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## PORTAL TO NORSE MYTHOLOGY

Greek mythology is what typically comes to mind when we think about the mythology influencing the Harry Potter universe. Another mythology has influences as well—Norse mythology. You've probably heard of Odin the Allfather or Thor with his mighty hammer. You probably know something about giants and trolls, goblins and dwarfs. How about dragons guarding treasure? If you've ever read fantasy books, comic books, or watched fantasy movies, and of course, if you're familiar with the Marvel Universe, you'll have heard of all of these people and creatures.

The Norse people were from what we'd now call Scandinavia—Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Iceland, and also Northern Germany. We might think of them now as “vikings” but that is a narrow term which really only referred to those people who traveled to new lands. Vikings were adventurers and raiders. It was a hard life living in the north in those days so the vikings left their homes to find places to plunder for money or new places to live, because they wanted space or better land. The “vikings” traveled, conquered, and settled many parts of England, Scotland, and Ireland, including the important cities of York in Northern England and Dublin in Ireland. Because they settled and created regular lives in what is now Great Britain, there remains a Norse influence in these countries. The influence of the Norse people and Norse mythology on English culture is still seen in modern books like Harry Potter.

The Norse people had a mythology every bit as sophisticated and full of stories as the Greeks. The Norse had a multitude of gods and goddesses, they had an

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interesting creation story, and they also told hero stories. One difference between the two is that the Norse gods and goddesses did not interfere in human affairs as much as the Greek gods. Odin (the “king” of the Norse gods) and Freya (the goddess of love and battle) did walk among humans and Odin did interfere with the lives of men, particularly kings or during battles. However, the other gods and goddesses tended to stay in their own world. They got into plenty of trouble on their own with each other! The god Thor liked to fight with the giants and Loki, the trickster god, constantly provoked the other gods, often to disastrous effect. This all happened, though, within their own world of Asgard. Or, as was the case with Thor, in the world of the giants, Jotunheim.

The influence of Norse mythology on the culture and literature of England is seen in tales of dragons, giants, elves, dwarfs, and heroes who search for treasure, which is guarded by dragons of course. In fact, the giants, elves, and dwarfs were all created at the beginning of the world and have their own worlds to live in.

In this section we'll learn about:

- The Norse Gods and Goddesses
- Norse Mythology in the Harry Potter World
- “Animagus” and “Witches”
- What Hagrid and Dumbledore have in common with Thor and Odin
- The Norse Creation Stories
- The Destruction of the World

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## Norse Gods and Goddesses

First, an introduction to the Norse pantheon. Two races of gods make up the Norse pantheon—the Aesir (AY-seer) and the Vanir (VAH-near). The Aesir live in Asgard. The following lists the Aesir gods with the exception of Frey and his sister Freya who are Vanir. There was a battle between the two races, the Aesir and the Vanir, which lasted for ages. They eventually settled the battle with the Aesir sending two of their gods to the Vanir and the Vanir sending three of their gods to the Aesir. Njord (nee-yord) and his children Frey and Freya were the three Vanir gods sent to live with the Aesir, and they brought with them some of their own magic. The two Aesir gods who went to live with the Vanir were Hoenir (HIGH-neer), the god of silence, and Mimir (MEE-mir), the god of wisdom.

**Odin (Woden, Woten)--**Odin is the chief god.

- Master of wisdom, magic, and poetry.
- God of war, battle, and death.
- He rides an eight-legged horse named Sleipnir, a gift from Loki.
- On Odin's shoulders perch two ravens, Hugin and Munin (Thought and Memory) who fly throughout the world and report everything to him every night.
- Two wolves, Geri and Freki (Greedy and Ravenous), sit on either side of him. Odin does not need to eat food so he gives his portion to the wolves.

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- Men who fought and died bravely in battle are rewarded by being taken to Odin's palace in Asgard, Valhalla. There they fight, hunt, eat and drink. Odin's maidens, the Valkyries, wait on them.
  - He frequently shape-shifts, most often into an eagle.
  - He is blind because he sacrificed his eye to obtain wisdom.
  - He wears a golden breastplate and helmet and carries a magic spear.
  - Odin is always depicted as blind in one eye. He dresses as a beggar with a tattered cloak, carries a staff, and wears a floppy hat that covers the blind eye.
  - The day Wednesday (Wodens-day) is named after him.

**Frigga**—Odin's wife.

- Frigga is mostly known as a wife and mother and is therefore considered a goddess of marriage and women.
- Frigga is also a goddess of childbirth and women call upon her when giving birth.
- She has the gift of prophecy but will not reveal what she knows.

**Thor**—God of thunder.

- Thor is also the god of lightning. When he throws his hammer, Mjolnir, it creates lightning.
- He is the god of the winds and weather and fertility.
- He has a hearty appetite for food and ale.
- Thor rides in a chariot pulled by two goats, Tannggrisnir (Teeth-barer) and Tanngnjóstr (Teeth grinder).
- He is married to Sif, a fertility goddess.

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- Thor is fearsome to his enemies (he hated giants), but he is protective of humans. The average person in the Norse world loved Thor, because he was a fierce enemy of evil and fought it whenever it appeared.

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***Mythology Connection!*** Thor and the goddess Epona from Celtic mythology were both popular with the common people of their times. Archaeologists have found many amulets of both deities.

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- Thor is the father of Magni who will survive the end of the world to become one of the fathers of the new world.
- Thor is depicted as a huge, red-faced man with a red beard.
- He wears a belt that doubles his already considerable strength, iron gloves, and wields a magic hammer, Mjolnir, which always strikes its target and returns to Thor's hand.
- The day Thursday (Thor's day) is named after him.

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***Mythology Connection!*** The Celtic god Taranos was also a storm and weather god. He was known as the “thunderer.”

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**Sif**—Thor's wife.

- A goddess of fertility.
- She is depicted with long golden hair.
- Loki tricked her and shaved off her hair. Thor made him replace it with hair created by the dwarfs.

**Frey**—god of vegetation and fertility.

- Frey is the god of agriculture and determines the outcome of harvests. People prayed to Frey for a good harvest.
- After Odin and Thor, Frey is the most important god in the pantheon because of his association with agriculture and fertility. The Norse people were farmers and raised livestock and so were dependent on the land.
- He is also a god of human fertility. People prayed to him for healthy children.
- He has a golden boar, Gullinbursti, a gift from the dwarfs. Gullinbursti is fast and shines like the sun when traveling. Warriors put images of Gullinbursti on their shields and helmets.
- Frey has a magic ship, Skidbladnir, that can sail on land, sea, or air, and will never veer off course. It is big enough that all the gods and their animals can fit in it, but also small enough that it can fold up and fit in a pouch.
- Frey fell in love with a giant maiden and gave his sword away as a symbol of his love. When the end of the world happens, he will be without a weapon.
- Frey is very handsome.

**Freya**—A goddess of fertility. Frey's sister.

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- Goddess of love and beauty.
  - Freya is also the goddess of battle. Along with Odin she claims the dead who died heroically in battle and takes them to her hall, Folkvangr. Women also go to Freya's hall when they die.
  - She is an expert in the Seid (magic), and the leader of the Volvas (wise women). She is the leader of the Light Elves.
  - Freya is very loved, especially by women. She loves music and flowers
  - She rides a chariot pulled by two cats.
  - She owns Hildisvini (Battle Boar).
  - She owns a cloak that will turn the wearer into a falcon and this allows her to fly.
  - She is very beautiful and wears a necklace, Brisingamen.
  - The day Friday (Freya's Day) is named after her.

