

THE RAGNAROK, DOOM OF THE GODS

The details of Ragnarok are many and terrible. When that dread catastrophe approaches, the first to notice any change in the established order of things will be men on Midgard, those descendants of Ash and Elm created so many aeons ago by Odin and his brothers. How will they know that Ragnarok is coming? First, they will experience a worldwide war. On Midgard there will follow one after the other three terrible years during which the whole world will be plunged into battle and strife. Sordid greed and envy will drive men to acts of madness and make them kill each other indiscriminately, brother murdering brother, father slaying son and son father, none showing mercy in unnatural crimes and murders.

Immediately following that cruel war will come the Fimbul winter, the monstrous winter which is really three winters rolled into one with no summer in between. At that time, blizzards will drive mercilessly from every point of the compass at once, frost will be hard as iron and winds sharp as knives. Nor will the heavens offer any comfort, no matter how men look to them, because something that seems to human beings an unimaginable disaster will occur: the wolf will swallow the sun! At one bite, the other wolf will gorge the moon, while all the stars will fall down from their places in the darkened sky.

The next sign will be that the ground will tremble and shake, forests will be torn up by the roots, crags crack from top to bottom and all fetters and bonds will be smashed and split. The elves and the dwarfs will crouch shivering by their shattered rock-holes, moaning in bewilderment at this upheaval which they cannot understand.

As the earth's crust splits and shakes, the wolf Fenrir, shackled by the gods in the Underworld, will break loose! The heaving land will be flooded by a tidal wave of waters caused by the World Serpent when, in a gigantic fury, he frees his tail from his jaws and buckles up out of the sea!

Then the dead men's nail ship Naglfar will crowd on her crew and slip her moorings at Corpse Strand where she has waited from time out of mind for this moment. At the helmsman's cry her myriad oars will plunge together into the great waves raised by the Serpent, and the waves will carry her not only over Midgard but up to the shores of Asgard itself. Her crew is all the Undead from Hel and her captain and steersman is the cruelest enemy gods and men ever had: Loki. He will break free from his fetters at the first earthquake, joining forces with his terrible sons Fenrir the wolf and the serpent Jormungander. Fenrir will lope along with his mighty jaws wide open, his lower teeth raking the earth, his upper scraping heaven, while flames gush from his mouth and nostrils. The World Serpent will blow in front of him rolling clouds of poisonous fumes which will envelop both earth and sky in smoke and stench.

At the height of the tumult and noise, the sky will split apart and through the rift will gallop the blazing cavalry of the fire giants from Muspellheim. Surt, who has stood since the beginning in the furnace, will spearhead the charge on a fiery horse, splashing flames in front and behind, thrusting before him in his outstretched arm the sword whose burning blade is brighter than a thousand suns. The hooves of the stallions of the fire giants will be all on fire as they pound up over the bridge of Bifrost. The many colored rainbow will break and crumble behind them.

All the hosts of Muspell will move steadily on in massed array, making for the battlefield on the vast plain known as Vigrith. Fenrir the wolf and the World Serpent will be there. There too will march the men from Hel, disembarked from Naglfar and led by Loki. Shoulder to shoulder with them will tramp the mountain and frost giants, marshaled by their own monstrous generals. The battlefield Vigrith stretches a hundred leagues in every direction, but the ranks of the forces of evil will fill it from one end to the other as they wait in fearsome array to fight the gods.

On the morning of Ragnarok the Rooster Gullinkambi will crow his first and last 'cock-a-doodle-do' from his perch on Valhalla roof, startling out of their sleep the champions in the hall below. At the

same moment Heimdall's keen eyes and ears will catch the first tiny rustle of the earthquake and the quiver of moving rocks. He will stand out on the walls of his palace by Bifrost Bridge and raise Gjallarhorn to his lips, drawing into his lungs a full, hissing breath. His trumpet will crackle out such a startling clarion call to arms that all the gods and their helpers will stand to at once, excited, the blood roaring through their veins. The blast from Heimdall's bugle will re-echo from every nook and cranny of the nine worlds in the Tree. At its ominous sound the Tree itself will start to tremble and then to shake: every corner of the universe will be seized with terror.

