodbye as it drifted out onto the water.



The only god not at Balder's funeral was Hermud. He was still galloping towards Hel, through gloomy mountain passes and pitch-black valleys.



Maybe I should have borrowed Gullinbursti instead.

After nine nights of non-stop galloping, Hermud reached the bridge across the river Gjoll. A hooded sentry blocked his path.



I am Modgud, warden of Hel's bridge. State your name and business!

Name, Hermud. Business, none of your business.



Modgud hesitated. The Land of the Dead was for the dead, but Hermud was alive. In the end, though, she let him pass.

What? He had a nice smile.

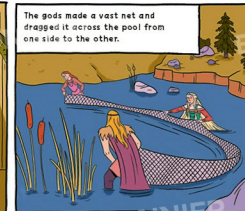
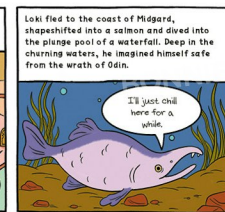
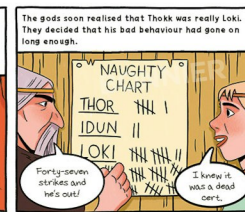
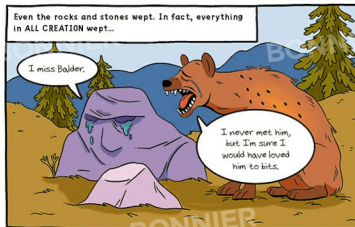


In one mighty bound, Sleipnir jumped over the iron gates of Ejuadir.

This looks like the place!

DEAD END





A desperate salmon leapt out of the water!





# HOW THE NORSE MYTHS CAME TO US

Because Scandinavia is so far north, the sun sets early and rises late. During those long, cold winter evenings, Norse families would huddle around the fire and tell each other stories about the

epic adventures of ancient gods and people. Even though the myths were not written down until many centuries later, they were successfully transmitted from each generation of Vikings to the next.

A Viking longhouse was a place of safety and storytelling. Parents and grandparents, brothers and sisters, uncles, aunts and cousins all lived together in the same house.

There was a hole in the roof directly above the fire, allowing some fumes to escape, but the air in the house was still thick with woodsmoke, making everyone's eyes water.

There were no schools for Viking children (yet). This was an oral culture, and storytelling was the main way for ancient knowledge and beliefs to be passed along.

The click-clack of the loom mingled with the crackle of the fire and the rich tones of the storyteller's voice.

Very few Vikings knew how to read or write, but some did. Old Norse was written using a special alphabet called runes. They carved names and short messages on runestones, rafters and swords.

The fire pit was the centre of every Viking longhouse, used to heat the house and to cook on.

Christianity spread across Scandinavia in the tenth and eleventh centuries. Rune writing died out and people began using the Roman alphabet (a, b, c...).



In the twelfth century, an Icelandic writer called Snorri Sturluson wrote down all of the Norse myths he knew. He was a great writer, and his versions of those ancient stories are full of vivid descriptions and witty dialogue.

Many other Icelandic writers followed in Snorri's footsteps. They wrote about humans rather than gods - exciting tales of romance and revenge, heroic expeditions and bitter disputes. These so-called 'sagas' were based on real history and real people but contained lots of wild exaggeration. Writing a cracking story was considered much more important than staying true to life.

Readers of the Icelandic sagas will get to know some very colourful characters, including:

KETIL FLATNOSE

GUNNLAUG SERPENT-TONGUE

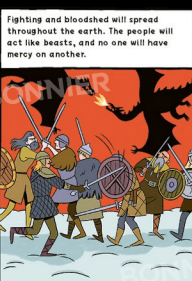
ULF THE UNWASHED

GEIRMUND THE NOISY

OLAF THE PEACOCK







Violent earthquakes will rock the world. Trees will fall, rocks will crack and every bond will break.





It is said that Odin will gallop his horse Sleipnir to Mimir's well, the well of wisdom.



As Odin drinks from the well of wisdom, he will see how the End must come. All gods, giants and monsters must assemble on Vigrid Plain for one last battle.



To Vigrid!

EEEEEE, THAT'S GROSS! DISGY, I WANT TO GET OFF!

Yggdrasil will tremble and groan as the two sides form their battle lines.



For Asgard!

For Midgard!

Odin and the gods, arrayed in shining armour, will be supported by the heaven-blessed warriors of Valhalla, who have been eagerly awaiting this day.

And don't forget your mouthguards!

Fenrir, Jormungand, Loki and Hel will be accompanied by a horrid horde of giants and zombies.

Fenrir will rear up, gnashing his fearsome teeth. Odin will thrust bright Gungnir high into the air and spur his steed towards the hellish wolf.



Step up, Fenrir! Time to dance.

Fenrir will seize Odin in his teeth and swallow him whole.



Jormungand will slither straight at Thor, spewing deadly venom from his mouth.



