

Edward Ferrie
TALES FROM THE NORSE LEGENDS

Read by **Benjamin Soames**

**JUNIOR
CLASSICS**



1	The Creation of the Universe	7:40
2	The Creation of the World	5:04
3	Day and Night and Sun and Moon	6:32
4	The Golden Age of Asgard	7:10
5	The Gods of Asgard	4:48
6	Loki, the God of Mischief and Evil	5:25
7	Yggdrasil & The Three Norns	4:25
8	The Apples of Idun	9:10
9	The Gods return to Asgard	3:59
10	Loki's mischief is discovered	10:35
11	How Tyr lost his hand	5:45
12	Skymir meets the dwarf Gerridour	8:45
13	How Thor got his Hammer	6:41
14	Thor's anger	10:42
15	The dwarves set to work	9:28
16	Thor in the Hall of the Giants	12:18
17	The Fort of Utgard	7:20
18	The Giant Cat	8:29
19	The Death of Baldur	9:19
20	Pleading with Hela	3:58
21	The Twilight of the Gods	11:06

Total time: 2:38:39

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TALES FROM THE NORSE LEGENDS

The tales in this collection are selected from the old Norse myths and legends, but who were the Norsemen? Broadly speaking, they were the peoples of Iceland and what is now modern Scandinavia: Sweden, Denmark and Norway. These old stories explain their understanding of the world and their vision of life.

The lands where they lived were far to the north and the geography of the region is one of extremes. Their world was a world of polar opposites – night and day, fire and ice, black and white, good and bad – and this is reflected in the stories. Iceland in particular is a place of volcanic rock, mountains and crevasses, hot springs and geysers, where fire bursts from the sea. Most of the demons and monsters in the stories are born out of nature. The giants (or Jotuns) are colossal beings of ice, rock, fire and storm, which were the natural dangers the men of those times confronted in the natural setting they inhabited.

The gods, though personalised, represent the benign aspects of nature. The Sun and Moon give heat and light: and Odin and Thor, the sky gods, send rain to

irrigate crops and wind to carry the Norsemen's ships across the seas. The importance of the gods was such that the days of the week were named after them – Sunday (the Sun), Monday (the moon), Tuesday (Tyr, or Tuw), Wednesday (Odin, or Woden as the Anglo-Saxons called him), Thursday (Thor) and Friday (Frey).

The Icelandic poets told their stories rather than writing them down and they were passed from generation to generation as part of an oral tradition. Although the essence was unchanging, details often varied from telling to telling. Stories, or sagas as they were called, were used to teach history, philosophy and even religion. With the arrival of the first Christian priests, these stories were finally written down. The result was a confused and confusing work called the greater (or poetic) Edda. Almost a century later Snorri Sturleson produced an attempt at a more rational version of the myths and legends which became known as the newer (or minor) Edda.

The Norsemen were also known as the Vikings and were famed for being terrible, savage fighters. Their attitude was fatalistic

– they saw the hand of the gods in nature, and knew nature could be very hostile. In the depths of their being their greatest necessity was to be courageous. Odin despised cowards and anyone who died a coward's death would never be accepted into Valhalla, the home of the dead heroes. It was a Viking's duty to be brave. Honour and the duty to offer strangers or travellers hospitality were also important ideas in their code of behaviour. The belief system was cyclical, following what was observed in nature – birth, growth, maturity, death. Ragnarok signified the end of life, not just for humanity but for the gods too; yet an important part of their religion was the belief that after Ragnarok the world should be reborn with new gods and new people – the evil cleansed away by the fire. This may have been a religious belief taken from Christianity. The god Baldur (sometimes known as the White god) was to die before Ragnarok and the Vikings believed that he would return afterwards, just as Christians believe in the resurrection.

GLOSSARY

ASGARD – The home of the Aesir; literally, the garden of the gods.

MIDGARD – The home of man, the earth.

JOTUNHEIM – The home of the Jotuns or giants.

NIFFLEHEIM – The land of ice.

MUSPELHEIM – The land of fire.

SWARTELFHEIM – The land of the dark elves.

HEIL – The underworld.

VANAHEIM – The home of the Vanir, a different group of gods from the Aesir.

ODIN – The one-eyed god and king of the gods of Asgard. His brothers were Villi and Ve.

THOR – The god of thunder, defender of Asgard and scourge of the giants. He travels in a magical bronze chariot drawn by two enchanted rams and wields the hammer Mjolnir the destroyer.

TYR – The grim-faced god of war, the bravest of the gods, who lost his hand to bind the wolf Fenrir.

HEIMDALL – The watchman of the gods and guardian of Asgard who stands on the rainbow bridge Bifrost. His senses are so sharp he can hear a leaf falling half a universe away or see into the depths of the seas at night.

BALDUR – The god of the dawn, the shining one, also called the White god. Baldur is invulnerable to all things except mistletoe.

LOKI – The god of mischief and evil who goes from being a companion of the gods to being their greatest enemy.

YMIR – The first living being, the greatest of the ice giants. He is killed by Odin.

IDUN – The goddess of the orchard who grows the golden apples of immortality.

SURT – The oldest being, the fire demon whose destiny is to consume the world at Ragnarok.

RAGNAROK – The final conflict between good and evil, when all are destroyed – the Twilight of the Gods.

JORMUNGANDER – The Midgard serpent – one of Loki's monstrous sons. A serpent so big it encircles the entire earth, destined to battle with Thor at Ragnarok.

FENRIR – The monster wolf, another of Loki's sons whose destiny it is to kill Odin at Ragnarok.

VIDAR – The silent god.

GARM – The hound of hell that threatens to swallow the sun.

Notes by Edward Ferrie

The music on this recording is taken from the NAXOS and MARCO POLO catalogues

MAHLER SYMPHONY NO. 2 IN C MINOR "RESURRECTION" Polish National RSO / Antoni Wit	8.550523-4
GRIEG PEER GYNT SUITE NO. 1, OP. 46 'IN THE HALL OF THE MOUNTAIN KINGS' BBC Scottish SO / Jerzy Maksymiuk	8.550864
SMETANA DOCTOR FAUST Slovak RSO / Robert Stankovsky	8.223705
SZYMANOWSKI MANDRAGORA Op. 43 Polish State PO / Karol Stryja	8.553686

Cover picture: Thor Fights the Jötunes by M.E. Winge
Courtesy of the Mary Evans Picture Library

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The tales of the Norse gods, of the giants, demons, trolls and dwarves, still have the power to fascinate more than a thousand years after they were first told. Here are the stories of the one-eyed god Odin, the all-seeing, who from his throne in Asgard, the home of the gods, has to prepare for Ragnarok, the final conflict between good and evil. There are tales too of Tyr, the god of war, of the cunning Loki, of Thor, the mighty thunder god and a host of others.

These retellings of the old tales are given extra dramatic perspective by the music of Mahler, Grieg, Smetana and Szymanowski. They come to life as never before.



Benjamin Soames trained at LAMDA. Since then he has been active on both stage and screen, appearing in the popular TV series *Sharpe* and *Absolutely Fabulous* and having toured worldwide in the acclaimed Cheek by Jowl production of *Measure for Measure* directed by Declan Donnellan. He also reads *Tales from the Greek Legends* for Naxos AudioBooks.

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