Then Odin will leap onto Sleipnir's back and thunder like the storm wind all the way to Mimir's well to ask advice from Mimir's head. It will be in vain, for this time the head will not answer. Odin will gallop back to Asgard with a heavy heart for he must lead his forces, knowing that nothing can now prevent the end of everything.

With Heimdall's bugle call to arms still resounding in their ears, the Æsir and the Einheriar, the champions of Valhalla, will buckle on their armor, seize their weapons and shields and ride in ranks to their battle stations. Odin, wearing his golden helmet and sparkling war-coat, carrying his spear Gungnir, will canter out in front to lead them. Thor's chariot will rumble at his right with the red-bearded god sternly controlling his fractious goats. On Odin's other flank will ride Frey, Tyr and Heimdall, all splendidly horsed and armed; and a little to their rear the silent god Vidarr, wearing on his right foot the Thickmost Shoe. Then, packed behind their leaders, the rank on rank of Einheriar, Berserks and Valkyries. The plain will rumble and tremble with the sound of hooves and marching feet.

The massed momentum of the opposing armies will force an inevitable collision. As the front ranks shock and entangle, everything will appear confusion. Then the ancient foes will seek each other out. Odin will charge full tilt at his supreme enemy Fenrir the wolf. The monster's jaws stretch open like a bottomless pit and Odin's fearless charge will carry him deep into the red throat! The terrible mouth will close on him forever.

Thor, fighting beside him, will see it all happen but cannot help his father. He will be himself involved in a life-and-death struggle against the wriggling coils of the World Serpent. Thor's hammer Mjolnir the Mullicrusher will not fail him. Its lightning will pierce the serpent's foul heart and strike him dead. But as the twisted coils unwind and free the gasping god, Thor, once the protector of Midgard, will stagger just nine paces before he too sinks down lifeless, enveloped in the poison mist of the Serpent's breath.

The forces of evil will not, however, have everything their own way. The silent Vidarr will stride up to Fenrir and by brute strength alone prise open his mouth. He will firmly plant the Thickmost Shoe into the wolf's lower jaw. Then, with both arms over his head he will grip the beast's upper fangs and force its snout backwards. With a sickening tearing sound the wolf will be ripped apart. A fearful howl of anguish will swell, dwindle and die. So Odin will be avenged.

The Hel hound Garmr, having broken his fetters and dragging his chain, will leap from Gniphellir to Asgard in one bound. Growling savagely he will attack Tyr. Well-used to dealing with monster wolves, Tyr will battle bravely, his sword in his good left hand. But the contest is uneven and he, like Odin, will be swallowed up. Just before he dies, however, as he passes into the monster's stomach, he will stab its heart from inside and kill it, too.

Heimdall, the whitest of the gods, will meet his lifelong opponent Loki in a blinding flash of light. When two flames encounter each other, though one is good and the other evil, they nevertheless burn each other out, leaving behind nothing but smoke and ashes. So will Heimdall and Loki perish.

Of all the gods' captains, only Frey will be left fighting. He will oppose the fire giant Surt. But his case is hopeless: long ages ago he gave away for love the sword which fought by itself, and now he, too, must face death. Frey is no coward and he will try to wrestle barehanded with Surt. But Surt's sword is brighter than a thousand suns and there is no doubt that Frey will be annihilated.

Then Surt, triumphant, will fling great swathes of fire and flames over everything in earth and heaven and the universe will disappear in a cataclysm of smoke and darkness. At last all will be as it was in the Beginning: chaotic, unformed, noiseless, nothing.

Name _____

Period ____

THE RAGNAROK, DOOM OF THE GODS

1. What are the 3 signs of the coming of Ragnarok? _____

2. What disaster will be caused by the 2 wolves? _____

3. As the earth cracks open, who will be set loose? _____
4. What event will cause the tidal waves? _____
5. What is the name of the dead men's nail ship? _____
6. Who will be her captain? _____
7. Who will lead the charging giants from Muspelheim? _____
8. What will destroy the Bifrost Bridge? _____
9. On the morning of Ragnarok the rooster _____ will crow his last 'cock-a-doodle-do' from his perch atop _____.
10. _____ will be first to see trouble begin. What is the name of his horn?

11. Who leads the forces of good into battle? _____
12. Odin will fight _____. What is the result of this battle? _____
13. Who will Thor fight? _____. What is the result of this battle? _____
