The Pathwalker's Guide to the Nine Worlds

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The pathwalker's guide to the nine worlds

raven kaldera

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Dedicated to the People of Asphodel who aided me, gifted me, and believed in me...
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Part I:

Walking Between The Worlds
Pathwalker

The road we walk has been walked before;
The footsteps of ancestors lie in the dirt before us
Under our feet, we tread in their ways.
These roads that I map have been mapped before,
Else no words would have come down to us
However dim, however garbled, however scorned,
Scraps and patches for us to piece together.
Yet the scraps and pieces are nothing
To the experience of the road itself,
So come, read the words of the new pathwalkers,
Those who follow the tracks, those who move
Through the dust, the snow, the rivers of blood and knives.

Why should we place this map in words?
Would it not be better, cries the wild heart,
To leave it secret, leave it myth, leave it scorned
That none might trouble its ways with disrespect?
Yet there will always be those who travel, I say back
To the fears and worries, and they deserve whatever words
Of wisdom we can give them. I would rather
Clean up the litter of a hundred tourists’ bones
Than have the death of one god-touched innocent
On my hands for my sin of silence.

So come, take this offering of words,
This map, this guide, this book of warnings,
And take those warnings to your heart,
Shapeshifter, journeyer, pathwalker, way-tamer,
Walker of the Roads cradled in the Great Tree,
And the Tree’s Blessing upon you, Walker,
In the roots, may you find your way
In the branches, may you find your way
In leaf that stretches to the darkening Gap, may you find your way.

—Raven Kaldera
I enter the labyrinth in broad daylight and walk it to the center. Around me is the physical world that I know so well, my familiar back field. The labyrinth was laid in the ground by many loving hands; I remember the two weekends that we all worked on putting it in, stone by stone. The grass is growing long between the rows of small rocks, but I can still follow it. I know that the center of this labyrinth is keyed to the Underworld, the Land of the Dead, but that’s not my goal. I will be coming out in Midgard, the world that is sister to my own.

I come into the center, make three circles around the Maypole that still stands there, left over from this year’s Beltane ritual, and start the way out again. I have my drum in one hand, jangling with bells, clattering with dried bones and hooves, decorated with symbols of the Nine Worlds. Over my shoulder, my bag is a heavy weight with all my sacred items. My magic traveling cloak hangs from my shoulders; with my free hand I find the place on its heavily embroidered map-surface that is Midgard. I can’t see it, but I remember what it looks like—fields and streams, plowed land, the surrounding ocean with the Great Serpent encircling it. “Midgard,” I say. “Take me there.” Then I start walking purposefully out of the labyrinth, beating the matching encircling snake-symbol on my drum. One beat for every step.

As I walk, the landscape around me slowly changes; something new becomes superimposed on it. I can still see my back field, the plastic tables and chairs left over from the last gathering, the familiar oak and birch and maple trees, the stone altar. That’s still there, if I focus in on it ... but I can also choose to focus on the other landscape that is quietly growing stronger—rock formations, mountains rising up above the trees, grass, the wide, wide dirt road that I am coming onto. I leave the labyrinth and join the road; I am not the only traveler on it. Transparent figures creak their carts ahead and behind; at the moment
there are no people with horses or oxen. I choose to keep to myself and not interact with them for the moment.

I’m in Midgard, or at least my home is, my astral body. For the moment, the two worlds are perfectly lined up. There will be imperfections soon, but I know how to handle them. I’m off to work; Midgard is only the entranceway to other worlds that I will need to get into. Most people’s jobs are only done in one world, but then, I’m not most people.

When I was four years old, a tall woman came to me in my dreams and told me that I belonged to her. She was dressed like the faery queen in one of my books—long black hair, gown like starry midnight, delicate veils—but even then, I was aware that this was just a mask that She had donned in order to make me feel better. I would not see Her real face for many years. She took me by the hand and brought me places, places that I didn’t understand, and showed me off to others that I couldn’t recognize. Years later, I would return to some of those places, and be stunned by where I had traveled as a child.

Without her holding my hand, I couldn’t leave my body. I got older, learned about astral projection, and tried it—only to be slammed back in as if a giant hand had shoved me. It was made clear to me that She did not approve, that She had other plans for me and that I was not to go wandering around without my flesh. I became a Neo-Pagan at fourteen, introduced into a Gardnerian coven by dating the high priestess’s eldest kid. I studied gods and goddesses and mythology; I knew from the clues that She left me that She was a Death goddess, a Lady of Darkness, but She would not tell me her name. I tried calling her Kali, or Hekate, but it wasn’t quite right. I learned then that it is not exactly true that all Goddesses are one Goddess, or even all Death goddesses.

There was a sense of waiting, all those years; I married, had a child, divorced, took lovers, learned how to do magic in many different Pagan groups. Somewhere along the line, I would get proddings—learn this, study that. Learn as many different forms of divination as you can, and get good at them. Learn how to move energy. Learn how to control your astral body. Learn
about herbs, the magical as well as the medicinal ones. Learn myths and stories. Learn to drum. Learn to sing. Still, I could say that this was the sort of thing that any budding witch ought to know. Nothing all that special, not yet.

I also came to terms with my medical condition. I am an intersexual, raised female, and I was dissatisfied with being female for personal and medical reasons. My abnormal endocrine system made me more and more chronically ill as I got older, and my seizure condition got worse as well. The divine proddings became divine orders; She who claimed that She owned me came to me more and more, telling me what to do. One thing that I had to do was to accept my status as a third-sex, third-gender person, and to modify my body in ways that reflected that. In other words, I was ordered to get a sex change. “Why?” I screamed. *I’m sending you where you’re needed most*, was all She would say. When She came to me, I often smelled rot, which I figured was some weird psychological twist on my part.

The idea both appealed to me and terrified me, and I ran. She followed. I became sicker and sicker, I began to bleed uncontrollably, and my shifting hormones started to make me unbalanced. I took refuge in a little cabin in the wilderness, alone except for my little daughter, and every weekend after my ex picked her up for visitation, I would run through the woods screaming. I fled from the spirits who pursued me at every turn, but I couldn’t get away. I rolled in the snow, I dived into icy water, I cut myself. I lay on the earth and dead people spoke to me through its thin crust. I ate dried leaves and raw meat. I kept seeing a Great Tree that turned and rotated as I watched; worlds lay in its branches like ripe fruit. (I figured that it was symbolic.)

Finally, after some months, my hormones temporarily equalized and I moved back to the city and met the woman who would later become my wife. Over the next year, the illness and hemorrhaging worsened until one night when I very nearly bled to death. I remember laying there and feeling my life eke its way out of me, and I was completely calm. I remember knowing that I was going to pass out, and there was a good chance I wouldn’t wake up again. I remember not caring all that much.
I did pass out, and I hallucinated that I was pulled apart in pieces and rebuilt. It was gruesome and gory, more like a slasher flick than some pretty guided meditation. I remember the skeletal hand that tore out my heart, and then put it carefully back in after they were done with me. (I figured that it was a skeletal hand because I'd seen too much gory art.) “They” were the hands that took me apart and put me back together differently. I say this knowing that it will make you, the reader, shake your head, but it was how I experienced things. Chunks of me were ripped out and thrown away, and never returned. A great hole was made in the back of my skull; I could see stars out through it, like a great swirling well you could fall in if you got too close. Something that I can only describe as “glittery” or “sparkly” sloshed around inside me, staining me all over, filling up my bloodstream.

I woke up grateful to be alive. When I made it to the bathroom and looked in the mirror, I saw with shock that my eyes had changed color. They had always been bluish-grey; now they had turned green, and they are green to this day. I'd always been madly attracted to men with green eyes; I could feel the message like a sign blinking behind me in the mirror. You are a walking dead man, She said to me, and you will walk as long as you do what I ask of you.

Parts of my personality were lost forever, never to return. I can barely remember what it was like to feel those things, desire those things, value those things. The hole in my skull yielded, and deities entered me, used my body, and left. The first god-possession took me entirely off guard, and I went to a few local Pagan priestesses for help. They had no idea what to do, and frankly the whole thing frightened them. In desperation, I went to an Umbanda house, and they trained me in how to handle the phenomenon—how to say yes to it, how to say no, how to keep it from frying your brain. Still, the Goddess I called Mama prodded me to leave as soon as I had that knowledge. This is not your path, she said, and I thanked them and left. I still talk to the orishas, and I still keep altars to them in gratitude, but they are not my focus.
I began to read history and anthropology out of sheer self-defense, trying desperately to find out what was happening to me. I ran across Mircea Eliade’s book *Shamanism*, and suddenly things began to click. I know that many people have complained about his scholarship, but for me, at this time, the book was a life-saver. I discovered that people all over the world had been experiencing the same thing that had happened to me—the long illness, the death and rebirth, the psychotic episode—which, true to form, never returned—the bothersome spirits, and the dismemberment hallucination. There was even repeated mention of the Great Tree, in many cultures. Suddenly, I wasn’t crazy; I had a name for all this, and for myself. I was to be a shaman.

One might think that I would settle down and accept my fate, but I’m a stubborn sort, and my daughter was at a period of her life when she needed a great deal of care from me. My ex was moving to California, and there would be no more shared parenting. I got down on my knees and prayed to the Mother Goddess for a reprieve, figuring she would understand. Just let me get her solidly and healthily to adulthood, I said, and then I will do whatever is asked of me, without hesitation. Just grant me this one thing, for her sake.

Amazingly, it was granted. My health got better, the bleeding lessened, and the spirits backed off. Over the next seven years, I got the sex change that had been demanded, and began to live life socially as a man. The male hormones cleared up three-quarters of my hormone troubles, raised my immune system, banished my depression, and stopped the hemorrhaging permanently. My body shapeshifted physically with a speed that awed me, and astonished the other female-to-male transsexuals in my support group. While they were still counting their first few chest hairs, I was growing a full beard and passing as male, even with large breasts. The secret was simple; I’d discovered that shapeshifting my astral body to male speeded up the effects of the testosterone. (That, and some divine aid, I suppose.) It was an object lesson: when I was fleeing my path, things would go appallingly bad for me. When I was following it, things would get dramatically better.
I had chest surgery—a bilateral mastectomy—when my daughter was thirteen. I’d never had any anesthetic before, or any painkillers stronger than an aspirin, and I was utterly unprepared for waking up with over a hundred stitches, eighteen pounds of flesh removed, and finding that my body refused to respond to narcotics. Codeine, Percoset, Demerol… I only got a little groggy, and the pain didn’t change. For the next four days, I did a private version of something like a Sun Dance in a hotel room, drumming, breathing, sometimes crying, sometimes riding the pain like the Gods rode me. When it had subsided enough that I could finally rest, I had learned how to use a new tool; the Ordeal Path was now also familiar to me.

I should now apologize about my use of the term Sun Dance, the Lakota ordeal where one is suspended from hooks in one’s chest until a trance ensues. The truth is that it wasn’t a Sun Dance per se; none of my shamanic techniques are Native American. When I figured out that I was to be a shaman, I started to look into Native American spirituality, but I was sternly shooed away from it … not by the Native Americans, but by the Goddess who owned me. This is not your path, She said, bewildering me. Having been raised in America, I naturally associated shamanism with the Indians, even though Eliade’s work made it clear that it was a global phenomenon. “Where are the books about my path?” I asked, and then I remembered that during my death She had revealed herself to me. Half beautiful woman, half rotting corpse who smelled of rot, dead souls draped about her. I learned my lesson: one death goddess is not the same as another. She was not just any goddess. I checked my mythology, and found Her name: Hel. My northern European bloodline had come for me. I was profoundly uncomfortable with the idea that one might be stuck with one’s ancestors’ gods, but I could not deny Her of the single skeletal hand … and the spinning world-tree, Yggdrasil, around which spiral the Nine Worlds.

When my daughter was a month away from her seventeenth birthday, the wights came for me again and reminded me of my promise. It was a moment of truth, and I accepted my fate. This would be my job for the rest of my second life. (By this time, of course, I had been assigned a tribe
of people who needed my aid. A classic shaman will always have a tribe to serve, although I would end up serving people who came from all sorts of places and asked for my help.) I pleaded that I needed aid in this endeavor, and the Gods sent me a second lover, one who was ready and willing to be a shaman’s assistant.

I won’t go into too much detail about the rigors of my training period, except to say that I got thoroughly enmeshed in Norse cosmology, but I still sometimes strayed outside of it. I checked out the Heathen community, and found that very few knew what to make of my experience. “There is no lore-based evidence that Norse religion was shamanic,” I was told. Maybe there isn’t … but I am owned thoroughly, body and soul, by a Norse goddess who wants me to be a shaman in a northern European-to-Eurasian-centered context … and I can’t say no to her. “There are no shamans in our religion,” I was told.

The fact that I dealt with the Death Goddess of the pantheon didn’t make things any better; many Heathen reconstructionists had a long-standing suspicion of Hel and her family, including her father Loki who would turn out to be one of my most skilled spirit-teachers. I also discovered that many Heathens were separatists, in the sense that they did not work with gods outside the Norse pantheon, and didn’t consider anyone who did so to be a Heathen. However, Hel seemed quite willing to send over certain non-Norse gods to teach me specific lessons, and if ecumenicalism is good enough for my divine patron, it’s good enough for me.

I made contact with several seidhr-workers, and found that we had many experiences and practices that were startlingly similar, and just as many that were entirely different. It was close, but not close enough for me to take on the label of seidhmadhr, especially since some folk in the Heathen community felt that seidhr referred only to their particular kind of oracular seidhr, which I didn’t do. There was also the issue that seidhr was the work of the folk of the late-Pagan, early-Christian era, and what I was being pushed to do seemed far older than that, perhaps centuries or even millennia older. I didn’t want to get involved with labeling wars, so I gave
up any claim to “seidhr” just as I’d given up claim to “Heathen”, and decided that I was just going to refer to myself as a Northern-Tradition Pagan shaman and leave it at that.

I returned to the Neo-Pagan community with a shrug, figuring that even if they couldn’t help me, they would at least accept me. I looked for people who worked with Norse gods and spirits, and found the mainly-Norse practitioners divided into two vague groups, which could be roughly termed Norse Wiccan and Norse Pagan. The Norse Wiccans used a basic Wiccan framework and simply inserted Norse deities into it, usually Frey and Freya. While this tradition is no worse than any others—and certainly it has been observed that super-traditional mystery-religion Wiccan practice has a strong relationship to Vanatru, or Frey-and-Freya worship—it wasn’t the right thing for me. Norse Pagans, on the other hand, were a varied group. Many seemed to be identical to Heathens except for a few specific differences: A) They preferred the Pagan community to the Heathen one for social or political reasons; B) although their central cosmology was Norse, they worked with gods and cosmologies outside of that structure as well (as well as any deity or wight within the Northern Tradition, regardless of how unpopular or reviled), and didn’t want to have to apologize for that practice; and C) they tended to fall onto the personal gnosis side of the primary sources vs. personal gnosis argument.

How have I gotten my shamanic training? Mostly I’ve been spirit-taught. (I was fascinated to find out, through reading the works of Sarangerel, that the Buryat shamans have a special word for shamans who are spirit-taught rather than human-taught—bagshagui—and that this generally happens when a shamanic genetic line dies out and the spirits move over to another line to choose and bother someone.) Deities and spirits come to me, and “motor me through” doing things, and then I practice them. It’s not a method that could ever be used by a human teacher. It’s also completely unprovable, so if you think that this is all bunk and that I’m merely deluding myself, it’s no skin off my nose; how can I expect you to believe what you’ve never seen? This book will be going
under the assumption that those reading it will be suspending their disbelief at first, if not for its entirety.

Sometimes I’m instructed to do things, and I have no idea if any historical human being ever did them. Sometimes I find out about that later. One example is my drum. I was told to get one, even though “there is no evidence that Norse people used drums for religious ritual.” Still, it was an order, and my wife bought me a gift of a simple Pakistani frame drum, because it was what we could afford. I was told to put jingles and metal bits and rattles all around the edge, which I did—tambourine jingles, bells, dried hooves for clackers, bits of bone. I was told to paint the top with the Tree and symbols for the worlds, which I did. I’d only ever seen Native American shaman drums, and they seemed so simple and streamlined; mine seemed cluttered by comparison, and who ever heard of a shaman’s drum with all those jingles on it? Later, I discovered that the shaman drum of the Saami (Laplander) people, called a *runebom*, has jingles around it, and a map of the worlds painted on the skin. Some scholars do theorize that if there were shamanic elements in Norse religion, they may have learned it from the neighboring Saami, so it makes a certain amount of sense.

Of course, this led to an interesting situation at a local Pagan gathering. I pulled Yggdrasil Moonsong, my drum, out of her case, and someone looked at her in horror. I was asked indignantly as to why I had ruined a Native American frame drum with jingles and bells. The next person in line corrected the first offended Pagan; it wasn’t a Native American drum at all, but an Irish bodhran, which was equally offensive to put all those jingles on. I turned Yggdrasil over and showed them the *Made In Pakistan* sticker that was still on her, stymieing both their comments, but the incident stuck with me. I’m not the only American Pagan to whom the word “shaman” is synonymous with Native American culture. Few know anything about non-Indian forms of shamanism, or that they even exist. There’s an assumption that white Europeans not only don’t have any connection to shamanic tribal culture, they never did in all of history. Therefore, if one wants real shamanism, one has to turn to the indigenous peoples.
Then there’s the problem of the backlash against such chasing after indigenous religion. I’ve called myself a shaman in public and been accused of stealing Native American spirituality before the words were quite out of my mouth. I’ve been accused of it for using a drum, working with spirit animals, having a (Saami) embroidered deer on my jacket, and wearing crow feathers in my hair. I’ve seen an open letter from a self-professed Native American activist who claimed that white people using the word “shaman” was stealing Indian religion ... and was apparently clueless that the word itself comes from the Tungus tribe of Siberia, not any tribe on this continent. As you can imagine, I do a lot of explaining...and I duck a lot.

Frankly, I was even uncomfortable with the word *shaman*. It seemed that too many people were using that word for things that could be learned in a weekend workshop for a few hundred dollars. It had been cheapened, perhaps even made ludicrous. Why not find a word in one of the old northern languages for what I was? *Because those words have been lost,* She told me. *This is close enough, and it is understood. Besides, it will be good for people to see what a shaman really is.*

All this wandering around from community to community didn’t affect my situation as the shaman of my tribe. Currently my tribe consists of three rings of people. First is my own Pagan group, Asphodel. Second is the community of third gender people, my sister-brothers and brother-sisters. I have as strong a commitment to them as I do to the people with whom I worship. Third, and much more sporadic, are the people who wander onto my doorstep with their problems. I check to see if the “on duty” light goes on, and if it does, I let them in and try my best to help them. Regardless of whether I am accepted in a larger community, I am never short of work to do. Some of my work, as was mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, isn’t in this world, exactly. Some of it straddles worlds, including this one; one of those tasks is my ongoing job to spread information here, in the world that we live in. This book is the fruit of that job.
**First disclaimer:** As you read the guidebook to the Worlds, you will see that it is interspersed with my journal entries regarding my first long orientation-trip to the Worlds of Yggdrasil. While I have included them for interest, please keep in mind that my experiences are mine alone, and no one else can be guaranteed to have similar ones. For example, I get along well with some races and not with others; I was welcomed into some worlds and not others. This will vary depending on who you are, what Gods or wights are your patrons, and what your mission is in going there. I was poorly received in Ljossalfheim for reasons beyond my control, but those with fey blood or Alfar affinities, or those who belong to Frey, would have an entirely different experience. I was welcomed into the Iron Wood, one of the roughest places in Jotunheim, but this is not necessarily going to be true for the average traveler.

To counteract the incomplete nature of my journal entries, I’ve tried to make the factual chapters about the various worlds as thorough as possible, incorporating the experiences of others when my own were inadequate. I advise you to pay strong attention to the warnings and suggestions in those, as they were culled from a variety of spirit-workers (thank you all, by the way!) who gave good advice based on their own journeying. However, nine worlds covers a lot of territory, and there are bound to be places and people and things that we missed.

**Second disclaimer:** Although I and my contributors have all done a great deal of research in the (pitifully inadequate) extant Northern-Tradition lore, this is not a book of scholarly primary source material about the Nine Worlds, nor do I claim it to be so. While scholars will find little here that contradicts the extant primary sources—except in places where lore contradicts itself—they will find plenty that is not even remotely covered. This is not a work of scholarship; it is entirely and unashamedly a work of personal gnosis. You won’t find footnotes and references here. If that’s what you’re looking for—a way to prove all this with references—you’re in the wrong place, and this is not the book for the job. No one will believe you anyway, and the Gods and wights don’t give a damn. This is a
hands-on book for people who are actually interacting with the Gods and wights of these traditions.

This book is part of the ongoing Personal Gnosis Project, wherein those of us who are having real, actual experiences are starting to compare those experiences, and finding that we have a lot in common that aren’t written anywhere in this time. We are attempting to create a fund of PCPG—Peer-Corroborated Personal Gnosis—that others who are having real experiences will find useful. It’s more important to us that people be safe and effective when dealing with spiritual issues than that they impress scholars who don’t literally believe in all this stuff anyway.
Chapter 2

World-Walking: The Etiquette of Alternate Reality

There are two ways that I know of to visit another world. (There may be more, but I don’t know about them yet.) One is traditionally referred to as “journeying” (if you’re Pagan), or “faring forth” (if you’re a Heathen seidhr-worker), or “astral travel” (if you’re a New Ager). It consists, at its most simplest, of removing your astral body from your physical body (leaving it connected by a cord of energy) and taking it elsewhere. Some do it alone, others in a controlled ritual with people present to monitor the body and hopefully “pull back” the astral body if the journeyer gets in trouble.

The second method I have come to call pathwalking, and it is a little more difficult, but it can sometimes be utilized by people who can’t leave their physical bodies for whatever reason. I will go into both these methods in succeeding chapters, because most people who visit the Nine Worlds get there by one or the other of them. But this brings us back to the question that should have been implicit at the beginning of this book: why bother? Why travel the Nine Worlds, or any other worlds, at all? After all, it likely won’t pay your credit card bills, find you a girlfriend or boyfriend, or get you a better job. Wouldn’t you be better off concentrating on this world?

Frankly, I’m not going to say that everyone ought to be out walking other worlds. Most people probably shouldn’t, especially if they have no training and no understanding of what they are getting into. But like sex among teenagers, some people in the Pagan and Heathen demographics are doing it anyway, with various levels of skill and knowledge. Some of them are going places that are more real, and thus more dangerous, than they expected. Some are getting into trouble. If they are going to be doing it
anyway, it seems that they ought to be aided rather than merely 
admonished and left to their own devices.

Long ago, before the age of easy travel, explorers made maps of the 
place that they had traveled. Often there were large empty places where 
they’d never made it through; these might have borne signs like “Here Be 
Monsters”. Strange people and animals lived there, in uncharted (to them) 
territory, people and animals who might object strenuously to the presence 
of strangers wandering through. Each explorer grew the map a little larger 
and a little more detailed, so fewer travelers stumbled in and never came 
out again. This book, with its collected experiences from many different 
worldwalkers, is rather like one of those old maps. There are still plenty of 
unexplored places where we suspect there are monsters ... and there are 
plenty of well-marked places where we know there are monsters, and 
travelers should beware.

Here I need to put in a word or twenty on the nature of reality, and of 
these alternate worlds. A guided meditation, as we’ll go into in the next 
chapter, is not the same as journeying. That doesn’t mean that when 
people do a guided meditation together, they aren’t going anywhere but 
their own heads. They might be going somewhere in their own heads, or 
they might be visiting a a kind of archetypal world-space that seems to exist 
as a cosmic construct attached to the collective unconscious. This cosmic 
construct, like a Star Trek holodeck, is sensitive to those who touch it, and 
can become a kind of idealized facsimile of wherever it is that they are 
trying to go, be it Asgard or Brooklyn. Most people who go there realize 
suddenly that they’re somewhere besides their own heads—wow!—and 
deck that they are really, truly in Asgard or Olympus or wherever it was 
that they were trying to go. This can happen with early attempts at 
journeying, too. In fact, some people never get beyond this place.

The problem is that it’s not really Asgard or Olympus or even 
Brooklyn. Going there is rather like going to Disney’s Epcot Center World 
Showcase and then saying that you’ve been to China, Italy, and Mexico. In 
fact, those of us who worldwalk regularly refer to it as “the Disney ride”. In 
a Disney ride, everyone speaks your language, is friendly and helpful, wants
to make sure that you have a good time, and never tries to kill you. If you throw popcorn at the waving god puppets, the worst that will happen is that you might get bounced out.

In the actual Nine Worlds—or the many otherworld equivalents—inhabitants are not there to teach you, mentor you, or even talk to you. Some of them might be friendly just because they're that sort; some will lie to you. Some will not want you there, and may try to throw you out, or prevent you from entering, or worse. Every animal you meet is not your potential totem or spirit animal. Some of them may consider you to be an intruder, or food. Every hall whose door you bang on is not going to let you in with no payment and no questions asked. Things aren't always aesthetically pretty, especially if you're among nonhumanoid types. People don't act the way you expect them to. In fact, they may be unable to—or refuse to—speak your tongue.

Those of us who want to worldwalk for real need to get over the idea that otherworlds exist for our own edification and amusement. They do not, any more than the denizens of foreign cities exist to help you find your way around, teach you the native arts, let you invade their homes to gawk, and politely ignore your rude and crass ignorance of their manners and customs. We also need to get over the idea that we have an automatic right to be there, which we don't. We are there by the sufferance of the Gods and spirits who order those realms, and those worlds are their territory, not ours. We need to stop acting like superior tourists; it is not in our best interests to play the archetypal Ugly American all over the multiverse.

The divine equivalent to the Disney ride is the divine answering machine. This is a phenomenon that those of us who work closely with deities have observed for quite a while. If you approach a deity who does not wish to speak to you directly, you get the cosmic equivalent of their answering machine. A deity's cosmic answering machine is complex, impressive, and it can do a lot of things, including give advice, recite key statements, receive prayers, and put out a little power for appropriate magicks. It is not, however, the voice of the deity itself. To rephrase C.S. Lewis, although one may be fooled into thinking that the voice of man (or
an archetype) is the voice of deity, no one could ever mistake the actual presence and voice of deity for anything but what it is.

Approaching the deity without believing in them is almost sure to get you the answering machine, and if you’ve never heard anything else, you might not ever know the difference. The sole exception to that is if a deity takes an interest in you, and decides to make sure that you really believe in them. If that happens, they generally win, if you’re important enough to them. If you keep your eyes staunchly closed, they may give up and move on, deciding that you’re not worth it.

On the other hand, some people may scream into the void repeatedly and be denied an answer, never be spoken to by divine voices. I am not certain, myself, whether this is because they don’t know how to listen, or because it is their orlog this time around to make their own decisions (and mistakes), and not be guided by other hands. Perhaps they are not yet at a time in their life where they can hear the Gods and spirits and not simply argue with them, or perhaps it’s something else entirely. However, this has always been the real schism in any religion or spiritual community...not between those who believe and those who don’t, or between two different sets of beliefs, but between those who follow what’s written down or taught because they have no other experience, and those who the Gods and spirits bother and pester, and who take their beliefs from that. Mystics have always been the real troublemakers, even more so than infidels.

Today, those who have conversations with Gods and spirits are dismissed as nutballs. I’m always annoyed by the attitudes of anthropologists who write about native shamans and spirit-workers with the subtle attitude of “So tell me about these alleged spirits of yours.” I’m also annoyed by anthropologists who write about their practices and include only those details that they find interesting, or quaint, or shocking, or as proving some thesis. Part of this is personal; many of us have been involved for years in the practice of uncovering and researching the shamanic roots and practices of northern European and Eurasian religions, especially the ones that have been lost and have few or no surviving practitioners. There’s nothing more infuriating than reading the account of some snooty
Victorian scholar telling how he observed a shaman or spirit-worker doing some now-lost rite, and he merely comments about how the shaman “did something odd with piles of herbs”, and the little ding goes off in my head as if to say, “You’re supposed to learn that,” and I scream at the empty pages, “What! What kinds of herbs! What did he do?”

I was recently interviewed by an anthropology student, and I pointed out to her that we were once again, ironically, in the same position as those long-deceased scholars and tribal spirit-workers. I stressed that she should keep in mind, while writing any paper that might be published and added to a body of permanent work, that someday someone might be desperately trying to reconstruct something from books because they no longer have access to human beings who hold that information orally. I told her to keep that in mind for anything she wrote; to consider what would be most helpful, not just in getting her a good grade, but for that possible future researcher and would-be shaman. What would he or she read in that paper that would help to confirm their course, or give them useful advice? It’s a challenge I hold out to all academic writers on the subject matter.

Many books on shamanism stress that world-walking is entirely safe, or mostly safe as long as you don’t go into those nasty areas, which will of course be clearly marked in a way that a modern Westerner will find symbolically meaningful. When I read or hear this, I have to assume that they’re all on the Disney ride. Not that there’s anything wrong with that; the Disney ride is put there for a reason. I’d rather have ugly Americans being ignorant and obnoxious at the China World Showcase than in Beijing, and I’d rather have seekers trying to enrich their lives and learn more about themselves during guided meditation to the “archetypal spiritual holodeck”, as a friend put it, than actually bothering real nonhuman individuals on their own territory.

To actually walk other worlds, you should have a reason for going there besides your own amusement or even your own personal growth. The nine-day journey that I describe in this book was on the order of an orientation tour; it was meant to get me familiar with the territory so that I could go back there for purposes of doing work for others. I’ve since been sent back
to one world or another for a variety of duties: bearing messages (that’s a common one), finding lost pieces of people, asking advice for seekers who can’t (or shouldn’t) go themselves, and so on. Part of being a real shaman is being a public utility, a servant for the community. While a certain amount of wandering about to get the lay of the land is useful, it’s only preparation for other tasks. If you don’t have a good reason to go there, don’t. This should not be something that people do because they are bored on a Saturday night, or want to think that they’re cool and powerful.

Going to the otherworlds to gain personal wisdom is a reason that can be both good and bad. While a quest for wisdom is always honorable—after all, Odin did it—please don’t go in with the attitude that your spirit teacher is waiting for you there (unless you’ve been specifically told that, in which case they will make arrangements to get you to their door with a minimum of wandering about) or that everything and everyone that you meet is going to be willing to teach you something (besides the lesson of minding your own business so that you don’t get hurt). Imagine going on a quest to find knowledge and teachers in the slums of Los Angeles or New York City. It’s not that there aren’t any, but you don’t want to be buttonholing every stranger hanging out on a stoop and asking them to teach you. It could be unhealthy. Parts of the Nine Worlds can be like that.

If you do go, there are some basic rules to follow. Many of these rules, ironically, can be found in folktales of fools and jacks and maidens who go on journeys themselves—so many of them, in fact, that one wonders if some of these folktales existed to subtly teach worldwalking etiquette, just in case. In her wonderful Internet article “Guidelines For Travel In Other Worlds”, Ragnheid lists quite a few rules skinned from folktales; many of us have also found this to be true. Here are my suggested etiquette rules:

1. Watch your back. Stop and analyze a situation before leaping in. Look carefully at the participants and how they are interacting with each other; remember that you are in an alien culture and people might not be reacting in familiar ways.

2. See if all the individuals or objects involved are really what they seem. This means that you had best learn to see through glamour, if
possible. Some glamour will still probably fool you, but if you stop and check before jumping in, you might notice that disguised pit at your feet. Many a folktale has a brave lad or lass saved because they had anti-glamour precautions.

3. If you want to approach someone or something, pause within their field of vision, bow or otherwise give a nonverbal signal that says you would respectfully like their attention, and check their reaction. If they ignore you or glare at you, keep walking. If they acknowledge you in a neutral or positive way, approach and speak to them as courteously as possible.

4. If you are asked questions, be truthful. The one exception to that is telling your true name to faeries, and we'll address that in the chapters about the Alfar realms. But if they ask you where you are from, don’t be shifty, or assume that they wouldn’t know where Cincinnati is, so why bother to tell them. That’s not the point; your truthful answer, even if it is unfamiliar to them, will be more proof to them of your trustworthiness. Don’t assume that the individual you are speaking to cannot sniff out lies. If it’s important to you to get your home place across to them, you can say, “the sister-world of Midgard”, which many of them know of, or at least will nod and move on.

5. If someone or something asks to travel with you, you should probably accept their company, unless your intuition screams otherwise, but don’t assume that by doing so they are automatically putting themselves in the position of “native guide”.

6. If they do offer to be your native guide, or do some other sort of useful task for you, ask them how you can repay them for it. The Nine Worlds are very definitely “no such thing as a free lunch” sorts of places. They may tell you up front about the conditions for their help; you might want to do some divination to see if it is worth your while. If they don’t say it up front, ask, politely, putting across the assumption that of course you will repay them in whatever way is possible. Make sure you get the price fixed before you accept the services. Don’t try to cheat them, or get the better of the deal; your honor and your maegen is on the line here, and is being judged. You can always invoke the name of Syn (Frigga’s handmaiden
who watches over lawful and fair contracts) when you agree, and ask them to do the same. (Don’t settle for a price of merely owing them a nonspecified favor at some point in the future. That could get you in trouble.)

7. If someone or something asks for your help, and you can give it out of generosity with little loss to yourself, do it. That especially goes for sharing food—bring more than necessary, and share it with any who ask, or who look at you hungrily when you get out your lunch. If they ask for help on something that seems beyond your powers, ask if they can tell you how to do it; they may not know how ignorant you are about their world, and it might not have occurred to them to give the details in the original explanation. Unlike accepting help, don’t set a price on it. Just do it, and then let them owe you the favor and be in your debt, and then you can (gently and courteously) bargain for a favor, or just let it be a mitzvah, as it were.

8. If you promise you will do something, do it. No exceptions. If it is truly impossible, ask if there is something else that you can do instead that will be a fair substitution. Don’t substitute anything yourself, assuming that you know best.

9. If someone or something gives you a token of some sort, keep it. It might be useful later, if only to prove to someone else you might meet that you really did speak with that person.

10. If you undertake a task for someone or something, do it to the best of your ability. If you can’t do it alone, ask for help. It may be that the Powers That Be will send some. Be smart enough to recognize it when it comes.

11. Don’t judge nonhumans by human standards of beauty or behavior. Don’t flinch when someone you find physically ugly touches you; that’s an insult.

12. If someone screws you over, before taking any kind of revenge, figure out if they did it because it is a function of their nature ... in which case they will not learn from your vengeance, and it’s a waste of time.
13. If you run across someone or something who is bound to help or serve you because of a geas or spell placed on them, ask if there is anything that you can do to help them. On occasion, just asking can break the spell, or perhaps there is something you can do, but they can’t tell you unless you ask of your own free will. If there is nothing you can do, then be as kind and polite and considerate to them as possible while they do their job, and get it over with quickly so as to make yourself as little burden as possible.

14. On the other hand, if you run across someone who offers to serve you because it is their job to do so and they are proud of that job, accept the service graciously, treat them courteously, and don’t tell them that they ought to be off living their own life.

15. Don’t hare off on adventures with people that you meet without getting good information on where you are going, what that place is like, and why you are bothering. Don’t take the advice of strangers who tell you about interesting places and cool treasure.

16. Be careful what you eat and drink. You can always pour it out as a libation to the Gods, and they usually will not gainsay you. (We’ll get to food in a later chapter.)

17. Don’t assume that you know best the about needs for any other being in the Nine Worlds. You don’t.

   If you can go with this kind of respectful attitude, then maybe you can get through without creating too much havoc. Actually, the best reason of all to go is that the Gods and spirits (or some combination of the above) are telling you that you have to. If you’re not sure, go to a good honest runemal and get some divination. Don’t do it yourself; you won’t be objective enough. Do pray, though, and talk to your patron deity, or a deity that you trust.

   And be willing to take no, or not yet, for an answer.
Chapter 3

Hame Flying: Faring Forth Into The Otherworlds

One of the skills that many modern practitioners consider that falls under Seidhr is the skill called Hamfarir (essentially “faring forth in the spiritual body”). With this skill, I travel to the Nine Worlds to gain knowledge and understanding of my faith and its ways. Often I fare forth to better understand a concept from the Lore, ask for deeper understanding from the Aesir and Vanir and other beings and creatures that inhabit the Nine Worlds. I’m also a bit of an explorer, trying to push myself and my understandings as far as I can to better serve the Folk and bring back what nuggets of spiritual wisdom I can for them.

—Rod Landreth, seidhmadhr

When I went to write this chapter, I was stymied by the fact that for me, pulling my soul out of my body was something that just happened. Unless Hela, my patron goddess, had deliberately locked me into my body (which She did for many years, in order to force me to deal with my physical form), leaving it was easy. It was coming back that I hated. When the time came for me to teach other people this art, I was completely at a loss. “You just do it!” was utterly unhelpful. Teaching these subtle things was an area in which I failed miserably. Instead, I decided to seek the help of various spirit-workers that I knew and trusted, and who had the experience not only of doing the work, but teaching it as well. Their generous knowledge is listed below in this chapter. Further information on trancework of various kinds will come forth in Wightridden: Techniques of Northern-Tradition Shamanism, the next in the series of these books.

There are many different techniques for journeying; indeed, when I asked various hame-farers about it, each had a different method for getting
to the same place. To this end, I am including some different variants on how to do it. If one doesn’t work for you, try another. Actually, you should probably read all of them, as each has tips you can borrow. However, no one should ever start with an esoteric art such as faring forth without first learning the basics of grounding, shielding, and protection. If you are already skilled at such things, you can skip the next section; if you’re not, you need to master it before you can go bopping around in other worlds, or you might develop difficulties.

A Basic Guide for Journey Work

by Alfíld

Firstly, I don’t think everyone should journey. For the average devotee, spiritual seeker or witch, it’s just not that important. Frankly, there are some folks who shouldn’t do it at all. I will not accept as student in this craft anyone showing signs of narcissistic personality, histrionic personality or an uncertain weak personality construct. To do this work safely and well, one must be grounded, sensible and have a clear conception of who they are. A healthy dose of humility is also helpful, as is a strong will. It can be painfully easy to delude oneself in the beginning stages, and histrionics seem better at that than most. A strong psychic ability does not necessarily equal a stable psycho-emotional body. Also, the constant travel between worlds, which is the ultimate goal, can have a deleterious effect on those not able to fully ground themselves in the temporal world when necessary. If the personality matrix is weak, the stress of journeying can cause it to shatter, or even worse, allow the person to pick up unwelcome, unpleasant travelers.

Most of us, however, will not have to worry about this if we attend to some basic precautions. For instance, I won’t teach anyone journey work unless I have known them for at least a year. By that time, I can usually pinpoint whether or not they
are suited for this type of thing. (I also tend to prefer to only teach those who have a strong relationship with a God or Goddess. Often the Deity will provide lessoning of Their own.) But for those without an in-person teacher, simply taking the time to learn the basic exercises, which admittedly can be pretty boring, will usually prevent mishap.

Before even thinking about embarking one one’s first journey, it’s necessary to master the basics of grounding and centering. Pretty much everyone can benefit from these exercises even if magic and journey work are the furthest things from your mind. If you interact with people in any way, shape or form during the day, you will at some point be influenced by their energy and emotional state. (No, we can’t necessarily see such energy—unless one has the gift of Sight—but we can’t see germs either without a microscope and they certainly affect us!) These exercises help mitigate the effects of such psychic “contamination”. This is your first line of defense against imbalances in the etheric body and the first act of prevention necessary to maintaining a healthy psyche and body. Many of these exercises are equally helpful in times of emotional upset and turmoil and all of them are excellent stress reducers. For those who may be psychically talented, or who wish to learn how to journey, they are an absolute necessity.

**Centering**

The first and most important exercises that one can do, be it to develop one’s gifts or to begin one’s spiritual journey are grounding and centering. These two simple exercises are the backbone of any spiritual or magical practice.

Centering is not difficult. The first exercise is one that I originally learned in a martial arts class. It is very simple; all you do is focus on your breathing. *Inhale four counts, hold four counts, exhale four counts, hold four counts.* That’s all. Do it over and over repeating the pattern without breaks. Try to
time it to your heart beat but if that is too distracting don’t worry about it and just breathe. In time, as you breathe, you want to feel all the breath, all the energy in your body gathering in your second chakra. A chakra is a nexus of energy in the body. We can’t see them (unless we have the gift of sight) but they impact the energy of our body. There are seven major ones. The second one is located three inches below the navel. Eventually, as you breathe, you want to feel the energy gathering in a glowing golden ball at this point. Basically, centering is “contemplating your navel”! Be sure to breathe through your diaphragm taking deep, even breaths.

Centering can be very calming when under stress. If you find yourself in an emotionally stressful situation, it may help to fall into this breathing pattern. Now, there are, of course, many ways to center, but this tends to be the easiest and most adaptable. One’s center is based on where one’s center of gravity is. For most women, that is in the hips, the second chakra area. Some larger (or large busted) women, and most men center at the solar plexus or in some cases even higher. I don’t recommend using anything but the sex chakra or the solar plexus for this exercise, though. If you find the breathing pattern distracting and are able to do this exercise without it, through visualization or feeling, that’s wonderful. In that case, feel free to dispense with the breathwork. It’s good to do this at least every morning and evening.

**Grounding**

Now, once the energy in your body has been collected, it has to go somewhere. Grounding adds stability, it gives one a connection to the earth and a connection to basic, restorative life energy. Basically grounding is just sending all the energy that has been collected in the body, down into the earth. Don’t worry if you can’t see or feel anything...start with the mental focus and eventually your awareness of the internal flow of energy will increase.
The easiest exercise to begin with is also, like centering, a breathing exercise. Inhale and feel the energy gathered in your center. Now, as you exhale, feel that energy exiting the body through the root chakra. This chakra is located in the perineal area and is the point where our bodies take in life energy. It’s the survival chakra. On the second exhale, feel it entering the earth and branching out into a thick, sturdy network of roots. Continue this imagery for as long as you need to, with each ensuing exhalation taking you further and further into the earth until you feel fully grounded.

In time you will want to learn different ways of grounding, and you will find that many of the exercises are primarily visualization exercises. Don’t worry if you’re not good at visualizing things … that too is a skill that comes in time. I always had difficulty with it. You may find that the image comes via feelings instead of sight and that’s OK too.

The idea with grounding is to be a tree. Once you’ve gathered the energy at your second chakra, send it down through the root chakra. See it streaming from your root chakra in a solid golden cord of energy. This cord goes down through the floor, through the foundations of the house and into the earth, it reaches very deeply and with each exhalation see it branching off like roots of a tree, tying you tightly to the earth. In time you will learn to pull energy up through this ground as well.

Cleansing

In addition to centering and grounding, when one is involved in any type of magical work, whether as a novice or master, it is vitally important to regularly cleanse one’s etheric and auric bodies. We clean ourselves physically after a hard day’s work, it’s simple common sense to do the same thing after a hard day’s magical work too! Perhaps because of the way I was initially trained, I have always preferred elemental cleansings and various types of cleansing baths. Smudging
oneself with the smoke of various sacred herbs (sage, cedar and sweetgrass were commonly used by Native Americans and this has been co-opted by Wiccans, mugwort was traditional among the Anglo Saxon *maegen* workers, I personally prefer dragonsblood), will often clean the aura. I have a horsehair whip which I use to brush myself down before and after each journey. Cleansing baths are ideal and common to many sacred traditions. If I am doing serious journey work, I will take a bath in sacred herbs before and again after with the stronger recipe being used for the latter situation. My favorite is the traditional beer bath, which is an old German folk custom. I pour two large cans of dark beer into my bathwater and take a nice soak. It cleans the etheric body like nothing else.

**Basic Shielding**

It behooves every psychic, shaman, magician, or spae-worker to develop strong, solid shields and wards. This is a matter of emotional and etheric survival for some people. Shields are necessary. We lock our doors when we go outside. We wear warm clothing in winter. We put on sunscreen when going to the beach. We put on bug repellent when hiking through a mosquito-filled swamp. Shielding one’s aura is exactly the same thing: good psychic common sense. It prevents a plethora of problems. There are many different ways to shield and every practitioner eventually discovers what works best on an individual level. What all the various forms have in common is that they are basically techniques for keeping outside energy from distracting—or more importantly, harming—you. Any practitioner who advocates going about this work without adequate shields should be well avoided: they’re disasters waiting to occur!

Shielding techniques are as varied as one’s imagination. The basic technique that I first learned, and the one I first give to my students is to draw energy up through the same
channel used to ground, but instead of letting that energy flow through you, feel it flowing around you. Once you feel yourself completely encased in a solid ball of energy, allow (if you can’t see or feel it yet, consciously know that it is there ... the rest will come in time) the outer wall to become diamond hard, like a mirror reflecting all incoming energy.

You can also consciously set this shield to feed upon the very energies it is created to repel (which is what I personally recommend), or feel it connecting to the earth (just like when you ground), where it can draw more power. You don’t want to feed a shield with your own internal energies; that can exhaust you. As it is, you may find yourself unusually tired when first learning to shield because it is using more energy and focus (and utilizing it in different ways) than normal. You must be fully grounded and centered in order to shield. Regardless of what form your shield takes, it should be checked several times a day.

As an aside, most people can learn these exercises. You don’t have to be especially psychic to do them. They are for anyone who needs them. In fact, most psychics I know would be painfully glad if everyone did learn these exercises! Walking around unshielded is like walking into a room full of thieves naked with your wallet and valuables in hand. To a psychic, it’s the equivalent of walking into a room screaming at full blast while wielding a sledgehammer. Learning to shield oneself is a matter not only of common sense but of simple psychic courtesy. It’s also good tactical common sense when traveling various worlds whose denizens might be less than welcoming to humans.

Here’s another variation of the above shield. Begin the following exercise by running through the basic grounding and centering exercises given above.

1) Once you have both grounded and centered, visualize/feel a glowing sphere of steel blue light glowing and spinning
above your crown. It is cosmic force, creative/destructive primal energy, Divine essence.

2) Allow that shower of steel blue energy to flow down around you. It washes over your aura and completely seals you in a protective sphere of power. Regardless of what color you see your aura as being, this shields it within a forcefield of steel blue energy. This forcefield should extend three or four feet above and below you and at least two feet in diameter around you.

3) Once you have this field securely set, visualize the interior being flooded with protective white light, light that washes away any stagnant or inhospitable energy.

4) Try to continue to feel or visualize this for at least five minutes.

5) Finally, visualize a personal symbol of power—it can be anything: a pentacle, cross, valknot, hammer—radiating on the forcefield at about the solar plexus area. This seals and locks the shield into place.

6) Then go ahead and let it fade from consciousness. It will still be there, though I recommend doing this exercise several times a day.

This is based on a “Pillar of Light” exercise given by Denning and Phillip in their book “The Art of Psychic Self Defense”, though again, you will find variations cropping up throughout the occult community. It teaches you to construct a basic personal shield. Once you have mastered this technique, you can begin to experiment and adapt this shield to your needs and preferences. There is one caveat: you must be adequately centered and grounded to shield effectively. In terms of strength, you can consciously set the shield to filter out specific types of energy input, and you can set it to specific level of force.

Once you’ve mastered this basic form of shielding, experiment. You can make the energy you call up diamond hard, or a delicate netting that will filter in only what you
wish, or anything else your imagination can come up with. For empaths and telepaths, the two forms of shielding offered above won’t do much to help you ward your gift from external mental and emotional clamor. Telepathy and empathy require special shields: construct a mental wall inside your head. Actually, shielding the channel directly provides the best protection for both empaths and telepaths but this can take some practice. Either way, for these two psychic gifts, the shield is a mental one, created internally, not an external one created via energy manipulation. Of course both empaths and telepaths should also incorporate an energy shield into their shield matrix as the mental shields won’t ward against magic.

In addition to the basic mirror shield offered above, it is possible to utilize elemental energies in shielding. The drawback with a mirror shield is that, like any crystalline structure, if it is hit at the right point, with the proper amount of force, it can fracture or shatter. Ideally, it’s best to layer one’s shields, creating a matrix of multiple levels of differing shields. Elemental shields are very good for this, as they tend to be far more flexible and dynamic. Most people will find that they resonate better with one of the four primary magical elements (air, fire, water, earth) than others and that favored elements is the perfect place to start with elemental shielding.

I only recently learned the following fire-based exercise from my friend Fire. I’ve found that while it is not a combat shield, it is a very good outer shield, particularly when you wish to shield without making those around you uncomfortable (sometimes a strong ward will be unconsciously sensed by other people and it can make them vaguely uncomfortable). I call it the candle flame shield. In this shield, your aura forms the wick of the imagined candle. The shield itself, is the fire that is called forth around the aura. Mentally set this fire shield to draw on the “oxygen” of incoming emotions and energy. This is one of the easiest shields to maintain and it is also very easy to build
appropriate combat shields over or under it. Best of all, it will, to most Sighted people, look like part of one’s aura.

The four elements can also be used to create spinning vortex shields. These are excellent for combat, but at the same time are far more higher profile than the candle flame shield. This type of shield doesn’t necessarily require any elemental affinity. Its power comes from the utilization of pure force. Here are some examples of how this shield can be put into play: call up the power of water around you, constantly spinning and shifting to deflect any incoming energies; call up the power of earth in a sandstorm shield to devour and disperse any incoming energies; the same could be done with fire, which will eat anything thrown at it; air might be called around one in a tornado shield. The best thing about this type of shield is that it is very flexible. This is not the type of shield that will crack under pressure.

When crafting a shield, it is important to tell the shield exactly what it is meant to be repelling. Ideally, build it, feed it a snippet of the type of energy you wish it to repel (just like giving a bloodhound a scent marker before setting it loose to track) and then set it. With the more dynamic shields, like the sandstorm above, you may wish to put a buffer shield between your aura and the storm, as they can sometimes be rather abrasive. A simple cloak of energy, laying right against the aura works well for this. It’s also a good idea when traveling, to conceal your combat shields. You don’t want to broadcast that a magician or gifted person has just entered the area. That can be like setting up a neon sign that reads “good eats here.” Try to camouflage your more combative shields. Manipulating the color and feel of the aura is helpful here, constructing a prism type shield around you that reflects back incoming light so that essentially, you look like part of the landscape around you is also good. Some practitioners, familiar with the way wyrd works can actually fold the fabric of place around themselves, effectively rendering themselves invisible to the Sight. A good “see-me-
not” shield with a bit of an empathic push behind it also does the job effectively.

For those called to the runes, certain runes make excellent shields. They can be used to set shields directly in the threads of individual orlog. Algiz is particular good for this purpose, as is Eihwaz.

Building and maintaining an effective energy shield takes time and diligent practice. It is one of the most important skills you will ever learn. In addition to the energy shield (but not in place of it), certain forms of folk magic like hoodoo, rootwork and Anglo-Saxon leechcraft also utilize stones, herbs and the like for shielding purposes. These talismans and amulets can be quite effective but should never, ever take the place of a good personal, energy-based ward.

The term “faring forth” is a modern Northern-Tradition euphemization for the practice of sending one’s soul out from one’s body, either to this world or (usually) others. It is more commonly called “journeying”, and outside of Pagan influences tends to be referred to as “astral travel”. The ancients’ word for it was hamfarir, meaning that the hame (Old English, pronounced hahm-eh, or hama in Old Norse) fared out of the body. Hame, or astral body, is a term that survived in the literature of shapeshifters; folk are referred to as going out “in wolf’s hame”; the subtleties of the term were lost until people assumed that the shapeshifting was entirely physical ... and thus fictional.

However, to those who work with Northern-Tradition shamanic techniques—whether they are shamans or simply shamanic practitioners—the astral body is just as important as the physical body, because it can go where the physical body can’t. Most people are barely aware of their hame, if they understand such a thing at all, but the first step in journeying away from your flesh is to become aware of the vehicle that you will journey with.
For some people, it’s a matter of “fake it till you feel it”. In other words, you may not know how to feel your astral body, but if you could feel it, what do you think it might feel like? Try to follow that, and to experience it, and you may find something clearly jumping into your head—a feeling, a sensation of the energy-shape of your body. Play with extending your astral fingers a little, and retracting them back. If you can shift it, even just a bit, you can become more aware of it and what it does.
Basic Instructions for Journeying
by Sophie Oberlander

Before anything else, it’s important to thoroughly relax the body. (It may also be a good idea to do this sitting up because otherwise midway through the relaxation, the journey may be involuntarily abandoned in favor of sleep!) Tension is just another tie that binds our bodies to Midgard. In addition to assisting with the journey work itself, the preparations done before one sits down to embark on the faring forth, help to put the mind in the right psychological state for the work at hand. Eventually, the skilled worker will develop triggers and mental cues to achieve each state, from relaxation to faring forth to grounding upon return quickly and efficiently, but for now, it’s best to do everything carefully without taking short cuts. So first relax and make sure you will not be disturbed. Lock your door, turn off the phone, remove any and all distractions. Sit in a chair and starting at your toes, mentally relax every part of your body from toes to crown. Then begin to focus on your breathing. Breath is a powerful key to effective magical work.

This is another area where skill with applied visualization and guided meditation will come in handy. Visualize/feel yourself stepping out of your body and walking forward through rich, non-threatening darkness. Use your breath as a key: with each exhalation, feel yourself moving farther and farther away from your physical body and the temporal constraints of Midgard. Remember: energy follows intent. Your hama will follow the direction of your creative will. So see a path before you stretching forward toward the horizon and follow it, taking careful note of anything else that you might encounter on this path. Follow the path until you come to an immense and ancient Tree. Its topmost branches reach into the sky further than the eyes can see and its great gnarled
roots reach with equal depth into the rich, dark earth. Its trunk is so immense that a hundred men, standing hand-to-hand, could not span its width. This is Yggdrasil, the World Tree, doorway to all the worlds.

Now, it must be admitted that not every farer goes to Yggdrasil, but I am Heathen and the Gods that own me and that I love are Norse so for me, it provides the perfect and most logical starting and stopping point. From the Tree, if you are able to find entrance to its body, you can journey to any of the nine worlds. It’s also possible to simply fare to them without using the Tree as a stang, but Yggdrasil provides a navigational point. When you have reached the Tree, should you wish to travel from that spot to a particular location, simply center yourself and expand your awareness. You will get a “gut feeling” about which way to journey. I was actually kept at the Tree itself for several months—that was the terminus of my journey. Only once I had acquired the necessary skills and allies was I permitted to go farther.

That brings up another important point about journeying: it’s best to have a network of allies. One’s patron God or Goddess can often provide enormous advice and support here as might one’s ancestors and what many practitioners term power animals. I would not suggest journeying until at least one ally has been acquired. Some of the lands that you may seek to fare forth to are not always particularly welcoming of humans. There are things there far more dangerous than dragons.

Also, there are many levels of journey work. I tend to prefer to keep a small percentage of my awareness safely grounded in Midgard. I find it assists in recall of the journey, but this may not be the case for everyone.

When you wish to return, if you have gone farther than Yggdrasil, first come back to the Tree. The Tree is safe space, neutral territory and it provides a good place to take stock of your journey and to do a preliminary hama-check to be sure you’re reasonably clean. I often meet Odin at the Tree before
and after journeys for continued lessons and “quality” time. It’s a nice midway point from which to begin the return to Midgard. It can make “re-entry” far smoother. So after returning to the Tree, start walking back along the path that you initially took to find Yggdrasil. As you walk, with each step, start to become aware of your breathing again. It is at this point, as each step brings you closer to your physical body, that the fabric of the place where the road lies and where Yggdrasil stands will start to fade. Once there is nothing but cloudy formlessness around you, begin to feel your physical body. Take as much time as you need in centering and grounding yourself. Focus on the sounds around you, the feel of your chair against your skin, your heartbeat and breath. It is important not to just open your eyes and get up—it can be a psychic shock and you can actually become ill from it. So take your time, and even when you are completely back in your body, center yourself and ground before rising. Then, eat something, preferably protein and juice, take your cleansing bath and record your experience.

**Trance-Breathing**

This is where creative visualization comes into play. An old axiom in magic goes: energy follows thought—and that is largely true. Knowing that this second skin, so to speak, is there and that any damage to the hama can have immense impact on the physical body is a good place to start. Traditional exercises for learning to go out of body, particularly breathing exercises, can also be very helpful. Once you’ve achieved getting out of your body, the question of whether or not the hama exists becomes moot. Most of the exercises are geared toward weakening the sticky connection between one’s physical body and one’s astral body. They perform the opposite of grounding and centering, which reestablishes a strong connection between the two.
The most common exercise, which I first learned about 15-20 years ago, is cross-nostril breathing. With your thumb and forefinger pinch your nostrils, closing the right nostril with your thumb. Inhale four slow counts through the left nostril. Pinch your nose completely shut and hold that breath for 16 slow counts. Free the right nostril and exhale eight slow counts. Then inhale through the right nostril four slow counts. Pinch the nostrils and hold that breath 16 slow counts. Release the left nostril and exhale through that nostril for eight slow counts. Continue in this alternating pattern for fifteen minutes. It’s good to do this three times a day.

After you’ve practiced this for a couple of weeks, begin to increase the breath count. Go from 4-16-8 to 8-32-16. After a week or so with the new count, increase it again, always following the same pattern. Try to see how high you can go! Traditionally, this is a pranayama yogic exercise designed to increase the levels of prana in one’s body, but it has the effect of loosening the hold of the astral body to the physical.

Sitting after centering and grounding and extending your awareness to the outer edges of your body, and then visualizing your “aura” in the mind’s eye and trying to feel for any weak spots or damage or gunk, is also a very useful exercise. The more you work with your aura, the more you’ll become aware of it in a conscious way. This will extend to hastafaring skills and supplement them greatly.

The etheric senses can be very subtle. Even if you don’t manage to go out of body from these exercises, they will help increase one’s awareness of that all important second skin.
Basic Technique for Journeying

by Lydia Helasdottir

Start by getting yourself comfortable. That sounds trivial, but people often underestimate how long they can stay in a given position, and especially as a beginner, bodily discomfort will interrupt your journey and drag you back. It can also distract you at important moments when you need to be paying attention to your environment. Some Northern-Tradition journeyers suggest that if you are going to be ascending in direction—traveling up the Tree—it’s best to do this sitting up with your spine vertical, whereas going down to the lower realms is best done lying down. (Raven’s Note: Beginners will come into the World of Yggdrasil in the middle, through Midgard, although you may be leaving Midgard immediately without hardly noticing it, unless you linger.) However, most experienced journeyers have found that the actual leaving-the-body can be done in any relaxed position—prone, supine, fetal, sitting, propped, whatever. Your clothing should be loose—I prefer to do this naked, with a blanket over me, but that may not always be practical in cold environments.

Next, practice the basic four-fold breath. This consists of four counts of breathing in, then the breath held for four counts, then four counts of breathing out, then the breath held again for four counts. Do this until your body is used to it, until it is automatic. It gives your body something to do so that it won’t become disturbed when so much of your soul leaves it. When you’re good at this—and it may take a long time and many practices—the trick is to extend yourself on the out-breaths, slipping out a little further each time. Eventually you get to the point where you’re far enough out of your body that you can just go somewhere else.

I think people misunderstand this part of it; they think that they have to feel their vehicle literally leaving their body, seeing themselves under themselves and floating through the room and all that stuff. Well, that’s handy and all, but it isn’t actually necessary for doing it, and it’s really unhelpful if you’re traveling in a car and trying to do that at the same time—something that is only for the experienced, I might add.

For me, I have a variety of levels, from 90% here and 10% journeying, to 10% here and 90% journeying. I sit down, I punch in the
coordinates of where I want to go on my intergalactic navigating machine, and press “Go!” That’s something that many of us do, making the interface look like technology we’re familiar with. It started when I had to travel to meet with a particular deity who wanted to speak with me on his own turf. I had to figure out how to go and meet him; my teachers were saying, “You have to go see this deity and talk to him.” Well, how do I do that, then? She said, “Just intend to meet him, and go, and the rest will get taken care of.” So I closed my eyes and intended to meet him, and suddenly I was face to face with him.

Some people can speak or communicate while they’re away; their mouth will move and words will come out and describe what’s going on, to whoever is there or onto a tape. That works for me sometimes, and sometimes I have to go through the whole experience and remember it all when I come back. Or I might bop in and out and back and forth.

How do you know if it’s real? If it’s really important stuff, we have a three-level verification. First you test them. You say, “Who are you?” and they’ll say something or other, and then you can test them further. Working in the Northern Tradition, I would tend to throw an Os at them, or Ken. You can do that with Ogham as well.

The second level is to check with divination. Is this what I really thought it was? Do the divvy. Did we get all the information we needed to get? Did we ask all the questions that we were supposed to ask? Is there anything that we need to be worried about? Is everything all right? We always do a divination session after being sent to talk to things, just to be sure. If it’s something really important, then we want two confirmations. We call on somebody else in our network to confirm it without us telling them what we were doing, and then we also ask for some sort of physical manifestation. For instance, let’s say we got some information from some bogey about something or other. Then your mother-in-law starts telling you about some sort of strange dream that she had and this stuff comes up, and you go to the store and some truck drives past you that says “Welcome to Bogeyville” or whatever. You ask for a physical, non-journeying, non-suggestion thing to show up in the physical world like an omen. We always ask for that if we’re told something really serious, like “You should sell the house and move to Kamchatka,” or some such thing of great import.

The other thing that people have to keep in mind is the issue of speed. Sometimes you have to really slow yourself down a lot to talk to
certain entities. Things like boggarts and tree spirits don’t have the same time cycles. I expect that our speech sounds to them something like “bblbblbbl”, and we have to really slow down to communicate with them. We can do full-on 90% out of the body journeying, but I don’t find that it’s all that necessary. It’s a lot more dangerous and tiring. Once you get used to traveling places, you can travel with more and more of you here.

Tips For Journeying
by Allyson IsLeBrigid

Start with guided meditations. This is an easy way to learn it, although you need another person’s voice to take you through it. Unless you are experienced, do not stray from the guided meditation; let it take you places. In time and with experience, you will gain the confidence and knowledge necessary to undertake unguided journeys. Unguided journeying is dangerous because, as folklore tells us, not everything out there has our best interests at heart. Some entities you may encounter are downright hostile, and will try to trick you into binding service agreements with them, or try to psychically assault you and steal your life energy.

Things to keep in mind while out there: Do not eat or drink anything offered to you by any entity (deity or wight) that you do not have an established, trusting, working relationship with. Do not fall asleep while in the Otherworld, unless you are highly experienced and you have created a very safe space. If you find yourself falling asleep, end your meditation-journey and try again at another time.

You’ll want to establish a tether line for your spirit back to your body on this plane. Ward and shield it against breakage, damage, and assault. Ask for the protection of a Deity you have a relationship with and/or of your Spirit Guides while your spirit “fares forth”.
Do not invite anyone or anything to come home with you to this plane, no matter how harmless it may seem. The entities in the Otherworlds, even the small ones, require vast amounts of energy to manifest and sustain their presence in this world, and that energy has to come from somewhere. If you’ve invited them to live in your space, that will probably end up being you. This is probably why encounters with these entities are so rare and why only the sensitive/gifted can see/feel/hear/experience their presences while they are here. Once you have invited them here and they come, you are responsible for being hospitable in the spiritual sense. Many cultures have considered hospitality to be a sacred bond between you and your guests, and this may mean supporting/sustaining them from your own personal store of spiritual/psychic energy.

Watch for symbols and omens. The Otherworld is a landscape of symbols and omens, do not try to interpret what is said to you, what you see/hear/experience—too literally. Like the Bardic art of kennings, which have multiple layers of meaning depending on how you interpret them, information from the Otherworld has layers of meaning and cannot always be interpreted literally or taken “at face value”.

While many people may have opinions on how to journey, many of which you may find useful to some extent, there’s nothing like actually trying it. Don’t give up if your first try doesn’t get you anywhere; this is a complicated art to master. Try again, and again. If worst comes to worst, call on a deity who is skilled in such things—such as Odin, Freya, Loki, Hela, Groa, etc.—and ask them to walk you through it. If you make offerings, and they are moved to do so, they may help you out.

So once you’ve made it out for the first time, there may be a nagging voice in your head continually wondering whether you actually did it, or whether you’re just imagining things and deluding yourself. That’s normal. In fact, it’s a fair question. As Lydia Helasdottir suggests above, do divination—or if you’re worried that you’ll influence your divination method
with your hopes and fears, have someone else do it for you, preferably someone who is uninvolved with your issues.

The final step, when you come back, is to check yourself all over thoroughly. Sometimes one picks up stuff that sticks to one’s aura when journeying. It is normal to feel slightly weak and tired, but if any given part of you feels weird—not physically painful per se, but just weird in a way that it wasn’t when you left—try to probe it with your astral fingers and see what happens. If you feel like something hitched a ride, or you were wounded in some way, do a thorough cleansing (suggestions above) and have someone with the Sight look you over. If nothing is particularly wrong, ground and center, and eat something to ground your body still further.
Several months ago Hel told me that She had further plans for me. The plan unfolded in my head like the opening of a map: I would be required to do a nine-day retreat, and do a walking tour of each of the Nine Worlds, one per day. At the time, I thought to myself, “Wow, sounds tough. It would probably be a good thing for me, but I don’t have the time ... Got so much to do. Farm work. Writing. Gatherings. Maybe another year...”

Yesterday She got back to me on it. Ahem. You’re supposed to be planning for this trip. That’s when it came home to me that this was not something that I could put off. It had to be done, and done soon. I took this news to the folks on the Hel email list, other people who work with and/or are owned by Her, and several of them said, “Oh, yeah, She made me do that too.” Which was something of a relief—this is not that unusual, I guess—except that some of their admonishments were scary. “Pick a time to do it, and commit to it,” one woman said. “I kept putting it off, and one day Hel woke me up in the morning and said,”
‘Call in sick to work for the next nine days. You start now, whether you like it or not.’"

So I looked frantically at my calendar, and chose a nine-day period in early October. I’d rather do it in the fall, which is Hel’s time, and anyway I’m pretty cold-hardy. I’d rather endure nine days of cold than heat and bugs. Then I peeked at the information that She’d “downloaded” into my head about the Rules for this journey, and it terrified me.

I’ll be pathwalking for this trip, bringing the worlds in to overlap with each other, walking with my body in this realm and my astral body in the other realms. I’ve done this before, but only for an hour or so, not for days. But I will have to do this for nine days straight, no breaks. And no one can come and help me. Because I will have to be physically walking to many places in the Nine Worlds, someone else invading my space might knock me back here, requiring me to start over.

Or they might get trapped there with me, and I’d have to walk them out. Naked. Defenseless. Because one of the rules that chilled me was: You can take nothing with you that does not have a soul. In other
words, nothing that isn’t whammied, that isn’t filled with energy so that it shows up on other planes as well as this one. That’s every article of my clothing, my tools, everything. Everything I might need to survive for nine days in the woods.

This badly restricts what I can take. For things to whammy well, they have to be handmade, or specially worked on. They usually have to be of natural materials. Artificial stuff made of man-made chemicals doesn’t take a charge well at all. Nylon tents are out. So is ordinary clothing. (“What happens if I bring something dead?” I ask Her. “It might get lost,” She says ominously. OK, OK, this is going to take a lot of planning.)
Chapter 4
Pathwalking, Way-Taming

There are many ways to journey from world to world. The most common one throughout the ages was, simply, to leave the body behind and go out with only the soul and consciousness, connected to one’s unconscious or tranced-out flesh by an astral cord. This is the way that most world-travelers go, because it’s the easiest—journeying, faring forth.

However, not all of us can manage to do this kind of traveling. Some people are very tied to their bodies, and just can’t seem to get out of them no matter how hard they try. There may actually be some organic built-in reason why they’re so stuck—perhaps being in a body is part of their lesson for this lifetime—and it may be best not to force the issue. Some folks are just very body-centered; others find that without the sense-boundaries of the body, they become easily confused and lost.

The problem may also be one of not being body-centered enough. I am personally not allowed to leave my body and go out on my own; my patron deity knows me all too well, and knows that my personal discomfort with my own flesh—partly due to gender dysphoria, partly due to pain caused by physical disability—might make it all too tempting for me to stay out of it longer than might be healthy for me. Other folk who aren’t comfortable with the concept of having a body at all, or aren’t comfortable with their personal bodies for whatever reason, might decide that the ability to leave might be far too open to abusing.

Another reason not to fare forth is when you’re part of a team that does worldwalking of some sort, and you’re not the central figure going into the main trance. Many groups who do journeying rituals as a public spectacle, or at least with a team of people to monitor the trance worker, find that it’s
useful if the drummers and monitors know how to go along on the journey, at least partially, with the main tranceworker. However, you can’t do that without your body and still do your job, especially if that includes beating a drum, so pathwalking is a good technique for them to learn, if possible.

Pathwalking, or “way-taming” as we’ve also called it, after one of Odin’s titles, is the technique of walking in two worlds at once. In order to do it, you “pull in” the other world and superimpose it on this one. Your physical body walks in your home world, while your astral body moves through the second world. It’s safer spiritually, in some ways, than going out without your body. First of all, you can’t get separated from it accidentally, which is the number-one risk of astral journeying. It’s harder for you to lose pieces of your soul, either accidentally or to malevolent entities, if it’s still firmly tied to your flesh. It’s harder to get hopelessly lost, because you can back out and start over if you need to, which is annoying, but not actually harmful.

On the other hand, it is unquestionably harder on the body than short-term astral journeying. (Long-term astral journeying has its own risks of not eating or drinking for days, but that’s something that few people end up doing except by unfortunate accident.) Crossing worlds can cause headaches and digestive problems in some people, and the “double vision” can wear on the nerves. It’s also exhausting, and sometimes the body can start to feel very heavy after a while. Doing it for several hours is not so bad, but several days of pathwalking can leave you fairly weak and in need of a great deal of recuperation.

I find that every time I switch from one world to the next, my gastrointestinal tract becomes upset and decides that it wants to purge everything, usually within an hour of crossing. Two or more crossings per day means that ordinary food doesn’t digest well at all. I can’t fast due to hypoglycemia, but I can imagine that fasting could make this easier. On the other hand, pathwalking does seem to burn calories and leave you hungry in short order, so even food that passes through quickly might do some good. Some people might have the opposite problem: food that “sits” in
them and refuses to digest. The secret to dealing with this is to have your food energized before eating it, as constipation during pathwalking is likely to be a problem of the food not being able to exist in both worlds until it’s been in you for a while.

Another thing about pathwalking that is both useful and annoying is that you can take physical objects with you into other worlds ... if they have been charged and ensouled enough that they, like you, will show up in two worlds at once. Some folks who journey have learned that they can call special charged magical tools and items to them while they work in other worlds; the astral body of the item goes with you while the physical one stays here, just like the human who uses it. When you’re pathwalking, anything that you actually intend to physically use in the other world has to be charged enough to be visible and useful there as well as here. That includes all your clothing, dishes, tools, and anything else that you might need. It can be handy, though ... if you really want to wear your favorite shirt, you can take it with you. The chapter on “Creating Your Kit” will go further into this issue.

Pathwalking does have some basic requirements that are absolutely necessary. First, you have to have the Sight. By this I mean that psychic input translates to your brain as visual stimuli. When you do energy work, do you “see” something as well as feel it, smell it, or hear it? Not everyone does get visual stimuli from psychic work, and that’s all right for many other techniques...but for pathwalking, you do have to see where you’re going. Stumbling blindly through another world is a bad idea. It’s also good if you can hear things as well, for obvious reasons.

Second, you have to have a good awareness of your astral body, even if you can’t remove it from your physical body. You should be able to track your energy flows, know when your astral body is low-energy, or wounded, or just not doing well. To pathwalk, your astral body walks in one world while your physical body walks in another; although they are in the same space, you may feel sensations with one and not the other, and you have to be aware enough of your hame, or astral body, to tell the difference. This
also means that pathwalking requires you to mentally process a variety of stimuli at once; if you’re easily distracted and can’t multi-task well, it may be more confusing than it’s worth. Practice by trying to hold a conversation while listening to a song on headphones. You can switch your attention back and forth, but you have to be able to both follow and add to the conversation, and be aware of the song lyrics. If you can’t do that, even with practice, then pathwalking may not be your thing.

Some people respond very poorly to pathwalking; one seidhkona described her attempts as: “I found the superimposition dizzying; the sensations uncomfortable, bordering on painful, overly exhausting, and decidedly unpleasant. I had a headache for days, felt like I was dragging around lead weights in the form of my body and had very little ability to manage things after the experience. It was very difficult for me to leave the experience when I had to return as well.” If you’re used to “far ing forth” without your body, the sensation of having to manage that body, as well as having to manage two simultaneous superimposed visions, may seem entirely too difficult and not worth the trouble.

Occasionally, someone will slip into pathwalking during a guided meditation ritual without actually meaning to, or understanding what’s happening. Another seidhkona recounts, “Recently, at a friend’s ritual, someone was conducting a guided-imagery meditation and I slipped into a pretty deep trance state. I was able to get up and walk around outside for several minutes without slipping out of it. I wasn’t exactly seeing the other world, but I had a definite sense of being in both worlds at the same time. This has happened to a lesser degree on two other ritual occasions.” Some have reported trying to leave the ritual by getting up and walking out, and feeling unable to leave the other world behind. They generally either walked around until it wore off, or they went back in and rejoined the group journeying, leaving normally at the end with everyone else.

Other people can interfere with your experience of pathwalking. First of all, interactions with other people who are not actively pathwalking with you can knock you out of the other world and back into this one. In rare cases, it can also drag them in, which is a real problem, especially if they
can’t see what’s going on, or if they can but are easily freaked out. I recommend absolute privacy for most pathwalking experiments...but I also recommend that you tell at least one other person about it, and tell them to come get you if you don’t return reasonably on time. It’s also good to have someone magically-adept who knows how to come in and fetch you; perhaps traveling in astrally, perhaps just knowing how to knock you out if you’re stuck somewhere. When I was gone for nine days, I got regular meals delivered to a specific place by my partner, who would have become concerned and called for help if I’d missed two meals in a row.

Now comes the hard part. How the heck do you actually learn the trick of pathwalking? The answer is that I can’t tell you how, especially in the medium of print. I was spirit-taught, meaning that various gods and spirits “motored me through” the technique by taking my body, doing it, and then having me try it. (“Motoring through” is a word utilized by people who work with autistic patients; often, the only way to teach them a physical skill is to actually move the parts of their body in the way that it should go. For example, to teach them how to turn a doorknob, you’d wrap their fingers around the knob, wrap your hand around theirs, and turn. That’s what the gods and spirits who taught me did, on an astral level.) Not only can I not describe how to do it properly on a printed page, I couldn’t teach you if you were there in front of me, at least not the way I learned. So how do you go about it?

Start by talking to the gods who do this sort of thing regularly. The Norse deities who are most associated with this kind of thing are Odin (one of whose epithets is Way-Tamer), Freya (the mistress of seidhr), Hela the goddess of death, and especially Loki. Make offerings to them, ask them to teach you this (or to send some other spirit to teach you), and then spend some time doing utiseta, or “sitting-out”—and meditating. Wait for a teacher to come to you. If you feel the sense of forbidding pressure, it may be that you’re not meant to learn this technique. If the spirits come to teach you, they may ask a price. Consider carefully before agreeing to it, especially if it involves lifelong vows.
So over the next four months I’ll be making my kit. In a weird way, I’m happy about it. Up until now, She’s let me work with magic items, but not depend on any of them, except for my drum and guitar. Now I get to have magical tools, for the first time! No tacky silver shit from the witch store. Mine all have to be handmade by me, or handmade by loved ones who can whammy. I’m also allowed to be loaned magical objects for the trip by loved ones. Them’s the rules. Of course, some people get wands and pendants. I get magic socks.

So I told my friends what I’m going to be doing, and the result is much more positive than I expected. I figured they’d just think that I was crazy. Instead, they are enthusiastic about helping, and many of them are volunteering to make me things for the trip.

We discuss the issue of shelter. I think about tents and stuff, but Bella points out that she’s been wanting to build a treehouse back there for some time. We picked out the area and discussed supplies and time frame. She assures me that it can be whammied
enough to show up on any astral plane, and I’ll be able to sleep comfortably in it each night.

