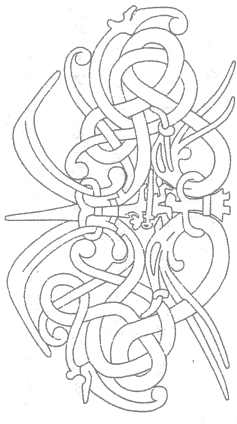


Weil Gaiman

Norse

Mythology

BEFORE
THE BEGINNING,
AND AFTER



N-Dark-67
[Yay boy]
MUSPELL (Fire) - Real

I

Before the beginning there was nothing—no earth, no heavens, no stars, no sky: only the mist world (formless and shapeless) and the fire world, always burning.

To the north was Niflheim, the dark world. Here eleven poisonous rivers cut through the mist, each springing from the same well at the center of it all, the roaring maelstrom called Fivergelmir. Niflheim was colder than cold, and the murky mist that cloaked everything hung heavily. The skies were hidden by mist and the ground was clouded by the chilly fog.

To the south was Muspell. Muspell was fire. Everything there glowed and burned. Muspell was light where Niflheim was gray, molten lava where the mist world was frozen. The land was aflame with the roaring heat of a blacksmith's fire; there was no solid earth, no sky. Nothing but sparks and spurting heat, molten rocks and burning embers.

In Muspell, at the edge of the flame, where the mist

burns into light, where the land ends, stood Surtr, who existed before the gods. He stands there now. He holds a flaming sword, and the bubbling lava and the freezing mist are as one to him.

It is said that at Ragnarok, which is the end of the world, and only then, Surtr will leave his station. He will go forth from Muspell with his flaming sword and burn the world with fire, and one by one the gods will fall before him.

II

Between Muspell and Niflheim was a void, an empty place of nothingness, without form. The rivers of the mist world flowed into the void, which was called Ginnungagap, the "yawning gap." Over time beyond measure, these poisoned rivers, in the region between fire and mist, slowly solidified into huge glaciers. The ice in the north of the void was covered in frozen fog and pellets of hail, but to the south, where the glaciers reached the land of fire, the embers and the sparks from Muspell met the ice, and warm winds from the flame lands made the air above the ice as gentle and as comfortable as a spring day.

Where the ice and the fire met the ice melted, and in the melting waters life appeared: the likeness of a person bigger than worlds, huger than any giant there will be or has ever been. This was neither male, nor was it female, but was both at the same time.

This creature was the ancestor of all the giants, and it called itself Ymir.

Ymir was not the only living thing to be formed by the melting of the ice: there was also a hornless cow, more enormous than the mind could hold. She licked the salty blocks of ice for food and for drink, and the milk that ran from her four udders flowed like rivers. It was this milk that nourished Ymir.

The giant drank the milk, and grew.

Ymir called the cow Audhumla.

The cow's pink tongue licked people from the blocks of ice: the first day only a man's hair, the second his head, and the third day the shape of a whole man was revealed.

This was Buri, the ancestor of the gods.

Ymir slept, and while it slept, it gave birth: a male and a female giant were born from beneath Ymir's left arm, a six-headed giant born from its legs. From these, Ymir's children, all giants are descended.

Buri took a wife from among these giants, and they had a son, whom they called Bor. Bor married Bestla, daughter of a giant, and together they had three sons: Odin, Vili, and Ve.

Odin and Vili and Ve, the three sons of Bor, grew into manhood. They saw as they grew, far off, the flames of Muspell and the darkness of Niflheim, but they knew that each place would be death to them. The brothers were trapped forever in Ginnungagap, the vast gap between the fire and the mist. They might as well have been nowhere.

There was no sea and no sand, no grass nor rocks, no soil, no trees, no sky, no stars. There was no world, no heaven and no earth, at that time. The gap was nowhere: only an empty place waiting to be filled with life and with existence.

It was time for the creation of everything. Ve and Vili and Odin looked at each other and spoke of what was needful to do, there in the void of Ginnungagap. They spoke of the universe, and of life, and of the future.

Odin and Vili and Ve killed the giant Ymir. It had to be done. There was no other way to make the worlds. This was the beginning of all things, the death that made all life possible.

They stabbed the great giant. Blood gushed out from Ymir's corpse in unimaginable quantities; fountains of blood as salt as the sea and gray as the oceans gushed out in a flood so sudden, so powerful, and so deep that it swept away and drowned all the giants. (Only one giant, Bergelmir, Ymir's grandson, and his wife survived, by clambering onto a wooden box, which bore them like a boat. All the giants we see and we fear today are descended from them.)

Odin and his brothers made the soil from Ymir's flesh. Ymir's bones they piled up into mountains and cliffs.

Our rocks and pebbles, the sand and gravel you see: these were Ymir's teeth, and the fragments of bones that were broken and crushed by Odin and Vili and Ve in their battle with Ymir.

Time

black

scarific

1000

black

The seas that girdle the worlds: these were Ymir's blood and his sweat.

Look up into the sky: you are looking at the inside of Ymir's skull. The stars you see at night, the planets, all the comets and the shooting stars, these are the sparks that flew from the fires of Muspell. And the clouds you see by day? These were once Ymir's brains, and who knows what thoughts they are thinking, even now.

III

The world is a flat disk, and the sea encircles the perimeter. Giants live at the edges of the world, beside the deepest seas.

To keep the giants at bay, Odin and Vili and Ve made a wall from Ymir's eyelashes and set it around the middle of the world. They called the place within the wall Midgard.

Midgard was empty. The lands were beautiful, but nobody walked the meadows or fished in the clear waters, nobody explored the rocky mountains or stared up at the clouds.

