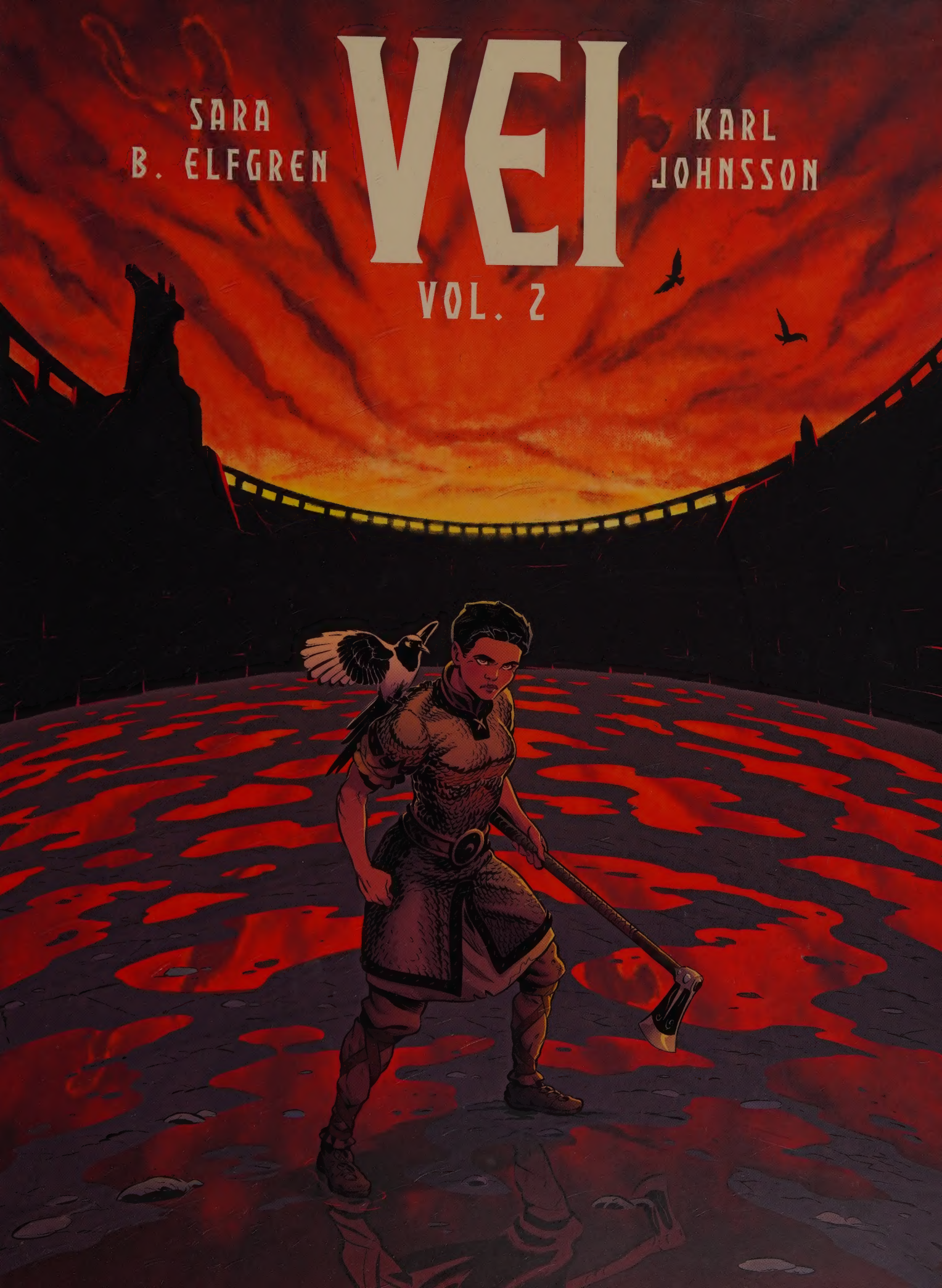

SARA
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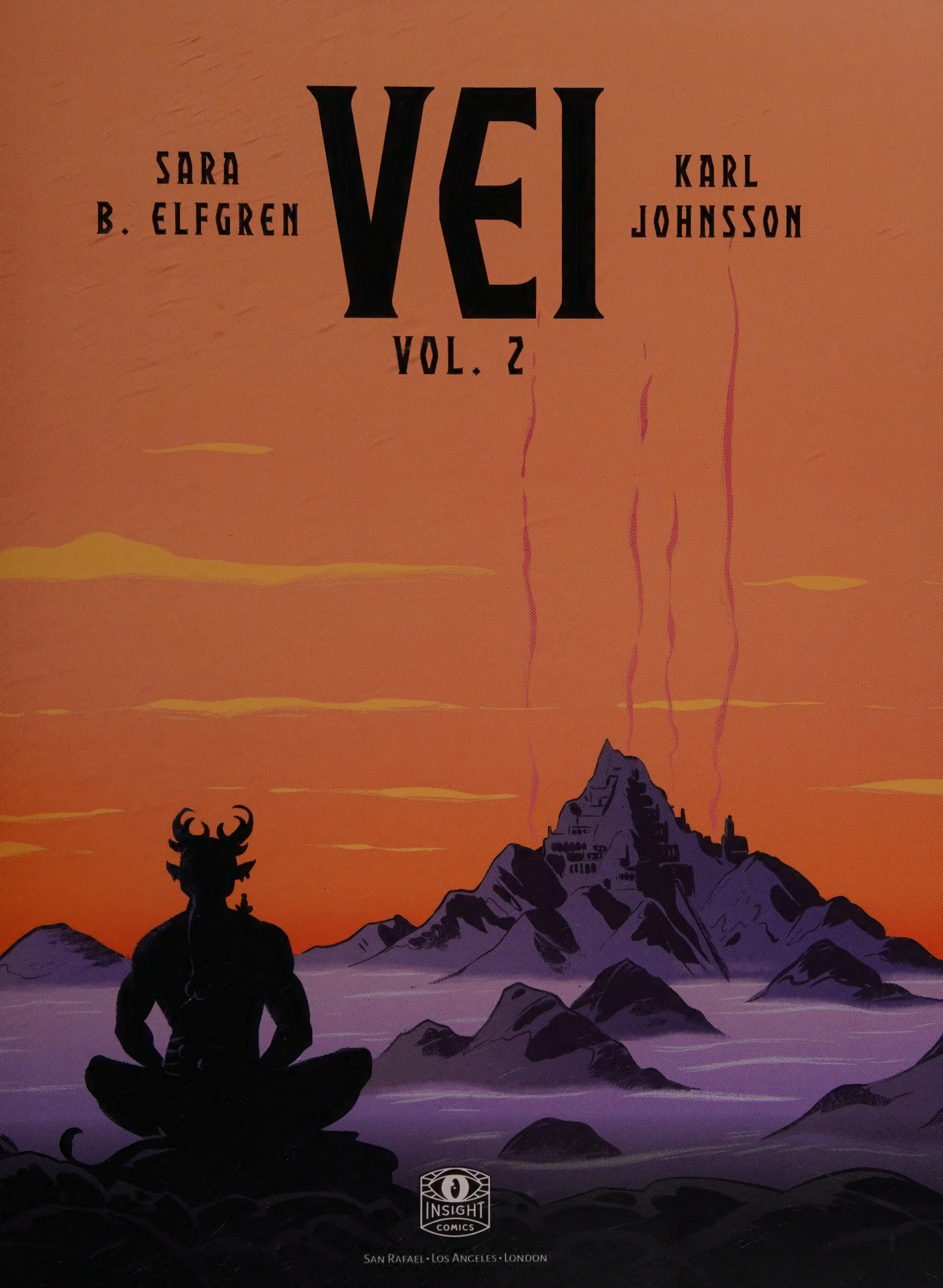



DIABOLO



VEI

VOL. 2


SARA
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VEI
KARL
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VOL. 2
INSIGHT
COMICS
SAN RAFAEL • LOS ANGELES • LONDON

CHAPTER 6




I WANDERED TO THE STREAM, TO THE STREAM TO QUENCH MY THIRST.
A CRANE STOOD IN THE WATER, AND THE CRANE SPOKE THUS TO ME:
"SISTER", SHE SAID, "OVER MOUNTAINS I FLY FREE..."
"...BUT NOWHERE HAVE I SEEN A FAIRER FOLK THAN THE JOTUN'S BROOD."
OH, JOTUN! OH, JOTUN! SACRED SOVEREIGNS, WE ARE YOUR CHILDREN.
OUR FAITH IS ETERNAL AS THE MOUNTAIN SNOW.


I WANDERED TO THE SHORE...
...TO THE SHORE TO CATCH A FISH.
A WHOOPER SWAN STOOD IN THE SWELL...
...AND THE SWAN SPOKE THUS TO ME:
"SISTER", SHE SAID, "OVER OCEANS I FLY FREE..."
"...BUT NOWHERE HAVE I SEEN A STRONGER TRIBE THAN THE JOTUN'S BROOD."


OH, JOTUN! OH, JOTUN! SACRED SOVEREIGNS, WE ARE YOUR CHILDREN.
OUR FAITH IS ETERNAL AS THE MOUNTAIN SNOW.
OH, JOTUN! OH, JOTUN!
ALDIS! COULD WE... PANT... REST A BIT?
WHO'S OLD AND WHO'S YOUNG HERE, EH?
YOUR LEGS ARE LONGER!
WE MUST REACH RANVEIG'S TOMB BEFORE SUNSET.
WHAT'S THE HURRY? SHE'S DEAD.
UNLIKE ME...
QUIET, GIRL! YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT A GOD! OUR FIRST MOTHER!
I'M SORRY, I KNOW...
DO YOU? THEN TELL ME EVERYTHING YOU KNOW ABOUT RANVEIG.
SIGH!


GILLINGUR, QUEEN OF THE GIANTS, BORE MANY CHILDREN. THEY ALL GREW UP TO BE TALL AND MAGNIFICENT. ALL EXCEPT RANVEIG.
SHE WAS THE SMALLEST GIANTESS TO EVER BE BORN. SHE DIDN'T FEEL AT HOME WITH HER PEOPLE AND LEFT TO JOIN THE HUMANS OF JOTUNHEIM.
RANVEIG TOOK MANY HUMAN LOVERS; SHE BORE MANY CHILDREN, AND HER CHILDREN BORE MANY CHILDREN, AND THEIR CHILDREN BORE EVEN MORE CHILDREN. CHILDREN, CHILDREN, CHILDREN...
VEI.
ANYWAY. THAT'S WHY GIANTS' BLOOD RUNS THROUGH OUR VEINS.
AND IN SOME PEOPLE, THEIR BLOOD RUNS STRONGER. LIKE IN YOU.
THAT IS WHY YOU ARE RAN.
IT RUNS STRONGER IN YOU TOO, 'CAUSE YOU WERE RAN BEFORE ME.
YES, AND IN THE FUTURE YOU MIGHT STAND HERE ON RANVEIG'S DEATH DAY WITH A CHEEKY YOUNGSTER AT YOUR SIDE.


OR YOU MAY BELONG TO A BLESSED GENERATION.
"THOSE WHO ARE CALLED. THOSE WHO WILL DIE IN GLORY...
"...OR PREVAIL AND SPEND THE REST OF THEIR DAYS IN THUNDER MOUNTAIN, THE ABODE OF THE GODS."
THE MEISTARILEIKIR...
VEI, RAN OF VEIDAR'S HERD...
...THE UNDEFEATED CHAMPION OF THE JOTUN!
YOU SLEW TURID.
THE CHAMPION OF THE ÆSIR IS...


...HILDR THE VALKYRIE, SHIELD OF ASGARD!
YOU SLEW MY SISTER.
I HAVE SLAIN MANY.
I CLOVE ASPEN'S SKULL WITH A SINGLE BLOW.
I RIPPED LOFTHRYL'S POISON FANG OUT, SLIT HIS COILING NECK OPEN.
YOUR SISTER, SKÖGUL THE VALKYRIE.
I IMPALED HER ON HER OWN SPEAR.


GORGAS THE PALE SHUNNED THE SUN.
I SCORCHED HIM WITH MY BRIGHT STEEL.
I RIPPED SKYTER'S HEART OUT.
IT KEPT ON BEATING IN MY HAND.
BODVAR THE GOATMAN WAS A REAL PIECE OF SHIT.
I RID THE WORLD OF HIS STENCH.


KURAG-BAL, THE SOW FROM THE SALT FLATS.
I BUTCHERED HER.
LARKA THE ANCIENT.
HER ASHES SCATTERED IN THE WIND.