In terms of clothes … I’ve asked folks to donate me any old clothing made of natural materials—linen, wool, leather, cotton—that they don’t want any more. There’s more hamingja (luck and fortune) in clothing patchworked together out of stuff given to me out of love and friendship. Joan donated an entire bag of torn or too-small silk blouses, which can be cut up for underwear and shirts and lining for my jacket.

Tannin went over my list of equipment with me, and brings up the issue of offerings, tolls, and bribes. I had forgotten about that. I will probably be required to visit any number of folk—Aesir, Vanir, Rökkr, Jotun, Ljosalfar and Svartalfar and Duergar. Some may be hostile. All will expect gifts and offerings.

Joshua points out that the best charm for not getting lost is to bring a map. We decide to make me a cloak that will be one big appliqued and embroidered map of the Nine Worlds. Then I start looking at maps, all of which are different. I pull up as much lore as I can to figure out where things are in relation to each
other. It doesn’t make much sense at the moment—the drawn maps tend to have things moved around arbitrarily to suit people’s sense of symbolism. That goes especially for Edred Thorsson’s map, which is way too neat and tidy and molecular. “Hel’s map is a thing of beauty,” one member of the Hel email list tells me, “but it’s not allowed out of Elvidner.” I’ll have to send away for more maps.

I handspin grey mohair and silk together into fine thread, and enchant it with a spell to confuse the steps of any who are trying to follow me with ill intent. I’ll make knotted lengths to wrap around a stick, and undo them as I need them. They will have a physical form (the thread) and an astral form (the spell). If I’m, for instance, walking in Jotunheim (being physically in two places at once), and something comes after me, I can reach into my bag (which will be made of one of Bella’s old leather skirts, and be embroidered with runes to give it soul), pull out the stick, unwrap a piece of thread, speak the spell that activates it, and drop it as I walk away. As it leaves my aura, it separates. The physical thread
falls back to this plane, and the astral element of it stays in Jotunheim, and does its job.

Of course the magicked tools will keep their souls even when they’re not in my hand—spells are a one-use thing—but they will be useful for dealing with things in those worlds. Or so I understand the process, and it’s worked for me before.

Ironically, the one place that I’m not afraid to go is the place that most people fear—Helheim. I’ve been there before, brought by Her. I’ve just never walked there myself. I can sort of understand why I have to do this the hard way, the walking way. I’m so bad at directions, so spatially dyslexic, I can’t find my way around anything until I’ve thoroughly walked it. So maybe it’s important that I get the ground tour of the Nine Worlds, so that I can be sent to find things or people or anything else that might have gotten lost there. Or whatever else She intends for me to do. For years now I’ve been putting this off—yes, I’m a functioning shaman, but I’ve been putting off the actual tribal duties—on the excuse that I was a full-time single parent. Well, my daughter is almost of age, and she will be leaving within a year, and she
hardly needs me now. I complained that I needed help, that I couldn’t do it without assistance. Joshua was promptly sent over with a big astral package label saying, “For Raven: one servant, assistant, and shaman’s boy.” Now my only excuse is that I need more training, and clearly that’s what this is.

We make jokes about the issue of ensouled artifacts. I kid about how so many of the types who get into trouble wandering about the Nine Worlds are warrior sorts—they go there with their enchanted sword and armor—I imagine Elmer Fudd singing “Spear and Magic Hel…met!” to the Ride of the Valkyries at this point—and then, in the middle of being attacked by something, they look down and realize that they have no pants! After all, who thinks to bring magic pants? It’s so unglamourous. And then six weeks later, they’re in a shaman’s living room, saying, “Well, uh, some troll ran up and hacked off my, uh, astral you-know-what, and, uh, this old hag sort of ran off with it, and I, uh, haven’t been able to get it up for six weeks, and could you maybe go and find it again for me?” And the shaman puts his hand
to his forehead and sighs and says, “Where did this happen again? An old hag? OK, OK, I’ll see what I can do...”

For what it’s worth, my sword and armor are going to remain on the astral plane only. It’s not that I can’t get any. I have dozens of swords, but I’m told by the Boss Lady that it’s best not to go around looking as if you’re cruising for trouble, and anyway any sword and armor will be entirely useless on this plane, unlike boots and socks and pants and knife and cup and fire steel. So the stuff that my body does not need to survive does not have to be physical.

My friend Gary gives me a book of embroidery patterns of Saami folk designs, including ones from the spirit drums. They are adorned with stags and birds and hunters. I will put one on the back of my jacket to watch my back, and another on the case I’m making to protect my drum. Luckily I can recruit the Ancestor Thread Guild to help with the counted cross-stitch...it’s good to have a Kingdom of people.

Speaking of which... A voice very sternly tells me that I must formally turn rulership of the Kingdom over to one or more regents for the period of time that
I will be away. I ask Bella and Sir Tannin formally to watch over the Kingdom for me during that time, and they agree. Bella will handle interpersonal problems, and Tannin, my senior knight, will deal with paperwork and administrative issues. I’ve never heard that voice before. The last thing he says is, “Come and visit me. I’ve been waiting for you.” It is not a suggestion. I am ninety percent sure that it is Odin. He is also both king and shaman, I realize. Actually, he’s the only god I know who combines those two archetypes. I expect that I do have a lot to learn from him, even if he isn’t fond of my mistress...
Chapter 5

Doing Magic In
Otherworlds

Once you leave your homeworld, things change. Some spells that worked before don’t work, and have to be altered; others work even better. If you’re pathwalking in two worlds at once a spell might work in one world and not the other. There are sound and logical reasons for this, but in order to explain them, I’ll have to digress into a bit of magical theory. Bear with me.

Although magic can be divided into a wide variety of traditions, and aesthetic and technical styles, its basic nature can be reduced to three general categories: thaumaturgic, theurgic, and spirit-based. They have very different sciences behind them, and are good for different goals and places. Most magical systems are a blend of the first two; for that matter, so are many spells.

Thaumaturgic magic is direct, and based on the properties inherent in the natural world. It is done by directly and consciously hitting something with “juice”, or energy. You “flavor” the energy with your intent, and stick it or send it to the thing you want affected. It can be your own personal energy, or it can be drawn from the cosmos, but it is always consciously directed towards a specific goal. Usually, the accompanying visualizations or words are clear and direct as well, such as “Open!” or “Stay!” or “Attract wealth to me!” Visual patterns used are representational of the goal, even if only symbolically; for example, if you’re drawing a binding spell, you might use the figure of a knot or chain. If you’re doing it physically, you’d actually tie knots in a piece of string or cord.

When you use props and tools for thaumaturgic magic, you use the inherent natural qualities of those things. For example, a stone undeniably has the qualities of “solidness” and “endurance”, so it could be used in magical work for gaining those qualities. A piece of clear quartz would have
those qualities plus “clarity”; a sharp-edged stone would add “sharpness”, and so forth. A strawberry might have the quality of “sweetness” to magically call on, as well as being close to the earth. A dropped feather from a bird has once flown through the air, and would be useful for invoking mental flight, or lightness. And so forth.

Thaumaturgic magic, as I’ve said, is very conscious, because if you can’t feel it, you can’t hit your target. It can be done with the unconscious mind—and I’ve known some people who were just not naturally good at feeling energy, so they trained themselves to do it unconsciously—but some part of you is actually handling the “juice” and sending it out to do its carefully directed job. The good thing about thaumaturgic magic is that you don’t have to know a lot of lore to do it. You also don’t have to know anything about religion, or deities, or how people lived long ago. People who are very scientifically minded can do it, because it only requires a keen observation of the natural world. One of the drawbacks, however, is that it requires focus and concentration, and if you’re hysterical or otherwise in a mood where that’s impossible, your spell may not work. Another drawback is that it falls down somewhat when doing pathworking, as I’ll get back to in a moment.

Theurgic magic is entirely different. Imagine that the universe—our world and many layers of other worlds—is crisscrossed by a giant web of energy that binds it all together. The thought and intent of people from all worlds travels back and forth across this web. Some strands of the web get so much intent traveling down them that they develop grooves, shallow to deep depending on how much use they get. The intent of deities makes very large grooves. A group of people can get together and create a new groove with their combined intent. Myths are grooves like this; people reenact them over and over again, often without realizing it. So are stories, songs, chants, symbols, words of power, and spells.

When we say an old spell, or sing an old song, or use an old symbol, or enact a myth, we fall into that groove and slide along it to its end ... unless something goes wrong and knocks us out of it. It takes very little energy to do this; usually only enough to connect with the groove, and then its own
energy takes over and carries your intent to its end. Sometimes you may have to push it along if it stalls out for some reason, and of course you can feed it more of your own energy to make it move faster along the groove, so to speak, and thus have a bigger impact at the end, but in general theurgic magic takes less energy than thaumaturgic. The other side of that coin, however, is that it doesn’t always work, because there are a variety of reasons why you can get tipped out of the groove, or more likely, miss it entirely. For beginners who are working with old spells, I’d give it a 50/50 chance of working at best.

The more familiar you are with a particular groove—say, an old non-representational symbol or spell—the easier it is to find it and fit your intent into it. Because the energy of the universe carries the work for you, many people can’t feel theurgic magic the way that they can thaumaturgic magic. You write the mysterious symbol, and you hope it works, and maybe it does and maybe it doesn’t. There isn’t that feel of energy going from you to the goal, so it may be imperceptible...unless you are really hooked in to the energy of the web enough to feel it, which most beginners aren’t. On the other hand, theurgic magic can actually work for people with no psychic knack, no ability to sense energy flows, no experience, and no belief that what they’re doing is actually going to work. If they manage to hit that groove, something will happen regardless of ability, knack or belief. That’s where all those stories come from about the fool finding the magic book of spells that work when he reads them, even when he has no idea what he’s doing. It also means that it has the same chance of working when he’s too messed up emotionally to be able to do a focused, conscious, thaumaturgical spell.

Theurgic magic is very abstract. A symbol might not look at all like what it’s supposed to symbolize as far as your mind is concerned, but it will still have a chance of working. Perhaps it meant something direct once, but that culture has faded and the original meaning has gone with it. Perhaps it meant something to one specific person once, but it was repeated out of faith without understanding. Perhaps it is the symbol of a deity associated with what you’re trying to accomplish, and its groove was created by that
deity and is difficult for us mere mortals to understand. Perhaps it never had any representational meaning at all in this world ... and maybe, just maybe, it's an import from another world. People like me are not that unique; there has been a flow of ideas and communication to and from other worlds as long as people have been doing this, which is a pretty long time.

Because theurgic magic is bound up with learning grooves created by other minds and souls, many of which cannot be found by looking at the natural world, it requires a huge amount of study and memorization of lore. Thaumaturgic magic, ideally, could be figured out by someone who'd never read a single myth in their life, or for that matter a single book. Theurgic magic, on the other hand, we have only through the written words of those who worked on the huge job of mapping out cosmic grooves. (They were obviously oral traditions once, but those have pretty much died out when it comes to Western theurgic magic.) That means research, and trial and error.

The third type of magic, spirit-based magic (also referred to as shamanic magic, although any shaman worth their salt will be able to do all three as part of their practice), is the rarest of the three. It is magic that is done by allying yourself with various wights who then do the bulk of the work for you. Rather than working with pure energy, or working with universal power symbols, it is about working with actual entities. It is also a very personal and subjective practice; you can’t trade around spirit allies like you can interesting sigils. Generally, they come and find you, and they may require deep commitments or serious payment in order to aid you. This kind of magic is ideally learned apprenticeship-wise from a single teacher, although many of us have to figure it out on our own. We will not be covering it further in this book, but will delve into it in the next book in the series, Wightridden: Techniques of Northern-Tradition Shamanism.

So what does this have to do with way-taming? The problem with us is that we’re too centered on our own world and our own species. Just as we tend to anthropomorphize other entities when we meet them (and then be
surprised when their motives are not human), we also tend to assume that other worlds will have physical laws that are just like ours. They don’t. Clearly, if their laws were too different, we wouldn’t be able to function there, but we can’t assume that the natural properties of anything in their world will be identical to those properties here. Even a plant which looks the same in both worlds could be poisonous in one and non-poisonous in another. This means that thaumaturgic magic based on the natural properties of this world has an iffy chance of working somewhere else. Maybe it will, maybe it won’t … and the only way to figure it out is to try by trial and error. This can take a long time, considering that every time you change worlds the rules are a little different.

Theurgic magic, on the other hand, works wherever you are. Those universal grooves are accessible anywhere, which is how magic spells originating in other worlds could work here if they’re strong enough to have created a groove. The runes, for example, not only work properly in every one of the Nine Worlds, they work in worlds outside of the Norse cosmology. (Although I’m not covering those in this book, I can assure you on this point.) They are a groove carved into the cosmos by the will of the Norns and the sacrifice and suffering of Odin. You can call upon them wherever you are, and the next chapter will explain their special uses for pathwalking.
I’m spending my free time embroidering magical sigils for my jacket and drum case. Looking through the book of Saami embroidery patterns, the two figures that grab me first are primitive octagonal pictures copied from Saami shaman’s drums—antlered reindeer in the center, and little birds in the corners. The reindeer seems to want to watch my back, from between my shoulder blades.

Even with a map, I worry to myself, I might get lost. I’m so good at getting lost. It’s one of my best talents. The folks on my e-list tell me to take along a spirit animal. Spirit animal? I don’t have one. I’ve never had a familiar; I’ve had pets, but didn’t seem to bond to them in that way. I have two totems, but the actual Spirit doesn’t drop in for tea and cookies; the animals simply inspire me, and I have things in common with them. I have their “medicine”, but they’re not spirit animals that I can call on. Besides, I get the distinct impression that I’m supposed to be taking actual physical things on this trip, which
would bring us back to familiars again, which I don’t have.

I obsess about these problems while I hang the laundry, and then I hear a voice in my mind. I know that voice, deep and smooth and soft. It’s Herne’s voice. “You won’t get lost,” he says. “I’ll make sure you don’t get lost.”

I feel an immediate rush of relief. Thank you, thank you. When the oldest and greatest of the hunter/tracker gods says that I won’t get lost, then I’m probably safe. I guess that opening my body to horse gods does give me something useful in return. I hadn’t thought that there would be any obligation; do you feel an obligation to the taxi that you take a ride in, beyond paying the owner’s fee? But apparently Herne has some small fondness for me. I’m one of his little predators. He probably sees me the way I see a house cat. “Can you go anywhere in the Nine Worlds?” I ask, foolishly thinking that as he’s not a Norse god, perhaps he’d have trouble moving through their cosmos.

He laughs at me. No, that’s not accurate; Herne never laughs. He is amused at me. He doesn’t even
speak, but I am suddenly reminded of how old this god is. I call him by a Celtic name, but he is older than Celts, or Norsemen, or even Indo-Europeans. When I don furs and do the Wild Hunt every year while he rides me, I am tapping into the same tradition of the Paleolithic cave-dwellers, dressed in their furs and reenacting the sacred hunt around the bonfire. And yet he is older even than that. He is the guardian of the predator-prey relationship, and every animal that is involved in that, which is nearly all of them. He is truly Lord of the Animals. Before there were humans, there was Herne. He might not have looked as we humans picture him—I expect he shows a different face to all his children—but he was there. Herne is familiar with velociraptors and pteranodons and great toothed fish. If it moves and breathes and eats (or is eaten by) other animals in some way, it is under his protection.

The really old gods, the pre-human gods like the Earth Mother and the Green Man and the Hunter, they don’t bother with the cosmic boundaries set up by the younger gods. They just walk through them as if they don’t exist. They can go anywhere. As long as
his children are there, so is Herne. “Why are you putting the deer on your belongings if not to invoke the Hunter’s protection?” he asks rhetorically.

“Because it was on the shaman’s drums,” I say.

“And who do you think that the shamans were speaking to?” Damn, do I feel stupid. He goes on: “And don’t worry about the spirit animal. I’ll take care of that. I own all the spirit animals,” he says. “They’re all mine.”

Of course you do, I think to myself. I assume this means that one will appear in spirit form when necessary, or that I simply won’t need one. I go inside and tell my family what he’s said, hoping it makes them feel safer about the trip, as it does me. I have spirit allies, yes I do. I have allies who’ve shared my body, and they give a damn about me.

The next morning, our friend Lorelei calls, and she comes over that afternoon. She wears a tattoo of a deer’s head on her ankle, something that I hadn’t noticed before. She has rescued a baby crow, a tiny fledgling that had apparently fallen out of its nest and was being attacked by cats on the road. It’s
bigger than our cockatiels, which seems strange for a baby, but crows can get really big. Its feathers are still fluffy and soft and bedraggled, with many of them missing, and it can’t yet fly. It still has to be fed by hand, and it opens its gaping maw to accept food. It can’t yet peck or feed itself; it’s too uncoordinated. Divination says that it’s a girl. She’s friendly and pettable and attaches herself to us immediately as soon as we feed her. I sit with her on my shoulder, on my leather vest with all the thongs for her to dig her claws into. She pulls my hair and shits on my arm and then curls up to sleep. I have named her Maegen, a Norse word that refers to the personal power that one earns by honorable deeds and by keeping one’s word.

I tell Lorelei about my discussion with Herne, and she laughs and indicates the tattoo and says she’s glad to be of service. Less than 24 hours and a Corvid is delivered to my house in a milk crate. Now that’s service, all right. Guess he likes his little predator.

If everyone lived my life, how could they disbelieve in the gods? There’s no way. No hallucinatory voice in my head could have pulled off that trick, unless I’m way more powerful than is
actually possible. It’s as if everyone is pulling together to get me through this journey. It’s wonderful to know that you matter to the gods, that the mattering isn’t all one-way. Herne cares. I doubt he’d pull my ass out of trouble if I was really stupid, but he cares enough to help me. I won’t get lost, and I’ll have a spirit animal, wearing flesh. My people will provide my magical stuff, and the rest is up to me. There we are. I wonder if Odin himself got so much aid when he walked off into the wilderness in search of wisdom?

“...Do you know you’re not forgotten, Do you know that someone cares? For half of love is keeping promises, And you’ll find the other half of love Is simply being there...”

—Wild Gods, my song for Herne and all the wild gods.
Chapter 6
Pathwalking
With Runes

There are certain magical spells that can help you alter your pathworking experience for your own comfort. This goes rather more into sorcery than shamanic work, but the two have often blurred together. I learned the runes for divination over twenty years ago, and slowly discovered that they had magical uses as well, which falls under the general heading of galdr, or Norse magic-working. However, when I started walking between worlds, I discovered that the runes had a whole related set of uses that were specific to moving between worlds.

The runes are the best tools I've found for tweaking your experience magically during pathwalking. I use the Anglo-Saxon Futhorc rather than the Norse Futhark, because I’m one of those people who could never be happy with only 24 crayons in a box as a kid, and because the extra Futhorc runes work well with some of the Rökkr deities that I work with. However, if you prefer only to deal with Futhark runes, just ignore the ones in the forthcoming list that you don’t recognize. Also, don’t think that these are the only uses for the runes. They are a multi-purpose magical and spiritual toolbox, and different people have unearthed different uses for them. These are just the ones that I use.

I am not listing the runes here in either the Futhark or Futhorc order. I’m listing them in the order that they are most useful to the pathwalker. I strongly suggest that you have some familiarity with the nature of each rune, from a divinatory and/or magical and/or spiritual perspective, before you work with them under these circumstances. There are many excellent books on runes out there; one of my particular favorites is Edred Thorsson’s Runelore. You ought to be able to find suitable study material without trouble in any bookstore that has a decent occult/Pagan section.
I’ve been asked: Does the stroke order and the visualized color really make much of a difference? The answer is that I’ve found them to help in the depth and permanence of the spell, but they are not necessary for it to work. Some people can’t visualize runes in color anyway. Where did I get the colors? I messed around on other planes, pathwalking and trying them out, until by trial and error I found the ones that worked best. Some were obvious—Ken is red, Laguz is blue—duh. But use them or skip them as you will.

![Raido](image)

This is the single most important rune when pathwalking, because it’s the one you’ll use to make the topology of two worlds line up appropriately. When two worlds overlap, their gross natural features tend to pull together. This is because like attracts like—high places attract high places, valleys attract valleys, and roads attract roads. It’s especially true for roads and paths, because these are highways of energy carved by the walking feet of many people. However, sometimes there’s a road in one world that just doesn’t exist in the other, and there’s nothing for it to line up with.

You’ll only be able to easily walk down an open way that exists in both worlds, where two roads have lined up together. If there’s a path in the homeworld but none in the second world, you’ll feel a sense of pulling, or dragging, or barrier, or severe discomfort when you try to walk it. If there’s no path in this world, then of course you won’t be physically able to drag your body through those trees or rocks or whatever. It does limit the ways that you can move, and can be frustrating when you’re trying to find your way through wild or rough territory.
This is where Raido comes in. Raido, or Rad or Rade, or however you like to pronounce it—is the Rune of the Road. To use it for pathwalking, trace it in the air and speak it aloud. As you do so, concentrate on the idea of the paths shifting together, until a clear way opens up before you. The rune Raido will temporarily force paths together, even if they’re rather far apart, long enough for you to walk down them. Be warned that if your Raido-spell is forcing together two paths that are quite far apart, it may be a little uncomfortable to walk them. I tend to feel a sense of strain, as if one is holding together two things that want to spring apart, and sometimes it feels like the ground is tilted over to the side as I walk. It’s still safe to walk, but get down it and off it as soon as you can.

You can do the Raido-spell repeatedly, if you don’t like the way the paths shifted. However, sometimes certain things just don’t line up in any way that you can get to them. Water is especially tricky: bodies of water, even small ones, usually won’t line up with anything that isn’t some kind of body of water. If you’re living in, say, the middle of the desert, you will find it difficult to pathwalk a road to the Well of Wyrd if there’s nothing wet for miles. The way to get around this is to build a water-anchor beforehand (see Laguz).

If there is a choice of landmarks—for example, three or four bodies of water—the topological feature that you’re trying to get to will line up with the one most similar to its energy. When I was pathwalking on my own property and had to visit all three wells, both the Well of the Norns and Hvergelmir seemed happy to line up with the deepest part of the spring that gurgled under our little bridge. However, no matter how many times I used Raido, Mimir’s well refused to line up with any water feature on our property. The road kept shifting away, and I finally ended up a quarter-mile away from my property at the local fishing pond. For some reason, its energy was more compatible with Mimirsbrunnr than my little spring. It also seems like the more spiritually “loaded” the place is, the pickier it is about lining up a counterpart landmark with compatible energy.

Raido is drawn with the thumb, with the vertical stroke upwards and the diagonal ones downwards. Its color is the dusty brown of the road.
Ehwaz, or Eh, is the Rune of the Horse, and is the traveler’s other mainstay. It makes the road itself move faster under one’s feet, which can be very useful when crossing long distances in other worlds. Ehwaz’s action reminds me of the faery-tale story of the “seven-league boots” which made every step a great jump of seven leagues.

When roads line up during pathwalking, they seem to line up by direction and general energy and not necessarily length. A road in one world might be much longer than the road in the other world that has locked onto it. This makes for weird sensations when you’re trying to walk them—sometimes it seems like you’re walking much longer than you ought to be to get somewhere that looks as if it’s right over there, and sometimes the road seems to rush beneath you and you’re there in much fewer steps than you expected. This is because one road has been “stretched” to match the other one, so to speak. It seems as if your pace tends to be somewhere between what it takes to walk each road.

While coming up on something too quickly is merely confusing, taking forever to reach it can be tiring and annoying, and it’s here that you use Ehwaz. Draw it in the air over the road, or if it’s a particularly long and tiresome road, draw it in the dust. It will speed up the second world’s road in relation to the homeworld’s road, and the second world’s road will seem to move faster under your feet. I find that not looking down while you’re walking under the influence of Ehwaz is advised, as it can be disorienting. As soon as you stop, the rune stops as well, and you have to restart it.

Ehwaz is drawn with the index and middle fingers together, from bottom left to bottom right. Its color is light grey.
Laguz, or Lagu, or Laeg, is the Rune of Water, and it can be used in pathwalking to find bodies of water (such as creeks, springs, or even large puddles), and to line them up together, much as Raido lines up paths. Another use for it is in preparation for pathwalking; if you know that you will be visiting a sacred body of water (such as Urdabrunnr or Mimirsbunnr or Hvergelmir or the oceans surrounding Vanahem or Midgard) and there is no actual water in the place where you’ve decided to do your pathwalking, you can create landmarks for it to line up with. You can use large pots or woks of water, or metal trash cans, or buckets, or even a garden hose with a few holes punched in it to leak water. Paint the Laguz rune on it, and that will serve as an anchor for the second-world water feature. You do have to differentiate between fresh and salt water; to anchor an ocean’s shoreline you can try adding some salt and dried seaweed to the water, but the absolute best option is to pour in some actual seawater. If you don’t live near the ocean, have some friends send you a bottle of it.

Laguz will also, in some cases, temporarily purify water in the second world and allow it to be drinkable. This is good if you have to get a drink from the River Slith, which is full of knives, or the blood river that runs through Myrkwood, or any other stream that you fear might be enchanted. It only works on a cupful at a time, so dip it out and then set the spell. It also does not work on the quality of the water in your homeworld; you’ll have to resort to more physical technology with regard to Giardia and other parasites.

Laguz is drawn with the index finger, up on the long stroke, then down on the short one. Its color is blue.
Berkana, or Beorc, is the Rune of the Birch Tree, growth, and nourishment. It is Frigga’s rune, and supposedly can be used to get her attention, although as with all things divine you take your chances there. On a pathwalking level, Berkana does for foodstuffs what Laguz will do for water: make it nourishing and nonpoisonous in the second world. It may not alleviate enchantment, though, as long as the enchantment won’t directly affect your health. If it has botulism in this world, it’s unlikely that Berkana will make it safely edible.

Berkana can also be used to anchor trees. It will work almost every time on a birch tree; for other species it’s hit-or-miss. Berkana is drawn with the little finger in the same way as Raido. Her color is white.

Kaunaz, or Kano, or Ken, is the Rune of Fire, and the Rune of Truth. Drawing it in someone’s direction while they are talking may give you an intuitive feel for whether their words are true. Ken can also be used to anchor fires that you make yourself but need to leave for a moment (please don’t leave fires completely unattended, have a support person monitor them!) or candles, or torches. It’s a good all-purpose fire-starting spell as well. If you bring primitive fire-making equipment such as flint and steel, or a firebow or fire-twirl, mark them with Ken. For a firebow, add Nyth, for a fire-twirl, add Cweorth.

Draw Ken with the middle finger, from the top down. Its color is red.
Mannaz, or Mann, is the Rune of Humanity. It is a link to your physical body, and can help bring you back there. Although one doesn’t technically separate from one’s body during pathwalking, the fact that one is splitting it between two worlds can, in some cases, cause the soul to start to separate out. If you are skilled at journeying, and you are in a safe space, you can just lay down and fare forth. If it is important that you stay pathwalking and not faring forth, then Mannaz is the rune to use. Figure out where the separation is starting from, and draw it there on yourself. If you aren’t sure, draw it over your navel. If you’re worried about staying in your body, you can prepare by drawing a series of Mannaz runes on yourself—forehead, throat, heart, solar plexus, navel, genitals, hands, and feet. That will thoroughly anchor you, although it may make it difficult to be aware enough of the nonphysical planes to be very useful. It’s best tried beforehand, in a less crucial space, so that you know how your physical and astral bodies react to the rune. When you’re back from pathwalking, it’s a good idea to use it on yourself in order to get yourself accustomed to being totally in your body again.

Mannaz is drawn with the middle finger. Draw the left vertical line from bottom to top, then cross over with the diagonal. Repeat the process with the right side. Its color is that of flesh.
The Rune of the Serpent, when drawn, will bring you to the border of Midgard, whichever part is closer. Since the border of Midgard means the Big Snake, that’s who you’ll see. It tends to land you on the shore closest to Jormundgand’s rippling coils. Because of the nature of the rune, and the fast-moving Snake (most people don’t realize that the Snake is constantly in motion, tearing around the world), you won’t stop short. You’ll hit the border and slide sideways for a bit, carried along by the Snake’s motion. Don’t be thrown off; let the momentum slow down and don’t get dizzy.

Obviously, this rune only works if you’re in Midgard (in which case you’ll end up at the inside border) or one of the worlds adjacent to Midgard (in which case you’ll end up at an external border). You can also use it to invoke the Snake, with a bit of poured seawater.

Ior is drawn with the index and middle fingers together. Draw up with the vertical stroke, then make the X with downward strokes. Its color is sea-green.
Gar, the Rune of Odin’s Spear, is actually a kenning for the World Tree upon which Odin was hung. Gar is a difficult rune to use, and it may or may not respond to you. If it does respond, you’ll feel an immediate sense of vertigo as you find yourself rushing up and down the World Tree as if in an invisible elevator. If you make it in the air in an upwards direction, you’ll go up; making it downwards brings you down. The problem is getting control of it, because it doesn’t just nicely stop at each floor. If you go down and you’re not careful, you will land yourself in the Land of the Dead, and if you’re not in the area where most non-employee mortals are allowed, you can get yourself in trouble. Going up too fast can be even worse, because you won’t just land safely in Asgard. Nobody gets in or out of Asgard without permission. You might end up shooting up to the top of the tree, and then having to find your way down again. It’s a rune to be used with care, and lots of practice. Make sure that the first time you try it, you have a backup plan to come back from wherever you might get stuck.

Gar is drawn with the index finger. Draw the diamond starting from the bottom and going deosil, and then make the X from the top down, left side and then right. It seems to have no color of its own.
Eihwaz, or Eoh, the Rune of the Ash Staff, is one of the two runes I use during pathwalking as protection. It makes a difference as to which direction you draw it. Starting at the bottom and moving to the top seems to create a more “offensive” kind of defense, while drawing it top to bottom is purely defensive. What it mostly seems to do is trip people up. You can cast it at a specific piece of ground in order to trip up someone who enters, or you can cast it right at someone. It won’t actually hit them unless they make a move toward you, as it’s not an offensive weapon like Tyr. Carving it into a tree, or making it several places in the same area, will make intruders stumble all over the place, until they eventually stumble out again. I’ve combined Eihwaz with Algiz for a really fine boundary spell, and with Tyr as a combined offense-defense weapon.

Eihwaz is drawn with the index and middle fingers together. Its color is black.

Algiz, or Eolx, is the other really kickass protection rune. Algiz says, “Who goes there?” and issues a challenge, and creates a boundary that an intruder will run up against. There are specific differences between the actions of Eihwaz and Algiz. Algiz isn’t made to be used in a battle; it’s to protect your territory and property while you aren’t present, whereas Eihwaz can be used defensively in combat. Eihwaz is covert—they don’t know it until they stumble and fall—while Algiz is in-your-face.
Approaching an Algiz boundary will give the intruder a definite feeling of “this place is dangerous/guarded/generally not good for you go any further”. It’s not a subtle rune. The stag rears its head, the upraised hand lifts and says, “Hold!” and the approaching person has to decide whether to go on and risk whatever else you’ve put there, or retreat. It can be combined with Eihwaz for defending boundaries, or Tyr for a punishment should they cross the line, or with Othila to protect your home space.

Algiz is drawn with the index finger. Draw the line bottom to top, and then draw in the V from left to right. Its color is black.

Nauthiz, or Nyth, is the Rune of Need, and it is useful for protecting your necessary items when you have to put them down and come back for them. Nauthiz is a big NO over something, a Don’t Touch. If you use the rune while thinking about something unpleasant, it can take on that energy as well. For instance, when I had to leave things in Alfheim while I went to my treehouse, I put a Nyth over them while imagining the scent and feel of cold iron. The enspelled place gave the energy of “Don’t touch this, it’s cold iron” and kept the small pixies at bay. It can also be combined with another rune, such as Fire or Ice or Thorn, to give the illusion that this would be hot or cold or otherwise unpleasant to touch.

Nauthiz is drawn with the index finger. Draw both lines from the top down, the vertical one first. Its color is black.
Tyr, or Teiwaz, is a weapon-spell, and no mistake. To use it, draw it in the air starting at the bottom of the spear-shaft and ending at the point, and then bring your hand back a little as if miming grasping the spear, and then make a throwing gesture, which can be subtle or dramatic depending on your circumstances. You can also use the Tyr-symbol as an arrow and mime shooting it, but that’s a little more complicated. If it hits the target, the target will hurt. How much it will hurt—mosquito sting or knock-them-across-the-room—will depend on how strong and/or armored your target is, and how strong your own power is. This is very much an offensive rune; it’s for whacking someone. Be careful not to use it frivolously, or on someone (or something) whom it will merely anger and not disable.

Tyr is drawn with the index finger. Draw the shaft from the bottom up, then the point in a V from left to right. Its color is red.

Thorn, or Thurisaz, is used to place painful obstructions in the path of someone who is following you. It’s a nasty little rune, and only to be used in emergencies. It’s especially good when laid on brambles, shrubs, trees placed thickly together, an area with stumps or roots sticking up, or any mass of plant matter. Its action makes the plants close in and attack anything that attempts to move through them. On bare ground, it’s less effective, but it can still afflict the pursuer with sharp stones that find their way into their shoes.
Thorn is drawn with the little finger, and always behind you as you quickly move away, never in front of you. Draw the shaft from top to bottom, and the thorn from bottom to top. Its color is the dark red of blood.

Ansuz, or Aesc, is the Rune of the Messenger, and it is used for speeding messages to others. You can draw it in the air, and then make a gesture as if releasing a bird to fly, at the same time that you mentally send a message to someone. You can also write the message on paper, burn it, and draw Ansuz in the rising smoke; this method is especially good when communicating with deities or spirits. Of course, on a purely pragmatic level, you can draw it on a note that you are leaving for someone, to make sure that it gets there. Ansuz is a good rune to use for a pathworking anchor for Asgard. It can pull you towards Asgard if you need to get there and you’re lost, but remember that Asgard is one of the hardest worlds to enter without permission, and you may end up getting blocked.

Ansuz is drawn with the index finger, and always above the head. Draw the vertical line up from the bottom, and the wings downward. Its color is sky-blue.
Os, the Rune of the God-Mouth, is the bard’s rune, and it helps with languages. It’s both used to charm your own speech, so as to make your words more persuasive (an important tool for those of us who get into otherworldly beings’ homes and cities by storytelling or singing), and to aid you in understanding the languages of other beings—sort of a “Babel fish” rune. For enchanting your own speech, you trace it directly on your tongue, as Iduna cut the runes into Bragi’s tongue. For learning the languages of others, trace it in the air.

Os is drawn with the little finger. Draw the main stroke bottom to top, then the upper V outwards left to right, then the lower V inwards right to left. Its color is blue.

Fehu, or Feoh, the Rune of Cattle, symbolizes wealth. Anything you draw it on will take on a subtle glamour of wealth and value. You can draw it on yourself and you’ll come across as wealthy and important, but be careful—in some areas, that’s likely to incite a robbery attempt. You can draw it on gifts to make them seem more valuable, or on useless items to distract people from the really valuable stuff.

Fehu is drawn with the middle finger. All lines go bottom to top, starting with the vertical. Its color is green.
Chalc, the Rune of the Chalice, symbolizes the quest for the unattainable, or at least the difficult-to-attain. It has two magical uses, one quite useful and one only slightly unethical. The latter use is similar to Fehu, in that laying Chalc over an object lays a glamour of “this is the one thing that you want more than anything else, that you must have!” It can be a useful distraction to keep the eyes of others off of you, but be careful with it—if you’re carrying that thing, people may try to take it from you. The other use is in finding something you’re searching for, but it only works if you have a real emotional need to find it; i.e. if it’s connected to your heartstrings in a big way. If you’re casual about finding it, Chalc won’t work well. Draw the rune in the air, “grasp” it with your hand, and see what direction it pulls you in. It will fade after a second, so pay attention.

Chalc is drawn with the index and middle finger together. Draw the cup first, then the center stroke from top to bottom. Its color is gold.

Gyfu, or Gebo, the Rune of the Gift, has several different uses. Its most direct pathwalking use is that it can be used to line up crossroads with each other, should you see a need. (To anchor a crossroad, use a bind rune of Raido and Gyfu.) It can also be used for its gift-meaning, to confer hamingja on a gift given. Adding Gyfu to any object that you are giving as a gift will pass a little of your own hamingja into it, and it will be that much more valuable to the receiver. It works well as a blessing on gifts. I’ve also
invoked it by drawing it in the air while stating, “I give you this gift,” when someone is reluctant to accept a gift freely given (generally because they don’t believe that it’s really freely given). This tends to make them much more comfortable and relaxed about accepting it. Of course, the gift has to be really freely given, and as far as I can tell if you do it while secretly hoping for some kind of obligation, it may inhibit any future gifts that you get. Gyfu needs to be invoked in this way only with an open heart.

Gyfu is best drawn with the index and middle finger together. It doesn’t matter which side you start on, but draw each line top to bottom. Its color is rose or pink.

Isa, or Is, the Rune of the Icicle, is the classic stay-spell. You can use it to “glue” things that are precariously balanced in place, to “freeze” something to the ground (people will be able to pick it up, but they will feel extremely reluctant to do so), or if you’re really good, to stop something or someone in its tracks. If you’re using Gar and you’re falling or shooting up too fast, Isa will temporarily stop you long enough to get your bearings and step off. Isa retards rot and helps to keep things cool, so it is useful drawn onto containers of perishable material. Isa is also a good anchor for and magnet to Niflheim; you can use it to get there should you so desire it.

Isa is drawn with the thumb, from top to bottom. Its color is pale ice-blue, or white.
Hagalaz, or Haegl, is a rune used in pathworking to lay ill luck and chaos on a particular area. Its only ethical purpose is to evade pursuit by enemies who have no legitimate trouble with you. Laying it on an area can cause all sorts of problems, from bad weather to swarms of bugs to falling trees, and you don’t necessarily know if that area is home to innocent creatures who don’t deserve your meddling. Remember that what you do comes back to you when using this rune, as one of the ways in which it can go wrong is that it can attach itself to you rather than to an area, and then you’ll be followed by a cloud of chaos and difficulty. It will make you harder to catch, but you won’t enjoy it. If you must use it on an area, don’t be in a hurry. Stop and ask the land-wight for permission, and if it seems unhappy with the idea, don’t do it. If you’re in that much of a hurry, try something else.

Hagalaz is drawn with the index finger. All strokes point downwards, starting with the verticals. Its color is dark grey.

Dagaz, or Daeg, is the Rune of Daybreak and the Summer Solstice. Its pathwalking use has to do with the cycles of time. Each of the Nine Worlds has its own set of seasons, which may be similar to or have nothing whatsoever to do with our own earthly seasons. I don’t pretend to know the length of the year or the type of seasons in any of the Nine Worlds, but Dagaz does. Cast on a map, it will give you a vague intuitive idea of what
season is going on in any given world. Since sometimes it’s easier to anchor a world when the weather is similar to your own—Niflheim is a cinch to anchor in a cold northern winter, Muspellheim is simple in the southwestern desert, and so on—casting Dagaz into the air will automatically pull you towards whatever world is closest to your own climate and season. If you ask it, Dagaz can also help you to find the world where the time of day is the same as your own—in other words, it tracks the motion of Sunna through the Nine Worlds. It won’t pull you all the way there; it’ll just give you a hard tug in the right direction so that you can have that information.

Dagaz is drawn with the index and middle fingers together, starting at the bottom left and going any direction. It seems to come in shades from orange to yellow.

Uruz, or Ur, is the Rune of the Wild Ox. It signifies strength, and can be added to anything that needs strengthening, including yourself. It’s good for poles that need to not snap under heavy winds, or straps that need to hold up a heavy bag, or ropes that are stretched to the end of their tautness. If you need to apply it to yourself for physical strength, draw it on one or both biceps with your middle finger. For strength of heart, draw it on your heart chakra; for strength of will, your solar plexus. In both these cases, take a deep breath as you draw it, as if to draw its essence into you through the skin. Uruz is a very masculine rune, and very feminine people who have used it on themselves have complained that it tended to make them “walk more male”, at least temporarily, so take that into account.

Uruz is drawn with the thumb, starting at the bottom of the higher vertical. Its color is dark grey.
Ac, the Rune of the Oak Tree, is also a strength rune, but it is less about active strength and more about endurance. Ac is a more feminine strength, although feminine is this case is never weak or retiring. It is Angrboda’s rune, and as such has a “giantess” energy to it. Ac is useful on the long haul, when you think that you can’t go one step further. Put it on your boots, or apply it magically to your legs and feet, or your back if you are doing hard labor.

Ac is drawn with the index finger, in the same way as an Os. Its color is brown.

Sowelu, or Sigil, is the Rune of Victory, and the Rune of the Sun. Although it can be used magically to lay potential victory on a warrior (in which case draw it onto the heart chakra), its most practical pathwalking usage is to bring the sun out from behind clouds. On the end of a stick, it can be used to dowse the direction of the sun under a thick cloud cover, thus showing time of day. Cast on a map, it will show the world where time is currently closest to noon, when the sun is highest, as Sigil also tracks to Sunna.

Sowelu is drawn with the index finger from top to bottom. Its color is yellow or gold.
Ing is the Rune of Sacrifice, and as such it is used to mark offerings. Sometimes, just leaving something around can be deceptive; don’t assume that the natives know what you’re doing. To lay Ing on something, magically or otherwise, marks it clearly as a religious offering. It is especially appropriate for offerings given to gods, or laid on altars.

Ing is drawn with the index and middle fingers together. Draw from the bottom to the top as two sideways Vs, starting at the bottom left. Ing’s color is gold.

Yr, the Rune of the Bow, has many small purposes. Draw it on your forehead to focus yourself when you are disoriented or your mind is wandering. Mark it on a bow and/or arrow for more accuracy. Since it is associated with craft work, mark it on your crafting tools in order to give them skill. With this association in mind, it can be used as an anchor for Nidavellir.

Yr is drawn with the thumb, like an Uruz, with the central stroke downwards and then the cross-stroke, if you use it. Its color is blue.
Jera, or Jer, the Rune of the Harvest, is purely and simply the best route to Vanheim. It’s a good anchor rune for that world, and it’s useful if you’re trying to get there and having a hard time. You can draw it in the air, or if you’re completely disoriented, you can scratch it into the earth and stand on it, and draw Vanheim in to you.

Jera is drawn with the thumb from the top down, as two Vs, or if you want to make the later version, do the vertical stroke from the bottom up and then add in the diamond starting at its top point. Jera’s color is green.

Wunjo, or Wyn, is the Rune of Light. It can be a magical light in dark places, but remember that light attracts things, including dangerous things, so being able to see in the dark may be a better option. Wunjo is a good anchor for Ljossalfheim, and can be used to draw you there if you are having trouble finding it.

Wunjo is drawn with the index finger, the vertical stroke up, the diagonals down. Its color is white.
Perth, or Peorth, is the Rune of the Cave and the Dice Cup and the Mystery. It is linked to the Well of Wyrd, and can point you in that direction. You can use it to try and contact the Norns, or to find the Well. To anchor the Well itself, make sure that you have some kind of body of water, and use both Laguz and Perth.

Perth is drawn with the index and middle fingers together, starting at the top open corner. Its color is black.

Cweorth, the Rune of the Funeral Pyre, is Surt’s rune, and as such is a good magnet and anchor for Muspellheim. Magically, it can also be used to accompany burnt sacrifices, and it can purify things that you need to ingest. It won’t make them nourishing, like Berkana, but it can burn off enchantments and poisons. Things magicked with Cweorth are completely safe, but tend to taste burned or washed-out.

Cweorth is drawn with the index and middle fingers together, like an Eihwaz but starting at the extra tails. Its color is dark red.
Ear, the Rune of the Grave, is a magnet and an anchor to Helheim, the Land of the Dead. When you use it, where you end up will depend on how important you are to Hela, whose realm it is. You might end up on the Helvegr, the Hel Road, and all you need to do is keep walking forward. (To deliberately get to the Hel Road, use Ear and Raido.) You might end up at the gates of Helheim, or possibly even inside, although the latter is unlikely unless you’ve already been to Helheim and have some kind of clearance. Ear can also be used in attempts to communicate with the Dead. It is Hel’s rune, and if you use it in her territory, you will get her attention, so be careful that you are not frivolously bothering her dead folk.

Ear is drawn with the index finger. Draw the vertical up and the horizontal Vs from right to left. Ear’s color is black.

Stan, the Rune of the Keystone, can be used in pathwalking as a neutral anchoring point. Use it to anchor something that isn’t covered specifically by one of the other runes, or use it in combination with another rune as extra anchoring power. Sometimes it might be necessary to anchor a landmark and then walk away from it for a while; Stan can help make sure that it’s still there when you come back, although it won’t work for more than a day or two at best.

Stan is drawn with the thumb, starting at the lower right corner. Its color is grey.
Remember when Dorothy clicks her heels three times and says, “There’s no place like home”? That’s Othila, or Oethel, the Rune of the Homeland. Unless something is actively blocking you, this rune can often bring you home. It works best if you’ve set up some kind of anchor in your own world with an Othila on it, and if your physical body is actually on your own land, where you live. It can fail sometimes if you’re doing your journeying in a place that is physically strange to you, such as a state forest or park that you are not familiar with, and not “at home” in. If you intend to use Othila to bring you home instead of, say, a link with the land-wight or your own implacable will, you should visit the place you will be journeying on a regular basis, and eat several meals in that spot. Play with the grass, rub on the trees, do whatever you need to do to make it feel like a safe, familiar place. Go there in your mind when you’re home. This will give the rune something to grab onto. If you are physically journeying on land that you own, you can make a permanent installation, such as a number of stones in the shape of an Othila.

Othila is drawn with the little finger, starting at the lower left “leg”. Its color is brown.

**Writing English in Runes for Magical Purposes**

Runes can be used in two ways for marking spells on something. Their most obvious use is their own intrinsic symbolism, which can be combined in bind runes to create a more complex meaning. However, you can also spell out actual English words in runes, and this will give the markings a certain amount of power. Which is more effective will vary with the situation. For instance, for keeping something cold, there’s no point in writing out “cold” in runes when you can just use the Rune of Ice. On the
other hand, if you’re putting a complex multi-part blessing on something that you want specifically worded, then you’d better resort to sentences.

The problem is that modern English doesn’t always write well in runes. It writes even less well in traditional Futhark runes, which is why if you are intending to write English in runes, I strongly suggest that you learn the Futhorc runes, even if you never use them for anything other than their linguistic value. Futhorc runes, being closer to Anglo-Saxon, are better for writing English than are the runes of the Norse languages, from which our tongue split millenia ago.

If you want to use Futhark, one course of action is to write not in English, but actually in one of the Scandinavian tongues—Swedish, Norwegian, or Danish. It will also work reasonably well for German. Modern Icelandic is very close to Old Norse, so it would work exceptionally well. If you want to be extra authentic—and yes, the authenticity, does add a certain amount of oomph—you can research Old Norse or Old Germanic. However, this may be too much work for most people who simply want to throw a line on something with a magic marker, and who would prefer to work in their native language.

Some of the words in English are Anglo-Saxon in origin (although even they have changed phonetically over the years), but many, if not most, are borrowed, usually from Latin-derived languages. These borrowings don’t have the same phonetic group as the Futhorc, much less the Futhark. The way that I’ve chosen to compromise is this:

1. Try to use as many Angle-Saxon-derived words as possible. Use borrowed words only when there’s no other choice. For example, I was trying to write “cycle of the year”, and getting bogged down on how to spell out “cycle”. This is actually a Greek-derived word, and the idea that C can make both S and K noises, even in the same word, is a later corruption. After half an hour of agonizing over whether to spell it phonetically (“sykle”) or letter-for-letter (“kykle”), I asked myself about how it might have been phrased before the word “cycle” came into the English tongue. What popped into my head was “the round of the year”. Round was a word that I could spell easier, so I used that wording instead.
2. When you do have to use Latin or Greek-derived words, write them phonetically.

3. When you use Anglo-Saxon derived words, you can write them phonetically if you want, but I find that it works best magically if you write them phonetically for their original pronunciation. For example, the word “one” is pronounced “wun” today, so theoretically we could write it WUN—Wyn, Uruz, Nyth—but it used to be pronounced just like it’s spelled—“oh-neh”. I spell it Os Nyth Ehwaz, just like it’s written, and this seems to fit better.

This brings us to the problem of knowing how the words were actually pronounced. It’s perhaps better to do some linguistic research, or bother some scholars, than to guess and assume you know how things were pronounced. On the other hand, the problem with dead languages and dialects is that it’s damn hard for us to be sure how things were pronounced anyway, and it may be a matter of your guess versus some professor’s guess. However, some rules are simple to remember. Our silent “e” at the end of words was once pronounced, just as it is in modern German, so it’s perfectly fine to leave the Ehwaz at the end of the word. That will also help to make the word recognizable to others, and to you years later when you’ve forgotten what you wrote.

Writing any word in runes will give it extra magical meaning; that’s part of their particular power. It’s one of the simplest ways to enspell something, because even if you’re lousy at sticking power and energy into something, the runes have a power of their own and will do it for you to an extent. People who are psychically blind and deaf can use the runes in this way, and have decent results. It’s classic theurgic magic; the gift of Odin and the Norns.
I’ve figured it out!

I’ve pored over maps and descriptions of the Nine Worlds until my head spun. Joshua tried to figure it out, too, and he said it was like thinking in non-Euclidean geometry. Niflheim, is to the north of Midgard, but it’s on a lower level. Jotunheim is also to the north of Midgard, but somehow has a border with Asgard ... as does Muspellheim, the border of which is a long sloping forest called Myrkwood. Vanaheim has a border with Asgard, somehow, that’s all water; both Vanaheim and Midgard are islands; there’s nothing to the east of Midgard unless you’re like Thorsson and arbitrarily stick Jotunheim in the east instead of the north where it’s supposed to be. Bifrost goes up to Asgard from Midgard and the Helvegr goes down.

When you try to draw it, none of it makes a damn bit of sense. Some people draw it on three levels, like three disks revolving around the world tree. One author, who had obviously never been there (or he wouldn’t be referring to the worlds in Jungian terms
like, “Ljossalfheim is the land of the intellect...”) has
them on a horizontal plane around a vertical axis.
Yet people who’ve been there tell me that it isn’t
nearly so molecular as he’d wish. But the three disks
skew borders that are supposed to be there, and
there’s all this trouble over what’s on what disk.
People said things to me like, “The geography is
fanciful; don’t take it too seriously; it could change
at any time,” and other unhelpful things like that.
Except all the descriptions, ancient and modern, had
the feel of the blind men and the elephant. Everyone
describing—quite accurately—one small portion, yet
no one having the big picture. I was sure that there
was, somewhere, a big picture.
So I stared and figured, and read, and then
finally I saw it. Actually, I don’t think that I figured
it out at all. I think that Yggdrasil itself finally
showed it to me. The secret is that the Nine Worlds
are arranged in a big sunwise spiral around Yggdrasil
the World Tree, sloping from Asgard to Helheim. I
drew it wrong at first—damn spatial dyslexia—and
had to redraw it sunwise, and then it all fit perfectly.
There’s no question about what’s on the “level” of
each world, because none of them are exactly on the level with any other, but slightly higher or lower. There’s nothing to the east of Midgard because ... Midgard is in the east! Niflheim and Jotunheim are both in the north, one above the other. The waters and the forests spill over the edge of the spiral, from one to the next, and the borders all work. Midgard is between Muspellheim and Niflheim ... but not directly on the spiral.

Now I just have to applique and embroider this big spiraling map onto my spirit cloak. What a job. Phew. And I’m still not sure how many halls there are in Asgard, and who they belong to...
Chapter 7

Building the Kit

In order to pathwalk, you have to move with your physical body in this world and your astral body in the superimposed world. However, most of us don’t think about the fact that we rarely go anywhere with nothing but our bodies. We take our stuff for granted. It doesn’t occur to us that underwear might be important, or good shoes, or a mug to drink from. When we journey, of course, we simply shape ourselves clothing and tools, usually without thinking about it.

When we do think about stuff, we think about fancy ritual tools like knives, amulets, jewelry, and so forth. While there’s nothing wrong with that, my magical tools are on a much more practical scale. I was warned clearly about the nature of my kind of worldwalking: take nothing with you that is not magicked to the point where it will show up in both worlds. That is, not if you want to be able to use it in both worlds, anyway. This meant that every piece of clothing, every tool, everything that I was going to take with me, had to be “whammed”, as I put it to my magic-practicing friends. We planned the kit six months in advance, and everyone helped to put it together. I walked into the otherworlds with the combined magic of a dozen people on my back and in my arms.

A word of advice to those who would create pathwalking kits: having the help of other magically-trained people can be good or bad. On the one hand, having people who care about you put their energy into implements, especially if it’s done while making them, is an immense source of luck and bamingia. (The word bamingia is a Norse concept similar to “luck”, or “fortune”, or “mojo”. Gifts carry bamingia, as do old things that have been well loved.) It’s like carrying their blessings on your pathwalking. On the
other hand, make sure that every one of them is committed to the project with a whole heart. Two of the people who helped me were actually quite ambivalent about my journey; one feared for my safety, and the other resented my taking time from other duties. Once I’d crossed over, everything that they had given me began to fall apart, or get lost, or go dull. I ended up having other friends scramble to find and whammy some replacements. The hamingja of a friend’s blessing only works if it’s given without reservation, and with open hands.

As much of the kit as possible should be made of natural materials. Things that were recently alive enchant better than plastics and other man-made chemical constructs. If you have to bring something artificial, try to add something to it out of natural materials that will hold the charge, which may or may not work. If you carve something yourself out of wood, the best wood of all comes from the place where you’ll actually be doing the pathwalking, because it’s a link to the land-wight there. (One assumes that you will not be doing long-term pathwalking in any place where you don’t intend to form a good relationship with the land-wight of the vicinity.) Metal holds a charge well, but the less processed it is, the better. The best metal tool of all would be hand-forged by you or by a blacksmith who understands magic work, but you can also inscribe manufactured metal tools with a decent result. Several craft-mages that I know swear on the utility of magicking with a Dremel tool.

Things that I wish that I’d gotten around to putting together: A leather bottle for portable water. Some kind of firemaking thing, either flint and steel or a firebow or fire-twirl. (This would have necessitated learning to use these things, and as the man who promised he’d teach me up and died, I never got around to it.) A good knife of my own—I borrowed one, but I would rather have had my own. Handmade rope. A wrought-iron fork. Some kind of sundial that could be planted and made permanent. Some sort of handmade paint, usable on flesh and on stone, and a brush. Home herbal aspirin for the medkit, which I’ve since learned how to make by grinding wintergreen berries into apple cider vinegar.
I'm sure that other pathwalkers would think of things that they couldn't do without, but this is the survival list that I used. Since I was being brought my meals and my hot water and my fire every night by Joshua, there was no way that I could call this real wilderness survival, but that wasn't the point. I wasn't out to prove that I could survive in the wilds of this world, I was out to prove that I could survive in the wilds of other worlds. To that end, having to worry about my basic food and shelter needs here was counterproductive. Don't take on more physical obstacles than you have to in order to do the work; it proves nothing useful.

Part I: Daily Kit

(For color pictures of my kit, which were too expensive to print in this book, please feel free to take a closer look at the pictures on my website at: http://www.northernshamanism.org/nine/kit.html)

1. Cloak

The biggest and most important thing that I made was my Cloak of the Nine Worlds. I’d been terrified that I might get lost, and my boyfriend suggested that the best cure for getting lost was taking a map. Since I wanted everything that I took to have some practical usage, we came up with the idea of making a cloak that was also a map. Each piece of it was appliqued and embroidered to represent a not-to-scale fantastic picture of a particular world, and the hood and upper back were made from leafy fabric to symbolize Yggdrasil. The idea was that when you wore the cloak, you were Yggdrasil, and the worlds swirled around you. Yggdrasil is a ladder that you can climb, going up and down from world to world, without having to follow known “roads”.

I looked at many different people’s conceptions of what the Nine Worlds looked like in relation to where they all were, and none of them rang true. Finally, a friend suggested that I ask the expert ... Yggdrasil itself. I ceremonially asked the Great Tree for a map, and nothing happened at first. About three weeks later, however, the idea suddenly
appeared in my head, as if it had been placed there. The presence that touched me briefly was very old, very slow, and very inhuman. It was a lesson learned: talking to Yggdrasil is a slow process. Like Tolkien’s Ents who didn’t like to move or talk hastily, Yggdrasil lives at a different and much slower pace than us, and it can take hours just for it to notice that you’ve tried to contact it, and days for it to figure out how to respond. When dealing with giant world-supporting magical trees, the key is to be patient.

The “map cloak” concept worked well, because I could simply grab the appropriate part of the (rather voluminous) cloak when changing worlds, and it gave me a good mental anchor. We enchanted the cloak to be a living map, one that would help to guide me to go wherever I touched, and I used it when changing worlds.

2. Drum

When Mickey Hart was researching material on sacred drums which later became his book Drumming On The Edge Of Magic, he commented that “wherever there was a shaman, there also seemed to be a drum”. My drum was a simple frame drum given to me years ago by my wife, who saw it and was informed by the spirits that it had been placed there for me. She knew that I’d had a similar frame drum years ago with tambourine jingles around the outside, and that when someone had accidentally sat on it and broken it, I’d removed and saved all the jingles. I drilled holes and transferred the jingles to the new drum, thus transferring its spirit and energy. I named her Moonsong, after my last drum.

As time went on, I was urged to add more and more things to it, bits of metal, bells, boiled-out dried goat hooves to clack together, and finally three shin-bones of a favorite buck goat, Phil, who had come down with inoperable kidney stones and been lovingly sent off to Hel. I positioned the shin-bones so that they hung on the underside of the frame and beat the drum from the inside; all I had to do was hold it and move it a little, and it would practically beat itself. The final addition was painting the branches
of the Tree on its surface, with the Nine Worlds hanging in its limbs. I also made it a case from an old red suede skirt that my wife had worn for years, and I embroidered a deer motif from a Sami hunting drum on it.

I’d used the drum to go into trance plenty of times, but when I’d journeyed between worlds, I’d done it on force of will alone. I was also slow and clumsy, and sometimes had to try a few times to get it right. Learning to use the drum to get me there was a vast improvement in my technique.

3. Clothing

When I built my wardrobe for the trip, the most important thing was that the clothing have a great deal of hamingja. First of all, since it all had to be enchanted, I knew that it was going to have to be made of natural materials. Natural fibers hold magic much better than do synthetic ones, because they were alive more recently than the age of the dinosaurs. Secondly, anything given as a gift from someone who cares about you holds its own hamingja, especially if it used to be something of theirs, something that they valued, that they used with their hands or wore with their body. So I sent a message out to my circle of friends and family, asking them to donate any old natural-fiber clothing that they didn’t want. Even if it was full of holes, I figured that I could patchwork it together.

I was inundated with old clothes in no time. A few friends actually gave me old linen tablecloths that had been used on their tables, and now had large visible stains. I cut tunics out of them, piecing the unstained parts together. One green linen tablecloth from Germany became a pair of pants with laced cuffs at the bottom. A friend gave me all her old silk shirts; I cut them apart and patchworked them together into linings. Each tunic, shirt, and pair of trousers was embroidered with runes that gave them particular qualities. The green linen pants, for example, were embroidered with “tireless” and “noiseless”. The tunics were decorated with trim I made out of wool I’d spun from my own sheep, and each had a rune by the collar that gave it a certain magical slant. I made one Water (Laguz), one Harvest (Jera), one Earth (Berkana), and one Sunrise (Dagaz). The first time I wore
the Sunrise shirt, I felt like I’d drunk ten cups of coffee. I put chainstitch into the trim, as I’ve found it holds magic best.

I made myself an ankle-length black circle skirt out of heavy cotton donated by a friend. I sewed two bands of orange trim on, and then I began to embroider, in runes, a poem that was to go all the way around the skirt eventually. When I began the trip, I had only the first line. I gained one line each day, and one on the way home. The skirt is full enough, though, that I haven’t yet filled it all up. Why a skirt? One of my shamanic geases is mandatory gender-crossing behavior.

My jacket, like the case I built for my drum, was made out of old suede skirts that my wife had worn and torn—much hamingja, I figured—and a piece of orange leather made to look like snakeskin. I embroidered another Saami deer-and-bird motif from a spirit drum on the back, between the shoulder blades, so that the Hunter would watch my back. I sprinkled powdered elk antler, left over from carving an antler given to me by an ex-lover, under the patch as I sewed it on. Embroidered bands of Sami motifs decorated the back, sleeves, and pockets. The rest of the jacket had a “snaky” feel to it, so Joshua embroidered a repeating motif in blue-greens meant to symbolize the Midgard Serpent, and I stitched it onto the collar so that it went around my neck like a snake hangs when you drop it over your shoulders. Under the band of trim were tucked several shed snakeskins collected from a formerly owned ball python, and I sewed them securely underneath where they would be safe. Other pieces of embroidery were added over time, some of them Saami designs of fish or geometric motifs, some Scandinavian designs of deer, evergreens, and other animals. The belt for the jacket was handwoven by a friend, and I hammered disks of sheet brass with runes and shaman-drum designs and stitched them on.

Joshua also magicked my wool socks, sewing runes onto them that said “warm dry feet”. (He joked while doing it that it felt like a mom sending her kid off to summer camp and stitching his name into all his clothing.) In spite of everything, I still ended up underestimating how cold it was going to get—that summer and fall was unseasonably cold and rainy—and
my first night out, I sent Joshua a note authorizing him to buy and rune-up two pairs of cotton long underwear.

My friend Jarrett Grace, a fellow member of the local Pagan fiber arts guild, made me a pair of magic mittens knitted from green wool he’d handspun himself. They were made in a bear-paw style, with the “hood” that fell back to reveal half-fingers underneath, so I could have warmth or dexterity as I chose. He knitted “warm hands” into them in runes, and “locked magical intent into them with every knitted stitch,” as he put it in his own inimitable British style. As it happened with several of my belongings, the mittens ended up with an extra unplanned magical quality: they insulated the hands from other magic, so that one could touch something enchanted without it rubbing off on you. My daughter discovered this while examining my kit; she was able to pick up my magical hairbrush without being affected by its powers.

Joshua drew runes on a pair of moccasin boots with a magic marker for me. He had been worried about making them properly, but then he found the instructions being “downloaded” into his head, and he couldn’t sleep until it was done. The instructions said that there had to be some sort of alliteration in the lines, as alliteration was a useful magical tool according to his late-night vision. The poem that he ended up writing was: “Pathwalker, Wegtamer (way-tamer), Walk two paths as one, Walk one path unerring, Walk no path unloved.” on one boot, and “Welcome wherever we walk, gestr, vinr (guest, friend). Fleet footed, never fall. Steps sure, never stumble” on the other.

I also brought with me a belt that my wife had tooled with magical symbols years ago, and my old hat decorated with a skunkskin given to me by the former lover who’d given me the elk antler. The skunk is also my totem, and the spirit animal that is my tie to this land rather than the land of my ancestors.
4. Bag

The Druids had what they called a “crane bag”, which held their magical items. Many people conceive of this bag as a little pouch, suitable for wearing at the belt, but I still remember the words of a friend who is a traveling urban shaman, homeless and wandering the country. He referred to the handmade calico-and-denim knapsack over his shoulder as his crane bag, and advised me that the best ones were big enough to hold everything you might need to take with you. So I created my magic bag-to-hold-my-stuff large enough to be a good-sized knapsack, out of a russet suede skirt that my wife had outgrown. It was the sort that fastened up the front with snaps, so I just cut strips off the bottom to make into straps, and then sewed the waistband and cut hem up with heavy thread, leaving the snap edge to be the opening.

I folded over the edges of the straps and stitched them by hand with chain stitch in bright colors. As I sewed, I concentrated on binding magic into it that would have two purposes. First, it would never get lost and would always be to hand when I looked for it. Second, it would resist being picked up by anyone but me. (My friends later referred to it as “Raven’s monogamous bag.”) Before I’d even finished the embroidery, the straps themselves were beginning to take the magic; they were always within reach when I thought to look for them, and when I’d toss them into the embroidery bag, they’d always surface as soon as I opened it.

I put a couple of small appliqued patches on it; one with an eye and one with a crossed-out hand, both against theft. Unlike the smaller tools, which were merely charged, the bag ended up getting itself ensouled by the process. By the time the straps were riveted on, Bag—for that was her name—had taken on a very feminine personality. When I held her in my arms or on my back, I felt a distinct sensation as if she were “cuddling” me. When other people grabbed her straps to pick her up, they tended to immediately drop her. “It felt as if your bag bit me,” one said.
5. Bowl, Cup and Spoon

One of the things that I was outright ordered to make was a set of ritual dishes. My mug was a carved cherrywood piece that my parents had bought in Germany when I was a child. My spoon was a simple wooden spoon from the kitchen that had been used for years of stirring cake batter. My bowl, on the other hand, was somewhat more special. It was a wooden oak burl that my wife had found on our property soon after moving in, and carved into an asymmetrical bowl shape. It was the first creative thing that was made on the property, and as such it was a link to the land-wight. Joshua wood-burned runes into it that said “Health, bamingja, harm be not done.” The cup got something similar, but more extensive: “Health, bamingja, fair memory, harm be not done.” I remembered all the stories about various nonhuman folk whose magical draughts made one lose their memory, and I wanted to specifically guard against that. The spoon was woodburned with a spiral up the handle and a bind rune of Othila and Eihwaz on the back.

The idea was to create dishes that would automatically neutralize any enchantment, sorcery, or astral poison. One could drink a faery brew out of my mug and it would have no more effect than if it were water. Indeed, that was what we concentrated on when we charged it as a group: visions of everything that went into it becoming as pure as water.

As soon as I went to eat my first meal after having crossed over, I realized that I was going to have to eat everything that I consumed out of those dishes. It wasn’t just the poison or enchantment issue; I was quite sure that everything Joshua brought me was safe. It had become a taboo: when away from your own plane, you only eat out of the dishes you have brought along. Experimentally ignoring the taboo increased the gastric problems I associated with world-crossing, so I can only guess that they helped to stabilize the food and drink magically in some way.

Although I chose wood, magical dishes could be made just as well out of clay, and the runework could even be fired in (although clay is somewhat
more fragile; I wanted something that could be dropped on the ground safely). Metal might work as well, although I would suggest copper as the best option, then steel, and to avoid metals such as aluminum.

6. Hairbrush

My friend Allyson found me a wooden hairbrush with natural bristles on it. I have long hair that’s too thick for a comb, and I didn’t want to go nine days without properly brushing it, but it was difficult to find hairbrushes that weren’t made of various sorts of plastic. One was finally discovered, though, and Joshua woodburned the round handle with a pattern of braided cord that slowly unraveled, until at the end of the handle it was only hanging strands. Between the strands he burned the word “unbinding” in runes. I’d been given the message that this was the word that had to be on it.

Although we just expected it to be magically untangling, sliding through my hair and removing all snarls and elflocks (and it performed wonderfully for this), it turned out to do more than just this. I’d had a self-inflicted binding spell on me for behavioral change; it was designed to slowly fade out as the change became habit. (I strongly recommend such spells for dealing with addictive or unwanted behaviors.) It was about half faded, but after Josh brushed my hair with the newly magicked brush, suddenly the rest of the spell was gone. My hairbrush had become a wand of unbinding, useful for getting myself out of any unwanted spells that might fall upon me.

For those with less—or finer—hair, a comb might do just as well as part of a pathwalking survival kit, and would serve the same purpose. Carved wooden combs can still be found, imported from Asian countries; if you’re skilled with woodworking, you might be able to carve one yourself out of an appropriate piece of wood.
7. Pen, Ink, and Paper

My pen was a peeled hazel stick, carved with the word “sword” in runes (I’m a writer, so it makes sense to me) and fitted with an ordinary brass dip pen nib in one end. My friend Tannin, who runs an occult store, made me Dragon’s Blood Ink, properly magicked by her. My daughter Jess had received a papermaking kit for a birthday present some years back, but it had lain unused while she navigated her tumultuous teen life. Dragging it out of the closet, she spent several days learning to use it and making me around sixty sheets of homemade paper. My mother donated many piles of newsprint to use for the project. Forty of the pages were bound into a small journal, which Joshua covered with green leather, and the rest were tucked into the back of it to use as notes when I needed something brought or fixed.

8. Hatchet

I knew I would need a hatchet because I’d be laying my own fires. I had at first wanted to start them from scratch, but I couldn’t master the art of the firebow or fire-twirl, or even tinder and flint, soon enough. We decided that the better part of valor was to have Joshua bring me down fire every evening with my dinner, and that Julie, who had planned to be working in the back woods periodically, would start off morning fires for me on particularly cold days. Chopping the wood, however, was my job. To this end, my friends the Tashlins (Wintersong, Fireheart, and Summerwind) prepared to magic me a hatchet. They considered forging one, but due to time and equipment constraints, they decided to buy one and fix it up. They burned runes in the handle, sharpened it, and worked on ensorcelling it to be both sharp and safe. The idea was to make it able to chop through anything seamlessly except for human flesh, which it would refuse to cut.

To this end, after all three had worked on the ensorcellment, Wintersong shut himself up alone and magically “taught” the axe to avoid human flesh. Part of this process involved him swinging it at himself and
convincing it to stop at the last moment, a technique which his partners strongly disapproved of (which was why he did it in private and didn’t tell them about it until afterwards). This particular axe had to be especially safe because I have spatial dyslexia, and I’m rather klutzy at best.

The hatchet, like Bag, did inadvertently end up with something of a soul. The Tashlins named it RavenWing. I used it only as a tool during the trip; I did wonder if it could be used as a weapon (being as it was only enchanted to avoid human flesh) but as my job on this trip was diplomatic and spreading mayhem would be a bad idea, it remained useful in peaceful pursuits.

9. Wool, spinning, and spun spells

I brought along a basket of carded wool for spinning, and a Viking-style spindle with a carved soapstone whorl. My wife makes soapstone spindles, complete with carved runes, and I remember one night we were watching the Discovery Channel when a show on the archaeological excavation at L’Anse Aux Meadoux (the site of Leif Ericson’s ill-fated colony) came on. I was spinning, using one of the soapstone spindles, when on the television appeared a soapstone whorl that could have been its twin, if it had been buried in the back yard for hundreds of years. It had been dug up on the site. I held mine up and cackled gleefully.

During the weeks leading up to the journey, I spun spells from the wool from our sheep. This is a simple trick if you know how to spin; just recite the spell and concentrate while the spindle whirls, and push the energy out, and visualize it getting twisted up in the fibers. I made a number of spells in gray-and-white yarn for invisibility, designed to be tossed over the shoulder as you recite the spell, and then you walk away and your pursuers can’t find you. I also spun some out of black yarn for shadow-binding spells, and some out of plain white silk for creating boundary spells (string it from tree to tree in a circle, and then mark the proper runes on the “anchor” tree). I cut a stick of rowan wood and wrapped them all onto it, and stowed it in Bag.
10. Magical Medkit

I created a small first aid kit for myself, in case of emergencies. The padded case was made from donated cotton clothing in bright yellow and orange (for visibility) and had several loops inside to hold everything in place. For years I’d collected the small colored glass bottles that mimic old-fashioned medicine bottles, some in the shape of fishes or skulls or houses. I’d started collecting them as a child out of love for my grandmother’s collection, and as an adult, I eventually inherited that collection, as the relatives that picked over her empty house had no use for two shelves full of tiny glass bottles. I chose the smallest ones, ranging from two to three inches high, and filled them with herbal tinctures made by my wife—comfrey for sprains and bruises, echinacea and goldthread for the immune system, mullein for colds, hawthorn berry for my blood pressure, valerian for sleeping, and a shot of my wife’s famous elderberry liqueur. Joshua replaced their poorly-fitting rubber corks by carving little ones out of discarded wine corks.

I filled a small pillbox with myrrh for antiseptic for cuts, figuring that any of the tinctures would work well as antiseptic as well due simply to their alcohol content. Another tiny screw-top makeup jar held out homemade “Green Goo” for skin irritations, which is simply melted beeswax with pureed jewelweed and a little Vitamin E oil stirred into it and cooled into salve. I also sterilized and wrapped a needle and a pair of tweezers for pulling out splinters, which turned out to be my most frequent use of the medkit. I had been given a quarter yard of fine Egyptian linen, and I cut it into bandages of different sizes, fringed the edges, packaged them in clean unbleached paper coffee filters, and microwaved them. Another coffee filter held a bit of candied ginger for upset stomachs. I also brought along a good-sized pot of udder cream to rub on my fresh tattoo. I had my friend Ana the Reiki master, our group’s healer, charge the kit. It wasn’t elaborate, but I figured that if I hurt myself more extensively than I could fix with the kit, I needed to quit and go home anyway.

I also made myself some homemade cough drops, and ended up using every one of them. The recipe goes as follows.
**Raven’s Herbal Cough Drops**

1. Make up a very strong tea of the following:
   - 5 parts Horehound
   - 2 parts Thyme
   - 1 part Spearmint
   - 1 part Peppermint
   - 1 part Lemon Balm
   - 1 part Rose Hips
   (Optional: 10 drops peppermint oil, eucalyptus oil, or both)

2. Strain out the herb bits and put the tea in a large pan.

3. Add 2 ½ cups of sugar and 1 tbsp butter and bring to a boil on the stove.

4. During the boil, cover for about 3 minutes so the steam can wash down crystals on the sides of the pot. Then uncover and cook at high heat, without stirring, to the hard-crack stage, which is 300 degrees. (You’ll need a candy thermometer or some other thermometer for this part.) The syrup should be separating into threads that are hard and brittle.

5. Have a greased marble or ceramic slab or large plate ready. Pour a little onto the plate, cut it with scissors as it cools, and roll the bits quickly into balls. Keep the rest of the pot going over low heat as you use it. Work fast; this is best done with several pairs of hands and a few greased plates.

6. Wrap the cough drops in small pieces of wax paper and store in a cool place in a sealed jar. If you pile them all together without separating them, they may fuse into one giant cough drop that must then be chipped out of the jar.
11. Guitar and case

My guitar, Madrigal, didn’t need any ensorcellment; two decades of being played by me had done that for her already. However, her case was padded black nylon, and it seemed very inert and unspellable. My attempts to magic it all slid off. We discussed various possibilities, which might work for other people who are trying to transport a magicked item in an unmagickable case, such as making a large natural-fiber bag that the whole thing could be popped into, or stitching panels of enspelled fabric onto it to hold the magic. I eventually ended up just making an alternate case for her, though, pieced together from various colored quilting cottons.

I brought the guitar because I knew I’d have to sing for my guest—right in a few places. It didn’t matter that the songs weren’t old Norse sagas—I expect that they’re tired of that anyway, and appreciate fresh new things. For the unmusical, reciting poetry or telling good stories is a good way to earn your entry into a new place.

12. Personal care items

Allyson, the Martha Stewart of Pagandom, made me an impressive gift basket of magically charged soap, shampoo, toothpaste, and deodorant stone. It became very important to me to get clean before changing worlds, if possible, as a matter of purification, and I was grateful to have her gifts.

Each bar of soap was charged and marked on the full moon with a bit of Allyson’s blood; she warned me to wash it off before using a fresh bar.
Allyson’s Magical Soap

Use a simple olive-oil based Castile soap recipe, of which there are many, and add the following ingredients:

Dulse: for the element of Water, and for the cleansing of the Sea
Rosemary: for the element of Fire, and for consecration and protection
Sage: for the element of Earth, and for wisdom and knowledge
Thyme: for the element of Air, and for clairvoyance and contact with other planes
Bran: as an abrasive, good for getting off serious dirt
Green Clay: for grounding and purification
Pine Rosin: for psychic projection
Liquid Chlorophyll: for the blood of the Green Man

13. Other random items

I also brought my bag of runestones, a utility knife with a handle of goat’s horn from one of our goats, a single necklace, and a punched-tin lantern given as a Yule gift from a Pagan friend who worked as a tinsmith at Old Sturbridge Village. We brought bedding and an oil lamp to the hermitage, but aside from that, the rope bed, the wooden moon box, and Maegen’s cage, the place was spartan and undecorated. Joshua came down every night with charged candles and relit the lantern and the oil lamp, delivered my dinner, and rang the bell attached to one of the trees that held up the treehouse.
I was also given a gift of a corked glass bottle of seawater by a friend, who simply felt that I would need it. The seawater came in very handy for pathwalking uses, to line up ocean shores with little freshwater streams, and to invoke the Great Serpent. The same friend also brought a gift from his little girl Maia. She had heard about my journey and decided to give me a protective gift—a scrap of her “blay”, or magic security blanket that had disintegrated into little pieces some time earlier. She still used the bits for various protective reasons, and she felt that I would be safer with the tiny scrap of blue fabric, still showing its faded cows and moons and stars. She was a little worried that I would find it wanting, as it was just a ragged scrap, but I figured that there was a lot of bamingja in a little child’s security blanket. Besides, in all the folktales, people are always better off when they accept blessings and advice from children, fools, and homeless beggars.

