

In the beginning, before there were mountainous ranges jutting high into the clouds, seas of sand with flowing desert storms or the thunderous crashing waves of the oceans, before there were fields of grass swaying gracefully in the winds, there was no Earth and no Heaven above; only Múspellsheimr and Niflheimr and, what lay between them, Ginnungagap.

To the South lay a realm known as Múspellsheimr. This great expanse flickers with dancing flames of all imaginable colours, it frenzies with violence and anger and yet it shines with brightness and a chaotic hope of life. This is the realm of Surtr, the fire jötun, wielder of the infamous burning blade. No one could possibly endure to survive such an environment except for those that are born into it. Black Surtr, the Swarthy One lives here; he sits upon his molten throne in the furthest reaches of that land, brandishing his flaming sword; he sits awaiting Ragnarök when he will rise against the Gods and do battle with Freyr, bringing death to all and consuming the nine worlds of Yggdrasill with fire.

To the North is the realm known as Niflheimr. It is a vast expanse of land littered with mountains of ice and fields of drifting snow. In the heart of Niflheimr lies the great boiling spring Hvergelmir, it is the source of the eleven rivers: the Élivágar. They are calm Svöl and Gunnthrá the defiant, Fjörm and bubbling Fimbulthul, fearsome Slidr and storming Hríd, Sylgr, Ylgr, broad Víd and Leiptr which streaks like lightning, and lastly freezing Gjöll which flows closest to the gates of Hel and is home to the mighty bridge Gjallarbrú. Between these realms there once stretched a Cosmic and seeming Emptiness; this was known as Ginnungagap.

It was here that Ice-waves sprang from Hvergelmir streaming into the countless void. The yeasty venom in them slowly thickened and congealed like slag, and the rivers overflowed with Eitr. That venom also spat out in a Scotch mist, an unending miserable torrent that soon settled down, turning into hoarfrost. And so, this went on until all the Northern part of Ginnungagap was heavy with layers of ice and rime, a forsaken place haunted by gusts and skuthers of wind. And just as the Northern part was frozen and dead, so the Southern was molten and glowing with life, but in the between laid Ginnungagap as tranquil as the air on a cool summer's twilight. There, the fires of life poured out from Múspellsheimr where it infused with the icy rime of Niflheimr and there it rejoiced and gamboled and played like a jaded child, and the Eitr began to drip and in those drips did life make haste, and in that haste did take the form of the first life, a jötun.

That jötun was Ymir the Screamer; he was evil from his first thought and emotion, and while he slept, he did sweat, and from this sweat that oozed from within the pits of his arms he did breed a man and woman, and from his legs fathered a son of six heads, who was known as Þrúðgelmir. Ymir was the forefather of all the jötun, and they called him Aurgelmir. As the ice in Ginnungagap continued to melt, the fluid took the form of the primeval cow Auðumbla. Ymir fed from the four rivers of milk that coursed from her mighty teats for three days while Auðumbla sustained off the ice that surrounded her. And over the course of those three days Auðumbla continued to lick at the briny ice and by the eve of the first day a man's hair jutted from the ice. Auðumbla continued to lick away at the ice and by the eve of the second day a man's head had

arisen from the icy rime. Auðumbla licked again and again and by the eve of the third day a man's whole body had arisen from the salty brine, this man would be called Búri.

Búri in time would born a son named Borr and Borr would marry a daughter of Bölþorn, her name was Bestla, and she mothered three children. All of them sons. The first born was Óðinn the Alföðr, the second was Vili, and lastly was Vé, they were the first true Æsir.

The three sons of Borr had no liking for the brutish and evil Ymir and his growing gang of unruly jötun. And as time progressed the sons of Borr grew to hate them all. Finally, one day after their hatred grew too strong, they attacked and killed Ymir. His wounds gushed like mountainous rivers after a cold Winter's thaw; so much was the flow of blood, and so fast, that the deluge drowned and suffocated all the jötun, all except for Bergelmir and his wife. They had escaped, embarked in a lúðr made of a hollowed tree trunk, and rode out on the tides of carnage.

Óðinn, Vili and Vé raised the body of the dead jötun on to their massive shoulders and hauled it to the middle of Ginnungagap. This is where they fashioned the World out of the parts of his dismembered body. They shaped the Earth from Ymir's flesh and the mountains from his unbroken bones; from his teeth, jaws and fragments of shattered bones they made rocks and boulders and stones. Óðinn, Vili and Vé used the welter of blood to make landlocked lakes and seas. After that they formed the Earth and laid the rocking ocean in a ring right around it. And it was so vast, so expansive that most men would dismiss the very idea of crossing it.