I HAVE SLAIN MANY...
...HILDR, VALKYRIE, SHIELD OF ASGARD.
SO MANY...


HOOWL
LOKI, WOULD YOU LIKE THE GIRL'S PRETTY BRAID? YOU CAN HAVE IT LATER!
GÖNDUL IS CRYING SO LOUDLY, IDUN. IT HURTS MY EARS.
ALLMOTHER FRIGG... SOB... FORGIVE MY TEARS.
"THE TEARS OF THE VALKYRIE ..." NO. TOO TRITE.
YOU WILL HAVE YOUR VENGEANCE.
SING, GODDESS, THE WRATH OF A VALKYRIE, DREADED AND MIGHTY. HER SISTERS LAY SLAIN, AND HER PAINS THOUSANDFOLD WERE A DELUGE OF GRIEF.
SPLENDID, BRAGI. SPLENDID.
THIS HUMILIATION MUST COME TO AN END!
IT WILL, ALLMOTHER.
KRACK


MY CHAMPION *THE STRANGER* WILL ANNIHILATE VEI.
HE HAS MASTERED EVERY FIGHTING TECHNIQUE IN THE WORLD.
HE CAN KILL BY MERELY TOUCHING THREE POINTS ON HIS OPPONENT'S BODY.
WE KNOW, HEIMDALLR. YOU'VE GONE ON ABOUT HIM SINCE THE LAST MEISTARILEIKIR.
I UNDERSTAND WHY IT'S A SORE SPOT FOR YOU, SKADI. YOUR OVERFED PIG DIDN'T MEASURE UP.
KURAG-BAL HAS EARNED HER PLACE AMONG THE SPIRITS OF THE WILD HUNT.
I'M SURE HER SQUEALS WILL MAKE ENEMIES TREMBLE.
THEY SHOULD.


ONE, TWO, THREE, FOUR. FOUR CHAMPIONS LEFT!
GÖNDUL IS ONE!
SOB!
AND THE STRANGER...
...NYKR OF THE BOTTOMLESS LAKE...
AND THE THIRTEENTH!
THE ALLFATHER'S CHAMPION, WHOM NONE CAN OPPOSE!
WHO THE CHAMPION IS? ONLY ODIN KNOWS!
IT RHYMES!
I WANDERED TO THE STREAM...


...TO THE STREAM TO QUENCH MY THIRST...
...A CRANE STOOD IN THE WATER...
...AND THE CRANE SPOKE THUS TO ME...


OH, JOTUN! OH, JOTUN! SACRED SOVEREIGNS!
WE ARE YOUR CHILDREN! OUR LIVES BELONG TO YOU!
TURID... GARMAR...
WE DIED FOR YOU!
WE DIED FOR YOU, VEI, THE UNDEFEATED!
SINDRI... GERD...
WILL YOU HONOR THE GODS?
ARE YOU PREPARED TO DIE LIKE WE DID?


LEAVE ME BE!
VEI?
DAL... IS HE REAL?
I UNDERSTAND WHY YOU WISH TO INTOXICATE YOURSELF. SO DO THE WARRIORS OF MIDGARD.
BUT I FEAR THAT YOU MAY BE COURTING DEATH.
I WASN'T AFRAID OF DYING WHEN I FLOATED IN THE SEA. I'M STILL NOT AFRAID.
BUT I WON'T LET ANY OF THE ÆSIR'S LACKEYS SLAY ME. I WON'T DIE TO PLEASE ODIN AND HIS HORDE.


I FELT THE SAME WAY WHEN I FOUGHT EVERY DAY TO SURVIVE.
I REFUSED TO GIVE THE CROWD WHAT THEY WANTED: MY BLOOD.
WATCHING THE OTHER FIGHTERS AND LEARNING FROM THEIR MISTAKES KEPT ME ALIVE. THOSE WHO NUMBED THEMSELVES WITH MEAD AND HERBS ALWAYS CAME TO A BAD END.
IF INTOXICATION DIDN'T FELL THEM, THE HANGOVER DID.
BLACK LICHEN WON'T GIVE YOU A HANGOVER.
IF USED IN MODERATION.
BUT YOU SEEM TO BE WAY PAST THAT POINT.
I'M SURPRISED THAT VEIDAR ALLOWS THIS.
VEIDAR LETS ME DO AS I PLEASE AS LONG AS I'M SOBER IN THE ARENA.


FOOLISH CHILD. THE ARENA IS EVERYWHERE WHEN ODIN IS YOUR ENEMY.
HE'S UP TO SOMETHING. I CAN SENSE IT. YOU CANNOT LET YOUR GUARD DOWN.
DON'T TELL ME WHAT TO DO! I ALREADY KILL FOR YOU, ISN'T THAT ENOUGH?
YOU'RE THE FIRST RAN WITH A REAL CHANCE AT WINNING THE MEISTARILEIKIR.
AND THIS IS HOW YOU HANDLE IT.
DON'T WORRY. YOU'VE TAUGHT ME EVERYTHING I NEED TO KNOW. I WILL STRANGLE NYKR AND MAIM THE STRANGER. AND GÖNDUL...
I BEAT HER SISTERS EASILY.
AND THE THIRTEENTH? ODIN'S SECRET?
I CAN KILL ANYONE. I'M A WARRIOR.
IT PLEASES ME THAT YOU SEE EVERYTHING SO CLEARLY, VEI.
SEE YOU AT THE FEAST.
THE FEAST... I HAD FORGOTTEN ALL ABOUT IT.


EVERY MEISTARILEIKIR, A GRAND FEAST TAKES PLACE.
TO VEI! UNDEFEATED CHAMPION OF THE JOTUN!
THE FOLLOWING DAY IS A DAY OF REST FOR BOTH SIDES AND THEIR CHAMPIONS.
TO OUR RAN!
VEI, THE UNDEFEATED!
THE GREATEST? SHE'S THE ONLY ONE THEY HAVE LEFT!
LET ME GET MJÖLNIR AND I'LL...
NICE AND EASY, THOR.
LISTEN TO SKADI. TURN THE FLAMES OF YOUR WRATH INWARDS. LET THEM HARDEN YOUR HEART.
WE HAVE ALWAYS PREVAILED IN THE MEISTARILEIKIR, AND WE SHALL PREVAIL AGAIN.


THE FEAST IS USUALLY A SOMBER OCCASION FOR THE JOTUN, OR SO VEIDAR HAS TOLD ME.
GLORY TO VEI! GLORY TO QUEEN GILLINGUR! THE TIME OF THE JOTUN IS NIGH!
TO VEI, RAN OF THE PEOPLE OF BIRCH VALLEY!
THIS FEAST IS DIFFERENT.
VEI IS THE GREATEST CHAMPION!
VICTORY TARRIES. I HAVE SEEN IT.
YOUR VISIONS ARE ALWAYS OBSCURE, DEAR SISTER. GULP, GULP, GULP.
I HOPE SOMEONE STRANGLES VEI SO THAT HER EYES POP OUT OF THEIR SOCKETS! POP, POP!
I WILL WEAR THEM AROUND MY NECK LIKE JEWELS.
YOU'RE SO INVENTIVE, SWEET IDUN.


A GROUP SELECTED FROM MY VILLAGE IS HERE.
THEY SING SONGS ABOUT ME, SONGS IN MY HONOR.
VEIDAR LOOKS AT ME WITH PRIDE.
WE NO LONGER TALK ABOUT WHAT LIES BEHIND MY VICTORIES. WHO IS BEHIND THEM.
"THE ARENA IS EVERYWHERE WHEN ODIN IS YOUR ENEMY."
NEVER MIND. I'M THE STRONGEST CHAMPION OF THE JOTUN.
ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE HALL, THEY SIT. THE STRANGER. NYKR. GÖNDUL.
WHERE IS THE THIRTEENTH, ODIN'S SECRET?
NO MATTER. I CAN KILL ANYONE.
I AM VEI, THE UNDEFEATED.
AND TOMORROW I WILL REST.


HONORED GUESTS! LET THE ENTERTAINMENT BEGIN!
SQUEAK
SQUEAK
SQUEAK
I WANT TO SEE THIS.


VEI, COME AND CELEBRATE YOUR VICTORIES WITH US!
I'LL BE RIGHT BACK, GYLA.
ARE YOU COMING, DAL?
I DON'T KNOW...
HE'S HANDSOME EVEN THOUGH HE'S SO MUCH WEAKER THAN US.
I'VE NEVER BEEN WITH A MAN FROM MIDGARD.
GO AHEAD AND STAY, DAL. YOU SEEM TO HAVE YOUR HANDS FULL.
TAKE GOOD CARE OF HIM!
WE'LL BE SOOO GENTLE...
A SENSE OF VERTIGO COMES OVER ME.
PERHAPS IT'S CAUSED BY THE FUMES FROM THE JOTUN'S DRINKING HORNS.
PERHAPS IT'S THE HATE BETWEEN ANCIENT ENEMIES EATING AND DRINKING AT THE SAME TABLE.
A HIGH-PITCHED SHRIEK CUTS THROUGH THE DIN.


WHAT... WHAT IS THIS?
DON'T YOU RECOGNIZE THEM?
YOU HUNTED THEM YOURSELF.
YOU AND YOUR GOD VEIDAR.
BUT PERHAPS VEIDAR FAILED TO MENTION WHAT THE GIANTS DO WITH THEIR PREY.
PERHAPS HE DIDN'T THINK IT WAS WORTH MENTIONING.


WHO CARES ABOUT THE SUFFERING OF A TROLL?
WHO CARES ABOUT THE PAIN OF A FOREST ÁLF?


LET THEM DIE FOR THE JOTUN'S PLEASURE!
LET A DOZEN RAN DIE FOR THE JOTUN'S GLORY!
AND HAIL VEI, THE UNDEFEATED!
VEI, THE GREAT WARRIOR!
VEI, WHO TAKES LIFE AFTER LIFE...
...WITHOUT AN OUNCE OF REGRET!


BE SILENT!
YOU KNOW NOTHING!
YOU...
YES?
YOU...
SOMETHING IS WRONG.
VEEE!
GYLA?


"THE ARENA IS EVERYWHERE."


VEI...
OUT OF MY WAY!


PATHETIC HUMANS!
GÖNDUL?! NO, SHE WOULDN'T... NOT AT THE FEAST...
VEI!


SMACK
GYLA?
DAL?
AAAAH
AAAUU
STAMP
RAARGH
HURGH
JOAR.
GYLA.
PUNY CREATURES! YOU STINK OF FEAR !


YOU CAN'T EVEN DIE WITH DIGNITY! YOU CRY AND BEG FOR MERCY!
MY SISTERS ARE SLAIN, BUT I SHED NO TEARS!
I'LL SHED YOUR BLOOD INSTEAD!
HNNGH...
LET HIM GO!
MY SISTERS' SLAYER!
MURDERER!
HOW I HAVE LONGED FOR THIS!


SMACK
HUH?
VEI, RAN OF VEIDAR'S HERD!
MEET YOUR DEATH!

CHAPTER 7




MEET YOUR DEATH!
VEI!
VEI, WAKE UP!


LOKI?
VEI, YOU MUST WAKE UP!
VEI!


WAKE UP!
HNNGH!
PITIFUL... GRUNT... WORM...


RAN!
SMACK
VEI!
UFF!
MY INSTINCTS TAKE OVER.
THERE'S ONLY...
SOCK
HA!
...HER AND ME.
ARGH!
SPLISH


KILL...
...OR...
KRACK
...BE KILLED!
SOCK
I SHALL... PANT... SEND YOU... PANT... TO HEL!
HHAH... HHAH...


THE ARENA...
BAM
...IS...
...HERE!
HHHAH!
SHACK
AAAAAAAAH


KRUNCH
KRUNCH
KRUNCH
KRUNCH
MGGGH...
HUUUURGH!
TOO LATE.
I WAS TOO LATE.
GYLA.
JOAR.
I FAILED THEM.
HOW PRETTY YOU ARE WHEN YOU WEEP, VEI, THE UNDEFEATED!
IDUN.
SHE SMELLS OF APPLE BLOSSOMS AND SWEET DECAY.
LET'S SEE HOW PRETTY YOU ARE WHEN YOU SCREAM!
ANOTHER SMELL.


ASHES, BLOOD AND IRON.
QUEEN GILLINGUR.
YOUR CHAMPION HAS SLAIN ONE OF OURS OUTSIDE THE ARENA.
IT IS AN AFFRONT TO ASGARD...
...AND A CRIME AGAINST THE LAWS OF THE MEISTARILEIKIR.
I DEMAND HER LIFE.
COME TO MJÖLNIR!
VEI!
SAVE HER EYES FOR ME!