**Part II: Offerings**

A good chunk of the collected items for this trip were simply offerings, created specifically for the denizens of the various worlds. Going on the assumption that any guest is more welcome when they bring gifts, we created a bribe-fest for every sort of creature that we could think of, which probably had a lot to do with my not getting attacked or run out on a rail. Some I carried on me, others were brought down on specific days at my request. All were magically charged, either at their making, or at their purchase. They were, in the order that I gave them out:

1. Silver coins, hand-melted and cast. I had friends give me all their real silver jewelry that they no longer wanted or needed to melt down. Some of these included wedding rings from handfasted couples who had split up, oath-rings from broken oaths, pendants from spiritual paths no longer followed, chains that had become unredeemably tangled, and someone’s baby spoon that had snapped in two. All went into the flame at the Tashlin’s forge to be melted down and recast into rough silver coins
inscribed with bind-runes. In a very real way, these coins were transformed out of a wealth of broken dreams and wishes. My donated hoard made eleven of them, and I handed them out to various folk along the journey as a kind of toll. The first one was given to an innkeeper in Midgard. The last few coins were given to the Duergar lords, who appreciated the silver if not the workmanship.

2. In Muspellheim: Fruit of various kinds for the fire giants, who don’t get very much of it, charmed to have “innocent cute little baby” energy in them. My daughter did the ensorcellment, carrying them about wrapped in a cloth on her shoulder, as one would a baby, and the fire-etyins definitely found them much more appealing to chomp down that way.

3. In the Myrkwood: tribal-looking junk jewelry to leave in the shrines of the local tribes.

4. In Asgard: For Odin, a bottle of Willow’s Blood mead, made by my friend Willow and dyed red with hibiscus flowers. For Frigga, a bottle of blessed salt, and an hour of my help with the spinning. For Freyja, a bottle of “loved-up” honey, as Joshua put it. For Iduna, new modern varieties of apple to try.

5. In Alfheim: Here my friend Allyson, the Martha Stuart of Paganism, did her usual amazing job, She built a set of runes for the Alfar royalty out of marzipan. Each rune was marked with a mixture of special spices that seemed appropriate for that rune, oil, and her blood. They were presented in a cardboard box covered with mirrors, glass gems, and plaster, with a bag of gold tissue to put them in. Although the Alfar weren’t fond of me personally, they were much impressed with my gift.
Allyson’s Marzipan Runes

First, get a block of marzipan; you can generally find it in baking supply stores in a wrapped oblong tube. Cut off slices, roll them into balls, and then press out even circles. Carve the rune into each one with a butter knife or chopstick.

Make a paste of pomegranate juice, beet juice, and a few drops of your own blood. Divide the paste into several small cups and mix a different spice with each one. The idea is not to use authentic Norse flavorings, but interesting new flavors from other parts of the world that the Alfar might not have around. With a fine paintbrush, paint the paste into the rune grooves. The spices, for the appropriate runes, are as follows:

Clove: Raido, Mannaz, Thurisaz, Kaunaz, Cweorth
Allspice: Uruz, Ear, Nauthiz, Stan
Coriander: Gebo, Perth, Os, Ehwaz
Coconut: Ior, Isa, Chalc, Laguz
Cinnamon: Teiwaz, Algiz, Eihwaz, Hagalaz,
Vanilla: Berkana, Othila, Ac, Gar
Saffron: Sowelu, Wunjo, Ansuz, Dagaz
Dill: Yr, Jera, Fehu, Ing
6. In Vanaheim, a bottle of harvest pomegranate mead for Frey, a bag of organic flour, some organic fruit, and some dried corn.

7. In Jotunheim: A great iron pot of cooked leg of mutton with onions, and a bottle of Jack Daniels.

8. In the Iron Wood: Raw organ meats—hearts and kidneys—for the barbarian Jotun tribes.

9. In Svartalfheim: For the Svartalfar, small round chocolates shaped like eyeballs (it was October, and there were Halloween candies appearing in the stores), and a red glass ornament with “I’m fun to smash” energy on it. For the Duergar, the rest of my silver and a bottle of Crown Royal whisky, which softened them up a good bit.

10. In Niflheim: For the frost giants: more fruit, especially citrus fruits which they never see. For Garm, a chunk of meat wrapped in bread.

11. In Helheim: For Hela, a giant bouquet of carefully dried and preserved long-stemmed roses. My friend Julie was a solitary Pagan on a military base, and she celebrated the high holidays by herself, and used long-stemmed roses of appropriate colors rather than a sword, as she couldn’t keep large weapons on the base. She dried the sacred ritual roses after every holiday, and donated a full year’s worth for the perfect gift for Hela. For the Dead: Singing. Hours of singing.
So I had my first visitation from Grandpa Loki last night. I’ve actually been terrified of dealing with him. I have no illusions about how miserable he could make someone if he took a disliking to them. I suppose I wondered if he would respect Hela’s sovereignty over me. However, whenever he mentioned her, it was with a strange affectionate reverence, as if he was terribly proud of her. Like the parent who knows that the child has outstripped them, and is glad for it. He won’t violate her rules; She is the stronger of the two, and he’s fine with that. But that doesn’t mean that he has to be gentle with me.

I sent everyone away because I didn’t want them near him. I didn’t know what he’d say or do to them, and I wanted them to be safe. Bella helped me make a fire, and went back to the house. I sat at the fire and waited for him, and waited. Finally he came, slipping into me with a motion so subtle that I almost missed it. Unlike other deities, whose approach has been various forms of shoving, Loki was easy and slick about it.
One shudder, and then he was in me. I came for you, he said, as if I should be grateful that he’d finally given me his attention. I got the distinct feeling that he was there at Hel’s request.

I thought that he needed the fire to come through, but he laughed at me. I asked for a fire because you’re scared of it, he said. It’s true; after being set on fire twice, I’m fairly nervous when close to it. So he told me to squat next to it, almost in the coals. I did. It was unpleasant but he somehow gave me to understand that what he was going to teach me would be more effective if I could learn it on top of that kind of emotional distraction.

He informed me that my ability to slide between worlds was sloppy, slow, and clumsy. That I needed to be fast and graceful about it. I had no idea to do what he wanted, but he knew. He lined up fat red pillar candles on the rock in front of me, lit them, and proceeded to drag me and my body partway between worlds. Before making a “landing”, so to speak, he’d backpedal and come back. Then he said, Now you do it, and withdrew from the driver’s seat.
So I tried, and failed...or at least I wasn’t fast enough. I couldn’t do it the way he did it. And he smiled that evil smile—I could feel my face making it as he slid back into the driver’s seat—and he said aloud, Wrong. Do it again. And he picked up the candle and poured hot wax on my arm, and although I couldn’t move, I could feel it, and I screamed silently in my head.

It took me five tries, like that, and a lot of wax, but I learned. I finally did it right. It felt kind of like the way one motors an autistic kid through something... if they had a really nasty caregiver. Fool, he said at one point. Don’t you know that this could mean your life if you get it wrong? You can’t afford to be clumsy here.

I should say, before everyone thinks that I consider Loki some sort of terrible beast, that I don’t mean for this to sound that way at all. I was quite clear that this was a sort of psychic boot camp; I needed to be able to do this worldwalking while not only distracted but possibly terrified or in pain. I needed to be able to do it skillfully even when disaster was hailing down around me, and there was no one
better qualified than him to teach someone how to jump worlds when a mob of terrors are after you. Doing it in a nice calm way would not have prepared me for the worst, and that was what he intended to do. I may well be sent to dangerous places to do dangerous things, and I don’t blame him for being harsh with me any more than I would blame a martial-arts sensei who repeatedly knocked me down until I learned to roll.

Then, as if it were a reward, he started talking to me. Telling me things that I think I’ve waited my whole life to hear, waited my whole life wondering about. My blood is in you, he said. My blood and the blood of my clan, the Jotun Gods of the Iron Wood. I wondered instinctively how gods could mate with humans ... I mean, really, they don’t have bodies that manifest physically on this plane, complete with sperm and eggs and such that could fuse with ours ... and he laughed at me again. How can you say that, he asked, poking at me ironically. Oh yeah. The gods do have bodies. They borrow them. And if the humans conceive children while one or the other is being ridden ... I got the image of the god in question
rummaging through the DNA, rearranging the chromosomes, creating the image of themselves, being even more of a contributing parent to the child than the source of those chromosomes. My blood is in you, he said. More than once, my blood has been in your line.

And I thought about the madness that recurs in our family, the violence, the sadistic hungers, the psychic vampirism, the rage disorders, my endocrinal intersex condition. And I thought of Angrboda, the Hag of the Iron Wood whose name means foreboding, and then of Fenris in his chains, and of the great alien hermaphrodite serpent ... and of myself, of how inhuman my astral form is getting. It was always more inhuman than my physical body, but now it's even more so. Our family has so many shadows but they all seem to match up with this particular family of Jotun gods. Now I know why.

You were bred specially, Loki said, and then I had to react with horror. How? Why would anyone want to deliberately breed anything like me ... the vampire intersexual mutant with all the medical problems? (Maybe not mutant ... maybe throwback?) How could
I be anything but a horrible accident? He got angry then, and it was old anger, old resentment that went way back. They said that my children were monsters, he snarled. They called them monsters, my children and grandchildren and my descendants, but they didn’t understand. They were all exactly as they were supposed to be. And so are you.

And so am I. Deformations and all, so am I. It almost makes one want to laugh.

Postscript:

About a month later, Loki spoke to me while I was wandering through the Blockbuster Video. Early that morning, I’d had a bad dream that I was back in my body as it had been when I was 15. I awoke feeling massively uncomfortable and dysphoric, and unable to figure out what to do. We went shopping, me moping about somewhat, and then while staring at videos, he spoke up exasperatedly. He informed me that even a blind man could see what was wrong ... I’d inadvertently shapeshifted my astral form whilst dreaming, and I’d gotten stuck. “But what do I do?” I cried inwardly.
Gaaah, he said rolling his eyes. I taught you how to do that.

“But you didn’t,” I said. “You taught me how to move between worlds, not forms.”

Gaaah, he said, making hair-pulling gestures, his eyes snapping dangerously. Same shit, different day. Just do it.

“But I don’t have my drum,” I began, and then silenced at his mental expression.

There’s music playing in here, he said. There’s a backbeat. Use it.

So I did. And it worked, using the same technique that he’d showed me. In fact, it was so easy that now I have to be careful not to imagine myself transforming into something, or it’ll start, and I worry about the effect that will have on my physical form. But I seem to have passed the first lesson I’ve done in a long while, or at least squeaked by.
The image came to me in a dream, and I obsessed about it for months. It was a pole, crowned with a skull, and on it were rungs decorated with many fluttering strips and hanging objects. When I looked in my books on Eurasian shamanism, I did find pictures of poles like that in old woodcuts (and a few photos from Siberia with no useful captions), but there was no explanation of exactly what was supposed to be on them, or how they were used. I knew, very strongly, that this pole was supposed to be a representation of the World Tree, and I went from there. Thinking it through, I supposed that there would have to be nine rungs, one for each world.

My friend and fellow spirit-worker Elizabeth—Loki’s wife—came to visit, and we discussed the idea. I decided that there was no point in waiting; with two Northern-Tradition spirit-workers on the land, something ought to come out right. So we dowsed for a place at the edge of my ritual field on the back of my farm, dug a hole, and then dowsed for the right tree to cut down. My wife followed, chain saw in hand. The pendulum led me to a small oak that was dead on the top half but still alive at the bottom—caught between worlds, as Elizabeth pointed out. We made sacrifice to it, asked its spirit for permission, and got a firm assent—we got the feeling that the spirit in the tree knew that it was not going to make it. Cutting it down, we lashed nine rungs to it and then stood it up in the hole, figuring that we’d decorate it standing up, like a Yule tree.

Nothing happened. That nothing seemed significantly wrong. Something ought to happen, we felt very strongly. I sat and thought about
it, but got nothing but static from my tense state, which sometimes happens. Finally I grabbed some books about the research and archaeology of northern religion, and did some bibliomancy, opening them at random. (See, I’ve discovered what the “lore books” are good for—bibliomancy! Yes, that’s me chuckling.) My finger alighted on a passage about finding holes in the ground that had been filled with offerings as part of some unknown religious rite. “That’s it!” Elizabeth said, lighting up. “We need to feed the hole!”

So we went back out, took it gently down from its standing position, and laid it on the ground. I tied a skull from one of our goats on the top, and tied on strips of red cloth—it seemed important that those strips be red somehow—and then we went to the empty hole. The book had listed many things that were found in these sacred shafts, and we had some of them, and added others that we felt were intuitively important. There was a handful of old coins, an egg from our chickens, some goat milk from our goats, a few polished stones, a cup of mead, a bottle of ale, some homemade bread, some bones from sheep we’d raised and slaughtered, some pieces of junk jewelry. I recaned the hole with a mugwort stick and then threw the stick into the hole. Finally, I pricked my finger and let some of my own blood fall into it.

Then we stood the pole up ... and it was as if we’d plugged it into an electric socket. Our prior conviction that “something ought to happen” was entirely correct. It not only turned on, it seemed to come to life, as if there was a guardian spirit in it. The skull suddenly looked like a head, glaring down at us ... and I knew what the point of this pole was. It was a quick door between worlds, and the spirit that I had called in with our offerings and my own blood was waiting for orders. “Keep everything out until further notice,” I told it, “and let no one but me through and back again.”

We proceeded to decorate the rungs for the rest of the day. I started with strips of colored cloth fluttering off the ends—sky-blue for Asgard at the top, pink and lavender for Alfheim, green and gold for Vanaheim, dark green for Jotunheim, blue and green for Midgard, red for Muspellheim, gray and purple for Svartalfheim, white and silver for Niflheim, and black
for Helheim. I made up pouches of the appropriate herbs for each world, in
matching colors, and tied them on. Then we added appropriate sorts of
junk jewelry and strings of wooden beads, and small bags of appropriate
items—bones for Helheim, flint and ashes for Muspellheim, colored
marbles in light and dark shades for the two Alfár-worlds, coins for the
duergar of Nidavellir, miniature weapons and a brass sun for Asgard. I filled
a small jar with raw flax dyed sea-green, and laid a small coiled snakeskin
on it, and hung that on the Midgard rung for the Serpent. For Vanaheim, I
put one perfect wheat head and a handful of amber chips into a narrow
glass bottle and hung that up.

As we crossed the field later that night to check on the stang (and add
a few more things that we’d found) we could see it literally glowing at the
edge of the field. It seemed like a tall, hunched presence, draped in its
fluttering strips of cloth, standing guard. It stayed very much alive for the
rest of the month, and then as autumn moved into winter it seemed to
recede, seemingly knowing that there would be no travel in the snow-filled
months.

I began to use it to travel and get back safely. When I’d first
pathwalked, I was careful to set up runic markers and wards to get me
where I wanted to go, and back. With the stang, I went into the labyrinth,
came out, walked right over to it, grabbed a rung, and bing! I was there,
facing my stang in the physical world, and someone else’s pole in another
world. Apparently these things are scattered all over the Nine Worlds.
Some of them are off limits; these guardians can keep you out, so I found
that they were best used for places where you were expected, where you had
made an appointment, as it were. Also, there aren’t so many of them that
they can take you anywhere you want. However, getting home was a snap; I
just touched the wood of the pole itself, and the guardian of my pole—
bound by my own blood—brought me right back. I’d never been returned
so safely and surely.

Since then, the stang has remained in my back field, as it always will
until it rots and falls over and I have to replace it. The field is host to
various people’s gatherings, and folks either give the stang a wide berth, or
they feel strangely drawn to make offerings to it. More than once I’ve seen someone pause, stand before it for a moment, and then dig in their pocket for spare change, which they toss at its feet, and then they shake their head and move on.

A week later, Elizabeth built her own pole. Since she lives in an urban apartment with no land around it, she had to do it differently. She described her own stang-making in a letter to me:

My stang ended up being a bit different from yours, since I live in a second-floor apartment and don’t have a connection to any piece of land, nor anywhere I can erect a pole in the ground. I decided not to do the “pole in a pot” thing because it felt wrong to just use dirt from some random place, or buy potting soil. What I did was to construct a ladder that can lean against a wall indoors. I used sections of unfinished wooden stair railing and some dowel rods from Home Depot, since I didn’t have any young trees to chop down or anywhere to find suitable wood.

There are ten rungs on the ladder—one for each of the Nine Worlds, and the topmost for the totem symbol. I had no skull (and no time to ask someone to send me one, since Hela told me I had to make the stang before Halloween, and I’d just gotten home from your place) but using a skull from an animal I didn’t kill or eat myself felt kind of weird. I sat here thinking of what I should do, then I had a flash of inspiration and used a carved wooden mask that had been hanging on the wall over my desk. It felt appropriate, somehow. The mask got tied to the topmost rung of the ladder, which I had constructed using jute twine to lash the rungs on, leaving a couple of feet empty at the base and narrowing the ladder somewhat with each successive rung. I guess the idea is that the skull or mask or whatever on top of the pole represents the spirit of the pole itself, so using a clan totem or personal totem animal’s skull or other meaningful symbol carries a lot of weight—especially if it’s a skull from a creature you hunted or butchered yourself, which you already know.

I added some red strips of cloth to the top rung, too, like we did with your pole and the skull—I think this is meant to symbolize the
blood of the tribe or clan, or the blood of the sacrificial animal, or both. Blood seemed to be the idea, anyway.

I tied things onto the rungs for each of the Nine Worlds. The only stuff I didn’t have lying around already turned out to be feathers, ribbon, strips of cloth, some of the Nine Worlds herbs, and beer for the Vanadheim rung. I was surprised at how much stuff I managed to find in my apartment for this, even though I don’t usually keep a lot of crafts stuff around. I used the same colors we used for your stang for each rung of my ladder, though I didn’t have any dead snakes or actual bones at the time (I put a rubber skeleton hand on the Helheim rung, for instance, though later I found some real bones to tie on). I put a lot of unused jewelry on as well, including a snowflake bracelet for Niflheim, and a bronze medallion with a petroglyph of a sailing ship on the Jotunheim rung.

Since I wasn’t putting the ladder in a hole, I thought about how to “feed” it with the egg, etc. What I finally did was to beat up the egg you gave me in a bowl along with some milk and the rest of the beer. I smeared these on the bottoms of the ladder’s two poles, along with some of my own blood. I put an earthenware bowl on the floor between the legs of the ladder for the coins and various other non-food items. Then I smudged the ladder with the mugwort, blew on it, lit a candle and set it at the bottom too … and it came alive! I vaguely remember you advising me to put it wherever I dream, and so it’s propped against a bedroom wall near my altars, and almost immediately I began having vivid dreams. I haven’t seen the ladder glow the way your stang did that night; my bedroom doesn’t get very dark due to the lights outside my building, but I could definitely feel the spooky foo coming off it when I stood in front of the ladder.

When I used it at Hallowmas to get to Alfheim, I lay down at the foot of the ladder, and then when I was ready to go, stood up out of my body and grasped the Alfheim rung, and I wound up holding onto a stang on a road that leads into the elves’ realm. I later used that one to move to Svartalfheim, and from there to the Helvegr not far from Mordgud’s tower. Each of the stangs I saw was built like yours—a pole, not a ladder—but was otherwise very different in terms of appearance.

While I was making my ladder, I had the strange feeling that it was kind of an experiment for the spirits too, adapting it for people
like me who, in this day and age, may not have a relationship with the land, or own or live on property where they can build a stang without getting in legal trouble or having it vandalized or stolen, but who for one reason or another need to have and use a stang. I left enough room at the bottom of my ladder for it to be set into the ground, if I ever get the chance to do so. Right now, if I have to I can take things off the ladder, transport it to a new residence, then replace them and smudge, etc. all over again. I’ve added a few items here and there since I made it, too, when I felt I ought to do so.

Since my stang isn’t plugged into the ground, it doesn’t have the ability to pull energy from the earth, and I have to make regular offerings to it to keep the spirit-guardian alive and present. I feed it several times a year with my blood and other offerings.

—Elizabeth Vongvisith

One thing that Elizabeth and I both noticed was that the poles in various worlds looked different. The first time that I used my stang, I went to visit Angrboda in the Iron Wood; she had a pole not far from her lodge, with a wolf’s skull on it. Two in Vanaheim had, variously, a horse skull and a stag skull. There is apparently one in Svartalfheim with a large saurian head of some sort, and one in Alfheim with a dragon’s skull. While finding one in the Nine Worlds can actually mean a way home, be sure to find out who is in charge of it, and ask their permission to use it.

Once a World Tree pole is created, it’s not something that you can just abandon. If it is rooted in land, you’d better make sure that you own that land and will never be moved from it, because it is bound there by your blood. If it is a portable sort like Elizabeth’s one would assume that it ought to be moved with the greatest reverence, and placed carefully. It should never be dismantled; if you must get rid of it, burn it entirely to ashes in a fire and return them to the earth.
Day before leaving

I got my tattoo. It really hurt, more than I expected it would, and it still hurts like crazy. Guess all those macho folks who claimed that “their tattoos didn’t hurt all that much” were either lying or had a much higher pain tolerance than me. It makes my arm ache, and it’s hard to raise it. Hopefully it will heal up some before I have to leave tomorrow, or it’s going to be hard to do any manual labor. I would have liked to have had more time to heal it, but Mulysa, although an excellent tattooist, kept forgetting to call me back and schedule the appointment. However, one isn’t supposed to bargain over magical things.

It’s the nine-letter word HELGRENZE, which modernly means hellbound, but it originally meant oathbound to Hel, and that’s the meaning that I use. It’s in black runes—Haegl Ehwaz Laguz Gyfu Raído Ehwaz Nyth Algiz Ehwaz, and each of the runes also has meaning to me. Haegl is Hel, of course, my first allegiance, but it is also the rune of Hail, the rain of chaos, and I can’t deny that this has been so much a part of my life. I’ve been trained by its constant
unending stream of misfortunes that I can’t halt to be strong under fire. Newage types may think that the stream of misfortunes was something that I could get away from if I “just had the right attitude”, but no. It’s training. Hel needs a war zone correspondent, medic, counselor, and special ops agent, and you don’t train up one of those by letting him live in relative comfort.

There are three Ehwaz runes, the rune of the Horse that means slow progress. What comes to mind is three horses, one black, one white, and one red—the progression of colors that marks the third gender path. The first horse, right next to Hel, is the black one, and that’s both Baphomet—one of my main teachers on this path. To ride the black horse is to ride with the dead, to the paths of the underworld, to be Lord of the dark places. Dealing with the dark parts of people’s psyches is part of my job. Not to mention my ever-increasing work with the dead—as Josh commented, just as a priest has to put up with old people complaining about their goiters and gallstones, shamans have to put up with dead people bitching. In my case, the dead transfolk who crowd
me, screaming for justice. I ride the black horse, on the paths of darkness, which I know so well.

The next runes are harder. Laguz is the rune of Water, meaning flow, and I have such a hard time with flowing. I’m wrapped so tight. I so often resent how I have become a door through which messages and information and orders flow, whether I will it or not. It’s hard for a control freak like me to be used, often without warning or consent. Yet I have to learn to flow with it, to open and let it come without resentment, because I have no choice...this is the way things are going to be for me, the rest of my life, and I’d better learn to “lay back and enjoy the rape”, as the nasty politicians say. Josh and I have taken to doing sexual yoga exercises designed to open me up—I won’t go into detail, but it works surprisingly well. We’re going to do this tonight, to get me good and opened up for this journey, where I cannot afford to be closed to stimuli and vision.

The next rune is Gyfu, the rune of the Gift, the Crossroads, and Partnership. I must never forget that this path brings gifts as well as terrors. I have been blessed with a wonderful wife and an amazing
boyfriend, and I am so damn lucky in love. Who cares if I don’t have money, or that I can’t hold down a real job due to the demands of this one? I have people who love me enough to put up with all this shit, people who love me for who I am. I have a whole kingdom full of folks who went out of their way to help me get stuff together for this trip. I can walk through the combat zone and not be touched—only Hel gets to beat me up. I know what I’m supposed to do with my life. What more do I need? I need to remember to be grateful.

Raido, the rune of the Road...the road I walk tomorrow. Shamans “journey”, and that’s part of what defines them. They go to places that other people can’t, and fix things. That’s the road this symbolizes, not just my personal path...the road that I will ride, on the beats of my drum, not just this month, but many times. This is the orientation tour, not the end result. Also, Raido echoes my Sagittarius sun.

The second Horse is the white horse, the horse of Rules and Honor and Law, and it is a har done to rise. Both my shaman job and my kingship job are bounded by geases and rules, some of which I only
discover when I trip over them. “Gee, can I do this? Uh...guess not.” The white horse is hard to ride because he keeps only to a narrow path, and he refuses to stray off into that interesting-looking side road...not because it’s necessarily wrong, but because it’s just not for me, not this time around. I get few choices, but I get surety.

Nyth is the rune of Need, the firebow without which our ancestors would not have survived. It is also the rune of No, the boundary and limit. This rune, to me, says: Remember that you have a body, that you live in this material world, that you need to take that into account. Your physical needs cannot be neglected in favor of your job, or you will not last long. And I do want to be an old shaman-king someday, and still be hale and able, if possible.

Algiz is the Elk-rune, the rune of challenge, the upraised hand, the rearing horned stag. It is for Herne, the Hunter with whom I do have a bond, who has promised to protect me on this journey, whose little crow I keep as a token. Maegen will be going with me on the trip; we’re putting up a hook in the hermitage to hold her cage. She is starting to fledge
out with her permanent black feathers. Hail Herne, Keeper of Predator and Prey, by all your many names.

The final Ehwaz is the red horse, and I don’t know what that one’s for. I expect I will find out. After all, I’m still in training, I don’t know everything yet. 37 years old and still such a beginner...soon, I hope.

People have been wonderful about my kit. I’ve been getting amazing gifts from everyone. Ken stopped by yesterday; apparently he’d read my site and told his little daughter Maia about my quest, and she insisted that I needed some important things. He brought me a glass bottle of seawater—don’t know what it’ll be useful for, but if people say that I need it, then obviously I need it. Maia donated a scrap of her magic security blanket (her “blay”), blue with cows and moons, to tie around the neck of the bottle. All the protective hamingja of a small child’s faith. It’s one of the rules of journeying that you read in folktales—when children or animals say, “You need this,” then you need it.

One day left.
The next morning...

Before I go, I wanted to make this last entry into my journal. Julie showed up this morning—she’ll be here for the whole time of my trip, to help Bella with the farm—and she brought a giant armful bouquet of long-stemmed dead roses that she’d dried, in all colors, for me to give as an offering to Mama Hel when I get down to Helheim on my final day.

The hermitage—our little treehouse—is all ready. It’s a little cabin suspended between four trees, the walls clinker-built like a Viking ship out of scrap lumber. We finished making the rope bed and moved down the futon, and Tannin donated a large wooden box painted with moons. That’s all that will fit in there, along with Maegen’s cage and my punched-tin lantern. I will be moving my kit down there soon, and Allyson has come out to give me a ritual sendoff. I’m trimming my beard and I will burn the trimmings in the fire, along with a blood offering. My tattoo still aches, wouldn’t you know? Ah well.
We had a panicked moment this morning when we couldn’t find my magic hairbrush. Josh enchanted it to be a wand of unbinding, and he used it to brush out my hair last night, and then put it on the dresser. It wasn’t there this morning. We tore the bedroom apart, afraid that some malevolent spirit had stolen it, with no luck. Then he thought to look in my crane bag, where it goes, and lo and behold there it was. No one had moved it there, as far as we know. All we can figure is that the magic on the bag makes it pull things back that are removed from it, which is a neat trick. Means that even if someone steals something out of it, as soon as they put it down, it’ll just get pulled back. Good Bag.

So far, Odin’s stated strongly that he wants to see me, and I have appointments with Frigga (to ask a boon for my wife) and Freyja (to ask a boon for my boyfriend), and Iduna (to drop off a message for a friend) and the Norns. And the folks in the Iron Wood want to see me... family, I guess. And the dead, the dead were bothering me last night while I was trying to make love to my wife, and Josh came in from milking the goats and mentioned that there seemed to
be dead people in the barn. All right, all right, I’ll be there on the ninth day. I’ll see you then!

I’ll see you then... in nine days...

Raven
Part II: The Other-Worldly People
Chapter 9 🪄

Trolltryggr: Working with the Giant-Races

When I was formally and officially claimed by Hel—which meant that She told me who she was, after years of my serving her namelessly, and had me put her mark on me—She then began to send me around to learn from various folk. Some were gods, some were wights, some were dead people. None of them were human. Of the gods, many were the deities of the Jotunfolk, traditionally referred to as the Jotnir, but modernly referred to by many who work with or are sworn to them as the Rökkr, or Shadow-Gods. Most of them were related in some way to Hel, so She was just having me make the rounds of her family.

The dead folk that I was sent to work with were dead Jotunfolk, who apparently go to Helheim just as many human souls do, or they are recycled back into their worlds. Since then, I’ve also visited Jotunfolk in their own worlds—Jotunheim, Muspellheim, and Niflheim—and had interactions that were various levels of peaceful. For most people, this might not be the case, especially those who go dealing with the Jotunkind without understanding their cultural rules.

In a way, I find that although the Jotun are beneficial to work with, particularly in this day and age, it is much, much more delicate to work with them in some ways. By this, I do not mean that they are delicate as entities, but that they must be approached with total awareness of the entire relationship. I find that they are a bit touchy, and caution must be used. This is important, and perhaps this is something that can be seen as one way in which some folk
don't work well with them. Jotnar don't like to be ignored, they don't like being overlooked once you've started to work with them and they take an invested interest in you, and they claim a lot more responsibility on your part than any Aesir-god does. What do I mean by this? I have to do the work. I have to work with them, I have to do what they say, I have to keep active to keep them present. They also don't allow much laziness in my work, either. Another way they demand responsibility is they seem (at least for me) to require a lot more patience and awareness and politeness to the rest of the world—human, animal, plant, you name it.

—Lyn, spirit-worker

Forces of Nature

The Jotunfolk, taken as an entire race, are more numerous in the Nine Worlds than any other type of being. Of the Nine Worlds, three of them—Jotunheim, Muspellheim, and Niflheim—are entirely ruled and populated by them. A fourth world, Helheim, admits the Dead of many races, but is ruled by Hela, a Jotun goddess. They are a power to be reckoned with. Although this article will highlight enough information for the traveler to go on with, those who expect to have deeper dealings with this race of beings should consult The Jotunbok, the book that I wrote on working with the Giant-Races, also available from Asphodel Press. Most of this article and much of the "denizens" sections of the Jotun-ruled worlds is excerpted from that book.

There is a certain school of thought which sees the Jotnar as the Gods/spirits that were revered in northern Europe before the coming of the people who brought the Aesir and Vanir; possibly the pre-Indo-European folk. We know little about them; the tiny scraps we do know about come from the existence of their words in our language (they gave us the base for such words as wife, child, house, and slave, so we know that there was a good deal of intermingling), and what archaeological evidence we are able to turn up. We know that they had a Mesolithic-to-Neolithic culture, but not much more than that. (Some of the folk that I interviewed had independently had sudden inspiration upon seeing the museum exhibit or
the book or TV show about Otzi the Iceman, and strongly felt that he was an example of this pre-Indo-European shamanic culture, and that it was known and taught by the Jotnar, under various names.) As can be seen by the Titans in ancient Greece, and the Fir Bolg of the Ireland, the old gods of the conquered people become the demons of the conqueror’s gods. This theory has been put forth by Liljenroth, although I am still anxiously awaiting a good English translation of his work.

There’s no question in my mind that it was the Jotnar who first befriended the people of northern Europe, before the Aesir or even the Vanir got around to dealing with them. Back when agriculture was spotty, when we were hunters and gatherers and herders who were just settling into villages and doing some planting—or not yet, even—that was when we learned from Them. Their involvement with us goes back that far, and they remember it, all right, even if we as a culture have forgotten. Their cultures are much more shamanic, one might say, and so are their practices…and so were ours, in those days.

—Ari, spirit-worker and spamadhr

But back to real and not theoretical life. In the past few years, rumors have come around about Norse/Germanic religionist people (besides myself and my friends) who work with, or are called by, the Jotunfolk...often to the dismay of the general Asatru populace, who tend to see most of the Jotnar as enemies by definition. However, as this phenomenon is growing, Norse/Germanic religionists as a whole need to come to terms with it.

The most important thing to keep in mind, and the one thing that we who work with the Jotnar would most like readers to come away with, is to understand that this is not a dualistic faith like Zoroastrianism or Christianity. The Aesir are no angels, and the Jotnar are not demons of Satan. It’s not that simple, or that black and white. To fully understand and live this faith is to get beyond dualistic good and evil. Whatever else it may be, the faith of my ancestors was based on keen observation of the nature of this world and the Otherworlds, and nothing in nature—in any world—is good or evil. While there may be tension between opposing forces, to rank one side as “good” and the other side as “evil” is a holdover from an idea that sprang from Zoroastrianism to Manichaeanism and finally
into Christianity, and that world view is not reflective of the way our world (or any of the Nine Worlds) works.

We dare not forget the effect that Christianization had on the only surviving heathen lore, and that its first effect was the forcing of this dualistic world view onto the people. From their perspective, the Jotunfolk were especially easy to demonize, even more so than the Aesir or Vanir. Regardless of what our ancestors came to believe, the denizens of the Otherworlds don’t see things that way. Individuals are judged, not entire races of beings. Thor may kill one giantess and have an affair with another one. Skadi aligns herself with the Aesir; Sigyn with the Rökkr. In real life—and for those of us who are tranceworkers or spirit-workers, the Nine Worlds are very real and not just archetypes or myths—things aren’t that black and white.

The three pantheons (and the assorted minor spirits) of the Norse/Germanic peoples are engaged in a complicated dance. They war with each other, yet they marry each other. They denounce each other and befriend each other. They battle over some territories and respect each other’s claim on others. They act, in other words, like neighboring tribes. Sometimes they act like the Sharks and the Jets, or the Crips and the Bloods, or the Hatfields and McCoys, but those are actually rare compared to the general peaceful coexistence. Those of us who work with them, and are followers of the deities of the three different pantheons, must remember this ... and must not attempt to project the tales of those oversimplified battles and alliances onto each other.

The Ethnocentrism Dance

The Jotnar have some habits, as a race, that we humans find difficult to deal with, and we tend to demonize them for these things. It’s hard to get beyond our own cultural imprinting and appreciate that these people are members of a different species from us. Some of their cultural practices—cannibalism, duels, sexual violence—may upset or horrify us if we see them through human eyes. What we need to remember is that they are not
human, and cannot be held to human morality. They have their own moral code(s), which work for them; their nature is different and could not be best served by human rules. It is the ultimate in ethnocentricity to assume that we can judge them by our standards.

What I have seen is that the Jotnar are all different. They have distinct personalities, motives, and preferences. They are individuals, not some mindless screeching horde. They are not stupid; many of them are cunning and intelligent. Some are hostile to everyone but their own, some are benignly inclined toward others but not inclined to care much, and a few are actively interested in outsiders. Some will give their word and stick to it no matter what, while others are simply not to be trusted under any circumstances. Some are wise and fair, others cruel and vengeful, but most are somewhere in between. I don’t believe they can all be painted (or tarred) with the same brush. In short, they remind me a lot of human beings in many respects.

However, I think the etins should be accorded caution, circumspection and respect, no matter whether you’re well- or ill-disposed toward them personally (if nothing else, they can be viewed as worthy enemies by those so inclined). No one has to like or admire them, but they shouldn’t be dismissed as insignificant. After all, I doubt Thor would’ve made it his business to fight them if they were all just a bunch of sniveling weaklings.

—Elizabeth, tranceworker

What the Jotunfolk are like varies widely—frost giants are not fire giants are not Jotunheim mountain-etins are not Iron Wood Clan etins. But they all have certain racial traits in common:

1) A wild, primal temper, and the ability to berserk easily. Some have excellent self-control, some don’t. Their various cultures have boundaries for this racial tendency, which include strong rules around what is and is not an acceptable reason for challenging or killing someone.

2) Strong passions in general—high emotions, harsh violent lusts, wild ecstatic joys, loud crude humor, overkill vengeance. Their one mark is their intensity. They live life at high volume and deadly seriousness. There is no
such thing as a boring repressed Jotun, or a flighty noncommittal Jotun. (Loki can pass as that last one, but he’s faking it when he does it.) Even with the ones who have the mask of polite courtesy and iron self-control—like Utgard-Loki and Mordgud and Gerda—you can sense that roiling volcano underneath.

3) Strong clan and tribal loyalties. Jotunfolk all live in tribal societies and generally feel a stronger kinship to their blood family than to whoever they might marry. One example of this is Gerda’s insistence that Frey give up his magic sword as a bridal-gift to her family; besides the fact that an expensive bridal-gift shows the value of the bride, she also increased her family’s power in this way.

4) Powers that are strongly linked to nature and the elements—wind, water, fire, snow, rock, trees, animals. Some curious researchers have asked me what the difference is between a Jotun and an elemental spirit. Although it’s a tricky concept to tease apart, I have tried to make sense of the clear difference between them.

It’s difficult for us as ordinary human beings, caught up in the bias of our own existence, to understand what it is to be fire, or ice, or some other natural phenomenon ... difficult, but not impossible! Shamanic-types the world over have studied “becoming one with the natural world” as a way to gain knowledge and power. One of the things that Hela is having me do, as part of my shamanic training, is to “master” the elements. This does not mean being able to wave my oh-so-wizardly hands and call up storms and lightning. On the contrary; this means being familiar with them, understanding them inside and out, having had the experience of being as close to them as it’s possible for a human to get. You meld with them and understand the essence of them. Working with Jotun nature is very helpful for this.

To explain the difference between a wight/elemental and a Jotun, I could use an example from the Finnish Kalevala, where the sorcery is all about learning the “true name” of something—like cold, or heat, or the sun, or fire, or whatever. The “true name” isn’t a magic word, it’s a magic feeling, a way of being, an intimate knowledge of that element. When
you’ve made that intimate connection, something of it is in you, and you can work with it far easier than someone who’s standing back and working with it from a safe distance.

To be in the presence of the elemental Jotnar is to see this up-close and in action. Take a fire-etin, for example. It is not that he is just fire, otherwise he’d just be, well, a fire like any other fire. It is not just that he knows the true name of fire; it is that he *embodies* the true name of fire. It is not that he embodies the *spirit* of fire, it’s that he embodies the true name of fire, that experience of being one with fire yet being oneself as well, separate. The fire that knows itself, in essence, and who can be not-fire at will. An elemental has a much more limited understanding of itself as a conscious being. A Jotun is fully as conscious and complicated as a human (and perhaps more so), while having the experience of being a part of nature as an integrated part of themselves.

5) Jotunkind have an almost casual familiarity with shapeshifting. All of them can do it to one extent or another, all that I’ve spoken to about it have been doing it since birth, and the really adept ones whip their physical forms around like we change clothes. They consider it a cultural art form. Much of the time, you’ll see them in their “force of nature” form, which means that you might walk right by one and not notice them. They have perfectly usable humanoid forms as well. In general, though, Jotnar vary wildly in size and shape, not just between subraces but between individuals in the same family. As an extremely physically homogenous race, we are often made uncomfortable by the multitudinous differentiation among Jotunfolk.

6) Their cultures vary, but all seem to be more bloodthirsty, more intense, more primal than humans. They have codes of honor, but those codes are much harsher—they have to be, or they’d all kill each other. (One seidhr-worker commented, “To use a terrible pop culture reference, they are much more like Klingons than humans.”) Certain things are acceptable in their culture that are not so in ours—one example is cannibalism, which they do for both funerary and vengeance reasons. Just as I wonder if many Pagans who have visions of some utopian dark-age agricultural past are
actually unconsciously tapping into Vanaheim, I wonder if some folk who have visions of the fantasy “barbarian” tribes are actually tapping into Jotunheim.

7) Jotnar are passionate fighters, all of them. The natural forces that they are most in tune with are the most powerful of Nature’s forces—the hurricane, the brush fire, the earthquake, the storm at sea. (While we, from our perspective, tend to assume that these are entirely negative and even evil, that’s coming at it from our perspective. Nature would disagree. She might even say that these moments are when She is at Her most awesome, even if they are inconvenient for us.) They fight for territory, for tribal justice, and for sport. Some will even humor us and fight for sport with us. One tranceworker commented, “I’ve dealt with several of them in varying capacities. Several times, being the martial individual that I am I’ve challenged them to ‘test my mettle.’ This seemed to greatly amuse them. I have won and I have lost. I can honestly say that I’ve walked away from all of them on my own two feet. I think this is why it was so easy to ‘test my mettle’ against them. They saw it as entertaining that the little human wanted to tussle.”

They will also fight for dominance, to see where people are in the “pack order”. This is especially true for the more animal-oriented Jotunfolk. On my first visit to the Iron Wood, I was surrounded by werefolk, and one of them jumped me. I shapeshifted to a fighting form and knocked him down, and he retreated. It was just a challenge, to see how I should be treated. Often, it seems, passing human tranceworkers will be challenged, either for this reason or because they are trespassing on someone else’s territory and are being legitimately warned off. Instead of realizing what is happening, they may think that this is a life-or-death battle, and that this strange beast is challenging them out of nowhere for no reason except to eat them. They lash out instead of thinking, and things get worse from there.

8) Jotun sex is wild, rough, and violent, but not sexist; in general, male and female Jotunfolk tend to be equal in size and ferocity, with no sexual dimorphism. The idea of females submitting to or being overpowered by
males is ridiculous to them. Jotun female nature is not any more “frithful” than Jotun male nature. They are much less prone to any sort of rigid gender role than any other race in the Nine Worlds, including humans. Ordinary sexual activity among the Jotunkind is as passionate as anything else that they do, and as violent, and is often accompanied by a great deal of wild shapeshifting during the act. The one time where there are active/passive partners is during Jotun ritual sex magic, and strangely enough, it is the passive partner who is considered the primary magician, with the active partner as their assistant.

The marriage customs of Jotunfolk vary from place to place, but there are strong differences between their generally accepted customs and those of, for example, the Aesir. There is no taboo against nonheterosexual relations in any Jotun tribe that I have found; although heterosexuals tend to have a somewhat higher status in tribes where childbearing and siring is important, there is no penalty for engaging in any sort of relationship that does not cause trouble in the tribe. This is especially true in the Iron Wood where there are a high percentage of hermaphroditic or gender-ambiguous births. Many humans who work with Jotnar find it surprising that even the largest and most “macho” male Jotun warrior, if he isn’t interested in ever doing it with another large macho male warrior, probably has a friend who has done just that, and is likely just fine with the general concept even if it isn’t his own preference.

Monogamy as a standard is very rare; one may take as many spouses as one can A) afford financially, and B) keep from fighting with each other. Multiple spouses don’t generally live together unless they are related, such as a pair of sisters or brothers, which means that those with two or more spouses also have two or more households and need to wander between them. Jotun marriage ceremonies will vary from formal religious ritual to simply stating one’s intentions in front of the tribe, but what they all share is some form of blood-sharing. If there is no blood publicly exchanged between the two people in question, the wedding is not legitimate as far as the Jotnar are concerned. Even a finger-prick is essential, although generally both partners give their hands for a blade-cut that will make a
scar. These scars are shown off in the same way as wedding rings might be to a human; if there is a breakup, both partners might disfigure the scar with many vertical lines across it. Sharing blood seems to be less about drama and gore, and more about kinship relations between tribes; it’s how you make your partner ritually into part of your family by placing some of your family’s blood into their body.

Whether of not a married couple will live together might also vary. The idea that partners ought to live forever under the same roof and spend every night in the same bed is foreign to Jotunkind; they might prefer to live with their own tribes or families, and simply get together in one place or the other for part or most of the time. Some might live with one spouse and visit another. Some permanent wanderers might have no home at all save that of their spouse, but be on the road much of the time. When you do find a couple living together permanently, it may be because they have small children to raise and/or are isolated from their clans, or because they are the ruling couple of a family or clan.

There are many different types of giants — fire-etins, frost-thurses, mountain giants, island-giants, sea-etins, etc. — but rather than go into every different sort and their tribal tendencies, I’ve chosen to list them under the worlds in which they are most often found. Note that I say “most often” — many giants are wanderers, and relocate to new areas where they may or may not put down roots. You never know who you might find wandering about in Jotunheim, for instance.
Divine Shadow: The Rökkr/Jotnir

Many people will claim that there is no evidence in the lore than any human beings ever actually served or worshiped the Jotnir, the Gods of the Jotunfolk. While that may or may not be true, there are a growing number who do so today, which I suspect is due to reasons I’ll go into later in this chapter. Some of the folk who work with them have given them the modern name of Rökkr, from the old word for “shadow”, as a way to refer to them as a pantheon (and yes, some of the folk who work directly with many of these wights refer to themselves as “Rökkatru”). They include both major and minor figures, including Hela, Loki, Angrboda, Fenris, the Great Serpent, Surt the Lord of Muspellheim and his mate Sinmora, Mordgud the guardian of Hel’s Gate, and Utgard-Loki the Lord of Utgard. Although she is nominally an Asa, Sigyn is usually included in this pantheon due to her loyalty to Loki. There are other notable Jotnar and part-Jotnar who I do not have the time and space to describe here, and haven’t met personally.

Loki and Sigyn

Probably the most infamous Jotun of all is Loki. While I could write about him, I would rather have him spoken of by those who work directly with him. As the most famous (or infamous) Jotun in history, he requires a section all to himself.

Loki generally appears as a male, tall, good-looking and of moderate to slender build. He has often been seen as having green or blue eyes and hair ranging from blood-red to a sort of orange-blond. He tends to be somewhat androgynous-looking no matter how he’s dressed, though it must be remembered that he is able to assume any form he wishes, particularly if he thinks it’ll help him get what he wants. He is also very charismatic, a smooth talker and a good listener, intelligent and persuasive, and he usually gets the better of everyone else in debate, flying or verbal conflict of any sort. He can
be engagingly childlike and is often very funny, even at his own expense. There is much about Loki that is admirable, but the reasons he is so widely mistrusted are because he is so very charming and skilled at persuasion, and because the things he does and says are not always in keeping with others’ notions of honor or right conduct.

Loki’s fire-giant blood is very evident in his personality, which is sometimes extreme and not always consistent. He is quite temperamental and can act impulsively. He is a master at wielding insults that cut to the bone, if you happen to catch him in the wrong mood. He can utter tender words of devotion one minute and hurl cruel insults the next, yet be perfectly sincere about both. Despite his temper, Loki rarely holds grudges, but when he does, he’s a vicious, spiteful enemy, able to patiently wait to serve up his revenge ice-cold. His behavior often seems unpredictable and illogical to others not accustomed to seeing things from his point of view. Nevertheless, he inspires fervent loyalty in many people, even while incurring violent dislike from others. At the same time, Loki’s loyalty only goes as far as his friends; with others, he’s not always terribly concerned about being nice or fair. If you’re not already a friend of Loki’s and you have business with him, be aware that he may gleefully treat you as a plaything (and he is rough on his toys), or at best, he might be sarcastic and careless about your feelings or your comfort.

Because his primary weapon is speech, Loki more than anybody else understands the real power of words, as skilled as he might be at finding loopholes in them. He is not easily fooled or outsmarted, and you attempt to match wits with Laufey’s son at your own peril—though if you do manage to get around him, he’ll most likely have more respect for you rather than be angry. Loki adores pranks and jokes, though they may not seem so funny when you are the butt of them. He appreciates wit and clever speech in others, and while he’ll most likely get the better of you in any challenge or agreement, he is not one to resist having a bit of fun in the meantime—which is another reason Loki is so distrusted. He has a way of making people forget why they’re there in the first place.

And further along those lines, Loki is an accomplished seducer, with the pleasing talent of making one feel as if there is no one else he desires more. He likes to flirt and may even make sexual advances toward you, and he is not picky about your gender, your
preferences, or whether or not you’re already attached. Loki is
difficult to resist, sometimes overwhelmingly so, but to him it’s all in
good fun. He won’t be offended if you decline, and he considers the
game of courtship quite as much fun as its hoped-for conclusion. He
especially likes it if you rise to the occasion and banter with him with
the obvious attitude that you aren’t about to be taken in by his
charm, but are willing to play the game anyway.

Loki is quite interested in mortal folk; there are a number of
Heathens, Neo-Pagans and others who count themselves as his, and
who say that it was he, not they, who made the first overtures of
friendship. He seems to be the most gregarious of all the Jotnar, and
perhaps of all the Aesir as well, as far as hanging around with
human beings is concerned. Indeed, despite his reputation, Loki has
allies in many places, most of whom are well aware of his character
and inclined to treat him with varying degrees of wariness, no
matter how long and well they have known him. Being a friend of
Loki’s can sometimes be aggravating, and even his closest
companions may quarrel violently with him, but he generally tries to
help his friends, and is capable of showing great kindness and care
to them when he is moved to do so.

Loki is a sorcerer and has made it his business to learn magic
from many different folk, sometimes without their knowledge. If
you ask him nicely and give him some particularly delightful gift, he
may instruct you in the finer points of shape-shifting, or teach you
the ways of Jotun sorcery with its emphases on blood and other
elemental magics. He might share the runelore he learned from
Odin, or Freyja’s seidr-craft. He is also knowledgeable about sex
magic and may even offer to give you some (ahem) hands-on
training with that, either through someone horsing him or directly.
He can also help you with anything to do with word-magic, spoken,
written or even sung. If you need it (and most people do) there is no
better teacher than Loki to help you understand the importance of
minding what you say and to whom. He will also teach you the
value of keeping one’s word no matter how difficult it might be—
which can be a painful lesson. He has a particular soft spot for
shamans and spirit-workers, as such people live on the fringes of
society and their life’s work often entails the regular crossing and
disturbance of boundaries, something Loki himself is very familiar
with. Those who have been called to this line of work might find
Loki a surprisingly sympathetic and helpful, if sometimes annoying ally.

Loki is not generally found in any one place in the Nine Worlds all the time, though he spends more time in Jotunheim than anywhere else. Trying to go to Asgard in search of Loki is not advisable (for a number of reasons) unless he specifically tells you to meet him there. There is some dissent as to whether or not Loki is still actually bound in his cavern; the experience of many Lokeans and spirit-workers suggests that if he is, it has not hampered his ability to move about the Nine Worlds as he wills, in some form or another. At any rate, since he is pretty hard to pin down, you’ll need to ask him to come to you before you go out looking for him, unless, of course, you are bidden to meet him somewhere in particular.

Loki cannot be “invoked” and will not be summoned—or at least, there are none in the mortal world who can rightfully order him around. Certain Asatruar should take note: politely asking for some of his time and attention is more likely to win a response than if you approach him with an attitude of hostility because he is the “enemy of the gods.” This is a mistake for which you will pay, sooner or later. Although Loki was banished by the Aesir and suffered a terrible punishment which left its mark on him in more ways than merely physically, he did not lose all of his cunning, power and dangerousness, and this should be kept in mind when dealing with him.

True to his often contradictory nature, Loki appreciates forthrightness and honesty in others, and if you need something from him, he will help you more readily if you just ask instead of trying to manipulate or second-guess him. However, Loki will expect something from you in return, and you would do better to have a boon or gift ready to offer rather than let him set the terms. If you don’t, Loki might amuse himself by demanding something merely ridiculous or trivial...or he may insist on a favor or a sacrifice which you will deeply regret. He’ll always seek whatever advantages he can gain from any sort of agreement, so it’s probably better to go into it with something to offer than to be at his mercy, so to speak.

As for what to give Loki, his favorite things seem to be strong liquor, small toys and candy. Fireworks or anything that makes a loud ruckus (or a mess) is also appreciated, especially if it’s
something childish and amusing such as a wind-up sparking toy. Loki also appreciates handmade items, such as carvings or artwork, needlework or foods made from scratch, particularly things like cakes and pies. He also likes well-composed poetry, songs or stories, written just for him and spoken or sung aloud. Like his daughter Hela, Loki has a good deal of consideration for people without much money; he will not demand anything you truly cannot afford, so if cheap beer is all you can get, he won’t insist on 30 year old single-malt Scotch. (If you happen to be wealthy, on the other hand, he’ll cheerfully insist that you get that expensive bottle for him, since after all, you can easily afford it…) He will seldom turn down anything outright, however, though he may not be particularly gracious about it.

—Elizabeth, spirit-worker and mortal-wife of Loki

According to lore, Loki admitted complicity in the murder of Balder, the youngest and most beautiful of Odin and Frigga’s children. He also insulted the Aesir at their feasting, revealing their hypocrisies and wrongdoings, and then fled. For his various offenses, the Aesir tracked him down where he had been hiding out with his second wife Sigyn and their two young children Narvi and Vali. The Aesir turned Vali into a rabid wolf and made him turn on and destroy his brother Narvi, whose intestines they used to magically bind Loki into a cave. Skadi, who was still upset with Loki for a number of reasons, put a poison-dripping serpent over Loki’s face in order to torment him. His weeping, mourning wife Sigyn forsook her people in order to stay with her imprisoned husband and minister to him in his bindings.

Today, Loki is one of the most popular Norse deities of all, although worshiping him is still looked at askance in many circles. Those who work with Loki have differing beliefs on whether or not he is still chained. Some feel that part of him is still bound in that cave, although the rest walks free; others feel that Odin has long since freed him, although his mental scars may still remain. Certainly when he talks to people, it is not from that place of torment. Loki seems to have no home in the Nine Worlds; he keeps moving, and calls no place his hall.
His wife Sigyn, similarly, speaks to people. Sigyn’s background is uncertain, except that she grew up in Asgard and was given to Loki as a child bride. Some conjecture that she was Njord’s fosterling, others that she was purely Asa. She is as unlike Loki’s first wife, Angrboda, as it is possible to be—shy, quiet, playful, nurturing, strong in her gentleness. One spirit-worker who deals with her characterized her as saying, “Sigyn gathers wounded things to her breast.” She sometimes appears as the Sigyn of her youth—the dancing, playful, shy child bride—and sometimes as the later Sigyn of her loyal agony in the cave—thin, worn, suffering, but still quietly strong enough to reach out to others who also suffer.

The other deities of the Rökkr pantheon—Hela, Fenris, Jormundgand, Angrboda, Surt, Sinmora, Utgard-Loki, Farbauti, Mengloth, Mordgud, and Hyndla—are described in the world-chapter that contains their hall. Loki and Sigyn, not choosing to reveal their current living-space, are described here for that reason.

**Jotunkind and the Aesir**

As with all things to do with the Jotnar, there are no absolutes. Some Jotnar marry into Aesir and Vanir lines, and ally with them. Others oppose them implacably. Most are somewhere in the middle. The ones who consider most of the Aesir honorable enemies—and remember that the emphasis is on “honorable”—will sometimes extend that opposition to followers of the Aesir. While the lore calls them “enemies of mankind”, from what I’ve seen, they only count as enemies those humans who are committed to the side of the Aesir. They have nothing against humans who do not have primary allegiance to the Aesir. (For that matter, there is very little lore about the Jotnar actually harming humans at all.) They have much less of a beef with the Vanir, and more frequently marry into their ranks.

It’s a difficult situation. On the one hand, insults have erupted in religious groups from Asatruar who closely serve their deities, and who feel that an enemy of their Gods must be their enemy as well, sight unseen. I
understand the pressure involved. The Aesir do see the Jotunfolk, for the most part, not only as lesser creatures but as a dangerous force to be restrained. There is a strong undercurrent of ... do I dare call it racism? Yes, I do dare ... among them. Heimdall has said flatly to myself and to other tranceworkers, including Asatru spae-workers, that he sees humans with Jotun blood as being unworthy to ever enter Asgard. Odin has gone back and forth on the subject, canny old man that he is.

However, some of my best friends are wives of Odin, or followers of Aesir gods. And we are sensible human beings who have absolutely no need to have any kind of feud between us, just because our bosses have issues. In fact, I think that this is a way in which we can teach Them something. (I know, the very idea that we could, over time, change and teach the Gods will make some people’s eyes spin around in their head. But I think there’s something to that! And I intend to live as if this, at least, this example, is a gift that I can give.) I will serve my Lady while not carrying on the feud that some of her people are involved in, and I encourage Asatru folk to do the same. After all, if I, with all my Jotun-blooded handicaps, can do it, surely so can they?

In some ways, the Aesir are proponents of forcing order on chaotic Nature, which two thousand years ago was necessary for the survival of the species. They are the force of civilization. However, the pendulum in our world has now swung so far in the other direction that our imposed “order” has thrown things out of balance and is now causing harm. We have a greater problem from pollution than from most actions of nature these days. I agree that there is a balance to be had here. However, we humans need to remember that our place is in the middle of that balance, always—after all, the one of the Nine Worlds that we are closest to is Midgard—and not at one end or the other.

Not all etins are enemies of the Aesir; some have joined forces with them. One is Skadi, who went to Asgard asking for weregild for her father’s death, and the weregild that she asked for was to be given a husband. While this may seem strange to us, especially considering the independent nature of giantesses in general, it was a canny move on her part. By
becoming the wife of a member of the Odin’s council, she paved the way for herself to get a voice on that council as well, a Jotun voice that was trusted by the Aesir. Even though her marriage did not last, she stayed in Asgard and is one of the few giantesses “acceptably” worshiped today.

Another etin who has allied himself entirely with the Aesir is Tyr. In fact, he is so thoroughly enmeshed with them that we forget that (by some accounts) he is the son of a fire-giant and a frost-thurse. Lyn writes again: “Tyr! What a difficult Jotun from a Rökkatru perspective. I’ve learned a lot about doing what had to be done from Tyr. I think that he is more of a priest than others know. I think that he was/is a priest for the Aesir, teaching them about the time before they wrote themselves into legend. I think it was aligning himself with the new, denying the old, that cost him his hand. I look at Fenris being bound as a changing of the guard, the last loose strings that need to be taken care of. As guardian of those strings, it was Tyr’s job to put them in the closet. He still can be seen in the setting sun, and is the dying light over the land. He is the sunbeam that is the single ray on the way out.”

In many ways, Tyr is a way for those who are unfamiliar with the Jotun to understand the Norse word “trolltryggr”, which means “faithful as a giant”. We think of trolls as nasty ugly creatures, due to centuries of human folklore and decades of fantasy novels, but when a Jotun says that they are going to do something or be a certain way, they are dedicated loyally to that in its entirety, sometimes beyond all reason. We humans, especially in this sound-bite age of convenience, could learn something from this.

Ancient Teachings

I find that a lot of Seidhworkers (particularly Hrafnar/Harner-type Seidhworkers) are learning to get along with the Jotun. They are frequently working with landwights, which of course leads them to the Jotnar, which always seems to surprise them that they didn’t find Freyja at the end of the string they pulled on! Not to mention that they didn’t stop to think that the Norns are giantesses … As I traveled about I met a lot of different Jotnar. I met with Rock,
and Wind, and Forest, and so many others. The forest Jotun teach how to see in all directions at once, the weather giants teach a lot about thinking patterns, the rock giants are great for protection and healing ... That was when I began to understand that the Jotnar are very active in Seidhr. In Seidhr, whatever style you choose, you are dealing with dead things and ancient things. Well, let's face it, sooner or later you gotta deal with Jotun to do that. The Jotnar, the Alfar, all of these are so connected, but so many Asatru people are afraid.

—Lyn, spirit-worker

For most folk in the various Northern-Tradition religions, the main question will be, “Why should I bother to deal with the Jotnar at all? What can they teach me that the Aesir or Vanir can’t?” Leaving aside the fact that everyone has something to teach that no one else can, there’s certainly no reason why any particular person ought to work specifically with trolls and giants, especially if they make you uncomfortable and they are not speaking to you personally. For the same reasons, there’s no reason why I should work with the Aesir particularly closely. However, I have been known to talk to them on occasion, when I needed something—especially when I needed to learn something that I couldn’t get elsewhere. Similarly, some of my friends and acquaintances who follow the Aesir or Vanir have been known to consult Jotunfolk when they required teaching in a particular area.

One of those areas is shapeshifting. Although the Gods and the Alfar can shapeshift, to an extent—Odin is reasonably good at it, as is Freya—no one is quite so accomplished at it as a Jotun. It’s part of their nature. Shapeshifting—for us in our more material bodies, that means changing the shape of our body at will—can be a powerful learning experience. In a very real way, you can’t really understand what you are until you have gone by way of what you are not. That’s why such a large part of the shaman’s path is shapeshifting, and/or gender changing, and/or body modification, and/or playing with neurochemistry. It’s deliberately putting yourself into the deep knowing of what you are not, and by this you learn more about what you are, although that’s not the main point, it’s only a side effect and
a preliminary teaching (something that the core shamans often miss). Of course, becoming what you are not has this tendency to change what you are, starting the whole process over again.

I guess what I’m saying here is that one of the major things I’ve learned is that you learn a lot more by sitting still and opening the door and letting the things that want to talk to you come, and those that don’t, let them be. The other big thing is to approach each entity with an open mind, regardless of your pantheon/party alignments. Aesir, Jotnar, heck, anything and anybody are very different when you approach them and let them define themselves. Let a giant be who they see themselves as, and you’ll get a lot more than if you look at them as some chaotic-evil-rock-thing. Trees can teach us to see in all directions. Rocks can teach us patience. Soil can teach us growth. Water can teach us so much as well.

That is one way to figure out how to give them good offerings. Work with them for a bit. The amount of plain-out work they demand—like scrubbing, sewing, general house work and gardening—most people don’t have the patience to do these sorts of things, especially in a world other than ours. Most people, I think, would be outraged if their deity told them to clean something for them. They would take it as degrading rather than the lesson it really is. Nor would they understand the whole ‘pay as you go’ idea. You have to work for them to get them to work for you. I think it is so funny how so many people want to return to a tribal lifestyle but cannot figure out the barter system. Yeah, many entities like a touch of beer, wine, ale, mead, alcohol, etc…. but let’s face it. What do you want more? Someone to bring you a bottle of wine when you visit, or someone who brings you a bottle of wine, cooks your meal and cleans your kitchen before they leave? This may be that I grew up in a household where it was expected to clean up the relatives home we were visiting before we left. If you don’t like doing the dishes, there is always firewood to be cut.

What I am saying is that you need to look at this as though you are a guest in their home—which you are. We aren’t entitled visitation rights to the other worlds. In fact, tourists get killed where I usually go. But I will say that
there are a lot of people out there doing a lot of crappy things in these worlds. They get what is coming to them. So treat the thurses like they are respected relatives that you are visiting. Kiss Aunty-Ice-Beard when she bends down to you and her breath smells like rancid rotting rat, give Uncle Avalanche a quiet afternoon for his nap, help around the home with what needs to be done—they don’t have time for moochers and free-loaders—be respectful and bring them a gift you made for them.

—Lyn, spirit-worker

Jotun Blood And Bone

Why are they attempting to communicate with humans? I can’t speak for all of them, but of the ones where I’m absolutely sure that the individuals are really talking to Jotnar, I find certain things that we all have in common. We all have Jotun-like personality traits, more so than in the rest of the population, and those traits were present in our family history as well. In many cases, we struggled with them for much of our lives. According to the etins, we share blood with them, however thinly.

How nonhuman blood gets into a human bloodline is a long and complicated situation. To make it short, suffice it to say that when a deity or wight or other powerful creature borrows (as in god-possession or spirit-possession) the body of a human being, whether the human is conscious of it or not, and that human being conceives or sires a child during that time, the embryo’s genetics shift to mimic some of the nature of the possessing spirit. Some people may find this unbelievable, but I believe it, and find merit to the idea, and it has consistency in my experience of the situation. Until I come across evidence to disprove it, I will go with it. (Besides, the one time I met Odin, I asked him about it, and he was silent for a moment and then acknowledged that it was true, and so did Heimdall, the one time I met him.)

According to my own boss, bringing Jotun bloodlines into humanity has been a long, slow process that is finally starting to peak. Apparently some of the Rökkr deities, particularly Hela and Loki, felt that the Jotunfolk ought to be more invested in humans. This may be because of
Hela, who deals with human souls on an everyday basis, as well as Jotun souls (and a very few Alfar/faery ones). There is some evidence that Hela may also be recycling Jotun souls into human bodies, but I can’t comment on that for certain. However it goes, some time back they started a full-scale breeding program, to get more Jotun blood into humankind, and thus have Jotunkind recognize humankind as valuable “brotherkind”, so to speak.

So as far as I can tell, they are approaching those of who smell like family. It does seem as if they treat us honorably, at least according to their codes. They are not always as nice to those who don’t have those bloodlines. A few of them may also be approaching other humans for less savory reasons—likely feeding off their energy, because some of them can do that; it’s a common Jotun gift. (And a not uncommon gift among humans with Jotun bloodlines.) I’m not pretending that they are nice. Nice is the last thing that they are. They are dangerous, but then so is Thor if you piss him off.

The question of “why should anyone deal with the Jotnar if they approach you” then gets reframed as “what do you do when they, not the Aesir or Vanir, are the only ones who approach you”? And the answer is, you deal with them. If it’s their door you’re sent to, that’s for a reason. Ask the Nornir; they know, although whether they’ll give you a straight answer is debatable. Godhis, gythjas, and seidhworkers need to remember this when someone with Jotun blood shows up at their door. Give them the list of cautions and etiquette, and let them go their way.

It does seem that if you have enough Jotun blood, or certain types—it has not yet been established whether it’s quantity or quality—the Aesir will simply not deal with you. It’s like you have “reserved for something else” written all over you astrally. Before I had even heard of the Heathen community, I was talking to all sorts of Pagan gods. The ones who responded were useful or noncommittal or supportive, but clear that I was reserved. However, I could never get any of the Norse Gods on the phone, so to speak ... except for Hela, who owned me. Then, when she revealed
herself and her name (I played a Rumpelstiltskin-like game to figure her out—“Are you Kali? Are you Hecate?”—with no luck at all) I started getting visits from Loki, Jormundgand, etc. I never touched the Aesir until I was sent there directly on an errand. It was like I didn’t exist for them. Now they acknowledge me, but only as Hela’s servant.

So I can well understand the chagrin of someone where Frigga won’t return her calls, but here’s Mordgud appearing in her dreams. And would such folks have a place in a religion called Asatru, if this was chosen for them before they were even born? It’s a hard question.

I’ve noticed, also, that folks with Jotun blood tend to have certain personality traits. One, not surprisingly, is anger management difficulties. Those of us with Jotun blood so often have an internal Fenris-part, so to speak, that has nowhere to be and go in this world, this time, this space. It’s hard for us to deal with that part, and dealing with Him, the ultimate expression of that, was useful and healing. So is learning to be around folk who have that in themselves, but have had to bind themselves to social codes that clearly state when and where their rages, their passions, their hungers are acceptable.

Most people don’t understand what it’s like to go around boiling all the time, or to be very cold and yet strongly passionate, and have that be an integral part of your nature from birth rather than having it stem from some damage. They tend to give bad advice about how to handle it, ranging from “Just don’t be that way,” to “Heal yourself and it will go away,” or “I refuse to believe that this is really just the way you are,” or “If that’s really what you’re like inside, you are dangerous and ought to be locked up.” This is unhelpful at best and can be downright damaging at worst. Talking to the Jotnar can help you understand how to live with this kind of nature, even if you do not live in a society where there is any place for it.

One note of hope: If you are close to someone who is strongly connected to Jotunfolk, and perhaps has the personality characteristics that suggest Jotun blood, an excellent deity to call on for aid in understanding is
Frey, the fertility-god of the Vanir. Frey fell madly in love with Gerda, who is a cold, reserved etin-woman from a bloodthirsty family, and was willing to give up his sword to her family and thus be evermore defenseless in order to win her. Frey is a god of Light who loves and appreciates Darkness; he loves it and is drawn to it, in Gerda’s nature as well as that of others. According to some partners of Rökkatru folk, Frey can be extremely helpful in coming to not only an understanding, but a (perhaps even erotic) appreciation of their nature.

“You and I are more alike than you think,” Frey said to me. “I know about sacrifice. Ha! Yes, I know about sacrifice.” And I saw him as the pure golden god who is cut down at his height, approaching death not with a grim acceptance or dutiful obligation but a big smile and that ever-present erection, celebrating even this aspect of life. And more … “I also know what it is like to love one of that blood. There could be no Asa bride for me. No, I needed someone dark, someone wild. And I too know what it is to willingly be completely defenseless for that love.” I recalled the irony of this gorgeous god desperately courting a fierce giantess who scorned his beautiful home and people, accepting only when he gave his sole weapon as a bride-price, and my defenselessness against my own lover with his murky twisted Jotun bloodlines.

—Joshua, spirit-worker’s partner

As the marriage between Frey and Gerda was condemned by the Aesir and the Alfar, it has become traditional among many Northern-Tradition folk to call upon them at weddings that are not quite socially acceptable (as opposed to Frigga, the Aesir goddess of marriage, who is in charge of more acceptable unions). These might include weddings between two very different people (the sort where everyone says, “That’ll never work!”), people of different traditions, or the wedding of an Asatru/Vanatru with a Rökkatru. Because Frey has since ancient times been fond of nonheterosexual folk, and since the Jotnar have no taboo against nonheterosexual relations or polyamory, Frey and Gerda have also been honored for the weddings of people of various alternative lifestyles.

Any time that ordinary mortals deal with wights of any sort, the so-called “fairy-tale rules” apply. In other words, don’t be stupid, don’t be selfish, don’t think that this experience is all about you, and make an effort
to step out of your own issues and see the motives of the beings that you are dealing with ... not just for courtesy, but for your own safety.

Dealing with Jotunfolk can get you astrally killed and eaten, at worst. It can also get you a great deal of knowledge, wisdom, experience, and protection. If someone says that they’re dealing with the Jotnar, I’d tell them to be very careful. First, they should make sure that they understand the Jotun rules—of hospitality, of tribal loyalty, of privacy. Second, that they understand the realities of Jotun culture and will not bring human ethnocentrism and disgust to their dealings with them. Third, that they understand that unless the Jotuns say that they’re blood kin, they will never truly be on an even footing with them, and should treat them like the nice doggie who’s part wolf and one day might just up and bite your face off for no apparent reason—with respect, distance, and care.
Of all the races whose lore Tolkien stole for his various books, the Duergar—or dwarves, as we call them, although that term has been historically appropriated for short humans who would generally all rather see it fall by the wayside—are the least changed by his fiction. Lore about them is sparse but extremely consistent.

In modern fantasy gaming, the term “duergar” has come to mean a sub-race of evil dwarves, as opposed to jolly “Snow White”-type dwarves, but in actual lore there was no such division (unlike the Alfar). The term “Duerg” (plural “Duergar”), or Dverg, or Dvarg, or the German Zwerg, is the general term of reference for the dwarfish race.

Tales of the dwarves are strongest and most common in Germany. Many stories tell of the Duergar living in caves under the mountains, helping the working folk in the surrounding areas. According to stories from Bohemia to Bavaria, entering the tunnels of the Duergar could transport one to another world, which suggests that up until a couple of hundred years ago, there were functioning doors to Nidavellir in the German mountains. There are many tourist caverns in Germany that are referred to as the “Dwarves’ Cavern”, in memory of this past era.

The stories also speak again and again of the infamous exodus of the Duergar in the early 1800s, when many peasants tell of seeing them all march away into the mountains, never to return. Many farmers had good relations with them—tales are told of mortal families who were closely entwined with the Duergar, who helped with farm labor, traded for food, lent them cooking-ware for weddings, and occasionally had affairs with mortal lovers—and according to their accounts, the rise of the hammer-
mill mines (and industrial mining in general) discomfited the underground neighbors to the point where a mass exodus was planned and carried out. Several accounts exist of friendly Duergar apologizing to mortal allies regarding their imminent disappearance.

The interesting thing about these tales is that they postdate stories about the faery peoples closing their doors by a century or two; this suggests that what drove the Duergar out of our world was not so much the onslaught of Christianity that so peeved the Alfar, but the oncoming industrial revolution. While we might think that the metallurgic Duergar might approve of such things, one must remember that by all accounts, the idea of wastefully strip-mining huge holes in the earth and making it uninhabitable would be very much against Duergar ways. They have always treated the areas under the earth as other races of the Nine Worlds have treated the above-ground areas: as a valuable place to be stewarded and cared for.

**History of the Duergar**

Legends say that when the great sacred giant Ymir fell, maggots chewed his body, and the taste of his magical flesh gave them humanoid forms and intelligence, creating a new race. The Duergar themselves do not agree with this creation myth; they believe that the first Duergar were stones that came to life with the touch of the new Sun, born in the Earth and burrowing their way upwards. Either way, they are clearly native to the Nine Worlds, unlike the Alfar of both types who may well be immigrants from elsewhere.

During the era before Ymir’s death, the Duergar were ignored by both Jotun and As alike. When Ymir (whom the Duergar called Blain) was killed and the flood came, they survived by floating on the lower part of his body. When it washed up, his lower spine became the mountainous country that they claimed as their home. Burrowing into the rocky hills in search of water, they slowly became an underground people who rarely surfaced except to deal with other races. They were ignored still further, for a very
long time, until their reputation as craftsmen began to spread and suddenly all the other races were at their doors, hands outstretched. At that point, they began to engage in the thriving trade that has since become their major source of wealth, if wealth can be described as what they get from the outside rather than the precious metals and gems that they own.

The first fathers of the Duergar are held in great esteem by their people, although none of them are still alive. Modsognir (“Frenzy-Roarer”), the eldest, sacrificed his life for his people some time ago; his story is one of the greatest of Duergar songs. Durin (“Sleeper”) lived the longest, and the only one whose death is bad luck to speak of. The others have songs that are sung on special holidays to commemorate them. Two of them, Lovar and Svarin, have a grave-mound in Svartalfheim that is a special pilgrimage-place for their people.

The names of many of the Duergar have come down to us, although there is little lore about their individual personalities. Some of their names are: Ai, Althjof, Aridva, Bafur, Bari, Bifur, Bombur, Dolgthvari, Dori, Fal, Fili, Finni, Frosti, Fundin, Gandalf, Ginar, Gloin, Har, Haur, Heptifili, Hor, Hugstari, Ingi, Kili, Modvitnir, Nain, Nar, Nidi, Nori, Nyi, Nyr, Oin, Onar, Ori, Radsvinn, Rek, Siar, Skafinn, Skirpir, Thekk, Thjodrerir, Thorin, Throin, Thror, Vali, Vig, Vindalf, Virpir, and Vitr. If some of these names sound familiar, it’s likely because J.R.R. Tolkien borrowed them wholesale for his “Lord Of The Rings” books. For the record, the Duergar are aware of this, and find it hilarious.
Duergar Natures

The Duergar are a race of short, sturdy, long-bearded people. There are few Duergar-women, and those few generally have several husbands and command a lot of power, although they seldom leave their homes and deal with other races. Sometimes the woman shortage tempts some Duergar men to abduct females of various species, although Jotun women tend to be more trouble than they are worth. Ivaldi himself, the Emperor of the Duergar, captured a Valkyrie and forced her to marry him and bear him children until she escaped.

Physically, they are short and powerfully built. Both male and female Duergar are said to grow facial hair; having a beard is a sign of adulthood among the Duergar, and shaving off one’s beard is only done forcibly as a penalty or penance, a sign of humiliation. They do often dress and plait their beards and hair elaborately with jewels. Duergar clothing itself tends to the utilitarian, but for festivals (or to prove their wealth) they will wear elaborately embroidered (although simple in style) clothing, with lots and lots of fine jewelry.

