



The Norse Myths Epic: A Glossary

YGGDRASIL – an Ancient Ash Tree that is the central pillar of the nine realms, tended to by the three Norns: **URD**, **VERDANDI** and **SKULD**,

who control the fates of Gods and Men. Its roots extend from the *Well of Urd* in *Asgard*, to the *Well of Mimir* in *Jotunheim*, and to *Niflheim*. **ODIN** found the Runes of magic in the pool at its base.

The Nine Realms are on three levels:

Asgard (power gods) and **Vanaheim** (nature gods) and **Alfheim** (light elves)

Midgard (mankind) and **Jotunheim** (trolls) and **Svartalfheim** (dark elves or dwarves)

Muspelheim (fire) and **Niflheim** (fog and ice) and **Helheim** (abode of the dead)

Asgard is the Fortress Home of the Gods joined to *Midgard* by a rainbow bridge. (*Bifrost*)

The Aesir – Gods of Power and Order

ODIN – The “All Father,” King of the Aesir, often a wanderer of many nicknames seeking magical knowledge (*seid*) – known for his two ravens; his spear, *Gungnir*; his ring, *Draupnir*; and his swift eight legged horse, *Sleipnir*.

FRIGG – The motherly Queen of the Gods in *Asgard*, **ODIN**'s wife and **BALDR**'s mother, She spins the clouds at night and knows the fate of all, but never tells.

THOR – **ODIN**'s mighty son – a slayer of Giants and trolls with his hammer, *Mjollnir*, a belt of Strength, and Iron Gloves – He drives a chariot pulled by two Goats

SIF – The golden haired wife of **THOR**.

LOKI – A cunning and fickle trickster dwelling in *Asgard*. Mischevious, a magician and shapeshifter, his pranks create evil havoc requiring crafty ways out.

TYR – A bold and courageous Warrior God in *Asgard*, a son of **HYMIR**, the Giant.

BALDR – The beautiful and good son of **ODIN** and **FRIGG** who was the first God to die by **Loki**'s treachery.

BRAGI – A son of **ODIN**, the God of Poetry

IDUN – Wife of **BRAGI** who provides the Gods with the Apples of Youth, carried off by the Giant, **THJAZI**

HEIMDALL – The Guardian of the Aesir, stationed at the Rainbow Bridge, who will blow the horn at *Ragnarok*.

The Vanir – Wise and Fertile Gods of Nature

FREY - God of Prosperity, who rules the elves, and is known for his Sword, his Golden Boar and his magic ship, *Skidbladnir*.

FREYJA - **FREY**'s sister, a lusty and lusted after Goddess, who has a carriage drawn by Cats and a Falcon Cloak. She claims half of those slain in battle for *Valhalla* which are carried off by the Valkyries.

NJORD – God of the Sea and father of **FREY** and **FREYJA**

Jotunheim is the mountainous home of the Giants

Giants – Troll-like beings of Chaos and destruction, who sometimes marry Gods.

YMIR – The First Frost Giant formed of fire and ice whose body was fashioned into the worlds by **Odin** and his brothers.

JORD – The Giantess earth-mother of **THOR**

GERDA – The most beautiful Giantess who married **Frey** – the Northern lights

THJAZI – A Giant who flies off as an eagle with **IDUN**

SKADI - Winter's Giant huntress with her ski's, bow and arrow. Married **Njord**. Daughter of **THJAZI**

VAFTRUDNIR – A Giant who knows almost everything

SKRYMIR (UTGARD-LOKI) The mage-ruler of the Giants

HYNDLA – A Giantess who knows everybody

More Giants include **GIERROD**, **THRYM**, **HYMIR** (**Tyr**'s father), and **HRUNGNIR**, strongest of the Giants

The Dwarves (Dark Elves) live underground and forged the treasures of the Gods.

The Monstrous Children of LOKI – **SKIRNIR**, the eight legged horse; **FENRIR** the Giant Wolf; **JORMUNGAND**, the Great Sea Serpent encircling *Midgard*, and **HEL**, Ruler of the Dead.



A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE NORSE MYTHS

There is more interest in the Norse Myths today than in any other Mythology. It's Giant trolls, Elves, Dwarves are mainstays in fantasy. Vikings are portrayed as savage raiders with horned helmets on television series, both factual and fiction. The Marvel Cinematic Universe has elevated its heroes into the realm of super-heroes. Norse influence can be found in the arts, opera, literature, music and cinema.