DAL, NO...
BRAK
YOUR HAIRY BOAR OF A SON WILL NOT LAY A FINGER ON VEI.
GÖNDUL BROKE THE LAWS OF HOSPITALITY.
VEI DREW A WEAPON.
ZZT
GÖNDUL SLEW THE CHILDREN OF THE JOTUN.
YOU MAY CHOOSE NEW THRALLS FROM MY RETINUE.
THEY SHARED OUR BLOOD. BLOOD THAT GÖNDUL SPILLED.
VEI HAD THE RIGHT TO RETALIATE.
VERY WELL. BUT ASGARD REQUIRES ANOTHER CHAMPION.


YOU HAVE MANY WARRIORS AT YOUR SERVICE. CHOOSE ANOTHER.
I CHOOSE DAL.
HE IS FROM MIDGARD. HE HAS SERVED ME AND PRAYED FOR MY FAVOR IN BATTLE.
HE CARVED RUNES IN HIS FLESH FOR MY GLORY.
HE BELONGS TO ME.
THIS IS FAIR.
THE JOTUN ACCEPT DAL AS ASGARD'S NEW CHAMPION.


HELP HIM!
WE... SOB... WE CAN'T.
THE QUEEN'S WORD IS LAW.
IT'S SO AWFUL!
I CAN'T FIGHT DAL!
THEY WILL KILL YOU BOTH IF YOU REFUSE.
TAKE ME AWAY FROM HERE.


GOOD NIGHT, PRINCESS.
VEIDAR...
YOU SHOULD BE ASHAMED.
I AM! I'M ASHAMED THAT WE ALLOW THIS TO HAPPEN! EVERY DAY I WATCH AS OUR CHAMPIONS ARE SLAUGHTERED!
THEY GIVE THEIR LIVES FREELY. IT IS THEIR FATE.
WE CHOSE THAT FATE FOR THEM!
CRY AS MUCH AS YOU WANT IN YOUR CHAMBERS. BUT NEVER SHOW WEAKNESS IN FRONT OF OUR ENEMIES.
I'M SORRY, MOTHER.
ALLMOTHER FRIGG?


ALLMOTHER, SHALL I HAVE GÖNDUL'S BODY FETCHED?
NO, GNA. LET THE BEASTS SUCK THE MARROW FROM HER BONES.
WE SHALL REMEMBER HER AS SHE WAS.


HAVE BRAGI WRITE AN ELEGY.


AREN'T YOU THE FLATTERER. ASSUMING THE SHAPE OF ONE OF MY SERVANTS.
PRRRR!


I SAW HOW SHE LOOKED AT YOU. GILLINGUR'S LITTLE CHAMPION.


ISN'T THAT HOW EVERYONE LOOKS AT ME, FRÖJA?


I SAW HOW YOU LOOKED AT HER TOO, LOVELY LOKKE.
SHE IS A RIDDLE. I ADORE RIDDLES.
THE ANSWER WILL BE BLEAK.
VAGUE WORDS, VALFREYJA, LADY OF THE SLAIN. HAVE YOU PRACTICED SEIDR AND SEEN WHAT SHALL COME TO PASS?
I HAVE.
THE THIRTEENTH WILL SHED VEI'S BLOOD AND ASH DARKEN THE SKY.


I SLEEP FOR A NIGHT AND A DAY.
WHEN I WAKE UP, NOTHING HAS CHANGED.
GYLA.
GARMAR.
TURID.
ALDIS.
THE NAMES OF THE DEAD ARE TOO MANY.
DAL.
JOAR.
INGRID.
VIMAR.
SO YOU'RE FINALLY AWAKE.


GÖNDUL WAS QUICK-TEMPERED, BUT SHE WOULD NEVER BREAK THE LAWS OF HOSPITALITY.
I FOUND SOMETHING IN HER DRINKING HORN.
TRACES OF A POISON CALLED ÓFNIR'S GALL.
ÓFNIR. THE INCITER. THE OBFUSCATOR. ONE OF ODIN'S MANY NAMES.
THE POISON STRIPPED GÖNDUL OF ALL SENSE AND RESTRAINT. SHE WAS LEFT WITH ONLY HER WILD GRIEF AND CONTEMPT FOR HUMANS.
ODIN KNEW WHAT SHE WOULD DO.
AND THAT I WOULD INTERVENE.
TOO LATE.
DON'T BLAME YOURSELF. THIS IS HIS GAME, AND WE'RE ONLY PAWNS.
YOU HATE HIM.
ODIN IS THE GOD OF WAR AND BLOOD, AND THE WORLD WITHERS IN HIS SHADOW.


OFTEN HE WANDERS THROUGH MIDGARD, LEAVING DEATH AND DISCORD IN HIS WAKE.
MISFORTUNE AND MISDEED FOLLOW HIM, HANGATYR, GOD OF THE HANGED.
HE DESPISES HUMANS, YET KEEPS MORTAL WOMEN AS MISTRESSES.
DAGRUN WAS SUCH A WOMAN. A MIGHTY VÖLVA WHO SERVED FREYJA. WHEN SHE FELL PREGNANT, SHE KEPT IT HIDDEN. FOR THE FLAME-EYED FATHER DOES NOT LET HIS HALFBREEDS LIVE.
I WILL NEVER KNOW WHAT SHE NAMED ME. SHE RAN, BUT THE CATCHER CAUGHT US, GUNGNIR IN HAND, SET ON SLAYING US BOTH.
BUT FREYJA HAD SEEN IN HER SEIDR THAT MY TALENTS WOULD SERVE THE SUPREME. I NEVER SAW MY MOTHER AGAIN.


HE TAUGHT ME A LOT, THE CUNNING ONE. MY POWERS GREW, AND HE KNEW HOW TO HARNESS THEM.
HE NEEDED ME, RAFNATYR THE RAVEN GOD, FOR HIS TRICKS AND ILL DEEDS.
I SERVED HIM, BUT I NEVER WON HIS FAVOR.
PERHAPS I MOURNED THIS FOR A WHILE.
BUT IT MADE ME CLEAR-EYED AND FREE.
I SHOULD HAVE REALIZED WHAT HE WAS PLANNING.
HAD I KNOWN, I WOULD HAVE OVERTURNED GÖNDUL'S CUP. I WOULDN'T HAVE LET THIS HAPPEN.
I BELIEVE YOU.
I'M SURPRISED BY MY OWN WORDS, BY THE FACT THAT I MEAN THEM.
I HEARD YOUR VOICE. YOU SAVED MY LIFE.
IT WASN'T EXACTLY THE FIRST TIME.













I CLOSE MY EYES.

WHEN I OPEN THEM AGAIN, I'M ALONE.




BZZZZZZ ZZZZ ZZZT
BZT
TK-TK
I HAD A FEELING IT WAS YOU.
I UNDERSTAND WHAT VE! SEES IN YOU.
WHY WON'T YOU LET A LITTLE FLY LIVE ITS LIFE?


I JUST SPOKE TO HER.
LET ME GUESS.
SHE WILL NOT KILL ME. AND SO YOU CAME TO ME INSTEAD.
REST ASSURED, IF SHE REFUSES, I'LL DO IT MYSELF. SATISFIED?
IT WOULD SATISFY ME MORE TO SEE YOU LIVE.
WHY ARE YOU HELPING VEI?
I HAVE ALREADY ANSWERED THAT.
TOCK
I REMEMBER. BECAUSE IT AMUSES YOU. BECAUSE ODIN IS ARROGANT. BECAUSE YOU HAVE HUMAN BLOOD JUST LIKE HER.
I THINK YOU'RE LYING.

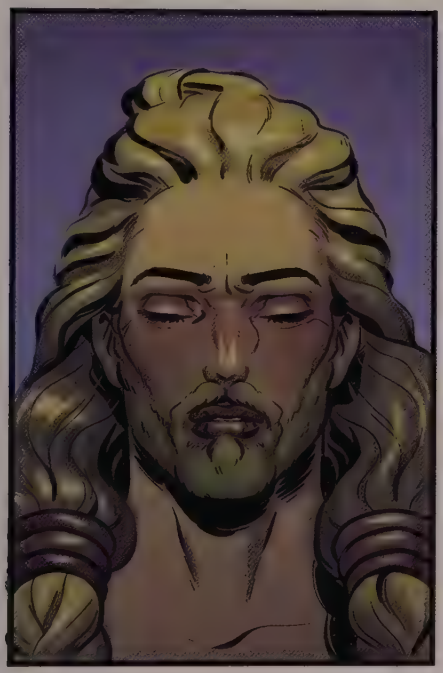

WHY? BECAUSE MIDGARD CALLS ME A TRAITOR AND A LIAR? LOKI THE SCHEMER. LOKI THE DECEIVER.
WHO IS THE HIGHEST GOD, ACCORDING TO THE PEOPLE OF MIDGARD?
ODIN.
ALLFATHER ODIN, THE WISE, THE SUPREME. AND I AM HIS SHADOW. IS IT THAT SIMPLE?
OR DO THEY CALL ME A LIAR BECAUSE I SPEAK THE TRUTH?
THE TRUTH WILL TEASE AND AMUSE YOU. IT WILL IRK, RATTLE, AND SEDUCE YOU--JUST LIKE ME.
I WANT YOU TO LEAVE.
LIAR.

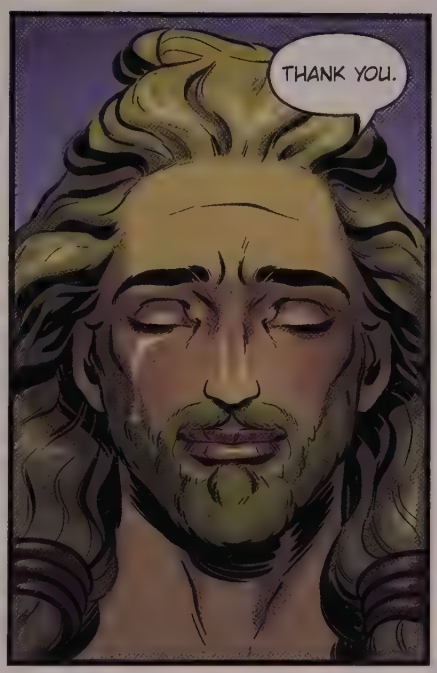

WHY WOULD I WANT YOU TO STAY?
YOU'RE AFRAID.
YOU HAVEN'T FEARED DEATH FOR A LONG TIME.
YOU HAVE IMAGINED AN ETERNAL LIFE IN GLORY AT MY FATHER'S TABLE IN VALHALLA.
BUT NOW YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT AWAITS YOU, AND YOU'RE AFRAID.
AFRAID OF LANGUISHING IN HEL WITH THOSE WHO DIED FROM OLD AGE AND DISEASE.
AFRAID OF BECOMING A SHADOW AMONG SHADOWS.
QUIET.
SISTER HEL DOESN'T DESERVE THE BAD REPUTATION MIDGARD GAVE HER.
GOOD NIGHT, DAL.
WAIT.


I... I HAVE QUESTIONS.
I'LL GIVE YOU THREE.
TELL ME ABOUT HEL.
I CAN'T. NOT EVEN GODS MAY REVEAL HER SECRETS.
BUT ONE DAY NEITHER HUMANS, JOTUN, OR ÆSIR WILL WALK THE EARTH.
EVEN THE STARS WILL FADE.
I FIND SOME COMFORT IN THAT.
YOUR SECOND QUESTION?
SO YOU CAN'T REVEAL THE SECRETS OF DEATH, BUT...
MY LIFE BEFORE MY CAPTIVITY... MY PARENTS... I DO NOT REMEMBER THEM.


PERHAPS YOU HAD GOOD REASONS TO FORGET.
I WANT TO KNOW.


THEN I WILL SHOW YOU.




THANK YOU.


TO BE A CHERISHED CHILD IS A BLESSING.