Duergar are widely acknowledged to be the greatest craftsmen of the Nine Worlds. They crafted Odin’s spear and ring, Freya’s necklace, Thor’s hammer, Sif’s golden wig, Frey’s ship, Fenris’s chains, the Mead of Poetry, and many other treasures for Aesir, Vanir, Jotnar, and Alfar alike. It is generally accepted that if it is Duergar-make, it is excellent quality. Their work is traded all over the Nine Worlds, although it is usually the special custom orders that end up in the myths. Duergar can be workaholics, miserly, greedy, possessive, and materialistic; they can also be amazingly creative. They drive a hard bargain for their work, and take pride in getting the best of it; although they will work for anyone who will pay them, they have a long-standing mistrust of the Aesir, as the members of that race have robbed them so many times. They are skilled with their own system of runes, and have their own magics, which they will not reveal to anyone.
The Duergar are very focused and mission driven. I suspect, though, that the image they portray to me is drawn from my own ideas and ideals of what a “dwarf” is supposed to look like. They are far more positive and boisterous than they have often been portrayed. The great lesson that they have taught me is to never look at an item just one way. When I would watch one crafting, he would take an item, like a piece of marble, and he would turn it, turn it, and look at it. Often it seemed to me that this was the longest and hardest task in the creative procedure. Then, with a flick of the wrist, he would draw something out from it. The object was not the art, but what was drawn out of it. The “voice of marble” is something far more valuable to be added to a piece of paper than any writing or illumination. Their “magic” was similar in many ways to what the Alfar did, but was far more direct. They would chant just a syllable or two and “push” it into the object. They really used their hands a lot; a mere brusque syllable and they would smooth out a jagged edge on a rock or warp the metal like putty.

—Rod Landreth, seidhmadhr

As a rule, they will lay curses on the things that they make, so that if they are stolen they will immediately begin to make their new owner’s life miserable. Don’t even think of paying a less than fair price for something of Duergar-make; they have a keen sense of what the market will bear for their labor, and the curses just aren’t worth it. They will also lay curses on something that they make under duress, as the history of the sword Tirfing in Hervarar’s Saga shows. Tirfing is made because the mortal warrior Svafirlami catches the two Duergar chieftains Durin and Dvalin alone in a Russian forest, and threatens them with death unless they will make him a fine sword that will cut through anything. They give their word in order to redeem their lives, and return with Tirfing, one of the finest swords ever made. However, they inform Svafirlami just before disappearing that it is cursed; it brings war and strife like a magnet to its owner, and once it is drawn, it must be appeased with human blood or it will turn on its owner and kill them. It isn’t long before Svafirlami is done in by Tirfing’s treachery. It is then passed down through generation after generation, leaving a ridiculous body count and destroying nearly everyone who touches it, unless they are extremely pure of heart and very careful. At least once it
is buried with its owner, but his shield-maiden daughter digs it up again. Finally it is buried once again by her grandson, after still further carnage.

On the other hand, doing favors for a Duerg and having them indebted to you can be a very profitable thing, as is shown in the tale of *Thorston’s Saga*. The sailor Thorston saves a dwarf-child, whose father is so grateful that he immediately gives the man the literal shirt off his back and all the magical items in his pockets. The woolen shirt is enchanted to be protective and ward against fatigue while swimming, and the dwarf also gives him a ring that will bring wealth, a black stone to make him pass unnoticed, and a three-colored magical flint with a striker. The dwarf instructs him that striking the white side of the flint will bring rain and hail, while the yellow side will bring sunshine, and the red side will create a bonfire. While Thorston is surprised at the gift-giving—he protests that he does not expect to be paid for saving a child’s life—the story is an example of the Duergar system of value. It is not that the child’s life could be bargained for in material goods, it is that the life of one’s child, returned to you, is well worth all of one’s magical possessions.

Anyone who is a craftsperson has a chance of making friends with the Duergar, although you can expect a lot of unflattering comments on the quality of your work. If you can take that well, instead of bridling and taking offense, they may actually offer to teach you to do better, or at least not turn you down when you ask. If you get the chance to study any sort of craft with a Duerg, take it. They won’t be gentle teachers, but there is no better authority on the subject, and it’s worth putting up with their cantankerous natures. Duergar are extremely loyal to friends who treat them with respect, and the humans of Midgard have often been enriched by their aid.

Folk of many different races have cheated or stolen from them, and this has given rise to a certain amount of mistrust on their part towards just about anyone who is not one of their race. Of all the races in the Nine Worlds, they are the most reticent and have the least to do with anyone else. They rarely teach any but the simplest of their magics to outsiders, and as a rule, there is no penetrating their secret societies, no matter how
much they like you. They have crossbred with humans in the past only rarely, and even more rarely in the recent centuries, so there are far fewer humans with Duergar bloodlines as opposed to those of Alfar and Jotun, or the various Gods. Even today when humanfolk are making overtures once again to the ancient races, they have hung back. They will be friendly to those who treat them well, but do not mistake this friendliness for any chance of learning their secrets, or you will come smack up against a gruff wall of retreat. It is better to respect their privacy when dealing with them, and let them set the boundaries.

If there are few mortals with Duergar blood, there is still a good deal of it splashed around in other places in the Nine Worlds. Some giants are known to have married Duergar men and women and had half-breed children. In some cases, one child will be mostly giantlike while another might be mostly dwarflike; their combined bloodlines do not work as humans might. One example of this would be Mimir, whose sons by a long-dead Duergar wife were Dvalin, Alfrik, Berling, and Grer, the forgers of Brisingamen. Another would be the giant-farmer Hreidmar, who seems to have been half-Jotun and half-Duergar, and whose sons were variously Jotun-seeming (Ottar and Fafnir, both shapechangers listed as giants) and Duergar-seeming (the wise Regin). Other cases come down to us as forced attempts (such as Ivaldi’s Valkyrie-wife) and near-misses (such as the brilliant Duerg Alvis who asked Thor for the hand of his daughter Thrud; Thor challenged him to a game of riddles, and when Alvis won, turned him into a stone).

The Duergar do more than just mine metals and gems out of their underground tunnels; they cultivate them with magics as a gardener would cultivate a garden or orchard. Gems and crystals are farmed there, and caverns carved out with such attention to detail that it might take many generations before the original designer is satisfied. It is the opposite ideology from our wasteful ideas about the understructure of the earth. Ironically, they have little value for the surface areas of the earth, and have been guilty in the past of unsustainable and destructive use of upper-Earth, including cutting down too many trees or damming up rivers.
When they are at their best, the Duergar have immense patience, especially when locked into a creative frenzy. It is a state that we humans tend to associate with an inner Muse, but the Duergar have a name for it in their own language, a name that expresses a complex range of spiritual ideas. It is the idea that one is so seized by the object that is being created, from its first birth in one’s mind to the final moment of manifestation, that one can think of nothing else. One eats and drinks and breathes nothing except the creation of the object one is bringing into being; the language used by them to describe this state casts the manifesting object both as lover to be pursued and child to be birthed. They consider this state to be a holy and blessed one, and craftsmen caught up in it are treated as sacred and lucky. There is an entire art among their people of being the support system for someone caught up in a creative frenzy; they are respectfully chivvied into eating and drinking and sleeping, and excused from all other duties. To fake such a state is nearly impossible, for the Duergar believe that certain energies are released from someone in this condition, and the lack of these energies would be noticed. Besides, the final work would speak for itself as to whether it came from divine creativity or simply self-delusion.

When a Duerg goes bad, as happens with some of them—in fact, it is an unfortunate fact that some of the best-known Duergar in history are their criminal exiles run amok—it usually centers around overwhelming greed and covetousness. One example of this is the occasional wifeless Duerg who steals and holds a woman of another race captive, forcing her to bear him children. Another infamous example is the brothers Fjalar and Galar, exiled from Nidavellir for various crimes. They traveled to Vanaheim and killed the magical and wise homunculus Kvasir, hoping to be able to make a magical potion out of his blood that would give them power. The boiled-down blood gave men poetic ability and visions, but the brothers did not value this, so they went to Jotunheim in search of a market to sell it. The tale is told of how they murdered Gilling the giant more or less out of spite, and killed his wife for being the only witness. Their son Suttung
tracked the evil brothers down and tied them to a cliff at low tide to drown them, and they offered him the Mead of Poetry as weregild.

Problems of this sort have created the reputation of greediness—and specifically greed to the point of lethality—that has dogged the Duergar. It’s not as if they don’t have the love of material objects and property as a racial trait; they do—and that is why they are most aware of it. All their rules and laws, including their spiritual rules, are set up to acknowledge this and help them to handle it in honorable ways. They will also point out, if someone brings it up to them, how often they have historically been cheated or stolen from by other races and many of the Gods themselves. Look to your own assumptions about money and property and value and greed, they say to those who level the finger. At least we have no delusions about where we stand with it.

Dealing with the Duergar

In general, if we take the folkloric rules into account, the nature of the Duergar was to be helpful in return for needful things, to drive a hard bargain, to be reticent and secretive, and to value their dignity. In the stories, when mortal peasants make enemies of them, it is either because they pried into secrets, deliberately set them up to be made fools of for the general amusement of onlookers, refused to pay for a gift, or denigrated the helpful efforts of their short neighbors. One example of the latter comes from German folktales of farmers who woke up to find their grain all cut down weeks before ripeness. They screamed and cursed the dwarves who had claimed to be their allies, and grumblingly bundled up the grain and fed it to their cattle, who were at least extra fattened for the winter. Mere days later, a hailstorm came that would have flattened and ruined every stalk of grain had it been standing.

Other examples include many tales of villagers refusing to return items they have borrowed, or pay for favors arranged. The Duergar hold the web of obligation in high value; a gift should be repaid with a gift, and so on. If no return gift comes from the initial offering, they will simply move on and
never help again. If, however, the trade of obligations begins, it is expected to continue as best as possible. Attempting to bail out of a long-term relationship of mutual aid with the Duergar is considered a betrayal, and they feel within their rights to strike out at the betrayers. They have sympathy for lack of resources, but feel that some effort ought to be made. Duergar have a strong work ethic and think little of people who don't; laziness is never an excuse with them.

These can be seen as the basic ground rules for dealing with the dwarven people:

1) Joke with them, but don't humiliate them, nor do anything to deprive them of their dignity. Occasionally you will find Duergar who are ill-made or slightly deformed (although nothing like some of the amazing and bizarre bodies of some tribes of Jotunfolk); they will generally hide this fact under bulky clothing, and you should simply pretend that you don't notice. They tend to have the most trouble with deformities of the legs and feet; some folktales tell of villagers who tried to peer under the long robes of helpful Duergar allies, or made them walk through ashes in order to look at their footsteps, and thus gained their anger. They are a private people, unlike the Jotunfolk, and feel that these things are none of your business. Let them have their dignity, at all costs, even when they are getting drunk and doing stupid things. The next morning, just pretend none of it ever happened and they will be grateful.

2) Don't go prying into Duergar secrets. They are clannish and a bit paranoid—having been robbed so many times by outsiders—so if you are left alone with something that you are told is a “secret not for your eyes”—say a door or chest, don't give into curiosity. The likelihood is that there's nothing in it but a trap, set to test you. You will gain more from your courtesy and forbearance than from nosing about. If they tell you that something is not for you (or your kind), take them at face value and drop the subject.

3) If you don't wish to enter into a web of obligations with a Duergar, thank them and politely leave, cutting off all contact. They will shrug and get on with their lives, but you will get no more attention or aid from
them, ever, and they have long memories. If you decide that it’s worth the effort—and their aid can be very useful in time of need—then you must hold to it until you’re dead. You can always renegotiate specific parts of the agreement—they are a practical people and understand renegotiation—but once in, you’re stuck.

4) Whatever they give you, accept it gracefully. Likely, as with the farmers and the cut grain, it will come in handy eventually. Spirit-worker Estara T’Shirai mentions that: “My husband used to visit the Duergar; as I recall he found them surprisingly ‘eat, drink, and be merry’ in disposition when at home. They expect an exchange of gifts with visitors, and unlike with the Alfar, you had best take what they offer or you will insult them. Exchange of permanent goods implies a permanent link; exchange of things like ale better for laying groundwork.” On the other hand, they will take what you give them with equal grace, even if you don’t have much. In many ways, it’s the thought that counts. However, if they ask something specific of you that you clearly have to give, and that won’t wreck your life (although it might inconvenience you), you’d best do it without excuses.

5) Bargain if you like; they enjoy a good barganing. But don’t insult them with offers that devalue their work. They know what their work is worth. You may not. Keep that in mind, when you deal with them in the marketplace.
You wanted me to write about money, and about what Andvari the Duerg has taught me. I’ll try. I wish I were a writer and could do justice to Andvari. He is not “only” the patron of money; he is the patron of possessions of all kinds. That is why, when I was a young child, He taught me that I owned my own dignity and my self-worth. They are mine by right and cannot be taken away from me without my consent. Therefore my father’s behavior (when he ranted at me in public, shouting at my five year old self that I was a rag, a piece of shit, an insane child) was his possession, not mine. As long as I understood this, as long as I did not hold those insults for him no matter how often he presented them to me; he had to hold them. My father had to keep his ridicule, and I kept what was mine—my dignity. And so I was invulnerable. Andvari taught me this (how the heck did he manage to teach it to a five-year-old?) and thus, Andvari saved me.

Money is as sacred as dignity and self-worth. Yes, it has been desecrated; but you can only profane that which was holy to begin with. Some of the money I have belongs to me by right; some belongs to me by accident. Money that is mine by accident is dormant (no matter how high an interest it yields). It is neutral. When I find the person who owns that money by right, and hand it over, that money regains its sacredness. It lives again. If I do not hand it over, that same money will die and rot. Oh, it will be sitting in my bank account, it will show up in my bank statements, but it will poison something within me.

Money is like soil—it must transform, or it will die. It must transform into people’s dreams, or needs, or both. The frightening thing about Fafnir, whom so many people unwittingly follow, is that he does not allow the treasure to evolve, to transform itself into college for one friend, or a watertight roof for another, or a garden for the sake of the earth we stand upon. Fafnir’s money sits there and rots, as does he who guards it. But every time one gives something back to its rightful owner, a little bit of the world’s imbalance is corrected.

It is also important to never give away what is yours by right, be it money, strength, energy, whatever, or you cause the balance to go off kilter again. It is simply wrong to steal—even from oneself. You keep what you own; you are the steward of what you do not own, until the rightful owner comes along. Andvari did not mind Loki taking his treasure—all but the ring—because it was not his by right. The ring, however, was his. What people don’t understand is that Andvari did not curse the ring; he did not need to. He merely pointed out that it was cursed, because when you take away someone’s rightful possessions, that object becomes accursed. It is the law of cause and effect, not of revenge. All possessions, be they spiritual or material, are subject to the law Andvari taught me.

I love money—hey, I’m Andvari’s great-granddaughter, a piece of good fortune that leaves me awed and grateful and deeply happy. I love what is mine, and will defend it tooth and nail. I equally love it when I am given the
immense gift by the Gods of righting a little bit of what is wrong, of correcting a little bit of the distortion. Maybe because I love money, money has always loved me back. I know that if I ever cling to it (and it is true, even if it is a cliché, that one should not cling to what one loves), it will leave me and find a better owner and a better steward. Money is a live, sentient power with a will of its own, somewhat like a landwight.

The real difficulty (at least for a Taurus with no social graces, with Mercury in Taurus to boot!) is learning a way to give rightful owners their rightful property in such a way that they understand you know it was theirs all along. That way, you are not insulting them by playing at being some Lady Bountiful. I hate patronage. Yet it’s difficult, because people have been conditioned to regard money as impure.

Let’s say you know a person who needs money. Let’s say all you have is $25 to give. If you give that person $25, he/she will most likely resent it on some level; but if you bring them a fruit basket of equal cost that he or she needs like a violinist needs boxing gloves, that’s considered all right, as though money were so defiled that it has to be transmogrified before being offered. The truth is, money is pure. We are the ones needing an attitude adjustment in regards to both giving and taking.

My respect for one friend, which was already high, soared the evening she said to me, “We are indebted to you, Fuensanta.” I was appalled at the idea and stammered, “You are not indebted to me—I was thanking you, with my gift.” She thought about this for a second, smiled a wonderful smile, and said “In that case, you are welcome.” And all was well. I guess it only took her one second to understand all that it is taking me an hour to write.

I believe that Andvari possessed my maternal grandfather, putting a little Duergar blood into my family line, because he was a little bit like Andvari Himself; and maybe Pedro Maria Arismendi became more like Andvari after he was possessed because Andvari would not take what was not his without giving back something in return. Pedro Maria was the elementary schoolteacher of a small Venezuelan fishing village, at a time when schoolteachers were considered “important” in villages. And at a time when nobody who was anybody carried their own parcels—there was always a servant to do so—Pedro Maria would go to the market and walk back nonchalantly holding the live chicken purchased for their supper. His shocked wife would remonstrate: “Pedro Maria, this is below your dignity!” The diminutive man would look up at his (huge) wife and calmly answer: “With chicken or without it, I am Pedro Maria Arismendi.” He knew what was his by right—his dignity—and what was his by accident—his status. I try to keep the wisdom of these two great-grandfathers, Andvari and Pedro Maria, in my head and in my heart.

Andvari once told me, “I forge consciences, not gold. I forged your ancestors. I forge you.” And so my prayer to Andvari is, “In the name of Andvari, forger of consciences, may I never mistake what is mine by accident for what is mine by right.”
Chapter II

Dancing Light
And Singing Dark:
The Alfar

“I am not of the small folk,” said Aráfél in measured words and cold. “I am not paid in a saucer of milk or a handful of grain.”
—From “The Dreaming Tree” by C. J. Cherryh

The Alfar—the Old Norse word that later became “elves” in English—are one subgroup of a race of beings whose mythology is spread across all of Europe. They are the most archetypally well-known race, mostly due to modern fantasy novels, and yet strongly misunderstood and euphemized. Their lore is vague and garbled, perhaps even more so than that of the Jotunfolk, although many modern spirit-workers are teasing it out. Due to the nature of elf-folk themselves, it is often difficult to get straight answers out of them.

The word álf (pl. álfr) derives from the same Indo-European root word as the Latin albus (white). The original meaning of the word is significant to the character of the Alfar of Norse mythology, who retained a reputation for being entities of “light”. The implications of this for our ancestors were somewhat different than what might today imagine as “beings of light”; there was no assumption about their morals, goodness, or guaranteed helpfulness, only that they were entities with a great deal of magic and energy—“brightness”—to them. One spirit-worker acknowledges that “Out of their normal setting, ‘Light Elves’ live up to the name—they tend to seem very shiny. Once you’re in Alfheim and adjusted to it, it’s not so noticeable: it’s more like watching television with the color ramped up a bit past normal intensity.”
There is a great deal of confusion about what sorts of beings are referred to as Alfar, and from what we can glean of the ancient sources, there seems to have been a great deal of confusion in ancient times as well. This may seem surprising to people who mistakenly imagine all our ancestors to have been highly “spiritual” shaman-types. But if one remembers that elves of any type are elusive and mysterious about their natures, that spirit-workers have always been rare, and that the average person might easily have conflated elves, ghosts, land-spirits, and anything else that seemed powerful but that she didn’t understand, the matter becomes understandable, if not clearer.

However, today there are more spirit-workers who deal with the elven race(s) than with any other nonhuman race. This upswing comes partly from the popularizing of the Fey Folk in general (although Celtic-oriented Pagans do a lot more work with them), and partly from the proliferation of people with elven blood, a phenomenon that will be discussed below. This gives us a great deal of spirit-work personal gnosis which can be compared, and much of it is very consistent not only with individual accounts but with historical and mythological ones. In that vein, the majority of the words in this chapter come directly from spirit-workers who have offered their experiences and perspectives.

**Light, Dark, and Black**

The first obvious categories when considering the Alfar are the divisions of light and dark elves (Ljossalfar and Svartalfar). Here, again, there is confusion; the term “Svartalfar”, meaning “black elves”, mostly referred to the Duergar, who although they seem to have had an entirely different genesis from the Alfar and were entirely different physically and in temperament, were thought to be related to the Alfar, or at least their “opposite numbers”. On the other hand, occasionally the word Svartalfar refers to some kind of dark version of the Alfar, in the same way that the Celtic Sidhe were divided into the Seelie and Unseelie Courts. These have also been referred to as the Dökkálfar, or “dark elves”; there are vague
references to Odin learning from them in his travels, and referring to them as “the old men”. Modern spirit-workers affirm this division, and affirm also that some of the confusion stems from the fact that the Svartalfar share a world with the Duergar—called, annoyingly, Svartalfheim.

Long ago a faction of elves quarreled with the rest over some political issues which remain obscure to outsiders. There was a civil war, and the dissenting faction was defeated and forced out of Alfheim, finally ending up in the land of the Duergar, who allowed them to stay in their world. Thus they became the Svartalfar, and to this day they are still far less numerous than the Ljossalfar. (This is why Hela only exacts half the tribute for the Teind from them than she does from the others.)

—Elizabeth Vongvisith, spirit-worker

Even if one takes this as compelling information—and from the number of spirit-workers who have verified it, I do—the question remains as to what terminology to use in order to be least confusing. I am choosing, somewhat arbitrarily, for the purposes of this writing, to refer to the Duergar only as the Duergar, since that is how they prefer to be called. I am personally using the term “Dökkálfar” to refer to the renegade Alfar of SvartaLfheim; most of the spirit-workers use the term “Svartalfar”, so both of those terms can be considered to refer to these entities for the length of this book.

The Dökkálfar are clearly of the same racial type as the Ljossalfar, from whom they broke away; they differ only culturally. (More extensive discussions of their nature can be found in the Svartalfheim chapter.) However, regardless of their personal enmity toward their “light” cousins, the ancient sources record that they have chosen to be on the side of the Aesir should Ragnarok come to pass. Other than that, they are known to be more unkindly disposed towards humans, and more likely to mess with them. Traditionally, bad dreams are said to be within the domain of the Dökkálfar, as indicated by the German word for nightmare, “Albtraum” (elf-dream). It is said that the dark elves will sit upon the dreamer’s chest
and whisper the bad dreams into the sleeper’s ears. (In Scandinavia, the creature responsible for this is known as the Mara.)

While the Dökkálfar seem to be culturally more willing to be violent and destructive, the Ljossalfar are no shirkers when it comes to attacking humans. Indeed, there is no way that we can simply assign all the positive elf/human interactions to the Ljossalfar and all the negative ones to the Dökkálfar. The Celts understood this, and their lore clearly warns that both the Seelie and Unseelie could be equally dangerous—or helpful—to humans, apparently with little rhyme or reason to their decisions.

The Ljossalfar see themselves as being just and fair, but they can also be cruel and extremely unforgiving; they can carry grudges for centuries. The Svartalfar are openly malicious and don’t care who knows it, but will keep their word faithfully and can be generous and fair-minded in their dealings with others. They are all passionately interested in anything to do with magic, though the light-elves will pretend that certain brands of sorcery repel them. They can become insatiably curious and even singleminded about magic when the mood strikes them. As with many things, the light-elves and the dark-elves consider themselves rivals and enemies, and the old breach has never been healed, but they are more alike under the surface than they themselves are willing to admit.

—Elizabeth Vongvisith, spirit-worker

Another sort of reference to the word “Alfar”, and the one which is the most confusing, is the use of the word to refer to male human ancestors, as distinct from the Disir who are female human ancestors. This use of the word is troublesome, as it is in widespread use today as part of votive ritual. However, nearly all of the Alfar-knowledgeable spirit-workers that I contacted during the writing of this book agreed that the actual Alfar are not the souls of dead humans. Estara T’Shirai emphasizes that “Those are in Helheim and, where appropriate, the particular halls of the Gods who chose them. In fact, within my own group we seem to find that people who work easily with the Alfar have great difficulty working with the ancestors
and vice versa, because the energies are so different that it’s unusual to have them both within one person’s normal range of capability.”

Yet another sort of word use is to refer to the general land-wights as Alfar or elves. This, too, seems to be a misnomer; the Alfar are clearly a non-human, non-Earthly race from somewhere else. While they can step in and out of our world (although many who work with them claim that the doors in and out of elven realms were once much more strong, and have mostly closed over the years), they are not the same beings as the small nature-spirits of our realm. They do, however, form bonds with “our” nature-spirits when they come here, and often use them as their eyes and ears.

To study the myths and folklore about elves, all over Europe, is to watch what was once (in preliterate days) a clear set of stories about a wise and powerful people, independent from humans and our world, become mangled and twisted up with tales of other beings. This change has clearly begun by the time of most Viking-era lore, and continues through the centuries in an ever-more-blurry downward spiral. With time, the figure of the elf merged in the minds of the Scandinavians, the Germans, the English, the Welsh and others with the guardian spirits of Nature, the wights of the forest and fields. The Anglo-Saxon terms *wudu-aelfen* and *sae-aelfen* are an intermediate state of such a merging. Eventually they became malignant sprites and demons that cause illness to men and cattle, or even in one case a historical tribe, the so-called “Alfar” of “Alfheimar”, an area of Scandinavia between the two rivers Raumelfr and Gautelfr.
The Alfar Character

Physically, elves range from much smaller than human size to taller, though not as tall or large as Jotunfolk. In Rolf Krake’s saga, the Danish king Helge finds an elf-woman on an island and rapes her, suggesting that she was human-looking. Humans perceive some of them as very beautiful and others as strange-looking, but there is clearly an inhuman nature to their beauty.

Visually, they usually appear as tall, blond of varying shades, with pale complexions and usually blue/grey eyes. That doesn't mean other colorings don't pop up, just that they aren't that common and are usually associated with having ancestors from other racial/cultural groups. Most of them seem to be quite reserved in expression. Their clothing styles are elegant and understated. In fact, a lot of their adornments are elegant and understated. They have their own language, quite apart from the other indigenous races in the lore, though are adept at several others, including a few human ones, and have a talent of picking them up.

The Ljossalfar are very egalitarian. You won't find anything, except for maybe childbirth (and I think they have ways around that, even) that both genders aren't capable of doing, and don't do. They're very no-nonsense as well and this can give the impression of them being distant, aloof and humourless. This doesn't mean that they are so, nor does it mean that they don't have a sense of humour, it just tends to be dry and sardonic, if not outright facetious. They do appreciate clever plays on words, but I don't think that's distinct to just the Ljossalfar.

—Silvaerina

The Alfar are organized into “Houses”—the term doesn't refer so much to what kind of dwellings they inhabit as to extended kinship groups—almost tribal, but the light-elves would smack you if you used such a term to describe their society. They take a great pride in tracing their lines of descent and keeping track of all their inter-House alliances and so forth. The Houses to which the Svartalfar belonged have been excised from the records in Alfheim; it seems that most, if not all the members of a few powerful Houses were banished from Alfheim when the Svartalfar fell, and they are never spoken of by the light-elves.
Regardless of which side they’re on, the Alfar love anything to do with art or beauty, though their respective aesthetics are somewhat different. Svartalfar appreciate the morbid, weird and grotesque far more than the light-elves do. I imagine they’d much prefer the painting of Salvador Dali to the pre-Raphaelites, for instance. The Alfar are also good at drawing energy from their surroundings, and if those surroundings are pleasing to them in some way, then it doesn’t necessarily have to be untamed, raw nature. The light-elves will not take energy from other living beings, mostly because they’re too xenophobic to risk “polluting” themselves, but some of the dark-elves will happily feed on other beings if given the chance.

—Elizabeth Vongvisith, spirit-worker

What the Alfar themselves are like depends on the “caste,” what realm you are in, and especially in the commoners’ case, what job they do. The nobility very much resemble Tolkein’s description, but even more on the side of esoteric, ethereal and mystical. They are not always slight; in the Duchy of Winter they are solid hardy folk, not so much dwarves, but people who thrive in the cold winter climes. Imagine a creature that can walk through a blizzard smiling but still be “Elven” and you get a good idea. The commoners range from ghastly (spirits of decay) to cantankerous (kobolds, tomte, and nisse) to homely (gnomes and brownies). The commoners are the ones that carry out the “jobs” of things. There are winged fey folk (they are quick to tell you they are not pixies) that paint the leaves the autumn colours. In the Duchy of Spring there are industrious creatures that do everything they can to help the flowers grow, and then coax the petals to open.

—Rod Landreth, seidhmadhr

It’s all really a bit more like Tolkien than heathens tend to want to admit—except that there’s a catch, because in The Lord Of The Rings, it so happened that the elves philosophically agreed with the humans’ objectives, so they were kind and helpful. But this situation is not a given, and if in fact the Alfar are aware of you and do not approve of you or your objectives, the outcome is quite different.

—Estara T'Shirai
Elves and Magic

More than any other race, the Alfar (and other elven races in other pantheons) work with magic on a daily basis. Other races have and use magic, perhaps even a great deal of it, but magic is interwoven into the fabric of every moment of an Alfar life. They do small magicks—one can’t even call them spells, as they are much more instinctive than that—in the same way that we modern technological humans unthinkingly use technology—to flick on a light switch, to check the weather and our email, to nuke a bowl of food in the microwave. Where a non-Alfar would save their magical energy and light a torch, an Alfar in their own world will do the magical equivalent of flicking on the light switch, with as little thought as when we do it. Of course, just as we have an extensive system of electrical wires that allows us to do that, their world is a huge network of magical energy lines, accessible at will to those who know how to use them, and continually added to and improved by succeeding generations.

In a very real way, Ljossalfheim is the most “technological” of the Nine Worlds, but it is not a technology that travels well to any other place except in small amounts. While some may object to this idea, having seen or been the recipients of very effective elven magic in the past, it seems that the kind of magic that the Elven races can work outside of their homeworlds is actually quite small compared to the wonders that can be manipulated in Alfheim and its sister realms.

The key to understanding both the light- and dark-elves is that both races are folk who live and breathe magic. They are magic in a way that other folk—even the Aesir and Vanir—are not. They are slow to adapt to change, and very suspicious of anything that’s not part of their established traditions, although once they’ve found that some new innovation works for them, they will lose no time in adopting it (and trying to give it the luster of centuries). It’s said that the reason some of the dark-elves turned to “forbidden” magic is that they were introduced to it by contact with the Jotnar. To this
day, the light-elves consider the Jotunfolk savages, and have a great deal of disdain for them and for those who associate with them.

—Elizabeth Vongvisith, spirit-worker

It is my understanding that all the races of “Elf” have innate magic/energy working abilities, though some are more formalized than others. Magic/energy working for them is like breathing or simple thought is for us. They don’t really think about it, they just “do”. This doesn’t mean that they don’t also train or aren’t schooled, though. Many Ljossalfar, if they are so inclined, use runes to focus the intent of the working because it can take a lot less energy than to simply will a major force or effect into being, though it isn’t necessary. It also feels no-nonsense. There’s not much in the way of “playful” in their workings, whether spur of the moment or not.

—Silvaerina

It’s not magic to them, it’s part of their existence. Turning on a TV with a remote seems perfectly normal to us, disguising leaves to look like cash to pay you for something seems perfectly normal to them. You took the “cash”; they didn’t make you. The “magic” is often pulled from the Realm in which they work and live. When a commoner paints the leaves in autumn, it’s out of purpose.

As an example that I watched, an overseer of a group of commoners that was preparing corn for harvest had a mirror-like object that allowed him to look at the field they were working in at one time. Through colour and musical tone, he knew if a particular cornstalk had received what it needed or not. Rarely was there a problem, and when there was, he would just “step” to where the problem was; most often it was something wrong with the cornstalk. (I can’t explain “stepping” beyond “you just stepped where the problem was and you were there”. No words, incantations or anything; just desire and will. It took me a bit to “get it.”) When I followed him once, the stalk—actually several—had some sort of bug. He consulted his object and called an air spirit (I immediately thought of a sylph) and asked the spirit to relay a question concerning the quotient of blight for this field. It vibrated away (that’s the best I can describe) and then sort of coalesced back with a report that 400-odd stalks were blighted. The overseer looked at his object, touched something, and a musical note responded. He turned to the commoner and told him to work on that stalk, but to leave the others alone.
The most fascinating expression of “magic” I saw was when an Alfar smith was making some wondrous filigreed instrument. He drew in the air before the object a complex design of sigils and as he did so sang, chanted and said...notes, chords and tones? Colours were also involved. The sigils were clearly of a “base 3” and resembled some sort of runes and were coloured. This was used to “shape” the object by manipulation of sigil, note and colour. I felt a tremendous amount of energy applied in multiple ways and on different levels. Clearly the skill and talent of the smith was not in personal power, but in ability to manipulate this energy primarily through the sigils, although the notes and chants and colour played a part also.

I watched warriors fight, watching a play of weapon and flow. The Duke of Autumn explained to me that the individual warriors were interacting with the “spirit of battle” and using skill in weapon and parry to manipulate, pull and push this “spirit” into going against the opponent. To my sight, they were actually pulling and tugging at something that was around them. Again, colour and chants were involved, but it flowed into around and through the skill with the weapon. The warriors also touched different parts of their armour and spots on their weapons. Flashy and overdone moves, tugs or pulls on this “spirit of battle” would gain applause and cheers unless the opponent countered. Imagine the complex martial arts of the “Matrix” with a cloud of glowing lines that attached to everything in movement, moving in around and in intricate patterns of attack and defense relating to a sword and staff.

—Rod Landreth, seidhmadhr

Elven Blood

Claiming Elvish ancestry was not at all unusual in ancient Germanic and Scandinavian lands; similar cases are to be found in all the Celtic countries as well. The mythic human figures who claimed such ancestry usually proved it with superhuman deeds. In “Das Niebelungenlied”, the resistance of the Burgundians endures mostly because of the feats of the hero Hagen (Hoegni), whose elvish ancestry was the source of his great prowess. He is finally vanquished by Dietrich of Bern, another hero who is the son of an elf. This is echoed in Welsh lore in the “Meddigon Meddfai”, 1230 AD; here we find the story of three brothers, the sons of an elvish wife who, due to the virtues of their descent, became famous doctors in Wales. Another interesting tale is the sixteenth-century Icelandic poem
“Koetlu Draumur”, where an Alf’s love for the mortal woman Katla is consummated in her dream; she bore his son, whom her mortal husband Marr accepted as his own. The elven ancestry serves as a reason why later the same son of Katla, the sea-traveler Are Marsson (actually well-known through Iceland), could reach the mysterious island of Hvitra-manna-land.

Katla’s elven lover who fathered her flesh-and-blood child in a dream is quite believable when one thinks about the way that nonhuman blood gets into a human bloodline in the first place: spirit-possession during the conception of a child. It is quite possible that her Alfar lover came to her in the body of a human being that he had “borrowed”, and that he passed on some of his traits to her human child in this way. It is even possible that the body was that of her husband, which would explain why the man accepted the child as his own.

Modernly, many people are discovering, through memory or instinct or being told directly by the Elven folk, that they have some sort of Elven blood. There seems to be less Alfar blood around than, say, that of the Sidhe, but it is there. This kind of bloodline can gift a mortal with skill at certain types of magic—especially glamour magic—but it can also create genetic problems. Any nonhuman blood, especially in “throwback” amounts, can create physical and mental health problems—often unusual ones—but this is a field that requires much more study and discussion. More research and interviewing needs to be done to distinguish the specific maladies peculiar to Elven blood, including such things as dietary intolerances, allergies, and mental illnesses.

Some scholars who work with the thin crossover point between folklore and medicine have catalogued the folkloric physical indicators of “changeling” children, and matched these up with a variety of rare but recognized genetic disorders in the demographic of the mythmakers. One good essay on the subject is “Fairies and the Folklore of Disability: Changelings, Hybrids, and the Solitary Fairy” by Susan Schoon Eberly in The Good People: New Fairylore Essays (ed. Peter Naraváez, University Press of Kentucky, 1991). Their claim, of course, is that ignorant peasants mistook these diseases and malformations as evidence of faeries. I would
throw out for debate the controversial idea that while these may certainly be evidence of legitimate genetic disorders, that does not rule out the possibility that these disorders are caused by—not mistaken for—Elven blood in a human child.

Some folk who work with the Alfar have been told by them that there was much more of this sort of thing going on centuries or millenia ago; the “elven” realms have been sundered, or at least drawn much further away, from ours during more recent history. (They have also been given the information that the addition of “elven” blood of various types to human bloodlines is starting to increase again.) One wonders if the ancient custom of using the term “alfar” to refer to both elves and ancestors has its roots in this practice. Perhaps some families or clans starting calling on the Alfar as their ancestors, because they actually were their ancestors ... and then in later centuries the truth behind the practice became lost, and people habitually used the word “alfar” to mean any (putatively male) ancestors, just as “disir” (which formerly referred to goddesses) became a generic term for female ancestors.

Both groups of Alfar tend to have very few children at any given time—this fact has always plagued them, and therefore the tales that the faeries steal human babies to replenish their failing bloodlines has a basis in fact. The Svartalfar will steal other races’ babies too, not just humans; there are more than a few dark-elves with Duergar blood, not surprisingly, and even one or two with Jotun blood, though they tend to be picky about the kinds of giant-children they take. They’d prefer to get their hands on an Iron Wood infant, but any child from a line of sorcerers will do. Part of Angrboda’s deep dislike for the Alfar comes from the dark-elves’ habit of trying to steal babies from among her kinsfolk (they have rarely succeeded), as much as from her irritation at their snobbery towards her people in general.

The light-elves, on the other hand, have mostly only taken infants from mortal families which already had Alf-blood, which rather beggars the question of who first thought to take a human child and why, but they conveniently ignore that. They have a kind of condescending fondness for humans from Midgard or other
mortal realms, and tend to treat favored ones rather like indulged pets. However, there is also a true basis for the legends about faerie men or women falling in love with mortals and taking them away to their own land, and of course, the time discrepancy between the two places accounts for the many stories of people coming back to find that hundreds of years have passed. The Celtic legend of Oisin is a good example of this.

—Elizabeth Vongvisith, spirit-worker

I cannot confirm or deny that I am descended from them. Frequently, particularly in the Realm of Autumn, and to a lesser degree the Hall of Winter, they call me “cousin,” which I have only been able to ask once what they meant (asking such a thing in the high court is just rude, I’ve gathered), and a “knight” told me that it is because I am so close to them and their nature. Many of the commoners claim to be amazed that I can visit them and interact with them, or that I can perceive them at all when they do their jobs on Midgard. There clearly is some intimation that “my nature” is different... To further complicate things, several generations back (three “greats” back) my grandfather was a Witchbinder in the Ozarks. There was a tradition that the grandparent taught their grandchild (of the opposite sex) how to use their various skills and their talents. My grandmother said I was the one to learn some of her “recipes” and other skills. So because of this, I may very well be descended from them, and that has given my family these natural skills and talents. In other words, we have a little Alfar magic in our blood.

—Rod Landreth, seidhmadhr

I have always had a mild disaffinity to cheap metals and alloys (I break out in hives). This limits what I can wear for jewelry, and eliminates getting piercings at all. That said, I seem to have no real problems with iron. There are a lot of people I know who have an Elven/Fae bent who have extreme susceptibility to iron.

—Silvaerina

The Ljossalfar are extremely touchy about protecting and preserving not only the sanctity of their realm, but their own bloodlines. Necessity has often forced them to mingle their blood with that of mortals, as they have over time become a somewhat inbred folk, but having fae blood will not necessarily guarantee you
a warm welcome into Ljossalfheim unless you know your lineage and can prove you’re related to some noble House. Bloodlines are far more important to the nobility than to the rest of the Ljossalfar, however.

Whereas their response may be friendly to lukewarm if you’re fae-blooded, you should expect contempt and even hostility if you are a mortal who has Jotun blood, or possibly if you carry any other nonhuman blood than Alfish (save for obvious, direct descent from one of the Aesir or Vanir—if you’re descended from Frey, the Ljossalfar will go out of their way to keep you happy). If your business takes you into the light-elves’ land and you have nonhuman ancestry that’s likely to offend them, they won’t attack you outright unless you misbehave, but be prepared to deal with insults, snubbing and other unpleasant treatment. Getting insulted and trying to attack them certainly won’t help matters; ignoring it and treating them with firm but distant politeness will enable you to quickly conclude your business there and leave as soon as possible.

The Svartalfar have bred with humans as often as their cousins have, but they are not nearly as snobbish as the light-elves in regards to other races. There are those in Svartalfheim/Nidavellir with Jotun or Duergar blood, or even blood from races that dwell outside the Nine Worlds. Ljossalfar who have been banished from Alfheim for “tainting” their bloodlines may find sanctuary among the dark-elves. Jotnar are not unwelcome in Svartalfheim, nor are their mortal kin—or at least, they’re no more unwelcome than anyone else. The dark-elves are insular, secretive, and more than a bit suspicious about strangers, but they are far less concerned with maintaining “pure” blood than their cousins.

—Elizabeth Vongvisith, spirit-worker

Elven Souls

This is where things get tricky. Having Alfśor blood is a different situation than having an Alfśor soul that has been reincarnated into a human body. First of all, how did this happen? The answer, corroborated by several spirit-workers who deal with the Alfśor and the Northern Gods, is that Hela does it deliberately.
Medieval literature proliferated the concept of the “teind to hell”, the legend that stated that the faeries were barred from the Christian heaven, but exempted from going to the Christian hell by sacrificing some of their number to the Devil every few years. This tale weaves in and out of various stories, including the famous “Tam Lin”. Apparently there is a pre-Christian basis to this tale, and the Alfar are indeed bound to sacrifice a certain number of souls to Hel, but it is to the goddess of Death and no Devil. What hold Hela has over them that requires them to make an offering of the teind is unclear. Some people’s personal gnosis suggests that the Alfar, after having come into the Nine Worlds and made themselves a home, wished to continue their policy of death as it had been wherever they came from: they would reincarnate only into new Alfar bodies, among their own people.

Hela, it is said, likes to mix souls and bodies up a bit, and considers this sort of thing the deathly equivalent to inbreeding, and so must be bought off. This means that a certain number of Alfar souls must sacrifice themselves—or be unwillingly sacrificed; which way that ratio swings is unclear—so that She can do what She will with them. Apparently one of the places that they end up is here.

Humans with Alfar souls, especially those who were very recent sacrifices, often have a problem with living in this world. Alienation from the physical body is rife, as is generally ignoring it, perhaps even to the point of slow suicide. Those who are a little more balanced and comfortable in their skins still may feel a vague-to-intense longing for some other place, somewhere that is more beautiful than here. There are many reasons why people might feel like aliens among the human crowd, but this condition is epidemic in Alfar-souled beings. This continual longing can interfere with the practicalities of ordinary life, especially when it comes to committing to a mundane, prosaic career (or marriage, or child-raising, or anything else that one couldn’t just run away from if that beautiful unknown door to the Otherworlds suddenly opened).

There is some evidence that Alfar souls incarnate more comfortably in bodies with some Alfar bloodline, which means that the two conditions
may be co-morbid, as it were, but that doesn’t always happen. Sometimes they have to deal with living in a perfectly ordinary and not very magic-sensitive body, because Hela feels that it would be good for them in some way. This can be excruciatingly painful to an Alfar soul, who perceives this as a kind of blindness or deafness or other permanent disability, and treats it accordingly.

So what happens if you are fae-blooded, and/or you are what has been termed “otherkin”—a fae-souled being who, for whatever reason, has been reborn in a mortal body? Will that affect things? Yes and no. First of all, being fae-blooded—having at least one Alf in your line of ancestry—generally isn’t a big deal unless you’re descended from someone of particular note, for good or ill. Having fae blood might make some things easier, like seeing through glamour, but it doesn’t generally get you star treatment in either Ljossalfheim or Svartalfheim because to the Alfar, it’s the elves with a bit of human blood, not the humans with a bit of elf blood, that are really important. If you are blood kin to a living Alf or a line of Alfar, however, that’s going to be taken more seriously. Both dark-elves and light-elves will readily “adopt” human relatives if they are certain you’re one of them. This may be good or bad, depending on your point of view.

If you are fae-souled, an Alf who’s been reincarnated as a human, then your treatment by the Alfar will depend on who you used to be rather than who you are now. The Ljossalfar, being as proud as they are, consider any life but a near-immortal Alfar one to be inferior. If you were one of the unlucky sacrifices that died for the Teind to Helheim and was reborn as a mortal, don’t expect a warm homecoming. For many centuries the Ljossalfar have been in the habit of sacrificing unwilling victims of questionable soundness—the equivalent of clearing out the prisons and mental institutions—and if you’re one of those unfortunate souls who was forcibly dispatched to appease Hela’s demand for tribute, the very sight of you will make the light-elves highly uncomfortable and inclined to avoid you at all costs. If you were one of those who died willingly, their attitude will soften somewhat, but they will still consider you someone to be pitied rather than someone who deserves respect for
sacrificing yourself for the good of the rest. It’s their problem, not yours, so try not to feel insulted by this.

If you left Alfheim via other means, then your reception will be entirely dependent on the circumstances of your death and how you found your way into the mortal realm. The exception to this is banishment. Sometimes the Alfar will forcibly exile repeat troublemakers, politically inconvenient members of various Houses, or those who have committed what is in their eyes an unforgivable crime. Many wander into one of the other worlds and eventually die (the high-Court Ljossalfar in particular lead ridiculously sheltered lives and can rarely cope with the denizens or ways of other realms). A few also end up dead by their own hand, unable to bear the shame of banishment. Occasionally these folks get reincarnated as mortals, depending on what Hela decides is best for them. If you know you were exiled from Ljossalfheim or Svartalfheim, you would do well never to attempt to return—they will probably kill you if they can, since most banishments are magical curses as well as legal proclamations. If your god-boss(es) send you anyway, the Alfar will just have to take it up with Them.

As with most things having to do with the Alfar, perversely, the Svartalfar are much more tolerant of “otherkin”—unless they have banished you from their own land, that is. Otherwise, they have a kind of morbid fascination with human-bodied fae, and are even likely to regard those sacrificed unwillingly in the Teind or kicked out of Ljossalfheim as “one of them,” since the Svartalfar as a group were driven out of Alfheim long ago by their less open-minded cousins. If you were ill-treated by the Ljossalfar and that’s why you’re wandering about in a human body, you’ll probably get a surprising amount of sympathy from the dark-elves. If you were one of the willing sacrifices, they will treat you with respect, since one of the things that the Svartalfar look down on the Ljossalfar for is their cousins’ unwillingness to accept that the Teind serves a necessary purpose for the survival of both their realms. The Svartalfar are much less squeamish about death than their kin are—they’re not shy about dealing it out, either—and for all their general ill-will, they do understand that idealism and isolationism don’t make the worlds go round.
One thing to remember, if you are fae-souled, is that while you tarry in either Ljossalfheim or Svartalfheim, you should take care to avoid kneeling before anyone of consequence. The reason for this is that if you formerly departed that world under a cloud of some kind, kneeling in front of nobly-born people is essentially a sign of repentance and an indicator that you have officially placed yourself under that person’s dominion. Because of this, the Alfar may even try to trick you into kneeling in front of one of their lords or ladies. Bowing to someone for respect or politeness’s sake is fine, but avoid getting down on one or both knees in the presence of highly placed Alfar unless you really want to beg their forgiveness and become a thrall, and your stay to become permanent.

—Elizabeth Vongvisith, spirit-worker

Frey’s Influence

When considering the Alfar relationship to the other races, the first thing to take into account is the Van God Frey, who is called the “Lord of Alfheim”. What this means, in real terms, is not so much “head of the Elves” as “colonial governor of the World of Alfheim”. Frey is the go-between for the Ljossalfar (the dark Alfar do not answer to him, and he considers them to be not his problem) and the other worlds, most specifically Asgard and Vanahem. His rulership is another part of the “rent” that the Alfar have to pay to keep their prime piece of real estate in the Nine Worlds; in a sense, Frey’s rulership is Odin’s equivalent of Hela’s teind. (It is interesting that the two deities to whom the Alfar must pay tribute are Odin and Hela; it does set a clear idea of the real balance of power in the Nine Worlds.)

Frey will, in a pinch, be a go-between for the Jotun worlds as well; his marriage to Gerda gave him a good deal of clout and respect with the Jotnar. Skirnir, Frey’s good friend and right hand, is an Alf; so are his two servants, Byggvir and Beyla. They travel with him from world to world on his yearly perambulations through Alfheim, Asgard, and Vanahem, taking care of his household and farms.
The Alfar, so far, seem to have a good and non-resentful relationship with Frey. It was probably wise of Odin to select his young Vanir hostage to be his diplomat and governor; golden Frey is almost impossible to dislike, even for the mercurial Alfar, and generally gets his way in Alfheim. He does not interfere with their daily lives, reserving his influence solely for managing dealings with the folk of other worlds—including our own. This means that Frey can be called upon to help with problems that you may have with the Ljosalfar.

Frey rules Alfheim as its high Lord, and the elvish Lady and Lord of the ruling Houses answer to him. When he’s not there, they are the de facto rulers. He pretty much lets them mind their own people’s business, although when he feels moved to lay down the law about something, they have to obey. He does not have anything at all to do with Hela’s Teind; that is something strictly between Her Ladyship and the elves, and he keeps out of it, though they have asked him numerous times to use his influence to make Hela quit demanding blood sacrifices of them.

—Elizabeth Vongvisith, spirit-worker

Dealing With The Alfar

Long ago, the ways that peasants dealt with the Elven folk had largely to do with avoiding and appeasing them. Especially in Celtic mythology, there are a great deal of stories warning how dangerous it is for ordinary mortals to have regular dealings with the Fair Folk. We know little about how the actual Alfar were treated ritually, except that they are frequently mentioned in passing prayers, but this may be more like thanking the bad fairy at the christening in order to be left alone. There are references to an alfablót, which was performed in homes in the late fall, but it was secret and never done with strangers in the house, and we have no more information about it.
If you are a journeyer and/or a spirit-worker, you may well end up dealing with the Fair Folk in one capacity or another, dangerous or not. Attitude, in these dealings, is of prime importance. Advice on this is as follows:

The Alfar are their own folk. Their culture has not changed as much as ours, so they can come across in some ways as rather archaic—in fact, they will sometimes play this up to strangers. They still live tribally, with distinct clans that tend to serve specific functions within the tribe. They have their own relationship with the Gods, who come across somewhat differently both in Alfheim and to this world’s fey-blooded than they do to other people. My experience is that they are, on one hand, sticklers for custom and proper behavior (mostly by their own definitions of those), but on the other demand absolute freedom of association and movement, so they are seldom interested in the lines we draw regarding such things.

They are a bit arrogant, which they feel is somewhat mitigated by their self-avowed “talent for diplomacy”—meaning that they will be coolly polite to anyone, but they remain far more likely to be genuinely hospitable to those who carry their blood or a fey spirit, or at least have become well known to them, than an outsider.

It does not do to deal with them as you would a land-wight; it offends their sense of dignity. That said, they are noticeably better-disposed toward people who have previously worked respectfully with plant and animal spirits. They also look favorably on creative types, so showing up in a nicely embroidered cloak or singing a heroic ballad (on key) serves well. Note that their aesthetic and general manners dictate that you pay attention to detail and harmonize with what’s around you—so if your cloak is day-glo hunter orange or your ballad interrupts a lovely birdsong they were listening to before you got there, you’ve blown it. Beauty is one of their core values, particularly beauty that looks natural or mimics nature in some way.

Their is what Deborah Tannen would term a “high-courtesy” form of interaction. Speakers do not interrupt each other with trivial bits of agreement or side issues, nor is their meter of speech particularly hurried. You wait your turn, and then say what you mean to say, preferably in a composed and attractive manner. Of
course, they have human visitors at a disadvantage here, because many of those trivial bits are carried for them by linguistic inflection and by empathic bonds. The ones who deal with humans much do come to understand this, and once they’re familiar with you, you can be a bit less formal, but it’s best not too presume too much too soon.

They tend to be a bit close with their real names, so expect that the first name you learn for a contact will actually be one of their titles or a nickname. They may in turn prefer to call you by a nickname they will most likely choose for you. If they like you, they may eventually tell you what it means.

—Estara T’Shirai

(Raven’s note: As a corollary to the above, if you have a magical name that is not often used, and the has real power vested in it, or a hidden soul name that is where you keep your power, it’s best not to tell them what it is. On the other hand, being cloak-and-dagger about your regular name is something that shouldn’t be done if you are actually intending to have a long-term relationship with them, or if they are likely to be able to easily find it out from your patron deity, or if you are the sort who can’t keep straight what pseudonym you’re supposed to answer to. The legends say that the faeries have used people’s true names to whammy them, but frankly, if they want to whammy you, there are plenty of ways for them to do that without ever using names and such.)

The Alfar have a very low tolerance of stupidity, perceived or otherwise, which is probably their worst fault. Much like cats, they don’t like to be called on it when they do something that could be interpreted as stupid or clumsy for that matter. They can appear proud and arrogant, and are to some extent, but are also very sure of their abilities, knowledgeable and skilled, which can be mistaken for pride and arrogance by those less so (people do tend to overcompensate with trying to denigrate their ‘opponent’ when bested).

—Silvaerina

Bearing Gifts: All the Alfar love music, poetry and stories, though their aesthetic preferences vary wildly—the Svartalfar, for instance, prefer the grotesque to the delicate and refined. If you are a skald, a musician or singer, or a good storyteller, and you are willing
to entertain with your gifts, you will earn a measure of respect from the Alfar. If you lack these talents, you can always give them gifts. All elves are fascinated by strange, cunningly wrought and/or precious things—unusual, beautiful art or craftwork, cleverly made toys or dolls, musical instruments, items of fine clothing or jewelry, rare and delicate sweetmeats or drinks, exotic flowers that do not grow in the Northern lands of Midgard or its sister realm. (Just don’t give them cold iron.) They are rather childlike in this respect. If you know you have to win someone’s favor or ask for a boon, an appropriate gift can make all the difference even if you aren’t a witty skald or gifted musician.

—Elizabeth Vongvisith, spirit-worker

The creatures of Alfheim follow the “fairy tale” rules, which are a protocol all its own. The nobility contain all the rights and wrongs about such a caste. The commoners can be capricious and their pranks can take on nasty sides—for instance, they find it hysterical when a person gets frostbite or breaks their nose. Things are far more literal to them—words can be heavier, and actions can be revelations of deep character virtues or flaws. Emotions can be weapons, and a touch a metaphor. I need to stress these beings are not human; they can and do take a great deal of joy of making the humans realize their limitations. Take drinking, for instance. Don’t even try to match them; it’s viewed as a challenge and you won’t win, nor are you sure exactly what game you might be playing. They do not share many of our common cultural considerations, and can come across cold and alien.

Remember that you are dealing with higher beings. They view us humans as different but lesser beings, though they often envy us our spontaneity and individualism. Gaining the trust of one or two helps you navigate through things. Watch your words, limit your actions and make sure you adhere strictly to any promise you give. My most important bit of advice from experience is don’t tell them “thank you” when they offer you anything. It’s a high insult to them. You can appreciate their gift and be honored, but the best way to respond, even if it’s not immediately, is to give them a gift in return or perform an action for them. Learning this gains a great deal of societal currency with them.

—Rod Landreth, seidhmadhr
My overall relationship with them evolved over the years, especially when I started working with Skirnir directly regarding things runic. In the lore, he is Frey’s messenger, and was sent (pleaded with—believe me, Skirnir’s take on things is very different than what is in the lore, which he takes great amusement in) to woo Gerda on Frey’s behalf. Skirnir is also a rune-master, and a very strong one. From what I gather from Skirnir, he is more Frey’s proverbial right hand, and head of House in his own right. A couple of Easters ago, I sent him a rather pointed letter (via a shaman), which resulted in my getting adopted into his house by Skirnir personally. I felt when he received that letter. It didn’t help any that I was at work at the time, and trying to ring people in on a cash register. It was disconcerting, to say the least.

Anyway, the agreement I made with them was essentially to be their representative here. They had already acknowledged that I was akin to them. With people becoming aware of their natures (waking up, so to speak) in greater numbers, someone who is able explain to them what was going on is very useful. There’s something else as well, something about being an “anchor”, but I’m really not sure what that’s referring to.

—Silvaerina

My first interaction with them was when I was a child of about eight. I was walking to one of my favourite places in the woods near my home shortly after lunch. I remember seeing my dog, Lady, stop and lay down strangely. I remember turning around and seeing the roof of my home and then being surrounded by laughing, giggling, whispering and joking voices. I remember that these voices seem to come from the ground, the trees, the bushes and then ‘wrap’ around me, touch me, and fill me with a sense of joy and fun. I was not afraid as these voices seemed familiar and my friends. I remember ‘coming to’ very near the same place, except it was late in the evening. My mother was yelling for me to come home, quite angry with me as it was well past the time I was to come home. I have no real recollection of that time but vague impressions of playing and cavorting with creatures of light. A few years later, I got my hands on Tolkien and was convinced I had been in the company of the Elves.

—Rod Landreth, seidhmadhr

As with just about any being out there, treat them with respect and courtesy, and don’t make assumptions about who you think they are and are not. They aren’t all cutesy and nice, and if you succeed in irritating them enough, they will curse you. Gerda, Frey’s wife, almost had that happen, though those circumstances were somewhat unique (and which she doesn’t like being reminded of). That said, they also don’t expect everyone who comes to visit to fully understand their ways, and do allow
some leeway, though they also expect people to clue in, and won’t necessarily explain things. Their reasoning is that if people are observant, they’ll pick things up.

They don’t take well to being ‘summoned’ (as in a classical Wiccan/Ceremonial Magick circle), and will likely ignore it (unless they find something interesting). And if someone does catch their interest is this fashion; look out! Likewise, trying to banish them—or more likely their earth-spirit/little-people allies, the beings who can be and often are their eyes and ears here—is also unwise. Remember, they are magically inclined beings, whose magic is innate. They tend to have a better understanding of it than we do, and can seemingly bend reality far easier than we can.

—Silvaerina

From the Alfar, I’ve learned that protocol and formality are very serious when traveling the Nine Worlds. The lessons of Hospitality are found all through this. I’ve learned about their influence on weather, the seasons, and the “mechanics” of such things. I’ve learned that power ought to be used with a velvet glove, and with the most attention to control rather than expenditure. They’ve actually shown me the functions of nature and the necessity of the various aspects of “cycle of life.” They’ve taught me that extensively to think on my feet, and that even if I don’t do it perfectly, intent does mean quite a bit. So being gracious in my faults often gets me far even if I’m considered a bit of a rube.

—Rod Landreth, seidhmadhr

Glamour’s Mirrors

As we will discuss in the Ljossalfheim chapter, one of the most difficult things to remember is that the Alfar live and breathe glamour. To them, it is as important as clothing (or at least recreational clothing) would be to us; walking about with no glamour would be like wearing nothing more than an old T-shirt and a pair of grubby jeans all the time. While there are a few lower-class Alfar who do the glamour equivalent of just that (and are received in the upper classes with about as much enthusiasm as the T-shirt-and-jeans guy is in the fancy restaurant), most consider personal glamour as much an art form as dressing one’s self for the purposes of looking attractive or making one’s self feel good.
The Alfar can see through each other’s glamour, but they can tell when another Alfar is trying to peek beneath their “face”, and it is considered extremely impolite to do so—rather like trying to look under a woman’s skirt. Indeed, the nature of their glamour creations is a subtle language unto itself, a way of communicating without words to their audience. This is especially so among the Court Alfar, where it can take on the stylized complexity of the Victorian “language of flowers”, where bouquets were used to send arcane messages between lovers.

Another factor to be aware of is that things in the lands of the Alfar are very seldom as they seem. All types of Alfar use illusion-magic (or glamour) not only to alter or disguise their own appearances and the appearances of objects as a matter of course, but to enchant the unwary and/or naive with a kind of mild brainwashing. Glamour is less about making people see things differently than it is about making them feel differently about what they’re seeing. If you suddenly find yourself nodding avidly and agreeing to outrageous requests or ridiculous statements, you’ve probably been glamoured. Recognizing this fact makes it much easier to break, and mostly it just takes a focused effort of will. Using rune magic, such as throwing a Kenaz rune at something you believe to be glamoured, will also break the enchantment, though it’s also likely to piss off the elves. (Depriving an Alf of his or her personal glamour merely out of idle curiosity is rude and ill-advised; only do so if there’s a compelling reason or your survival is at stake). The best protection against falling under someone’s spell, however, is to not to take anything for granted.

The Alfar can actually shapeshift, and indeed the line between glamouring and shapeshifting is pretty thin, but many of the light-elves consider shapeshifting as overkill and glamouring a more subtle and refined art. Svartalfar will use whatever means necessary or whatever suits their fancy to alter the appearance of things. Many Alfar use glamour simply to make things prettier or more interesting, without any real intent to deceive, so if you detect that someone or something has been glamoured, don’t assume there’s an ulterior motive. Fae-blooded mortals generally are far less susceptible to glamour than others, and more likely to see through it.
So long as we’re on the subject of untruth, here’s a warning: don’t lie to anyone you meet in either Ljossalfheim or Svartalfheim. They can see right through it, and will not appreciate either your duplicity or your creativity. One of the frustrating things about dealing with Alfar is that they hold high expectations for mortal behavior while not bothering to stick to those standards themselves—as all their fascination with illusion and glamour shows. An Alf will never tell a bald-faced, straightforward lie—not even a dark-elf—but they may freely trick, bedazzle, cozen, exaggerate, understate, lie by silence or omission, and otherwise try to obscure things, and will see nothing wrong with this. If you can beat them at their own game of smoke and mirrors, they’ll most likely respect you for it, and perversely, might even become friendlier. But don’t attempt to tell them blatant untruths—not even teeny white lies—unless you want to return home black and blue from their pinching, with your hair snarled in elf-knots, unable to remember who you are and why you went to Alfheim in the first place...

—Elizabeth Vongvisith, spirit-worker

Elven Cousins

One of the most debated issues among those who work with elven-wights is the problem of whether the (strongly similar) fey-types from other cultures and pantheons are the same folk as the Alfar—either broken off and gone to the World of Yggdrasil, or actively traveling from world to world even now. Others claim that they are similar in species, but different in tribe and culture; still others that they are all different races. Folks that I interviewed had varying opinions on this.

I do think that they’re all linked in some way, though with some much closer and easier to reach than others. The Sidhe are particularly close neighbors, and in my opinion almost as closely related as the Dark Alfar—they live in hilly realms rather than the forested one, and are somewhat different culturally, is all. But many other, more unlike races live ... well, my instinct is saying “way to the South”, so I guess I’ll run with that. Some of the more important tribes have shortcut ‘portals’ to some of these places, and there is, I understand, something akin to a faery U.N. where interracial matters are settled.

—Estara T’Shirai
I see all the elf-races as distinct, though related, and having their own realms. They do interact, however. In fact there was a Sidhe—well, diplomat/emissary is the closest descriptive that fits—whom I was introduced to several years ago by Frey, in residence at one of the houses I visited. As for how I view them as distinct, that gets a little tricky. We all have several sets of energy patterns, one of which is “racial/cultural”. There are detectable differences, if you clue in to what to look for (which I cannot describe how to go about). About the only way I can describe these differences is that the Sidhe feel ‘cyclic’ or ‘spiral’, the Tuatha feel ‘angular’ and the Ljossalfar feel ‘linear’. Though I know that doesn’t make much sense.

—Silvaerina

To me the Sidhe, trooping fairies and the Alfar all seem to be the same. The commoners conform to many expectations of all the lesser fairy beings that have been catalogued in numerous sources. I know that these forms have changed as the years go by and that what was considered wealful at one time now has taken on a much darker cast, mostly because of Christians view of nature and the world. The nobles are the Sidhe as far as I am concerned. I use the information found in sources about many of the Faerie, and also use the sources of the Germanic world. Alfheim, to me, is what has been called Faerie in later Irish and English sources. I think much of the folklore preserved in these ‘fairy tales’ reveal a great deal of their worlds. Reading these later sources has helped me a great deal in understanding how to deal with intricate protocols, etiquette and interactions. It has also helped me understand our ancestors much better, and the important concepts that the Nine Noble Virtues try to encapsulate.

—Rod Landreth, seidhmadhr
Alfar Fascination

Of all the races in the Nine Worlds, the Alfar are the ones that will attract the most adoring human beings. Elves are like a glowing, glittering beacon to certain humans—especially those who are imaginative, artistic, lovers of beauty, and feel alienated and misunderstood. We grubby physically-bound humans call them the Fair Folk for a reason. As a species, we are bound to them by many generations of ambivalent contact and exchange, and we always will be.

The nature of the Alfar, as with any other race, is widely variable, and all this information is given as a general guideline rather than infallible rules. Some of the haughty light-elves are very sympathetic and kind towards humans, while others see humans as mere playthings. Some Svartalfar are likewise friendlier than the rest of their folk, while others are best avoided no matter what. Sometimes the smallest sprite or most ordinary wood-dwelling solitary Alf can be more powerful than an entire cavalcade of nobly-born Ljossalfar mounted on their strange, fey steeds. Use your best judgment and don’t assume anything is as it appears.

—Elizabeth Vongvisith, spirit-worker
Part III:

Guide to the Nine Worlds
In order to understand the geography of the Nine Worlds, it is crucial to start with Yggdrasil, the World Tree. Conceptions of the World Tree have been found in tribal societies from Siberia to Polynesia; they differ in some aspects, but generally come with some kind of upper world in the top branches of the tree, some kind of ancestral world of the Dead at the roots, and various other worlds in the middle. It has been theorized that they are different trees on the same model, or that they are the same tree existing in many different dimensions, with different worlds in each, which seems more right to me somehow.

We refer to the dimension of the Tree explored by the ancient Norse/Germanic/Saxon peoples as Yggdrasil. Ygg is a byname of Odin, and Yggdrasil means “Odin’s steed”, a kenning. This doesn’t mean that Odin owns or controls the Tree—he doesn’t—but he was hung on it once as part of a pain ordeal, and the reference is to him “riding” the tree in this way. The Tree itself is sentient, and has been known to send messages to people (and through them), but the messages are usually long, slow, and cryptic. The Tree is not a humanlike being, and its way of knowing and communicating is much longer and slower than ours.

Yggdrasil exists in a void of nothingness called Ginnungagap. Nine worlds spin around the tree—Asgard, Ljossalfheim, Vanaheim, Jotunheim, Midgard, Muspellheim, Svartalfheim/Nidavellir, Niflheim, and Helheim. When I term them “worlds”, it must be recalled that they are exactly that. The ancient Norse, not understanding the concept of a round world, or for that matter anything larger than their own small flat piece of Earth, told of
them in the only ways that they could conceive of—as countries or continents on a flat plane. They spoke of moving between worlds as one would move from Germany to France (by crossing a river) or from Denmark to Britain (by crossing an ocean).

Here’s where things get strange. The geography and physics of the space around the Tree is not like our extremely physical world. Each of the Nine Worlds is like a small pocket world, with its own time, seasons, year, etc. They don’t line up with each other. Between each of the worlds is a world-barrier of some sort. When you pass through it from one world to the next, the time of day and year will be different. In Jotunheim, it’s spring and the middle of a morning thunderstorm; in Vanaheim it’s early autumn and a clear, crisp evening is falling over the golden leaves. The feeling as you pass from one world to another is subtle but definite. It is more apparent to your astral body than your physical one, and the physical effects of worldwalking are discussed in the chapters on how to do it.

I’ve noticed that with a few specific exceptions, the world-barriers tend to be on water—large rivers or ocean. It may be that water holds a world-barrier better, or that it tends to collect around the “edges” of worlds. The idea of three-dimensional worlds that still somehow “butt up” against each other is pretty strange to us, but this is just one of those things that we have to take with the hope that eventually it will be better explained. In the meantime, it’s a matter of using what we know, even if we can’t understand it.

In talking to different spirit-workers, there seem to be two different conceptions of how the worlds are arranged around the Tree. The first conception sees the worlds as arranged in flat layers, with Midgard in the center of the middle layer. The tree grows up through its middle, and it is surrounded by Muspellheim, Vanaheim, Niflheim, and Jotunheim. Ljossalfheim is suspended above it, with Asgard above that. Svartalfheim is suspended below it, with Helheim below that. The tree passes through the middle of five worlds like a central axis. Some theorists have conceived this arrangement as positively molecular in its neatness. Spirit-workers who
actually visit the Nine Worlds admit that it is far less neatly arranged once you are actually there.

The other conception is that the worlds are arranged in a spiral around the Tree, in the order listed at the beginning of this chapter. While one world might be “under” another on the spiral, it can be reached by going off the “far edge” and downward; thus both Jotunheim and Niflheim can technically be to the north of Midgard. In this conception, Midgard is simply one world in a line, rather than the central point.

I should mention now that when we are talking about the relationship of worlds to each other, the concepts of “north”, “south”, “east” and “west” are not the same as they are in our single physical world. It’s more as if one divided the space occupied by the Tree into four quarters and then arbitrarily decided that they corresponded to those four directions—i.e. if we declare this direction randomly south, then the point at ninety degrees to it must be west, etc. We use these terms because they are what our ancestors understood, and they work as well as any for these complicated concepts.

**Denizens**

Yggdrasil is generally pictured as an ash tree, but this may be human interpretation. On the very top of the tree sits an eagle, Hraesvelg (“Corpse-Eater”), who is actually a wind-giant in eagle form. He is very old, of the first generation of Ymir’s kin. Winds—or rather, energy currents—blow from his wings, and are controlled by the wind-deer. At the bottom of the tree, crawling back and forth between Helheim and Yggdrasil’s exposed root in Niflheim, is the great dragon Nidhogg. She gnaws on Yggdrasil’s root, forcing it ever into new growth. Ratatosk, a squirrel-wight whose name means “Teeth That Find”, runs up and down the bark of the tree carrying messages (mostly insults) between Hraesvelg and Nidhogg. All three of them do not generally talk to most visitors and are not very approachable.
Four deer run through the upper branches. They are the keepers of the power of the Four winds, and are named Duneyr (Rest), Durathor (Slumber), Dvalin and Dain. Dvalin is actually the famous Duerg leader Dvalin the Old. Dain was once an Alfar lord. Duneyr was a mortal from Midgard, and Durathor, also known as Asvid, was a Jotun runemaster. All four agreed to take on the forms of immortal deer and control the winds that blow from world to world.

This does not mean that they necessarily control the atmospheres of the various worlds. However, there are “winds”—currents of energy, really—that “blow” from world to world, and can sweep things and beings with them. Magically skilled folk can learn to “ride” these currents, but attempting to control them for one’s own purpose will bring one or more of the Wind Deer down upon you. While they do not engage in combat as such, their control of the winds means that they can sweep you quite literally off of Yggdrasil and into Ginnungagap.

The Guardians of the Four Directions are four Duergar known as Austri, Vestri, Sudri, and Nordri. Actually, it is unknown as to whether they are or ever were actually Duergar, or (more likely) whether they are divine entities who simply take on Duerg form. They are can and often do take on other forms as well—elemental spirit-forms, birds, horses, dragons, etc. The Duergar of Nidavellir worship them as gods, and consider them to be divine entities who give the race of Duergar the honor of taking their forms. The four of them can be called on to help out if you have lost your way, as they know all the paths between worlds (and many within worlds) like the backs of their hands. They like to be invoked and poured for at gatherings and workings, but otherwise do not require much in the way of offerings.
History

In the beginning there was the Void, and the Void was called Ginnungagap. That eternal nothingness, where there is neither existence nor nonexistence, lies at the beginning of many creation myths. Then, somehow, the Tree came into existence, and around it spun the first three worlds that came into being: Niflheim, the world of ice and frost and mist, with the great well Hvergelmir, the Roaring Kettle; Muspellheim, the world of fire, and Jormungrund, or “Giant-Land”, the underworld that lay beneath these two. (This last world is rarely mentioned, and it is not the same as Jotunheim, which came later. It was the land of the Dead.) Surt the Black was apparently already living in Muspellheim; whether he was there alone is unknown. This would, however, make Surt the oldest living creature in the Nine Worlds, a fact about which he is mostly silent.

Niflheim and Muspellheim drifted in and out of each other’s orbits. Finally, they drew close enough together that melted ice from Niflheim flowed out over the gap and formed the river Elivagar, whose every particle held a shard of ice-poison. This ice piled up into an iceberg, but it slowly melted as Muspellheim grew closer. As it melted, it revealed the body of a sleeping giant, Ymir. Ymir was an enormous mountain-sized frost-etic, without much of a brain; he mostly lay there semi-paralyzed and mewed.

Also thawing out of the ice was a great cow, Audumhla. Ymir suckled on her udders and found nourishment. As Ymir slept, his sweat gave rise to a male and female etin, and his two legs rubbed together and gave birth to yet another giant. These grew, coupled, and made another generation of frost-thurses. Audumhla licked at the salty ice for her own food and uncovered yet another creature, a much smaller creature named Buri, who would be the ancestor of the Aesir. Buri grew up in the company of various giants. (There seems to be some discrepancy about how many giants were actually created; it may be that there were already some about before Ymir, or that more than just three were created. Like all creation stories, the reality of it was lost in the mists of the previous generations.) After many
generations of giant-breeding, Buri had a son named Bor by an unnamed giantess, and Bor eventually sired three sons by another giantess named Bestla. These sons were Odin, Vili, and Ve, and they began all the trouble by taking it into their heads to kill the enormous, helpless Ymir.

Up until this point, the two worlds of Muspellheim and Niflheim were separated; the great void that lay between them was called Ginnungagap. It was apparently possible, with difficulty, to pass from one to the other across the Gap. Some giants had already done so, and fire and frost giants were interbreeding. The sons of Bor apparently felt that more useful land was needed, so they killed Ymir and used his corpse as a variety of magical anchors to create new worlds. Some pieces floated off and created worlds by themselves—Svartalfheim, populated by Duergar who also sprang from Ymir’s body, is one example, Jotunheim is another—and some, like Asgard and Alfheim, the sons of Bor created themselves, for Bor’s people and the otherworldly Alfar.

The problem was that Ymir’s blood gushed out and caused a huge flood, washing away most of the unwarned denizens of the two worlds. It was so great that it actually put out the fires of Muspellheim for a time, and plunged the world into darkness. The sons of Bor worked fast to triage the damage; Ymir’s body was placed across the gap to form a world-bridge, but it fell apart. They grabbed for whatever pieces they could get, and anchored them to the Tree. Meanwhile, Bergelmir the third-generation leader of the frost-etins shoved his wife and whatever of his people he could find into a lur, a hollowed-out tree trunk that could serve either as a boat or a coffin. They washed up on the piece of Ymir’s back that would become Jotunheim.

The sons of Bor continued their world-building, creating skies and solid ground, anchoring worlds to the Tree, and making stars out of sparks from half-drowned but still-sputtering Muspellheim. Ymir’s broken bones made mountains, his teeth rocks and boulders, and when the final flood of his blood went down, the remaining fluid made the rivers, lakes, and oceans of the various worlds. Ymir’s brains were flung into the sky, where they became clouds. The sons of Bor then called into the world by some
arcane process the Four Guardians of the directions, whom they charged to guard the four corners of the World Tree.

There are conflicting stories about the creation of humans. One says that after having finished their world-building, the sons of Bor were walking along the beach and came upon two washed-up logs. These they breathed life into—Odin giving them breath, Vili giving them movement, and Ve giving them identity—and the race of humans was born from these first two humans, Ask and Embla (Ash and Elm). On the other hand, there is a conflicting account that states that Ask and Embla were actually called into this world before the great flood, and that they were saved by the giant Bergelmir, who stuck them high in a dead tree that he hoped would survive the flood. With this other account, there is no knowledge of who actually called them into the world; both the sons of Bor and the giants take credit for it. At any rate, Midgard was created as a place for them to live.

**Time And Seasons**

Yggdrasil itself is suspended in space, in the black nothingness of Ginnungagap. It has no seasons per se; the Sun and Moon-chariots pass from world to world around its trunk, but outside them, there is no discernable seasonal change. As the worlds rotate around Yggdrasil, however, each of them comes close to our world and then draws apart. Midgard is always close, for some reason, which is why it is referred to as our “sister world”. (For more information on this complicated concept, see the Midgard chapter.) It is possible to visit any of the worlds at the time of (our) year that they are furthest away, but it is simply easiest to do it when they are close. Sometimes, during that period, they come so close that things “leak” over. For example, “interference” from the Elves on Beltane has a long and legendary history.