Odin and Vili and Ve knew that a world is not a world until it is inhabited. They wandered high and low, looking for people, and they found nothing. At last, on the rocky shingle at the edge of the sea, they found two logs, sea-tossed, that had floated there on the tides and been cast ashore.

still exists

The first log was a log of ash wood. The ash tree is resilient and handsome and its roots go deep. Its wood carves well and will not split or crack. Ash wood makes a good tool handle, or the shaft of a spear.

The second log they found, beside the first on the beach, so close to the first log they were almost touching, was a log of elm wood. The elm tree is graceful, but its wood is hard enough to be made into the toughest planks and beams; you can build a fine home or a hall from elm wood.

The gods took the two logs. They set the logs so they were upright on the sand, the height of people. Odin held them, and one by one he breathed life into them. No longer were they dead logs on a beach: now they were alive.

Vili gave them will; he gave them intelligence and drive. Now they could move, and they could want.

Ve carved the logs. He gave them the shape of people. He carved their ears, that they might hear, and their eyes, that they might see, and lips, that they might speak.

The two logs stood on the beach, two naked people. Ve had carved one with male genitals, the other he had carved female.

The three brothers made clothes for the woman and the man, to cover themselves and to keep them warm, in the chilly sea-spray on the beach at the edge of the world.

Last of all they gave the two people they had made names: the man they called Ask, or Ash Tree; the woman they called Embla, or Elm.

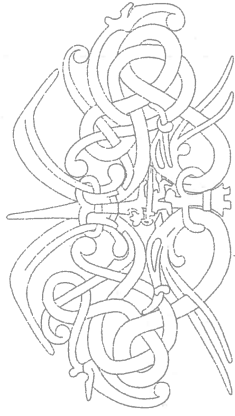
Ask and Embla were the father and the mother of

all of us: every human being owes its life to its parents and their parents and their parents before them. Go far enough back, and the ancestors of each of us were Ask and Embla.

Embla and Ask stayed in Midgard, safe behind the wall the gods had made from Ymir's eyelashes. In Midgard they would make their homes, protected from giants and monsters and all the dangers that wait in the wastes. In Midgard they could raise their children in peace.

That is why Odin is called the all-father. Because he was the father of the gods, and because he breathed the breath of life into our grandparents' grandparents' grandparents. Whether we are gods or mortals, Odin is the father of us all.

YGGDRASIL
AND THE
NINE WORLDS



Fenwick

The ash tree Yggdrasil is a mighty ash tree, the most perfect and beautiful of all trees: also the largest. It grows between the nine worlds and joins them, each to each. It is the biggest of all the trees there are, and the finest. The tops of its branches are above the sky.

It is so large that the roots of the ash are in three worlds, and it is fed by three wells. *he in - out them*

The first root, and the deepest, goes into the underworld, to Niflheim, the place that existed before other places. In the center of the dark world is the ever-churning spring, Hvergelmir, so loud it sounds like a roaring kettle. The dragon Nidhogg lives in these waters, and it is always gnawing at the root from below. *Just as it is*

The second root goes to the realm of the frost giants, to the well that belongs to Mimir.

There is an eagle who waits at the highest branches of the world-tree and who knows many things, and a hawk, who perches between the eagle's eyes.

A squirrel, Ratatosk, lives in the branches of the world-tree. It takes gossip and messages from Nidhogg, the dread

corpse-eater, to the eagle and back again. The squirrel tells lies to both of them, and takes joy in provoking anger.

There are four stags who graze on the huge branches of the world-tree, devouring the foliage and the bark. There are uncountable snakes at the base of the tree, biting at the roots.

The world-tree can be climbed. It is from this tree that Odin hanged himself in sacrifice, making the world-tree a gallows and himself the gallows god.

The gods do not climb the world-tree. They travel between the worlds using Bifrost, the rainbow bridge. Only the gods can travel on the rainbow; it would burn the feet of any frost giants or trolls who attempted to clamber up it to reach Asgard.

These are the nine worlds:

- 1) Asgard, the home of the Aesir. This is where Odin makes his home.
- 2) Alfheim, where the light elves live. The light elves are as beautiful as the sun or the stars.
- 3) Nidavellir, which is sometimes called Svartalfheim, where the dwarfs (who are also known as dark elves) live beneath the mountains and build their remarkable creations.
- 4) Midgard, which is the world of women and men, the world in which we make our home.
- 5) Jotunheim, where the frost giants and the mountain giants wander and live and have their halls.

9) Vanaheim, where the Vanir live. The Aesir and the Vanir are gods, united by peace treaties, and many Vanir gods live in Asgard, with the Aesir.

10) Niflheim, the dark mist world.

11) Muspell, the world of flame, where Surtr waits.

12) And there is the place named after its ruler: Hel, where the dead go who did not die bravely in battle.

The last root of the world-tree goes to a spring in the home of the gods, to Asgard, where the Aesir make their home. Each day the gods hold their council here, and it is here they will gather in the last days of the world, before they set out for the final battle of Ragnarok. It is called the well of Urd. ^{in Asgard}

There are three sisters, the norns, who are wise maidens. They tend the well, and make sure that the roots of Yggdrasil are covered with mud and cared for. The well belongs to Urd; she is fate, and destiny. She is your past. With her are Verdandi—her name means “becoming”—and hers is the present, and Skuld, whose name means “that which is intended,” and her domain is the future.

The norns will decide what happens in your life. There are other norns, not just those three. Giant norns and elf norns, dwarf norns and Vanir norns, good norns and bad, and what your fate will be is decided by them. Some norns give people good lives, and others give us hard lives, or short lives, or twisted lives.

They will shape your fate, there at Urd's well.