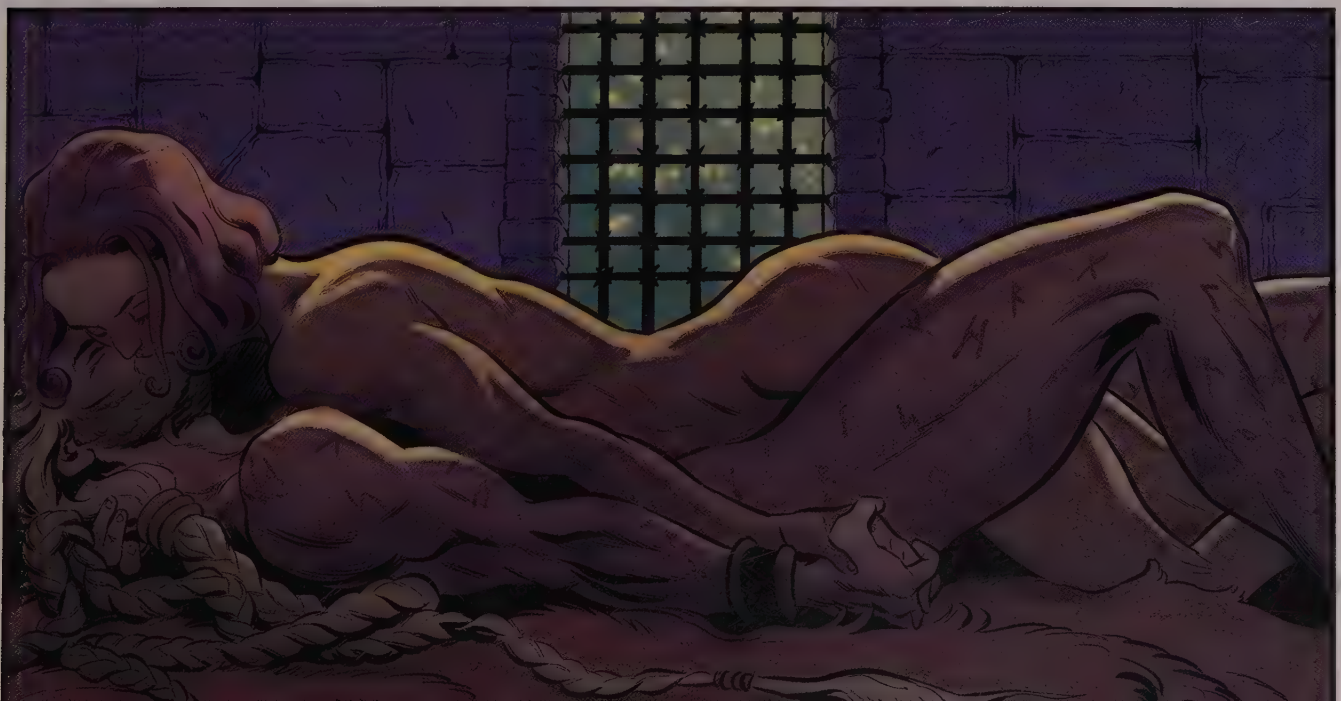


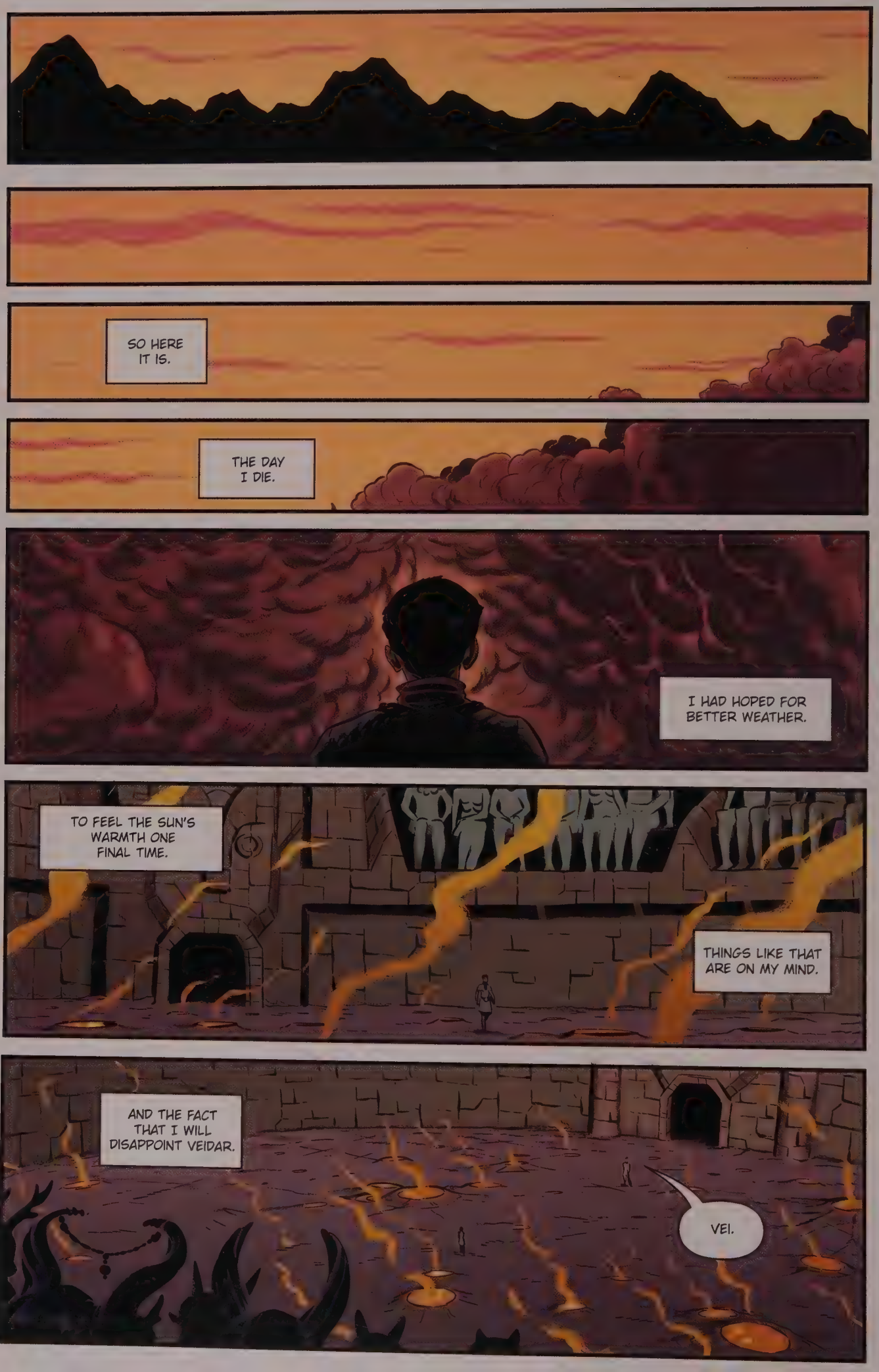

AND NOW?
I... I DON'T KNOW...


YES.
WHAT...?
THAT IS THE ANSWER TO YOUR THIRD QUESTION.








SO HERE IT IS.
THE DAY I DIE.
I HAD HOPED FOR BETTER WEATHER.
TO FEEL THE SUN'S WARMTH ONE FINAL TIME.
THINGS LIKE THAT ARE ON MY MIND.
AND THE FACT THAT I WILL DISAPPOINT VEIDAR.
VEI.


LOKI TOLD ME YOU'VE MADE YOUR CHOICE. I AM ASKING YOU TO RECONSIDER.
YOU CAN'T LET LOKI DECIDE.
I DON'T. I AM READY, VEI.
DAL...
I SHOULD HAVE DIED IN AN ARENA MANY YEARS AGO. AND THERE'S NO OTHER WAY OUT.
BOTH OF US DYING IS POINTLESS. IT'S YOUR DUTY TO LIVE AND CONTINUE TO FIGHT.
IT IS YOUR DUTY TO ME.
LET ME DIE WITH HONOR, LIKE A WARRIOR.
I CAN'T.
YOU CAN, YOU...


AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAARRRGGHH


DAL!
THAT SMELL...
ASHES.
BLOOD.
DAL?
HHAH HHAH
IRON.
HAAARGH
HISSS
CHANG


DAL ISN'T HIMSELF! IT MUST BE OBVIOUS TO EVERYONE!
PRINCESS, DO NOT ACT RASHLY.
THIS CAN'T GO ON!
OUT OF THE CORNER OF MY EYE, I SEE PRINCESS SÓL APPROACHING HER MOTHER.
MAYBE SHE WILL PUT A STOP TO THE FIGHT.
MAYBE ODIN WENT TOO FAR THIS TIME.
HHAH
HHAH
DAL... I BEG YOU...
MOTHER, THE ÆSIR ARE USING MAGIC!
NOT ANOTHER WORD.


NO ONE STOPS THE BATTLE.
KRACK


LITTLE HUMAN.
YOU MUST BE SO TIRED.


BUT IT IS OVER NOW. YOU DO NOT HAVE TO FIGHT ANYMORE.


SUDDENLY I SEE IT. THE FACE BEHIND THE FACE.


I AM A WISE GOD. I CAN BE MERCIFUL.
HIS VOICE IS SO WARM, SO TENDER.


TELL ME WHO AIDED YOU.
HE KNOWS.


GIVE ME A NAME AND I WILL LET YOU AND DAL LIVE.
A NAME...


GIVE ME THE TRAITOR'S NAME AND YOU SHALL HAVE YOUR LIVES BACK.
I WILL GIVE YOU PEACE.


PEACE...
YES...
I'LL GIVE YOU WHAT YOU NEED.





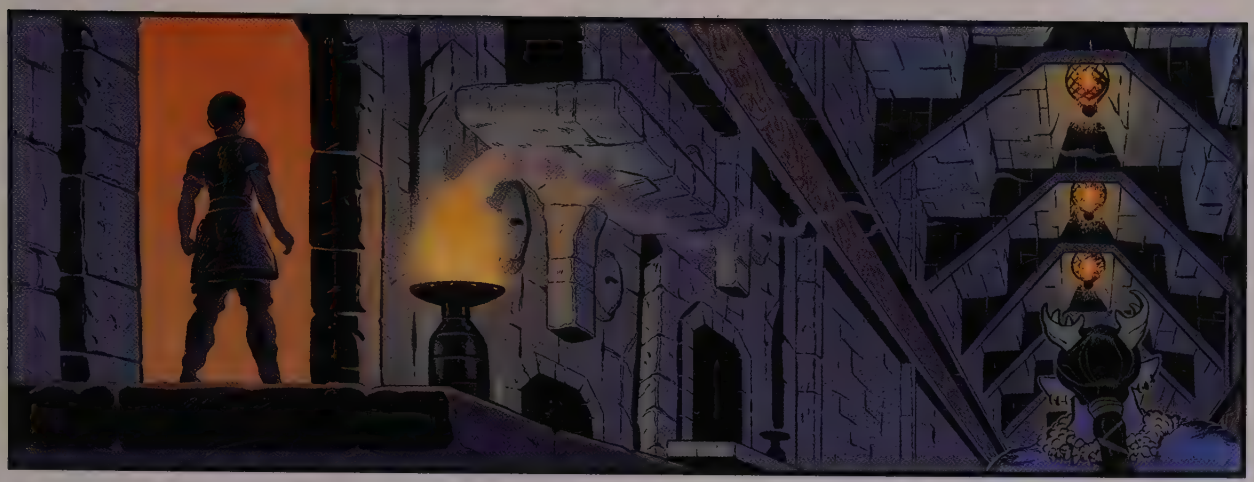
CHAPTER 8

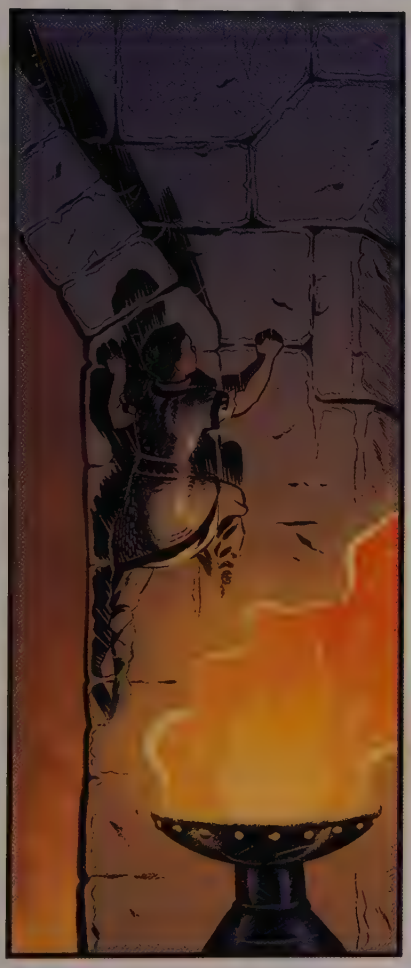
VEI?