**Loki**—While Loki is not technically a god, he is supremely important in the Norse pantheon. There are many, many stories of Loki.

- He was welcomed into the Aesir because he is beautiful and charming. He also helped them build the wall that stands between Asgard and Midgard.
- The gods like him because he is mischievous, although they end up getting burned by him in the end. Odin loves him.
- Loki is a shape shifter.
- The gods and goddesses put up with him until he did one malicious trick too many. Then they bound him in a cavern with a venomous serpent to torment him.

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- With the giant Angrboda, Loki fathered Fenris the wolf, the Midgard Serpent, and Hel, Queen of the underworld.
  - He was also the "mother" (when he was in the form of a horse) of the eight legged horse Sleipnir. Loki gave Sleipnir to Odin as a gift.
  - Loki caused the beginning of the end of the world when he killed Balder.

**Balder**—son of Odin and Frigga.

- Balder is the god of truth, light, love, joy, innocence, and happiness.
- He is beloved by the gods and men.
- No dishonesty or treachery can enter his hall.
- He is the first god to die, killed by Loki's treachery.
- Balder is depicted as beautiful and radiant.

**Tyr (teer)**—god of battle and martial honor.

- He is the god of honorable battle, strategy, and cunning.
- Warriors would mark their swords with the rune of Tyr before going into battle.
- He is depicted as a one-handed god because his hand was bitten off by Fenrir the wolf, an enemy of the gods.
- The day Tuesday (Tyr's day) is named after him.

**Heimdall (HAIM-dall)**—he is the watchman of the gods.

- Heimdall is stationed on the rainbow bridge Bifrost that connects Asgard (the home of the gods) and Midgard (the home of humans).
- He can see to the ends of the earth and hear the slightest sound, even the grass grow!



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- Heimdall visited Midgard and created the classes of humans, like peasants and kings.
  - He watches for enemies of the gods, like giants.
  - He holds a horn, Gjallarhorn (Resounding Horn) to warn the Aesir of any intruders. He will use this horn to announce the end of the world, Ragnarok.

**Hermod (Hair-mode)**—messenger of the gods.

- Hermod stands at the gates of Odin's hall Valhalla and welcomes fallen heroes.
- He traveled into the underworld after Balder's death to bring him back.

**Hoder**—Balder's blind brother.

- He was tricked by Loki into killing Balder.

**Forseti**—god of justice.

- He settles disputes in his hall, Glitnir, and everyone leaves reconciled.

**Bragi**—god of poetry.

- Runes were carved onto his tongue and then shaved off and put in mead. The gods, elves, and men then drank the rune-infused mead.
- He meets fallen heroes at Valhalla and sings of their deeds.
- This is where our word “brag” comes from.
- His wife is Idun.
- Bragi is depicted playing a harp. When he sang nothing could resist, not even the trees.

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**Mythology Connection!** Orpheus, a mortal man from Greek mythology, could play the lyre so beautifully that everyone and everything, even the trees, would stop to listen.

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**Idun (ee-DOON)**—She is the goddess of eternal youth and Bragi’s wife.

- She keeps the magical apples that prevent the gods and goddesses from growing old. The Norse gods are not immortal and have to eat the magic apples to stay alive.

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**Harry Potter Connection!** In order to stay alive, Nicholas Flamel has to keep drinking the Elixir of Life, for as Dumbledore tells Harry, “*while the Elixir of Life does extend life, it must be drunk regularly, for all eternity, if the drinker is to maintain their immortality*” (HBP, 502).

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**Aegir (AY-ear)**—god of the sea and all the sea creatures.

- He is the embodiment of the ocean. Aegir is older than the Aesir and Vanir.

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- He is known for throwing great parties where he brews ale in a giant cauldron. He often has guests, especially Thor.

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***Mythology Connection!*** The Celtic god Dagda has a cauldron that never runs out of food.

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- Aegir is responsible for both the good and bad things that happen at sea.
- Portrayed as an old man with long white hair.

**Ran**—goddess of the sea.

- Wife of Aegir. Together they had nine daughters.
- She has a net that catches men who go out to sea. She receives men who drowned at sea into her hall.

**Hel**—goddess of the netherworld.

- She is the offspring of Loki and a giantess.
- Half her face has human features and the other is a skull.
- She rules the dead in her hall, Helheim.

**Skadi**—she is a giantess and a goddess of winter.

- She lives high in the mountains.
- She is a huntress and carries a spear.
- Travels on skis or snowshoes.

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**Mani**—moon god.

- He drives the chariot that pulls the moon across the sky.

**Sol**—sun goddess.

- She drives the chariot that pulls the sun across the sky.

### Children of the Aesir Gods

**Vali**—son of Odin. He was born solely to take vengeance on Hoder for killing Balder. He will survive the end of the world.

**Vidar**—son of Odin. He will kill Fenrir after Fenrir kills Odin. He too, will survive the end of the world.

**Modi (Strong)**—Thor's son. Modi's followers were the berserkers, men who would go crazy in battle.

**Magni (Angry)**—Thor's son. Magni is believed to be the only being in the world stronger than Thor. He will survive the end of the world.

### Other Deities

**Norn**—the Norn are like the Greek Fates.

- They spin a thread of fate for every living being, including the gods.
- Once the Norns weave your fate it cannot be undone. Not even the gods can change their fate.

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- The Norns control time.
  - The Norns guard the fountain that nourishes Yggdrasil, the World Tree and they also water the tree.
  - The gods meet in council at the Well of Urd which is where the Norns live.
  - The three Norns are depicted as facing in three different directions and each one has a different face.

They are:

- *Urd (past)*—she is old and ugly and looks backward.
- *Verdande (ver-dahn-deh) (present)*—she is young and beautiful and looks straight ahead.
- *Skuld (future)*—she is veiled and cannot be seen and looks in the opposite direction as Urd.

## Valkyries

The name means "chooser of the slain": they are women who choose men who die in battle and bring them to Odin's hall Valhalla. In Valhalla the fallen heroes feast and drink and fight until the end of the world when they will be summoned by Odin to fight on the side of good. In Valhalla the food and mead never run out and if the men get hurt in a fight their injuries heal by the end of the day. The Valkyries serve them mead.

The Valkyries go down to a battlefield dressed in full armor. After a worthy man dies she takes him to Valhalla on horseback. In some stories the goddess Freya

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is the leader of the Valkyries. She chooses half of the slain warriors for herself and takes them to her hall in Asgard.

The Valkyries are the daughters of Odin. They can transform into white swans while in Midgard. However, if anyone ever sees a Valkyrie in her natural form, outside of the battlefield, she'll no longer be a Valkyrie or allowed in Asgard.

### Norse Mythology in the Harry Potter World

Now that we have a background in Norse mythology, let's look at the mythological references in the Harry Potter books. Unlike with Greek and Roman mythology, Norse mythology is not such an obvious influence on Harry Potter. There were multiple characters in the Harry Potter books who took their names from Greek and Roman mythology, but only one with a name from Norse mythology. However, the Norse influence is still felt throughout the books, if you know where to look!