Yggdrasil itself is a source of light, as is the land of Muspellheim, and these were originally the only light source. However, when the last worlds were built, the Aesir decided that there needed to be a more regularized and brighter light source, and they recruited (some tales imply a
nonconsensual draft) certain etins to eternally ride the skies, bringing
greater and lesser light to all things in turn. The Sky-Etins are not a
specific variety of Jotun; rather, they have created their own tribe and
culture out of necessity. They are a close-knit clan, and while they are
interested in the problems of those below—and who wouldn’t be, with all
that perspective and vision during every day?—they will not brook
interference with their schedules, because they know that granting it to one
would mean granting it to all.

The Sky-Etins

Before the Aesir set up their day-and-night technology, the three
ancient worlds were lit by the pale greenish light of the tree, and the
glowing fires of Muspellheim. This gave a permanent twilight to Niflheim
and the underworld. After the flood, Jotunheim was formed, and as it was
closer to Muspellheim it got more light, a dull orange glow seeping
through the world-barrier. When the Aesir set up Asgard, they put
together a system whereby the Sun and Moon roll through the sky of each
world on a set path.

We tend to forget that in the Norse cosmology, the entities that
personify the Sun, Moon, Day and Night are also etins. They are not
considered a genetic tribe of Jotnar unto themselves; they are (with the
exception of Nott) fire-etins who have been set to do a particular job from
which they almost never get a break. They have sacrificed themselves, as it
were, to bring light and darkness to the Nine Worlds. As such, they are
close-knit and are culturally a tribe unto themselves. They tend to be fairly
close to the Aesir and get along with them well, with the exception of Hati
and Skoll, who do not consider themselves part of the Sky-Etin clan, being
Iron Wood to the core. When the Sky-Etins marry, it is usually to fire-
etins, with the exception of ancient Nott, who has taken many lovers of
many races.
The gods of the Sun and Moon are Sunna and Mani, respectively. They were originally the children of a giant named Mundilfari, who was known as the Turner of Time. They were snatched up by the Aesir to forever ride the sky in turn. Their track takes them through all the Nine Worlds; while Mani is over one world, Sunna will be over another one. This strange schedule reminds us that these are actually separate worlds and not just regions of a single world; although they may share an artificial sun and moon, they do not exist in the same space together. Sunna can be over Midgard for fourteen hours, and then pass through eight other worlds with varying day-lengths spent in each one, and then be back in Midgard ten hours later. This is due to the time dilation that occurs as she passes through the world-barriers. One circuit for her may be several days’ worth of ride, yet each world is only in darkness for the length of its night. It’s one of those things that make your head hurt if you think about them too closely.

Sunna is tall, golden, and beautiful, and has been called All-Bright, Everglow, and Fair Wheel. Her personality is impulsive and fiery, almost childlike in her innocence and enthusiasm. She is married to a fire-giant, one of the sons of Surt, whose name is Glow. Since her job never stops, he generally visits her in the chariot. (One assumes that she gets the day off occasionally.) He cares for their young daughter, who is being groomed to take over Sunna’s dangerous job should something happen to her (such as Ragnarok).

Sunna charges across the sky every day with wild abandon, never swerving from her path in the sheer love of chariot-driving. Her Sun Chariot is drawn by two golden horses, Allsvinn (All-Swift), and Arvaker (Early-Waker), who pull the sun behind them. Its heat would be too much for them, except that Odin created a talisman called the Isarnkol, which hangs above their shoulders on the double yoke and constantly spreads cool mists, protecting them from heatstroke. Ahead of Sunna, as a herald, travels Daeg, or Day, a sky-etin who rides the red-bay horse Skinfaxi. The horse’s mane sheds light as it goes.
Mani is calmer and more thoughtful and reflective than his sister; he has been known to wander off course in order to watch over people and is especially fond of the humans of Midgard. He has a compassionate heart, and is struck by seeing those in need, especially children who are being abused, and he is often prayed to in order to protect specific children. He is known to have rescued two children, Bil and Hjuki, snatching them up from the earth and sending them to live in Asgard. (Their names seem to be the foundation of the “Jack and Jill” rhyme.) He is also a god of calendars, mathematics, and other rational thought that requires counting and numbers. He plays a flute as he walks, and is especially revered by the Dark Alfar and the Duergar. Those who work with Mani say that his moon-cart is pulled not by horses, but by large dogs, and sometimes he simply walks, being a patron of travelers and walkers in general.

Mani is preceded and heralded by Nott, a Jotun goddess who rides a black horse named Hrimfaxi. The dew drips off of Hrimfaxi’s bit as he passes over the worlds. Nott’s father Norfi was the first architect of Jotunheim, and designed many of the great halls, including the halls of Thrym and Utgard-Loki. Nott herself is a very old giantess, one of the oldest from before the flood, which she survived by being on a visit to Jormundgrund at the time. She has been married three times (that we know of) and had numerous affairs. Her first husband was named Nagifari and to him she bore a son named Aud; her second was a cliff-giant named Annarr who sired on her the earthy etin-bride Jord, eventual mistress of Odin and mother of Thor, Meile, and Frigga. Her third and current husband, Delling (“Dawn”) was a red elf who gave her a son that later become Daeg, the god of Day and Sunna’s herald. She also had an affair with the old Vanir-god Frodi, and bore him Njord the sailor-god before leaving him with the infant boy. Nott is not known for being maternal; she tends to be a wanderer, leaving her various children to be raised by their fathers.

To make sure that the Sun and Moon chariots ran on time, the Aesir made a deal with two fierce Jotun werewolves, Skoll and Hati, sons of Fenris by an Iron Wood giantess. They gave them the power of flight,
which they can use only to chase the sun-chariot or the moon-chariot. The truth is that neither of them spend their entire time chasing chariots; they are simply on call if something goes wrong and the moon or sun are not on time. Sunna is almost always on time; if anything, she tends to be early in her enthusiasm. She treats Skoll, the wolf who is in charge of chasing her, like a fun, competitive game, and enjoys racing him. Mani, on the other hand, is much more interested in what is going on down below, and as such has a regrettable tendency to stop and watch, or even interfere. Hati, the greater of the two wolf-brothers (also referred to as Managarm), will eventually show up and chase him back onto his scheduled path. Mani despises the wolf, and hates being shepherded in this way. He is also well aware that should Ragnarok start, the two wolves will attack and kill them. (Sunna seems to have a “let ‘em try to catch me!” attitude about that.)

The amount of time that Sunna and Mani spend in each world varies wildly from world to world. Asgard gets the most light, with some days as long as summer-solstice days at our Arctic Circle, without the accompanying long nights during the rest of the year. This is one reason why it is the “Shining Realm”. Ljossalfheim also gets a great deal of light, and Vanaheim somewhat less but still more than Midgard.
Day 1, Midgard.

“I am a traveler on Man’s Roads.”

When I visualized leaving for this journey, I imagined slinging my bag over my shoulder, kissing my loved ones, and going off down the path without looking back. The focus, in my mind, had been entirely on what I’d do on the journey, without any thought to how I’d leave.

My friends and family, however, insisted that there be a ritual to send me off. For once in my life, I didn’t think that I needed such a thing. Usually I’m all for rituals marking times of passage in life, but somehow I just wanted to sneak off without fanfare. It felt vaguely like the reasons that I have not celebrated a single birthday of mine with a party in nearly twenty years, except for the occasional surprise party thrown by loved ones. It didn’t seem triumphant, or sad, or any good emotion. It felt tense and uncertain, and I couldn’t think of a good way to celebrate that. However, it became clear that they, the people who know and love me, needed such a
ritual, perhaps more than I did. So I agreed to it, except that I didn’t want to help create it. I have enough to concentrate on, I told my friends who brought up the idea. Don’t make me do anything but show up.

So after all my things had been carried out to the little treehouse, just big enough for a futon rope bed and a large box, after my crow Maegen had been brought out in her cage and hung up, we all trooped out to the ritual field. My friends called the four elements, asking the blessing of four deities that they felt to be appropriate. My daughter Jess called Air, and asked for the blessing of Freya upon me. (She said that she picked Freya because Freya likes spooky violent chicks like her.) Allyson called Fire, and asked for Loki’s blessing. Joshua called Water, and asked for the blessing of Jormundgand the Serpent. Julie picked Earth, and asked for the blessing of Angrboda, Loki’s wife and Hel’s mother. She gave me mint and roses, and smeared a tiny bit of blood from a razor cut on my forehead. Joshua also cut himself, but since he’s my lover and we’re fluid-bonded, he fed me the blood from his cut as a going-away
present, a way to take part of him with me on the journey.

Odin had requested that I formally delegate my kingly duties to others before going on this journey, and I had already delegated the symbolic rulership to my wife Bella, and the administrative duties to Sir Tannin, neither of whom could be present because of work commitments. I officially gave my mediation duties to Dame Allyson, kissed Josh and Jess, and then everyone left and I was alone in the field.

My first task was to talk to the land-wight. I call it Oong, although that’s not its actual name, just something that it’s willing to answer to. I doubt I could understand or pronounce its real name. I lay flat on the ground and talked to it, and it came, as it always does. I told it where I was going and asked it to please pull me back here if I needed it to. It agreed enthusiastically; Oong is sort of like a big overgrown puppy who is not too bright but eager to please. I dug a hole between my thighs and buried a polished carnelian as a gift to seal the bargain, and then donned my cloak of the Nine Worlds and picked up my drum.
I walked the labyrinth all the way to the center, drumming slowly, with the piece of the cloak that is Midgard clutched in my other hand. As I went, I tried hard to concentrate the way Loki had showed me, reaching out toward Midgard with my mind, pulling it toward me, pulling myself toward it. When I reached the center I put the drum close to my head, closed my eyes, and drummed the Midgard spot, first softly, then getting louder until it reached a crescendo. The drumbeat pulled me over and through, and I tapered it back to quiet, and stopped. I opened my eyes and looked around, seeing the doubled sight of two worlds … my field, and other things. I was in a clearing surrounded by trees, but where my home is on a hill and there is nothing above the treeline but sky, in Midgard I could see mountains rising beyond, and I realized that I was actually in a valley there.

I shouldered Bag and began to walk; there was a well-worn road lining up with the bare, well-trodden spots in the field. As I went down the road, the images of houses and other small buildings came into view. One of them, larger than the others and with a
hinged sign hanging out front, seemed to be an inn. As I passed it, a man came out and looked at me curiously, and then hurried to catch up with me.

“Are you a traveler in these parts, my lord?” he asked me. I was a little annoyed at the “my lord”, as I was trying to travel unobtrusively, but perhaps the fact that my clothing was in good condition—well, and that I was wearing this ridiculous fancy cloak—gave the impression of riches or nobility. I affirmed that I was traveling, and he invited me to stay at his inn, telling me that the beer was good. Besides the fact that I don’t drink beer, I had places to go, and I didn’t feel comfortable being around large groups of second-world people just yet, so I declined.

Then he asked me if I was a king. I was startled—I had brought nothing with me that signified kingship; in fact, I felt like all such things were best left at home on this trip. He seemed to sense my discomfort, because he rushed to tell me that he had seen quite a few kings come through here in his time. Then he asked where I was headed, and I said that I was off to speak to the serpent. His eyes widened; as I strode off, I called back, “It’s all right—I’m a relative.”
To invoke the serpent, I ended up at the chalice in the west part of the field. I sat before it and called, but it wasn’t quite right. Then I remembered that Ken Russell had given me a bottle of seawater, and I poured about a third of it into the chalice, drew the Ior rune on its side with a wet finger, and called again. The wind picked up, and a black dog suddenly ran in from the woods, circled me, and ran away again. By this I mean that the black dog was fully and thoroughly in the homeworld, the actual field, not Midgard. (I later found out that it was newly acquired by my neighbor.) At the time, it bothered me—omen? Spy? Message?

I looked up and the blue sky, and the body of the serpent began to rise above the treetops—s/he is so huge!—and then move into the sky, as if the sky was ocean. I wasn’t sure how to interpret that particular joining of worlds, so I decided not to think about that—the idea that the sky of our world could be lined up with the ocean of Midgard, even if only temporarily so that I could talk to the Big Snake. Or talk at it, rather; I sort of tried to think thoughts at it, but it was, as usual, alien and difficult to
understand. One of its coils seemed to run ethereally through my whole body, and I just got an image of sky and clouds and sea, and then it was gone. I liked to think that it was a blessing.

Afterwards, I wrote this chant:

Serpent bound, wound around,
Holding all the world within your coils,
Serpent bound, wound around,
Turning through the ocean’s shining waves,
Serpent bound, wound around,
Ring the world with power like a wall,
Serpent bound, wound around,
At the cost of your freedom Midgard’s saved.
Our journey through the Nine Worlds will start with Midgard. There are a lot of differing opinions as to what and where Midgard actually is. Most people’s opinion is that it is actually a reference to our world, our material plane here. However, the more I journey, the more I find that although our world here does have an “astral” body, just as we do, that is not necessarily Midgard. The reality seems to be a little more complex than that.

Midgard is a world that spins around the World Tree that is Yggdrasil. It is the one of the Nine Worlds that lies the closest to our own, and as such it’s the easiest to get into. Beginning journeyers would do well to start with moving themselves into Midgard before moving to any of the other worlds. Actually, that’s often exactly what happens, if only unconsciously—the journeyer’s thoughts move their body in the direction of Yggdrasil, and it’s Midgard they get pulled into, usually only for a few seconds before moving to another of the worlds. Our concept of Midgard as being central and close is so strong that much of the lore claims that it is the central world that all other revolve around.

Some journeyers experience it that way, or haven’t looked critically enough to see any differently. Others have noticed Midgard as being simply one world in a line, spiralling around Yggdrasil at about mid-level, and somewhat to the east. This differentiation varies depending on whether journeyers are seeing the worlds organized into a spiral or into three flat layers. The denizens of the other eight worlds do not see Midgard as particularly more important than any other world, and less so than some. They also do not see it as physically central, so it may be that this perception is largely our own Earth-centric and thus Midgard-centric view.
Midgard itself seems to be similar in nature to our world many centuries ago. There is some speculation that there may have been a time when the two worlds were joined even closer than they are today—perhaps even as one—and that the boundaries between astral-Earth and Midgard, or even physical-Earth and Midgard, sometimes blurred and folk could wander back and forth, on purpose or accidentally. As the split between the two seems to be that our world is so much more physical/material than the Nine, it may be that many centuries ago, that split was not as pronounced, and our world (or theirs, or both) has changed some since then. This gives rise to a possible idea that some or all of the humanfolk of Midgard actually once came from our world, when the two were more joined than they are today. However, there is almost no way to probe further than speculation into these matters, so let us consider the situation as it stands.

**Time and Seasons**

As the sister-world to our world, Midgard’s seasons are lined up perfectly with ours—or, more specifically, those of the northern part of our northern hemisphere. This may be why Midgard is so much more accessible to us. Day length varies depending on time of year and where you are in Midgard. The single continent is about the longitude of Europe from the Mediterranean to the Arctic Circle, and and in latitude about as wide as Eurasia, so day length will vary accordingly.

Midgard’s seasons are remarkably similar to that of northern Europe, and line up with them as well in terms of the months and year. It is the one place in the Nine Worlds where you can reasonably guess the season and weather before entering.

**Geography**

Midgard was constructed by the Aesir out of the brow-ridge of Ymir’s skull. It is still mostly water, with one large single continent, surrounded by ocean and river. As we will see by studying the rest of the Nine Worlds, water is more often the path of a world-barrier than earth. The ocean on
which the continent of Midgard floats is dotted with small islands and fjords. Mountain ranges, hilly ridges, valleys and lowlands all figure into its varied topology.

Those who envision Midgard as central to the worlds see the worlds of Muspellheim, Vanaheim, Niflheim, and Jotunheim circling it to the south, west, north, and east respectively. (There is conflict in the primary sources as to whether it is Niflheim or Jotunheim that lies to the north of Midgard. In the spiral map, both are true.) Yggdrasil is seen as rising up through the center of the world in this particular map.

For those who envision the Nine Worlds as a spiral, it’s a little more complex. In the north, the ocean boundary narrows to become the great salt river Elivagar, which carries the world-boundary between Midgard and Jotunheim. To the west, rising on the spiral and passing through the Tree, one moves through the world-boundary to Vanaheim. To the south, once one crosses the water the shores give onto the dark Myrkwood, which then gives way to Muspellheim. To the east, the world-border falls off downwards towards Svartalfheim and Nidavellir, which are technically under (but not underground) Midgard.

Jormundgand: The Great Snake

Not far off from the coast in any direction is the great bulk of the Midgard Serpent, Jormundgand. The Great Serpent, child of Loki and sister-brother of Hela and Fenrir, was enchanted by Odin to forever encircle the continent of Midgard. This is more than just some kind of decoratively cruel act; the Serpent is the living carrier of a protection enchantment. With that ring of living flesh in place, no great enchantments can penetrate, and the fragile humans are safe from fatal divine interference. Actually, there are a lot of rumors around what sorts of terrible things the Serpent-boundary protects against, but it may be that only Odin knows what they all are. There are also rumors that the Serpent-boundary keeps some magic in as well as out, but again it’s all speculation.
Jormundgand is an enormous sea serpent, greeny-blue in color, and s/he swims in a constant circle around Midgard. S/he is like no other creature in the Nine Worlds, including any other Jotun. S/he was created from the magic of the Iron Wood acting on the combined bloodlines of Loki and Angrboda, two of the most powerful Jotnar the Iron Wood itself ever brought forth.

Of all the Jotnar that I’ve dealt with, the Big Snake is the one that I think is most easy to misunderstand. It is an incredibly alien creature. Touching its nature is very strange. It is hermaphroditic, although it tends to “feel” to the person contacting it like whatever their gender is. It doesn’t speak in words, or any kind of a language that we would consider a language, but it does speak, somehow. I can’t explain that—it boggles my mind to try—but the one time when I shared a body with the Snake (which seems to have no name; as it is unique, it doesn’t feel like it needs one, it is simply “I”) it felt as though all the verbal parts of my brain were being shoved aside and disconnected. It took an hour before I could properly speak, after that.

Those of us who work with Loki’s family tend to doubt that the Snake claims anyone, not the way that Loki or Hela (or Odin or Thor, for that matter) do. I think that it will attempt communication with specific people, and they may mistake that. If they say that the Snake talked to them in words, or in human thought-concepts, that’s generally when I doubt them. However, it is possible that the human mind “translated” the concepts into words without realizing that this is what was happening.

Myrkwood

This chapter is a good place to stick in a reminder about the Myrkwood. Reports vary on whether or not it is technically part of Midgard or of Muspellheim; as far as we pathwalkers can tell, it is a liminal space between the two that belongs to neither. It is a thick, twisted, dark wood on the shore of Muspellheim, just beyond the narrow Midgard ocean to the south. The Myrkwood is inhabited by tribes of ... well ... something.
Rumors vary as to what they are—Midgard humans who have gone feral, or who have interbred with some kind of Alf or Jotun, evil Alfar who live on blood, or some other race of beings that are not described anywhere. The fire-etins of Muspellheim claim that they are not Jotuns of any sort, and generally give them a wide berth (which suggests against their being human, as Surt’s children are generally not intimidated by anything remotely human).

What is known is that they are territorial, fierce, and cannibalistic. As you enter the Myrkwood on the shore side, you will see a variety of shrines scattered under the eaves of the trees, containing squat, deformed, bizarre-looking idols. These are the Gods or worshipped wights of the people of Myrkwood. Immediately leave offerings on every shrine you see, and every one you come across. This is the best way to make sure that they will leave you alone. Propitiating their protective spirits will get you safely through without even a sight of the Myrkwood people; it’s always worked for me.

Running through the middle of the Myrkwood is the Blutwasser, the River of Blood. It is only knee-deep, but if you wade through it, you will smell of blood for days. Not far beyond the river is the border of Muspellheim; you will see the trees becoming more and more charred as you go closer.

**Ulfdalir and Ysetur**

In the northernmost stretches of Midgard, close to the northern border of Jotunheim, there is a place called Ulfdalir, or the Wolf-Dales. The wolf-reference, however, is neither about real wolves nor Jotun werewolves; it refers to those individuals who are branded a “wolf’s head”, or outlaw. Bands of outlaw brigands roam there, but this is no jolly Robin Hood story. Most are starving, violent, and dangerous. However, somewhere in Ulfdalir there is a secret entrance to Helheim, so people sometimes wander in anyway. Don’t bother asking the outlaws where the Hel-tunnel is; assuming that they don’t kill you anyway, they don’t know and have no
interest in finding out. They are known to laugh at people who come looking for it, and offer to send them to Helheim by a quicker route.

Also on the Jotunheim border is a fortress named Ysetur, which was built by the Gods to keep an eye on the Jotnar and make sure that they do not attempt to lead an army into Midgard. Thor was originally stationed there, but he grew bored and the command was turned over to a bunch of Ivaldi’s hired Duergar mercenaries. The Duergar actually do little to prevent any Jotnar from entering, especially those with enough money to bribe them. However, the Jotnar seem extremely disinterested in invading Midgard in force, being more focused on Asgard. If you need to cross into Ulfdalir for whatever reason, hiring a troop from Ysetur is your best protection, but that requires some gold or silver coin.

Denizens

Midgard is home to the humans of the Nine Worlds. They are rarely found anywhere else in the Nine, being intimidated by the denizens and conditions of the other worlds, although sometimes you will find one journeying to more interesting and dangerous places. For the most part, the humans of Midgard live agricultural lives in small villages from which they rarely stray, except to travel to another village to find a mate. Some, living in the low Midgard mountains, have a herding or hunter-gatherer lifestyle, but most are farmers. Midgard has no cities, and few towns.

According to legend, Odin put his son Heimdall into a human body and let him live a human (or rather superhuman, actually) life among the people, both to get some good bloodlines into them and to allow him to gain some emotional investment in aiding them. During his human lifetime, he was named Rig, and he mated with women of different classes, and supposedly created the bloodlines for inbred class itself. While we of this world tend to be disturbed by the idea of genetic “classes”, I have found that many if not most of the denizens of Midgard are thoroughly sold on the concept, and use it as a justification for being whatever it is that they are. There is little point in trying to argue with them on the matter.
Midgard is also home to various Jotnar, Alfar, and Duergar who prefer living there for whatever reason, although they tend to be solitary and live in groups no larger than a single family. It is also home to the Huldre-folk, land-spirits who are humanoid in shape, if very small. Huldre-folk live in high mounds, underground yet above the level of the earth. They correspond to the “little people” of our world, who are not actually related to the Alfar, but are elemental beings whose nature is closer to that of land-wights. Huldre-folk are industrious and shy, and generally go about their business, although they have been known to capture humans who cut down woods that are sacred to them, or otherwise ruin natural beauty that they are particularly fond of. They are masters of healing with herbs, and will sometimes share their knowledge with humans in rare cases. As their name implies, they worship the goddess Holda, and are dedicated to her.

Female Huldre-folk will sometimes take on human sizes in order to seduce unwary human males, but there is generally something off about their presentation, as they can’t seem to get it quite right. At the least, their mannerisms will be strange, and their clothing in disarray; at worst, there will be extraneous tails or limbs that are revealed when things become intimate. Tales abound of Huldre-women with cow’s tails or donkey ears. If you are attracted to someone that you fear is a Huldre-woman, ask her to swear by the goddess Holda that she will neither harm nor detain you, and see what happens. If she likes you enough, she might actually do it. If she refuses, get away quickly.
Offerings

It is unlikely that you will be making an offering to a human of Midgard for anything except shelter or a guide. You can give them food, or jewelry, or coins. You can also help them out with their farm chores, although I’ve found that they really prefer tangible gifts (a strong difference from the rest of the folk in the Nine Worlds). Huldré-folk like sparkling things, and as for any other of the races of the Nine Worlds who happen to be passing through, check their world of origin for ideas.

Warnings

One can get stuck in Midgard, if only partially, and not even know it. It’s easier to drop bits of oneself there, or if you pathwalk there, to have it only recede partially so that a shadow of Midgard hangs around you. This can wreak havoc on your ordinary life, not to mention your physical health. Make sure that you are cleanly separated from Midgard, especially if you utilize it as the highly useful jumping-off point that it is.

There is very little that is dangerous in Midgard, otherwise. There’s also very little that’s interesting … except when Gods and spirits interfere, and then it becomes both more interesting and more dangerous. For advice, check the type of God or wight by tracing them to their home world, and then react accordingly.
Day 2, Muspellheim

“I am a skald before the Great Fire.”

Everyone talks a lot about the terrible Myrkwood, and how it is inhabited by evil monsters and wild animals, but the first thing that I noticed when I entered were stone shrines with carved spirit-figures that seemed to be waiting for propitiation. I made offerings to them immediately, and it was like a weight was lifted off the forest. I could feel them saying that I was free to go, and that no one would bother me. And no one did. So, important point: the key to getting through Myrkwood is to pay respects at the shrines of the tribes that inhabit it. Make nice to their local gods and you’ll get through easier. Of course, I only skirted the edge.

I had asked Julie to come down and make a fire for this day, to anchor Muspellheim, and I spent most of the day around it. They came out to see who this intruder was—I had one moment of terror while they circled me, because they’re so damn big—and then I showed them my tattoo and explained the situation
and they settled back with grunts. They squatted around the campfire and began to cook their own breakfast—apparently there are so many random fires among the hot black sandy shores of Muspellheim that they just pick one at random and cook over it. So I shared my breakfast with them as well—Josh had sent down a huge amount of scrambled eggs and OJ. Knowing that they don’t get much fruit here, I gave them the fruit that Jess had enchanted to feel like little babies. Yum, yum, crunch, they liked that.

One fire giant—older, blacker, not as tall but with more presence, came up and asked if there was a message from Her Ladyship. I knew at once that it was Surt from the way the rest of them treated him. No, no message, just me passing through. He saw my guitar and asked if I could sing for them. I said that I likely didn’t know anything that they knew. He replied that they’d heard everything they knew a hundred times; they wanted to hear things they didn’t know.

Fire giants are laconic, if they like you. Nasty if they don’t, I expect. Their hands are blackened with soot. The place burned my eyes and throat and I
craved water. But I had promised to stay and sing for Surt. I told him about my plans to go to Asgard the next day and he laughed at me. I told him that I was going to Asgard over the Thund Thvitr. “Do you have a boat?” No. Boat? I thought I’d shapeshift and fly in. “Sharpeye will shoot you down. That’s what he’s there for.” Don’t Hugin and Muninn fly in and out? “Yah, but he knows them.” I hadn’t wanted to go into Asgard with fanfare, but apparently there’s no sneaking into that world. “Those borders are guarded,” Surt says. There’s no way in? “If there was,” he says with an ugly grin, “we’d have found it.” He says I have to go up Bifrost. “You have Her Ladyship’s mark on you, they’ll let you in. They’ll not like it, but you’ll get by.” He calls Hel “Her Ladyship” or “fair cousin”. So I go back to Midgard tonight.

The fire giants tell me that wherever I go, a blast of cold air follows me, and I assume that’s a wind from our world leaking through. They don’t like to stand too close to me. And I found out from Surt that he is not technically related to the Iron Wood clan—he’s Loki’s godfather, and that of his children. He
says Loki was born here, although he won’t say why. Perhaps his ma knew he would be a fire spirit. Maybe being born here did it to him.

Things I’ve learned about superimposing worlds:

Distances are deceiving, especially in the dark, where the second world shows up clearer. I keep trying to go right instead of left from the hermitage because there is a path there in the second world—both Midgard and Mirkwood. You can only go down paths that appear in both worlds. You can force two paths together magically—Raido works good for that—but if they’re too far apart you feel like you’re leaning over sideways as you walk.

Time is deceiving. Things take too little or too much time. It gets distorted. After dark it gets worse, because you don’t have a sun to watch. Rainy days are bad too.

You bring a little of your own world through, and people can feel it and smell it. It may creep them out.
Muspellheim is the Land of Fire. It is one of the first two primal worlds created in a vortex around the World Tree, and the collision between Muspellheim and Niflheim—fire and water, fire and ice, heat and cold—created the energy that formed the basis for the other seven worlds.

Time and Seasons

There is no day or night in Muspellheim that the average traveler can understand. The Sun and Moon are entirely occluded by smoke, but the light of the fires creates a constant orangey-red sky, rather like Los Angeles at night but more colorful and brighter. The inhabitants actually do have a way of telling time and season, but they don’t explain that to outsiders. To the traveler, there may as well be no time or season. Muspellheim spins closest to our world, ironically, at the winter solstice.

Geography

To say that Muspellheim is the Burning Land is quite literal. A good percentage of it is molten lava rock, and much of the rest is constantly aflame. Attempting to fly over it from most of its borders is nearly impossible, due to the smoke and fumes and long distances where you don’t dare land anywhere. The general opinion is that unless you are a fire-etin, Muspellheim is uninhabited and uninhabitable, and no one can journey there anyway.
There is, however, a small portion of the Fiery Realm—perhaps less than a twentieth—where human beings can walk around, with caution. It is the small part of Muspellheim that is coastline; there are beaches of black sand and lava rocks, and bubbling hot springs, and holes in the earth where small fires spring up. Here the fire-etins keep their homes—huts made of shiny black rocks piled and melted together—and they use their human forms here. They are perfectly capable of traveling anywhere else in their world in fiery form, and indeed fire-giants all seem to be more comfortable in fire-form than flesh-form.

The beaches of the Land of Fire are all a long way from any solid border (such as the Myrkwood or the mountainous gates of Svartalfheim), which provides a natural barrier for overflying enemies and spies. Having to cross hundreds of miles of choking smoke, leaping flame, toxic fumes, and devastating heat generally discourages even the most sturdy of flyers. Should anyone make it to the coastal area and actually give in to the temptation to land, they will find that it is well guarded. This is the area of Surt’s court, and nothing breathes along that narrow stretch of black beach that he doesn’t know about. Generally the fire-giants will be surrounding you and demanding to know your business within minutes, and if they don’t like your answer, they will eat you. In other words, don’t go there without an appointment with Surt or Sinmora.

The two largest and most impressive structures in the coastal area of Muspellheim—in fact, in all of Muspellheim—are Surt’s manor and Naglfari. (Actually, I’m told by the fire-giants that there is a spot somewhere in the uninhabitable zone where they have been working for centuries on a huge spiral design of erupting lava fountains that stretches for a couple of miles, and that it’s a really beautiful thing to see, but of course nothing not born in Muspellheim could survive there.) Surt’s manor is carved entirely out of a single giant piece of black volcanic glass the size of several city blocks. It is round, with jutting projections like an iron crown, each of them a chimney over a hearth the size of my living room, belching white smoke. There have only been two such structures made, and his manor is the larger one. The smaller one is another giant piece of
black volcanic glass, this one with a spiral series of vaulted chambers cut into it, and it is an underground part of Elvidnir, Hel’s palace in Helheim, given as tribute by Surt to his godson’s daughter.

The stang of Muspellheim—and I know of only one—is the giant blackened half-burnt skull of some mammoth creature, mounted on a pole. It is within visual distance of Surt’s manor, in the semi-habitable zone, in the center of a pile of black sand.

Naglfari is the really impressive structure, however. It is a joint effort by Surt and Hel: a giant ship the size of a modern human suspension bridge, built entirely out of the finger- and toenails of the dead people who come to Helheim. It is a little more than half built, and it stands like a frighteningly immense white ghost ship against the stark black sands, directly on the water’s edge. The small black sea that laps against Muspellheim moves south over the edge of the world-spiral, and borders only on Helheim. There is talk of messengers who cross the waters, bringing the building materials over cupful by cupful, patiently incorporating them into the enormous ship, glued together with spittle and blood, and then they sail away into the blackness. Naglfari is the Nine-Worlds equivalent of the stockpile of nuclear weapons kept in reserve by two superpowers; each knows what the other has, and that they aren’t afraid to use it. Should Ragnarok be necessary—and no one that I spoke to, even the Jotnar, seemed to really want things to go that far—they will load Naglfari with all the legions of Helheim and as many Jotunfolk as they can crowd in, and sail on to battle ... and the opposing forces will most surely be outnumbered, if perhaps not outgunned.

Flora

None to speak of. Muspellheim borders on the Myrkwood, which is more properly a liminal space between the worlds, and there is vegetation there, but the Muspellheim side of the Myrkwood is full of charred trees.
Fauna

There are animals in Muspellheim besides the fire-etins, but little is known about them. There have been sightings of reptilian creatures that crawl through lava-hot mud, varying in size from a couple of inches long to something the size of a city bus. The fire-etins do hunt and eat some kind of animal; there are charred bones around to prove it, but discussing their diets might be considered impolite.

Cautions

Burns, obviously. Clothing and gear should be marked with spells or bind runes of nonflammability. Bring a salve of healing herbs—houseleek, calendula, and plantain are good—charged with healing energy, but expect to wake up with some amount of blistering anyway. Heatstroke is also a problem—bring a lot of water, perhaps marked with the Isa rune. It is said that the best water to bring to Muspellheim is melted snow from Niflheim.

Residents

The fire-etins are territorial, and curt and abrupt with outsiders. They take offense fairly easily, and react in an appropriately fiery manner. It is best not to travel there without first getting permission. While they are slightly more civilized than the roughest frost-thurses of Niflheim, that really only means that they might actually ask you your business and wait for an unsatisfactory reply before eating you.

In their human form, they stand six to eight feet tall, and their skins are usually blackened with soot. When they flip to their fiery forms, the soot is shaken off, and so you can see them with unblackened skin for a little while after they change back. They wear very little clothing—usually just a tunic or loincloth of some sort of tanned reptile skin—and there seems to be no clothing difference between males and females. Many simply go naked all the time, although they will put on Jotunheim-style
clothing when leaving home. In their fiery form, they are like great pillars of fire, or shooting balls of sparks, or coal-glowing shapes, sometimes vaguely humanoid-shaped and sometimes not. They can fling fireballs a good way, so running away from them is not recommended, nor is attempting to fly in. Like all etins, they are cannibals, and are not averse to eating visitors. Unlike other etins, they eat all their food cooked ... because they can cook it in a matter of seconds.

Fire-etins are generally cheerful and wild, except when they are being suspicious and cautious. In fact, if they are subdued, you’re probably in trouble. They dance wildly, laugh loudly—even while fighting—and fight as fiercely as a raging fire. They have infectious laughter and love to shoot sparks, competing with each other to create fireworks that illustrate their moods. They are the most confident and courageous of etins, and they always laugh during battle. Fire-etins build buildings out of black volcanic stone rather than simply hewing rough caves in mountainsides, and they do some relatively complex handcrafting. That includes some of their own metalworking, but for the more intricate and delicate things they trade with the Duergar, who are the undisputed masters of forging.

The Lord of all fire-etins is Surt the Black, the oldest Jotun still living, and the Lady is Sinmora. In the Eddas, it is said that Surt was there guarding Muspellheim long before Ymir and Audumhla broke from the ice. As such, Surt is the oldest living being in the Nine Worlds. Surt is rather short for a fire-etin, which shows his great age—not that they get shorter with age, but more that the younger generations are taller. His manners are more courtly than the average fire-etin, and his wrath is a little more controlled. He is very intelligent, although he has on occasion acted less so in order to gull visitors into making rude comments, and thus having a reason to fry and eat them. He is not to be underestimated. Surt has a close relationship with (and a great respect for) Hela, with whom he is building Naglfari as a joint project. He has said that he is Loki’s godfather, and that Laufey came to Muspellheim to give birth to him, and that she lay in Surt’s biggest fireplace to bring him forth.
Fire-etins are useful for learning to work with fire—well, obviously. They can help you with learning to make fire from an older method, such as tinder and flint, and with deciphering the subtleties of the rune Kano/Kaunaz/Ken, and with learning to heat your body with your own energy. They are very good for people who tend to throttle their aggression to the point where they get stepped on; they can help folk get in touch with their inner fire. They are also good for people suffering from burnout, who have lost enthusiasm for life. Their courage and confidence is contagious, almost to the point of blind enthusiasm, but it’s a nice change for the tired and cynical.

Offerings

Food that they wouldn’t normally get—raw fruits and vegetables, especially if they are full of juice, like citrus. Don’t comment if they cook or char food offerings that we tend to eat raw. Whole grains and ale poured into a fire is another good offering. Ari writes: “Fire giants love to be sung to, and they can get some pretty complex background harmonies going. Actually, all Jotnar love to be sung to. Singing is one of the best gifts you can give them, which means that musicians like me are generally expected to trot our stuff out and perform for them whenever we show up.”

One note of warning: If they offer you some cooked food to eat, take it and eat it. Don’t ask what it is. Don’t refuse it; if you are squeamish you shouldn’t be there. Even if it’s strange charred meat, eat it anyway. They aren’t trying to poison you, they’re offering hospitality, and even a vegetarian can eat noncorporeal meat while journeying. Occasionally, anyway.
Day 3, Asgard

“I have learned kingship on borrowed thrones.”

I entered Midgard again in the morning, as it was obvious that I was going to have to use Bifrost. After cleaning and showering in cold water, I walked back to the area where I’d met Cadgar before ... recognizable because of the large squarish rock formations jutting up from the sides of the road. He was in the yard of the inn, and I called him over; he came willingly enough. I still didn’t quite trust him—in spite of his friendliness there was an air of “user” about him—but I figured that he’d be the one to tell me where Bifrost touched ground. I shared my breakfast with him, and paid him a coin to guide me to Bifrost. Tannin and the Tashlins had magicked those hand-forged silver coins to seem irresistible to anyone who saw them, and he agreed quite willingly.

It took about half an hour to walk to the place—I used the Ehwaz runespell to speed our path, which impressed him—and then we came to an open field
which I lined up with our field. The place he led me to ended up being next to the poles and lines of the former wedding pavilion. “This is it,” he said. I was confused, but then I realized that Bifrost wasn’t exactly a permanent structure. “You have to call for it,” he said.

So I scattered the rest of my cereal on the ground and shouted to all the birds that fly between Midgard and Asgard to come and take it as an offering, and tell them that I was coming. Eadgar looked at me with huge, horrified eyes. Well, if there was no sneaking in, then it made no sense to be shy. At any rate, as I stood there, something mind-boggling occurred. In my home world, a bloody big bird flew right over the field—I’m guessing it was an eagle from the splayed wing tips—and simultaneously in Midgard, Bifrost came swooping out of the sky, following the eagle’s flight—and stopped on the earth not six feet in front of me. All I could do was stand there with my mouth open. I’ve never seen such an impressive double-world special effect before.

Anyway, I shouldered Bag and went to climb it, but it was slippery. My feet wouldn’t stick to it.
turned to ask Eadgar if this was normal, but he’d taken off. I looked back at the inaccessible Bifrost, still waiting ... a big old fuck-you. So I sat down on the ground and cast runes on the Asgard section of the magic cloak. They said that I should call the dead to help me. But the dead are down below, in Helheim, yes? Not necessarily. There are dead in Asgard as well. I doubt anyone in Valhalla will aid me, but Sessrumnir ... I remembered that Freya took a percentage of the dead warriors; that’s her bargain with Odin. That included warriors who were female, and, I expect, neither—considering that Freya likes sissy boys in skirts, and they wouldn’t be exactly be welcome in Valhalla. So I called out to Freya and told her that I am the speaker for the third gender dead, and if she has any that would like their stories told, she should send them down to fetch me.

And it worked. In a minute or two I saw two figures coming down the bridge towards me. As they approached, I saw that they are both wearing old-fashioned uniforms, in styles that I am too ignorant to place. They were both women, although they were both very butch and one looked entirely like a young,
beardless man. The slightly more feminine (and I do mean slightly) one gave me a hand to shake and said her name was Kay. The other one named him/herself Marc, with a grin. I asked if they would bring me up, and Kay told me to close my eyes and start walking. As I closed my eyes, I felt each of them lock on to one of my arms with an iron grip. I expected my foot to fall on an upward plane, but it fell on something solid and seemingly horizontal. We kept walking, and then I felt grass underfoot, and opened my eyes... and everything was golden and we were in Asgard. I turned to look and there was no Bifrost behind me, just a high sheer cliff and clouds.

Standing in front of me was someone who I guessed was probably a god, with an annoyed expression on his face. He was flanked by guards, and I guessed that this was Heimdall, or Sharpeye as the giants called him. “Who are you?” he asked, looking a bit disgruntled. Kay and Marc, next to me, were silent.

I held out my arm and showed my tattoo. “I am Hel’s own, and Odin has asked to see me.” He
frowned and looked disbelieving. “Who are you that you should be allowed to enter Asgard?” he asked.

I was suddenly very tired of this, and I smelled a test, “I am the Dreamer whose dreams come true,” I threw back at him, not knowing if that would help.

He looked at me for a minute, unreadable, and then he said, “You may enter. But you will build no anchors into this world. You are here on our sufferance, not under your own power.” OK, so no cairn anchors for Asgard. I told Kay and Mark that I would see them tonight at Sessrumnir, and I went off to find Gladsheim.

It has a roof that is actually glittering golden hay, with what seemed to be a giant goat (or more than one) grazing on it. I knocked on the door and told the doorkeeper that I was there to see Odin. I was shown in with no fanfare. Yes, he was expecting me. I got the feeling that the Bifrost incident was a test of my mettle, to see if I was good enough to get in by myself.

Odin is a shapeshanger, so I expect the form that he showed me—fortyish, lean, dark hair past his shoulders, dark beard close-trimmed, silvering at the
temples—was merely one of many faces he can put on. (In fact, I got the idea that it had been donned in order to show me something.) Tall, but not broad. Keen gray-blue eye, the other one covered by a patch. He asked me to serve him a drink, and after a bit of fumbling I managed to bring him a cup of the pomegranate mead. He asked me what I thought I needed to know about being a shaman-king. I told him there was likely so much I needed to know that I would gladly take any lesson he taught me. He gave me a lesson on humility and arrogance. The first part I won’t describe, because it’s personal, but I’ll try to describe the point.

I had to go to the privy, and instead of simply letting me go, he escorted me there, and stood outside the doorway, talking about his year living in skirts with Freya. “I trusted her to be ruthless with me,” he said. He seemed to feel I needed to know about that.

“I know what you really want,” he said. “You want to know how to make them respect you, even when you are doing the humiliating things that come with the shaman’s job.” And he taught me that a shaman-king must have utter arrogance and utter humility, both at
once simultaneously. “When you are playing with people’s lives, that is when you must have utter humility,” he said. Then he showed me when it was right to have utter arrogance... when you were doing some shamanic contortion, some spiritual gyration, that would look absolutely mad to an onlooker. It’s at that time that you have to be completely arrogant, to show that no matter how bizarre your actions look, you have absolute faith in their rightness, and your decision to do them.

“Can you be arrogant now?” he asked as he forced me to publicly do a difficult thing. I can still hear his tone of voice; it was not mocking, but serious: that moment was the time for being arrogant, for holding my head high.

So I got up with all the arrogance I could muster, and I followed him back to Gladsheim with my head high, and there we had the second half of the lesson. He had me sit on his throne, and he paced back and forth in front of me, throwing challenges that someone might make to a king. “Why should I respect you when you (insert deviant behavior)?” I answered as best I could, which was all wrong at first. “I do X
because...” Wrong answer. “Let me explain...” Wrong answer. “It shouldn’t matter that I do X, as long as I do Y.” Wrong answer. “You should respect me because I do Y.” Nope, complete evasion incorrect as well, as was anything involving justifying or explaining. I finally started to get the hang of it—the right answer is the one that subtly challenges their biases, and will not allow them to think further on the subject without confronting them. Example: Q: Why should I respect you as a leader when you do X? A: Do you consider yourself to be a freethinking individual who doesn’t slavishly follow unquestioned programming? Really? How can you say that when the only sort of leader you seem comfortable with is one who puts appearances over integrity, who would rather kowtow to stereotypes than challenge them? Clumsy example, but he finally let me down off that throne where I felt like a kid kicking his heels in a grownup’s chair. I don’t know how many mortals have been honored in that way, but I’m sure none were more relieved to leave it.

I scored a point, though, afterwards. Outside of Gladsheim, I brought out the golden ship that Bella
had sent with me, our wedding centerpiece. She had
told me that I could use it magically to cross water, if
I needed to. Immediately half a dozen Aesir,
including Odin, tried to pressure me into giving it to
them as an offering. I thought fast and told them it
belonged to my wife, which considering that she built
it and brought it out to me, wasn’t a lie. Odin made
some comment about husband and wife being one and
sharing property, so therefore it was all right. I
thought fast again and told him that I was on the way
to his wife’s hall next, and that if Frigga said that it
was all right for a husband to dispose of his wife’s
property against her will, then I would give him the
boat. He rolled his eyes and said that it was clear I
was descended from Loki, and dropped it.

So off to Fensalir, which is white-painted and
surrounded by birch trees, golden in the autumn. I
walked across a carpet of falling birch leaves to get
there. Waiting in Frigga’s hall, one of her
handmaidens—I don’t know her name, but she wore
white clothing—looked at my tattoo and said that it
looked bad. Actually, what she said was, “That was
cruelly done.” I got the feeling that she didn’t
disapprove of the tattoo itself so much as my being forced to go wandering while it was so fresh, and the fact that my body was having trouble with it. She blessed my little pot of lotion, and a couple of applications later, it didn’t hurt nearly as bad.

I offered to sit and spin with the women—I had brought my yarn and spindles—and they shared some good-humored giggles about the mortal man in a skirt who was offering to do women’s work with them. I told them that to imply that women’s work was beneath me would be to call women inferior, and I was not willing to do that. This brought on more giggles, but they allowed me to sit and spin with them.

Frigga is tall and elegant and has a kind of dignified graciousness that Martha Stewart could only wish for. I begged a boon of her—to help Bella to better understand and come to terms with her queenship duties. In return, she asked that I send her news of her son, once I got to Helheim. “A great light went out of my life when he was taken,” she said. She took the skein of yarn that I’d spun in her hall and did something to it, and told me that I should write her a letter with the news, tie it up in the skein, and
burn it, and the smoke would rise from Helheim to Asgard and she would be able to read it.

Then I went to Iduna’s cottage. Iduna is the plainest of all the Aesir goddesses—a big farm girl with dirty hands from working in the earth—and she gave me an apple tree root to make into a rune-stave for Allyson. She ate lunch with me and shared my fruit, although she commented that outworld fruit was strange-tasting. Then I went to Sessrumnir, where I played guitar and sang for people until moonrise. Kay and Marc came and sat near me. They told me snatches of their stories—disguising themselves as men and going into the military—but I was never clear on what country they were from and fought for (it wasn’t America) or what year they were born in (it wasn’t the 20th century). I wish I could research it, but I’m not sure where to start looking for stories about passing-women in Europe more than a hundred years ago.

When the moon came up, I went crashing through the woods looking for the Well of the Norns. It took a long time, and it finally lined up with the pool by the bridge. I threw in three coins, and they came, robed in black. I asked them to speak my wyrd, and they did.
(Always trying for a glimpse of my own file!) No, I will not write it here.

The next morning, I ate breakfast in Sessrumnir, trying to be unobtrusive. I was strangely reluctant to leave, less because I wanted to stay, and more because I just felt uneasy. “You’re stalling,” Kay commented, and she was right. I finally got my things together and moved between worlds to Alfheim, with a strange dread in the pit of my belly.
Asgard is the highest world in Yggdrasil, the home of the Aesir gods. It is known variously as the White Kingdom, the Golden Kingdom, etc. by those races in the other worlds. Located at the top of Yggdrasil, it is an artificially-created armed camp, probably the most well-guarded world of the Nine. No one gets in or out without an appointment, unless they have prior permission from the Aesir. It was created after the Aesir-Vanir war as a place that the Aesir could live unmolested by any other race. Before the war, the Aesir supposedly lived somewhere referred to as Manheimur, the location of which is unclear. Some personal gnosis on the matter was that it was the same area as Asgard, but was still a scattered village rather than an armed encampment, and that only after the war did its focus become one of warcraft and of developing the culture of the Aesir.

Asgard was carved out of the neckbones of Ymir by the brothers Odin, Vili, and Ve in their great task of worldmaking. The great wall around it was demolished by the Vanir during the war between the two races. It was later repaired, but not by the Aesir; they hired a great frost-etin, Hrimthurs, to build it for them. With the aid of his magic draft-horse, Svadilfari, he did do, but his price—the hand of the Vanir goddess Freyja—was not met. Odin promised him Freyja if he could get Asgard finished before summer’s end, and then promptly hired Loki to mess up and delay the work so that Hrimthurs would not have to be paid. When the giant discovered how he had been duped, he flew into a rage, which then gave Thor an excuse to kill him. His dead body was changed into a standing stone at the border of Asgard, but the beauty of the city’s white walls is a mute testimony to the work of this wronged giant.
Time and Seasons:

Asgard’s year is similar to that of Midgard, but somewhat longer. There is a regular turn of the four seasons, and the plants change appropriately. The days lengthen and shorten with the turn of the year, but unevenly—the summer solstice days are very long and bright, but the winter nights are not equally long. This means that Asgard is always fairly warm, the warmest of worlds other than burning Muspellheim. Its position in the top of the World Tree, and its favored spot in Sunna’s travels, make it the brightest and sunniest as well. There is little rainfall unless Thor makes it happen, which accounts for some of his great importance in the workings of Asgard.

While Asgard seems to have the sort of warm, dry, mild weather that would make it the most pleasant vacation climate in the Nine Worlds, its heat and dryness (and the mild but still chilly winters with little snow) does not lend itself to wide-scale agriculture. There is a good deal of gardening—the goddess Iduna is largely in charge of that—and orchards, but nearly all of the agricultural products used in Asgard are imported from Vanaheim, as part of their hostage deal with Frey and Freya. Asgard lacks the wet lushness of Vanaheim, and it is said that Freya’s first winter and spring in Asgard found her weeping at the lack of the spring flowers that she was used to. Her tears fell and became snowdrops, one of the few spring flowers now common in the White Realm.

Asgard spins closest to our world at Litha, the Summer Solstice.

Geography:

Asgard is the smallest world of the Nine, and the Aesir are the race with the smallest numbers. (Still, when you are there, it seems immense.) It was created not to house millions, but to be a pinnacle of both beauty and defensive capability, looking down from the height of the World Tree onto the other worlds. Its geography is largely rolling hills and valleys, with a few flat plains, and one mountain range far to the north. The Vanaheim
Ocean borders on its western coast, with a great bay, largely given over to Njord and his ships. The Thund Thvitr river, huge and deep, surrounds the remainder of its borders, running along the northern mountains of Jotunheim and dividing the two worlds, then bordering Alfheim in the south and rejoining the ocean again.

The Thund Thvitr is not only so deep that it is said that only Thor can cross it with relative safety, it is heavily enchanted. It will rise up against anyone who tries to cross it, unless they are a denizen of Asgard or have an appointment there. No boat will reach its far side unless the Aesir will it so, and it will rise and flood its borders at a word from them. The tumbling whitewater river has swallowed many bodies of ambitious Jotnar who decided to cross it and attack the White Realm. The Alfar have never cared even to try; getting appointments into Asgard is much easier for them, as they are allies of the Aesir. (However, there is a good deal of expected diplomatic traffic in and out of Asgard.) The Vanaheim Ocean obeys the commands of the Vanir and the sea-etins, right up to within several miles of the Asgard coast, but the Vanir would never allow a Jotun invasion of Asgard by sea, due to their alliance oaths.

The white walls of Asgard are huge and impressive, gleaming in the sun; a great ring around the entire world, just a quarter mile inland from the coast and the riverside. The walls, too, will belch flames half a mile high as a defense against flying enemies. The great main gate is called Valgrind and is bound in iron, ten times the height of a man. Rather than having specific cities, Asgard is organized around various halls and their courts. None of them are more than a day’s ride apart—this is a not a large world—and some, such as Gladsheim, Fensalir, Valaskjalf, and Valhalla, are right next to each other in a combination that some folk might mistake for a city. There are sixteen major halls in Asgard that are known to us, as well as a multitude of small halls belonging to minor deities that satellite around the major ones.

The plain of Vigrid is the largest and emptiest part of this world. Nothing grows there and no one lives there. It is a hundred and twenty leagues wide, an enormous patch of brown dust on one end of the Golden
World. This is the future battlefield for the possible Ragnarok, and the Aesir have put a great deal of time and effort into laying battle enchantments on it, in order to further their chances of winning against Hela’s infinite troops. The layers of battle-magic have grown so thick there that nothing can grow or live for long, and visitors are advised to avoid it and observe only from a distance.

There are two small “pocket-realms” that float above Asgard, called Andlang and Vidblain. They mostly seem to be high-class “summer vacation spots” for the upper-class Alfar, which the Aesir may rent to them. Little is known about them except that mortals are not allowed there.

One of the things that the traveler will instantly note about Asgard is the great number of birds here. It seems as if birds, of all sorts, are the most profligate form of fauna, and that is actually correct. The skies and trees and rooftops are often full of them, and be assured that some, if not all, are the eyes and ears of some deity. Bringing crumbs and feeding them is a lucky thing to do.

Residents: The Aesir

While not every deity or wight in Asgard is Aesir-blooded, most of them are of the lineage of this famous tribe of Gods. There are many halls in Asgard; most of the main ones are listed in the lay of Grimnismal, but there are many smaller ones satelliting around them. For example, some of Frigga’s handmaidens abide with her in Fensalir while others have their own smaller halls a short distance away and merely work at Fensalir.

Unless you have made an appointment—which can consist of making an offering to a deity before you leave and then doing a divination to find out if it was accepted—it is best not to walk up to a hall and attempt to invite yourself in. These halls generally have doorkeepers, although if you are expected you may not see them. They are there to keep people out; please remember that a God’s hall is their home, and not a Disney tourist attraction for you to wander through. Be as courteous as you would to any
important person whose home you had never visited. Bring a gift, if possible.

When dealing with the denizens of Asgard, it is best to be as upfront as possible. Thoughts, emotions, actions and motivations, especially from a human, had best be in alignment. Deception of any sort will generally go badly for the mortal in question. They will be respectful and hospitable to those human god-servants who journey forth to Asgard on business for their respective Deities, but hospitality is a virtue highly prized by the Aesir, and this includes the hospitality a guest shows to his or her host. Visitors may in fact be judged by the depth of their hospitality.

It is nearly impossible to bring a gift equal to the wealth and beauty of Asgard. Natives, however, value creativity and have a well defined sense of the aesthetic. Crafts, well made weapons, books (surprisingly) all make very good gifts. While they will appreciate bardic offerings and stories, do not boast of your deeds outside the bounds of truth. They do not take kindly to mortal liars and braggarts.

Places in Asgard

Bifrost

The only way in or out of Asgard from another of the worlds, for mortal spirit-workers anyway, is Bifrost the Rainbow Bridge. (It is also possible to be brought straight into some place in Asgard as soon as you start journeying, but you can bet that if this happens, you have the implicit or explicit permission of one of the regular residents to be there. Nobody gets in or out of this well-guarded province without attention.) Bifrost is not a permanent structure; it is generated by magic from a single point in Asgard, a particular tall white crag that forms part of the walls. When the Aesir have a reason to generate and drop the great rainbow, they do it—for the Dead that are welcomed in, or honored guests of any sort. The rest of
the time, that point is marked by Heimdall’s hall, Himinbjorg, which will be the first thing passed by any traveler across Bifrost.

**Himinbjorg**

Heimdall’s hall, Himinbjorg, is situated at the top of Bifrost, the Rainbow Bridge. He is the guardian of Bifrost and lets no one through. Heimdall is Odin’s son by one of Aegir and Ran’s nine daughters, although he does not get along with his maternal folk and is fanatically loyal to his father. Heimdall is tall and handsome with piercing blue eyes, generally wears shining white armor and carries an impressive sword, and his teeth are entirely covered with gold and flash in the sun. We tend to associate golden teeth with replacements for rot, but Heimdall’s are gold largely for ornamentation.

Himinbjorg is painted the blue of the sky, with shining windows and a white roof that looks as if it is made of clouds. The great horn, Gjallarhorn, sits beside the doorstep. It is an enormous horn, taller than a man or even a giant. When blown loudly, its blast can be heard throughout the Nine Worlds. Heimdall will blow a soft blast on it when gods and particularly honored visitors arrive via Bifrost, as a way of announcing their presence. Heimdall’s horse Gulltop (Gold-Fringe) grazes behind the hall. For some reason, Heimdall does not like riding much, and only rides Gulltop on ceremonial occasions.

The Jotnar refer to Heimdall as “Sharp-Eye” (and by a few other choice names) and it is true that he has exceptionally keen senses of sight and hearing, which is why he is chosen to be the divine gate-guard. He has sacrificed an ear to Mimir’s Well in exchange for exceptionally heightened senses, just as Odin sacrificed an eye for wisdom. When Heimdall was born, Odin sent him in the form of a mortal child in a boat to Midgard, where he washed up on the coast of Aurvanga-land. He was raised as a mortal, although with godlike gifts that he used to make himself a king when he came to adulthood, and sired many children. Just before death, he had his dying body placed into a boat and sent out across the waters to Vanaheim,
where Odin rescued him, cleansed him of mortal flesh and made him into a young god once more. It is unclear as to whether the whole episode was arranged by Odin to get more of his own blood into the humans of Midgard or to give his new son some sympathy for Midgard’s people, or both.

Either way, it worked. Heimdall is especially fond of the mortal folk of Midgard, and is very protective of them. He will extend that fondness to a certain extent to mortals of our own world, if they seem similar to those of Midgard. He is especially fond of young men, and will counsel them if they seem in need of it. He dislikes the Jotnar even more than Thor, and that includes humans with Jotnar bloodlines.

If you try to get to Asgard via the Rainbow Bridge, it is Heimdall who will decide whether or not you can pass. He doesn’t let just anyone in; generally you have to have an appointment with a certain deity, or you have to have already visited Asgard in some other way (and not caused any trouble), or you had better convince him that you are a sincere worshipper of the Aesir and want nothing more than to bask in their presence. Whatever you do, don’t offer him money or any gift as a means to entry, and that includes gifting him after he lets you in. He will see it as a bribe, and become very offended, and it is likely that you will be bounced out right quickly. Heimdall prides himself on being unbribable, and so he is. His devotion to his job is unshakable. If you wish to gift him for other reasons, wait until he is off duty and seek him out.

**Valhalla**

Valhalla is the most famous hall in Northern history. It is the home of the Einherjar, Odin’s chosen who fall in battle. Its timbers are giant spear-shafts, and it is roofed with a dazzling array of many-colored battle shields. The carved figure of a wolf guards the western door, and the figure of an eagle the eastern one. Inside, it has five hundred and forty doors, and behind each door are rooms for eight hundred warriors. While Valhalla is
by no means full, it does have enough people for a small city, populated entirely with the Dead.

The Einherjar spend their time feasting, fighting with each other for practice (being dead, if they fall, they are immediately revived to do it again), drinking, and being generally entertained. They are rowdy, boisterous, and often drunk. If you like the idea of hanging out with hundreds of drunken jocks whose idea of a good time is spitting each other on spears for fun, go ahead; they will welcome any visitor, especially if he has a story to tell. However, be careful to stay sober and not insult any of them, and don’t enter fighting contests. Not only are they likely better than you, having little to do but practice fighting, but you are a mortal and can be killed while they are already dead.

On the roof of Valhalla, you may see an enormous goat and an even bigger stag, wandering around grazing on the thatched roof as if it is a field. The she-goat’s name is Heidrun, and she is milked twice daily. Her udders are enchanted to produce wine from one teat and beer from the other, as a way to get more liquor into the endless gullets of the Einherjar. The stag on the roof is named Eikthrynir (Oak Thorn), and with its goatish companion, it continually nibbles on the exposed bark of the enormous tree that grows up beside the roof. The tree is named Laerad, and it is a sucker-sapling of the World Tree.

The main route into the hall is through the great double doors, but they are of course heavily guarded. A back way into Valhalla is through the kitchen, where the cook Andhrimmer works. If you ask for help, he may give you a task in the scullery, and after a hard day’s work you may be allowed to serve in the hall upstairs. Andhrimmer has a giant magical kettle, Eldhrimmer, in which he cooks the stew for the million starving warriors upstairs. One enormous resurrecting boar, Saehrimmer, is slaughtered every night for the feast and revived again the next morning with no memory of what happened.

The employees of Valhalla are Odin’s Valkyries. All are tall, strong, fierce women who are sometimes referred to as “shield-maidens” or “corpse-goddesses”. They can change into various birds such as ravens and
swans, and are usually dressed in armor when on duty. Their first duty is to pick up anyone fallen in battle that Odin feels is appropriate, meaning that they are worthy of being in his troops, and they are his rightful territory. They are also tough enough to keep all those dead sword-jocks in line, and make sure that the fighting does not stray over outside of Valhalla’s borders.

Be extremely respectful to any Valkyries you may encounter. Despite the fact that they may not be armed for war while in Odin’s hall—though they may, enjoying battle practice as much as the men—they are warriors and living extensions of Odin’s will. Insult them, particularly by denigrating their battle skills on the basis of gender, and it may well be the last insult you ever offer anyone. They are valued far more by Odin than most of his mortal warriors, and it is unlikely that the average mortal will be met warmly by them at first.

The Valkyries who are in charge of making sure that the Einherjar get fed are named Herfjotur, Goll, Geirahod, Geirdriful, Geirolu, Geirromul, Geirrondu, Geirsigull, Geiravor, and Skeggjold. Two more, Hrist and Mist, are Odin’s personal dinner-servants and serve only him. The three most important Valkyries are Gondul, Hildr, and Skogul, who are in charge of deciding which warriors get taken on the battlefield. The three of them tend not to ride straight onto the field; they are generals who watch from the sky. They are mistresses of war magic, and can be invoked for aid and to teach battle-galdr. They will only teach those who are sworn to Odin, however (unless he instructs them to teach someone else), so don’t bother them unless you are willing to make that commitment. One may also encounter human women who are claimed by Odin as his Valkyries and who occasionally visit Valhalla as well.

Second in command of decision-making are Gunnr and Rota, Valkyries who ride out on the battlefield and do the work of their commanders. They are sometimes accompanied by Skuld, the third Norn. Skuld’s task seems to be one of both witnessing and veto power; the implication is that she represents and protects the interests of Fate, and will step in if she disagrees with the decisions of the Valkyries. (Other random Valkyries that
we know of are called Halmthrimull, Herja, Hervor, Hildeberg, Hjorthrimul, Holukk, Hrund, Kara, Kreimhildr, Olrun, Ragridr, Rangnid, Reginleif, Sanngridr, Sigdrifa, Sigrun, Skamold, Svava, Svanhvit, Sveid, Svipull, Tanngnidr, Thogn, and Thrima.) Eir occasionally rides with the Valkyries as well, though her function seems to be that of a battlefield healer; she may bring a merciful death to some of the fallen.

Odin himself often visits Valhalla, dressed in full battle panoply and with his terrifying Grimnir aspect very close to the surface. It goes without saying that the Einherjar are all fanatically loyal to him and cheer his entry, and compete to serve him. Odin’s magical spear is called Gungnir, and when he throws it over the heads of an army, it means that they are going to lose the battle. When he enters Valhalla, Gungnir is hung over the outside doorway, as a sign that he is within.

If you manage to be in Asgard for Yule, you might get a chance to see, or even participate in, the Asgardsreia. This is a Wild Hunt with Odin at the helm, followed by various mounted gods, wights, and some of the dead of Valhalla, hooting and screaming across the sky. The Asgardsreia flies over various worlds, but generally ends up tearing across Midgard and spooking the hapless inhabitants there. The Hunt may stop at various villages and demand food and drink, which will be provided by the terrified villagers. However, there is a purpose to this wild ride beyond just a mere frat-house-style prank. Many of the folk of Midgard have honored dead in Valhalla, and they consider it a blessing to see their dead husbands, sons, and ancestors riding with the Asgardsreia. Most will turn out in spite of their fright in order to catch a possible glimpse of their dead, and give them food and drink as offerings.

The hunt may also ride to claim unwary mortals whom they encounter in their wild ride, and to wreak vengeance on those who have wrought great offense to the All-Father. Occasionally they will ride to gather the soul of a great warrior who did not die in battle, or one whom Woden wishes to bring to Valhalla to join his troops. This however, is rare.
Gladsheim and Valaskjalf

Located on the plain of Idavoll (“Field of Tides”) in the center of Asgard stands Gladsheim (“Hall of Joy”), the inner sanctuary of Asgard. Its roof is thatched with gold, and at the end of the hall is a great tower covered in silver called Valaskjalf. Idavoll is a rolling plain usually covered in silvery grasses; the winds blowing across it do make it resemble the ocean, and thus its fanciful name. Valhalla is close by, visible easily from Gladsheim’s doorway.

The enormous golden roof is actually made of some sort of grass-thatch that glitters magically like metallic gold. Inside, feast tables are often spread, or else chairs are set up for meetings. This is divine territory, the ceremonial feast-hall of all the Aesir. At any given supper, several of them will be present, though almost never all of them; they are busy people. Odin often sees visitors here; in fact, if you have an appointment with him, this is the place to report, unless directed otherwise. His enormous and elaborately-carved throne rises at one end of the room, although unless it is during a feast or a formal occasion, he is more likely to be hanging out by the fire, chatting with friends.

There are other thrones up and down the room, between more normal chairs; each belongs to one of the Gods who has a voice on the Council of Asgard—Frigga, Thor, Sif, Tyr, Njord, Frey, Freya, Skadi, Bragi, Iduna, Heimdall, and Ullr. Other Gods may have influence, but their words generally have to go through one of these deities in order to be heard in council. It is not difficult to figure out whose throne is whose when they are empty—Freya’s is wreathed in flowers even in the winter; Skadi’s bears a white wolfskin, and so on.

The mascot of Gladsheim is an enormous horse named Falhofnir (Shaggy Forelock) who is ridden by Odin in ceremonial parades. Gullinkambi, one of the giant cockerels of the Nine Worlds whose job is to be a warning-siren for Ragnarok, likes to hang out on its roof.
Odin’s two pet wolves, Geri and Freki, lay at the foot of his throne and are thrown meat at dinner. There is some question as to whether they are actual wolves, magical wolf-spirits, or werewolf Jotnar who never taken human form, at least not where they can be seen. Odin’s two pet ravens, Huginn and Muninn, whose names mean Thought and Memory, can also sometimes be seen perching on his throne, when they are not off flying about to spy on the Nine Worlds for him. It is believed by some Odins-folk that Huginn and Muninn are a mated pair, male and female respectively, but no one ever gets close enough to verify this.

If you are invited to dinner at Gladsheim, be on your best behavior. Don’t get drunk. Offer to serve food and drink—the social customs here consider it an honor to serve your betters, so it’s not about reducing you to an insignificant waiter. Being allowed to pour a God a cup of drink and bring it to them is an honor; don’t forget that. If you can bring some kind of food offering as a gift, even better. The Gods sometimes debate things over dinner; if they ask you to testify, do so as honestly and objectively as possible. If they seem to want you to take sides, either side with your patron deity, if you have one—which they will all find appropriate—or if you don’t have one or they are not present (or don’t live in Asgard) try to stay neutral. Don’t argue, don’t get angry no matter what is said, don’t get involved in political scheming, and generally remain gracious and unflappable.

Valaskjalf, although it is attached to Gladsheim like the turret on a castle, is technically considered a separate hall. This is because although Gladsheim is used by all the Gods living in Asgard, Valaskjalf is Odin’s alone. Geri and Freki’s main job is to guard the tower door; they seem to have an instinct for when someone is approaching who wishes to enter it, and they will be up in a flash and growling at its gates. Do not try to pass them; they are authorized by Odin to use deadly force on anyone attempting to enter without permission. If you want to be using the Lord of Asgard’s personal watchtower, you had best take that up with him directly. (And the answer will generally be No.)
Valaskjalf is dizzyingly tall, made of silvery-white stone, and thatched with silver. In the top of the tower is Hlidskjalf, Odin’s great throne of watching. From this vantage point, he can look out a magically enchanted window/mirror and see much (but certainly not all) of the Nine Worlds. Some places, such as parts of Jotunheim, Muspellheim, and Niflheim, the underground areas of Nidavellir, and the entirety of Helheim behind the wall (Hela likes her privacy and can enforce it) are hidden from him. Still, if he cares to look, he can see much of what is happening in other places. His ravens, Huginn and Muninn, fly out from the tower frequently in order to bear messages and gather information.

Odin, the All-Father and Lord of Asgard, is a reasonably approachable God, but before you bother him, make sure that you have a good reason to do so. Generally, people approach him for his wisdom; he has a huge fund of knowledge on a staggering variety of subjects – leadership and kingship, diplomacy, community, warcraft, sacrifice, ordeals, altered states, and many sorts of magic. He is the ultimate expert on the Futhark runes, being as it was his suffering and sacrifice that brought them into the Nine Worlds, and eventually into our own. He is also a master of galdr-magic of all sorts, and has consulted many seers and studied the future intently.

Although he can be generous, he does not always give out his knowledge for free, or to those that he deems unready. The price on his training (unless it is set up for you by a patron deity, in which case it’s between them) is usually some kind of unspecified favor that he will call in some time in the future. If you are unattached to a deity, he may be interested in taking you on. Of all the Northern-Tradition Gods, Odin takes in the widest variety of folk, with the least judgment as to what sort of person you are socially. He will accept equally an angry lesbian from San Francisco and a neo-Nazi from Mississippi. It’s courage he looks for, not any particular set of beliefs, and he probably has more human servants than any other deity in these pantheons. His humans all tend to be fanatically loyal to him (including his various mortal wives), although many complain of too little personal attention—he is, after all, the ruler of Asgard and a
very busy man. This is something to remember when you seek him out –
don’t waste his precious time with whining or foolishness.

Odin is a shapeshifter, and can appear in various forms. They’ll usually
all be one-eyed, though, unless he is trying to look like a specific person.
Most people have seen him in either his white-bearded old man form, or a
younger and handsomer form of a man in his prime, but still piratically eye-
patched. He is famous for his charisma, which he can turn on and off at
will, and which has charmed many an unwary traveler. He is an excellent
speaker, able to sway most who listen, so be careful that he does not talk
you out of everything you own, including your free will.

Like many other deities, Odin has many heiti, or titles – from Alfathir
to Draugadrottin (Lord of Ghosts) to Gagnadr (Gainful Counselor) to
Grimmir (Masked One) to Jalkr (Eunuch). These all reflect the
multitudinous aspects to this complicated God’s nature. If you call him to
you by one of his heiti (assuming that he is willing to speak to you), you’ll
get the aspect of him described by that title. That’s the cosmic rule.
However, if you visit him in Asgard, you’ll get what he sees fit to give you.
Keep in mind that although he is brilliant and wise about many things, his
first priority is his people and their future, including being victorious at
Ragnarok. He is not above using anyone and anything if he feels that they
will further those goals, as long as he can do it without being overly
dishonorable. His people—and that includes both the Aesir and those
humans whose patron he is—come first with him, above the needs of
random travelers.

Another deity who may be found in Gladsheim—we currently do not
know the name or whereabouts of his hall, which may be deliberate on his
part—is Tyr, the Lord of Swords. He is Odin’s left hand—and he
sacrificed his own that Fenris might be bound. Tall, grim, and a superb
warrior, he is the God of Honor, and do not even bother to approach him
unless you take Honor very seriously. Although he is missing a hand, he is
no invalid, and can fight better one-handed than most folk can with two.
For those on the path of the honorable warrior, he is a good god to know,
although his standards are high and demanding.
Fensalir

Frigga’s hall Fensalir is whitewashed with a golden roof, echoing the birch trees that surround it. Birch is Frigga’s special tree, and the white trunks and yellow leaves in the fall match the graceful hall and its fine statuary. The lawns are dotted with golden chamomile, the plant called “Baldur’s Brow” in honor of her dead son. Behind Fensalir stretch the great fens that give the place its name, filled with the haunting calls of herons and the croaking of frogs.

The hall itself is large, with many smaller houses satelliting around it, which you pass on the way down the road to the great white door itself. Inside, however, it seems homely and bright, smelling of good food and drying herbs, every hearth a busy center of cooking, brewing, and making medicines. While most of the importance in Asgard seems to be centered around Valhalla and Gladsheim—at least for mortals who record such things—Fensalir is incredibly important to the functioning of this realm. It is the center of all small industry in Asgard.

We tend to associate industry with ugliness and pollution, but Asgard runs on what could be termed “home industry”, only on a divinely magical scale. Fensalir and its dozens of satellite halls include barns for caring for livestock, especially sheep, goats and poultry; great kitchens that preserve immense amounts of food; workshops full of folk skilled at many homely crafts; and halls for fiber arts including the vast looms that weave the fabric for the clothing of the Gods, which may be from wool, flax, or in the case of Frigga’s own spinning, the stuff of the clouds themselves.

Frigga, the Lady of the Aesir, is far more than merely some brood-consort of Odin. She is the most powerful woman in Asgard, and equal in counsel, as far as Odin is concerned, with Tyr, Thor, and Njord. Indeed, the position she holds is very much like that of prime minister to her king-husband. One of her attributes is that of frith-keeper; in this usage, “frith” refers to the kind of peace created when everything runs smoothly, everyone plays their part, and no one feels slighted or wronged by the part
of another. This kind of peacemaking is just as relevant to running a country as it is to running a household. Frigga is no decorative First Lady; she is a seer of great worth whose advice Odin takes seriously, the patron of marriage—and thus socially structured relationships—and the patron of all the works (crafts, cooking, etc.) that go into running a proper home, or stead, or village, or town, or country. Although she will not try for peace when it is clear that violence is coming, Frigga is an exceptional strategist and will seldom use force where strategy can prevail. That being said, Frigga is not to be trifled with in any way. She is quite formidable and the times when she has set her will against her husband’s, she has come out the victor every time.

Unless something important is happening at Gladsheim or Vingolf, Frigga is usually found at home in Fensalir, busy overseeing her various helpers. She is tall, lovely, and incredibly gracious, with the generosity of the most perfect hostess ever, but if you abuse her hospitality she is capable of turning icy-cold and showing you to the door with frigid politeness. She is very much a Queen, and rules Fensalir with a velvet-gloved iron hand.

Most of the smaller halls around Fensalir belong to Frigga’s handmaidens. How many of them exist, and what their names and attributes are, is a somewhat shifting list. The best personal gnosis information on them, and for that matter on Fensalir, Frigga, and its denizens, can be found in Alice Karlsdottir’s book *Magic of the Norse Goddesses* (RunaRaven Press, 2003), and we highly recommend this book as the best guide if you intend to have dealings in Fensalir. To cover all of the information Alice Karlsdottir has provided would not only take up too much space for this small guidebook, it would be reinventing the wheel. Instead, we will only touch on each of the known (and some of the little-known) of Frigga’s handmaidens, in case you run into them. Some have their own halls, while some prefer to hole up in Fensalir itself. One of them, Saga, has her own hall in an entirely different area of Asgard, and is described there, although she can sometimes be found at Fensalir. They are Frigga’s “captains”; besides them, there are dozens of other working folk, mostly women, under her command.
First of Frigga’s handmaidens is her sister Fulla, goddess of abundance, usually described as a buxom maiden with long golden hair. As the keeper of Frigga’s jewelry box, she has a special relationship with gems and precious stones. That she is the keeper of Frigga’s jewelry box is significant. The Lady of the House controls the wealth of the house, and the jewel box is symbolic of this. Human servants of Frigga who have gotten a glimpse inside the box maintain that it contains much more than temporal wealth alone, being a reservoir of power. Fulla is also the keeper of Frigga’s shoes, of which it is said that there are many pairs and they are all magical. She was also called Abundantia, and she wears a golden snood. Fulla lives in Fensalir itself and is very much the second-in-command when Frigga is busy. If you intend to visit Fensalir often, it might be good to get to know Fulla, as she may have good advice on how to handle the others in residence.

Probably the most important and most highly sought of Frigga’s women is Eir the Healer of the Aesir. She is usually described as dignified, practical, plain-looking, with an air of trustworthy competence; she might walk up to you and ask to see a wound in a private place and you would do it without worry, feeling secure that she will respond with useful, professional courtesy. She has a small but spacious house of her own among the satellite buildings of Fensalir, with herbs hanging from the ceilings and medicine in various stages of manufacture. Light and airy rooms hold beds for the sick and wounded that need tending; you will almost never see anyone there as you pass the rooms, though. That doesn’t mean that they aren’t there, but Eir believes in privacy for her patients, so the rooms will seem empty as you pass. If you go there for healing, you will be shown to one that is actually empty. If you go to learn healing, she might take you on her rounds, but most patients will still be invisible to you. There is also a fountain in the ante-chamber of this house of healing, and its waters are immensely cleansing to wounds of all kinds within and without. Visitors are encouraged to avail themselves of these healing waters.

