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LEGENDS OF NORSELAND

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Contents

1. The Beginning
 2. Ygdrasil
 3. Odin At The Well Of Wisdom
 4. Odin And The All-Wise Giant
 5. The Stolen Wine. Part 1
 6. The Stolen Wine. Part 2
 7. Loke's Theft
 8. Thor's Hammer
 9. The Theft Of The Hammer
 10. The Finding Of The Hammer
 11. The Apples Of Life. Part 1
 12. The Apples Of Life. Part 2
 13. Loke's Wolf
 14. The Fenris Wolf
 15. Defeat Of Hrungner
 16. Thor And Skrymer
 17. Thor And The Utgard-King
 18. Thor And The Midgard Serpent
 19. Valkyries' Song
 20. The Dying Baldur
 21. The Punishment Of Loke
 22. The Darkness That Fell On Asgard
- Vocabulary

Hrungner, elated with his success, and never once dreaming that, had Odin so willed it, he, with his brave steed Goldfax, might have been left far behind in the race, strode into the halls of Asgard and called loudly for food and drink and rest.

All these were granted him, and the giant threw himself down upon a golden couch and stared insolently upon the gods. All were there save Thor. "And where," bellowed Hrungner, "is the great god Thor, the mighty thunderer who dares defy the Frost giants; and whose strength is boasted greater than that of Hrungner, the chief of the mighty Frost giants?"

"Bring him into my presence," roared the giant. "Let me prove to you that one giant at least dares defy even the greatest and most warlike of you all."

Away upon the sea, Thor heard this boast. "Who challenges me and defies my power?" he thundered; and with the swiftness of the wind, hastening upward toward the shining city, he burst in upon the giant stretched out upon the golden couch.

"I challenge you!" bellowed the giant, springing from his couch and facing the god of thunder.

Thor raised his hammer. The lightnings flashed from his eye. "Halt!" roared the giant. "Little credit will it be to the god of Thunder to fall in battle upon a Frost giant unarmed and unprotected. You are a coward! Fight me as becomes a great god on equal grounds and under fair conditions. Come to me in the land of Jotunheim, and there will I challenge you to battle. Then will your victory, if you win, lend lustre to your greatness; and the fear of you throughout the land of the Frost giants be greater than ever before."

"As you say," answered Thor with a sneer. "Go now, and make ready for the holmgang,¹ in which the insolent, boastful Hrungner shall learn the power of the gods whom, in his ignorance, he dares defy."

Then Hrungner departed from the city of Asgard, and assembled the giants together to prepare for the coming battle. "Let us make a giant of clay," and at once every giant in Jotunheim fell to work. Whole mountains were leveled to the earth, and the great masses of stone and earth heaped high; until, on the third day, there stood a giant nine miles high and three miles broad, ready to defy the power of the Thunder-god when he should come. But alas for the heart of this warrior of clay! None could be found, either in Midgard or in Jotunheim, of size proportionate to the body of the mighty creation; and so, in despair, the heart of a sheep was chosen, and around it the clay warrior was built.

At the first sound of rolling thunder—by which the coming of Thor was announced afar off—alas! this heart, fluttering and trembling, so shook the mighty form that its spear fell from its hand, its knees shook, and Hrungner was left to fight his battle alone with the angry son of Odin.

Onward, nearer and nearer, came Thor the Terrible. The lightnings flashed and the earth rumbled. Seizing a great mountain of flint in his hands, Hrungner waited. His eyes burned and his face was set.

Suddenly, forth from the ground beneath his feet, the god of Thunder burst. Hrungner sprang forward. With a mighty force he hurled the mountain of flint. Thor, with a roar, flung his mighty hammer. The two crashed together in midair. The flint broke, and one half of it was driven into the heavy skull of Thor. The hammer, cleaving the flint, sped

¹ Duel