#### FENRIR

***In Harry Potter*** Fenrir Grayback is a werewolf; a particularly vicious werewolf who likes to attack innocent people and even places himself near people when he changes. He attacked and turned Remus Lupin into a werewolf. Fenrir is involved in many key scenes in the books: in the battle of Hogwarts, in the tower when Dumbledore is killed, and as one of the "snatchers" who captured Harry, Ron, and Hermione in *The Deathly Hallows*.

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***In Norse mythology*** Fenrir is the wolf offspring of the god Loki and the giantess Angrboda, and is also the father of all wolves. Even though Fenrir was a wolf and the offspring of a giantess, Odin allowed him to live with the gods and goddesses in Asgard. Some stories say Odin did it because Fenrir was the offspring of Loki, while some stories say that Odin did it because he loved wolves. However it happened, Fenrir lived in Asgard, but he grew so huge that no one wanted to go near him except the god of war, Tyr. Tyr fed Fenrir and was the only god whom Fenrir trusted. All the gods feared Fenrir because he was so big and had such a huge appetite.

There was even a prophecy surrounding the great wolf. Fenrir will be the one to kill Odin at the end of the world. Once the other gods heard this prophecy, they wanted Odin to kill Fenrir, but Odin knew you couldn't change fate, so he decided to have the wolf bound in shackles. At first the gods tried iron shackles and Fenrir agreed—he agreed because he didn't think there were any shackles in the world that could bind him. Of course, the iron shackles didn't work and he kicked them off easily. The gods tried a second time, but those shackles didn't work either. Odin finally went to the dwarfs and asked them to create something with which to bind the giant wolf. They constructed a magical ribbon called Gleipnir (glaip-neer). In Gleipnir the dwarfs wove six magical ingredients—the sound of a moving cat, the beard of a woman, a fish's breath, the spit of a bird, the roots of a mountain, and the sinews of a bear.

The gods took the ribbon to Fenrir and asked him to let them tie him up with it, but he suspected a trick and also suspected the ribbon was magical since it was so thin. Tyr eventually agreed to put his hand in Fenrir's mouth as a sign of good faith (in some stories he volunteers, in others Fenrir asks for one of the gods to do so). The other gods bound Fenrir with Gleipnir and the magical ribbon worked. He struggled but could not get free. Angry at being bound, and

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because he was tricked, Fenrir bit off Tyr's right hand. Tyr is always depicted with only one hand.

Fenrir will remain bound by Gleipnir until Ragnarok. The evil all around the world will make Gleipnir fall off, then Fenrir will escape and kill Odin. He swallows Odin whole. Vidar, Odin's son, will rip open Fenrir's jaws and stab him in the heart, and kill him.



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***Sound Familiar?*** There are several stories, both ancient and modern in which a god or hero loses his hand. In our Celtic mythology section we will learn about a Celtic god, Nuada, who loses a hand in battle and then receives a magical silver hand as a replacement. In modern times, Luke Skywalker and Darth Vader both lose their right hands in light saber duels, and both have their hands replaced by artificial hands.

In the Harry Potter world, it is Wormtail who loses his hand in sacrifice to aid in the Dark Lord's regeneration. He also has his hand replaced—Wormtail is rewarded for his sacrifice with none other than a silver hand! Dumbledore loses the use of his right hand when he wears the cursed Gaunt family ring.

The loss of a hand carries great significance in the mythological stories. A hero's right hand is his sword hand, the hand that he uses to fight, to protect himself and others, and even, as is the case with Nuada, to demonstrate that he is able to be a king. The loss of a hand also provides the hero, or other character, a chance to show that he can overcome a huge obstacle and still persevere.

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## GIANTS

***In Harry Potter*** Hagrid travels to the land of the giants to convince them to join Dumbledore's side rather than Voldemort's. He does not succeed, and the giants fight with Voldemort at the end. Hagrid also finds his half-brother, Grawp and keeps him in the Forbidden Forest. Grawp rescues Harry and Hermione from Professor Umbridge and the centaurs. Some of the giants in the Harry Potter world have Norse sounding names: Grawp, Bran, Fridwulfa, and Hengist.

***In Norse mythology*** the world is populated with giants, with many, many stories involving giants and the gods. These giants are very similar to the giants we meet in the Harry Potter series—ugly, huge, and usually mean. However, the Norse giants were also clever and intelligent. Some used magic to transform themselves into animals like eagles. For example, in one story a giant turned into an eagle and kidnapped Idun, the goddess who keeps the magic apples. They can also transform into human shape. When the gods needed a wall built around Asgard the "man" who came to do the job, with payment being the goddesses Freya and Sif, was actually a giant in disguise.

The giants, also called Jotun (YO-tun), live in Jotunheim (YO-tun-haim), a separate world from the gods and from people. The first giant of Norse mythology was Ymir (EE-meer), a frost giant. He was part of the story of the creation of the world (see below for the Creation Story).

The god Thor hated the giants, and was at odds with them all the time, although his mother was a giantess. Many of the giant stories in Norse mythology involve the god Thor.

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***Harry Potter Connection!*** Just like Thor, Hagrid is a half-giant and huge by human standards, but small compared to full giants. His full giant brother, Grawp, towers over Hagrid and can even beat him up!

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***Harry Potter Connection!*** At the end of the world, the giants, led by Hyrm (heer-rim), will come from Jotunheim and fight on the side of evil. In Harry Potter, the giants fight on the side of evil as well when they fight for Voldemort in the Battle of Hogwarts.

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## Trolls

***In Harry Potter*** Harry, Ron, and Hermione have a run-in with a troll in *The Sorcerer's Stone*. The troll is described as, *"twelve feet tall, its skin was a dull, granite gray, its great lumpy body like a boulder with its small bald head perched on top like a coconut. It had short legs thick as tree trunks with flat, horny feet"* (SS, 174).

***In Norse mythology*** trolls are a race in between giants and men. The giants concern themselves with the gods, while trolls and men fight amongst each

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other. Trolls are described as bigger than men in size and strength though not as big as giants. The trolls are dumber and less clever than men. They inhabit the mountainous out of the way places of the earth.

## Dragons

***In Harry Potter*** Harry encounters dragons on three occasions. In *The Sorcerer's Stone* Hagrid receives a dragon egg and then raises the dragon Norbert. It is the first time that Harry is introduced to a real dragon or is even aware that there are real dragons in the world. In *The Goblet of Fire* the Tri-Wizard champions have to retrieve an egg from a dragon. In *The Deathly Hallows*, Harry, Ron, and Hermione encounter the dragon that protects the vaults at Gringott's bank. The dragon guards the treasure in the lower vaults at the bank, but is chained and terrorized by the goblins, and so is a miserable dragon.

***In Norse mythology*** there are also three noteworthy dragons—Nidhogg, Jormungandr, and Fafnir.

***Jormungandr***—Jormungandr is the serpent that encircles Midgard, the world of humans. His body wraps around the world and he holds on by biting his own tail. Thor had three encounters with the Midgard serpent (I am including Jormungandr in the dragon section because in Norse mythology and legend the giant serpent and the dragon were interchangeable). The final encounter between Thor and Jormungandr will be at Ragnarok, the end of the world. Thor was Jormungandr's most bitter enemy among the gods because of their previous two encounters. So when things are set in motion for Ragnarok, Jormungandr will release his tail, rise up creating terrible waves, and his breath will poison the sky. He and Thor will meet and battle. Thor will kill Jormungandr

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but will be himself fatally wounded by Jormungandr's poison. Thor will take nine steps before dying. His son, Magni will pick up his hammer and will be one of the few to survive and begin a new world.