Gna, Frigga’s messenger, does not have her own hall but keeps a small room in Fensalir, which she only visits to sleep. She is always on the go,
running from place to place on her horseback errands, and quite content and happy to be continually moving. Gna rides a horse named Hofvarpnir (Hoof-Flourisher). She loves horses and with no provocation may start talking about their gifts, bloodlines, etc., and how her horse is the foal of two others named Gardrofa and Harmskerpir (Thick-Skinned). She will also gladly chat about the other horses in Asgard and their bloodlines—Glad, Gyllir, Glear, Skeidbrimir, Silfrtopp, Sinir, Gils, Falhofnir, and Lettfeti, among others.

Gefjon, said to be a strong farmworker who could lift oxen by herself, seems to be a giantess working in Frigga's service, or if she is an Aesir-woman, she has so much giant-blood as to overpower her Aesir bloodlines. Certainly the lore tells of her four sons, all giants, whom she turned temporarily into oxen in order to plow the island of Zealand away from the continent. She is a patron of manual laborers, working men and women; and also of unmarried girls. She has no daughters, but will advise any young woman about strength and holding their own in a difficult world. As such, she can be called on to help any teenage girl who is in trouble or confused about her life. She has her own cottage, behind the cow-barns.

Snotra, the handmaiden of virtue and hard work, is a quiet goddess who lives in Fensalir proper. Average folk seek her out for advice on right living, moderation, keeping their temper, etc. She does not give advice unless asked, and even then is calm and not preachy. She is an excellent Goddess to approach for advice in diplomacy.

Lofn is the protector of lovers, called upon for arranging for their romance. Lofn intercedes for them when others disapprove, which means that most of her traffic these days is with relationships that society tends to disapprove of; however, she feels that love is love and ought to be encouraged. She spends as much time in Sessrumnir, working with Freya, as she does in Fensalir with Frigga. She has her own small cottage, with a thatched roof full of birds who carry messages to and from lovers.

Sjofn is also seen frequently at Sessrumnir; she is the handmaiden of peacemaking between warring mates. Couples often come to her for relationship counseling when they are having problems. She has her own
cottage, quiet and calm, where she conducts her counseling; all weapons must be laid outside the door and well out of reach before anyone can enter it. She is also sometimes called upon by Forseti to do mediation of a larger sort between enemies, especially when they were once close.

Var, the goddess who witnesses oaths, is a mostly silent witness, rarely seen even at Fensalir unless someone is doing something that she needs to be there for. She stands quietly beside the altar at every wedding in Asgard, and can be called upon for all weddings or commitments. She is unyielding, and considers all oathbreakers to be in the wrong, regardless of their reasons. Don’t go looking for her; if you need her as a witness, she will show up. Her weapon is the staff, which she will occasionally utilize on oathbreakers.

Hlin, the handmaiden of mourning, gives comfort and consolation to those who are grieving. She generally appears as a comforting, maternal middle-aged woman dressed in dark grey, and she has her own cottage, starkly furnished, for those who wish to bare their souls to her, weep, and be gathered to her breast. You likely won’t see Hlin unless you need her for some reason, and then, if you are visiting Asgard, your feet may take you to her cottage. According to some who work with her, she is also teacher of warriors, much like the Celtic Skatha. Hlin is a weaponsmaster, and for those few whom Frigga finds worthy, will teach both her skill and wisdom in warcraft. She has what can only be described as a “weapons-salle” in one of the back rooms of Fensalir, a stark room with gleaming wood floor and high windows where she practices her craft and takes those sent to her to practice. She is best approached respectfully.

Syn is the doorkeeper of Fensalir, and another goddess of oathtaking. She lives in Fensalir proper, and if you come in after hours, it will be Syn who lets you in ... or decides not to. Frigga trusts Syn’s instincts, and generally lets her have her head when she is in charge of the door. You will have to explain your reasons for entering, and convince her that it is so important that folks must be disturbed in their beds.

Vor is another rarely-seen handmaiden. She is a seer and wisewoman, small and dark and often veiled. She is not called upon for divination, for
like Frigga she sees much but is close with her information. She is called
upon more often by diviners to bless their work and show them how to do
it more smoothly, a task which she will teach if she feels that they are
doing it for good reasons. She lives in a small room in the back of Fensalir
proper which is off limits to all mortals.

Huldra, the hardworking handmaiden of flocks and herds, is often
conflated with Holda. To date, some folks say that they are the same, and
some that they are different. Either way, Huldra is said to have a cow’s tail,
and to be the patron of the Huldra-folk, small earth-wights of Midgard.
She is not often seen at Fensalir during the day, as her job is
shepherd/goatherd/cowherd, taking the flocks out to the fields and seeing
them safe home again.

Vingolf

The beautiful hall of Vingolf was originally commissioned by Odin for
overflow of the growing Einherjar of Valhalla, but since Valhalla itself is
not yet full, Vingolf was claimed by the Aesir goddesses as a kind of female
haven. Although men are not specifically disallowed from Vingolf, they are
subtly discouraged from going there. This is a feminine sanctuary, with
halls full of female crafters, beautiful gardens, and a kitchen with excellent
food. Vingolf’s main charm is that it is built around hot springs, with a
sacred healing spa in the center. Men are explicitly forbidden from entering
the spa. The walls are rose-colored, and roses climb the walls, drenching
the place in their scent.

If you are female and wish to visit Vingolf, it’s best to get permission
from at least one goddess—any female deity who dwells in Asgard probably
spends at least some time there, even the warriorlike ones. Bring some
small lovely gift that they can use to beautify the place; homemade soaps or
cosmetics are especially valued.
Bilskirnir

The largest single-owner hall in the Nine Worlds is Thor’s place, Bilskirnir. The biggest building ever built, it is practically a small city, with six hundred and forty rooms, swarming with the overflow of Valhalla, specifically those who died while sworn to Thor. The walls are made of sun-dried brick and stone, and the rooms are all high-ceilinged and airy. It’s par for the course to leave the windows open even when raining; since there is no natural rain in Asgard, all rainfall is likely Thor’s doing and therefore one does him honor to get wet in his hall.

Thor himself has been the most popular Norse god for centuries; so much so, in fact, that his hammer is currently the generic symbol for most Norse-religionists. As the thunder-god, hurling his lightning-hammer in one of his famous rages, he is the champion of Asgard, and the one who gets sent out to deal with troublesome invaders. He is the god of the common folk, the ordinary farmers, which is why his chariot is pulled by two goats. Thor is tall and broad and has immense strength—showing the blood of his giantess mother Jord—and is red-haired, and red-bearded. He is impulsive and honest, quick to anger and quick to party, over-hasty in judgment and prone to drinking and carousing, but completely reliable when others are depending on him. Though he is teased for being simple—sort of the uberjock—Thor is very concerned with honesty and honor, and keeping one’s promises. He has no patience with prevarication and hypocrisy, or fancy word-games that come perilously close to being either of those. To Thor, whatever you do, you do it with your whole heart. You defend what’s valuable to you, you keep your commitments, you are a loyal friend and tribesman, you don’t need to lie about anything. Thor can also be surprisingly sensible; one of his by-names is "deep-minded".

Thor is commonly known to be a “size-shifter”, which is another trait that he inherited from his earth-giant mother. He can shift from ordinary human size to as immensely huge as any giant, which is why he gets trotted out to fight them so often in Asgard’s defense. However, one of the side
effects of this talent (for him; not all size-shifters have this issue) is that even when he is only six feet tall, he weighs as much as he would if he was twenty feet tall. Because of this, he is apparently banned from crossing Bifrost, and must leave Asgard by the long way around, crossing the Thund Thvitr river in a (one would assume very sturdy) boat, or even swimming or wading across. His hammer is called Mjollnir, and it strikes with the thunderbolt. Jokes about its overly-short handle abound in the Nine Worlds. His belt of strength is called Mengingjardar, and aids his size-shifting skill.

Thor is an eminently approachable guy. Unlike one of the complaints about Odin—that he sometimes treats those who deal with him in an impersonal, how-can-I-use-this-person-effectively way—Thor treats everyone that he takes an interest in with personal attention. He has baffled some folks by simply showing up to chat and schmooze, but that’s the way he is. He’s pretty good at smelling ulterior motives and dishonesty, so if you approach him, do it on his terms—be straightforward and hail-fellow-well-met, talk to him and party with him, and strive to be honest and open in his presence.

On certain rare occasions while visiting Bilskirmir, you might run into Meile (whose name means “Mile-Stepper”), the younger brother of Thor by many years. He is usually wandering the Nine Worlds—often in disguise, as he has no wish to be famous or do great deeds—but when he decides to come home, he stays at his elder brother Thor’s hall. It might be wondered whether Meile’s aversion to being known comes out of his relationship with Thor—after all, who could compete with that kind of fame?—or whether he is just an intensely private person. He will talk to those who run across him, and be reasonably friendly, but it’s best to pretend that you don’t know who he is (assuming you figure it out), and he may give you a cryptic name if you ask.

Thor’s wife Sif is tall, blond, and classically beautiful, with the same sort of queenly grace and dignity as Frigga, except with a younger and more girlish cast to it. There is something of the upper-class golden athletic type to her. She is very much a goddess of the high summer. According to the
now-infamous story, Loki shaved off Sif’s beautiful long golden hair as a prank. When her husband threatened to kill him, he commissioned a Duergar-made wig of hair fashioned from strands of real gold. When placed on her head, it melded with her own hair and became real through Loki’s magic.

Sif is generally friendly to visitors as long as they are the sort her husband would approve of. She is fairly good with a sword herself, although she does not fight in battles but instead trains young warriors at home. She has been invoked as a goddess of skill in battle, and also as a powerful seeress and sibyl. Another function of hers is that of fertility, and sanctifying spaces. Sif is called upon whenever a new building is built for the Aesir, to walk through its rooms with light and flame and hallow it for new living. She is a gracious hostess and will be attentive to the traveler, but she has a great deal of work to do being Lady of Thor’s Hall, so be considerate and try not to monopolize her time too much.

Sif’s first husband was Aurvandil, for whom she bore Ullr. It is not known why she and Aurvandil broke up, except that his next wife was Groa, a giantess-sorcerer. Thor didn’t seem to mind that Sif had been married before; he is still devotedly in love with his golden-haired wife, and it is most unwise to flirt with her in his presence. It’s not that she would ever be unfaithful to him—Thor and Sif are extremely monogamous—but the implication that she might even be interested would be insulting to both of them, and Thor tends to return insults with deadly force. Sif bore Thor his daughter Thrud, and she is stepmother to Thor’s two boys Magni and Modi, sons of the giantess Jarnsaxa who spend most of their time in their dad’s hall. They are both enormous good-hearted guys who don’t know their own strength, much like their dad.

Two other denizens of Bilskirnir are Roskva and Thjalfrí. They are either the half-human children of Egil Skytten, a Midgard human who had an affair with Groa, the giantess wife of Aurvandil, or two of the three children of Groa and Aurvandil themselves, depending on who you ask. (As Egil is simply another form of Aurvandil name-wise, the latter is much more likely.) Groa and Aurvandil were friends of Thor, and after raising the
children to their teen years they sent them to be fostered at Bilskirnir. Thjalfi became Thor’s page, accompanying him on many journeys. He is the official Bilskirnir courier and messenger, being very quick on his feet; he is an excellent guide for humans wandering about Asgard and especially the confusing maze that is Bilskirnir. Roskva is also an excellent guide, and as she keeps her ears open, she is a good source of gossip and information as well.

The interwoven marriage-and-children relationship between Sif, Thor, Aurvandil and Groa is interesting. Ari writes of his personal gnosis, “I’ve seen images of Sif as a slender child-bride, madly in love with Aurvandil the mixed-race star-hero who hardly noticed her, being always off on his adventures; and Sif as the maiden mother with her new son Ullr, lonely and left behind. Then finding out that her adored husband has fallen in love with the mysterious and magical giantess Groa, who is older, more powerful, more of an equal match for him. There is tears, betrayal, a separation; Aurvandil comes not to Asgard for a time, and there is a rift between him and his son, who turns to Odin as a father-figure. Then images of Sif meeting young Thor, and the two of them falling in love as equals, in a way that could not have been with Aurvandil. And Thor goes to Aurvandil to ask him to divorce Sif, and not only is it granted, but the two become friends and traveling companions. Later, Sif is reconciled with her former husband, and when Aurvandil and Groa are killed, she takes on the fostering of their two youngest children, Thjalfi and Roskva.”

Somewhat behind Thor’s hall is a smaller hall that belongs to his daughter Thrud, the sister of Magni and Modi (who apparently prefer to hang out bachelor-style in their father’s enormous place). Thrud is red-haired like her father and nearly as strong as her brothers, and people have generally described her as a tall, large-boned woman in battle gear. It’s said that she sometimes rides with the Valkyries for fun. She is a warrior woman, and not to be trifled with; she has killed several men who made inappropriate passes at her. The land around Bilskirnir is named Thrudheim, so called because of Thor’s doting pride in his daughter.
The best offering to bring to Bilskirnir is food. Thor’s house, like Valhalla, is always struggling to feed everyone, and he doesn’t have Odin’s budget. Any plain, wholesome food or drink will be welcomed, and will usually come with an obligatory invitation to dinner. Thor particularly appreciates a good dark beer or ale and either makes an excellent offering.

**Folkvang and Sessrumnir**

Freya, the goddess of love, sex, fertility, springtime, warcraft, and magic, is the most honored of all the Vanir hostages who live in Asgard. The eldest child of Nerthus and Njord, she was already an accomplished sorceress—and a great beauty—when she came to Asgard, and she was the one that Odin was most eager to have. This was not necessarily for any prurient interests—although it is well-known that she has had the occasional affair with the All-Father—but because she was the mistress of seidhr, one of the Northern-Tradition magical arts. The bulk of information about Freya, in general, can be found in the Vanaheim chapter.

However, meeting her in Asgard is somewhat different from meeting her in Vanaheim, because her duties are different in each place. Aside from the beautiful gardens and rich earth of Folkvang and Sessrumnir, she does little of her fertility magic in Asgard. She is still Mistress of Love, and Mistress of Seidhr, but the aspect of her that you will not see in Vanaheim is that of warrior-goddess and collector of the Dead. In her Asgard hall Sessrumnir, she can be seen occasionally in full armor, shining and white, over simple white clothing, going in or coming out to and from battle. Sometimes she can also be seen conferencing with the Valkyries of Valhalla, whom she accompanies onto battlefields. She automatically takes all spiritually-appropriate (meaning not sworn to some other deity such as Odin, Thor, Christ, or looked after by someone else) female warriors, male warriors who are exceptionally handsome, and warriors who are queer or transgendered, who fall in battle. She also takes other folk who worship her and come into her notice, unless they need to pass on to Helheim for some reason.
As Freya conducts her warrior duties out of her Asgard hall rather than her Vanaheim home, it is here that she keeps her armor, weapons, and war animals. These include a great bristled sow named Hildisvin ("Battle-Pig") who can run at great speeds and is sometimes ridden to war (apparently more for her effect on the enemy than anything else, for a boar can’t be a comfortable ride). Hildisvin was sired by Gullinbursti, her brother’s great Vanir boar.

The great hall is named Folkvang ("Field of the Folk"), and this refers to the land around it as well. However, Freya has manipulated the earth around Folkvang so that it is always springtime there, something that she would not be able to do in Vanaheim. The gardens surrounding the great hall, and the smaller but still graceful hall Sessrumnir beyond, are always in bloom with spring flowers. Blooming trees, a gift from Iduna, float like a cloud of color up and down the broad paths between buildings. Two trees that seem to be her favorites, and are found in many places, are linden and medlar. Green banks are studded with tiny strawberries. Fountains leap, filled with bright fish, and generally the place looks as if Freya has the best landscaper in Asgard, which she does—Herself. Just walking around the place is enough to raise anyone’s spirits.

You’ll find people strolling there as well, and it may take a while for you to figure out that nearly all of them are Dead. Unlike Valhalla, where the warriors spend a good deal of their time practice-fighting, in Folkvang people are expected to behave themselves and partake of the gentler arts. If they want to engage in fighting practice, well, Valhalla’s over there in that direction, and no better place for it. The Dead of Folkvang spend their time playing music, telling tales, making love, wandering in the gardens, and—in the case of Freya’s priest/esses—giving advice to mortal seidhworkers. There are also lots and lots of cats, everywhere, of every conceivable color, who are pampered and allowed to do as they like. Never mistreat a cat in Freya’s lands, and speak to them as courteously as you would to a person. You might see a couple of really large cats, golden-colored and the size of small panthers; these are said to be Beegold and
Treegold (named for honey and amber), who draw her chariot. They do not attack guests, but don’t take liberties with them.

Inside, Folkvang is graceful, comfortable, and generally looks as if Freya also has the best interior decorator in Asgard. (See above.) Unlike other halls, which tend to have large feast-hall-type spaces, Folkvang is divided in many smaller areas surrounding beautifully carved hearths, which encourage people to gather in groups, converse, and entertain each other. Bedrooms are generally placed just off of these areas, for folk to dally in.

Just beyond Folkvang is Sessrumnir, Freya’s own hall. It is smaller, as it only needs to house herself, her maidens, and a few dozen guests of her own choosing. If one were to compare architectural styles, Sessrumnir would far more resemble a Vanaheim hall than anything else. There are several rooms dedicated entirely to the workings of seidhr, including a high seat that is reputed to be the spookiest-feeling high seat in existence, practically a door in and of itself.

It is generally easy to get fed and entertained in Folkvang, and as long as one is courteous, well-behaved, and contributes to the hospitality, it is possible to linger for some time without trouble. The offerings listed in the Vanaheim chapter for Freya work well here, with the possible addition of fine armor and weapons for her folk.

Noatun

This is Njord’s hall in Asgard, located outside the walls and directly on the coast, in a small bay. It is easy to find—a great, arched white structure with curves vaguely resembling a ship, with dozens of actual ships anchored in the bay below like a flock of white-billowed birds. It is full of open windows high up near the great arched ceilings—more like the halls of Vanaheim than the A-frame or square-roofed halls of Asgard—so that the sea breezes constantly blow through. Old fishing nets are hung like curtains and tapestries, swaying in the salt winds. Seabirds cluster in droves on the roof and fly through the open upper areas of the hall, perching on the upper beams, but somehow never leave droppings inside.
All the furniture in Noatun is carved from the wood of old ships, sunken or decommissioned. You can see the projecting bows of ships in every hearth, and the sideboards in every table; keels and wheels and masts make up every part of anything one sits or lies on. The folk about the place are generally going about some aspect of shipmaking, or net-mending, or other such business; behind the great hall are extensive woodcarving and shipbuilding works.

There is a lovely walled garden in a courtyard just off of the main building of Noatun. It is filled with lush plants, many not native to Asgard. This garden is said to have been the favorite place of Sigyn while she was growing up, according to those who place Sigyn as Njord’s foster-child. Bringing a potted exotic plant is one possible offering. Njord’s favorite herb is rosemary, and the hills around Noatun bloom with many varieties.

Njord himself is generally only home in the evening. He spends the days out on one of his boats and comes back around sunset to feast and go over the day’s labor with his crowd of servants, which are mostly Vanir folk but include some humans and the occasional rare ship-mad Alfar. Information about Njord himself can be found in the Vanaheim chapter; basically, what goes on in his one hall goes on in his other hall. Noatun is very much like a small slice of Vanaheim seated on the border of Asgard, and one ought to act appropriately. If you stay for dinner, expect to be served fish and seafood.

**Sokkvabek**

Saga, the goddess of learning and lore, lives in a seaside hall called “Sunk-Bench”, referring to the fact that the front porch goes right down into the sea. You can literally sit on the benches in front of this many-windowed hall and dabble your toes in the saltmarsh-stream and drink, which is one of Saga’s favorite things. Sokkvabek almost always has an informal drinking party happening on its porch, with a great deal of storytelling. Saga collects songs, poetry, and anything that can be committed to memory. She is on good terms with the Norns, although she
is more concerned with the past than the present or future. Her hall is sometimes referred to as being made of glass or crystal, but that is largely due to it being windowed entirely around, like a greenhouse. She is Iduna’s sister, and her windows overflow with potted plants that are gifts—the land around is too marshy for a regular garden.

The salty stream that flows by her hall is filled with stories and memories; drinking from it (with her permission) will give one better recall and memory, but might also fill your mind with odd snippets and bits of stories, which can be maddening. For an offering, bring her books, or more ale for her regular salons.

**Skadi’s Hall: Thrymheim II**

As far as we can tell, the giant Thjatsi married an Aesir woman and inherited her property and hall in Asgard when she died. When he was slain by the Aesir’s flaming wall while attempting to invade Asgard, his daughter Skadi came all the way from Jotunheim to demand her inheritance, and an Aesir husband to make her “legitimate” and accepted in Asgard. While her arranged marriage to the Van god Njord didn’t work out, she still owns and lives in her late father and stepmother’s hall. During the Asgard summer, she goes back home to the northern mountains of Jotunheim for the snow-hunting there. She is a winter goddess, clearly showing her father’s frost-thurse background, and those who work with her report her as having dark hair and eyes, very white skin, and a temperament that slides between icy cold and fierce rage.

Skadi has little patience for weaklings, and does not suffer fools at all. If she respects you, and you can keep up with her, she can be a good companion. Her hall in Asgard she named Thrymheim, in honor of the frost-giant Thrym who is the titular king of Jotunheim; his hall in Jotunheim is also called by this name. It is her way of telling the world that she still owes as much loyalty to her Jotun heritage as to the Aesir with whom she currently makes her way. This makes for a certain amount of confusion; if you are in Asgard and someone mentions Thrymheim, they
likely mean Skadi’s Asgard hall. If you are anywhere else in the Nine Worlds and it is mentioned, they likely mean the Thrymheim in the northern mountains of Jotunheim.

Skadi’s Thrymheim is found in the Hartshorns, the sole narrow, cold mountain chain of Asgard. It is a snowy place, but with weather much kinder than that of her home in Jotunheim. She finds it quite balmy, and can often be found hunting there. She is best summed up by Lyn, one of the folks who serves her:

Skadi is very linked with the stars, and parts of them belong to her. She can teach a lot about star lore, about astrology, about how to use the stars to the world’s benefit. She knows a lot about maps, and is an amazing travel companion. She cares for her own, and she protects them fiercely. She has a kind of peace about her, but it is cold. It is the same peace that is found in the dead of winter under gray sky with the sun in late day. She is brutal, and has her purpose, and cares little of much else. From her navigation on land, communication with forests and animals as well as some forms of astrology and witchcraft can be learned. She knows much about winter and ice.

Her tasks are demanding, they are slow, and they are not always clear. The road she offers is long, round about, and often not what you think they may be. Those things, however, are for those who she chooses. She hasn’t time for people traipsing about in her lands wanting her help. She will deal with those she accepts, and will not take on seekers who aren’t going to be good for her. A good way to put it is this: People who go to her to take her knowledge of the stars and not offer anything in return are likely to get their stars, but get burned by them in the process. Her way of teaching can be difficult if you don’t pay your way through. So a lot of people who think the gods are there to give to them without anything in return should just avoid her. She isn’t a ‘loving’ god in that respect. She has things to do, and if you can’t help her in them, she hasn’t the time for you. And if you steal from her, you had better hope you can never be found by her.
Ydalir

Ydalir, which literally means “yew-dales”, is just that...a great, high, heavily-timbered hunting lodge in a thick grove of yew-trees. It is the home of Ullr, the hunter-god. He is the son of Sif (currently Thor’s loyal wife) by her first marriage with the star-hero Aurvandil. Ullr is lean, dark, and very silent, with a hunter’s gaze and patience. Due to some unknown political or spiritual reason, when Odin leaves home for short periods in the winter, it is Ullr that he puts in charge of Asgard temporarily, perhaps because of his utter neutrality.

Ydalir is sited so that one can easily see the Aurora Borealis, which is dear to Ullr. He is reasonably welcoming to guests who are interested in hunting with him, and his table serves mostly game.

Breidablik

Breidablik (“Broadview”) was the hall of Baldur and Nanna, given to them as a wedding gift. After Baldur’s death and Nanna’s suicide, Frigga sealed its doorways. No unclean thing is permitted to come near it; it exists in a magical state of non-rot in memoriam of her beloved son. While you can gaze on it from a distance, you will not be allowed in. Delling, a Red Alf from eastern Alfheim, guards its doors and turns away all comers.

Landvidi

Landvidi (“Whiteland”, also known as “Broadland”) is Vidar’s hall, where he lives with his giantess mother Grid. (One of the few Jotnar who have fully allied with the Aesir and who are allowed to live in Asgard, Grid is one of Odin’s sometime lovers, and is also something of a mentor to Thor, whom she considers a beloved stepson. She gave him the magical iron gloves and the belt of strength that he wears, and has lent him her magical iron rod, Gridarvol, on occasion.) Landvidi actually refers to the whole area, which contains greenwoods and many fields with long grasses.
Vidar, the lord of Landvidi, is a grim-faced, dark-haired Aesir who tends to dress in dark red. People come to him in order to ask about vengeance; you can generally tell those visitors by their grim, set faces. Otherwise, most folk leave him be. He is unmarried, and his mother is the Lady of his hall. Grid is large, maternal, and likes to mentor young men; she will freely give advice on any topic from battle to love. If you visit without an agenda directly involving Vidar’s aid, go to Grid first and talk to her; she will be much more hospitable.

Another denizen of Landvidi is Vali, Odin’s son by Rind and Vidar’s half-brother. He was sired forcibly by Odin on the frost-giantess Rind the day of Baldur’s death, in order to take vengeance on Baldur’s killer. When Rind abandoned Vali at Odin’s court, he was taken in by Grid and Vidar. A slight, handsome, dark-haired young man, he is surprisingly polite, and somewhat shy and reserved. He looks up to his older half-brother and will only aid those in vengeance whom Vidar approves. He will occasionally visit his mother Rind in her father Billing’s hall, high in the northern mountains of Jotunheim (and not open to the public), or his grandfather Billing in Vanaheim.

Glitnir

Glitnir is Forseti’s Hall of Justice, shingled in silver, with gold porch-pillars. The axe-bearing son of Baldur and Nanna, Forseti represents justice, good laws, arbitration, and good judgment. Conflicts are brought to his hall to be worked out. Forseti is a top-notch mediator. While he wears his axe on his back as a reminder that Justice has teeth, he is dedicated to finding peaceful ways to work things out that do not require bloodshed. If you have a grievance with a deity that you want publicly heard, it is possible to go to Forseti and ask his aid. Be warned that if he feels it is a lost cause—fair or not—he will tell you. If he feels that your cause is good, he will arrange a mediated session in the Hall of Justice, if the other deity is willing. Be aware that you may have to answer many questions from other
deities, and not necessarily ones you expect. Do not lie—no one can lie undetected in Glitnir—and do not refuse to answer anything.

**Brimir**

Brimir Hall is as yet untenanted. It is on Okolnir Island, which is in the center of the lake in the Fields of Gimle. It seems to be held as an emergency hall in case Ragnarok comes, as the prophecy claims that should the worst happen, Gimle will survive. Ironically, it is owned by the giant Brimir, who won the island in a game of chance with Odin. He built the hall, and periodically shows up to make improvements and alterations. Do not attempt to enter, as the place is magically warded.

**Gimle Hall**

Situated close to Brimir Hall in the Fields of Gimle, this is another emergency post-Ragnarok hall, with a roof of gold. It is currently untenanted. Don’t bother it, or consider squatting there; you will be noticed and removed.

**Iduna’s Cottage**

This hall is not listed in the lore, but I found it while wandering in Asgard. Iduna lives in a thatched cottage in the middle of a beautiful orchard, notable because the trees are all in different phases—some blooming, some budding, some growing fruit. A lovely garden surrounds the cottage, and the whole place is surprisingly peasant-like. Iduna herself is likely to be found working on the grounds, in the garden or the orchard. She is a tall, plain woman with hands that look like they do manual labor. Her husband, Bragi, is the Skald of Asgard and a beautiful singer, great storyteller, and excellent poet. However, he is usually away at Gladsheim, and is rarely at home.

Iduna prefers to stay in her cottage and orchard; perhaps a history of growing up a prisoner and frequently being abducted has something to do
with that. Like her sister Saga, she is the daughter of the Duergar-emperor Ivaldi and a captured Valkyrie. Unlike Saga who has been known to occasionally visit her father’s home, Iduna prefers to live where things are green, and has no love for the underground caverns in which she was raised.

Iduna grows the magic apples that keep the Aesir young and healthy. Do not attempt to beg, buy, steal, or otherwise obtain any of these apples, because she won’t let you have any no matter how much she likes you, being under strict orders from Odin not to share them (and they are few and precious anyway, barely enough for the Aesir) and if you steal them off the trees, you’ll find that they are just ordinary apples that don’t do anything except taste excellent. There’s more to their magic than just their growth; they must be given over with Iduna’s magic in order for them to work. That’s why outsiders kept attempting to kidnap Iduna herself. Otherwise, if you want to sit with her and talk about gardening, she’s glad to have visitors. As the Apple-Woman, she has deep wisdom about the spiritual nature of the Apple, the plant of immortality and the doorway-tree.

Rathsey’s Sound

Also known as the Isle of Counsel, Rathsey’s Sound is a small island lying where the Thund Thvitr meets the ocean. Here lives the once-mortal hero Hildolf, who for some reason (probably a bargain with Odin) has his own small hall rather than living with the rest of the Einherjar. He is much loved by Odin’s legions, who come to him for wisdom when they are in a bad way. He has appeared as a middle-aged, grey-bearded man with keen eyes, wearing a wolf’s pelt on his shoulders. He will take in and counsel any mortal, although he is wholly on the side of Odin and the Aesir, and his counsel will reflect that. He is especially good at talking to wounded warriors whom stress has mentally wrecked, giving them counsel that does not make them feel like weaklings. A good offering for him would be good drink that he can give to other “clients” when they show up.
Urdabrunnr and the Hall of Fate

At the furthest point of Asgard, beyond the forests of Ydalir and the small mountain range, the uppermost root of the World Tree protrudes through the ground. It is far more than an invader, it is the anchor on which the entire world of Asgard is seated. Like a curved, knobbly mountain of wood, it bears enough sprouts and suckers to create a large grove. Steps are carved into its living bark, so that sacred rites can be performed on top of it. If you climb these stairs, you had better be ready to perform one, with no dawdling.

Sheltered in the curve of the great root is Urdabrunnr, the Well of Wyrd. This is a large stone-rimmed spring from which water continually bubbles, feeding the root of the tree. The ground around it is muddy and wet; watch your footing. It is not known if a mortal could survive falling into the Well of Wyrd accidentally. To look into it will show you many things, most of them difficult to understand and easy to misinterpret. Don’t drink the water without the permission of the Keepers of that Well, the three Norns.

The Norns are the Fates of the Northern Tradition. They are named Urd (That-Which-Is), Verdandi (That-Which-Is-Becoming), and Skuld (That-Which-Should-Be), and they are mentioned as “the mighty maids from Thursenheim”, or Niflheim, home of the frost-thurses. Urd spins the threads of each person’s destiny, Verdandi weaves them, and Skuld cuts them short. Sometimes they appear to look identical; sometimes they appear with different ages. Unlike the Moerae (the Greek Fates), Urd is the eldest and Skuld sometimes appears as a black-armored maiden who sometimes rides along with the Valkyries. Generally they do not appear as beautiful, however; most spirit-workers report them as plain, almost dowdy thurse-women, focused on their work.

The Norns may or may not appear when you approach the Well; whether they do or not can give you a pretty good idea of whether or not the knowledge of your Wyrd, or that of someone else, is your business to pursue. If they do not appear, even when propitiated—and the Norns are historically difficult to propitiate—and if the Well shows you nothing that
is clear and simple, it’s best to go and propitiate them further from home. If they do appear, remember that to Them, They are very busy and you are not very important. Indeed, even the Gods are not terribly important in their scheme of things. The Norns owe allegiance to no one, and not even Odin and Hela—arguably the most powerful Gods in the Nine Worlds—can force their hands. Ask clear, concise, and well-thought-through questions, take what answers they give without arguing, and then go home and meditate on them.

In terms of propitiation, the Norns have no use for things. What they want is work. The best sort of straight-out propitiation for them seems to be doing household cleaning. Before you work, offer all the energy of this cleaning to them. As you work, you may feel as if you are also cleaning some other place as well, a place that you can’t see; as if your work is being done in two worlds at once. This can be assumed to mean that they are accepting your gift. Another sort of work-offering is needlework of any kind, especially spinning, weaving, or embroidery. However, as this is contributing to the energy of the tapestry, you will have to get their permission before offering them this gift. Do not think that by giving them the energy of each stitch, you are actually changing the tapestry of Wyrd. They wouldn’t allow that; you are simply lending them power to tend it themselves. If for some reason you need an immediate offering, blood is a good one. Cut yourself and allow it to flow right into the well.

Beyond the root of the Tree is a small cottage which, ironically, is referred to as the Hall of Fate. Only those who are the direct servants of the Norns are allowed to enter it and see it, so don’t try to go in. You wouldn’t get past the doorway anyway without getting mysteriously turned around and finding yourself back again at the edge of the pool.
Day 4, Alfheim

“I am a harbinger of the teind.”

There is no high noon in Alfheim, and no full night, either, I expect. Everything has the sheen of morning to it, with a strange glitter, and then it fades into twilight. Lots of things have glamour over them, so I had to cope with two overlaid worlds, plus an overlay of glamour. I could see where the glamour is, like a sparkly sheen over certain trees or rocks or people, and often I could see through it.

I don’t like it here.

I told the first Alf that I met that I was here to give a gift to the high court. I showed my tattoo, which got the coldest reception yet. They do not like Hel at all here; I’m still figuring out why. So then I sat and waited for the high muckety-mucks to show, and spun some silk. I offered it to a fairy, but she just sniffed and said that mortal spinning was too coarse.

The high court showed, in full array—although I can see straight through their glamour, if I chose, a fact that would no doubt piss them off if they knew
it—and I presented them with Allyson’s runes, at which point they became considerably less hostile. They were also relieved that I had no personal message from Her Ladyship. They made me carry the fancy box ahead of them like a servant, then I was told to go off and not bother them. I asked if I could see Frey, and I was told frostily that he was not in Alfheim at the moment. I got the feeling that was true, not just something to put me off.

So I sat and spun, until the small faeries tangled my spinning, and then I wrote letters home until they spilled my ink. I gave them candy to bribe them away, but I soon ran out, and they pinched me and pulled my hair and tied it to the chair. Eventually I figured out what was going on. Alfheim wanted me gone. The Court Alfar had grandly proclaimed that I could stay, but they could disavow the actions of the little fairies, and let them drive me out.

I found myself getting sleepy, which seemed dangerous—if I fell asleep in a hostile Alfheim, who knew when I’d wake up? I brushed my hair with Unbinding, my magical hairbrush, which helped. I needed to go check on Maegen and give her clean
water, but I didn’t want them following me, so I laid a “this feels like cold iron” spell on all my stuff, and used an invisibility string behind me on the path. Maegen was all right, but there was a big frog on the steps (in my own world), but when I looked at it I could see that it was a frog-faery that croaked at me and hopped off into the stream. I yelled at him, feeling a little frantic. I gave Maegen fresh water, and returned to find one Alf bitching out another for letting me slip away. I quickly gathered up my things, threw another invisibility spell over my shoulder, and crossed over to Vanaheim. There seemed no reason to stay.

Later, in Jotunheim, the lord of Utgard was to tell me why I’d been received so poorly in Alfheim. Apparently it has to do with a certain teind that they owe Hel. The Alfar/faery world, according to what he said, is a self-contained one. If they aren’t killed, they live a very long time, close enough to immortality to look like that to a mortal. If they are killed, they reincarnate as another Alfar or faery, and as they are very good at retaining their past
memories—that’s a fey gift—they practically pick up where they left off, as it were.

But nature abhors a self-contained system, and there was an implication there that their system is artificial, a product of some magical deal. And Hel dislikes it, and in order to keep Her off their backs, they have to sacrifice a certain number of themselves to Her. Some of the fantasy novels that talk about the teind to Hel (or more usually the Christian Hell, as they’re all operating on later Christian ideas) imply or directly say that the faeries that are part of the teind merely visit the realm of the dead for a few years and then pop back. According to what I was told, this is completely off. They are killed, for real; ritually sacrificed to Her, and She recycles their souls into non-faery bodies. Which, since the elves are terribly racist, might as well be the same as them disappearing forever. So to them, this is a constant attrition (their birth rates are low due to their immortality) for which they resent Her terribly.

(I immediately thought of the “changelings” I’ve known when I heard this—Robin, and some other “Otherkin” folks. It made sense.)
The problem is that they are continually late with the teind, as they resent having to slaughter a few of their own kind every few years or however often they have to do it. Hel apparently sends various messengers through as a reminder, and it seems that I was unwittingly one of these messengers. In other words, I was set up. They did react very strongly like the tenants who are late with the rent react when the super comes by to remind them of the landlord’s impending eviction notice. I wondered if Hel takes a similar toll from Svartalfheim, and began to worry about how that would go. The dark elves are even less nice than the so-called light elves.
Chapter 16
Ljossalfheim

Ljossalfheim, which is sometimes just referred to as Alfheim, is located next to and just south of Asgard. It is one of the “faery realms”, the set of realms that span several cosmologies and intrude into many of them. The faery realms themselves are fairly self-contained, although there does seem to be a good bit of travel between them—you can easily get to the realm of the Celtic Sidhe from Alfheim, for example. The exact nature of how the faery realms work, the permeability of their boundaries, and the geography of their cross-world placement has been studied itinerantly by many scholars over the years, largely in vain. It continues to be something of an elven mystery.

Humans have been inspired by the Alfar (and the Sidhe, and the rest of those diverse races, but from now on I am only going to refer to the Alfar for the sake of convenience) for millenia. We have also been lost many times in their realms, often with disastrous results, or so the stories go. Warning tales abound regarding humans who go to live in the country of the Fair Folk, only to return to find that everyone they knew is dead, or old and grey. Or they themselves have aged beyond their years; it is almost the signature of elven places.

Time and Seasons

Time flows very differently in Ljossalfheim, more so than in any other of the Nine Worlds. Day length is variable, and changes randomly. When Sunna and Mani pass overhead, they too are drawn into the magical web of the Alfar, if only temporarily, and although they always make it out the
other side on time (or a great many folk would be very angry), their normal effects are distorted.

Seasons will vary, also, depending on the area. Unlike other worlds, where there is a distinct “year” that turns (if only subtly, in the case of Muspellheim and Niflheim) similarly for every place in the world, in Alfheim it may be summer in one place, and winter in another. Generally the seasons follow each other, but any one area may be on a different cycle depending on the whim of the House that rules it. They are also not above “freezing” one season for a while in order to enjoy it further, although this takes a good deal of work. Some places do seem to be permanently “frozen” in season.

Alfheim spins closest to our world at Beltane, the halfway point between the spring equinox and the summer solstice, as do all the faery realms. There is a great deal of lore about the enhanced faery activity in our world during the Beltane season.

Travel Advisories

One thing you should pay attention to when traveling in Ljossalfheim is that the time discrepancy between it and the mortal world is very hard to control. Ljossalfheim is a land built solely around magic, which is totally nonlinear. It’s almost impossible to predict when the days, seasons or years will line up between it and any other world; it seems random, and it’s said only a few of the Alfar themselves really understand the cyclic patterns of their world. If you are a spirit-worker skilled in time travel or time manipulation, this should be easier to deal with. Otherwise, be prepared for your journeys to the light-elves’ realm to warp your sense of time considerably for hours or even days after you’ve come home. While you’re in Ljossalfheim, you may feel that your stay was only an hour or two long, whereas many more hours might have passed back home. Or you might have spent many days in Ljossalfheim, only to return and find that a mere two or three hours has gone by.

—Elizabeth Vongvisith, spirit-worker
The time differential is worse the deeper in you go, which is another reason to keep to the fringes at first. Casting a protective circle (no, you don't have to do it Wiccan-style: there are simpler but valid precedents in the lore for how to do this) will help keep you anchored correctly in your own time stream. The really odd thing about time in Alfheim is its fluidity. When comfortably “at home” there, you can actually control it to some extent; time really does become relative and even subjective. It can be difficult to wrap your brain around at first.

—Estara T'Shirai

Geography

Also variable. Ljossalfheim is more of a manipulated world than any other; the very stuff of the earth is continually being changed around, reworked, glamorized, unglamorized, and generally transformed over time. There are many villages in Alfheim, and many thousands of peasant huts where the poorer faery-folk live. However, the fact that the land and its residences change so often means that it will be much more difficult to magically extract a map from the Akashic Library. In fact, it may mean that the second time you visit, things are not where they were the first time.

I usually go into to their realm at a sort of gate right of a large branch on Yggdrasil. Essentially every season is idealized and represented in the landscape. Their structure and make-up is very medieval with a caste of nobles; these are the Alfar. Along with them are numerous commoners that perform all sorts of functions. Some of their homes (which reflect the “season” their land is in) are magnificent mansions, others are castles and still others are glorious Halls. I frequent the Duke of Autumn’s realm, the Duchy of Spring and venture to the mountain castle of the Old Man Duke of Winter. The land of Summer is usually too hot for me. All of these names are my name for them because that’s the season they closest represent. There are also lesser realms of air, sea, river, lake, forest, prairie, hills, and other landscapes.

—Rod Landreth, seidhmadhr
The landscape is largely forested, with both deciduous and coniferous regions; the trees almost everywhere are huge (though not Jotunheim-huge). There is at least one rather gentle range of mountains, and in that area there are also the green hills and valleys that form the other major ‘tourist attraction’ of Alfheim. (There are ways to pass directly from here to Svartalfheim: several of these are tunnels beneath the mountains.) Big urban areas are not the elven style: instead there are numerous small villages, built predominantly of low wooden buildings alternating with huts on stilts alongside particularly tall trees. These are arranged, as far as possible, so as to blend with the landscape, as to an extent are trails, so neither is particularly easy to find without either some familiarity with the area or a guide. Rivers and streams are many and bright.

—Estara T'Shirai

Alfheim is rather forested, at least the parts I saw of it, with evergreens. It is breathtaking, though not unearthly so. During my first visit, the dwelling I was ushered into looked like an extremely elaborate and expansive longhouse. It was constructed out of wood, and the ground level looked to be the primary meeting place, with the central floor space taken up by a long table. There were small alcoves off to the side for small informal talks. To be honest, they more resembled booths in a bar, though all the wood was a rich gold colour, and it was warm and inviting. I think most of the living quarters were upstairs. I didn’t notice any fire pits or fire places, though it was warm as if there might be. Either they have such features hidden with in their structures, or they are using magics to achieve the desired affect. My bet is on the latter.

Their realm is quite far-flung and somewhat mountainous, with different clans/tribes/houses living in different areas. The architectural styles change somewhat, as do the clothing and foods, but this seems to be based more on the environment than anything else. There doesn’t appear to be much distinction between the houses with regards to specializations, which is somewhat odd—that is to say that none of the houses has a specialty that only they have developed and the others haven’t, which are considered jealously guarded secrets. (This is in contrast to the Duergar, for example.) There are variances, but this is mostly cosmetic. If a new technique is developed, it is shared or at least traded.

—Silvaerina
I’m treated as a guest, with all sorts of hospitality, like an honored visitor—though not of noble birth; more like a dignitary of some merit but still not a member of their “caste.” The nuance is difficult to express. Several courts seem to treat me as a rather amusing fellow because of my various faux pas in trying to navigate through many of their intricate protocols and etiquette. I’ve also been to the homes of many commoners, which are good times of drink and song. These range from essentially glorified beaver-dams to hollowed-out trees to all sorts of residences from hovel to respectable cottage. Many of the lesser elves, however, don’t really have homes; just finding somewhere to rest when needed and pursuing their function or whim when they are not resting.

I work best with the commoners and they are largely a friendly lot. When I have gone to the mansions, castles and keeps of the nobles, they are formal in varying degrees. The Duke of Winter is a robust fellow who enjoys hunting and often goes out to monitor the commoners. I enjoy his court’s highly congenial atmosphere. The Lady of Spring is much more formal, albeit the best food is found in her court.

—Rod Landreth, seidhumadhr

History

No one knows exactly how the Alfar got into the Nine Worlds. We are quite clear, however, that they are not native, unlike the Duergar. They came into the Nine Worlds from their original home—which may be the same place as the Sidhe, or not—and were given Ljossalfheim by the Aesir. They are on excellent terms with both the Aesir and the Vanir, but don’t get on well with the Jotunfolk, whom they consider to be completely irredeemable barbarians. They pay tribute to both Odin and Hela for leave to live on Yggdrasil. (This latter is, of course, one of the subjects that the Alfar consider terribly rude to ask about, so don’t try it.)
Frey’s Hall

The Vanir god Frey is called the Lord of Alfheim; it is said that the patronship of Alfheim was given to him as a tooth-gift. For the most part, this is a ceremonial function, but it is Frey who speaks for them in the Aesir’s council, and they need him on their side. That is not the only reason that he is treated with a great deal of respect; the Alfar revere his affinity for fertility magic and plants, although they are uncomfortable with his yearly sacrifice and death. His wife Gerda is not so well liked, being an etin-bride, and was almost cursed by the Alfar in the beginning of their marriage.

Frey’s hall in Alfheim is the only place that you can absolutely count on to be in the same area every time, and to look the same; that’s because Frey insists on it. Even when Frey is not home, you can get a good meal out of his household servants, who have orders to be polite to any visitor, and to feed them and put them up for three days without judging them ... so long as they do not break any rules of hospitality. It is a great Norse-style hall, thatched with many different kinds of grain. In fact, a good offering is a bunch of different grains still on their stalks and in good condition, to be added to his roof.

When I first started defining my path as Asatru, one of the gods I discovered I had an affinity to was Frey, though in his role as Leader of the Ljossalfar. In fact I pledged my allegiance to him as my liege, even though Tyr is my patron and mentor (this is also quite apart from my subsequent ties with Loki and his kin).

—Silvaerina
The Rebels: Memories of Blood

Somewhere along the line, some of the Alfar started an internecine war, which ended in a great split between the two warring factions. The smaller group was forced out en masse, and they emigrated to the world of the Duergar, who negotiated a territorial bargain with them. These are the Dark Alfar of Svartalfheim, and their information is found in the Svartalfheim/Nidavellir chapter. The Ljossalfar prefer not to speak either of the war or of the existence of the Dökkálfar, so it is wise to avoid the subject when visiting.

There is a forest in Alfheim called the Svartvidr, a nasty place where the trees are twisted as if in pain, no animals dwell, and noxious and often poisonous plants grow. Most of the Ljossalfar give it a wide berth, though there are those who are (secretly) drawn by morbid curiosity to explore it. The Svartalfar cursed that forest when they were driven out of their homeland by their cousins. It used to be a place of great beauty and was said to have been planted by the first Alfar, but few of them can even bear to go near it now.

—Elizabeth Vongvisith, spirit-worker

The Problem of Glamour

The most difficult thing of all for the pathwalker is that Alfheim is covered in a constant coat of glamour. It’s on everything—the trees, the grass, even the clouds sometimes. Every realm is a work of art, quite literally. This means that, unlike the journeyer who only sees the astral, some pathwalkers may have to cope with seeing two or more layers superimposed over the physical realm. The frustration level largely depends on the ability of the pathwalker to see through magical glamour in general. If you don’t have this talent, then you’re no worse off than in any other world, at least where visual discrimination is concerned.

If you are the sort who can see through glamour if you stare at it, then your best bet is to merely keep running your eyes superficially over the
landscape, and you won’t get too confused. The key is to remember to respond to the glamour-figure and not the actual one behind it. For example, if a shorter Alf is using glamour to look taller, look at where the glamour-face is, and not the real one a foot lower—as he’s probably built in the magic to where a gaze directed at his glamour-face actually looks in his eyes, but if you look at his real face you’ll be staring a foot above his head, and he’ll notice that ... and be offended that you’re looking under his clothing, as it were. If someone puts out a glamour-appendage, take it, and try to stop thinking about the fact that it’s not real. It will feel perfectly real, if you do that; if you don’t, your fingers may sink through it, and they’ll know. Your courtesy depends on your ability to pretend that you can’t see through things.

If you are the rare sort who is so immune to glamour that it is merely a vague veil over the reality of what’s underneath (and this is really a rare thing; in fact, it’s most often a specific modification by certain gods done on their sworn servants), you had best work very hard at pretending otherwise. Keep in mind that a raking glance from someone who has blotted out an Alf’s glamour entirely is not only rude, but can temporarily interfere with the glamour magic itself. (There is some truth to the idea that rabidly disbelieving in it can wipe it out, which is worse than rude.) Alfheim will be a constant discipline for you of concentrating on that glamour, and you may get a headache from the multiple floating layers of vision.

However, glamour may also be used to conceal traps or dangers, and being able to see through it can be a lifesaver in the wrong places. It’s all right to let the Alfar know that you are capable of seeing through glamour; they won’t care that you can as long as you are courteous about it and don’t. Skill in changing your perceptions at will is the key to dealing with Alfheim glamour in a safe and constructive way.

Glamour is natural here; it’s a game, an art form, an intrinsic part of the nature of the place and its people. Some ability to deal with this is absolutely expected before anyone will guide you further in than the fringes. Often potential guides will greet you
with little tests to see if you understand the principle: a choice between two glamoured objects, say. For me the key has been to judge things by their feel and not their look—unfairly easy for me since my sight is poor anyway! If you practice this skill in your mundane life—knowing when the deal is too good to be true or the pretty person has a rotten soul—then it will also work in Alfheim.
—Estara T’Shirai

General Warnings

Travel in the Alf-realms can be hazardous and confusing. The time discrepancy between Ljossalfheim, in particular, and the mortal realms is very great and often unpredictable. Alfar behavior is likewise often unpredictable and inconsistent; formerly friendly beings may turn prickly and annoying without warning, and it is all too easy to offend an Alf without having any idea why you’re suddenly getting the cold shoulder. However, if you must sojourn among the Alfar for whatever purpose, you should keep a few things in mind.

Ljossalfheim is somewhat difficult to get into without an invitation, more so than other places in the Nine Worlds. If you do manage to trespass there, it’s probably because someone, usually the Lady or Lord ruling that portion of Ljossalfheim, or perhaps even the high Lady or Lord, has decided you are harmless and unlikely to do any damage, rather than being worthy and favored (though they like to think of it that way). You will not be allowed unlimited access to all parts of the realm, but you most likely won’t be harassed, either, unless you’ve somehow gotten on the elves’ bad side. In any case, you will be watched constantly, even if you’re not aware of it.

The light-elves are a stern people, but they are not generally malicious or sadistic. Assuming you are polite and behave in a civilized manner, as in any other world in which you are a guest, they will tolerate your presence without too much trouble. Some may even be curious about you, and therefore inclined to be friendly (those such as the forest-dwelling wood folk, who look vaguely treelike, are far more interested in mortal visitors than the proud Seelie Court types). If you’re there on business—say, an errand for your god-boss(es), or you have an appointment with a particular resident of Ljossalfheim, the elves will already know this, even if
they don’t speak of it. You would do well to state this openly when it seems appropriate to do so, just so there isn’t any confusion. If you are just there as a tourist, be sure to openly admire everything you see. Ljossalfheim is very beautiful, so this shouldn’t be hard. The Alfar are very vain and they feel that the natural reaction of any mere mortal finding himself in their world should be awe and abject gratitude for being allowed in. Kissing their butts may become really tiresome, but a little flattery can go a long way to ensure that later visits go smoothly.

— Elizabeth Vongvisith, spirit-worker

I would certainly suggest that someone first visiting Alfheim should find themselves a trustworthy guide. There are outposts along the edges where those willing to serve as such can be found, and those are the best places to start. Keep in mind that as an outsider you are not completely safe, particularly before you have a native companion who will vouch for you. In particular, as so much folklore attests, do not eat or drink in Alfheim until you have found this companion. If you know animal or plant spirits who will vouch for you, or if Frey, Freya, or Odin will, this will speed things up to an extent in finding a companion among the Alfar. Likewise, if you smell very strongly of Helheim or Jotunheim it will be slower going (though it is still possible, you may always be regarded with a hint of suspicion or alarm).

— Estara T'Shirai
Day 5, Vanaheim

“I am a keeper of the cycle of the year.”

Vanaheim is beautiful. It looks like one might think Summerisle, the fictional island in The Wicker Man, ought to have been a thousand years ago. The light is green and fresh, the trees all look as if they could talk, the people and cottages look like somebody’s ideal of the perfect pagan village. I think when Neo-Pagan fluffies imagine fantasy historical eras of “pagan days”, they’re just picking up someone’s snapshots of “What I did on my Summer Vacation in Vanaheim.”

Except that they do practice human sacrifice here, and these peace-loving folks did fight the Aesir to a standstill.

Yeah, I could live here.

I had accidentally aligned the ritual field with a sacred grove, I’m afraid. I made food offerings, and asked the grove keeper—a tall dark-haired Vanir wearing a headdress of stag’s horns—if I could stay. Permission was granted, so long as I didn’t interfere
with the ritual. So I got a day and a half to rest in Vanaheim's beautiful green peace. My guts were grateful.

Not much happened during most of my stay, and that was welcome. The lore says that it's always springtime in Vanaheim, but that's ridiculous. They have seasons, just like us. In fact, somehow the "seasons" in Vanaheim seem to be stronger and more pronounced than they do here. It was autumn, and everyone was getting ready for some harvest festival, and it just seemed so...well, autumny. As if the perfect distillation of autumn had settled across the land—the scent of the air and the woodsmoke, the blue of the sky, the colors of the trees, the crunching of the dried grass underfoot. As if the cycle of the year was kept so much more perfectly here than anywhere else. I know that doesn't make much sense, but it's what it felt like. I expect that someone arriving in spring would feel as if the spring was somehow "eternal", even though it would give way to summer in short order, and then summer would feel "eternal". In Vanaheim, you live the cycle of the year from day to day, as if it were the most important thing of all.
Their harvest ritual would happen the next day, and I would miss it, being off to Jotunheim. Still, that evening, Frey appeared in the field, surrounded by attendants. Apparently even though he is an Aesir hostage, he is allowed to go home for certain holidays. I suspect that Freya’s absence implied that they aren’t all allowed to go home at the same time. Perhaps they trade off.

At any rate, I took one look at Frey and fell in absolute drooling lust. I’d been warned that Odin and Thor had all this sexual charisma; certainly they weren’t bad-looking, but neither were my type or came across to me this way. Frey, on the other hand ... good gods, I don’t even know what it was about him, but I practically fell all over myself like a schoolgirl. He smiled a beautiful smile, and told me to meet him at his temporary hall, which happened to line up with the men’s lodge. And I won’t say anything more about it except that I discovered that when you have sex with a beer god, you get drunk from the sex.
Vanaheim (or “Vana-home”) is the world of the Vanir, a race of deities and spirits whose main focus is agriculture. This world lies on the western side of the World Tree, just below Alfheim and Asgard in the spiral path. No one is really sure where the Vanir came from, or how they created Vanaheim without the Aesir noticing, and they aren’t telling. However, they first come to the attention of the Aesir after they have already established their world and their land.

Time and Seasons

Vanaheim has four perfect seasons. By this I mean that Vanaheim is blessed with generally postcard-perfect weather, regardless of what time of year it happens to be. Indeed, Vanaheim has the best weather and climate of any of the Nine Worlds. Its “year” is significantly longer than ours, however; it may be difficult to line up the season here with the season there. Vanaheim turns closest to our world at the halfway point between the summer solstice and the autumnal equinox, the day that was referred to by some of the ancestors as Lammas.

Geography

Vanaheim is a large island, large enough that it could be called a small continent. Rolling hills decorate the central area, and the rest is meadow and pastureland, with small patches of woodland. The shoreline varies between open beaches and rock cliffs. Fishing is a popular industry, as the Vanir are closely allied to Aegir the sea god. The island is lush and green, with the most fertile soil in the Nine Worlds. Practically any seed will
grow, stuck into the ground. As such, Vanaheim is the food basket of the Nine Worlds, exporting and trading agricultural products with all the others.

There seem to be no cities in Vanaheim, nor even a capital or main hall where the important Vanir all live. The people of Vanaheim are organized into small villages, none of them much more important than any other. Government is done by moots, where village representatives travel to meet and discuss and decide law. The moots are large gatherings that take several days, and are often timed with seasonal religious rituals, as if to get as much as possible out of a single gathering. The location of the moots rotates around the island.

Villages usually center around a sacred grove, with cottages, small halls, and fields outlying around it. There are small temples in a few areas, but most worship is done outside in the groves. These groves are distinguished by carefully planted circles of sacred trees, stone altars, and the occasional stang. Actually, you won’t find stangs anywhere else in Vanaheim except for the sacred groves, which are holy ground and usually watched by a guardian priest or priestess. That means that when you enter this world, you will come in under surveillance, into a space that is considered sacred and must be treated with respect. Although the priest-guardians are generally not armed, they usually have guards around who are. As soon as you enter Vanaheim, respectfully declare yourself and tell them your business there. There may be food offerings left around the grove; don’t eat them.

The largest stretch of woods in Vanaheim is the Barri Woods, a magical wood of gold-leaved trees on the eastern shore, nearest to Jotunheim. The trees grow taller there than anywhere else in this world, and it is said by the locals that they are actually of Jotunheim stock, gifted or traded by the etins just across the water and world-barrier. This is the place where Frey met with his etin-bride Gerda and wooed her, and the Barri Woods are said to be particularly good for sexual rites and love magic.
Inhabitants

There is no extant myth of where the people of the Vanir came from. They themselves, when asked, have simply said that they settled Vanaheim when a piece of Ymir’s body (said to be his pelvis, as it is the most fertile area) became a stable continent in a stable world. They do not trace any descent from Ymir’s children, and may have come from outside the Nine Worlds. The first mention of them in myths is when Odin and his brothers run across them, act rudely, and a war is started. They are an agricultural people, practicing fertility rites and the occasional human sacrifice. Physically, they are much closer to the Aesir than to any other race in the Nine Worlds, but their bloodlines act differently. In terms of their nature, they are very much their own unique people.

Hospitality rules are very important to the Vanir. While they have a good deal of importance everywhere in the Nine Worlds, the Vanir are particularly picky about them. Any of them will likely give you a three-day guest-right stay in their homes, but there are rules about being a good guest. First, offer to help with whatever farm labor they require. If you don’t know how to do anything, ask for a task that takes little skill and can be learned quickly. If they happily put you to work, you are in. Don’t shirk; do your best job. If they politely decline to give you a task, it isn’t because they consider you too fine a guest to be put to work, it’s that they don’t like you that much, and don’t want you to be considered like part of the family, if only for a few hours. If they won’t allow you to help, they likely don’t want you back.

At one point, the Vanir fought a war with the Aesir, and after much loss of life both sides called it a draw. The point of mentioning this war is that people tend to underestimate the Vanir as warriors. They are not as openly warlike as the Aesir—in fact, there is a strict peace set on their world that it would do anyone ill to break—but they are just as skilled at the arts of warfare, and should not be dismissed. Be courteous and polite to
these “mere farmers”, or they may decide that you have violated their rules of hospitality, which in some parts of Vanaheim is a killing offense.

As part of the treaty terms of the war, the Aesir and Vanir exchanged hostages. Each side agreed to send over some members of great wisdom so that the other could benefit from them. The Aesir sent over Mimir and Hoenir, but they turned out to be unsatisfactory; Hoenir refused to talk about anything, and Mimir did nothing but babble. One senses either resentment at their hostage status, or an implicit order to keep quiet. The Vanir, however, were insulted, and hacked Mimir’s head off and sent it back to Odin with Hoenir. Odin resurrected the head and dropped it down a well, where Mimir is doomed to answer questions for eternity or until Odin decides to release him.

On the other hand, the Vanir hostages consisted of Njord, the god of ships and sailing, and his twin children Frey and Freya, the gods of fertility and love. The presence of the latter two seemed to be part of an ongoing deal to provide Asgard with food. Odin was especially eager to get hold of Freya, and not just for her beauty; she was the mistress of the seidhr—magic that he wished to learn. Not only were the Vanir hostages accepted as full voting members of the Aesir, when their people returned the other hostages, scorned or beheaded, no revenge was taken upon the all-too-important Njord, Frey, or Freya. The end result is that Asgard has a strong Vanir voice in its councils, while Vanaheim is fairly free to ignore Asgard, secure that its hostage-gods are quite safe there.

The three of them are allowed to come home and visit Vanaheim, as long as they do it one at a time. Njord can be found in Vanaheim in the spring and high summer, usually on a boat. Frey comes home around Lammas for his yearly role in the all-important fertility-based Ing ritual, and stays until the first snows. Freya presumably comes home some time in the winter and stays to see the spring open onto the land, her favorite time of year.
Njord’s Hall

Njord’s Vanaheim home is, of course, on the eastern seashore, facing Alfheim and Asgard. (His Asgard home is directly opposite it on Asgard’s westerly beaches, calculated to have the straightest possible shot over the ocean between the two.) It is a tall, white, arched building on the rocky outcrop of the largest northern bay. A small fleet of ships have their home in the bay, as Njord keeps all of the Vanir fleet under his protection, even when he is absent. The waters around Vanaheim never freeze, even in the winter, and fishing is always good.

Njord is currently single and solitary, but like the archetypal sailor he has had many wives and lovers. He is technically married to Nerthus—by whom he has sired Frey and Freya—but it is strictly a ceremonial marriage, to be reconsummated once a year for ritual purposes. He was briefly married to Skadi as a favor to Odin, but they could not agree on where to live and separated after a year. Some say that Njord still has a relationship with Skadi, when they rarely meet. He is the son of Nott, herald of the Night and an ancient frost-etin, by the old Vanir god Frodi.

Njord himself has been described as a lean, vigorous, bearded man in early middle age, with hands calloused from ship-ropes and face somewhat windburned. He is wise, practical, and gives sensible advice; he also has a good deal of quiet but authoritative leadership charisma. One spirit-worker who honors him referred to him as “every inch the perfect sea-captain”, and reported that a salt breeze seemed to move about him wherever he was. Anyone who is interested in ships and sailing will automatically find an ally to talk to in him. Appropriate offerings for Njord might be things carved out of the wood of old ships, or good wine, or coins from foreign countries (something he likes to collect), or anything relating to ship-voyages.
Nerthus’s Hall

Njord’s ceremonial wife, Nerthus, is the high priestess/earth mother of Vanaheim. Njord is her husband in name, but they do not live together; their marriage is strictly a ritual affair for the magical mating of earth and sea, in order to bring fertility to the land. Their two sacred children are the twins Frey and Freya, who embody the fertility of Vanaheim and bring that fertility everywhere they go.

Nerthus is very old and very private, and surrounded by taboos. She is large and voluptuous, with a Venus-of-Willendorf figure, and eyes like deep swamp pools. Her skin is brown as the earth, and her long brown hair trails on the ground for many feet behind her. She always goes heavily veiled in public and most people will never see her face—in fact, in ancient times it was death to look upon it. She is in charge of all human sacrifice in Vanaheim, and people willingly give their lives before her knife. She lives on an island in the exact center of Vanaheim—an island within an island—which is only big enough for her sacred grove, her temple, and her house. During certain times of the year, she will process through the various Vanaheim villages, bringing peace and fertility, and then return to her island. She is accompanied on her way back by a tithe of servants whose job is to bathe her in the waters of her lake, serve her every whim for a week, and then be drowned as sacrifices. Only seek her out if you are willing to pay a high price for her wisdom, and if you cannot get it elsewhere.

Nerthus is also sometimes found in Midgard, as she has a deep maternal love for the humans of Midgard. Unlike many other deities, Nerthus has a major cult center there, where she is the embodiment of the fertile and devouring Earth.
Frey’s Hall

Frey is a god with many homes, as his conflicting loyalties keep him always on the move. When serving his time in Asgard, he stays with his sister Freya in her hall Sessrumnir, and keeps it while she is home in Vanaheim. However, his beloved etin-bride Gerda will no longer come to Asgard with him, so he is alone during his sojourns there. He also has a hall in Alfheim (elaborated on more clearly in the Alfheim chapter), given to him by the Aesir, and he spends part of his Asgard-time there. While Gerda will come to live with him sometimes in Alfheim, she really does not like it there either. When he comes home to Vanaheim, the two of them live together in his Vanaheim hall in the Barri Woods, the place of their courtship. We do not at this time know the name of this hall, or even if it has one beyond “Frey’s Place”, but visitors have reported that it seems to be made entirely of golden corn dollies of woven straw.

Frey himself is a very accessible and friendly deity. He is tall and blond and beautiful, and laughs a good deal. In Vanaheim, the folk are more likely to refer to him as Ing or Ingvi, which is a title for his sacred role as corn king. While he is quite welcoming to all who seek him, the hard part is catching up to him as he moves from stead to stead during the year. He has divine rulership over such things as fertility, growth, abundance, peace, and contentment. He is a god of love and sex and sensuality (and it is not uncommon for him to have sexual relationships with many of his followers of whatever gender), but unlike his sister who values these things in and of themselves, Frey works with committed lovers who wish to build a home together, especially if they intend to own land. He is just fine with nonheterosexual unions (and worshippers), and his priests were often effeminate and cross-dressed. He is a god of marriage, but unlike Frigga who blesses socially sanctioned marriages, Frey blesses those which make people shake their heads and say “They’ll never make it—they’re too different,” or “they’re too strange”. His own wedding with the giantess
Gerda was not the most well-received of unions, and he is sympathetic to the lovers who flout convention and struggle across cultural differences.

As a god of peace, Frey dislikes violence in his hallowed places, not to mention his home. Starting a fight there is unforgivable, as is discourtesy towards other guests. While he seems like a warm and open type, you would be surprised how fast you will be hustled out by his servants if you make him unhappy.

If you can get him to show you his ship Skidbladnir, it’s worth seeing. It’s a tiny model ship that can blow up into a full-size creation at a word. It was a gift from Aegir, commissioned from the Duergar. He is proud of it, and loves to show it off, and to take short trips in it, although he has little of his father’s skill with ships.

Gerda, his etin-bride wife, is utterly unlike her husband. Where he is good-humored and expressive, she is reserved and cool; one might even say downright cold to those she does not know. She is tall and large-boned, like most etin-women, with pale skin and long dark hair that is usually neatly braided behind her. She tends to wear loose, concealing dresses, and she spends a great deal of time in her gardens.

At each of the households where she lives with Frey—in Vanaheim and in Alfheim—she has built a beautiful garden with high walls around it, heavily warded. When you are in her gardens, there is a stillness and a safe quality to the place that makes you feel as if everything except that small place has ceased to exist. If Gerda invites you to come walk in the garden with her, it is not because she wants your conversation and chatter. It is because she wants you to spend time with her quietly appreciating the beauty and the peace of it. She may speak of her favorite garden, which is in Jotunheim at the home of her parents, planted on the limbs of a huge tree a hundred feet in the air, in the canopy of a great forest where mists float among the branches. Bring her offerings of seeds, preferably flower or herb seeds for her garden. Plant a garden in her name, in some out of the way place, perhaps with walls around it.

At first glance, Gerda seems almost plain, and one wonders how this woman won the desperate love of gorgeous blond Frey. Then, when she
warms up a little, her dark eyes flash and you realize that under her cold manner lies hot-blooded Jotun passion, and for that moment she is both frightening and shockingly desirable, as if a dull-looking tabby cat growled and for a moment became a sleek black leopard. Then it vanishes as quickly as it came, and she is back to her self-enclosed coolness. Remember that although she is Frey’s wife, she does not take on the task of running his households, as they are apart for at least half the year. Those chores she leaves to Frey’s servant-woman Beyla, including the work of hospitality. She seems to consider herself a guest in her husband’s home, except for her garden spaces; it’s a strange way to run a relationship, but it seems to work for them, and there is no questioning the depth of their love and affection for each other.

Frey’s personal assistant and man-at-arms is Skirnir, an Alfar man who has sworn fealty to Frey rather than to any Alfar lord or lady. Skirnir is lean, sharp, and quick, with a penetrating wit and wry speech. He is clever, resourceful, coldly practical behind his wide smile and pealing laughter, and willing to twist arms and lean on people in order to fulfill his orders, though he never evinces this behavior in Frey’s presence. He takes his vocation as Frey’s assistant and bodyguard very seriously, and will not hear any untoward words about his master, although he may say some teasing things himself. Frey gifted him with his horse, Blodighofi, as a reward for aiding his courtship with Gerda. Skirnir wisely realized that this was a gift given in impulse that Frey would later regret, and discreetly returned the horse after a week, saying that it was too fierce for him. He is still allowed to use Blodighofi for errands and missions, however. Gerda and Skirnir do not get along, and generally avoid each other.

Frey’s two Vanir servants are Beyla and Byggvir, a middle-aged married Alfar couple who follow him fromstead to stead. They are reported as being the sort of charmingly goblinish faery-folk who make up the bulk of the Alfar commons—rather like an archetypal faery-farmwife and her leprechaun-like husband. Beyla milks the herd animals and tends to the bees at each farm, and Byggvir tends to the various crops, makes beer, and takes care of the magical World-Mill, one of Frey’s treasures. The World-
Mill, when turned, will keep pouring out a steady stream of grain. The type of grain varies from day to day, and Byggvir is always trying to get it to make new sorts. Byggvir is quite approachable, and will gladly show off the mill that is his favorite hobby. Beyla is more reticent, but can be wooed into talking by offering to help her with her tasks. (Knowing how to milk dairy animals is especially useful.) Other members of the traveling household include Blodighofi (“Blood-hoof”), Frey’s great red horse who is unafraid of fire, and Gullinbursti (“Golden-bristle”) and Slidrugtanni, the great tame boars that pull his chariot.

Offerings to Frey include good beer (preferably homemade or craft beers), fine breads, cheeses, and other well-made beautiful gourmet food.

**Freya’s Hall**

Freya also has two halls; the famous Sessrumnir in Asgard and her home hall in Vanaheim. This hall is tended for most of the year by four of her eight sisters. Three others of her sisters—Bjart (Shining), Blith (Mild) and Frith (Peace), are handmaidens of Mengloth in Jotunheim. Eir, the eldest of her eight sisters, is Frigga’s handmaiden in Asgard and a goddess of healing. Her hall in Vanaheim is simply referred to as Freya’s Home, even though she is not there most of the time.

Like her brother, she is a hostage for the continued peace between the Aesir and the Vanir, and she is allowed to come home only when her father and brother are absent. She travels from world to world in a chariot pulled by large golden cats; in some traditions there are four of them and in others two, named Beegold and Treegold, symbolizing honey and amber, her favorite substances. She can also fly through the air in dove form, or wearing a cloak of falcon feathers which can change her into that bird as well.

Much has been said about Freya, the Goddess of Love and Fertility, Lady of the Vanir. She is one of the most popular deities in the Northern Tradition, and with good reason. She is also an extremely versatile woman. Her sacred activities fall into four categories—she wears four “hats”, as it
were. First, she is a love goddess; this is her best-known attribute, and the one that marks her appearance. Like her brother Frey, she is tall, blond, and gorgeous. She can go back and forth from coolly poised to emotionally volatile, although her temperament mostly lends itself to being sunny. In her love-goddess persona, she grants the boon of love to some of those who apply to her ... but not all; no love goddess ever gave anyone everything that they wanted.

When she appears in her aspect as Love Goddess, she wears Brisingamen, the most beautiful necklace in the Nine Worlds, made by four Duergar smith-brothers. She traded four nights of her favors for it, thus proving that her charms really were worth the greatest piece of jewelry, and was serenely immune to the catty remarks of the Aesir about her whoring. Indeed, she has an aspect as Sacred Prostitute, wherein she teaches people to value themselves and their favors rather than desperately selling themselves cheaply to whoever comes by and looks interested. Freya’s lesson as Goddess of Love is that of self-esteem, and that the Universe will give you what are willing to settle for.

In her aspect as mistress of seidhr, the mystical art of the oracle, she appears in her mysterious-woman aspect, usually dressed in some form of traditional clothing. She teaches the arts of seid-magic to those she deems worthy, although she does have a preference for women and non-gender-conforming men. This is her most “witchy” aspect.

In her warrior aspect, she has the same job as a Valkyrie, except that the Valkyries choose the brave dead for Valhalla. Sometime shortly after arriving as a hostage in Asgard, Freya cut a deal with Odin whereby she would teach him her wisdom in return for the first pick of the noble slain, of which she could take up to a third. Inevitably, she chooses the best of the crop, including all the women warriors (except those sworn personally to Odin or one of his liege-vassal deities). She can be seen alongside of the Valkyries during battle, for those with the eyes to see, in her white armor. But this side of her is never expressed in Vanaheim, only Asgard.

The side of her which is most tied to Vanaheim—and for which she always comes home in the early spring—is that of goddess of fertility. Like
Frey, her touch makes the crops flourish, but her special time is that of the early seedling, coaxing it into the full-blown plant. When she is home for her ritual duties, she wears a gown covered in flowers and grains, the magical embroidery of which changes as the plants grow. She is the Goddess of Springtime, without whose sacred beginnings nothing will end well.

There are various stories about Freya’s various husbands, all of whom seem to be dead of various disasters. Although she has taken many husbands and lovers, it seems that none of them were able to hold her for long, much less make her monogamous. She wept tears for all of them, which became droplets of amber before they hit the ground. By one of her late husbands, Od, she had two daughters, Hnoss and Gersimi. Each of them have their own halls in Vanaheim, within sight of her own. Unlike her, they mostly take after their father and are round and brown and merry and bouncing. Gersimi means “jewelry” and she is a patron of jewelry-makers, as it is one of her arts, and she often supplies her beautiful mother with strings of beads.

Offerings to Freya include honey, flowers, fine drink, sweet breads and cakes, fruits, and anything lovely. She is partial to elaborate handiwork that someone slaved over. Jewelry, of course, is always welcome, as are natural perfumes.

**Frodi’s Hall**

Frodi is a very old Vanir god whose name means “Fruitful One”. According to the lore of the Vanir, he is the father of Njord by Nott, the sky-etin of the night. He is a grey-haired, bearded, wrinkled old man who lives in a small wooden hall surrounded by orchards and berry-brambles. While elderly and private, he will welcome you if you come willing to sing or tell tales, and lend him a strong back to help with the fruit-picking. As an offering, plant berry-bushes or small fruit trees and shrubs.

**Nehallenia’s Hall**
Nehallenia, whose name also means “Fruitful One”, is a goddess of vegetation and the sea. While it is unclear as to what pantheon she was originally from, she does have a hall in Vanaheim. It is by the ocean, facing Asgard as Njord’s hall is, and just down the coast from his place. It is built of woven branches, made to be in the shape of a cornucopia, which is her symbol. She is a goddess of good fishing and plenty, and her specialty is those things which flourish within half a mile of the coast in either direction—shellfish, seaweed, beach plums, and produce that loves the salt air. Like Njord, she is especially fond of rosemary as an offering.

**Holda’s Hall**

Holda is a Germanic goddess, and her actual home is in some strange underworld place that isn’t Helheim, but people accidentally fall down a well in order to get to it. However, I am told that she does have a hall in Vanaheim, where she is practically the center of the flax-weaving industry. Vanaheim is famed for its linen, whereas the spinners in Asgard under Frigga’s eye generally spin wool. Holda’s cottage sits in the middle of many fields of waving blue and white flax flowers, with an extensive culinary herb garden spread about it.

Holda is a goddess of the household arts; many folk who have worked with her report that she loves a clean, neat house, and will make those who call on her suddenly feel the urge to go on a mad cleaning spree, scrubbing floors and dusting shelves even if they have never done such things before. Cleaning is a good way to welcome her, anyway; it shows that you value what she’s about. As one can imagine, her home in Vanaheim is spotless, but still warm and homey. Her food never burns, her milk never sours, her fruits and vegetables never spoil, and her hands are never idle; while she talks to you she is likely to be spinning or weaving or doing some other sort of small craft.