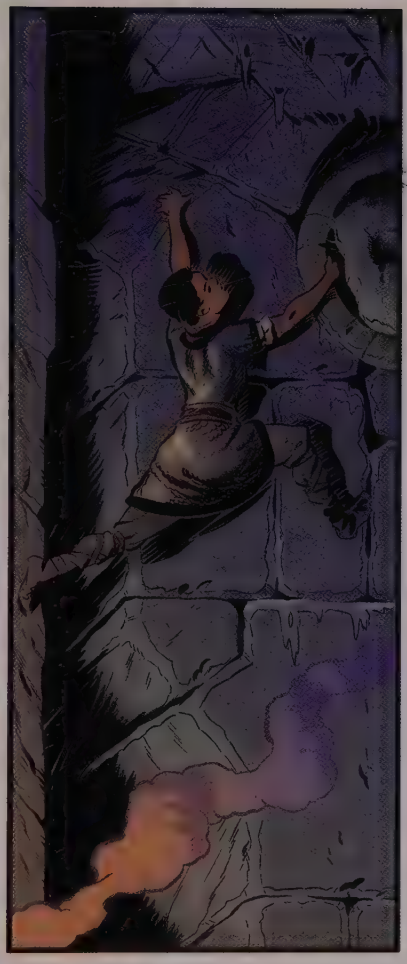
WHAT REALLY HAPPENED IN THE ARENA?

VEI?


YOU HAD NO CHOICE.
YOU SEE THAT, DON'T YOU?
REST NOW. I WILL FETCH YOU TOMORROW.












HOW COULD YOU BE SO THOUGHTLESS, SÓL?
YOUR BEHAVIOR AT THE FEAST COULD BE DISMISSED AS THE WHIMS OF A SPOILED PRINCESS.
BUT THE WAY YOU ACTED AT THE ARENA... BY GINNUNGAGAP! I CAN ONLY HOPE NO ONE HEARD YOU.
THEY DIDN'T NEED TO HEAR ME TO UNDERSTAND WHAT WAS GOING ON!
ODIN USED MAGIC IN FRONT OF EVERYONE! WE JUST WATCHED WHILE HE MADE DAL HIS PUPPET!
MOTHER, HOW COULD YOU LET IT HAPPEN? WHERE IS YOUR PRIDE, MY QUEEN?


SMACK!
HOW DARE YOU?
FORGIVE ME, MOTHER. I DON'T UNDERSTAND...
YOU DO NOT NEED TO UNDERSTAND. YOU SHOULD TRUST YOUR MOTHER AND YOUR QUEEN.
SOB.


DRY YOUR EYES NOW. REMEMBER THAT YOU ARE A PRINCESS.
SÓL... I WISH YOU UNDERSTOOD YOUR DUTIES BETTER. BUT I AM PARTLY TO BLAME.
YOU ARE MY YOUNGEST, AND I HAVE SPOILED YOU.
MY CHILDREN HAVE EITHER DIED FROM THE DISEASES THAT PLAGUE OUR KIN, OR LEFT THUNDER MOUNTAIN.
THAT IS WHY I WANTED TO PROTECT YOU, KEEP YOU WITH ME. INSTEAD OF CHASTISING YOU, I GAVE IN.
YOU ARE MY WEAKNESS, SÓL, AND THAT IS WHY I WILL TELL YOU THE TRUTH.
IN THE BEGINNING, THE FIGHTS OF THE MEISTARILEIKIR WERE FAIR.
A FEW TIMES THE JOTUN...
...EVEN CAME CLOSE....
...TO WINNING.

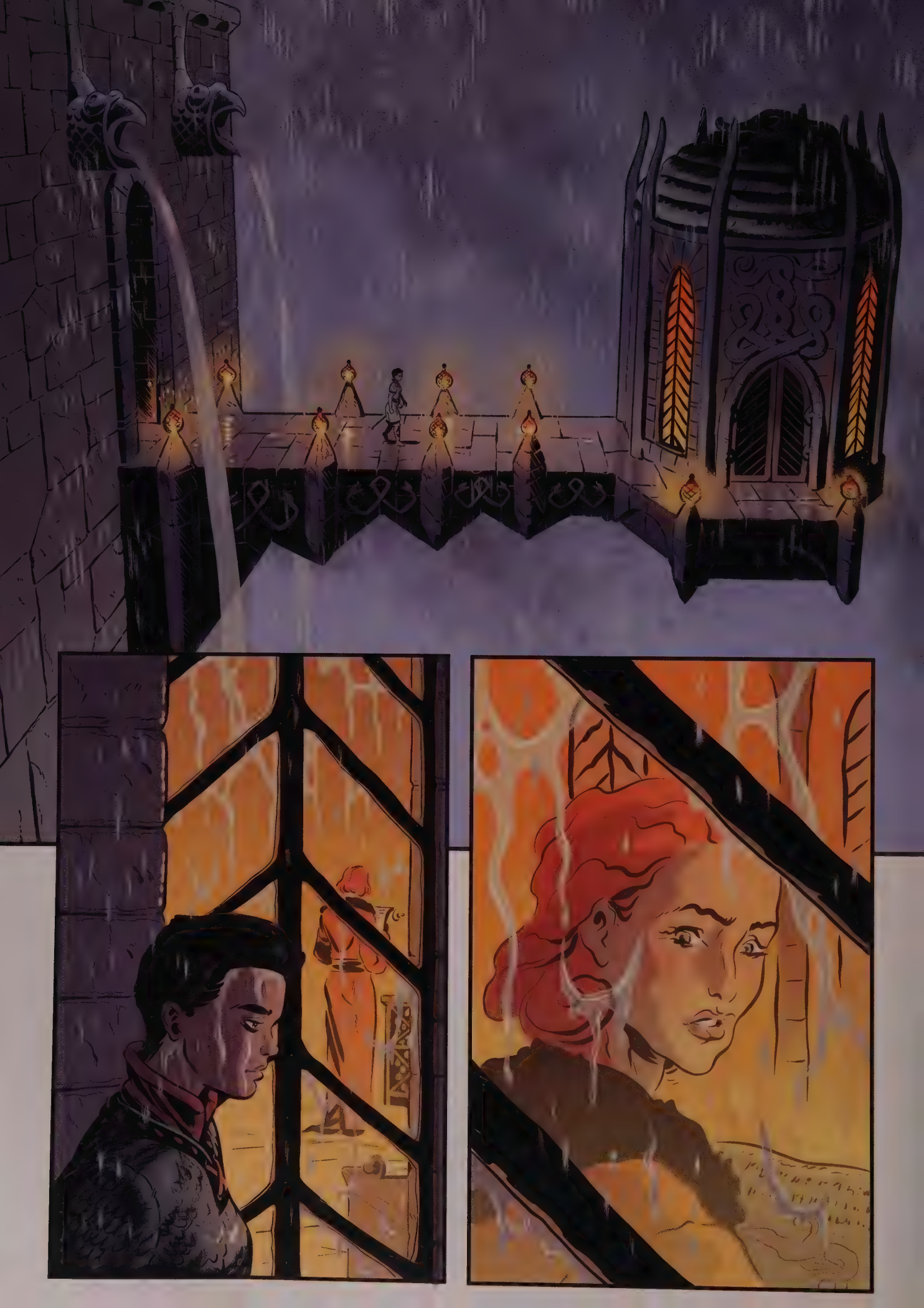

I DO NOT KNOW WHEN ODIN BEGAN TO DECEIVE US. IT MUST HAVE HAPPENED GRADUALLY.
DUFF
WHEN I REALIZED WHAT WAS GOING ON, IT WAS ALREADY TOO LATE. THE ÆSIR HAD GROWN SUPERIOR THANKS TO MIDGARD'S ADORATION. I COULD NOT ACCUSE ODIN AND RISK A WAR.
ONE-EYE'S AUDACITY GROWS WITH EVERY MEISTARILEIKIR. HE PROBABLY HOPES THAT I WILL BREAK THE PEACE IN ANGER.
BUT I HAVE BIDED MY TIME, DAUGHTER.
I AM PATIENT AS THE BEDROCK, AND MY PATIENCE HAS BORNE FRUIT.
VEI WILL WIN THE MEISTARILEIKIR, AND MIDGARD, FOR US.
THE ÆSIR PUT THEIR HOPE IN THE THIRTEENTH, BUT THEY HOPE IN VAIN--AND THEY KNOW IT.
DO YOU UNDERSTAND NOW, MY CHILD?


WHAT IS KEEPING INGOLF?
IDUN SENT FOR HIM.
POOR BASTARD.

GRRRRRR


THE WIND CHANGED. THE HUNTER BECAME THE PREY. THE CREATURE TURNED ITS FIVE HEADS. FIVE PAIRS OF EYES STARED AT ME. FIVE DROOLING MAWS OPENED...


INGOLF, CAN YOU TELL ME SOMETHING?
WHY DO BLOOD AND TEARS TASTE SALTY?
REVERED GODDESS, I BEG YOU... AAAAAAAAH!




WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?
A FOOLISH VENTURE, SNEAKING INTO THE ENEMY CAMP.
I KNOW YOU PROTECTED ME FROM ODIN TODAY.
AND I KNOW WHAT IT COST YOU TO THRUST YOUR DAGGER INTO DAL'S HEART.
YOU HAVE LOST SOMETHING THAT I CAN NOT HELP YOU RECOVER, BUT YOU ARE SAFE UNDER MY ROOF.
DRINK THIS.


IT'S ALMOST OVER.
I WILL STRANGLE NYKR.
I WILL MAIM THE STRANGER.
AND ODIN'S SECRET, THE THIRTEENTH...
I WISH I COULD DO MORE FOR YOU.
I KNOW.


THE SOUNDS SOOTHE ME.
THE SOUND OF RAIN.
THE SOUND OF FIRE.
THE SCENTS SOOTHE ME.
HONEY AND SPICES.
HOW LONG HAVE I SLEPT?
DON'T WORRY. DAWN IS FAR AWAY.

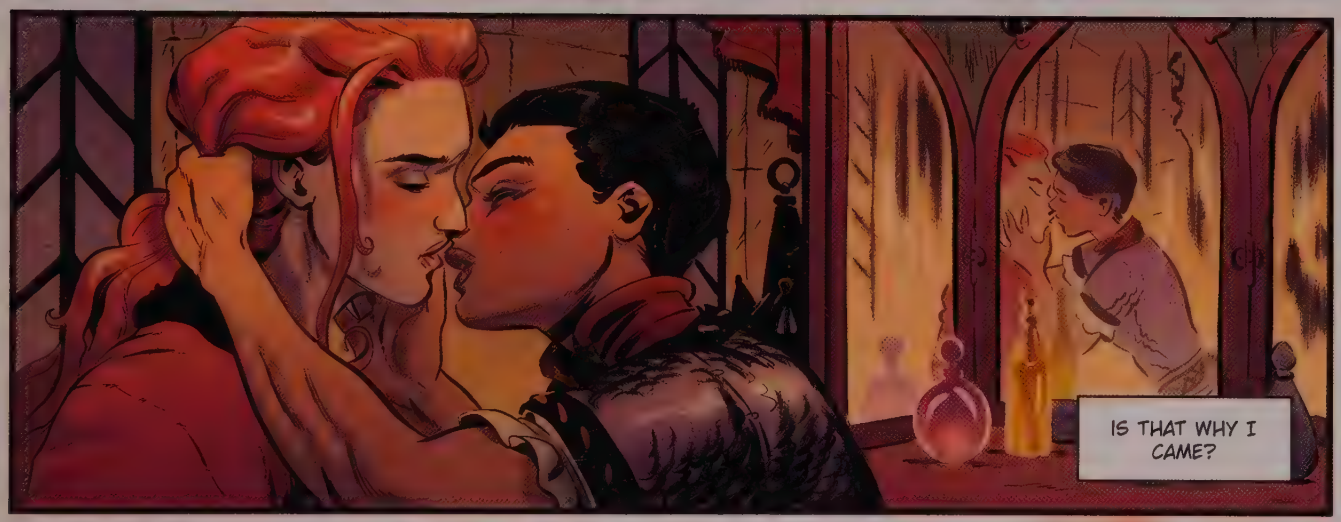

THE QUEEN KNOWS THAT ODIN IS USING MAGIC.
SHE BELIEVES HE'S TRYING TO GOAD HER INTO BREAKING THE PEACE.
THE QUEEN CERTAINLY CONFIDES IN YOU.
I EAVESDROPPED.
A DELIGHTFUL PASTIME.
WHY WOULD ODIN WANT A NEW WAR?
BECAUSE HE THINKS HE WILL WIN. BECAUSE IT'S IN HIS NATURE-- HERJAN, THE WARLORD, HERTEIT, GLAD OF WAR.