*The Nidhogg* (Malice Striker) is the dragon/serpent that gnaws at the base of the World Tree Yggdrasil. This is the World Tree from which all of the worlds of gods, men, dwarfs, and elves are sustained. He and the eagle that lives in the world above, trade insults. A squirrel delivers the insults back and forth. During the end of the world battle, Nidhogg will rise up from the earth bringing the corpses of the dead with him. He survives and lives on in the next world.

*Fafnir*—he was born the human son of a magician until greed turned him into a dragon. He stole his father's gold treasure and then turned into a dragon to protect it. He was killed by the hero Sigurd.

### Goblins

***In Harry Potter*** the goblins are small, sly, sneaky little creatures. They run the wizarding bank Gringott's and are good with handling money and protecting treasure. They prefer underground places and that is where they keep the vaults of money for the bank. The goblins are also expert metalworkers—they crafted the sword of Godric Gryffindor and Helga Hufflepuff's cup. Harry encounters goblins for the first time in *The Sorcerer's Stone* when Hagrid takes him to Gringott's to withdraw some money. In *The Deathly Hallows* the goblin Griphook helps Harry, Ron, and Hermione get into the vault of Bellatrix Lestrange to steal Helga Hufflepuff's cup. Griphook ends up betraying them. In the Harry Potter world, goblins do not come off as very pleasant beings

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***Harry Potter Connection!*** Many of the Goblins of Harry Potter have Norse sounding names: Alguff, Bodrig, Gornuk, Hodrod, Nagnok, Ragnok, Ug, Urg, and Vargot.

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***In Norse mythology*** there are no goblins, but the goblins in the Harry Potter books are very similar to the dwarfs in Norse mythology. Dwarfs were one of the first beings created after the gods. When Odin and his brothers killed the frost-giant Ymir, they used his body parts to create the world and the different races of beings like the dwarfs and elves. Dwarfs are also referred to as "dark elves" or "black elves" but not because they are dark or evil, but because they live in a different world than the "light elves." The "light elves" live in Alfheim which is in the upper world near to the gods in Asgard. They are favored by the gods, particularly the goddess of love and beauty, Freya.

The "dark elves," by contrast, live in Svartalfaheim which is a lower world closer to that of men. It is a dark, underground world between the world of men and the underworld. The gods put them in charge of all the gems, precious metals, and stones that are found under the earth. The dwarfs are not pleasant beings, being greedy and sneaky. In Norse mythology, dwarfs are the size of men and as smart as men. Later, in folklore and legend they become what we think of when we think of dwarfs, small, stocky little men with beards and deep, gruff voices.

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Like the Harry Potter goblins, Norse dwarfs or "dark elves" are expert metalworkers. The gods and goddesses often asked the dwarfs for help when they needed something special. The dwarfs made:

- *Odin's spear Gungnir*—it always hits its mark.
- *Sif's hair*—Sif is Thor's wife and has beautiful golden hair. Loki cut it off as a prank, Thor became furious and made Loki replace it. Loki went to the dwarfs and they fashioned new hair for her out of gold.
- *Frey's ship Skidbladnir*—his ship can sail on land, sea, or air, and will never veer off course. It is big enough to fit all the gods and their animals, but it can also become small enough to fold up and fit in a pouch.
- *Odin's ring Draupnir*—a magic ring (arm ring) that can multiply itself. Every ninth night it “drips” eight new rings of the exact same weight and size as the original. Draupnir means “dripper”.
- *Thor's hammer Mjolnir*—Mjolnir is very strong, it always hits its mark and will always come back to Thor no matter where he throws it.
- *Freya's necklace Brisingamen*—it has no magical properties, though it is very beautiful. Loki stole it from Freya.
- *Frey's boar Gullinbursti*—a golden boar who pulls Frey's chariot. The boar's bristles shine like the sun.

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**Harry Potter Connection!** Harry, Hermione, and Ron are betrayed by Griphook after he gets them into Bellatrix's vault at Gringott's. Regin, a dwarf from the Norse story of the hero Sigurd, also betrays his human friend. Regin was Sigurd's foster-father and told him all about the treasure guarded by the dragon Fafnir. Sigurd killed the dragon and found the treasure, much like Harry found the treasure in Bellatrix's vault. But because Sigurd tasted the blood of the dragon, he could hear the animals talking, and one of the birds told him that Regin planned to kill him. Sigurd killed Regin instead. Like Griphook, Regin's greed for the treasure made him betray the person he had sworn to help.

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## More Norse Mythology Influences

### Animagus

Although there are no humans who can turn themselves into animals in Norse mythology, there are instances of gods or other beings transforming.

**Loki**—Loki is the ultimate shape-shifter in Norse mythology. He shape-shifted into a horse and even gave birth as a horse to the eight-legged horse Sleipnir (sleep-neer). Loki then gave Sleipnir to Odin as a gift. In another story, Loki



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changed into a salmon after killing Balder. He tried to escape the angry gods by transforming and hiding in a river. The other gods caught him with a net.

### *Loki and Brisingamen*

In one story Loki wanted to steal Freya's beautiful necklace Brisingamen. He transformed himself into a fly so he could enter Freya's hall and steal the necklace. Freya was asleep and lying on the necklace with the clasps were underneath her, so Loki turned into a flea and bit her. When she felt the bite, Freya moved and Loki transformed back into himself and stole the necklace.

The god Heimdall helped Freya to recover the necklace. When Loki discovered that Heimdall was after him and the necklace, he transformed into a seal and swam to an island. Heimdall also transformed into a seal and the two fought over the necklace. Heimdall eventually won Brisingamen back for Freya.

### *Loki Steals the Immortal Apples*

In this story, the treacherous Loki helped one of the giants steal the immortal apples from Idun. Without their immortal apples, the gods all started to grow old. They demanded that Loki help them get the apples back from the giant. So Loki disguised himself as a falcon, flew to where Idun was being held, turned her into a nut, and then flew back to Asgard. The giant discovered Idun missing, turned himself into an eagle, and chased after Loki. As soon as Loki flew over the walls of Asgard, the gods built a fire. When the giant-as-eagle crossed over the wall his wings caught fire, he fell to the ground, and the gods killed him. Their store of apples was safe and they remain immortal.

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**Mythology Connection!** Like the Celtic Tuatha De Danann, the Norse gods have to eat special food, the apples of immortality, to stay immortal. Aegir, the sea god (like Lir) keeps a magic cauldron in which he prepares the gods' mead. Animals that regenerate after being eaten is also similar to Norse mythology. Thor has two goats he can eat, and as long as no bones are broken, they will come back again the next day. In Odin's hall of warriors, Valhalla, magical goats are killed and eaten and regenerate the next day.

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**Otr (Otter)**—Otter was the shape-shifting son of a magician. His most common form was...an otter! Loki killed him for food and turned the skin into a bag, but did not realize that the otter was really a person who had transformed. Loki encountered Otter's father and when he saw the bag he told Loki that it was his son and demanded compensation. He demanded that the bag be filled with gold. When Loki set out to find some treasure he went back to the pool of water where he killed Otter and there discovered Andvari, the dwarf who shape-shifted into a pike (a kind of fish) and guarded an enormous treasure.