Thor will raise his trusty hammer, let it fly and crush the serpent's skull.



Take that, foul serpent!

Mighty Thor will stumble backwards, drenched in serpent venom. Nine staggering steps he'll take before the poison finishes its evil work and stops Thor's valiant heart.



Farewell, Mjollnir, old friend. It's been real.

Surtr the Giant will step forward with his blazing beard and flaming sword. He and Freyr will duel long and hard...



VRING!

THUNG!

Poor Freyr. This is one fight he will not win.

Hum... last of line!

Having put an end to dear old Freyr, Surtr will put an end to everything else by ravaging the nine realms with fire. The last remaining gods and monsters will fight to their deaths beneath a fiery sky.

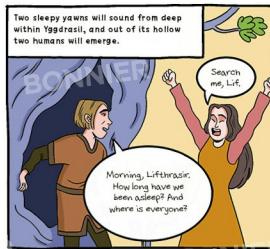
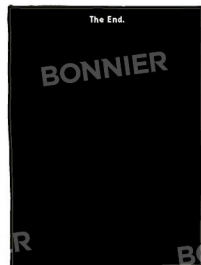
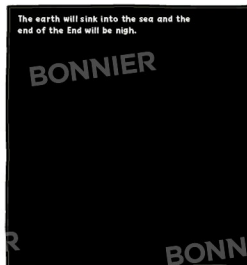
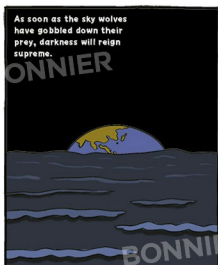
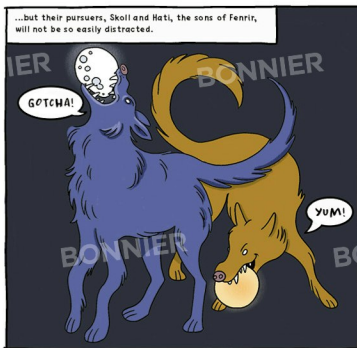
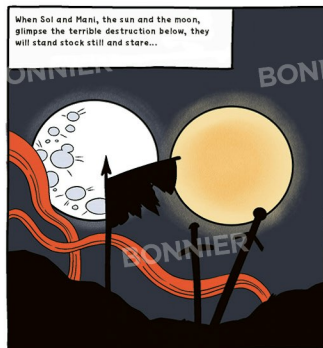
Cunning Loki and faithful Heimdal will deal - and both will fall.



Garm the grisly hound of Hel will wrestle one-armed Tyr, and each will kill the other dead.

Odin's son Vidar will rush to avenge his father's death. With one stomp from Vidar's magic Wolf Stomper™ sandal, Fenrir will fall dead.







Norse people believed that the centre of the universe was a lofty ash tree called Yggdrasil. In and around this tree were the 'nine realms'. Two of these realms, Asgard and Midgard, were connected to each other by a flaming bridge called Bifrost.

## A MYTHIC MAP OF

## NORSE MYTHOLOGY

The realms shown here are all mentioned in the Norse myths.

Each realm is connected to others by mysterious and changeable portals – dark roads, wild seas, tunnels, rivers and mountain passes. Sometimes

a realm can only be reached by borrowing Freya's falcon skin and flying there!

### ALFHEIM

Alfheim is home to the light elves, who are said to be 'fairer than the sun'. These mysterious creatures hardly ever travel outside of their realm.

### ASGARD

Asgard is the home of the gods, a golden fortress surrounded by a high wall and guarded by the ever-watchful Huginn. At the centre of Asgard is Odin's 'High Seat', from which he can see into all of the other realms.

### NIFLHEIM

This land of ice, snow and fog existed long before the creation of Asgard and Midgard. It is home to the fierce dragon Nidhogg, which gnaws Yggdrasil's roots.

### MIDGARD

Midgard or 'Middle Earth' is where women, men and children live. Its fields, forests and mountains were made out of Ymir the Giant's body, and it is surrounded by a vast ocean, where the Midgard Serpent lurks.

### MUSPELLHEIM

This land of fire and lava is ruled by Surt, a terrible giant with a blazing beard and flaming sword.

### VANAHEIM

This realm was the original home of Frey and his sister Freyja, before they moved to Asgard. We know very little about this realm, because it is only mentioned once in all of Norse mythology.

### JOTUNHEIM

Across the sea lies a mountainous land called Jotunheim, home to Thrym, Thiazzi, Skrymir and a host of other fearsome giants. Thor used to come here on his giant-bashing trips.

### HEL

Nine days' ride from Asgard, across the river Gjoll, lies a gloomy land called Hel, with its hall Eljavnir, dwelling place of a million dead souls and their shuffling, decomposing mistresses.

### NIDAVELLIR

The Old Norse word Nidavellir means 'dark places'. These are the mines-like tunnels and grottos of Andvari, Juvild, Eitri, Brokk and other dwarves.