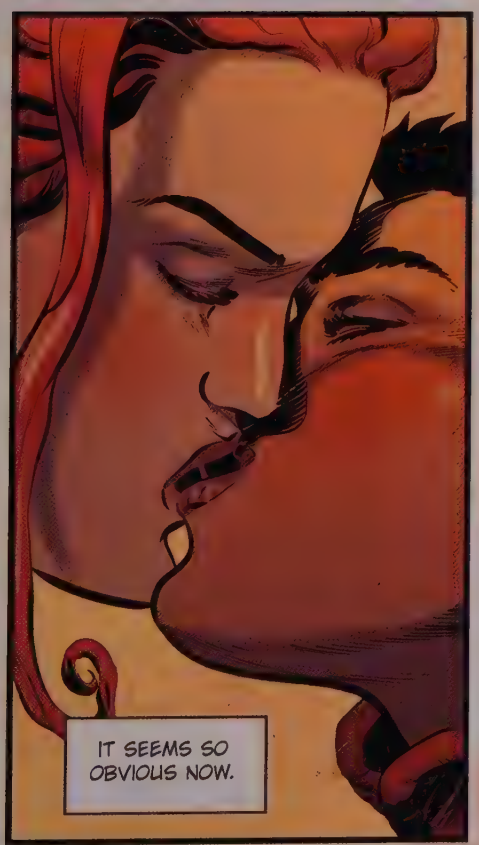

GILLINGUR BELIEVES I WILL WIN MIDGARD FOR THE JOTUN.
BUT IS ODIN PREPARED TO LOSE THE HUMANS' ADORATION?
WILL HE ACCEPT DEFEAT?
WHAT DO YOU THINK?
I ALREADY KNOW.
I KNOW THAT WHEN YOU THINK THE WORST HAS HAPPENED, WORSE THINGS ARE STILL TO COME.
IT GIVES ME AN ODD SENSE OF CALM.
YOU'RE A GOD.
WHY DO YOU BOTHER COMBING YOUR HAIR?
BECAUSE I LIKE IT.


I LIKE HAVING A BODY.
I LIKE HAVING DIFFERENT BODIES.
I LIKE HOW THEY FEEL, WHAT I CAN DO WITH THEM, HOW THEY AFFECT OTHERS.
IN THE FORM OF A CHILD, PART OF ME BECOMES A CHILD.
IN THE SHAPE OF A FALCON, I EXPERIENCE THE FALCON'S ESSENCE.
EVEN OLD AGE HAS ITS CHARM.
MY FACES ARE DIFFERENT, BUT ALL OF THEM ARE TRUE.


I AM ALWAYS LOKI.


AND I KNOW YOU DESIRE ME.


IS THAT WHY I CAME?


IT SEEMS SO OBVIOUS NOW.




HONEY AND SPICES.


THE RAIN PATTERS AGAINST THE ROOF, AGAINST THE WINDOWS.
THE FIRE CRACKLES.
THIS IS ALL THERE IS.
THERE IS NO LATER.


IF I'M GOING TO GET THROUGH THIS, I CAN ONLY THINK OF *NOW*.
AND NOW.
THE STRANGER IS A FORMIDABLE FOE.
HAVE YOU RECOVERED?
I HAVE.
NOW.
NOW.

CHAPTER 9


BANK
BANK
RATATOSKR... YOU HAVE A MESSAGE FOR ME, I GATHER.
VENERABLE HEIMDALLR IS EXPECTING LUMINOUS LOKI IN HIS CHAMBERS.
UNFORTUNATELY, I'M TERRIBLY BUSY.


I HAVE BEEN ORDERED TO WAIT UNTIL THE ESTEEMED LOKI ACCOMPANIES ME!
BANG
ILLUSTRIOUS LOKI!
SIGH.


REVERED HEIMDALLR IS WAITING!
BE CAREFUL. THEY'RE ANGRY.
THEY?
HEIMDALLR HAS SENT FOR ODIN, THOR, AND FREYJR.
ALL THIS ATTENTION JUST FOR ME. I'M FLATTERED.
YOU HAD A VISIT FROM THE ENEMY LAST NIGHT.


I DON'T SHARE YOUR CHASTE DISPOSITION, DEAR SKADI. I MUST ALLOW MYSELF SOME DIVERSION.
DON'T PLAY DUMB, LOKI. IT DOESN'T SUIT YOU.
THIS GAME OF YOURS IS MORE DANGEROUS THAN YOU THINK.
I DISLIKE SPEAKING OF THE WAR AGAINST JOTUN. IT LACKED THE PURITY OF THE HUNT.
BUT LISTEN CLOSELY. ODIN HAD TWO BROTHERS.
THAT SOUNDS FAMILIAR.
HE HAS FORBIDDEN US TO UTTER THEIR NAMES.
VÉ AND VILI, RIGHT?
VÉ, THE MERCIFUL. VILI, THE REASONABLE. VOTAN, THE SLY. THAT'S WHAT THEY USED TO CALL ODIN.


VÉ AND VILI COUNSELED THEIR BROTHER WELL. THEY KNEW HOW TO PLACATE HIM, HOW TO TEMPER HIS RAGE AND LUST FOR POWER.
WHEN THEY WERE SLAIN, VOTAN WAS LEFT WITHOUT MERCY AND REASON. HE BECAME ROPTATYR, THE SHATTERED GOD, INSANE WITH BLOODTHIRST AND VENGEFULNESS.
HE WANTED TO ANNIHILATE EVERY LIVING THING IN JOTUNHEIM AND LAY WASTE TO MIDGARD.
HE WAS PREPARED TO SACRIFICE EVERYTHING FOR REVENGE.
FRIGG AND FREYJA HEALED HIS MIND; THEY CONVINCED HIM TO CHOOSE THE PEACE THAT GILLINGUR OFFERED.


BUT ODIN'S VINDICTIVENESS IS ETERNAL. HE HOLDS GILLINGUR RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DEATH OF HIS BROTHERS.
TO HELP HER IN THE MEISTARILEIKIR...
IT WOULD BE AN UNFORGIVABLE BETRAYAL.
GOOD THING I'M NOT HELPING GILLINGUR.


IF YOU SAY SO.


AND HERE IS BROTHER BRAGI, PEN IN HAND, READY TO RHYME!
HMPF.
HE WILL WRITE AN ODE ABOUT HOW I REVEALED THE TRAITOR IN OUR MIDST.
YOUR TIME IS RUNNING OUT, HUMAN SCUM.
ABOUT TIME YOU GET TO WRITE AN ODE. OUR CHAMPIONS HAVE HARDLY GIVEN YOU THE OPPORTUNITY. DIED LIKE FLIES, THE LOT OF THEM.
VEI COULD NEVER HAVE SLAIN THE STRANGER WITHOUT HELP.
WE USUALLY SHOW FORBEARANCE WITH YOUR MISCHIEF, LOKI, BUT IF YOU HAVE LED THE JOTUN TO VICTORY...
YOU DISAPPOINT ME, BRAGI! WHERE ARE THE RHYMES?
RHYMES?! 'TIS ABOUT RHYTHM! DA-DI-DI, DA-DI-DI...
I ACCUSE YOU, LOKI! YOU HAVE WHISPERED OUR SECRETS IN VEI'S EAR!


DISTRESSING. MOST DISTRESSING.
I HAVE BUT ONE THING TO SAY: I HAVE ONLY DONE WHAT MY NATURE BIDS ME TO.
YOU DO NOT EVEN DENY IT!
THERE IS NOTHING TO DENY!
YOUR SOPHISTRY WON'T SAVE YOU NOW!
BE SILENT, HEIMDALL! IN DAYS LONG SINCE WAS AN EVIL FATE FOR THEE FIXED; WITH BACK HELD STIFF MUST THOU EVER STAND, AS WARDER OF HEAVEN TO WATCH.
WHAT SAY YOU, BRAGI? TOO POMPOUS?
DILETTANTE.
IF THIS IS ONE OF YOUR GAMES, LOKI, IT WILL BE OVER SOON ENOUGH.


YOU MAY HAVE DIVULGED OUR SECRETS TO VEI, BUT YOU CANNOT REVEAL ANYTHING ABOUT THE THIRTEENTH.
THAT I CANNOT.
"...THUS SPOKE LOKI, BORN AMONG HUMANS, FOSTERED BY GODS."
THE THIRTEENTH WILL NOT GIVE UP AS EASILY AS THE TWELVE WHO WENT BEFORE.
AND WHEN THE BATTLE IS OVER AND WE RETURN TO ASGARD, THE TRUTH ABOUT WHAT WENT ON HERE WILL COME OUT.
"...THUS SPOKE ODIN, LORD OF THE ÆSIR."
HICK
MY CHAMPION NYKR IS STILL IN THE GAME! IF ANYONE CAN DEFEAT VEI, IT IS HIM!

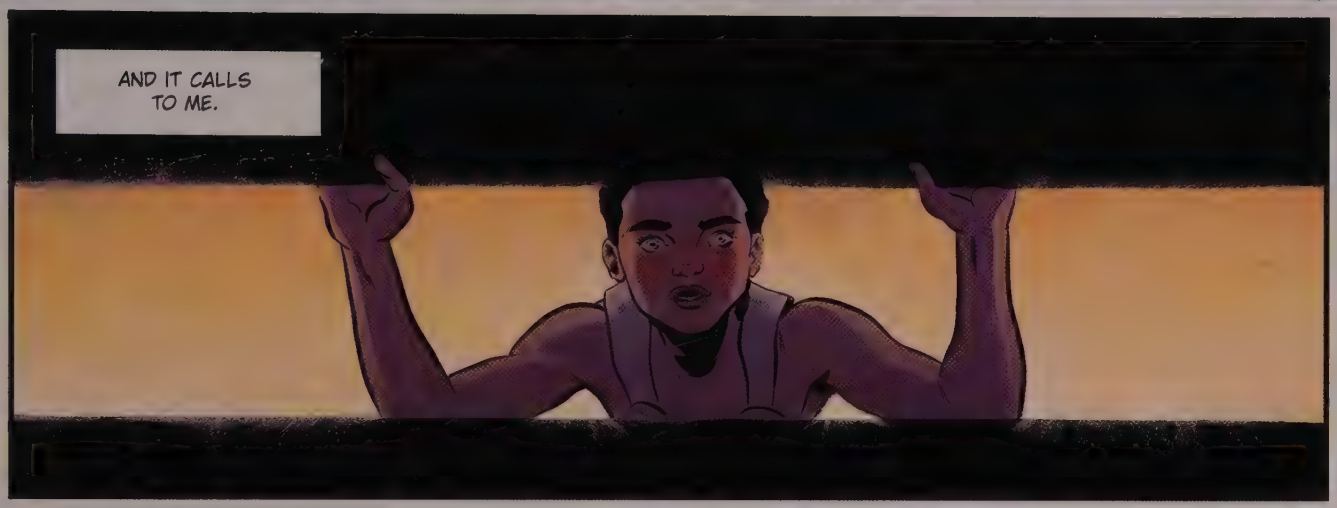

VEI
VEI
VEI
VEI
VEI
VEI
VEI
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VEI
VEI
VEI
VEI
VEI
VEI
WHAT IS THAT STENCH?
ROTTEN FISH.
SPLASH


MAKE SURE TO WASH IT OFF.
WHY IS IT SO IMPORTANT?
THE QUEEN DEMANDS YOUR PRESENCE.
GILLINGUR. WHY DOES SHE WANT TO SEE ME?
THE COURT OF JOTUN IS NOWHERE TO BE SEEN. VEIDAR'S FOOTSTEPS ECHO IN THE THRONE ROOM.