### Cursed Rings

**In Harry Potter** Dumbledore finds the Gaunt family ring when he was searching for the Horcruxes. Of course, being a Horcrux, it was cursed, but Dumbledore realized too late that the ring had been cursed, and it destroyed his hand.

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***In Norse mythology*** *Andvarinaut*, the ring of the dwarf Andvari was cursed. Andvari had a huge treasure of gold, but his most precious treasure was the ring Andvarinaut because it could produce more gold. Loki stole the ring (Loki steals again!), and so Andvari cursed it to bring destruction on its wearer.

### Witches

Norse mythology and society was not without its witches and wizards. They had magicians, (priests and priestesses) who were more in touch with the magical side of the world than the average person.

### ***In Norse Mythology***

**Gullveig (gull-vey-ig)**—Gullveig was a mysterious witch who got on the wrong side of the Aesir.

Gullveig the witch would regularly visit Asgard, the home of the Aesir gods and goddesses. What the gods found so obnoxious about Gullveig was that every time she'd visit she'd only talk about how much she loved gold and other precious metals. This happened every time. The gods did not like such greed; they thought it was unseemly. Finally it got to be too much and they threw Gullveig into a fire. However, she was too strong and the fire did not kill her. The gods threw her onto the fire two more times, but she never died. Three times they tried to kill her and three times she rose from the fire totally reborn. They began to call her Heid which means "shining one." She became a goddess of dark magic after this.

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When the Vanir found out about how the Aesir had treated Gullveig and how they had unwittingly unleashed a being powerful in dark magic, the Vanir declared war on the Aesir. This went on for ages. Neither side could win so they called a truce and to cement their truce agreed to exchange a few gods and goddesses. The Aesir received Frey and his sister Freya.

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***Mythology Connection!*** The war between the Aesir and the Vanir, two groups of powerful deities is similar to the war between the Olympian gods and the Titans in Greek mythology. The difference—in the war between the Olympians and the Titans there was a winner and the Titans were thrown into Tartarus or punished in some way.

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## ***In Norse Society***

### **Volvas**

The Volvas were actually the "witches" of ancient Norse society. The word "volva" meant "wand carrier." I call them witches, because that is what they came to be known as, but they were actually much closer to the Celtic Druids than to witches. Volvas practiced shamanism (which is communicating with the spirit world), sorcery, and prophecy.

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Volvas were mainly women, unlike the Celtic Druids who were men, and Freya was the goddess of the Volvas. The god Odin also versed himself in magic, but some of the other gods considered it “unmanly,” and Loki mocked Odin for pursuing the magic of the Volvas. The magic they practiced was called Seid (**sayth**).

Volvas were similar to Druids in that they were well regarded and given a spot of high standing in the community. A respected Volva had a lot of authority wherever she went and was well paid. Leaders of communities would summon Volvas in order to learn something about what was going on in the community. If there was a drought or something bad was happening they'd call for a Volva to perform her magic and discover the cause and cure of the drought or whatever was ailing the community.

The book, the *Saga of Eric the Red*, written in about the 13<sup>th</sup> century, contains a story about a Volva—Thorbjorg (an example of someone named after Thor). Thorbjorg traveled around during the winter and performed her magic. The people of one community were suffering because of a drought and so they called upon Thorbjorg to give a prophecy about when or if the drought would end. One of the chiefs invited her to his hall, because he wanted to know what was going to happen with the drought.

He set her a “high seat,” considered a great honor, which is literally a seat raised up on a dais of some kind so she was higher than the rest of the group. Usually the chieftain or king or other person of great honor sat at the high seat.

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The chieftain asked her to look over his homestead, his herd, and his people. Then they fed her all kinds of strange foods. These strange foods were said to help her "see" and do her magic. The next day she asked for preparations to be made so she could do her "enchantments." One of the requirements was that women needed to sing the "Weird Song" which called up the spirits.

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***Harry Potter Connection!*** In *The Goblet of Fire*, the Weird Sisters band plays at the Hogwarts Yule Ball.

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Unlike Sybil Trelawney, or Cassandra in Greek mythology, the seeress Thorbjorg was highly respected and sought after. People believed her prophecies and paid her well to tell them.

### Thor and Hagrid, Odin and Dumbledore

While there is no Thor or Odin in the Harry Potter books, the relationship of Thor and Odin to the Norse people and the relationship of Hagrid and Dumbledore to the Hogwarts students, particularly Harry, Ron, and Hermione, is strikingly similar.

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Thor was the god of the people, the one they loved the most and the one who was the most popular. Many people were named after Thor with names like Thorstein and Thorald for boys or Thora for girls. Many places were named after Thor as well, like Thorshavn, the capital of the Faroe Islands. Archeologists have found dozens of amulets and engravings of Thor's hammer among the remains of the average Norse person's house. Not so with Odin. The Norse people apparently did not carry around amulets of Odin. Odin is more remote and unattainable. People feared him rather than loved him. This is much like Hagrid and Dumbledore. Hagrid is much more universally loved than Dumbledore. When Harry, Ron, and Hermione want advice or want to talk to someone about what is going on at the school or with Voldemort, they go to Hagrid not Dumbledore. Even though the Slytherin's hated Hagrid (they hated Dumbledore too), most of the students were fond of Hagrid. The students look at Dumbledore with a bit of awe and even a little fear.

Thor is the god who drinks and eats heartily. Thor loves a good feast. Hagrid is the giant man who often drinks too much and says too much. Hagrid is easily tricked by those wishing to do him wrong (like Quirrell or Rita Skeeter or Umbridge), and by Harry, Ron, and Hermione as well. They know that with enough prodding and verbal gymnastics, they can trick Hagrid into telling them what they need to know. In this way the god Thor and Hagrid are alike. In one story Thor is tricked out of his hammer, Mjolnir, during, what else, a feast. In order to get it back he had to dress up as the goddess Freya and offer to marry a giant to get his hammer back. I'm sure he was one ugly woman!

Odin does not eat *at all*. He sits on his throne and feeds any food he gets to his two wolves, Geri and Freki. In the Harry Potter world, Dumbledore attends the feasts, but is not really shown eating. He does have a fondness for lemon drops

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and Bertie Botts Every Flavour Beans though, which makes him a little more down-to-earth than Odin.

Thor grapples with giants, not magic. Hagrid, although a magical person, is not allowed to use magic. He is simple and predictable.

Odin was capricious, and people did not know what he would do or when he might turn on a favorite. He is the god of wisdom and magic. He sacrificed himself on the World Tree in order to gain the knowledge of the runes. Like Odin, Dumbledore is a more remote figure, the Headmaster who is the master of incredible knowledge, but who keeps to himself. Dumbledore cannot be tricked into spilling information. Dumbledore knows more about magic than anyone else in the wizarding world. Odin is the god of magic and knows more about magic than any of the other gods. Odin knows everything that happens in Midgard, the world of humans, because his two ravens, Huginn and Muninn, bring him information every day. Similarly, Dumbledore seems to know about everything that happens in Hogwarts. He also has an animal familiar—Fawkes the Phoenix.

It's easy to imagine Hagrid carrying a giant hammer around with him and fighting giants, like Thor, while it is equally easy to imagine Dumbledore sacrificing himself for magical knowledge, like Odin.