She has a small flock of handmaidens to whom she teaches the homely arts; unlike other deities, she does not have a permanent staff, but rather rotates young girls who then go off to run their own households when they
have learned enough. The exception is a handmaiden called Harn, who is an expert in flax-dressing (the long and ungainly process of turning flax into linen thread) and she aids those who wish to learn this art.

For an offering to Holda, clean your house! If your home is already in order—including all the nooks and crannies such as the inside of refrigerators and the backs of attics—go to the home of someone who has difficulty keeping their place clean and commit an act of cleanliness there. It is especially good to help out disabled people, the elderly, or mothers with small children who are overrun and overwhelmed. Don’t worry about actually bringing anything to Holda. She’ll know what you’ve done. If you didn’t think to do any cleaning before you visit, ask to help out with something. She’ll put you to work.

**Billing’s Hall**

The giant Billing is referred to as the “Master of the Vanirs”, strangely enough ... which seems to mean that he is the master of dealings between the Vanir and the Jotnar. He is Gilling’s brother, Rind’s father and Vali’s grandfather. Although he is a giant, he has strong ties with the Vanir—one of his wives is a Vana—and he is in charge of handling the trade between Vanaheim and Jotunheim. He is mediator and bargainer, working towards the best deal for both sides, and both sides respect him for his fairness and neutrality. His hall is located at a large port on the Jotunheim-facing coast of Vanaheim; it is as much warehouse as living space. Although he is well-disposed towards human travelers, he is very busy and has little time for their questions.
Aegirheim

Just off the coast of Vanaheim lies Aegirheim, the underwater palace of Aegir, the sea god (originally known as Hler). While Aegir and his folk travel the seawater in every land, and are familiar with the beaches that wash everywhere from Midgard to Asgard to Muspellheim to Helheim, their main base is in Vanaheim and they do tend to ally themselves with the Vanir. Aegir’s father is Mistblindi, and one of his brothers, Logi, is a sworn man of Utgard-Loki. The other is Kari, the God of the North Wind and one of the chiefs of Niflheim.

Aegir was often shown as a vigorous man with a spear in his hand—one ancient term for the sea, *garsecg*, actually meant spear-man—with a long, flowing beard that he loves to decorate with shells and beads. His wife Ran, whose name means “Ravager” due to her habit of snatching people down to the depths of the ocean, is the Thief of Ships. She is not nearly as nice as Aegir is, and is harder to please. She is tiny for an etin-woman, small and delicate with pale, blue-tinged skin, long fingers, strange sea-colored inhuman eyes, and black hair so long that it trails on the floor behind her. Her eyes are cold and flick from side to side like green-glass blades. She enjoys human guests largely for their entertainment value, so make sure that you are properly entertaining.

Aegir and Ran’s daughters, the Nine Undines, take much more after their mother’s temperament. In their natural forms, they range from startlingly ugly to strikingly lovely but inhuman-looking, although they can all take on illusory beautiful-human-woman forms if they choose. In the water they will always be tailed mermaids; in Aegirheim they switch to legs. They are a close-knit and rather bloodthirsty lot, as can be deduced by their names: Blodughadda (Blood-hair), Bara (Big Wave), Bylgja (Breaking Wave), Duva (Hidden), Hevring (Heaving), Himinglava (Sky Shining Through), Hronn (Sucking Wave), Kolga (Cool One), and Unn (Billow).
Their names are a litany of the powers of the Ocean: Kolga the Cold One, and Duva the Hidden One are the eldest, twins in age and both reserved. Blodughadda, the Blood-Haired and bloodthirsty, is next in age. Then there is big-bellied Bara, and Bylgja of the Breaker; then another pair of twins—the terrible Hronn of the Whirlpool and the anguished, wailing Hevring. Then comes Unn, the Undine of the Tides; and Himinglava, the Fair-Weather Undine, is the youngest and most fickle of the lot.

—“Heimdall’s Birth”, Jotun legend

Sea-giants have several forms. They can look like pale humans, usually with long flowing hair nearly the full length of their bodies. They can take on the forms of fishes, dolphins, whales and other sea creatures, sometimes even floating clumps of seaweed. They can take on a form that looks like a transparent humanoid water-shape. They can also take on the classic half-fish mermaid/merman form that has so entranced sailors through the ages.

Sea giants seem to be more capricious and playful than the other varieties of etin. Aegir himself is very jovial—he is the brewer of the best booze in the Nine Worlds, which is imported all over and highly prized—and tends to be easygoing and enjoy partying. Still, when enraged, he can create huge storms that can drag down ships. His fingers are clawed, reminding us of that part of his nature. Ran is very much the flirtatious siren—of all the etins, female sea-giants are most likely to make eyes at humans, although to take them up on it can be disastrous—but she has been known to drag her victims down to the bottom of the ocean in her net, as have her daughters. She is the maker of all sea-storms in the northern oceans.

We tend to think of water as being the most gentle of the elements. The adjectives used to describe it symbolically all tend to center around things like “nurturing” and “healing” and “comforting”. The truth is, though, that the largest single amount of water on the planet comes not in the form of warm hotsprings or gentle babbling brooks. It’s ocean, and ocean is wild and ferocious and drowns people. It is also the source of life, something that is no conundrum to anyone who understands Jotun nature—and thus, through them, nature itself.

This can be seen in the nature of the Nine Sea-Undines. They are not the nurturing, welcoming waters; they reflect the nature of the sea that eats
people and ships. As in all things, when you confront the elements through Jotun nature, you start with the natural disasters. The sea-etins can bear you up and teach you all about the powers of water, or they can drown you.

To get to Aegirheim, the best route is via Hlesey Island, off the coast of Vanaheim. Here you can rent a boat from the locals (or bring your own), go down to the shore and make the proper offerings, and ask to be escorted to Aegir’s halls. If the offering is accepted, one of his servants (or daughters, if he thinks that you rate that kind of treatment) will come up out of the water for you. They will sail the boat for you—go ahead and let them!—and it will slowly sink under the waves. This is the frightening part for us air-breathers, but don’t worry—ask long as you are close to them, you will be able to breathe fine. It’s part of their magic. If you are rude, of course, they will throw you off the boat (or, later, out of the palace) and you will quickly drown as soon as you are out of range.

Aegir’s doorward is an etin named Eldir. Like Fjalar, his favorite form is that of a giant rooster. He is fussy and difficult, and prone to turning rude people away. If he answers the door in rooster form, be careful not to laugh; he would not be above pecking or scratching you badly and then throwing you out into the ocean. Eldir is a bit self-important; humor him and make sure he knows you understand what an honor it is to feast at Aegir’s table. Another of his servants is the young sea-etin Fimafeng; there is some discussion as to whether he is alive or dead.

During the feast, Aegir will pass around the Rimkalk, or crystal goblet used for toasts. This is your cue to tell him how honored you are to be there, and to praise his hospitality. If you have a song or poem to donate, go ahead, but keep it short. The great feasts are cooked in a magic kettle a mile deep called Seaboiler. It was originally owned by the giant Hymir, but it was borrowed by Thor, never returned, and won in a game by Aegir, who uses it in his enormous feeds.

One thing that you may find notable when dining with Aegir is the number of human beings at the table who are actually dead. There will usually be a quite a few ghosts at the table, enjoying his hospitality,
although these days there are far fewer than there used to be in the times of the great ships. These are people who were drowned at sea and whose souls were snatched by Ran, who holds the power to steal souls out of drowning bodies. She keeps them around Aegirheim, rather like pets, until they cease to be entertaining and then are summarily sent off to Helheim. The most entertaining ghosts, or the ones that Aegir finds the most engaging, have been there for hundreds of years feasting and singing and dancing.

**Offerings**

Offerings to water-etins might be food or polished stones that they would not have access to underwater; bread or cake or tree fruits, etc. Shiny coins and jewelry are especially liked. Please make sure that the metal is actually real precious metal; they can tell the difference and will be as insulted by pot metal as any Duergar. Sailors used to be given coins with which to pay off the sea-giants if they were “captured”. Alcohol with gold dust in it is also much loved, as Aegir appreciates gold. Don’t bother trying to give him beer, as you can’t make beer as good as his anyway and he dislikes modern chemical-laden beer. The Nine Sisters are especially fond of glass sea-floats, especially if you are actually willing to set them afloat in the ocean. In ancient times, sailors used to give human sacrifices to the sea-giants, throwing them overboard, and they still remember this wistfully. It meant a lot to them not just because of bloodthirstiness, but because the souls of those who drowned went to their own halls, where they would feast and be entertained for centuries. The Nine Undines all like blood offerings; a drop put into the ocean or into salt water will do.
Day 6, Jotunheim

“I am the lost child of the Iron Wood.”

I crossed over in Jotunheim in the morning, sad to leave Vanheim behind. Everything here is so huge ... the trees are enormous, incredibly tall, big enough to carve houses into, which many folk seem to have done. The mountains are easily as big as the biggest ones I’ve seen, and I’ve seen the Alps. I came out onto a large, heavily rutted road, with wagons traveling up and down, one every ten minutes or so, loaded with Jotun folk, hay, and animals. I figured that wherever they were headed was probably civilization, or what passes for it in Jotunheim, so I followed them. They gave me some curious looks, but didn’t call out or engage me.

I never got all the way into Utgard. Instead, I ended up at the guard encampment on its outskirts, and spent the day among the guards. I hadn’t been on the road for more than twenty minutes when I was “pulled over”, as it were, by a cadre of tall, heavily armed Jotun, all wearing the same badge, which
seemed to be as much of a uniform as they get around here. They asked my business, and I showed my tattoo and told them that I was a shaman, and Hel’s Own, and that I was on my way to Utgard, and then to the Iron Wood. That surprised them, and they stood back. I think they would have let me go then, but I asked if they could guide me to Utgard. They stopped off at the encampment outside the city—we could see its stone walls rising up close behind, and smell quite the odor—and I decided to stay there instead.

They were a rough sort, but I figured that they ought to have decent advice as to where was safe to go ... and besides, it was a safe place to spend the day. I impressed them by having my “invisible servant” deliver meat and whiskey to them; I promised to bring some, and then the lunch bell rang down at the hermitage—Joshua was bringing food. “There it is,” I said, and fetched up a leg of mutton cooked with onions. Joshua had thought to add a bottle of Jack Daniels; it was what he thought that Jotnar might like. I don’t know if all Jotnar would have liked it (although I suspect so), but it was just the ticket for
the guard encampment. They warmed to me immediately after that.

The guard regiment of Utgard are both male and female, seemingly all living together without trouble. I sang for them until evening. When they found out that I was going to the land of the dead, they were excited and insisted that I take messages to their loved ones. I memorized what names and messages I could, and then started taking notes. The most poignant one was from a young male giant with a snubbed nose and a bulldog-like face who was grieving the loss of his lover and shieldmate. I wasn’t clear on how recently she had died, but his companions were chiding him for having lost his spirit, and being unable to fight due to mooning around after her. He said that her spirit was haunting him, and he needed her to set him free.

We also talked about things, and they gave me advice and information, from their perspective anyway. The Iron Wood, according to them, is where the cannibalistic barbarians live. Much of Jotunheim is reasonably civilized (or nearly unpopulated), but the tribes of the Iron Wood live in a rougher style.
They are shorter than most Jotun, not much more than human height, and often deformed monsters, or half-beast, or werebeast. The place is a sinkhole of magic, and they way they spoke of it was almost as if it was radioactive. It creates both deformed mutants and gods; the monsters come out of there, as do the Jotun deities. Mama Hel was born there, to Angrboda, the Hagia of the Iron Wood. My bloodline, according to Loki, leads back to that place.

I also got some information about the sort of animals that populate the place. According to the guards, the animals of Jotunheim are much bigger than those of Midgard. As they described them, I recognized creatures that once walked our world, before the time of humans. They may have long died out here, but they still live in Jotunheim... the megafauna. The woolly mammoth elephants, the great cave bears, the dire wolves, the sabertooth. Different Jotun tribes and clans have different megafauna totem animals. One, particularly big and shaggy, boasted of his clan’s mammoth totem. He smacked the earth with his club as he spoke.
As evening drew on, a tall Jotun dressed in black came down to see me. I could tell by the way that the guards moved that he was important. He wasn’t dressed any finer than them—fairly understated, actually—but as he walked in, they moved aside and came to attention in a way that was clearly trying to downplay the fact that they were coming to attention. They closed in behind him as if protecting his back. I knew without being told that he was the guy in charge, the Lord of Utgard. Did that mean that he was Utgard-Loki, the sorcerer? It seemed so. He politely asked if I was the utlander shaman, and would I be willing to soothsay for him? I was startled, but the On Duty light seemed to be rather permanently on, so of course I agreed and got out my runes.

The question took me aback. According to him, in the past several years—I was unclear on how time in Jotunheim lines up with us—there had been a steady rise in outlanders coming into his realm and wandering about, often bothering Jotunfolk who were just going about their business. By outlanders, he clearly meant outworlders, people like me. Probably
journeymen. He wanted to know what was to be done with them: should he try to create alliances (against the Aesir, was the unspoken fine print to that), or run them off, or declare it tourist season (as in deer season, or squirrel season) and let his folk have at them? The answers, according to my reading, were that there would be few alliances—most of the folk have put themselves on the side of the Aesir—but that he shouldn’t have them killed without judging them on an individual basis. He thanked me and left without comment.

We, in our arrogance, think that the Nine Worlds exist for us, just as we mistakenly think that they revolve around Midgard. We think that all their denizens exist to entertain or educate or inform us, and that they are timeless and eternal. That we interact with them, but they do not interact with us. We couldn’t be more wrong. The Lord’s request showed that they are aware of us, that our intrusions disturb their world. Of course, in Jotunheim, I had little worry that our foolish curiosity-seekers would disturb things too badly, or they’d just get astrally
killed and eaten. A friend commented later that it would do some folk good to get eaten by giants.

As it grew dark, I took my leave of the Utgard encampment, and headed off in the direction of the Iron Wood. Took me over two hours of crashing through the woods to get there, but I finally came out in a clearing that I managed to line up with our field, except our field is flat and this was the sloped and rocky side of a mountain. The full moon hadn’t yet reached above the level of the trees, and somehow it seemed important to me that I make no move until I could see it. So I huddled cold on the mountainside, in my leather jacket with the furs attached, holding a bowl of organ meats that Joshua had sent down for an offering. It felt like hours that I waited there, getting colder and more scared. Waiting is great for letting your mind play tricks on you. Why am I doing this? I asked myself. What the heck do I think I’m going to find here? I’m a human, fergodssake. I will not smell right, and they won’t believe that I have their blood in me. Besides, I still have to find Mimir’s Well before the night’s up. This is ridiculous.
I heard the dinner bell, but I stayed longer, telling myself that I could eat after I’d dealt with this. But the moon took forever to come up, and I finally chickened out. It’s no big deal, I told myself. I’ll go eat and go see Mimir, and that will be enough. After all, I rationalized, if Josh has left me fire on the doorstep as he usually does, I’d better go make sure that it’s taken care of before it goes out. The predator in me, the bloodthirsty part of me that I restrain so well behind so many iron bars, grumbled and snarled as I walked back. Coward, he said. Coward. If you won’t do it, let me do it. Let me out and I’ll take care of the Iron Wood.

Out of the question, I told him, gritting my teeth, and made my way back to the hermitage. As I’d been afraid of, there was a candle on the steps getting dangerously low. After my first night, when I’d accidentally knocked over the candle and put it out, and had to eat my dinner in darkness and go straight to sleep, I learned to immediately light the punched-tin lantern and the oil lamp as soon as the flame arrived. Make more fire immediately, was my lesson. I took care of that, and then noticed that there were
extra baskets. Dinner was some extravagant Indian food Josh had cooked for me, and there was a basket of gifts for Svartalfheim that everyone had picked out—chocolate eyeballs, a lovely red glass apple with a “smash me” feel to it, and a bottle of Crown Royal for the Duergar. And there were notes from my daughter, and Julie, and Lydia, and Nahi, and of course Joshua. Various people were promising to send me energy and give me what aid they could. Even Thomas, who is Christian and admitted that mine was a very foreign land, offered energy of pure intention for my use.

I ate ferociously, and then laid out my cloak on the bed and cast runes on the section of the map that was the Iron Wood. The central rune, representing me, was Os—the speaker, the divinely inspired God-Mouth. The problem was the Tyr-rune, the warrior. I was specifically told by Hel not to journey with armor or weapons on this trip—I assume because that’s like going out with “Looking For A Fight” tattooed on your forehead—and I was basically unarmed, but I smelled a fight of some sort coming. I laid out two runes for my resources, and got Fehu (wealth) and
Gyfu (gift). I looked at the notes and the basket, and knew exactly what that meant: My value is measured by the gifts that I am given. I know that I am something damn special, because that many people think that I am worth all that effort...so I had best get my ass out there and deal with those barbarians, because they’re counting on me to do this Right, and that’s part of it. I almost cried, and I ended up laughing instead.

Besides, said my internal predator, we don’t want to have to face Mimir after an act of cowardice.

So I marched back to the field, and back to that empty hillside, and the moon was up over the trees, casting a white glow on half the field. Dogs were howling—lots of dogs—in my world. I would later ask my family if they’d heard anything, and got a negative, but I swear that the howling started in my world, and then began in Jotunheim. So I howled myself, and they howled back ... and then the dark shapes began to come out of the woods.

They stayed in the darkened part of the field, out of the moonlight—I don’t know why I thought the moon would give me an advantage—and they
surrounded me, slowly. I could smell them, wet fur and leather and smoke. I could barely see them in the dark, but there was something a little off about nearly all of them, some not-quite-normal way of moving or being shaped. Some were clearly half beast, with hair covering their face and body. Let me out, said my internal predator. Let me out. I’ll handle this.

I’ve never fully let him out, and I didn’t intend to now. No, I told him. This will require diplomacy. You’re not diplomatic. You’re a killer.

You don’t know what kind of diplomacy they use here, he snarled, but at that moment something else distracted me. One of the larger ones—I don’t know how I knew he was male, maybe the smell—suddenly shifted shape to something big and shaggy and canine-like, and then, before I could say a single word, he jumped me.

Or at least he tried to jump me. I’m still not sure how it was managed, but before he was halfway to me, still in mid-leap, my internal predator pushed out the bars of his cage and took over. Actually, it was more like the bars suddenly weren’t there any more. I
asked him later how that happened, and he wouldn’t tell me, he just implied that it had to do with the radioactive magic of the Iron Wood. I’d shapeshifted before—the astral body, not the physical body—but I’d never shapeshifted so grindingly fast, or so violently. A growl and a high yelping sound that was utterly unlike anything canine tore itself from my throat, and suddenly I was bigger than my attacker. Much bigger. I hit him before he hit me, and knocked him to the ground, and got my teeth in his throat. He yelped, sounding very canine, and my predator-self let him go. He slipped out from under me and moved quickly away, shifting back to a humanoid form. It came to me that this had been a challenge, a test of my mettle, not a lethal attack. It was a test of strength, although it probably would have gone badly had they found me wanting. Diplomacy indeed.

I shoved my predator back, shapeshifted to my normal form, and stood up. Now was the time to speak, and the words just came out of my raspy throat. I took off my jacket, held up my arm, and showed my tattoo. “I am the lost child of the Iron
Wood,” I called out to the circle of predators. “I’ve come here seeking my birthright. Speak to me of my birthright!”

They closed in again, but this time it was not to attack me. They sniffed me, touched me, stroked my pelt, made murmuring noises that slowly resolved themselves into words. “Your birthright is the taste of blood.” “Your birthright is the moon among the clouds.” “Your birthright is the scream and the leap.” “Your birthright is the loyalty of the pack, the protection of the tribe.” “Your birthright is the scent of carrion.” “Your birthright is the heart of Jotunheim.”

Later note, as I type this in. By the time I got home, I still hadn’t figured out what the heck I’d shapeshifted into. I always referred to that part of me as “my predator”, but I didn’t associate it with a wolf or bear or lion or other obvious creature. I’d never seen its true shape until that moment, and since I’d only felt it from the inside I was still in the dark. I catalogued what I’d felt—large, really large, bigger than the other guy who was wolflike, but bigger than
any wolf I’d ever seen in a zoo. But I wasn’t a wolf, not exactly.

Things that were canine-like: I was mammalian, and furred, and four-footed, and pawed, and clawed. I had a muzzle with teeth; clearly flesh-tearing and not grass-chewing teeth. I had ears that stuck up. I could smell, better than I normally do. I saw in black and white.

Things that weren’t canine-like: Although he was narrow all the way from front to back, like a dog, I was much broader and higher in the shoulders. There was bristly fur in a ridge along those very broad shoulders. My leap and my running felt more uneven than canine movements. My cry was higher and very different...and most obvious, I had no tail. No tail! I didn’t have time to check out what anything else looked like.

When I talked to my wife and boyfriend and daughter about the experience, and described the beast-form, Joshua just laughed and said that it was probably something prehistoric, and I’d probably see it on the Discovery Channel or something. Bella said that she already had. She had me describe it again,
and then told me that it matched best with a giant hyena—the hyenadon. The predator that is as much a scavenger as a predator (my other two totems, Raven and Skunk, are scavengers), whose females are all so soaked with male hormones that they have phalluses. I thought of my intersex condition, of the hermaphroditic Midgard Serpent, of the fact that hyenas are matriarchal. My daughter pointed out that the first child in our family is always a girl, and she inherits the powers that seem to have originated in Loki’s family. Later, I would learn that it was the totem of one of the tribes of the Iron Wood.

It was time to find Mimir’s well. After that spectacle, that beheaded bastard couldn’t frighten me. I did the Raido-Laguz spell again and again, but I couldn’t get it to line up with any of the bodies of water on our property. Grrr. It kept wanting to go east, so I took my drum and shouldered Bag, and hiked off to the street. It was the middle of the night, but there was the occasional car going by. As they passed me walking on the side of the road, they would swerve suddenly away. I was still pathwalking the
whole way, and I wonder what they saw ... or if going
by me made the road warp.

Mimirsbrunnr lined up with Moose Horn Pond, the fishing pond near my house. It took about fifteen
minutes to walk there. I threw a silver coin into the
water and called him, and after a while, he came up
and asked me what I wanted.

“I’m not sure,” I said. “I know that Hel wanted me
to come here. I don’t know what I’m supposed to get
from you.”

“I can answer questions,” he said, “but you’ll pay
a price. I can tell you the date of your death.”

I thought a moment. “Actually, I’m not so sure
that I want to know that,” I said.

“I could tell you the date of your loved ones’
deaths.”

“I don’t think I want to know that, either.” He
offered me more esoteric knowledge, but it all seemed
either to be stuff that I realized that I could live
without, or that I didn’t think that Hel wanted me to
know, or that I was pretty sure I’d find out eventually
anyway. I slowly came to the realization that there
was nothing he had that I desperately wanted, and I
told him so. Then I poured the last of the Jack Daniels, which I’d saved, into the water near his floating head. “Remember me as the one who gave you something for free,” I said, and then I turned and walked away, feeling lighter than I had in days.
Chapter 18

Jotunheim

The Land of the Giants was parceled out to Jotunkind when the first Aesir divided up the worlds. It is a land that is both forbidding and exhilarating, beautiful and dangerous. As is appropriate for Giant-Home, everything grows larger there. Trees are enormous, forests thick and towering, animals immense and fierce. Journeyers travel there for a variety of reasons, some useful and some foolish. Jotunheim was created to be a new homeland for the Jotnar, a place where fire-giants and frost-giants could come together. Both the Aesir and the Jotnar take credit for creating it, but it is clear that the early Jotnar designed and colonized it themselves. After some time, the Jotnar colonists seem to have evolved and acclimated themselves to the terrain, and the varying genetic strands of Jotunheim giants are different from either frost-thurse or fire-etin. As the Jotnar are shapechangers, it is not surprising that they could adapt so easily and produce adapted offspring.

Time and seasons

The day in Jotunheim is a little shorter than the day in Midgard, and sunset and sunrise happen more quickly. First the sky is light, and then the sun sinks abruptly beyond the horizon. The time of year when Jotunheim spins closest to our world is the fall equinox. Storms rage over Jotunheim on a regular basis; there is a great deal of rainfall, especially in the spring. While they are not usually as severe as the terrible storms of Niflheim, the place is infamous for its dramatic lightning, which nearly always sets some part of the forests afire. Between storms, the sky lightens and is fairly
bright, but the thick forests block out a good deal of the light. The high mountains also block the horizon, so unless you are flying, Jotunheim can seem like one of the darkest worlds of all. This is one reason why mountaintop fortresses are prized; they get more light than anywhere else.

Geography

Imagine mountains the size of the Himalayas covered up to the treeline with trees the size of sequoias, and you get a good idea of what much of Jotunheim is like. There are warmer sections that could almost be called rain forest or jungle, and colder sections where snow falls for half the year. There are cities carved out of the greenery, and roads that run in a complicated network under the giant branches, and the occasional upland meadow, but most of Jotunheim is under thick primeval forest.

There are three major mountain chains in Jotunheim. One lies along the western coast, one (the famous Nidfjoll Mountains where Sindri, the dwarf-built Ragnarok-shelter, lies deep beneath) grows on the eastern side and turns northward through snow and ice nearly as cold as Niflheim, and the smallest one splits the world down the middle and stabs south like an arrow. The famous Iron Wood lies in the southeastern area of Jotunheim; there the trees are shorter and more twisted, with larger gaps between them. The clearings in the Iron Wood are the only parts of Jotunheim that could be termed lowland meadows, but no farming is done there due to the Iron Wood's overwhelming emanations of strange energy. The southwestern area of Jotunheim is hot and steamy, with rain forests and multiple small rivers.

The largest river in Jotunheim is the Elivagar, which is really a narrow stretch of salt-water ocean. It is the water/world barrier between the southernmost border of Jotunheim and the northern border of Midgard. The Big Snake lies offshore here, just out of sight. (This is not the same Elivagar river as the original Elivagar in primordial Niflheim; it is a much-tamer descendant named in honor of that ice-poison river.) The north border of Jotunheim is the great Thund Thvitr, the second-largest river
and the line between Jotunheim and Asgard. It is riddled with small fortresses and guard settlements, watching the Cold War line between the two worlds. Another famous river is the Slith, which has iron-grey waters that float with razor-sharp volcanic-glass knives. It cuts through the southern border of the Iron Wood, and the knives are a protection enchantment by the local inhabitants.

In the northwest corner, near to the Thund Thvitr, is the forest of Galgvid. The inhabitants in this area generally consist of Egg ther the harper and his permanent guard encampment, set to watch the Asgard border for signs of invasion and/or weakness. Egg ther is a cheery sort for an etin, and will gladly take in folk to his table, so long as they are not directly allied with the Aesir and they can sing new songs for him to learn. Egg ther is the keeper of Volund’s sword of revenge, but like the keepers of the other magic swords in the Nine Worlds, asking to see it is not only rude but fatally ill-advised. His assistant is Fjalar (not to be confused with the famously evil Duergar of the same name), a giant whose favorite form is that of an enormous rooster. If there is an invasion, Fjalar’s crow will be the battle cry.

Off the coast of the western sea, the coastline dissolves into a myriad of small islands, each of which is owned by a particular etin. These giants tend to have close relations with Aegir, and do a good deal of fishing (which is a harder act in Jotunheim than in other places, as the fishes tend to be huge and toothed). Furthest out lies the island of Allgron, a midway-trading-point between Vanaheim and Jotunheim. It is owned by the rich giant Fjolvar, who is famous for his enormous brothel of females from all parts of the Nine Worlds—etin-women, Duergar-women, Vanir-women, mortal women from Midgard, and the occasional hapless Alfar-maiden. So far he has no Aesir employees, but he is always looking for talent.

**Utgard**

The city of Utgard (which means, literally, the outland fortress) is the single biggest Jotun settlement in the Nine Worlds. If the halls of Asgard
function as the Paris or Rome of the Nine Worlds, Utgard is the New York or Los Angeles—huge, sprawling, not always clean, a constant babble of interracial trade in the streets and fighting in the back alleys. It is the most “civilized” place in all the Jotun-controlled worlds, but that doesn’t make it particularly safe.

The main area of Utgard is surrounded by a great stone wall, although there is a good deal of sprawling suburb outside of the wall. Once through the gates, the narrow, crowded, noisy roads slope upwards to the highest central point, where Utgard-Loki keeps his hall. To get in the gates, you will need coin or some kind of worthy trade good, of which you will be tithed a certain percent in order to enter. The gate fees are fickle and variable and almost certainly higher for strangers. If you come with nothing in your pockets, it will be assumed that you are a beggar and you will be turned away. Make sure that you have some kind of coin or other goods that you might sell. This is a change from the usual hospitality of the Nine Worlds, but if the warders of Utgard did not set limits, all the flotsam of the other worlds, not to mention the greedy of Jotunheim, would be preying on the streets of the city.

Inside, Utgard is crowded with markets where you can buy almost anything produced in the Nine Worlds. Vendors come in all sizes, shapes, and species. Taverns, inns, and brothels abound. There are yards where people can play competitive games with each other while the onlookers bet on them. (Don’t get involved; there is usually a catch, such as the loser forfeiting everything they own.) Haggling is the rule, unlike our modern marketplaces, and the first named price of any item is likely to be ridiculously high, with the assumption that it will be argued down. There is no one coin of Utgard; any barter or coin is accepted at the discretion of the seller. You may want to do an anti-glamour spell on any item that looks too good to be true; it just might be.

The lord of Utgard is Utgard-Loki, a name he took to distinguish himself from Laufey’s son. He is both warrior and sorcerer, and is a brilliant, canny, ruthless leader who invokes deep respect from his people. Sharp as a razor, he is a leader worthy of respect, but he is much more
concerned with the welfare of his people than with the life of any given human whatsoever—as a good leader should be. He is known to be generous to visitors if he wants to impress them, or if they have something he wants from them; he is a faultless and courteous host, although he has been known to bait guests who seem too full of themselves. It is said that among all the great ones of Jotunkind, Utgard-Loki has never been seen to lose his temper. The kind of iron control behind that mask of flawless, regal politeness is awe-inspiring. He has mastered the ability to quell the most violent of drunken giants with his piercing gaze, and on the off chance that it doesn’t work, he has a supremely competent, loyal, and well-organized cadre of city guards who can handle it for him.

The Guard of Utgard is an elite corps with a reputation similar to the Landsknechts of Renaissance Germany. Unlike most other Jotun warriors, they are actually drilled and trained with a great deal of precision. They patrol the roads outside of the city, rounding up troublemakers (which includes strange outlanders who might be up to no good) and keeping the trade routes safe for merchants. They also patrol the city itself, breaking up brawls and keeping the peace. Like all Jotun warrior bands, the Guard has both male and female soldiers, including some warrior-couples who are shieldmates. Care should be taken not to underestimate female Guardswomen as weaker, less skilled, less ruthless, or more likely to accept a sad story than their male compatriots.

While Utgard-Loki is nominally liegesworn to Thrym, the King of Jotunheim, he technically commands more power and respect than the King himself. Their relationship is reminiscent of that between the medieval Japanese emperor and the Shogun; one was the ceremonial wearer of the crown, and the other was the actual war leader who made most of the decisions. Thrym The Old, as he is called (or sometimes Thrym The Loud) is the tribal head of the Jotunheim storm-thurses, and has been the elected monarch of the realm since Jotunheim was first boundaried. He comes south only for ceremonial occasions, as he dislikes noisy, crowded Utgard and is content to let Utgard-Loki handle most of the state decisions, as well as the defense of Jotunheim.
Mimir'sbrunnr

Probably one of the most-visited tourist attractions in Jotunheim is Mimir’s well, which is found next to the second extruded root of the World Tree. The Tree’s root extrudes from the ground like a vast earthwork, curling around to the southeast, and in the small valley made by its knotted bulk is the mouth of a cave. The well is just inside, and floating in it are a number of skulls and severed heads. Some are offerings that folk give to Mimir; some are trophies that he takes when folk fail to answer a bargain-question properly. The heads are a ward-off; many folk become frightened at the sight and leave, which is fine with Mimir.

Sometimes one of the heads will turn and speak, which means that Mimir has decided to make the first move. His head is old and wrinkled, with long white hair floating in the water like a cloak all around. More often, though, he will be underwater and you will have to call him up. Pouring good booze in the water is one way to start. Good offerings for him, before and afterwards, are alcohol and food with strong, sweet flavors that dissolves easily in water. While he gets no nourishment from it, he enjoys tasting it.

Mimir is one of the proto-etins, from the oldest generation of etins, and he is Odin’s maternal uncle. At one time, it is said that he was the consort of the former Hel, the old Death Goddess who held the title before Loki’s daughter claimed it. He went to ally with the Aesir, who were ruled by Odin, the son of Mimir’s sister Bestla. When the war with the Vanir was concluded in an exchange of hostages, Odin sent Mimir and Hoenir of them rather than any of the Aesir. (One wonders whether this was an honor or a scapegoat position, given what happened.) When they could not get any useful wisdom out of them (for what reason we aren’t sure), the Vanir chopped off Mimir’s head and sent it back to the Aesir in Hoenir’s hands.

Odin brought the head back to life by throwing it into the well that fed the second aboveground root of the World Tree, and there Mimir stays, a literal floating head and permanent oracle. He is the god of underground waters, and like them his wisdom runs deep and hidden. He has a fairly
direct line into the Library of the Akashic Records as well as a good relationship with the Norns, which is why people bother him with questions. He is also old, tired, capricious, embittered, and spiteful. Cranky doesn’t even begin to cover it. Being a floating oracular head down a well is a lousy job, and several journeyers have noted with compassion that the kindest thing that could happen to Mimir is to be released into death. He might like you, in which case he might actually be cooperative, although possibly sarcastic and insulting. If he doesn’t like you—and whether he takes to you or not seems to be less about you and your offerings and more about whether he’s just in a bad mood that day—you might think about coming back another time.

If Mimir says that the only exchange for your question is for you to answer one of his, do not take him up on the challenge. First of all, there is no way that you can beat him at this game. He will always come up with something you don’t know. He’s especially good at finding things that you ought to know but don’t, so that you are groaning and slapping your forehead and feeling stupid in the moments before you die. That’s right...the price for losing is beheading. Don’t think that because he is a severed head down a well that he can’t kill you. Floating blades will fall from the ceiling or fly from the walls before you can even turn around. Take those rotting, bloated skulls seriously. If he is in a bloodthirsty mood, apologize for disturbing him, leave your offering to perhaps sweeten his disposition towards you at a later time, and come back another time. (Remember that even Odin had to extract one of his own eyes to get some of Mimir’s wisdom. This is not a god to be taken lightly.)

Even if he does answer your question, keep in mind that he may make it deliberately cryptic, or leave out important information that may trip you up if you act on it. He will not, however, lie. Mimir never lies. The truth is his weapon, to manipulate and strike with. If he offers to tell you the most likely date of your own death, I strongly suggest that you decline. While it may be tempting to know, the next temptation will be to attempt to stave it off, and that gets into messing with the strands of Wyrd and into the work of the Norns, and can often just dig you deeper into the hole.
Besides, it wastes your question, and he may not be inclined to answer any others.

**Gastropnir**

Another often-sought place in Jotunheim is Gastropnir. This is the castle of Mengloth, the famed Healer of Jotunheim. It lies in the westernmost part of Jotunheim, near the shore of the Vanaheim Ocean, and is perched on the peak of Lyfjaberg Mountain. Lyfjaberg is easily visible from both the shore and from the mountain chain surrounding Utgard; it is the tallest mountain in the western chain. There is a twisting road that circles the mountain, but it is filled with hazards. The castle itself is said to have been carved from the bones of the giant Leirbrimir; the local story, however, is that Leirbrimir was a mountain Jotun who turned himself into part of the mountainside and stayed that way, and the jutting cliff that had been his body formed the foundation for the castle.

The front gate is enormous, of wrought iron shaped like twining vines, nicknamed Clanging Thrymgjol. It was supposedly forged by the three sons of the dwarf Solblindi. Two hounds, Gif and Geri, are constantly on watch outside and will not let anyone through. Attempting to bribe them with food will not work, as they are trained to deal with that: one will eat the food while the other watches. (It is quite likely that they are not ordinary hounds at all, but shapeshifted Jotnar.)

The gatekeeper and general majordomo of the place is Fjolsvid. He is a fairly large and intimidating-looking giant, but in actuality he is rather loquacious and enjoys chatting with passersby. His willingness to gossip, however, does not mean that he will be willing to let just anyone through. It is best to send a message to Mengloth first, asking to visit. She is the best-known healer among all Jotunkind, especially for women’s complaints. Folk of all races come to her to study, including Eir the healer of Asgard who is her colleague. While she is most sought after for healing, she values her privacy and does not consider herself a public utility. If you seek her out for healing or for study, be prepared to pay for it, and you had better be
serious on either count. Her fortress is not called “Guest-crusher” for nothing.

Mengloth’s husband is named Svipdag (not to be confused with the Svipdag who is a long-dead husband of Freya), the son of Aurvandil the star-hero and his giantess-wife Groa. He is often out hunting among the Jotnar, who consider him one of them. Mengloth’s handmaidens are named Hlið (Help), Hlithrasa (Help-breather); Thjodvara (Folk-Guardian); Björt (Shining); Bleik (White); the twin sisters Blith (Mild) and Frith (Peace) who are actually Vanir and younger sisters or cousins of Freya; and Auboda (Gold-Giver) who is the mother of Gerda, Frey’s wife. A handmaiden named Eir is also listed; there is some argument as to whether this is the same Eir, goddess of healing, who serves Frigga. While I have not met Mengloth’s Eir, being as the name is loosely translated as “healing”, it could simply be another Eir. It could also be that Frigga’s Eir herself comes to visit and trade learning; from my dealings with both of them, it is clear to me that they are colleagues at the least, and likely friends.

If you should get inside Gastropnir, you will see many halls around a courtyard that is open to the sky. One of them seems to be made of flame, or moving lava; the walls flicker as you look at it. This is Lyr, the Hall of Heat, a hall built specially for Sinmora the Lady of Muspellheim by her godson Loki and a team of hired Duergar-craftsmen. Avoid going inside, as it is extremely hot in there; the floor is of burnished gold that is almost molten in places. Lyr is sometimes used for heating patients with chills, or water is poured on the floor and it becomes a purifying sauna. It is also the keeping-place for Surt and Sinmora’s flaming sword/wand Laevateinn, which is the source of all the heat. Laevateinn was forged by Loki as a gift for his godparents, and it is kept in a bowl-shaped iron box sealed with nine locks. Don’t get any ideas about stealing it, as no one without serious amounts of fire-giant blood could even touch it, and anyway the warders of Gastropnir keep an eagle’s eye on it while outsiders are about.

Many folk who don’t journey, and whose only view into the Nine Worlds is through the clouded lens of lore, have claimed that Mengloth isn’t really a person unto herself but is actually a “heiti” or ritual name of
either Frigga or Freya. Since I have had some dealings with all three of those ladies, I can assure you that Mengloth is indeed her own person, a tall Jotun-woman who loves jewelry and is usually draped in strings of beads, many of which seem to be healing amulets. Ari writes: “I was told that I needed to be a healer, but when I prayed to Eir—the obvious choice—she sent me off on this quest up a mountain in Jotunheim to visit ‘a friend of hers’ instead. I ended up on Mengloth’s mountain, learning healing the Jotun way. She is famed everywhere for her healing abilities—she has very much the same standing among her people that Eir does with hers, and they consider each other equal colleagues, and trade clients that they are having difficulty with. The Jotun healing system is very complex and shamanic; it isn’t crude, barbaric hacking about like I thought it would be. They are very wise and learned, in their own way.”

Ari also points out that: “It was in reading the lore about Mengloth, and watching various intellectuals who had never met her argue over whether she was a Goddess or ‘merely’ a Jotun, that I came to the realization that none of us mortals are qualified to draw that line when it comes to powerful wights. Deity or simply powerful wight? How can we have the temerity and arrogance to decide that? I think that the people who are making those arbitrary judgments are people who haven’t met very many wights, or perhaps any at all. For myself, I treat anything that is significantly bigger, older, and wiser than I’ll ever be as a deity, and give them the appropriate respect. It’s only correct to do so.”

Mengloth can be prayed to for healing, and she is noted to be exceptionally good with women’s physical complaints, although she will take on any sort of healing problem if she decides that you are worth it. She is very particular who she takes on as a student; usually she prefers that someone be referred by another deity that she trusts, such as Eir, Hela, Sinmora, etc.

For offerings, remember that Mengloth’s name means “Necklace-Glad” and she loves gifts of jewelry, especially unusual pieces that she wouldn’t be able to get from the mines of Jotunheim or Svartalfheim. She has access to the mines of Jotunheim, so she naturally gets a good deal of crystals and
polished stone, but items like shell beads, unusual stones, or cut gems would be much more difficult for her to come by. Linen for bandages is also prized by her; all linen in the Nine Worlds is farmed in Vanaheim and must be imported.

**Thrymheim**

On top of a mountain in the northeastern chain is Thrymheim, the royal court of Jotunheim. Thrym is a frost-thurse, born in Niflheim, who was elected High King and Chieftain of all Giantkind. His duties are largely ceremonial, although he is called upon to mediate disputes between tribal leaders, and make decisions on problems that they might find too large or impactful to handle themselves. (What decisions Utgard-Loki or Surt wouldn’t choose to handle themselves, I can’t imagine, although I suppose there might be some.) Getting to Thrymheim takes some doing, as the passes are often frozen with many feet of snow. Native guides are good here; it’s not too hard to find a giant who is willing to visit Thrym’s table and drink his beer.

Thrym the Old is a jovial, white-bearded giant with a generous table who throws fine parties. The best offering to give at his table is that of entertainment—songs, stories, juggling, etc. In fact, if you announce at the door that you have entertainment to share, you will likely be let in immediately. Remember that the best songs and stories are ones that they likely wouldn’t have heard, but that would be understandable to them and their culture, and choose your repertoire carefully. Laugh at Thrym’s jokes, smile and nod when he tells war stories, don’t talk politics, and don’t get drunk and say things you’ll regret. If Thrym or any other Jotun there challenges you to a drinking contest, turn them down with good humor, perhaps saying modestly that you are a lightweight and could never win against their obvious prowess. Which, frankly, is likely to be completely true.

Keep in mind, however, that under his jovial manner Thrym is much colder and more hard-hearted than you might think. He hates the Aesir
with a passion, and if you are sworn to them, you’d better not talk about it. Avoid the subject, and don’t challenge him on it. Even if he knows that you wear a Thor’s hammer about your neck, he’ll let you in if you are entertaining, but leave your politics at the door and talk about neutral subjects. This is another reason not to get drunk while visiting.

The beer brewed at Thrymheim, by the way, is some of the best around, and is extremely strong for beer. Its recipe was started by Olvalde, a giant whose name means “Ale-Emperor”, and was continued by his sons Thjatsi (the infamous giant who kidnapped Iduna, was killed by Thor, and whose daughter is Skadi), Gang, and Ide. The latter two brothers are still alive and brewing. Be careful when you drink it; it tends to give mortals a terrible hangover.

Another giant-figure who often lives at Thrym’s court (although she has a modest hall slightly to the north of it) is Thorgerdr. While she passes as a frost-giantess in Jotunheim—she can throw wind and rain and hail with the best of them, and often does—she is actually Finnish in origin and spends part of the year in Lapland with the Saami. Somewhere along the line she started spending time in Scandinavia, and got inducted into this pantheon as a patron deity of Halogaland in north Norway. Unlike a giantess, her age waxes and wanes from sturdy maiden to iron-grey-haired matron throughout the year.

**Jarnvidur (The Iron Wood)**

The strangest place in all Jotunheim is the Iron Wood. There certainly seems to be something weird about the Iron Wood, something *unheimlich*, as the Germans would describe it; eerie, uncanny. While it looks physically like any thick forest, it is a swirling sinkhole of magical energy, almost radioactive in its behavior. The Jotunfolk call it the Heart Of Jotunheim, with the wider meaning that it is the heart of Jotun nature itself, its most sacred place. Anyone born in the Iron Wood is likely to have both strong magical/spiritual power or great deformities, or both. Most of the major
Jotun deities were born there—Hela, Fenris, and Jormundgand. Their mother is Angrboda, the Hag of the Iron Wood.

There are nine clan/tribes in the Wood; their totems are Wolf (thus all the werewolves in the forest), Serpent, Hyena, Lightning, Ghost Deer, Cave Bear, River Knife, Blood-Alder, and Hound-Beetle. Each of the tribes has a chief—Farbauti, Loki’s father, is chief of the Lightning tribe—and Angrboda, leader of the Wolf clan, is currently chief of chiefs, unchallenged since she beat out Farbauti for the position. There is a great deal of intermarrying in the Iron Wood—they are not monogamous by any means—and most Iron Wood Jotnar have the blood of many if not all of the Nine Clans in them.

Jotnar of the Iron Wood are a strange-looking lot. Although all Jotunkind are skilled shapeshifters, the Iron Wood clans often spend so much time in animal or half-animal form that it is sometimes known as the Wood of Werewolves. Many Iron Wood Clan Jotnar are lycanthropes of one form or another, and many stay in their animal form permanently, or at most shift to a half-animal form. Most are hairy or furred or pelted in some way, if they are not horned or hooved or scaled or feathered. Some are twisted and deformed; some are androgynous or hermaphroditic. (In fact, it is said among other Jotnar that being ambiguously gendered in any way is a sign of Iron Wood Clan bloodlines; witness the sex-shifting Loki and the hermaphroditic Snake.)

They are somewhat shorter than other Jotnar; about human height or a little less when in humanoid form (with exceptions, like the nine-foot Farbauti). Some clans, like the Hound-Beetle clan, look more like the human idea of the archetypal troll. Another telling indication of Iron Wood Clan blood is that the flesh is “loose”, as they call it; it means that they shapeshift so often and are so little tied to any one form that it is impossible to tell what their “original” form was, and indeed many forget it before they are out of childhood. Some are vampiric and drink blood, or life-force. They are superb hunters, and can teach the art of skillfully tracking prey, including on an astral level.
Iron Wood Jotnar are the most clannish of all; they rarely marry out of their nine clans, unless there is a shortage of babies, usually caused by too many deformities in the population. Other Jotun treat them with a strange reverence mixed with a little fear; we must remember that most of their Gods come out of the Iron Wood. Strangely enough, they are well-disposed toward any human who can deal with their hazing with goodwill and remain friendly. Hazing generally takes two forms. They may challenge you (which if you’re dealing with lycanthropes is a matter of jumping you from the bushes) and expect you to take it for the pack-order rough-and-tumble that it is, either by submitting graciously or by putting up a good fight until they let go, at which point you make a friendly overture.

The other hazing method is to send their most ugly and deformed folk to get close to you, and then watch your reaction. What we humans need to keep in mind is that to an Iron Wood Clan Jotun, to be physically bizarre is not a bad thing. It is a badge of pride, a mark of their bloodlines, the same ones that brought forth Gods. The effects of the magical radioactivity is such that the Jarnvidur folk have had to develop a culture where there is no concept of the “right” or “wrong” way for bodies to be, so long as one’s malformities are not life-threatening or prevent one from functioning or enjoying life. Iron Wood Jotnar are raised to compensate for each others’ physical differences and difficulties—a dwarfed troll will be put on the shoulders of a tall giant to see properly at a moot; someone with long legs will automatically look to carry someone with short legs if running is necessary; the weak of body are defended (especially since those who are weaker of body are very often stronger of magical powers) and the standard of beauty tends to be more about personal charisma than physical shape.

The Iron Wood folk are also well aware that those outside their wood do not share this cultural blindness to a physical ideal. Part of their tribal pride manifests itself in this particular form of hazing, wherein bizarrely-shaped trolls and wereas may sidle up to you and offer a weird-shaped limb, and see how you react. If you are clearly made visibly uncomfortable by their shape, they will lose respect for you. If you flinch, or show any disgust
or pity or distaste, you fail. To accept them without comment, flinch, or other negative reaction will gain points. If you respond with friendship, you pass the test and they can be quite friendly, if still a bit rough-and-tumble in their way of showing it. Once you’ve made positive contact, the Iron Wood can be a good space for people who don’t carry socially acceptable shapes themselves to hang out. Once they accept you, they do so without any judgment as to your body; you are simply shaped the way that you are shaped, and that’s just you. There are many healers in the Iron Wood who specialize in helping the kind of deformities associated with Iron Wood bloodlines, including those in humans.

In turn, however, once they accept you, it will bewarts and all. If you yourself are deformed or disabled, physically or mentally, they will not see you as damaged or abnormal; you are just what you are, specific only to yourself. Since they have a higher-than-normal rate of ambiguously sexed births (and, correspondingly, the most relaxed and normalized attitude towards shapeshifting between genders), those with gender issues may find a haven here, especially if they are working towards shapeshifting their own bodies in some way.

Meat is an acceptable offering for anyone you meet in the Iron Wood. They are also very fond of sweets, as they don’t get much of that. If you bring them drink, don’t bother with mead or beer; like the folk of Utgard, when they want to drink, they want the hard stuff. Strongly flavored liqueurs are your best bet. Small toys, strangely enough, are highly valued, especially if they are figures of bizarrely-shaped creatures.

Cannibalism is strong in the Iron Wood—not that it is missing anywhere else among Jotunkind—and that goes especially for funerary cannibalism. It is not unusual for a troll who has fallen in battle to expect that he will be cooked and eaten by his kin, who by doing so return his body to his clan, where it belongs. Older etins are stewed up in giant cauldrons to soften the meat, and cooked with savory herbs. If an Iron Wood etin is burned or buried, it means that they died of illness. To be
invited to a funeral feast is an honor. If you can’t stomach it, find an extremely polite and very solid excuse.

**Angrboda’s Hall**

Some folk who work with the Jotnar have been approached by Angrboda, the Hag of the Iron Wood of Jotunheim. The term Hag should be read as similar to Hagia—wise woman. She is a sorceress, a fierce warrior-woman, the chieftess of the Wolf Clan, the seer of the Nine Clans of the Iron Wood, the Chief of Chiefs by right of force, and the single most respected person who lives there. While each of the Nine Clans has its own chieftain, all defer to her in matters of outside policy, and she must be approached with respect. She has great although erratic powers of foresight, and is not easy to fool. She will prophesy for people, but she demands a high and often uncomfortable price.

She is almost always seen as a tall, tough, skin-clad, muscular giantess with reddish hair—“hair the color of dried blood”, as one seeker said—and is passionate, violent, bloodthirsty, and very wise about much old lore. As the single most important person in the Iron Wood, she is aware of everything that goes on inside of its borders. However, like most Iron Wood Clan folk, she does not generally leave her forest or interfere in outside Nine-Worlds activities.

The Mother of Wolves is very choosy about who she will work with. If she doesn’t like you for whatever reason, she will reject you, often violently. She has even less patience with weaklings than most other Jotnar—to her, weaklings get exposed at birth. That doesn’t mean physical weaklings, but those who are weak of will; she will work with the most crippled of folk if they are stubborn and persistent and not easily beaten down, but she is somewhat contemptuous of emotionally delicate and sensitive types. If you are a strong and competent person who is having a rough time, she can be surprisingly sympathetic. She is a Mother Goddess in her own way, but her mothering is very wolflike—fiercely protective of her own, but not above growling and biting when they do something stupid. She has a soft spot for
the deformed and bizarre who rise above the world that attempts to drag
them down. She is skilled in the magic of the hunt, prophecy and
divination, shapeshifting, and Jotun sex magic from a female perspective.
For an offering, start with blood.

Angrboda’s hall has a stang with a wolf’s skull a little way in front of it,
although it’s not a place to come through unless you are sure you have an
appointment. Her hall is hung with bones and skulls, and the door is
 guardians by two great wolves. Other members of Angrboda’s household
include her adopted sister Glut ("Glow") and Glut’s two daughters, Eisa
("Ember") and Einmyria ("Ashes"), both sired by her husband Loki.

Another of the chiefs of the Iron Wood clans is Farbauti the Cruel-
Striker, a very tall giant whose skill is with wielding the lightning. He is
Loki’s father, although for personal reasons Loki chose not to take his name
and is referred to only as Laufey’s Son. Farbauti leads the Lightning Clan,
who have a good deal of fire-giant blood.

In the mountains above the Iron Wood, you will find a turreted stone
cottage that belongs to Laufey, the mother of Loki and the wife of
Farbauti, Chief of the Lightning Clan. She lives by herself due to various
disagreements with her husband, although he visits her often. Her three
sons are all wanderers—Helblindi the sea-giant who prefers the ocean
islands, including the one from whence his mother came; Byleist the
storm-giant who attends intermittently on Thrym, and of course the
infamous Loki. Any of them might be dropping in at any time, as they are
all fond of their mother, and her cottage is really the only place that they
might call home.

Laufey is slight, lovely, and very motherly. She is a tree-goddess, with a
great affinity for the smaller understory trees. Visiting her home, if she is
welcoming, will likely get you fed some soup and gently told some edifying
tales. She is generally all right with visitors if they bring a gift and check
first before coming. Planting trees in our world is always an appropriate
offering for her; she seems to be especially fond of willows.
Gymirsheim

High on a mountain in the western range is Gymir’s fortress, surrounded by a wall of fire. He is Gerda’s father, and the husband of Auboda, handmaid of Mengloth. He does not see visitors unless he has invited them there himself, so don’t bother.

Hyndla’s Cave

Deep in the northern mountains of Jotunheim lies the cave of the giantess Hyndla, the Hag (read “wisewoman”) of the northern mountains. She spends most of her time sleeping, or what looks like sleeping to some folk; actually, she is “faring forth”, sending her mind out where her body cannot go. Her cave is guarded by a band of loyal etins who will not see her disturbed when she is unconscious, so seeing her is only possible during the short periods when she wakes up to eat and walk about a little.

Hyndla is small for a giantess—not more than human size—and wizened and old, with long silver-grey hair that drapes on the ground around her. She is pale from almost never leaving her cave, and walks with a stick. Her apparent frailty makes her guards all the more protective of her. She is a mistress of bloodlines; ancestry is her specialty, and it is rumored that she spends her astral-travel time walking up and down the bloodlines of many races. The Gods consult her when they want to know something about how someone is related to someone else, or for advice on their various human breeding experiments. Non-gods consult her about discovering unknown ancestors, tracing genetic disorders, finding blood-curses, or asking about future children. She is especially good for consultations about humans with problems from nonhuman blood, but you will have to go to her; she doesn’t come to anyone who calls. She is generally friendly, but can be cantankerous if she has just awoken. Flirting with her will usually soften her, but be prepared to go through with it if she decides to take you up on it; for all that she is old and wrinkled, she is also lusty.
Flora

Jotunheim is mostly forested, and the plant life is lush and rich and highly varied. In the lowlands, there are miles of wetlands and swamp, and some moors, giving way to rainforests and peat bogs. In the highlands (which is most of the world) the giant trees finally give way to scrub and snow at the mountaintops. Evergreens have been found that are so large that an entire fortress could be carved out inside them. In fact, the most common form of poorest-class peasant home is a space hacked out of a living tree, usually one so large that the hollow hardly bothers it. Most of the food-gathering is done in the forest understories, where the locals are experts on how to find fruit and nuts the size of a human head, as well as edible tree bark, blossoms, and roots.

Fauna

Jotunheim is the richest world of the Nine for the sheer number and diversity of the animals present. Here, the Ice Age megafauna still live, although they have died out in our world. Cave bears, cave lions, sabertooth tigers, hyenadons, dire wolves, mammoths and mastodons, and enormous crocodilians are just some of the predators hunted by the etins, even as they hunt other prey themselves. (You will also find the megafauna as totems used by the Jotunheim tribes.) The one thing you won’t find is any kind of primate; there are no monkeys swinging through the foliage. There are, however, many other sorts of small scurrying prey animal.

Insects can be fierce in the wetter, swampier areas, and many of them are poisonous. The Jotnar shift shape to keep them off, and it may not occur to a Jotun guide that you may be vulnerable to them. Make sure that you ask about it before setting out on a trip. There are also poisonous snakes to worry about. In the colder evergreen forests, your biggest problem will be tripping over tangled tree roots and crashing through thorny thickets while being chased by large predators. Either come ready to shapeshift into something fast, or bring Jotun guides and helpers. Make sure that you pay them well.
Denizens

For more information on Jotunkind in general, see the chapter on the Jotnar as a species and their general habits. Jotunheim has the widest variety of Jotnar—actually, the widest variety of intelligent creatures—of any world of the Nine. The Jotnar of Jotunheim vary tribe to tribe, depending on the ecology of their area. The malleable, shapeshifting nature of the etins has created a wide array of characteristics, and representatives of each of them live in various places. Intermarriage is rife; there are no taboos against one sort of etin marrying another sort of etin, and in fact bringing new bloodlines to a tribe is considered a good thing, so etins often “go wandering” when the urge to settle down with a mate seizes them. Throwbacks are common, and wide variations can occur even among siblings.

One example is the marriage of Farbauti and Laufey; he is mostly of fire-giant blood with the Iron Wood taint, and she is a mix of fire-giant, earth-giant, sea-giant, and frost-giant (and yes, a mix like this is not uncommon in Jotunheim). Their three children consist of Loki, who is clearly fiery and carries the Iron Wood blood; Helblindi who takes after his sea-giant relatives, and Byleist who is a frost-giant throwback. As a race, the etins of Jotunheim are vigorous, hardy, and wonderfully diverse.

Most of the residents of Jotunheim, however, fall under the category of “mountain giant”. Jotunheim is the most mountainous world of all, and the giants who live on the peaks and rugged cliffs have been referred to as “berg risi”. Some of the cliffs and mountains of Jotunheim “line up” with northern European mountains, enough that there is some moving between worlds. Since the mountain-giants are descended from both fire and frost giants, many will clearly show fire-giant or frost-giant bloodlines. In general, those with strong frost-giant blood tend to gravitate toward the northern mountain ranges, where it is still snowy most of the year. Thrym the Old, titular king of Jotunheim, is an example; he holds his court high in the snowiest mountains. Skadi also came from this area of Jotunheim originally.
In the more southerly areas, the giants live in the deep forests, in treehouses or hollowed-out trees. Wherever there are mountains (which is something like three-quarters of Jotunheim) they will aim for the highest peaks, or live in caves dug into cliffs. Despite the idea of a cave being primitive and rough, these mountain (or tree, for that matter) homes are often quite comfortable and even luxurious.

However, mountain giants can and do build great fortresses out of stone. Some pride themselves on building the structure in such a way that it blends in entirely with the mountain, and the various towers and turrets simply mimic peaks and outcroppings, providing camouflage and bewildering the tourist. Thrym’s fortress is one of these. On the other hand, the city of Utgard is an example of giant-building made to stand out and intimidate as a huge and obvious fortress that does not even attempt to blend into the landscape. The berg-risi of Jotunheim were famed as builders, which is why they were hired to build the main city of Asgard.

In terms of appearance, the giants of Jotunheim vary widely in size. Some—especially those who draw strongly from their home—mountains for power—can shapeshift into huge, slow-moving, incredibly strong forms. Others may be as small as humans. Some of the shoreline and island-dwelling etins might even be considered delicate—Laufey and her son Loki are two examples—but as there is no sexual dimorphism in their race, most etin—women of Jotunheim are tall, muscular, and large-boned, even if they are only of “normal” human size. (As the human race itself has grown significantly in height in the past centuries—just look at the size of our ancestors’ clothing in museums—it is possible that the smaller Jotnar in their humanoid forms are no longer all that impressive to us in this way.)

The giants of Jotunheim also vary in coloring—some fair-haired or red-haired; some darker. Those who are not allied with rock or mountain in their spirit-forms are generally allied to other earthy things—Laufey is very much a tree-etin, for example, and Gerda is associated with garden plants and hedges. They weave clothing out of plant fibers and dye it bright colors; embroidery is a popular art form with them and it is a characteristic of Jotunheim clothing to be well covered with bands of bright embroidery.
Soft, tanned leather dyed in bright colors is another popular clothing material.

Like the earthy land that they embrace, the giants of Jotunheim are said to have a great deal of stubbornness; when they plant their feet, there is nothing that will move them. Although they are the most “civilized” of their race—in other words, their lifestyles are higher on the technological ladder, they build cities and fortresses, and wear elaborate clothing—they are just as bloodthirsty and intense as Jotunkind anywhere. Due to a higher concentration of population, there are more laws and stricter codes among Jotunheim tribes regarding under what circumstances they may kill (and likely eat) each other, but it would not do to think that these giants are more “tame”.

Most of Jotunheim still works on a gatherer rather than an agricultural economy, as the terrain is unsuited to plowing and planting. On the other hand, Jotnar are experts at arboriculture, and have bred and selected trees that will bear substitutes for almost anything that can be field-grown. Orcharding and tree-culture is one of the few food-producing areas where they shine, and even the Vanir admit to having learned this art from them. Over seventy varieties of nut trees produce nuts up to the size of a giant’s hand, in many different flavors, which are ground for flour. Tree fruits and berries provide a large portion of the diet, and certain trees are grown simply for the young leaves and shoots from root-suckers, pale and tender from growing in the understories. The inner barks of some trees provide spices, and there are even a number of specially-bred parasitic herbs that will attach themselves to tree-limbs, creating an aerial herb garden. The “white herbs” of the forest floor, blanched from lack of sunlight, are especially valued for medicinal purposes.

The ideal forest etin-bride’s home is carved out of an enormous tree, hundreds of feet up in the canopy so that sunlight can come in through the eave windows, with fruit and nut trees trained up beside it so that their bounty is within reach, and aerial herb and flower gardens implanted on the huge branches. A spiral staircase may twine around the trunk to the forest
floor, or a particularly paranoid etin-woman may forgo the staircase and simply have a rope ladder that can be let down or pulled up as she chooses.

Jotunfolk of the few open areas live in stone-hut villages with thatched twig roofs, usually centered around a central hill where the bones of the seasonal sacrifices are hung from poles. Mammoth-tusks and the huge bones of the megafauna are commonly seen pressed into use as beams, rafters, and furniture.

If you see a house built entirely of bones, it is likely to be the local hedge-witch or wise-woman. There are many such in Jotunheim, some more or less locally famous, but they do not exist to teach you whatever they know. This is something that many travellers need to understand before they get themselves in trouble. If a wise etin wishes to tutor you in something, they will approach you, or let you know that you have an appointment with them. While the idea of going on a quest to seek them out seems romantic, that’s not the way they work. Some folk have managed to get themselves astrally killed and eaten by such naive and demanding behavior. This is not a peaceful and easy world, and its inhabitants are neither. Be careful and courteous, and be ready to take no for an answer.

Offerings

Offerings to them will vary depending on the individual. In general, try food from agricultural sources that they might not have—grains from plains areas that would be rare for them, or tropical fruits, or foreign herbs that are not found in Jotunheim (but might be found in China, for example). And, of course, labor—skilled or unskilled—is always a good thing.

If you offer food to the Jotnar of Jotunheim, make it hearty food with a high meat content and no niggling portions. They do appreciate herbs and flavorings, but light gourmet food is little more than an aperitif for them. Food that they won’t usually get due to its rarity in their area may be especially appreciated; tropical fruits are popular. If you give them drink, make it strong drink—Jack Daniels goes over well in most places, as does
schnapps. If you give them gold or silver, it should be in the form of
jewelry rather than coin; save the coin for the Duergar. Fine cloth and
pretty ornaments can work in Utgard, but everything should be sturdy as
well as beautiful; save the fragile, delicate toys for the Alfar. Good hand
tools are an excellent gift for the lord of a hall, but with the emphasis on
“good”, not cheaply made. The ideal gift is to actually slaughter a live food
animal for them at the beginning of your visit, but most people will not
have access to this.
Day 7, Svartalfheim

“I am a carrier of the hammer’s blessing.”

Keeping in mind the difficultly experience that I’d had in Alfheim, I didn’t want to have a repeat of it (only likely worse, as the dark elves are even less nice) in Svartalfheim. I woke up in Jotunheim to a thunderstorm, and when I crossed over, it immediately toned itself down into a grey drizzle that lasted all day. I brought an armload of gifts, and wandered about in the rain a while, looking at scraggly trees and barren landscape. When I caught sight of what looked to be dark little figures in the underbrush, I cheerily threw them chocolate eyeballs. Whatever—they were squealed in delight. “Santa’s here,” I called sarcastically as I threw more in other directions.

I was stopped by a tall woman dressed in a strange angular black dress with a full skirt. What seemed to be thin black spikes stuck out from her head like a crown. “What do you wish here, you who bear Hel’s mark?” she asked. Suspiciously. Her eyes bored into
me. Had they sent down a message from Alfheim? I wondered.

“I’m here to see the Duergar,” I said, figuring that I’d shift the attention onto the dwarves and away from the Svartalfar. I wondered if they had the same teind issues as the Ljossalfar. I knew that the Duergar didn’t; they lived a long time, but got old and died decently. “Give them a message for me,” I said. “Tell them that Hel’s Own is here to see them.” The Alfwoman looked significantly relieved, but said nothing. I presented her with the glass apple, and threw the rest of the eyeballs in various directions for her hidden chorus of dark faeries. Then I went back to the field kitchen and ate my breakfast.

In the middle of my meal, they came. I hadn’t actually figured out what I would do if they showed up, and I had to think fast. Six Duergar, richly dressed, looking at me just as suspiciously as the Alfwoman had. “You wished to speak with us?” the oldest-looking of them asked. “What would Hel have of us?”

I jumped to my feet, trying not to spill my oatmeal, and presented them with the nicest three of
the silver coins that my friends had made. They made a comment about how the silver was pure, but the workmanship was, well, substandard. They actually put it a little ruder than that. I told them that I was the king of a very small outlander kingdom, and that we were attempting to revive crafts that had been forgotten by most and practiced by very few, and as they could see by our handiwork we very much needed their help and expertise. If they had any advice, or magic, that they might be willing to give us, we would be most grateful. After all, they were the best craftsmen in the Nine Worlds. And so on.

They frowned and said that they’d think about it. I presented them with the Crown Royal, and they broke out finely chased metal goblets and split it between them, and became much friendlier. Amazing what good whisky can do. After some conferred muttering, they announced that they would be willing to teach me the blessing of the hammer, and that I could pass it on to all the crafters in my kingdom. “It’s a small enough magic, but a potent one,” the one said.
They made me kneel, and repeat each line with my hand on the hammer that one took from his belt and held out. This was the blessing that they passed to me:

From the mind to the eye,
From the eye to the hand,
From the hand to the hammer,
From the hammer to the fire,
From the fire to the mind,
Close the circle,
Open the door,
And bring forth all creation.

Afterwards, they asked me where I was going next. Niflheim, I told them. They made the usual surprised commentary, and asked where in Niflheim. Lyngvi Island, I said. “Lyngvi’s Island?” asked the oldest Duerg. “Give him a message, will you?”

I didn’t know that Lyngvi Island was really Lyngvi’s Island, belonging to a denizen of that name, and I said so, and asked who Lyngvi was. “He’s a Duerg of my family,” the oldest dwarf said, “and he hasn’t been home in far too long. Tell him that he
ought to come home for a visit. Do him good. Tell him that I said so.”

Before they left, they offered to let me stay underground in one of their caves, so that the Svartalfar wouldn’t bother me during my sleep. I considered it, but declined; I didn’t know where the cave would line up (likely I wouldn’t be able to line it up with my treehouse) and I didn’t want to spend the night somewhere else. Then the Duergar took their leave, a bit unsteadily. I went back to the hermitage and spun a batch of silk thread, charging it with protective barrier magic, and I put it in a big circle all around the hermitage. I stayed there in the rain, which grew heavier again, throughout the evening and night, and wrote in my journal until I ran out of ink.

I woke to Maegen’s screaming and the morning light. All four windows were wide open—they’re generally jammed shut and not easy to get open—and my stuff was strewn about the hermitage, except for what had been in Bag. Maegen was shrieking and hopping about her cage. I leaped out of bed, but didn’t see anything—whatever had invaded my cabin
had beat a retreat as soon as I had awoken. I stuck my head outside to see the silk thread snapped in several places. Time to get out of Svartalfheim, obviously. I decided to cross over immediately and eat and wash in Niflheim.
Svartalfheim is a dual land, divided above and below by the two races that live there—the Duergar, who claim primary ownership of the world, but who choose instead to live underground in mountain caverns; and the Dark Alfar, who are immigrants and live partially above the earth and partially under it. As discussed in the other chapters relating to the Alfar, I will refer to these immigrants generally as the Dökkálfar, but other spirit-workers do refer to them (rather than the Duergar) as the Svartalfar, and this will also be considered accurate for purposes of this book.

When the worlds broke apart in the great deluge, the Duergar found refuge on a piece of Ymir’s body, supposedly his lower spine, and excavated themselves a world. Although trees did grow on the surface of their dark, windy, spine-mountainous world, the Duergar hardly cared. Instead, they dug out amazing halls under the earth, carved with stunning artwork and architecture. When the Dökkálfar moved into the upper surface of the world, they and the Duergar struck a truce deal, with separate territories. Although the Dökkálfar do live in underground dwellings as well, theirs are generally surface caves and mounds, while the Duergar halls extend a mile or more under the surface. They call the Duergar-inhabited part of their world Nidavellir, as opposed to not-Nidavellir, which is what they call anything controlled by the Dökkálfar. (The Dökkálfar have a different name for their land, but this author has not been given that information.) Not-Nidavellir consists of some three-quarters of the surface lands, and less than a tenth of the near-surface caverns and tunnels.
Time and Seasons:

Svartalfheim is said to have the longest year of any of the worlds, discounting Helheim where all time and seasons are artificially maintained by Hela. A Svartalfheim year is equal to several Midgard years, spinning closest to our world at the spring equinox. There is little variation between summer and winter, and nothing in the way of spring and fall. The only variations seem to be a greater propensity to rainfall (or snowfall in the higher altitudes) during winter, and more high winds during summer. Days, like years, are two to three times the length of days in other realms; the ratio depends on the realm in question. Even in summer, days are shorter than nights—maybe a little less than half the time—and in winter, the Sun barely shows Her face in Svartalfheim. The Dökkálfar have adapted wonderfully to an almost entirely nocturnal existence, and indeed find the extensive daylight of other worlds oppressive.

The Duergar venture out of their tunnels only during daylight, and most of their lives are spent underground in a world of cavern-cities, which they can make just as bright as they choose, so the outside time and season hardly matters to any of them. They are aware of the seasons, though in a rather idealized way; when they picture them in carvings and art, they show the lush beauty of the seasons in other worlds such as Vanaheim, Asgard, or Jotunheim. Indeed, the Duergar live almost as if they are pretending they are somewhere else; only a few goatherds venture out during the summer, and a few others on pilgrimages to shrines.

The part of Svartalfheim which the Duergar gave to the dark-elves has the same properties of glamour and time distortion as Ljossalfheim, but to a lesser extent, as the Svartalfar had to basically reshape the land in one go to suit their preferences, rather than allowing it to develop organically over many, many centuries. Time here is likewise unpredictable, but the disorientation for mortal visitors is not as great and the aftereffects not as long-lasting. Then again, mortal visitors rarely wish to linger here.

—Elizabeth Vongvisith, spirit-worker
Svartalfheim and Nidavellir are more difficult to get into. The dwarves operate by their own rules and have a great many more visitors and travelers going in and out of their realm than the elves do. Svartalfheim is just as magically potent as Ljossalfheim, but it’s also a colder, scarier and creepier place. The dark-elves are often malicious and untrustworthy, and few spirit-workers who wander into their realm want to hang around longer than necessary. Flattery and wide-eyed admiration will not get you far here; cunning, a certain amount of ruthlessness and a tangible “don’t fuck with me” attitude are far more useful when dealing with the dark-elves.

— Elizabeth Vongvisith, spirit-worker

Svartalfheim is a dark, cold world; weather is steady and mostly unvaried, but there are a lot of high winds. It is almost entirely mountainous. The mountains are not as tall as the ranges of Jotunheim, but the land is more entirely covered, with little in the way of sheltered valleys and lowlands. The lower mountainsides are covered with evergreen forests, which become more and more stunted as they gain altitude, and the upper regions are bare stone open to the sky. Some mountains have been entirely denuded of forest, as the Duergar strip them for firewood for their forges. As the only thing holding the sandy soil in place is tree roots, with the forests cut it quickly erodes to bare rock. The Dökkálfar have made deals to leave their forests untouched by Duergar hands, or the entire world might have been stripped bare by this time.

This is also a dry world; there is very little rainfall and little in the way of natural surface lakes and rivers. There is, however, plenty in the way of underground spring water, which bubbles forth from holes in the mountains. It is said of Svartalfheim that there are ten times the number of lakes underground than on the surface. Heavily mineral-laden, this water is hard on ordinary agricultural crops, and anyway there is almost no flat and arable ground on this cold, dry, stony world to begin with. The Duergar historically survived by trading prolifically with other worlds. There is a
steady stream of foodstuffs and fiberstuffs trickling in at any time, to be exchanged for their fine creations, as well as the food they raise themselves in their caves.

The lack of arable land, light, and rainfall was quite disconcerting to the Dökkálfr who came as refugees to Svartalfheim in the wake of the Alfar War. (There has only been one such war of this extent in Alfar history, so when references are made to the War, everyone knows what is meant.) They were able to cut a deal with the Duergar for the unused above-ground land, and for a certain percentage of the Duergar-built underground caverns (mostly worked-out and abandoned mines), but few of the food-producing methods viable in lush Ljossalfheim would work in rocky, high-altitude Svartalfheim. The first few years saw starvation taking many of their number; the Duergar would trade some food, but would not support the entire colony, and their price was high. One of the oldest and best-known ballads of the Dökkálfr details the selling of some of their starving number as slaves, to the Duergar and to Jotun traders, in order to procure sustenance for the withering elven people. According to the ballad, every one of the surviving slaves bought by the Duergar were eventually, painfully, ransomed back, but few of those sold into Jotunheim were ever returned. The song recounts that although many did not survive, some chose to stay among their Jotun masters or even married them—a shameful thing for the newly transplanted Alfar—but that a few of their half-blood offspring returned to discover their Alfar heritage.

Strangely enough, it was this handful of half-Jotun skeletons in the Dökkálfr closet that helped to save the colony. In order to survive, the Dökkálfr adopted the cavern-growing plants of the Duergar, but these did not even actually entirely support the Duergar, much less a race used to living on above-ground plants. However, many of the arboriculture methods of forested Jotunheim transplanted effectively to Svartalfheim—these were, after all, worlds cut from the upper and lower parts of Ymir’s spine. Although Svartalfheim was more adapted to evergreens and fewer deciduous plants would grow there, the Dökkálfr have managed to adapt handily to tree-farming rather than ground-culture, and to breed their own
food-bearing trees. They also adopted the Jotun custom of fortified treetop homes, although their tree cities are often spread between many trees linked together for safety in high winds. Because there is less rainfall or snowfall, the tree-cities are often open to the sky. With the long clear cold nights, and the fact that they cannot alter the sky of this world (unlike Ljossalfheim), stargazing and astrology has become an important art to the Dökkálfr.

The largest trees are hollowed out with spiral staircases, which twine down into the underground parts of their cities. In this way, they live above and below the ground, leaving the understory itself a trackless (unless you are Dökkálfr and you know the secret trails), lightless morass of tree roots trained to trip up travelers, treetrunks covered in specially-bred bark so razorlike that it shreds the flesh of those who try to climb, evergreen shrubs with needles so sharp that they easily perforate skin and even leather, swarms of stinging heat-seeking bloodsucking insects, and the occasional patch of magical mushrooms spouting hallucinogenic and panic-inducing spores. The trees themselves are semi-awakened, and are loyal allies to the Dökkálfr, not above dropping a limb or two on anyone who does not have permission to enter. Even the Duergar now no longer enter the Dökkálfr forests without announcing themselves.