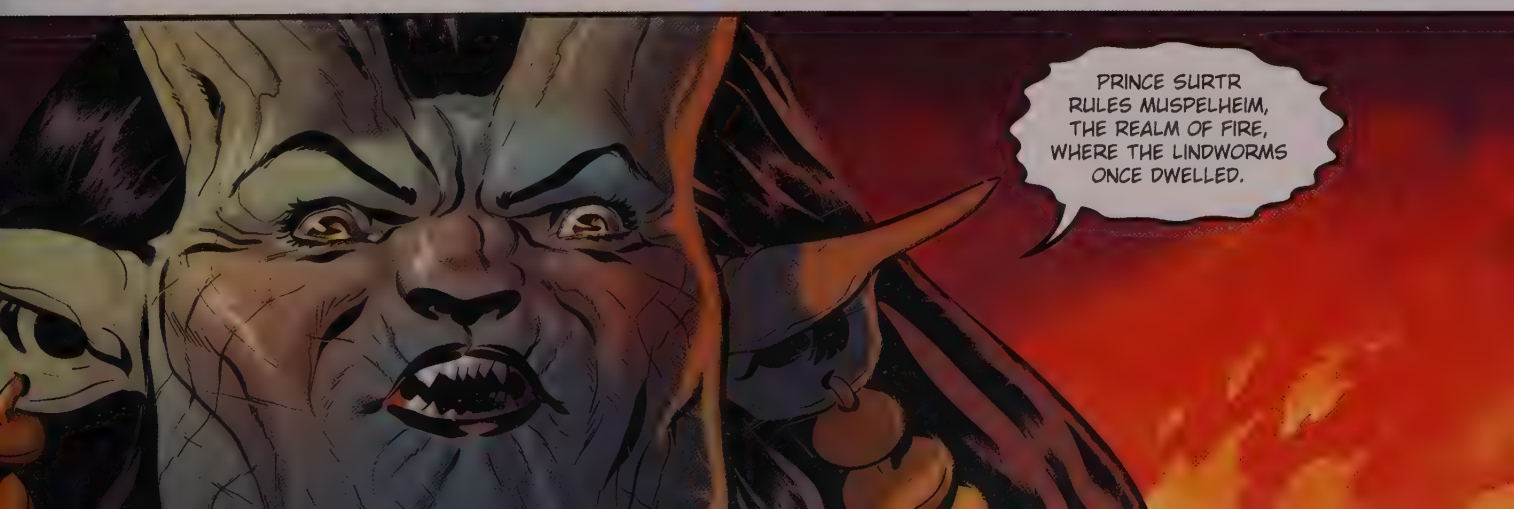

NEXT TO THE THRONE STANDS PRINCE SURTR, THE QUEEN'S ELDEST SON.
HE KEEPS LOOKING AT THE CHEST IN FRONT OF ME. I WONDER WHAT'S INSIDE. I WONDER IF I WANT TO KNOW.
VEI, RAN OF VEIDAR'S HERD.
TWELVE TIMES YOU HAVE FOUGHT, TWELVE TIMES YOU HAVE TRIUMPHED.
VEIDAR, YOU HAVE BROUGHT YOUR QUEEN GREAT HONOR.


THANK YOU, MY QUEEN.
YES, SHE HAS FOUGHT BRAVELY. BUT IS SHE READY FOR ODIN'S SECRET CHAMPION?
WHAT SAY YOU, VEI? DO YOU BELIEVE YOU CAN DEFEAT THE THIRTEENTH?
I'VE MADE IT THIS FAR.
YOU WILL GO EVEN FURTHER.
YOU'LL KICK ODIN'S ARSE BACK TO ASGARD.
THE CHEST IN FRONT OF YOU. OPEN IT.


I FEEL THEIR GAZE.
THEIR ANTICIPATION.
THE CHEST.
SUDDENLY I'M CERTAIN.
WHATEVER IS INSIDE IS ALIVE.


AND IT CALLS
TO ME.




PRINCE SURTR
RULES MUSPELHEIM,
THE REALM OF FIRE,
WHERE THE LINDWORMS
ONCE DWELLED.


THERE, IN THE ETERNAL HEAT, THE BLACKSMITHS OF THE DARK ÁLFAR HAVE FORGED A SWORD FROM MUSPELHEIM'S ORE. FOR GENERATIONS THEY HARDENED AND WHETTED THE BLADE IN A PLACE WHERE THE LINDWORMS' ANCIENT MAGIC FLOWS.
FOR THERE IS OTHER MAGIC THAN THAT OF ODIN AND HIS FOLLOWERS.
THE JOTUN HAD POWERS OF THEIR OWN. THEY FADED WHEN WE LOST MIDGARD'S ADORATION.
BUT SOON THE ÆSIR'S MIGHT WILL WANE, AND THE JOTUN WILL BLOOM ONCE MORE.


ALL YOU HAVE TO DO IS SKEWER THE ÆSIR'S CHAMPION.
BUT TAKE CARE; YMIR'S FANG STINGS AND ITS BITE IS VENOMOUS.
GOOSE BUMPS SPREAD ACROSS MY SKIN.
THE BLADE SPEAKS TO ME, A WHISPERING, HISSING SOUND.
IT HUNGERS FOR BLOOD. ITS HUNGER IS INSATIABLE.


YMIR'S FANG IS HEAVY AGAINST MY BACK.
VEI.
SOMEONE MUST HAVE AIDED YOU. OR YOU WOULD NOT HAVE SURVIVED THIS LONG.
WHO IS THE ÆSIR'S TRAITOR?
IT'S THE SECOND TIME SOMEONE ASKS ME, AND THE SECOND TIME I WON'T REPLY.


ANSWER THE QUEEN!
VEI...
OBEY, HUMAN!
LOKI.
SO YOU KNEW, VEIDAR, AND SAID NOTHING TO YOUR QUEEN?
I...
HE ONLY FOUND OUT TODAY! I TOLD HIM AFTER THE FIGHT AGAINST NYKR!
AND WHY HAVE YOU KEPT THIS A SECRET?
I WAS ASHAMED. I SHOULD HAVE BEEN ABLE TO WIN ON MY OWN.
CHAMPIONS ARE PROUD.
LOKI. ODIN'S OWN CHILD HAS BETRAYED HIM.
IT WILL GIVE ME GREAT PLEASURE TO INFORM HIM OF THIS.


LOKI HELPED US!
DID YOU REALLY THINK IT WAS AN UNSELFISH ACT? REALLY, HOW MISLED HAVE YOU BEEN?
I'M ASKING MYSELF THE SAME QUESTION.
THERE'S ONLY ONE WAY TO FIND OUT.
TAKE HER TO HER ROOM, VEIDAR. WE ARE DONE HERE.
MY QUEEN, I HAVE A QUESTION.
VEI...
LET HER SPEAK.
THE HUMANS OF MIDGARD... WILL THEY MEET THEIR NEW GODS? WILL THEY LIVE UNDER THEIR PROTECTION AS WE DO IN JOTUNHEIM?
OF COURSE NOT. YOU ARE CHILDREN OF OUR BLOOD.
THE HUMANS OF MIDGARD ARE OF A DIFFERENT KIND, AND THE ÆSIR HAVE TAUGHT THEM TO FEAR THEIR GODS.


ALL THEY HAVE TO DO IS TO FEAR US INSTEAD.
BUT NOTHING WILL CHANGE IN HERE IN JOTUNHEIM.
AFTER THE FINAL DUEL, YOU MAY RETURN TO YOUR VILLAGE.
UNLESS YOU PREFER TO STAY IN THUNDER MOUNTAIN.
YOU HAVE EARNED IT, AND SÓL IS VERY FOND OF YOU.
I UNDERSTAND.
REST NOW. TOMORROW WE WILL TASTE SWEET VICTORY.
GOOD NIGHT, VEI...
WHERE ARE WE GOING?
OUT.


VEI. IT WOULD PLEASE ME IF YOU CHOOSE TO STAY IN THUNDER MOUNTAIN.
AS ONE OF THE PRINCESS'S PETS.
THE QUEEN MEANT NO HARM.
SHE VIEWS HUMANS DIFFERENTLY, THAT IS TRUE. BUT SHE HAS ALWAYS CARED ABOUT THEIR WELLBEING.
EXCEPT IF THEY LIVE IN MIDGARD.
THE PEOPLE OF MIDGARD ARE TWISTED BEYOND SALVATION. YOU HAVE SEEN IT WITH YOUR OWN EYES. THEY ONLY UNDERSTAND THE LANGUAGE OF VIOLENCE.
DO YOU REALLY BELIEVE THAT?
CONSIDER DAL, WHO COVERED HIS BODY WITH RUNES, ONE FOR EACH LIFE HE TOOK.
YES. AND YET THERE WAS TENDERNESS AND DIGNITY IN HIM.


PERHAPS YOU ARE RIGHT; IT MAY NOT BE SO SIMPLE. BUT WHAT I BELIEVE IS OF LITTLE CONSEQUENCE. I MUST OBEY THE QUEEN.
IS THAT WHY YOU FLUNG ME INTO THE OCEAN? I, WHO WAS THE JOTUN'S HOPE?
VEI...
YOU DID IT TO SAVE MY LIFE.
BUT PERHAPS YOU WANTED TO SAVE THE JOTUN AS WELL-- FROM VICTORY IN THE MEISTARILEIKIR.
VEI!
PERHAPS YOU DIDN'T WANT TO SEE GILLINGUR TAKE ODIN'S PLACE IN MIDGARD AND BECOME THE GODDESS OF BLOOD AND WAR.
AND IF ODIN REFUSES TO LET MIDGARD GO, WAR WILL BE UPON US--THE WAR YOU'RE TRYING TO AVOID.
WHAT IS THE POINT OF THIS, VEI? WE ARE BUT PAWNS-- YOU, ME, LOKI...
WHOM YOU SURRENDERED WITHOUT A SECOND THOUGHT!
TO SPARE YOU FROM DOING IT.


YOUR LIFE IS SO SHORT AND MINE IS SO LONG.
OUR HEARTS TEND TO HARDEN OVER TIME, BUT MINE HAS NOT.
I HAVE HAD TO LEARN TO ACCEPT CIRCUMSTANCES BEYOND MY CONTROL.
MIDGARD IS FAR AWAY. YOU CAN LIVE IN PEACE AND QUIET HERE IN THUNDER MOUNTAIN, OR WITH YOUR PEOPLE. DO NOT LET DARK THOUGHTS POISON YOUR MIND.
COULD I CLOSE MY EYES AND FORGET WHAT I HAVE SEEN?
MAYBE IF I LIVED AS LONG AS VEIDAR.
REMEMBER THAT LOKI CHOSE TO ACT THIS WAY, AND WE HAVE NO IDEA WHY.
LOKI MAY HAVE HELPED YOU, BUT YOU ARE THE JOTUN'S CHAMPION.
YES.
BUT I DON'T KNOW WHAT THAT MEANS ANYMORE.


FREYJA, WHAT DO YOU SEE?


I SEE A BEAUTY WITH HAIR LIKE COPPER. I SEE A ROARING, RAGING FIRE.
I SEE A FATHER, A KING, A BROTHER. I SEE A BLOODSTAINED SKY.
I SEE MY PEOPLE, THE VANIR, CONQUERED BY THE ÆSIR. I SEE OUR HOME, VANAHEIM, RANSACKED BY ASGARD'S ARMY.
THAT WAS LONG AGO.
YES. SO LONG AGO.
SIDE BY SIDE WE FOUGHT IN THE WAR AGAINST THE JOTUN. WE ARE ALL ÆSIR EVER SINCE.
YOU ARE A QUEEN, AND NO ONE REMEMBERS THE VANIR.
MUCH HAS BEEN FORGOTTEN.
BUT SOMETIMES, LIKE TONIGHT, SOMEONE CALLS ME VANADIS IN PRAYER.


WE ALL HAVE MANY NAMES.
YOU HAVE COUNTLESS: SVÄFNIR, SLEEP BRINGER. YGGR, THE TERRIBLE ONE.
BUT ALSO UNN, THE BELOVED.
I DO NOT GO BY THAT NAME ANYMORE.
THAT IS WHAT YOUR BROTHERS CALLED YOU.
AND I WHISPER IT TO YOU WHEN YOU SLEEP.




"...AS WARDER OF HEAVEN TO WATCH." DAMNATION. THAT IS GOOD.
THEY ARRIVE AT DAWN. THE WANDERERS.


WHO ARE THEY?
RECLUSES.
THEY LEFT THUNDER MOUNTAIN TO LIVE IN SOLITUDE.
NOW THEY RETURN TO SEE YOU TRIUMPH.
WOULD IT BE BETTER FOR EVERYONE IF I LOST?
NO. I CAN'T THINK LIKE THAT.
I CAN'T CONTROL WHAT HAPPENS AFTER MY VICTORY.
THAT'S HOW I MUST THINK.
HUMANS OF JOTUNHEIM! YOU WILL WITNESS VEI, RAN OF THE PEOPLE OF BIRCH VALLEY, DEFEAT THE JOTUN'S ENEMY!


LONG LIVE VEI!
VEI!
OUR RAN!
I HOPE VEI DOESN'T DISAPPOINT THE GODS.
HOW CAN YOU DOUBT HER, SIGRID? SHE IS VEI, THE UNDEFEATED!
THE CROWD FALLS QUIET WHEN I STEP INTO THE ARENA.
SOON EVERYONE WILL SEE WHO THE THIRTEENTH IS.
ODIN'S SECRET.