### Thor and Hagrid

As we've seen, Thor is very much like Hagrid. Like Hagrid, Thor's mother is a giantess. Thor is of course big and strong like Hagrid, but he also has a ruddy



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complexion, red beard, loud voice, is not very subtle in how he deals with people and problems, and he eats and drinks a lot. He particularly likes to drink—just like Hagrid. Both Thor and Hagrid can get into trouble because of drinking too much. Thor once got so drunk at a feast with the giants that they were able to steal his hammer from him. He had to go to a lot of trouble to get it back. Hagrid is tricked into giving Professor Quirrell information about the Sorcerer's Stone in trade for a dragon egg while drinking at the Hog's Head. He is also given dangerous creatures like the Blast-Ended Screws because he had been drinking. The Screws eventually got him into trouble with Professor Umbridge.

### *Thor and the Cauldron*

In one story Thor was upset because Asgard had run out of mead. Aegir, the god who prepared the mead told Thor that if he was unhappy then he needed to go find a cauldron big enough to hold all of the mead the gods needed (and that's a big cauldron!).

Thor knew of the very cauldron he wanted. It belonged to, who else, but a giant! Thor disguised himself as a young man (a rather large young man presumably) and went to Hymir's (HEE-meer) house to get his cauldron that was *a mile deep*. Surely a cauldron that big would be big enough for the gods.

During his stay Thor and Hymir ended up going fishing together. Hymir told Thor that he must find his own bait. What did Thor do? He pulled the head off Hymir's largest ox! Hymir was not amused or pleased, but they went fishing together anyway. Thor took the oars and rowed them far out to sea, so far that Hymir became nervous because he was afraid of Jormungandr, the Midgard Serpent, the serpent that is entwined around the entire world.

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Thor and Hymir stopped and Thor placed his enormous bait on his fishing hook and cast off. Although Hymir did not know it Thor *wanted* to catch Jormungandr. And he did. Thor caught the giant serpent and as Thor brought him up the serpent thrashed around and spit poison. Thor, with his considerable god strength, stretched out to brace his legs and they went right through the bottom of the boat and onto the floor of the ocean. Jormungandr struggled and fought, but Thor had him within his reach. Then, all of a sudden, Hymir panicked and cut the line, allowing Jormungandr to break free. In a last ditch effort, Thor threw his hammer at the serpent. It struck a glancing blow but otherwise did nothing to hurt him. Jormungandr returned to the sea but held a lasting and fatal grudge against Thor.

Thor was upset with Hymir for cutting his line. Hymir was upset with Thor for trying to catch the Midgard serpent. They returned to Hymir's hall fuming. As they feasted, Thor, still mad, tried to smash one of Hymir's favorite cups, but it didn't break. Hymir laughed at him. Angry, Thor threw it at Hymir's head! It broke. Hymir was a giant so it didn't hurt him, but he was finally impressed with Thor's strength and gave him the cauldron.

Thor brought the cauldron back to Asgard and gave it to Aegir. The cauldron was worth the effort. It was definitely big enough for all of the gods' mead. They could drink all they want and the mead never ran out.

### *Thor and his Feats of Strength*

Like Hagrid, Thor also traveled to the realm of the giants and also learned that giants are not to be taken lightly. Thor, Loki, and two servants traveled to Jotunheim because Thor was convinced the giants were going to attack Asgard.

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When they arrived at Utgard, the palace of a powerful giant Utgard-Loki, they discovered that the giants require their guests to prove themselves.

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***Harry Potter Connection!*** Hagrid and Madame Maxime had to prove themselves to the giants through giving the appropriate gifts.

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Thor, Loki, and the servants had to prove themselves through feats of strength.

First up: Loki. He claimed he could eat more than anyone. He and a giant sat across from each other at a table and started eating. But Loki had barely touched his food before the giant had eaten the meat, the bones, and even the dishes! Loki lost the contest.

Next up: Tialfi, Thor's human servant. He offered to compete in a foot race. Unfortunately for him the giant he competed against was much faster. So fast, indeed that he was able to turn around and return before Thialfi even got to the end. He lost too.

Finally Thor agreed to compete. His first task: a drinking contest. Thor was given a special drinking horn and told that most giants could drain it in one drink with three drinks considered a poor showing. Poor Thor, he drank and drank and drank, but could not drain the drinking horn. The third time he made

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a little dent in the horn, but still failed at emptying it. Utgard-Loki looked at Thor with disgust and told him he thought Thor could drink more than that.

Thor's next contest was to lift up Utgard-Loki's cat. It was a big cat, but Utgard-Loki taunted Thor by telling him that young boy giants lift it. The cat came into the room and Thor got underneath it and tried to lift it. He pushed and pushed, but could only manage to get the cat to arch its back and one paw to slightly lift off the ground. Again Thor lost his contest.

Now Thor got into an angry rage and was determined to prove himself and so offered to fight one of the giants. Utgard-Loki looked around his hall and told Thor that everyone would find it beneath him to fight with Thor. The giant appointed his old nurse to fight Thor. Thor fought the old woman, but the harder he fought the stronger she got. He could not budge her and finally fell to his knees. Utgard-Loki stopped the fight.

The next day Thor and his companions readied to leave. Utgard-Loki accompanied them away from the giant's hall. Thor told Utgard-Loki that he was humiliated. Utgard-Loki told Thor a secret; he had been worried because Thor showed such considerable strength! He then told Thor the truth:

- Loki competed against Fire which devours everything in its path.
- Thialfi ran his running race against Thought and no one is faster than Thought.

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- Thor's drinking horn was attached to the sea and he had no chance of draining it. However, on the third drink Thor did manage to make a dent and that worried the giant.
  - The giant cat was actually part of the Midgard serpent's body and since it encircles the entire world it is impossible to lift it off its feet. Thor almost managed to lift his paw off the ground.
  - The old giant woman was Old Age and she defeats everyone no matter how strong they are.

Utgard-Loki told Thor to leave and never come back. Angry at the giant for tricking him, Thor reached for his hammer. Just as he was about to bring it down on the giant's head, Utgard-Loki disappeared. Thor returned home to Asgard disappointed and angry at the giant's trickery.

Like Hagrid, Thor had to return home without having accomplished what he set out to do.

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***Mythology Connection!*** Thor had to perform many feats to earn the giants' trust. Heracles, Jason, and Psyche all had their own magical feats to perform to either please a ruler or king or to stay alive.

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### *Thor's Scar*

In one story Thor fought the giant, Hrungrir, and during this fight Thor received a wound to his forehead. Thor threw his hammer, Mjolnir, at Hrungrir and the giant threw a whetstone at the god. The hammer and the whetstone met in mid-air. Thor's hammer ended up finding the giant, because, as we know, Mjolnir always hits its mark, killing the giant, but not before a piece of whetstone lodged in Thor's forehead. He went to a sorceress to remove it, but while she performed her magic Thor told her that her long lost husband would return home soon. She grew so excited that she couldn't remember the magic and the piece of whetstone remained lodged in Thor's forehead forever.

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***Harry Potter Connection!*** This is similar to when Harry and Voldemort met in the graveyard. They each attacked the other, but their weapons (in their case, spells) met in the middle. It is also reminiscent of when Voldemort tried to kill Harry as a baby. His curse nearly killed him, and it left a scar on Harry's forehead.