The Dökkálfr themselves pass easily through these places, however; their night-vision is unrivaled in the Nine Worlds, they know the territory, and the very trees will part and allow them to pass, as well as aiding them in finding their way. It is said that a Dökkálfr sorcerer need only lay a hand onto the bark of a tall tree and the tree will send him a mental picture of the whole sky and the stars from that tree’s perspective, thus telling him where he is. (It is also said that his payment for this information is the blood he leaves behind on the razor-sharp bark.) The spells that weave communication between Dökkálfr and tree-spirits are all sung, which means that they do a good deal of wandering through the forests singing their mournful, chilling songs. This has led to the Duergar naming their forests things like “Prickle-Pipes Wood” and “Spine-Creeping Wind Wood” and such. The Dökkálfr have their own names for their regions,
which at this time we do not know. Getting leave to travel in their land usually means that one of them gives you a physical token to wear on your person that will cause the trees to ignore you, and also cause some major paths to seem more obvious to you. You are on your own with the other hazards, however, including getting lost, and if you fall prey to them, they are unlikely to bother to help you.

I have encountered the Dark Alfar only once. I was taking a path back from a jaunt down by Niflheim and took a wrong road. I walked into a series of large caverns (so big I couldn’t see the ceiling), a dense forest of what looked to be some sort of grey “evergreens”, some clearly melding into the stalactites above. I felt I was being watched, and I got out quickly.

—Rod Landreth, seidhmadhr

The underground cities of the Dökkálfar are perhaps less than one-tenth of all the tunnels in Svartalfheim, and they are all quite close to the surface. Many will be decorated with illusion such that one thinks one is still outside, seeing trees and stars. Travelers on good terms with the Dökkálfar are more likely to be invited down than up; the tree cities are where the nobility live while the commoners dwell in the stone corridors. They all link into the deeper and more extensive Duergar tunnels, which honeycomb the entire world to a depth of a mile or so downwards. The borders between Svartalfheim and Nidavellir are all guarded, usually by folk of both sides, and there are always tolls to pay if you wish to pass from one territory to another via underground roadways.

The geography of Nidavellir is entirely created by the Duergar. In their own way, they have created a handmade world in the same way as the Ljossalfar, only with the work of their hands rather than with the arts of magical illusion and shapeshifting. No one really knows the extent of the tunnels in Nidavellir except for the Duergar themselves, and not necessarily all of them, either. There are tales of secret tunnels so deep that they are only used by magical secret societies, laden with cunning traps, and to enter them is fatal. The great, well-lit cavern cities of Nidavellir are joined by a labyrinth of tunnels that would take decades to learn; a native guide is
really the only way to go here, and they know it. Native guides are easily available for hire at every gate; as long as you pay them promptly and well, they will do their best for you.

Residents: The Dark Alfar

The history of the Dark Alfar, or Svartalfar, or Dökkálfar, as we know it, is briefly touched on in the chapter on the nature of the Alfar. We know little of the actual beginnings of the War, as neither side will speak of it, but we do know that a fleeing band of exiles came to Svartalfheim after being expelled from their home. Apparently they got no warm welcome in Asgard or Vanaheim; Jotunheim, Niflheim, and Muspellheim were Jotun-controlled and they did not wish to cohabit with giants and trolls; and moving in on Midgard would invoke the wrath of both the Aesir and the Vanir. As Helheim was only for the Dead, there was but one other choice, and they trooped to the realm of the Duergar and asked for shelter.

They were granted it, but the price was high. The Duergar extract a regular toll from the Dökkálfar as rent, and at first the Dökkálfar resented being tenant to another race which they considered inferior. By this time, however, the two races have come to the point of living together in reasonable peace and harmony. The Duergar outnumber the Dökkálfar many times over, and although the Dökkálfar control the trees on the surface, the Duergar are allies with most of the land-wights, including the spirits of the mountains themselves. Although they are canny and drive a hard bargain, they hold fairly to agreed-upon terms, and thus the Dökkálfar consider it in their best interests not to anger their hosts. There is considerable amicable trade between them, although they mostly keep to themselves, and even the occasional intermarrying.

Since their exile, the Svartalfar have formed their own society which is like a dark and twisted mirror-image of Ljossalfheim, complete with a ruling House. They are less exclusive than the Ljossalfar, though they’re quite a bit scarier and tend to fight among themselves much more (the Ljossalfar prefer intrigue and
backstabbing, thinking it more civilized). Many years of living alongside the Duergar, who are accustomed to having visitors and friends from other lands, has changed their attitudes towards outsiders, and while they’re still very secretive, fiercely loyal to their own kind and not inclined to allow many into their lands, they don’t look down on people from the other Nine Worlds, the way the light-elves do.

—Elizabeth Vongvisith, spirit-worker

There is some evidence that Odin studied with the Dark Alfar while on his journeys; he refers to them as the “old men”, rather cryptically. Many are fine magicians, and all love singing. The Dökkálfar speak the same language as the Ljossalfar, but with a different tonal dialect that has evolved over time. Much of their language is actually sung rather than spoken, and the melodies involved give subtle extra information to the words, making it even more difficult to pick up everything that is being said. On the other hand, humans with strong musical talent have claimed to be able to pick up a good deal of meaning from the music alone, without even understanding the words. All Dökkálfar also speak Duergar as an automatic second language, as the Duergar rarely bother to learn their tongue, but require that they speak in Dwarvish when communicating with them.

They do not come out during daylight hours unless they have need of something, but they swarm the woods at sunset. There are no large beasts that live naturally in the forests of Svartalfar—and indeed if you are chased by one, be assured that it is a Dark Alf in shapeshifted glamour who is toying with you—but there are many small birds and creatures that live in the trees and are hunted by the darts and blowguns of the Dark Alfar as a food source. They hunt in near-silence, and it is said that they are not averse to turning an unwary traveler into a game animal in order to hunt them through the trees and brambles, until they succumb to panic or wounds ... and, yes, the Dark Alfar have been known to kill and eat such prey.

This is, obviously, one of the more dangerous places in the Nine Worlds, and it is best not to go here without either a divine mission or a
previously-made appointment. Even so, neither of those is a guarantee of non-molestation. A divine mission may get you a short period of reprieve, after which you had better get going; an appointment may suddenly change at their whim into something more deadly. Remember that by their own social codes, the Svartalfar see little reason to refrain from lying to you, to honor their deals with you, or to keep you alive. Survival of and advantage to their own comes first, at all times.

As a people, they are ruthless, devious, and somewhat sadistic. Whatever traits caused them to be cast out of Ljossalfheim in the first place were exacerbated by the years of hardship required to adapt to survival in Svartalfheim. They are now a people as hard and cold as the land they live on, and their famed clannishness means that no one save their own is due any aid, honesty, or honorable behavior except as a whim, which can be withdrawn without penalty. The universal symbol of the Svartalf is the narrow, razor-sharp stiletto throwing-dagger carried by all adults; it is the pictographic basis for the symbol of their race in the Duergar alphabet. Like their knives, they are quick, sharp, accurate, bloodthirsty, cold, secretive, and deadly.

Ironically enough, women have high status in this society; most of the rulers are female, and take many husbands. High-ranking women bear children, but let them be raised by consorts and servants. The symbol of a female ruler among the Svartalfheim is the poisonous spider, a fact which has spawned many legends. Svartalf women should not be underestimated, nor considered the least bit more compassionate or warm-hearted than their male counterparts. Indeed, it is said that the seven tribal queens of Svartalfheim all magically remove their hearts and keep them in safe hidden places, making them even colder and less vulnerable as rulers. We cannot confirm or deny this story; it may be apocryphal, but it is certainly illuminative. Of the few mortals who have managed to get some kind of useful relationship with the Dökkálfr, most have been women who could connect with their cold, calculating nature.

If you really want to learn more about Svartalf nature and customs, the best way is to seek out the Duergar that have the most dealings with them,
get them drunk on some good liquor, and let the stories roll forth. They will tell tales of how Svartalf children are brutally trained to be silent and agile at all costs; how they developed their harrowing coming-of-age rites; how caretakers for their children were captured from other races, and when the child had outgrown the need for a nanny, he or she was made to slit their throat as an object lesson. “Watch your step, don’t go alone, and don’t turn your back on ‘em,” seems to be the general advice. Frankly, although many would-be adventurers are probably even now thrilling to the idea of how cool and Gothic such people would be, we strongly advise the beginner to avoid them. No matter how much you think you are like them, they are unlikely to grant you kinship, and your life expectancy among them will last only as long as your obvious usefulness.

Good offerings for the Dökkálfr, should you need to pass through their lands, are tasty candies and sweets—they rarely get sweets—especially if they are shaped oddly or macabrely, like small spiders or insects for example. Flying insects in general are a Svartalf totem and small gifts with this theme will be well-liked. Another sort of good gift is any beautiful, delicately-wrought, smashable trinket. One of the odd customs of this people is that they put a great deal of power into breaking beautiful handmade things that took time and skill to make. The more time and skill that went into them, the more power there is in smashing them. (One wonders whether this custom grew up in a sort of reaction against their landlords the Duergar, who value hand-wrought objects so highly.) This is often done to seal an oath; the more terrible the oath, the more valuable the item must be. Svartalf families generally keep a storehouse of such things for these occasions; it is said that after a wedding of the Dökkálfr court, the floor is strewn with the remains of a year’s worth of hours of glassblowing.
**Niorun’s Hall**

Niorun is the little-known goddess of dreams. Unlike most of the other deities, she chooses to live in Svartalfheim, where she is honored and revered by both the Dark Elves and the Duergar. Of all the places in Svartalfheim that might be considered halls, Niorun’s place is the only one where a traveler could claim sanctuary and be unopposed by residents. However, as soon as one leaves, one is on one’s own again. There is also the fact that Niorun’s hall is a strange place, and not altogether safe. It is filled with distorting mists of many colors, and one is often overcome by the compulsion to lay down and sleep. If you are a skilled lucid dreamer, her hall can be a good jumping-off point for prophetic dreamwork; if you aren’t, it can be deadly.

Niorun herself can be seen as a veiled figure walking through the misty halls, her face almost never seen. If approached, she will speak in riddles and poetry, or say things that one later cannot remember. Offerings to her include colored glass balls and prisms that she can hang up in her hall to rotate and add to the ambience.

**Nidavellir: The Realm Below**

Nidavellir isn’t like a city or just one location. It’s a complex labyrinth of “territories.” They’re sort of like main corridors that are like freeways and nobody really owns them. Then you have personal dwellings that just branch off. Often a wrong turn would walk you into someone’s bedroom or dining room. One “castle” (I say that because of the internal furnishing reminded me of a castle I saw in a magazine) had a clearly lit doorway, and thus you knew that you were “inside” and not just part of the area/village. You would also walk down a main corridor and walk out of the “town”; you just sort of knew that you had gone past the boundaries and were walking in unclaimed area.

—Rod Landreth, seidhmadhr
Residents: The Duergar

Most of what this guidebook says about dealing with the Duergar can be found in the chapter dedicated to the characteristics of their race. They are the absolute masters of this world; while the Dökkálfar rule in their forests, they are aware that they still inhabit this world at the whim of the Duergar.

Visiting Nidavellir is not that difficult. The main areas of Nidavellir are a hub of trade from all the worlds except Helheim, and there are hundreds of visitors coming and going at any given time. The Duergar take advantage of this, with fairly high prices for food, drink, and the crowded displays of saleable items. Capitalism is alive and well in this part of the Nine Worlds, where every bit of gold eked from tourists and traders enriches this barren country. Assuming that you bring at least some reasonably quality goods for sale, or the means to buy something, you can walk right in.

Duergar guides to the area are, as we have mentioned, easily for sale. They know better than to walk you into private homes or off-limits areas, so they are quite worthwhile. You don’t generally need to worry about being led into a dark alley and rolled for your meager pocket change; harm done to tourists and traders is bad for business and is sharply punished. The young Duergar who make a trade out of guiding are generally smarter than that. There is no rule, however, against constantly jacking costs for anything “off the beaten path”. That includes helping you to find certain famous names among the Duergar, and their various halls, and getting an introduction for the possible purpose of training or education. For each of these specialties, the price will go up, and it is up to you and your pocketbook as to whether it will be worth it.

Usually what travelers have come for is to shop, and the main guided tours will be the hundreds of shops in the main area of the city, filled with gorgeous trinkets of metalwork, woodcarving, jewelry, statuary, etc. While other races might make lovely things, it is agreed by all that the Duergar
are better at making it, whatever it is. The sole exception might be fiber arts, as they must import all their fiber and it is not a common art, but the few Duergar women who do weave and embroider are said to make breathtaking pieces.

Not only are they highly talented as a race, their work ethic shows in everything they make. Every piece offered for sale will be finished to the best of that dwarf’s ability. The idea that they would make shoddy work in order to save money and cheat customers is an insult. Cheaper pieces were made by less skilled craftsmen, perhaps apprentices still learning the trade. The Duergar guilds—in some cases more like secret societies—monitor all work sold with their seals of approval. Quality is far more important to them than quantity, which is why they have the reputation that they do, and why there are waiting lists for some particularly high-demand objects.

They also have a very good idea of what their work is worth, and what the market will bear. No Duergar, even an apprentice, sells his labor for pennies—at least to outsiders. They will drive hard bargains; although the buyer, thinking of his purse, may feel that the prices are unfairly inflated, to the dwarf that he is facing it is simply a fair measure of his time and labor. One doesn’t go to Nidavellir hoping to get a bargain on cheap toys with a bit of glamour on them; for that, one should find an Alfar peasant-merchant with a homely little caravan. Dwarves make high-quality luxury items, or solid practical things that will last several lifetimes and give good wear. Generally they will not mar the perfection of their creations with any glamour that shows them to be other than they are; to them, the quality of the creation should be able to stand on its own without help, or it should go back into the furnace to be melted down again. You can guarantee that a Duergar-make piece will be all that it looks and feels to be. On the other hand, they might lay a galdr on it that subtly calls out to passersby, attracting their attention and possibly sparking their greed, that they might suddenly find themselves craving the fine piece and impulsively buying it. To the dwarf, this is not such an unethical thing, because the workmanship is excellent and your life will be enhanced by owning the
item, won’t it? As they know a good deal about greed themselves, making a greed-\textit{galdr} is an easy thing for them.

The most famous and skilled smiths, most of whom won’t take commissions for mere mortals, are: The four Lovar brothers Dvalin, Alfrik, Berling, and Grer. The sons of the Duergar-King Ivaldi: Brokk, Eitri, and Sindri. Andvari the Fish, as he is called in Nidavellir, and his son Narvi. The last two are your best bet if you want someone who will deal with human beings.

For food, they keep extensive underground caverns filled with food that can be grown in the light and heat from magical artificial lightning—mostly root crops—or without any light at all, such as the famed hundred varieties of edible mushrooms (a few of which are valuable medicinals, or even hallucinogens). Duergar ale, in fact, is root-based, rather like vodka which is made from potatoes, rather than grain-based Vanaheim beer. It is said that they even make fungus-derived alcoholic drinks, but it is also said that it is unwise for the traveler to partake of them. Physically, the Duergar have a huge tolerance for alcohol, unrivaled even by most average-sized Jotnar. Their sturdy bodies can burn it off at a great speed, so accepting a challenge to a drinking contest with Duergar is extremely foolish.

Wealthy Duergar also keep herds of goats for their milk and meat; unlike sheep and cows, goats can survive on brush rather than grass, and they are kept in caverns and fed on branches brought in during the winter. In the summer, they are herded up the mountains daily for forage; Duergar goatherds are well-armed and well-paid, as nearly all the skirmishes between them and the Dökkálfr have come from goat-poaching. Some of the richer dwarves have imported pigs, raised in underground caves on roots and food scraps. Flocks of tame pigeons are the most common livestock, flying out daily through vent-holes in the caves and returning to underground roosts where their droppings are added to the underground gardens. Some poorer Duergar use and eat bats in the same way; it is a sign of the rather tenuous peace with the Dökkálfr that one of the names for a livestock bat is also applied to their elven neighbors.
Accepting food and drink from the Duergar is generally safe; it is very rare that they would attempt to poison or ensorcel someone with food. That’s much more of an Alfar danger. At worst, they might try to get you drunk and then chivvy you into agreeing to something that you wouldn’t dream of accepting while sober. Since turning down their gifts—including liquor—is considered terribly rude, you might try investing in a magical tankard that turns all liquid to water as soon as it is poured in. Make it sturdy-looking but not that attractive, so that it won’t flag their covetous interest; you might put a sloppily sentimental line about some fictitious ex-lover on it as an excuse for only drinking out of that one cup. Another possibility is to provide them with a small-to-moderate quantity of very excellent alcohol, which you will be excused from imbibing in order that there be more for them.

Gifts—or payment, if you wish to buy from them—should come in the form of raw materials for their craftwork, especially things they don’t have access to—exotic gems and precious stones, pure precious metals, shells, raw or spun fiber, fine hardwoods. You can also bring them food and drink, especially bread, fruit, and sweets, or herbs and spices. If you trade, be prepared to bargain hard, but remember that they will not take less than they think their work is worth.

**Durin’s Hall**

Durin was one of the Eldest of the Duergar Fathers. He built the World-Mill to create fertile soil in Svartalfheim, but it did not work for him, and was eventually bought by Frey, who is far more skilled at using it. He (along with his friend and partner Dvalin) was also the crafter of the cursed sword Tyrfig of Germanic legends. Durin was chosen as the first chieftain of the Duergar, and his memory is still loved and revered. His death is considered unlucky to speak of for some reason, unless you are one of his close relatives, and even they are closemouthed about it. His hall is one of the grandest cavern-mazes in Nidavellir, but rather than keeping it
as a private hall or passing it along to the next chieftain, his relatives decided instead to open it to the public as a place of respite and peace.

To stay in Durin’s hall is quite possible, but rather expensive unless you are a friend of the family. The atmosphere is somewhere between a high-class hotel and an ashram, with bubbling hot springs and quiet, peaceful, beautifully carved caverns glittering with lights and mica mosaics. Don’t disturb the quiet by making a ruckus; if you want to do that, getting a room at a local tavern will give you plenty of noise and partying.

**Dvalin’s Hall**

Dvalin is one of the most powerful Duergar in Nidavellir, and the most skilled runemal in that world. He is actually half-Jotun, as his father was the famous Mimir, who had an affair with the famous Duergar-woman Lovar, and sired Dvalin and his three brothers, Alfrik, Berling, and Grer. Dvalin’s daughters (for he had several wives) became the progenitors of the Lovar family of dwarves. The four of them are a sort of corporation, creating beautiful items on commission. Their most famous creation was Brisingamen, the fairest necklace in the world. Freya desired it, and paid for it by spending four nights making love to the brothers. Even though they didn’t get a single piece of gold for it, they still consider it to be their greatest sale.

At first, Dvalin was just a powerful Duergar-lord in Svartalfheim, and then through a miracle of near-death at the moment of Odin’s torment on the Tree, he received the Duergar-runes into his hands. He taught them only sparingly, to a secret society of hand-picked Duergar, and eventually he mysteriously vanished, only returning home a few times during the long Svartalfheim year. His family know where he is, as do many of his people, but it is considered bad luck to speak of it. (He has become one of the Deer of the Four Winds; more information is in the Yggdrasil chapter.)

It is very rare to find Dvalin at home, as he does not answer pleas for aid that have to do with Duergar matters—he considers his other (secret) work to be more important, and figures that there are enough of his people
around who could answer any ordinary question quite handily. If your problems are issues relevant to his other job—which would be very serious issues indeed—you won’t have to travel to Svartalfheim to talk to him about it. Indeed, he would more likely show up no matter where you are, accompanied by his three co-workers. None of the others—Dain the Alf, Duneyr the Midgardian, and Durathor/Asvid the giant—bother to keep earthly halls or realms any longer; Dvalin was the only one of the four who had an extensive family to keep his hall going, and so he visits his descendants periodically. Among the Duergar, he is treated with quiet reverence, rather like a living saint—the first and greatest of the Duergar runemasters. If you catch him at home, don’t bother him with petty issues; he is busy with greater matters and would rather spend his precious home time playing with his great-great-grandchildren. Pay your respects, leave a gift (which he will probably pass on to his family, as alone among Duergar he has rather gone beyond a need for material objects) and go.

His hall is administered in his absence by his three bachelor brothers, who are still acclaimed as some of the best master craftsmen among the Duergar, and are decent runemasters as well. They have extensive workshops in the hall, with many apprentices learning under them. If you have questions about craft, it is better to approach them, as they are still very much in the family business. Don’t ask them rude questions about their nights with Freya; they consider it a sacred subject and will not have their memories degraded by lewd gossip.

**Aurvangar**

Aurvangar is the place in Joruvellir (an area of Svartalfheim’s surface claimed by the Duergar) where grave-mound of Svarin and Lovar is found, from which came the Lovar family of Duergar. They were the first Duergar couple to mate and have children together, although both often took other lovers. Aurvangar refers to both the above-ground and the underground areas. The great grave-mound towers in the midst of the flat area; theirs is the only above-ground grave of a famous Duerg. It is usually covered with
offerings, and is guarded—a hidden door to Nidavellir, with guards who watch over the grave, is nearby in the mountainside.

The grave-mound lies near Juruvale Marsh, the only place in Svartalfheim with wetlands, and the only sacred bog. It is used by both races to drop offerings. The Duergar generally drop in items, and the Dökkálfar generally drop in freshly murdered bodies. They try to make their visits not coincide with each other.

Ivaldi’s Hall

Ivaldi is the Emperor of the Duergar, also called “Vidfinnar” and “Svigdar”, both nicknames referring to his ability as a champion drinker. His children by his first (Duergar) wife are the champion craftsmen Brokk, Eitri, and Sindri. With his second wife, the Asa Valkyrie Hildegun, he sired Iduna, Bil, and Hjalfi. Hildegun was captured coming off of a battlefield by Ivaldi and his men, who took her as an inadvertent prize of war. The story is unclear as to whether she stayed with him so long by force or choice, or first one and then the other.

Ivaldi is a tall (for his race) Duergar with dark skin, long black hair, and a long jet-black beard that he is quite vain about. He is handsome, in a hook-nosed, craggy way, and he is quite brilliant; he did not get to be the emperor of his canny, fractious race through accident. He holds the title of Emperor—a rather pretentious title, given that the Duergar hold only one world—by wealth, bribery, force of arms, and general charisma. He is also one of the greatest sorcerers among the Duergar. He is the son of Svarin and Lovar, and thus of Lovar family descent, and the half-brother of Dvalin.

He lives surrounded by a court full of his kinsmen, including his umpteen Lovar brothers, sisters, and cousins—Draupnir and Dólghrasir, Hár, Haugspori, Hlévangur, Glói, Dori, Ori, Dufur, Skirfir, Virfir, Skáfidur, Ái, Eíkinskjaldi, Frosti, Finn and Ginnar. His brother Andvari has his own hall, and his brother Yngvi fled to Niflheim where he is the custodian of Fenris’s island. His remaining two brothers, Fjalmar and Galar, were the
infamous pair who were exiled due to their habit of murdering people, and eventually killed Kvasir the Van in order to make the Mead of Poetry from his blood.

Ivaldi’s Hall is located high in one of the mountains; it is not difficult to get in, but seeing him personally is less easy. If you speak to Ivaldi, make sure that you gift him as the King that he is. He is canny, and his first thought about anyone he meets is how he can best use them to further his ends, if it is possible. However, he is not an unfair man, and will return fair service with fair accounting. Like many skilled leaders in the Nine Worlds, he is good at telling when someone is lying to him, so don’t blow yourself up or exaggerate your powers or abilities. He will just look right through you with those cynical dark eyes and you will feel like shriveling up. His courtiers enjoy a good song or story, but he is more interested in news of the outside worlds, any of them.

**Byrgir**

This is an empty well standing on a mountaintop in Svartalfheim. At one time it poured forth magical waters that gave the gift of poetic power and ecstasy, but Ivaldi magically emptied it, which stopped its flow and ensured that the holy water was in limited supply, and thus more valuable. When Ivaldi’s brothers Fjalar and Galar came to him with Kvasir’s blood, he lent them enough water to make the blood into the Mead of Poetry, intending on a share of it. However, they fled with the Mead of Poetry and Ivaldi’s price on their heads and curse at their backs, saying that they would not live another six turns of the Moon—which was true, as Sutting hunted them down and killed them soon after for the spiteful murder of his parents.

While their mother, Hildegun, was still a prisoner at Ivaldi’s court, her children were hostage to her safety. The eldest, Iduna, escaped to Asgard where she became the gardener-goddess there. (There is some personal gnosis that she was also a twin, but her brother seems to be deceased.) The younger two, Hjuki and Bil, a daughter and son, had the job of bringing
back buckets of holy water from Byrgir, a job which Ivaldi would not entrust to anyone else. He thus slowly emptied out the well and sold its contents bit by bit to the Aesir. On the last trip, however, when the children were dredging up the very last bucketful, the Moon-god Mani (whom the Duergar name Nepur) seized them and the bucket up to the sky. (This story is said to be the basis of the “Jack and Jill” rhyme.) The Moon-god had a history of attempting to rescue children from mortal parents who abused them, but he had not counted on their father Ivaldi, the Emperor of the Duergar and a determined and powerful sorcerer.

The tale goes that Ivaldi chased the Moon across the sky through many worlds in pursuit of his children, and finally caught up with him under a mountain. He fought Mani with singleminded wrath and a great axe, and the frightened Moon-god (never much of a warrior) fell back before the Duerg-King and yielded. Ivaldi reclaimed his children and his holy water, and returned to his hall in Nidavellir. There, with an empty well and weeping children, he reconsidered, decided on mercy, and allowed Hildegun and their children to go to Asgard. Bil later renamed herself Saga and became the goddess of lore, and one of Frigga’s handmaidens. Hjuki, on the other hand, returned to his father’s side where he lives mostly at court, and is Nidavellir’s ambassador to Asgard.

The empty well is something of a shrine to the Duergar, and they throw offerings down into it. They also throw in gravel and sand and concrete, in order to discourage people from climbing down and stealing the offerings.

Andvari’s Hall

The Duerg Andvari is one of the top ten smiths in Nidavellir, and one of the few who will actually take commissions from non-divine people, if you are willing to pay his extremely high prices. He specializes in jewelry, although he is quite capable of forging anything from pots to armor. Andvari seems to be fonder of humans than many other of the Duergar. Indeed, he is an odd sort of Duerg, much given to wandering about in his
earlier days, and he used to hole up in a pond by a waterfall in Jotunheim, where he would change himself into a salmon. His treasure was hidden behind the waterfall. The Duergar have many tales about their folk doing such things—temporarily hiding out with one’s hoard in a paranoid fear of being robbed—and it is referred to as “dragon disease”, in memory of the half-Duergar Fafnir who turned himself into a dragon in order to better guard his hoard. Generally it is considered a kind of temporary insanity that one outgrows, with the implied idea that the powers of Wyrd will set you up to lose such hoarded treasure anyway, as is what happened with Andvari.

Currently, Andvari keeps a hall in Nidavellir with his several grown sons. Narvi, the eldest, is a fine smith in his own right. He has close ties with Loki, who named his own ill-fated eldest son with Sigyn for him. Both Andvari and Narvi drive a hard bargain for work, so be careful and stay sober when negotiating with them.

**Hall of the Four Directions**

This is less a hall than a temple. While the Duergar have few buildings that could be considered temples or shrines—their worship is more of a homely sort of thing, done in privacy by families—the biggest exception is the Hall of the Four Directions, a sort of ongoing architectural artwork dedicated to the Dwarves of the Four Directions, who guard the far corners of the World Tree. These entities are not actually Duergar—at least according to the Duergar themselves—but greater deities invoked into the Nine Worlds by Odin, who set them to guarding the four directions.

According to Duergar myth, they looked down at the various races inhabiting the Nine Worlds and noticed that the Duergar seemed to have gotten the worst of things. The Aesir, the Vanir, the Alfar were all powerful and beautiful, with lovely worlds near the top of the tree. The Jotnar, for all they had been disenfranchised, were the most numerous and still claimed the most land—three worlds’ worth. The Duergar, on the other hand, were scorned as mere maggots, cast into the darkness of the lower limbs of the Tree through a power struggle they did not understand
and had no part in, struggling to carve a living out of a cold world of mountains. The four Guardians admired their strength and persistence and creativity, and chose to take on the form of dwarves themselves in honor of their favorite race. The Duergar revere them as Gods, and swear their most sacred oaths by their names—Austri, Vestri, Sudri, Nordri.

The temple itself takes up the entire top section of one of the highest mountains in Svartalfheim. The central chamber is perforated with many glassed windows to let in light, and the four wings spreading out from it are each decorated with statuary, mosaics, and some of the most amazing and intricate carving in the Nine Worlds—all in honor of the Four Guardians. Austri’s wing is themed as a field of spring flowers, with every petal a jewel inlaid in a stem of precious metal. Sudri’s wing is filled with more gold than is seen in any one place in the Nine Worlds, with a great golden sun filling the whole ceiling, and a floor like the iridescent ocean itself. Vestri’s wing is decorated like a multicolored autumn, with entire trees built of copper twigs and leaves of precious stones, the floor a stone mosaic of a forest floor. Nordri’s wing is decorated in silver and alabaster and thousands of glittering crystal gems, with a ceiling of blued steel and a marble floor so slick that one could skate on it.

The Duergar are constantly adding tiny bits to this living, growing sculptural temple; the four wings keep expanding outward and becoming more glorious. They are generally pleased to have people visit their great temple of devotion, as it is a noted tourist attraction. If you go, bring an offering, but give it to the temple keepers; don’t lay it in the temple itself. Only the finest offerings are eventually added to the permanent temple, and to assume that yours is worthy would be considered an act of hubris. No one ever steals anything while there; they wouldn’t dare. If so much as a petal was pried out of a gemmed flower, the horde of praying Duergar who were visiting that day would rend them to pieces for the great insult.
Day 8, Niflheim

“I have shed tears for the chained beast.”

It was cold in Niflheim, and pretty cold in my world as well, and washing with cold water from the Indian pump was rather awful. I saw frost giants lumbering about in the distance, but they never approached me. The part of Niflheim that I wanted, anyway, was Lake Amsvartnir, which was near the part of it that’s all water, not the part that’s all frozen ice and snow. It’s constantly foggy there, with cold mists that roll over you. At the lake’s edge, I looked out across and saw the barren, mountainous island in the distance.

I poured a jug of water across the outer ring of the labyrinth, did the Laguz spell, and prayed that the lake would line up with the lake, and it did, just long enough for me to turn into a raven and fly across, while jumping across physically. I landed on the island’s shore and wandered around a while, not knowing how to find what I was looking for. Then I heard a sharp voice behind me, and turned to see a
small, skinny Duerg glaring at me. He challenged me, wanted to know for what purpose I was disturbing his island. “I’m here to see Fenris,” I said.

He rolled his eyes. “Ah, the wolf,” he said. “Don’t get any stupid ideas about freeing him. You won’t be able to.”

“I’m aware of that,” I said. “But I’m supposed to see him, for some reason.”

He pointed to the north. “Go to the other side of the island,” he said, “and follow the rivers of blood.”

He started to walk away.

“Wait!” I called. “Are you Lyngvi?”

He turned back. “Of course. Who else would I be?”

“I have a message from your kinsman. He says you ought to come home for a visit. That it would do you good.” The little Duerg snorted and walked away, grumbling to himself. I wondered what had made him leave Nidavellir to live on a deserted island in Niflheim.

The lake’s water on the northern side of the island was pinked by the two streams of blood that trickled over the rocks and into the surf. I followed the streams
down into a cave, which took me in pathwalking terms to the western boundary of my property, where there are huge fallen stones. In the cave, in the dim light, I saw him, huge and chained. A wolf bigger than a horse, a sword thrust through his muzzle and pinning him to the ground. Bound with glittery chain no thicker than a necklace. His yellow eyes slitted in the dark, and I heard his voice in my mind.

I wanted you to see me this way, he said to me. I could come to you unbound, with the small part of me that is allowed to walk loose, so long as I wreak no destruction. But I wanted you to see this, because I knew you would understand.

I knelt beside him and wept. Yes, I understand, you who are one of the greatest creations of the Iron Wood. I understand both the hunger and the necessity. I reached out and just barely touched his pelt, near his shoulder. I knew that if he were free he'd eat me, no matter that I would willingly be his friend, and that those chains were what allowed me that small touch. It was his nature, and part of mine.

I had not brought any offering for him, so I let my tears drip onto him. It was all I could think of to do.
We spoke for a short while, and then I washed my hands in the streams of blood and left. The air was very bright and cold outside, and the mists had cleared for the moment. Lake Amsvartnir sparkled in the sunlight, and my own world seemed very far away.

“...The Hag of the Iron Wood had three children, and the daughter was Death, the son was Destruction, and the third encircled the world...”

—Jotunheim children’s rhyme
Niflheim means, literally, the Home of Mists. It is a cold and partly frozen realm, one of the two primal worlds that collided and created the basis for all the others. In this freezing realm, glaciers and mountains of ice once solidified long ago from an ancient river called Elivagar, meaning Icy Waves. It was a river of poison, of a sort which crystallized all things into frost. When Muspellheim collided with Niflheim, the frost began to melt in the southernmost areas, and the first being, Ymir the frost-giant, was formed. Elivagar’s drops are still present in Niflheim, although they are spread throughout the world, but even their diluted form is enough to keep this world cold-to-frozen.

Time and Seasons

There are seasonal changes in Niflheim, but they are similar to that of an arctic area in this world; in Greenland, the Inuit might easily be able to figure out what season a snow-covered country might be, but it would all look like winter to those unfamiliar with the area. The days are long, several days’ length in our time, and the nights are longer, and they extend even further in the winter. Since the skies are rarely clear, it is difficult to tell anyway. Niflheim spins closest to our world somewhere around Oimelc, the midpoint between the winter solstice and the spring equinox.

Geography

More than half of Niflheim is covered in snow and ice that never melts. The weather is often cloudy; it is not named the Land of Mists for nothing. Typical weather might include dense pea-soup-thick fogs that roll
over the land, or blizzard conditions, or fog with snow in it (a lovely combination for a traveler to get lost in). One might even see thunderstorms with snow. The cold in these areas can be brutal and bitter, and it is best to wear warm clothing or bring a lot of heat magic. As the Home of Cold, this world does tend to suck the heat out of even stalwart types. It is a very dangerous place to get stuck.

Towards Svartalfheim, the terrain gets more mountainous and the ice melts; here the land is nearly all water with random mountaintops forming steep islands. The waters float with icebergs, so boaters should take care. The water itself is near-freezing cold. If the traveler can assume an avian form, it’s best to fly over this area; dry land is far between.

There are no aboveground structures in Niflheim; not that most buildings would survive the dramatic storms anyhow. All the inhabitants burrow underground in caves. The exception is found at the border of Niflheim and Helheim, where Mordgud’s Tower stands along the Helvegr. Frost-etins have elaborate cave-tunnels, but wandering into them without invitation, even to get shelter from the weather, is a mistake.

 Probably the most important geographical feature in Niflheim is Hvergelmir, the great well called the Roaring Cauldron. Unlike the other two sacred wells, which are small, Hvergelmir is an enormous frothy whitewater hot-spring of roiling, turbulent water from which many rivers flow. It is not safe to be too close to it, as it often overflows its banks and floods the area. Due to the cold, the waters often freeze into ice, and Hvergelmir is surrounded by fantastic naturally-formed ice sculptures like frozen waterfalls. Sometimes one can also see ice sculptures actually created by frost-thurses around the rim; it’s one of their favorite art forms.

Hvergelmir is the source of all the rivers in the Nine Worlds, flowing upward through the Tree. Why water flows upward here is uncertain; it is one of the mysteries of Yggdrasil, and reminds one of the old Indo-European idea that fire that fell from the sky and water that bubbled up from the ground was sacred. The major rivers that flow from Hvergelmir are named Svol, Gunnthra, Fiorm, Fimbulthul, Hrid, Sylg and Ylg, Vid, Leiptr, Sid, Vid, Sekin, Ekin, Gipul, Gopul, Gomul, Geirvimul, Thyn, Vin,
Tholl, Boll, Grad, Gunnthrain, Nyt, Not, Nonn, Hronn, Vina, Veg, Svinn, Thiodnuma, and the great river Gjoll, which runs parallel to the Gates of Helheim. As the river Gjoll moves away from Hvergelmir, it goes over an enormous waterfall called Franangr, behind which are a series of refuge-caves that only the brave can reach. One of its claims to fame is that Loki once hid from the Aesir in the form of a salmon beneath Franangr’s billows.

Hvergelmir is located close to the gates of Helheim, and next to it emerges the third and lowest extruded root of the World Tree, Yggdrasil. It is hard to envision how enormous this root is. It is the size of a small mountain and runs literally off the boundary of Niflheim and into Helheim; the walls of Hel pass over it like a bump in the landscape. The dragon Nidhogg, a thirty-foot wingless earth-dragon in colors of silver and blue, crawls back and forth over that wall to gnaw at the great root on both sides of the border. Nidhogg can generally be safely observed from a distance; she rarely attacks or even takes notice of travelers.

The watery area of Niflheim is filled with many small islands, like small mountaintops protruding up from the waters. Sometimes they are almost indistinguishable from the icebergs that also float around; sometimes the icebergs collide with them. This area of Niflheim is home to some Duergar who have wandered from their native land and dug out the frozen mountain/islands, and their islands actually have the names of the Duergar who own them. (There are frost-thurses living on the islands, too, but they don’t seem to need to name them.) Courtesy dictates that visitors to the Duergar islands find the residents and announce themselves. Some will give you succor, and some will simply grunt and go on their way. As opposed to the family-and-tribe-oriented Duergar of Nidavellir, these mostly seem to be antisocial single males, who drifted to Niflheim in order to get more silence and privacy. They don’t tend to enjoy visitors, and most prefer to be left alone.
Lyngvi Island: The Cave Of Fenris

The most famous of these small islands is Lyngvi Island, which is claimed by a dwarf named Lyngvi, in the middle of a small lake called Amsvartnir due to its dark waters. This island is used by the Aesir, with Lyngvi’s permission, to house the most famous current prisoner in the Nine Worlds—Fenrir (modernly anglicized to Fenris) the Great Wolf, son of Loki. The water on the eastern side of the island is stained red; two streams of blood pour forth from Fenris’s sword-pinned muzzle and trickle out of the cave mouth and into the small bay. An enormous stone (called Gioll, and covered with protective runes) covers the cave mouth, with just enough room for a person to squeeze through. A hole bored in its center gives forth a magical cord, called Gelgia, woven of the hair of many of the Aesir. It is attached inside to the magical chain that binds Fenris, created sorcerously from the six impossible things. The other end is attached high above to another enspelled stone called Thviti, also covered in runes. The reason that the stones and the cord have names is that they are alive, with guardian wights invoked into them that never sleep.

Loki and Angrboda’s werewolf-son Fenrir was taken from them as a hostage in his childhood. It did not go well, and eventually he got to the point where he was a wild berserker, killing and eating everything in his path. The Gods got together and decided that he should be chained, and did so. To this day he is imprisoned underground on an island in Niflheim, although it is said that if Ragnarok comes he will break free. Both Angrboda and Loki seem to have mixed feelings on the subject; although they dislike the fact that Fenrir is chained, neither did anything to stop it; they both seem to understand that he was more of a hazard than even they could handle.

I have met and spoken with Fenrir, and I’ve wept for him. I am also aware of the very good reasons why he can’t be let loose. It’s hard to look at any magnificent chained creature, even when you know it would eat you in a heartbeat if you unchained it (which I couldn’t if I wanted to). I honor
my own ambivalences, as I honor the ambivalence of his existence. Not everything is easy, black and white, and anyone who tries to see him in either light has missed the point.

Fenris is, in many ways, the ultimate expression of Jotun nature without boundaries. He is what he is. He would rather die than be other than what he is. He is scary. But it was valuable to me to see him, to speak with him, to hear his wisdom—and yes, it is wisdom—about the dark places in the soul. He is an expert on that.

It is possible to visit Fenris—Lyngvi himself does not think of himself as a jailer and doesn’t seem to care one way or the other about the prisoner chained in his basement—but one ought to be strongly aware of one’s reasons for doing it. Gawking and mocking at the great beast is not a good enough reason. Fenris may be powerless, but he has friends and relations all over the Nine Worlds who check in on him (including his sister Hela who is in charge of seeing that he is fed), and disrespect will get you marked down in a bad way with them. Attempts to free him are futile, as the divine magic that imprisons him is far stronger than even a team of human sorcerers could budge.

Flora

None at all in the frozen areas, except for cave lichens. There is some scrub on some of the mountain-islands in the watery areas. Supposedly there are some powerfully healing tundra-type plants on the islands, but they are hard to find. Their main powers seem to be that they are adaptogenics—helping the body become stronger and more able to cope with stress.

Fauna

There are a few arctic-type animals in the snowy regions, and there are seals and other cold-water mammals in the watery region. They can be hunted, although you ought to make sure that you are not hunting on the territory of a hungry frost-thurse. If one does show up while you are
standing there with your kill in hand, offering it to them as a gift may get you spared.

Cautions

One problem that has been reported by travelers to Niflheim is that it is not unusual for frequent visitors to come home with colds, or even pneumonia. Beef up your immune system before you go. Dress warmly, with warmth spells on your clothing and especially your socks. Fire-spells, and the fire-rune Ken, are exceptionally good for this. Be careful, though, because fire spells can make you stand out like a beacon in cold Niflheim. If you want to pass unnoticed by frost-etins, put a camouflage spell over yourself.

Even camouflage spells can’t hide actual fires from frost-thurses, no matter how small. It is said that if you must bring a captive fire (in a lantern, bowl, or other container) to Niflheim, forget about passing unnoticed, and bring coals from the ever-burning fires of Muspellheim. These do have the power to counteract Niflheim’s cold, if only in small ways.

The energy of Niflheim has been likened to a drain, spiraling downwards. There is something about even its still white tundra that suggests constant movement. It is the energy of the compost heap, rotting downwards. It’s part of what makes visitors more prone to illness. This world is nearly at the bottom of the tree; only Helheim is lower. Gravity seems heavier here; travelers may find themselves tiring easier, and ought not to take long walks. Flying over Niflheim is possible, but bird-shapers need to take into account the twin problems of sudden, terrible storms and the arrows of sharp-eyed frost-etins.

Bringing a boat with you—especially one that can shrink up and fit in your pocket, magically, is a good way to get around the watery areas of Niflheim. Unless you are a really experienced whitewater rafter, however, surfing the rivers just around Hvergelmir is not recommended.
Residents

The only permanent residents of Niflheim are the frost-giants and the renegade Duergar. As Duergar nature is discussed in the Svartalfheim/Nidavellir chapter, we will go on directly to the frost-thurses.

The frost-thurses (or “rime-thurses”, Old Norse *hrimthursar*) of Niflheim are the oldest and most feared of all etinkind; by that I mean that they are feared by nearly everything that isn’t a deity, and by some of them as well. They are the largest etins; their humanoid form can be up to fifteen feet tall, and their weather forms—generally a thirty-foot screaming, whirling blizzard—are even huger. They are taller than any other giant, up to fifteen feet tall in their humanoid form, and more like in their weather-form. In humanoid form, they have pale skin, almost blue for some of them, and hair that ranges from snow-white (and has nothing to do with age) to dark. If they wear clothing, it is usually skins and leather, although some have woven fabric of some sort that they have traded for. In some cases, they may wear the entire skin of a huge animal, like a white bear. This may make it difficult to figure out whether the bear-thing coming for you out of the snow is an actual bear or a bear-clad frost-thurse. Check the aura of any predator before shooting at it; Jotun auras are unmistakable.

There is no one ruler of all the frost-thurses in Niflheim. They are organized into a bunch of loose tribes, and come together for moots and decision-making. Any of the wise elders of any tribe is respected as much as any other, although one of the most famous of them is Kari the North Wind, brother of the fire-etin Logi and the sea-god Aegir. Frost-thurses are keenly aware of the fact that they were the first intelligent beings to be created in the Nine Worlds, and they are proud of that fact. One of their strongest oaths is swearing by Elivagr, the primal frost-river of Niflheim, some of whose nature runs in their veins. In personality, the frost-thurses are private, retiring, suspicious, and cold. They hunt silently rather than noisily, and they are superb hunters. It is said that they have a certain amount of power of the weather in Niflheim, and can bring down storms, which is another reason not to anger them.
The frost-thurses can be very problematic. Perhaps I should just change that to automatic-problem. They are the least friendly of giants, but they also will ignore you first, until you present a problem. They can smell intent pretty damned fast. They also don’t take kindly to humans in their physical form, so be aware of that when you enter. If you are more of a fire-blood type, then they may find you difficult in other ways. For me, I am frost-étin-blooded, so I don’t find their basic disposition all that bad, but perhaps that is because I am a lot like them. I don’t like people when I meet them for the first time, I hate going out to where people are unless I need something, and noise can set me off like nothing else. Actually, if you can think about an avalanche as an entity, you’ll see what I mean here. An avalanche zone can be seen or not, but if you so much as make too loud a noise, step in the wrong spot, or don’t take heed, it will come crashing down on you. As for offerings, they seem to like milk, tea (green tea and white tea especially), and work. Hard work. People often forget that the Norns are frost-thurse.

—Lyn, spirit-worker

There is no reasoning with a Niflheim frost-thurse if they decide that you don’t belong in their territory, and often at that point, you become food as far as they are concerned. Their environment is harsh and cold, varying from frozen snowfields to tundra, so this attitude may have been honed by the general lack of food in the vicinity. They can easily be seen in the distance of Niflheim, which gives travellers time to avoid them, but they move exceptionally fast in their snow-forms, so if you are in Niflheim and see one, go in the other direction as fast as possible. Hiding in caves and crevices too small for them to enter has been useful for some people.

Fortunately, if you are just passing through, they will usually not bother you. Things that attract their attention: Hunting without permission on their doorsteps. Starting fires close to their homes. Carrying fire, in general. Littering. Invading their caves, thinking that just because it’s an empty cave means that it doesn’t belong to anyone. If you must use a cave, leave an offering for whoever might own it, perhaps with a note thanking them, or the Gyfu-rune.
If you run into hostile frost-thurses, one way to get out of being attacked is to tell them that you are looking for the Helvegr, the Road to Helheim, and are lost. They have a great deal of respect for the Land of the Dead that borders their world, and for the Lady who rules it, and they will not molest any pilgrim who is going to that dread land. On the other hand, they are not unaware that some folk lie about such things in order to escape retribution, so they may well call your bluff and insist on escorting the traveler who invokes the Helvegr right to the road, at least within sight of Mordgud’s tower. At that point, you have no choice but to walk the Hel-road, so this excuse should only be invoked as a desperate last resort, or if it was actually one of your intended destinations. As harsh as Niflheim is, it is less difficult to extract yourself from than Helheim.

Frost-thurse blood gives a certain amount of coldness to the disposition. As Lyn notes, the Norns are supposedly of frost-thurse lineage, and they need to be cold-blooded to do what they do. Compassion for its own sake isn’t something that Jotunfolk in general are strong on, but this goes even less for frost-thurses. On the other hand, no one can teach you about weather as well as they can, and they are excellent teachers for learning outdoor survival as well.

The non-Niflheim-dwelling descendants of frost-giants are the storm-giants, who may live anywhere in the Nine Worlds. Thjazi is one example, Thrym is another. There is a good deal of blurring as to what is a frost-thurse and what is a storm-giant or wind-giant; it seems that even the Jotnar themselves don’t draw those lines tightly, except that the permanent denizens of Niflheim are always referred to as frost-giants; those who migrated out or were born elsewhere may have any combination of names and powers.
Offerings

Any food, or small item made of wood (preferably something that is both useful and beautifully made) that will not degrade in the cold. They aren’t so much for metal, preferring stone and wood (when they can get the latter). They like cake and bread, but don’t like caraway seed; it may be that they are allergic to it. Fruits and vegetables are especially valued, as there isn’t much in Niflheim. An elderly frost-thurse once wept with joy when I gave her edible flowers, which was pretty impressive, as I’ve never seen any of them make such an emotional display before or since.
"I am a speaker for the dead of my tribe."

Going from Niflheim to Helheim didn’t take a lot of world-hopping; you just cross through the gates, and they do it for you. I walked the very last part of the road to Helheim—most seidhr-workers have to walk more of it, I think, but I just picked it up within sight of Mordgud’s tower. She came out and hailed me. I went to show her my tattoo, but she just laughed and said, “We know who you are,” in the kind of voice that ought to have ended with a “silly thing”! I’d brought my lunch with me, and we sat down on the side of the road and shared it. She’s a tall, Amazon-like giantess... don’t know about all the pictures of her looking like a pretty little girl, the Mordgud I met was quite butch and dressed in shiny black armor that seemed to shift and change as I watched it, flowing about her body. She wore a voluminous black cloak and carried a spear, but she was quite friendly to me. She asked about my trip, nodded sagely, and then sent me on after lunch was finished.
The big dog ran up to me too, as I crossed the gate, but I was ready for him and I’d saved some meat. He sniffed me, and immediately went all friendly, which somehow I had expected. It seemed strange to come to a world, finally, where I didn’t have to worry about the reception. I passed through the gate without fanfare and wandered into the Land of the Dead. It was autumn there, and the trees were a riot of color. There were orchards with a few withered apples still hanging on the trees. I passed the lake, and the Island where the dead come to talk to the living, and then the burial mounds. First a few big mounds, with many footsteps around them, and then more and more mounds, until I was walking in a sea of barrows as far as the eye could see. After about half an hour, the barrows ran out . . . and so did the footprints, and I was in uncharted territory, the parts of Helheim where Mama doesn’t let non-employees wander about. I walked through the woods for about another half hour, just looking at the leaves beneath my feet. There is an incredibly peaceful feeling to Helheim; you could just walk around for hours feeling it.
But I had a bargain to conclude. I asked some of the dead souls that I passed where to find Baldur, and they pointed the way. After about thirty different directions, I finally came to a small clearing and called out his name. He came out of what looked like a ruined stone structure ... not as if he lived there, but as if he had been wandering around in it, enjoying the peace, just as I was. His long golden hair rippled to his knees, echoing the golden of the birch leaves behind him, and he looked at me curiously.

I told him that his mother had asked me to send her news of him, and that I was to write a letter to her, and what would he have it say? He sighed, and there was a world of meaning in that sigh. He told me to send her his love, and tell her that he was doing well, and happy, and that his wife was well also, and that she should be strong.

"Anything else?" I asked, thinking that this was a bit brief.

"No," he said firmly. "Nothing else." Then he turned and went back into the woods. I wondered how many times she’d sent messengers. Going back the way I came, I managed to make a larger clearing line
up with the field, and went to the firepit. I wrote Frigga her letter, bound it with the wool I'd spun, started a fire with the lit candle I'd saved from last night, and burned the letter. Julie had left roses by the firepit from her last ritual, and I burned them as well, and threw in all the notes that people had sent me. (I knew they'd be on the hard drive where Josh would have saved them.) “May your missive rise on the smoke of love,” I called to the sky. “I have fulfilled my part of the bargain, Lady.”

By this time, the Dead had clustered around, watching, murmuring. I took my guitar and sang for them, sang for hours and hours, until the sun went down and it got dark and cold. I knew what I was waiting for, but I didn’t know how long it would take. I called out the names of the dead Jotnar that I had messages for, and passed on the messages. The young female etin whose lover was still haunted by her memory came forth, and I pleaded with her to help him let go. I had rather hoped that perhaps I would see one of my own beloved Dead, but I didn’t.

Darkness fell, with clouds, so there was no moon. Just as my hands were getting numb from playing
guitar in the cold. She came out. I knelt and laid the
dried bouquet of ritual roses at her feet, and She
touched my hair with Her skeletal hand. I don’t know
what I expected from our exchange, but it was brief—
She told me that she was proud of me, that I had
outperformed her expectations, but that meant that
She would simply expect more of me. I asked Her to
please be more lenient on my physical body; that I
would not last as Her tool if She kept running me into
the ground with Her demands. She told me that I
should not pathwalk for at least a month, in order to
re recuperate, once I left her realm. Then She blessed me
and went off into the darkness, and I was done.

Or almost done. I got my drum and cloak and
crossed back into Midgard, and then I was ready to
walk the labyrinth out and go back to my homeworld,
but four figures came out out of the dark before I
could get any further. They came from four directions
and surrounded me—a little shorter than my height,
but stocky and bearded; clearly Duergar. Smiling
tolerantly, even. “We’ve been watching you,” one
said. “Do you know who we are?”
I threw back my head and sang out in a loud voice that old Wiccan song that my first boyfriend, the fam-trad witch, taught me:

“Blessed be the guardians of the world,
Blessed be the guardians of the world,
Blessed be the East at dawn,
Blessed be the South in fire,
Blessed be the West waters,
Blessed be the North earth,
Homeland of our Lady and Lord.
Blessed be the guardians of the world,
For they stand on a barren plain,
Watching, watching all that goes round.
May life thrive, now and always,
Blessed be the guardians of the world.”

Yes, it was an old Wiccan thing, but I wanted to communicate that this was the first I’d ever heard of them, in this context. They seemed pleased and amused by it. “Yes, some folk conceive of us with all sorts of forms,” one said—Sudri, I think—“and we can certainly do that, if they want.” As if to demonstrate,
they all flickered through a rapid series of forms, animal and mythical, and then resolved again to just four dwarves. “But we’re really just us.”

“We just wanted to let you know that you can call on us,” another one said.

“For what?” I asked, rather stupidly. I was very exhausted, and my brain was largely baked.

“Well, for one thing, we’re pretty good with directions,” Vestri said rather tartly, and the other ones all grinned. I apologized and thanked them, and they faded out into the night. Then I crossed wearily back into my home world and walked that last exhausting stretch to the house. Josh had put a candle in the window for me, I saw as I approached. As the door opened for me, I called out “Is there room for a traveler?”

And then I was home.
Helgrenze I walk, chained but my sight free.
I am a traveler on Man’s Roads.
I am a skald before the Great Fire.
I have learned kingship on borrowed thrones.
I am a harbinger of the teind.
I am a keeper of the cycle of the year.
I am the lost child of the Iron Wood.
I am a carrier of the hammer’s blessing.
I have shed tears for the chained beast.
I am a speaker for the Dead of my tribe.
I am the Dreamer whose dreams come true.

(There will probably be more to this poem, considering that it only goes halfway around my skirt. But this is enough for now—sort of my own personal Song of Amergin.)
Long ago, before the dismemberment of Ymir and the creation of Midgard and Asgard, the underworld was named Jormungrund. It was populated by the dead souls of Jotnar, and some live ones as well—Jotnar are particularly good at traveling to the Deathlands. As far as we can tell, it was looked after by a goddess named Hel, but she was not the Hel who lives there today. Both the name and the job title seem to be something that is passed on. Apparently someone needs to take on the important (and fairly powerful) job of looking after the Dead, and someone is chosen from one of the races when the last Hel retires.

Jotun legend has it that when the old Hel died, the Dead roamed the Nine Worlds for years, as there was no one to keep them in check. Every race hoped to have one of its members chosen for this crucial task, which would create an unlimited power-base for whoever was allied with Death, if Death could be persuaded to side with its native race. Collective breaths were held across the Nine Worlds ... and then Angrboda, the Hagia of the Iron Wood, had a daughter by her consort, the infamous Loki. When the girl-etin was barely walking, it is said, she took on her shapeshifting form, and it was that of a rotting corpse. This was the signal that she was the inheritor of the name and the title, and she was immediately named Hel, or Hela in the Jotun-tongue (the Alfar call her Leikin), and raised to claim the rulership of the Land of the Dead.

Various rumors went around that Loki and Angrboda had done dark magic to make sure that their child would be the Death Goddess; other rumors said that they had merely foreseen that it would be so, and married in order to bring it about. Whether it came about by chance or planning, it was a great disappointment to the other races, who had hoped to pull the
Deathlands out of the control of Jotun hands. Odin promptly put a “banishing-spell” on the tiny Hela, which basically banned her from ever entering Asgard, and indeed she has never set foot there.

When Hela grew older, she took over Jormundgraud and entirely recreated it, renaming it Helheim. Instead of caves and dankness, she opened it to the black sky and planted orchards, and grass grew over the stony burial mounds. She built the castle Elvidnir and swore that no matter how many the Dead, she would find a way to feed them all, if only sparingly. She redesigned Helheim in such a way as to bring maximum peacefulness to those who reside in it; instead of dank caves, it is a subtly ever-changing tapestry of hills and fields and colorful autumn woods.

It is not enough to say that Helheim is ruled by Hela. Her touch is stamped on every part of it. There is no place in that world that she is not aware of, and that world is huge. Most people don’t get beyond the “tourist” area past the Gate, so they have no idea of the scale of the place. Helheim is the biggest of all the Nine Worlds. It has to be, to hold the legions of the Dead. Its enormous area is held by the cosmic “rootball” of Yggdrasil, like a great disc around its base.

Hela is extremely protective of her dead folk, and She does not appreciate people bothering them unduly. As such, Helheim is strictly guarded. No one sneaks in, any more than they could sneak in to Asgard. (Odin managed it once in order to forcibly conjure up the Volva and compel her to answer questions, but never since.) If you have an appointment to speak with them, She will send whichever dead souls are willing to talk into the area that, for lack of a better term, I refer to as the “tourist area”. The rest of Helheim is off limits except to those who live there, and those who work for Hela and have some sort of mark on them to prove it, or those who have been invited there by Her.

Even with this in mind, people constantly try to get into Helheim. Some go to get wisdom or information from the Dead, some go to find lost loved ones, some go to harass the more famous denizens, such as Baldur, Nanna, and the Volva. Some go because they feel the need for an Underworld ordeal. While this can be an honorable quest, be prepared for a
real ordeal in every sense. Just because you come for spiritual rather than emotional purposes doesn’t mean that they are going to make it easy for you. Quite the opposite, in fact.

**Time and Seasons**

There are no seasons in Helheim except at Hela’s whim. She seems to like it to be autumn most of the time, so that the apples will be ready to eat. Some folk have reported it as being other seasons, but more often than not it’s autumn.

Day or night varies depending not on when you are, but where. Some places, such as Dead Man’s Shore, never get any daylight and the stars are crisp and clear against the night sky. Other places have subdued late-afternoon sunlight, or twilight. It is never morning anywhere in Helheim.

**Geography**

The border of Niflheim and Helheim, except for Hel’s Gate, is separated by a mountain chain and a stretch of narrow inland ocean protruding from the seas north of Helheim. Unlike the borders between other worlds, which are set, for some reason the Niflheim/Helheim border is fuzzy and moves around, perhaps as much as half a mile in any direction. The frost-étns of Niflheim are aware of this, and avoid the area. The river Gjoll forms as much of a boundary as anything can; at least it never seems to move regardless of what world is overlapping it at the moment. It is wide and fast and quite impassable.

Most of Helheim will likely never be seen by anyone living, including most of the spirit-workers who might read this book. And anyway, most of it is unremarkable—quiet, peaceful, rolling hills, generally covered in autumn leaves, and wide meadows of grass. There are small houses among the trees, but they can vanish and reappear as you turn your head. The Dead live everywhere, but you won’t see most of them even if you were to walk through. However, we will cover the areas that you might actually get
a chance to see, as well as some famous legendary places within its boundaries.

**Hel’s Gates And Their Guardians**

There are several gates into Helheim; it’s a big place and has many doors. Each of them will generally have a guard on it, although if you have an appointment (or are accompanied by a deity who has a free pass into and out of Helheim) you may not see them. With the exception of Mordgud, the guardians rotate gates, so you can never be sure which one of them will be at any particular entrance except for the main Gate.

The Helgrind is the main Gate, set into a wall of solid, smooth black rock. You approach it on a bridge over the great rushing river Gjoll, which is impassable in every other place. The bridge is thatched with gleaming gold, and as you start towards it, you will see that it is made of knives, blade-edge upwards. If you don’t look down, but keep walking bravely, they will not cut you; in fact the bridge will feel smooth. From the bridge, the Helvegr slopes downwards and northwards.

**Mordgud’s Tower**

Next to the other end of the bridge is Mordgud’s Tower, made of the shiny black stone which is common in Helheim and Muspellheim. The bridge is guarded by a tall “maiden etin” named Mordgud. “Maiden etin”, translated into Jotun terms, seems to refer to an unmarried female warrior, more the Amazon than the blushing human maid. Sometimes she appears as a skeletal figure (one of her illusions), or a tall Amazon-like etin-woman (her real figure), or just a forbidding dark shape with a loud voice. Don’t try to slip past her; she has had millenia of experience in discerning the dead from the living, and you won’t be able to fool her for a second. She will stop you, and you must state your business. If you have no specific appointment, she might turn you away. At that point, you’d best go home and try to get through to Hela, her boss, and beg for an appointment. If
you get no answer, you’re probably out of luck and Her Ladyship doesn’t want you visiting.

If Mordgud does let you by, she may demand that you leave something behind as a token of your good behavior. If she asks for this, you should immediately give her the most valuable thing that you are carrying, unless it is something to be delivered to Helheim. She is honorable and will give it back when you return past her watch, unless you misbehave yourself and incur Hela’s wrath. Other reports say that she requires people to recite their ancestry, or at least their families, so be ready in case this comes up. If you don’t know your ancestors, say so; don’t make them up.

Some reports claim that Mordgud extracts a toll of blood from living people wishing to enter Helheim. At any rate, it is good common knowledge that one ought to give a token of blood whenever dealing with the deities of death—some won’t even look at you unless blood is involved—and it’s not surprising that Mordgud might demand some. Have a lancet on you just in case. Understand that leaving your blood with her is more than just an offering; it’s leaving a bit of your energy behind so that you can be controlled should you act up.

I have spoken with Mordgud a few times now. As I work for Hela, I have the equivalent of the “employee ID” (tattooed on my arm, actually) and the tall Amazon-like giantess in the black shiny armor has sat and passed the time with me, chatting, as one employee to another. Although she can be fierce, she actually has an open, friendly nature; she just makes sure that no one gets in or out who shouldn’t.

Although her job is very much like Heimdall’s—in a way, she is his “opposite number”—she is more than just a security guard, or a thug at the door. Mordgud has seen a great deal of death, and has shepherded many people from the realm of the living to the realm of the Dead, and she has deep knowledge and wisdom of such transitions. She is a psychopomp in her own right, and can be called on by those who feel stuck in their own dead places. She may not lead you out, if the time isn’t right, but she might point out the way for you.
Other Gates

Then, when you reach the massive Helgrind in the black rock, you will find yet more Guardians that you must pass. (The name of the stone door leading into Helheim, by the way, is Drop-To-Destruction.) The Helgrind will slowly open and someone else will show up to check you out. This is a high-security area, so be prepared.

Garm, Hela’s enormous dog-guard, lives in the cave Gnipahellir. He is an eight-foot-tall black hound with glowing eyes. It is important not to underestimate Garm. While he may act like a big dog—vicious and dangerous or friendly depending on who you are—it’s an act. There is as much intelligence in Garm as in any other of Helheim’s guards. He is a Jotun who is always in dog-form, but he is no dumb beast. Garm seems to be on a general patrol around the borders of Helheim, meaning that he could be anywhere at any point. More often than not, however, he will be lending support to Mordgud at the main Gate. Garm will probably decide if you should enter based on a sniff or two. Don’t ask us what he’s sniffing for; we don’t know.

Bigvoer and Listvoer are a pair of etin-women who are often placed on guard to one or more of the Gates, especially the inner Gate. Sometimes they appear with Mordgud; sometimes she may send visitors on to their Gate. Like her, they may require a token left with them until you return. If you leave clothing, they may wear it until you return. They appear as a pair of elderly, cackling hags, but do not underestimate their strength. They are sorceresses and can deal with you quickly. Be polite and even a bit obsequious to them; this will make them laugh and make them better disposed to you.

Another gate-guard is Ari, a giant whose favorite form is that of a great shrieking eagle. He loves to frighten the approaching rows of Dead by swooping down on them, but unless they stray from the road he does not actually harm anyone. Yet another gate-entrance is guarded by Hrimgrimnir, a very tall frost-giant. He tends to blend into the stonework and only come out if he thinks that you don’t belong. Of all the guardians,
he is the oldest—dating to before the current regime—and the most unfriendly, tending to eat intruders.

The other doors into Helheim don’t need to be documented here, as they are mostly hidden and the random traveler is unlikely to find them. However, there is a second bridge further south on the river Gjoll, called Gjallarbru. It was crossed by Hermod on his way to Helheim, and it does lead to another door. However, this Gate is only open if they know that someone is coming, and that they approve of their errand, so if you come without an appointment, you may cross the Gjallarbru only to find yourself staring at sheer black rock wall with no visible openings.

The Tourist Area

Directly inside the Gates you will find an area of Helheim that consists of grassy hills and small streams, with delicate bridges set over them. Apple orchards line the walls; whether or not to eat the fruit is something of a mixed review. Some report that eating Hel’s apples will give you strange prophetic dreams; others claim that it will prevent you from leaving, like the pomegranates of Hades. Since the jury is mixed, I would say that unless Hela herself invites you to do so, or unless you work for Her, stay away from them.

There is a great lake visible from the edge of the orchards; mists curl up from its surface and nearly obscure the island in the center. This island is where the dead people come who would actually like to speak to you. The lake can be walked across as if it were solid; one’s feet sink in a little, but it bears you up. The water is filled with the faces of the dead, as are the mists that swirl there; don’t let it freak you out. If it bothers you that much, don’t look down. The more “solid” Dead will be waiting for you on the island, and you can speak to them there, although you must remember that just because someone is dead doesn’t mean that they know all the secrets to the Universe.

From the edge of the lake, you can see rows and rows of great humped shapes. These are the barrow-mounds, which stretch on for miles; yes,
Dead people actually do live in them. While you can go a short ways into the barrow-mound area, penetrating too far will trigger some kind of magic that will simply get you turned around and dumped out again near the lake, facing the pathway Out. The barrow-mounds mark the edge of the tourist area. Beyond this, few mortal feet can tread.

**Dead Man’s Shore**

If one were to walk all the way through the country of the barrows, which would take hours and perhaps days unless one had a speed spell, one would reach an area where the dark sea of Helheim dips in a kind of jagged bay. This is Dead Man’s Shore, an area of seashore where the underworld sun, for some reason, never shines. It is directly across the water/world barrier from Muspellheim above it; if you were to take a boat and sail away from the shore, you would eventually begin to see a red glow on the horizon.

Corpses and the shed skins of serpents litter the shore. Nidhogg comes down periodically in her task as carrion-remover and eats the corpses. She is sometimes followed by her brood of serpent-children, whose names include Goin, Moin, Grabak, Grafvollud, Ofnir, and Svafnir. While you will sometimes see the serpents outside Helheim in the wastes of Niflheim, the cold makes them slow and they are not much danger there. In the (somewhat) warmer climate of Helheim, they are faster and more lively. They cluster around Nastrond, the Hall of Serpents, but will not attack anyone outside of that hall, on Hela’s orders. They might come at you and try to knock you off your feet, however, or squirm around your ankles in an attempt to disconcert you. Do not show fear; address them individually in a polite and conversational voice, as if they were human beings offering to shake your hand rather than great serpents coiling around your ankles. They will respect your courage and courtesy (especially the latter) and may even speak to you. The Hel-serpents talk in hissing whispers; human speech is not easy for them and they rarely bother with it, so if they talk to you, you can consider yourself honored.
Nastrond

The Hall of Serpents is probably the most horrifying place in Helheim. It is a large hall, nearly the size of a football field, with two great doors on the end carved with the forms of writhing snakes. Inside, a huge domed roof of many rafters arches overhead, through which poisonous serpents crawl. Venom drips down from their fangs and falls onto the Dead souls below, burning them and eating away at their astral bodies. The floor is packed with them, and they writhe in agony. The screaming and moaning can be heard half a mile away, and the sight of all the tormented people writhing in pools of acidic venom is macabre and disturbing to even the least squeamish.

The reality of Nastrond is that everyone there has chosen to be there on some level. Hela is not a malicious goddess who tosses people into torment for no reason, or even if she feels that they have done wrong. Those who choose Nastrond do it because they have done wrong in their life, and they feel that they need to be punished in order to learn something, as a beginning step to their eventual atonement. After one gets over the horror of the sight of Nastrond, one realizes that the doors are not locked, and that one can walk in and out if one chooses. However, there is no use attempting to convince the sufferers to leave; they will be convinced that they cannot leave, until they have worked out whatever it was that they needed to work out on a soul level.

Elvidnir

This is Hela’s castle in the depths of Helheim. It is enormous and rambling, one of the largest structures in the Nine Worlds. Half of it is elegant and beautiful, and half is a falling-down ruin. Not going into the ruined half goes without saying. The other side contains lovely halls and rooms, including a great library, an orrery, and a gleaming mirror which can show various sights. One wall of one hall has a great map of the Nine Worlds that is constantly changing. There are feast-halls with seatings for thousands, as Hela regularly feeds her Dead charges.
Ganglati is the serving maid of Hela. She is tall, dark, and ponderous. In spite of the fact that she moves very slowly, she somehow manages to get a great many things done. She is rarely seen outside of Elvidnir. While she may seem cold to you, be polite and helpful and she may come to like you, although she won’t show it. Especially if you are sleeping in Flvidnir, being polite to Ganglati may make the difference between a reasonably comfortable stay and a time riddled with subtle horrors.

There is much talk in the Christianized stories of Helheim that speak of it being a place full of misery and hunger, but none of the spirit-workers that I have interviewed have found it to be this way. Scary, yes, in places, but all the Dead seem to be well taken care of. The feasts held in Elvidnir are quiet, almost like eating in a monastery when contrasted to the loud revelry of Valhalla, but they are filling and peaceful. There is something strongly maternal about Hela’s care for her charges, even though she is no mother goddess. Her love is impersonal, but constant, and visitors are also considered under her care and will not go hungry unless they offend her.

Hela may well be staying at Elvidnir, or she may be out elsewhere in her land on business. Like all wights of Jotun blood, she is a shapeshanger, although her shapeshifting is almost always worked on several variations of her half-rotted form. Hela is probably one of the most physically grotesque of the Death Goddesses; it seems important to her to push the literality of Death into people’s faces. She has been seen as half beautiful woman and half rotting corpse, or half skeleton. Sometimes that division is above and below the waist; more often it is bilateral down the middle. Occasionally she has appeared as a young pale girl with white hair and skin, smelling of rot. (In fact, the rot smell is often present with her, and it is a good way to know that you are actually speaking with Hela. The general coldness of the atmosphere around her is another tip-off.) If she holds out a hand for you to take, it will probably be her skeletal one. This is a test. Remember that she was born in the Iron Wood, where showing your acceptance of the physical deformities of others is part of how you show respect and friendship. Take her rotting, skeletal hand (which, as some people have reported, feels exactly like a dead limb except that it moves) and kiss it. If
you can’t bear to do such a thing, you have no business being in her country. It is said that she only holds her living hand out to the Dead.

Hela is tall, generally clad only in a long, simple robe of black or grey, and does not stand on ceremony. She has been described by several people as having a low, quiet “whiskey-and-cigarettes” voice, and she moves slowly and sometimes with a limp—that skeletal foot! Her great stillness is one of the things that people notice about her. When she sits, she may move her hand occasionally to gesture, but very little else; psychically she is like a great pool of black stillness. Every move is made with graceful, ghostly slowness. It is said that she moves fast only when she is angry, and then you’re in too much trouble to notice.

In the Northern Tradition, it is often possible to bargain with one’s deities, or to tease or cajole them, or otherwise play with rules-lawyering and trying to talk around them. Sometimes it even works. Odin and Loki are notable for being open to this kind of activity. On the other end of the spectrum, Hela is totally implacable. When she gives an order to you, nothing you can say will make her change her mind. If you persist in defying her, she will hurt you in some way that is perfectly designed with your personal misery in mind, and will be impossible for you to resist. She shows no sadism or glee in your pain; she just does it as coldly and impersonally as she does so many other things. No one says No like a death deity, and Hela’s No seems to have actual weight to it; you feel crushed by it. There is no fighting her and no bargaining; she will continue to coldly say No long after you have no more fight left in you. This is a goddess who can make all the Aesir back down; remember this before you face off with her.

Generally, however, her coldly implacable side is only brought out when someone either A) clearly and knowingly breaks her rules, or B) asks for her aid and advice and then refuses to do what she tells them must be done. If you can avoid these two errors, you won’t see it, but it is always there, just beneath the surface of her serene and compassionate demeanor. Many of the folk who have worked with Hela speak admirably of that detached, noninvasive compassion, telling of how it gave them a safe space
in which to heal themselves. Hela has a deep wisdom and a great deal of objective perspective; She sees far and wide and studies the threads of Wyrd with an intense focus. She is capable of far-seeing planning on a long-range scale that leaves other, more self-focused deities (not to mention humans) in the dust. If you ask her for advice, you can guarantee that it will be designed with the greatest amount of long-term good in mind, although it may require a good deal of short-term pain and sacrifice. If you need help in extremity, and she feels that it is appropriate, she will give it. If she feels that giving you aid would interfere in your orlog, no plea in any world will change her mind. She will not aid anyone in going against the natural order, even a deity; one remembers how even Frigga did not win against her when it came to Baldur’s death.

Some folk have felt themselves called to her Underworld and, once there, were informed that she had invited them down as a way to begin a death-and-rebirth period in their lives. If this is the case for you, forget trying to get out of it. This is not Hela’s malice or even whimsy; she has neither. Consider it a heads-up that your life is going to fall apart and need to be rebuilt from scratch, and humbly accept whatever advice she may have as to how you can best survive this.

**Offerings**

Hela likes dried, well-preserved flowers, especially dried roses. She also likes blood, as do all the Death deities. Garm likes meat and so does Nidhogg; bread baked with animal blood in it also works. Mordgud likes you to share food with her, or some small lovely gift. Don’t give her jewelry; she’s not that sort of woman. A knife might be more appropriate.

What the Dead seem to like more than anything else is music—instrumental and/or singing, and perhaps poetry read aloud to them. Second to entertainment, offerings of food and drink are traditional.
Cautions

The most important thing to remember in visiting the Underworld is that You Have No Power Here. Nothing. Nada. When you pass the Gate, you are at the mercy of Hela and her servants. If you visit other worlds and need to leave quickly, you have a good chance of slipping back to your body simply by the strength of the tie to your flesh. If they inflict wounds on you, it may hurt your physical body as well, but there’s much less of a chance of death. Helheim is different, and it shares this characteristic with every other Realm of the Dead. Once even part of your soul passes into Hela’s territory, she is perfectly capable of keeping it there. She is also perfectly capable of yanking it entirely out of your physical body, leaving it to die.

This doesn’t mean that she is necessarily likely to do this. Hela does not kill people on a whim; she hates waste. However, it is a possibility, and it is something that you should be aware of every minute that you are there. The Land of the Dead can kill you. Death is not metaphorical here, and you must not forget that.

Even if you are not in mortal danger, Helheim has a peaceful aura about it that can make you terribly sleepy. People who have spent days there have noted that they spent much of the time unconscious, and the urge to just lay down and pass out can be overwhelming. Leave before you can’t resist the urge any longer.

Be aware, also, that no one is allowed to fly, or even wear a winged form, in Helheim. For some reason Hela has decreed that everyone is to walk when visiting her world. Attempting to fly, in any form, will simply get you dragged down from her sky (and don’t think that she can’t do that) and kicked out, or worse.

Another thing to remember is that the Underworld is full of what I call “shadow-places”. These are areas that are filled with strange psychic reflection-shadows. They aren’t ghosts, although they may seem like that at first, but when you walk through these areas, the “shadows” will catch
your internal shadows, the fears that you keep in your dark places, and they will suddenly manifest in some way before you, if only visually. Sometimes the manifestation doesn’t even have visuals, but is just a powerful reliving of the emotion of a painful time in the past. I suspect that these areas are designed just for this purpose, but they can drive someone mad if the individual can’t get a handle on themselves.

Due to the current popularity of guided meditations “to the Underworld” (which, by the way, I believe are a good thing), people tend to forget that actual visits to the actual Underworld were traditionally believed to be very dangerous, and with good reason. Although you can get into trouble in the rest of the Nine, Helheim is subtly the most dangerous place of all. You can go mad there, you can lose pieces of your soul there, and you can die. Walk with extreme respect, don’t bother the Dead unless you have an approved mission, and have someone staying with your body who can retrieve you if necessary.
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