The three brothers then raised Ymir's skull high above their heads creating the Heavens above, placing it so that it's four corners reached to the ends of the Earth. They set a dwarf under each corner of the sky, and their names are Norðri, Suðri, Austri and Vestri. Then Óðinn, Vili and Vé seized on the sparks and glowing embers from Múspellsheimr and called them the stars; they put them high in Ginnungagap to illuminate the Heaven above and the Earth below. In this way the brothers gave each star its proper place; some were fixed in the sky; others were free to follow the paths appointed to them.

The Earth was round and lay within the ring of the deep sea. Along the strand, the sons of Borr marked out tracts of land and gave them to the jötun that had survived, and there, in Jötunheimr, they settled and remained. They were so hostile that the three brothers built an enclosure further inland around a vast area of the Earth. They shaped it out of Ymir's eyebrows, and called it Miðgarðr. The sons of Borr used Ymir's brains as well; they flung them up into the air and turned them into every kind of cloud conceivable.

One of the jötun, Narvi, had a daughter called Night who was as dark eyed, dark haired and swarthy as the rest of her family. She married three times. Her first husband was a man called Naglfari and their son was Aud; her second husband was Annar, and their daughter was Earth; and her third husband was shining Delling who was related to the sons of Borr. Their son was

Day, and, like all his father's side of the family, Day was radiant and fair of face. Then Óðinn took Night and her son Day, sat them in horse-drawn chariots, and set them in the sky to ride round the world every two half-days. Night leads the way, and her horse is the frosty-maned Hrímfaxi. Day's horse is Skinfaxi; he has a gleaming mane that lights up sky and Earth alike.

Not too long after the world itself was created, Óðinn was walking along the coast of one of the new land masses. With him were two other Gods, these were his brothers Vili and Vé. They soon came across two fallen trees with their roots exposed along the shore and Vili said...

'Brother Óðinn do these tree trunks not look somewhat like the lifeless bodies of a woman and a man?'

'Yes, quite', replied Óðinn.

'I have a wondrous idea', exclaimed Vili...

'Let us create a new race from this ash and this elm.'

'That is an excellent idea Brothers', said Óðinn.

The three brothers gathered around the tree stumps resembling the lifeless bodies of the man and woman, first Óðinn breathed into them the spirit of life, and the two lifeless bodies arose, and flesh formed around the ash and elm stumps. Legs and arms formed, then the head, eyes, mouth and ears, and finally the genitals. Next Vili waved his hands, and the sparkle of intelligence entered their eyes, and their skin became warm with the blood now pumping from their hearts. Lastly, Vé gave to them the gifts of hearing and sight. They would call the man Ask and the women Embla. They dressed them in suitable clothes and were then given Miðgarðr, the world of human civilization, for their dwelling-place. They became the father and mother of the entire human species.

After the sons of Borr had made the first man and woman, and set Night and Day, Moon and Sun in the sky, they remembered the maggots that had squirmed and swarmed in Ymir's flesh and crawled over the Earth. Then they gave those wits and the shape of men, but they live under the hills and mountains in rocky chambers and grottoes and caverns. These man-like maggots are called dwarfs. Modsognir is their leader, and his deputy is Durin. So, the Earth was fashioned and filled with men and jötuns and dwarfs, surrounded by the sea and covered by the sky.

Once they were finished creating the realms of man and jötun and dwarf, the sons of Borr decided it was time to build their own realm, this would be known as Ásgarðr; a mighty and glorious realm, a place of green savannahs and shining palaces towering high over Miðgarðr. The realms of man and of God were linked together by Bifrost, a flaming rainbow bridge consisting of three colors, it was built by Magick and great skill, and it is wonderfully sturdy. All the Æsir; the guardians of men, crossed over and settled in Ásgarðr. Òðinn, the Alföðr the oldest and greatest of them all.

There are twelve Divine Gods and twelve Divine Goddesses, and a great assembly of other Æsir. And this was the beginning of all that has happened, remembered or forgotten, in the regions of the world. And all that has happened, and all the regions of the world, lie under the branches of the great ash Yggdrasill, the most wondrous of all trees. It soars over all that is and has three mighty roots that delve deep into Ásgarðr, Jötunheimr and Niflheimr, and there sits a spring under each. A great unnamed eagle sits in the branches of Yggdrasill while Veðrfölnir the hawk perches between his eyes, and Ratatoskr the bright eyed and bushy tailed red squirrel scurries up and down it, deer leap within it and nibble at it... meanwhile the great dragon Níðhögg gnaws at one of the mighty roots of Yggdrasill. It gives life to itself; it gives life to the unborn.

There are three wells that take leave within the mighty tree, Urðarbrunnr, the well of Urðr, where the three Norns - Urðr, Verðandi and Skuld make their home, and where they draw water for Yggdrasill so that its branches will not rot. Hvergelmir well, the birthplace of the eleven rivers, and Mímisbrunnr, Mimir's well. The winds whirl round it and Yggdrasill croons or groans. Yggdrasill always was, is and always will be.