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### Odin and Dumbledore

One way in which Dumbledore is like Odin is that he is willing to make a great sacrifice. In *The Deathly Hallows*, Dumbledore was willing to sacrifice himself to gain the locket Horcrux that had been hidden in the cave. In order to obtain the locket Horcrux, Dumbledore had to drink the poison which covered it. He

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nearly died. Only Harry helping him into the boat saved him. Not only did Dumbledore make that sacrifice, he also sacrificed his right hand when he touched the cursed Gaunt family ring. Sacrifices play a big role in many mythologies, Norse included.

In Norse mythology, Odin made a huge sacrifice. Odin sacrificed his EYE.

Odin wanted knowledge and not just any knowledge—he wanted the knowledge of the Universe. He traveled to the Well of Urd, also known as the Well of Wisdom, to visit the god Mimir (*Mee-meer*), who was the guardian of the well. The Well of Urd is the well that nourishes the World Tree, Yggdrasil, the tree in which all of the nine worlds of humans, gods, giants, dwarves, and elves live. Because the World Tree grows in its water, the Well of Urd houses all the knowledge of the universe.

When Odin approached the god Mimir, he asked if he could drink from the Well. Being a good guardian, Mimir told Odin he'd have to make a sacrifice if he wanted to drink from the Well. The Well contained too much deep wisdom to offer to just anyone. A great sacrifice was required.

Odin gave Mimir his eye. Mimir then gave Odin a drink from the Well of Wisdom. From that moment on, Odin gained extensive knowledge. Odin is the Norse god with the most wisdom and is the most far-seeing.

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There is symbolism in Odin giving up his eye in order to gain wisdom. After all, the eye is the vehicle through which we see, and being able to “see” clearly is usually considered a sign of wisdom.

Both Odin and Dumbledore are willing to do just about anything for wisdom and knowledge.

### Norse Mythology Creation Story

A mythology of a people is not just the stories they tell about their gods and goddesses. They also have stories about how the world was created, how humans were created, and why certain things came to be. Additionally, in Norse mythology they had a story about how the world *was going to end*.

### Creation of the World

In the beginning there was a chasm called Ginnungagap. In one direction, mist and in another direction, fire. When the two came together it created a frost-giant named Ymir and a cow named Audhumla (ood-hoom-la). The cow survived by licking salt off of the ice. She licked the ice and then a man, Bur, appeared. Bur had a son, Buri and then Buri had three sons—Odin, Vili and Ve. They were not giants, but gods. One day Ymir, the frost-giant slept and he sweated out a male and a female under his left arm. From them came a race of giants.



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Odin and his brothers battled with the frost-giant Ymir and killed him. When Ymir's blood poured out it killed all of the other frost giants, except two. They swam until they came to a rock. The race of frost giants then continued.

Odin and his brothers divided up Ymir's body to make the world:

- Body=World
- Blood=Oceans, lakes, rivers, and other bodies of water.
- Flesh=Earth
- Skull=Sky
- Bones=Mountains
- Teeth=Rocks
- Hair=Trees

They called this world Midgard (which means “middle earth”) and it became the world of humans.

### *Yggdrasil (ig-drah-sill)*

Yggdrasil is the World Tree. Some stories say that Yggdrasil grew out of Ymir's body. It is an ash tree and it supports all nine of the worlds of the Norse cosmos.

At the upper level are three worlds:

- *Asgard*, the home of the Aesir.

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- *Vanaheim*, home of the Vanir.
  - *Alfheim*, home of the light elves.

The middle four worlds:

- *Midgard*, home of humans.
- *Jotunheim*, home of the giants.
- *Svartalfheim*, home of the dark elves.
- *Nidavellir*, home of the dwarfs.

The bottom two worlds:

- *Hel*, realm of the dead.
- *Muspellheim*, land of fire where no one dwells.

The roots of Yggdrasil are nourished by water from three wells and the three Norns live by the well Urd that waters the tree. The root in Niflheim is in a dark and nasty place, and the Nidhogg eats away at the root trying to destroy it. The branches above hold an eagle and a squirrel. The eagle surveys the world while the squirrel goes up and down the tree between the eagle and the Nidhogg delivering their insults to one another.

### Creation of Humans

Odin and his brothers were walking along the edge of the sea admiring their handiwork in creating the world when they came across two fallen trees, an

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elm and an ash. Odin breathed the spark of life into them. The other brothers gave each tree the five senses. These two trees became the first man and woman; the woman, Embla, came from the elm and the man, Ask, from the ash. Odin and his brothers gave the two new humans the world of Midgard.

### The Story of Balder and Loki

The story of Balder and Loki is important because it signals the beginning of Ragnarok, the Norse end-of-the-world scenario. What happens to Balder is the catalyst that sets the circumstances of Ragnarok in motion. It is also a story of traveling to the underworld, disguises, and treachery. All familiar components for a mythological story!

Balder was the god of light and truth. He lived in his palace, Breidablik (bray-tha-bleek), where no untruth could pass through its doors. His wife was Nanna, a goddess of vegetation. Balder had a twin brother, Hodur who was his exact opposite. Where Balder represented life, Hodur represented dark. Where Balder represented innocence and truth, Hodur represented sin. Balder could see with clarity while Hodur was totally blind.

Balder started having visions in his sleep of dark and terrible things. They were so bad that they bothered him during the day, and since he couldn't sleep, he became depressed and gloomy and moped around Asgard. This concerned the other gods and goddesses. Since no untruths could pass through his palace walls they knew the visions he was having were true, and since they bothered him so much they knew the visions were awful. No one wanted to see Balder, their beautiful god of light, upset by such dreams. Balder was the god of light

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and his body even emitted radiant light. His light must have been dim while suffering from these visions.

The gods gathered to discuss the problem. What should they do about Balder? They decided that his mother Frigga would travel to every corner of all the nine worlds and get assurances from everything that they would not harm Balder. Frigga received her assurances. After that, all the gods met in Gladsheim again to celebrate Balder's health. They got drunk and decided to check and see if Frigga really had protected Balder. One of the gods threw a pebble at Balder's forehead. He felt nothing. So the gods decided to try other weapons. They threw stones and daggers and swords until finally Thor threw axes at him. The items all bounced off of Balder. All the gods enjoyed themselves with this sport.

However, Loki, the trickster god, wanted to cause trouble. He was determined to see if Balder really was impervious to harm. He slunk off to come up with a plan. He went to Frigga's palace where she had gone, because she was tired of the festivities. Loki disguised himself as a disgusting old hag and he asked Frigga what was causing all that commotion and why the gods all threw things at Balder if they were supposed to be celebrating him. Frigga told him. He asked if she really got the assurances from everything. She admitted that she hadn't gotten one from mistletoe. Frigga was so disgusted by Loki's disguise that she was in a hurry to get him out of her palace, and so she was not as careful as she should have been.

### *Balder's Death*

Loki went to the forest where mistletoe grows and formed some into a fine point. He then went back to the celebrations where he located Hodur not

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participating in the festivities because of his blindness. Loki sympathized with Hodur that he couldn't participate and offered to give him a good weapon and to guide his aim. Hodur allowed Loki to guide him. Hodur went over to where Balder and the others were celebrating and with Loki guiding his aim the mistletoe spear pierced Balder through the chest. Balder died immediately.