With origins in pagan Scandinavian religion and culture, the little known of the original myths is only from carved symbols and runes – though more today from archaeological study of graves and picture-stones – such as the exhibit currently at the Nordic Museum. It was in the 13th Century that Norse myths turned into formal verse by unknown Icelandic Skalds (poets) were collected into the thirty-four lays of the *Poetic Edda*. By this time Christianity had come to Iceland and the old religion was mostly forgotten, when Snorri Sturluson, a clergyman, wrote a handbook on traditional Skaldic Poetry called the *Prose Edda*. Skaldic Verse is characterized by “kennings” – metaphors like “Freyja's tears” or “Sif's Hair” for “Gold,” etc. Since understanding these allusions requires knowing the myths, Snorri included an overview colored by his own perspective along with many of the myths.

Besides the two *Eddas*, many Icelandic *Sagas* (stories) followed – “historical” accounts of ancient times. The monarchies of Scandinavia sought to root their histories in a glorious past. It was in England, in eighteenth Century, that Thomas Percy, Thomas Grey and William Blake discovered a romantic interest in the myths. In the nineteenth Century, they entered the heart of German national culture as Richard Wagner composed his four part *Ring Cycle* Opera. Sadly, the “*volk*” mysticism of Guido Von List was one root of the jack-booted Aryan Race identity of National Socialism.

During the golden age of children's literature in England and America, many writers and illustrators discovered in Odin, Thor, Loki and Freyja inspiring stories of courage and heroism, even as Norse studies bloomed in the academic world. J.R.R. Tolkien drew heavily from the old Norse themes in writing *The Hobbit* and *Lord of the Rings*, but instead of capricious gods, he had men, dwarves, elves and hobbits struggling with evil and darkness.

In the 1960's Stan Lee and Jack Kirby introduced Thor into the comics – bringing along the rest into *Tales of Asgard* and later into the blockbusters of the Marvel Cinematic Universe – a multi-world striking similar to the nine realms of the Norse. In Neil Gaiman's novel *American Gods* (2001) “Mr. Wednesday” and “Low Key Lyesmith” (Odin and Loki) have become con men in our very midst. Adapted to television in 2017 – this book reflects the fact that the gods and heroes of Norse Myth are very much alive in our modern culture.

- Barry McWilliams

A GLOSSARY OF NORSE MYTHS



“THE BODY OF STORIES THAT WE TODAY CALL “NORSE MYTHOLOGY” ARE THE TALES THAT VIKING POETS RECITED IN DIMLY LIT HALLS TO THE CAPTIVATED ATTENDEES OF GRAND FEASTS, AND WHICH FATHERS AND MOTHERS TOLD TO THEIR CHILDREN AROUND ROARING HEARTH-FIRES ON LONG WINTER NIGHTS. THEY ARE EPIC MYTHS OF WAR, MAGIC, LOVE, BETRAYAL, TRIUMPH, AND RUIN. NOT ONLY DID THEY PROVIDE DEEP WELLS OF RELIGIOUS MEANING FOR THE VIKINGS; THEY ALSO SPEAK TO MUCH THAT IS TIMELESS AND UNIVERSAL IN THE HUMAN CONDITION, AND SO CONTINUE TO PROVIDE MODERN AUDIENCES FROM AROUND THE WORLD WITH WONDER, ENTERTAINMENT, AND EVEN SPIRITUAL NOURISHMENT FOR SOME.

“NORSE MYTHOLOGY WAS NEVER A NEAT, TIDY SYSTEM; THE VIKING MIND DIDN'T DEMAND THE SAME KIND OF STRICT, RATIONAL CODIFICATION THAT THE MODERN MIND DOES (OR AT LEAST THINKS IT DOES). INSTEAD, THE VIKINGS SEEM TO HAVE BEEN MUCH MORE CONCERNED WITH HOW MUCH THESE MYTHS SPOKE TO THEIR HEARTS AND IMAGINATIONS, AS WELL AS THE DEGREE TO WHICH THE MYTHS REFLECTED AND MADE SENSE OF THE WORLD AS THEY EXPERIENCED IT.”

- DANIEL MCCOY, WWW.NORSE-MYTHOLOGY.ORG



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