At first the gods were stunned, but then they recognized Loki behind Hodur. As soon as he realized he was found out, he ran away. The gods then began to mourn their loss. Odin knew, though, that the death of light and truth meant the beginning of the end of the world.

Frigga asked for one of the gods to travel to Hel in the underworld to return Balder to the land of the living. Hermod, son of Odin, and the messenger to the gods, offered. Odin lent him his eight legged horse Sleipnir.

In Niflheim Hermod found Balder and Nanna, but their spirits seemed dead. He tried to get Balder to leave but Balder said that it was impossible. So, Hermod spoke to Hel of Frigga's pleas to return Balder to life. Hel agreed that she would release Balder only if everything in the world, both animate and inanimate, shed a tear for Balder.

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***Mythology Connection!*** In Greek mythology, when Persephone was kidnapped by Hades and held in the Underworld, it was Hermes, the Greek messenger god, who went to get her back. He was no more successful than Hermod. Notice also how similar their names—Hermes...Hermod.

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Odin sent out four messengers to announce Balder's death and ask for everything to grieve. Everything grieved and shed a tear except one giantess. She refused to shed a tear. Turned out that the giantess was Loki in disguise!

After the mourning, Odin fathered a child named Vali. Vali was born solely to revenge Balder's death. He carried a quiver full of arrows, and when he came across Hodur he killed him.

### ***Loki's Punishment***

Loki was banished from Asgard for his actions. But one day he returned while the gods were feasting, and he started shouting at them. Thor was not there but he walked in as Loki shouted at his wife Sif. Thor tried to hit him with his hammer, but the nimble Loki got away again. He hid in a hut on top of a hill. He devised ways of finding out if one of the gods was coming for him. He even stayed next to a stream that led downhill and if he needed to escape, he'd turn into a salmon and swim away. Unfortunately for Loki, Thor found out about this and when the gods returned for him they were able to throw a net and catch him as a fish. They then imprisoned Loki and tortured him. They tied him

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up with the entrails of his own son below a serpent whose venom would drip into his eyes. Loki's wife caught the venom in a bowl, but when she poured the contents of the bowl out, Loki would get it in his eyes again.

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***Mythology Connection!*** In Greek mythology Zeus punished Prometheus for tricking him and helping humans. Like Loki, Prometheus was bound and tortured by an animal. An eagle came and tore out his liver every day.

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With Balder dead and Loki imprisoned the end of the world will happen. All of the forces of evil and those of good will face off. At the end almost everything will be destroyed. Balder, however, will survive and return from the dead after the battles and destruction of Ragnarok.

### Destruction of the World: Ragnarok

The mythology of the Norse is different from the Greek, Roman, or Celtic in that they have a conception that the world will end one day and most of the gods and goddesses will perish with it. Try to imagine what the Norse world was like—long, hard, cold winters when you could go weeks or months without seeing the sun. The best light you'd get would be a sort of twilight. If you lived in Iceland you'd see volcanoes spewing up lava and ash in addition to the ice covering the ground. This kind of natural environment would be very conducive to envisioning a dramatic end of the world.

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The end of the world scenario is called Ragnarok, and it means the Doom of the Gods. It will be a great battle between the forces of good and evil. Balder's death will signal the beginning of Ragnarok, and from there the world turns evil.

Ragnarok will happen in stages:

- A terrible war in Midgard with all kinds of foul crimes taking place, where brother will fight against brother, and where goodness will be destroyed.
- A horrible winter that will last for three years. It will be bitterly cold with howling winds and black darkness. People will starve.
- The sun and moon will be devoured and the world will be covered in a complete darkness.
- Fenris the wolf (who had been bound by the gods) escapes his captivity and will rise up to seek vengeance on the gods who had tricked and imprisoned him.
- Loki will break free of his bonds and will also seek vengeance on the gods. He will captain a ship filled with the dead from Niflheim.
- The giants will gather in Jotunheim and prepare to attack the gods.
- The Midgard Serpent will thrash around causing terrible waves and spitting his poison over the land and sky.
- An awful ship, Naglfar, which is made from the nails of dead men, will carry giants to the battlefield.



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- Hel will leave Niflheim to join the battle. She will consume the corpses on the battlefield.

Heimdall, the god who watches the rainbow bridge, Bifrost, will sound his horn to warn the other gods. They will then don their armor and prepare for battle with the forces of evil. A terrible battle will take place between the gods and the forces of good on one side and the evil creatures on the other side.

- Odin fights with Fenris the wolf. Fenris swallows Odin whole and kills him. However, Odin's son Vidar stomps on Fenris's jaw and kills him in turn.
- Thor fights with Jormungandr, the Midgard Serpent. Thor kills the monster but is killed himself by the serpent's venom. Thor takes nine steps before dropping down dead.
- Heimdall fights Loki. They kill each other.
- Frey fights with a fire god, Surt. Frey is killed because he has no sword. He had given it away because of his love for a giantess.
- Tyr fights Garm, the hound who guarded the gates of Niflheim. They kill each other.

After the fighting between the gods, when nearly everyone is dead, all of the nine worlds will be consumed by fire.

From the ashes, though, there will be rebirth. The World Tree Yggdrasil will survive, though a bit worse for wear, and two humans will spring from it. They will repopulate the world of humans. The world will become green again.

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However, some evil will remain in the world. After all you can't have good without evil. The Nidhogg survives as does a new underworld to house evil people.

Odin's sons Vali and Vidar will survive, as will Thor's sons Magni and Modi. Balder and his brother Hodur arise from the dead along with Odin's brothers Vili and Ve. All of these beings, along with the two new people, create and live in the new world.

### Harry Potter's End of the World

At the end of *The Deathly Hallows*, the forces of good (Harry and all of his friends) fight the forces of evil (Voldemort and his followers) at the Battle of Hogwarts. This is essentially an “end of the world” scenario; Voldemort's victory could mean end of the world for everyone who is good and opposes him. If he were to win, then their world would be destroyed. Hogwarts would be a place where people like the Carrows rule, and the Ministry of Magic would be a place where people like Dolores Umbridge are in charge.

The herald that signals that the end will come, similar to the killing of Balder, is the death of Professor Dumbledore. Bad things follow Dumbledore's death.

- The Minister of Magic is killed.
- Snape and the Carrows take over Hogwarts.

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- Death Eaters roam the world searching for “undesirables,” particularly Harry.
  - The Muggle Born Registration is born and Snatchers are dispatched to arrest Muggle-borns.
  - Prisoners are freed from Azkaban.

Then, just like during Ragnarok, the Battle of Hogwarts pits the forces of good against the forces of evil one-on-one. Bad people die.

- Molly Weasley kills Bellatrix Lestranger.
- George Weasley and Lee Jordan take out the Death Eater Yaxley.
- Professor Flitwick kills Dolohov.
- Hagrid kills Macnair, the executioner.
- Ron and Neville “bring down” Fenrir Greyback.

In the Battle of Hogwarts, just like with Ragnarok, some of the people fighting for good die.

- Fred Weasley is killed in an explosion.
- Remus Lupin is killed by Dolohov.
- Nymphadora Tonks is killed by Bellatrix Lestranger.
- Collin Creevy dies.

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Luckily the forces of good triumph over the forces of evil in the Harry Potter books!