YMIR'S FANG HISSES, CRAVING BATTLE.
WE WAIT.
PAD
PAD
PAD
PAD
PAD
PAD
I DON'T UNDERSTAND.
PAD PAD PAD PAD
WHAT...
FLOP


WE HAVE TO STOP MEETING LIKE THIS.
LOKI...
VEI...
WHAT THE NIFELHEIM?
BUT WHY?
WHAT A PERIPETEIA!


VEI...
LIAR.
LET ME...
GET OUT OF MY HEAD!
YMIR'S FANG THIRSTS FOR BLOOD.
LET ME LEAD, SINGS THE BLADE.


LET ME STING.
VEI, LISTEN!
I SURRENDER TO THE BLADE.
VEI!
RITCH
I COULD NOT TELL YOU!
I WAS BOUND TO SILENCE.
IT DOESN'T MATTER. YOU'RE MY ENEMY.


AM I? THINK, VEI. WHAT HAPPENS IF YOU STRIKE ME DOWN?
YOU DIE.
YES, YOU COULD ACTUALLY KILL ME WITH THAT INFERNAL WEAPON.
LET'S SAY THAT I DIE AND THE JOTUN PREVAIL. EITHER ODIN DECLARES WAR, OR MIDGARD ENDS UP IN NEW, CRUEL HANDS.
KLANG
AND IF I TRIUMPH, ODIN TRIUMPHS. THEN EVERYBODY LOSES, INCLUDING ME.
I KNOW ALL THAT! WHAT DO YOU WANT?!
I WANT YOU TO CHOOSE A DIFFERENT PATH WITH ME.
VEI, CHILD OF JOTUN AND HUMAN. LOKI, CHILD OF HUMAN AND ÆSIR. TOGETHER WE CAN CHANGE THE WORLD--FREE IT FROM THE TYRANNY OF ODIN AND GILLINGUR.
WE STAND BEFORE JOTUN, ÆSIR, AND HUMANS. WE ARE THEIR UNDEFEATED CHAMPIONS, AND THEIR BELIEF IN US MAKES THE MAGIC THAT SURROUNDS US STRONG.
THAT IS WHY WE CAN DESTROY THE MIGHT OF THE GODS.
BUT WE MUST ACT NOW.


A WORLD WITHOUT GODS...
GIVE ME YOUR HAND.
DO YOU TRUST ME?
NO.
GOOD GIRL.
IT HAPPENS SO QUICKLY.
WHAT...?
NO...
MY HAIR STANDS ON END.


IMPOSSIBLE...
WHAT ARE YOU DOING, LOKI? KILL HER!
THE THIRTEENTH WILL SHED VEI'S BLOOD.
THE SWORD IN MY HAND VIBRATES.
THE AIR IS CHARGED.
COLD.
LIGHTNING.
HEAT.
FSSSS


ACCURSED CHILD!
AND ASH WILL DARKEN THE SKY.
KRACK
SHRAK
KRACK
THE SWORD IS JUBILANT.


IT SINGS OF FREEDOM.
FREEDOM AND DESTRUCTION.
WHAT IS HAPPENING?
HOLD ON TO ME!
RUMBLE
BOOM


SHE IS FREE!

CHAPTER 10




SHE.
I IMMEDIATELY KNOW WHAT SHE IS.
NO OTHER BEING CAN BE SO POWERFUL.
SO TERRIBLE.
SO MAGNIFICENT.
BA-R OOOM


A LINDWORM.
THE CRYSTALS ON HER BODY GLITTER AS SHE SLITHERS OUT OF HER PRISON.
HER EYES ARE COVERED BY A GRAY FILM.
IS SHE BLIND?


THE QUEEN OF THE LINDWORMS GREETS HER ENEMIES. SHE SAYS THEY HAVE GROWN OLD AND FRAIL.
THEY IMPRISONED HER IN THUNDER MOUNTAIN AT THE END OF THE WAR AGAINST THE LINDWORMS.
IT TOOK ME A LONG TIME TO FIGURE OUT HOW TO FREE HER.
SHE WAS BORN WHEN THE FIRST SPARK LIT IN THE ABYSS GINNUNGAGAP.
BORN IN CHAOS, RAISED IN FIRE.
HER NAME IS *RAGNARÖK*-- THE FATE OF THE GODS.


YMIR'S FANG TREMBLES AT THE SOUND OF THE ANCIENT ONE'S VOICE.
MAGIC REACTS TO MAGIC.
THE CRYSTALS ON HER BODY COME LOOSE.
THEY'RE ALIVE!
KRACK
KRICKET!


TO ARMS!
JOOOTUN!
RAAAAAAAAA
FOR ASGARD!
AAAH!
WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?


I'D LOVE TO TAKE ALL THE CREDIT, BUT YOU WERE THERE TOO, REMEMBER?
YOU TRICKED ME!
OF COURSE. I *TRICKED* YOU.
WHAT DID YOU THINK WOULD HAPPEN WHEN I SAID WE WE WERE GOING TO DESTROY THEIR POWER? FREE THE WORLD OF THEIR TYRANNY?
FREEDOM COMES WITH A PRICE. AND WHAT IS THERE TO MOURN?
THEY'RE FINALLY PAYING WITH THEIR OWN BLOOD.
MY PEOPLE ARE THERE. THE HUMANS OF JOTUNHEIM ARE INNOCENT.


WE CAN'T JUST STAND HERE AND LET THEM DIE!
GIVE ME YOUR SHOES!
YOU'RE RIGHT.
IT WOULD BE A SHAME TO OBSERVE THE MAYHEM FROM AFAR.
LET'S HAVE A LOOK AT WHAT WE'VE ACCOMPLISHED.
WOSH
DON'T LOOK DOWN. LOOK AHEAD.


FOR THE JOTUN!
HSSS
CHOMP
GAAAH!
NGGGHHH!!
RAGNARÖK. THE FATE OF THE GODS.


WHAT HAPPENS WHEN SHE'S DONE WITH THE GODS?
WHAT...?
I TRUSTED YOU! HOW COULD YOU, VE!?
LOKI WAS RIGHT.
I WANTED TO SEE ODIN AND GILLINGUR FALL. THAT WAS MY ONLY CONCERN.
AND NOW I HAVE UNLEASHED DEATH.
I WILL TRY TO STOP RAGNARÖK. YOU HAVE MY WORD.
BUT SOMEONE MUST HELP THE HUMANS OF JOTUNHEIM.
I'LL DO IT.


THE AIR IS HEAVY WITH MAGIC AND THE NAUSEATING FUMES FROM THUNDER MOUNTAIN'S DEPTHS.
ROARS, HOWLS, AND THE CLATTER OF SWORDS ECHO THROUGH THE CRATER.
KRICKET!
KRICKET!
HA!
KRACK

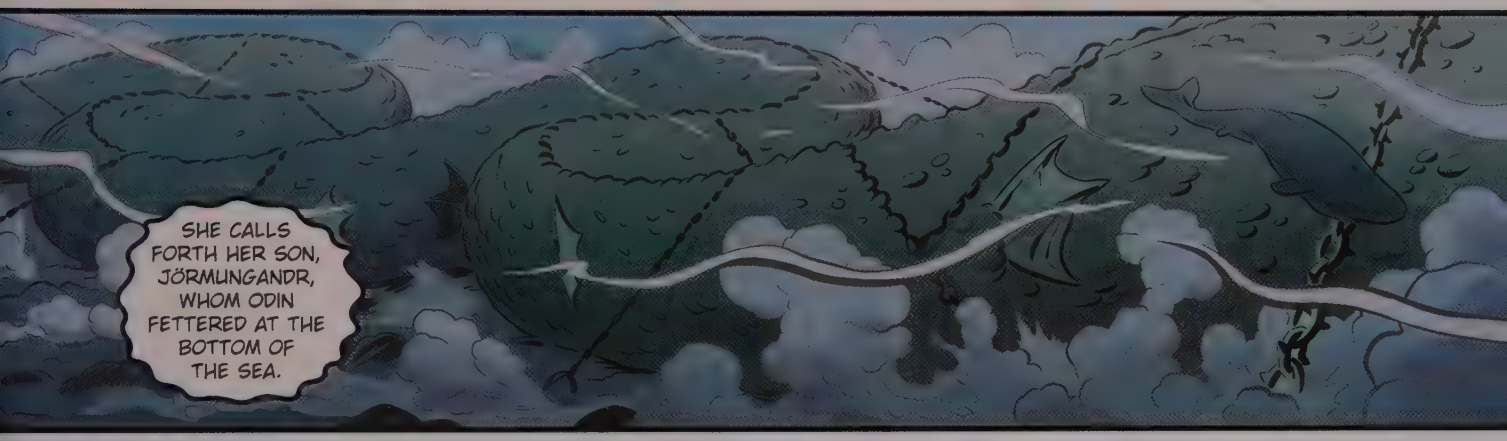

KRICK
KRAS
NOTHING BUT SHARDS AND SPLINTERS LEFT!
KRUNCH
KA-KRACK

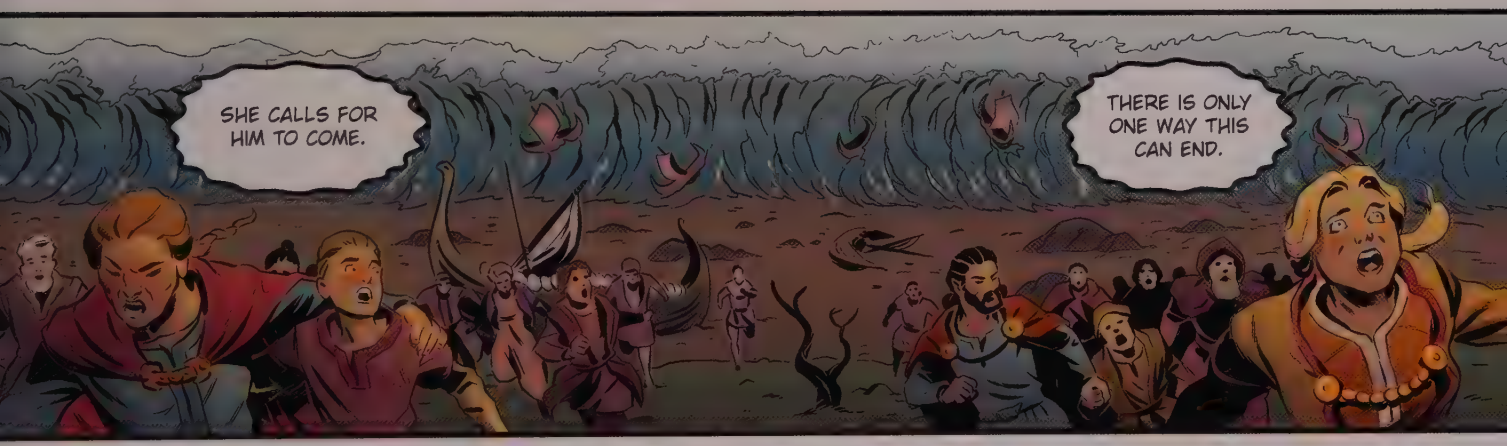

FACE THE POWER OF MJÖLNIR!
GAAAH!
VEIDAR!
BLAM


YMIR'S FANG REJOICES. IT WANTS TO TASTE DIVINE BLOOD.
YOU...
SPRAK
UGH!
DEATH IS IN YOUR HAND.
BAMF
MY HAND...
LET GO OF THE SWORD!
I... I CAN'T!
TOO LATE, THE BLADE SINGS.


IT SINGS IN MY BLOOD.
A PART OF ME.
VEI, WHAT IS HAPPENING...
WHAT...
SHE IS CALLING FORTH FIRE FROM MUSPELHEIM!
SHE IS SENDING IT ACROSS THE WORLD! ALL THE WAY TO MIDGARD!


FREYJA, SAVE US!
WE HAVE ANGERED THE GODS!


SHE CALLS FORTH HER SON, JÖRMUNGANDR, WHOM ODIN FETTERED AT THE BOTTOM OF THE SEA.


SHE CALLS FOR HIM TO COME.
THERE IS ONLY ONE WAY THIS CAN END.


DOOM.


VEI! WHAT HAPPENED TO YOUR HAND?


VEI!


WE COULD NOT KILL RAGNARÖK-- THAT IS WHY WE IMPRISONED HER!
FIRST SHE WILL ANNIHILATE US! THEN SHE WILL SET THE WORLD ABLAZE!
AND NOW SHE IS GETTING HELP!
JÖRMUNGANDR!
REMEMBER ME? PRINCE SURTR! ENSLAVER OF MUSPELHEIM! WORM-BANE!
WROSH

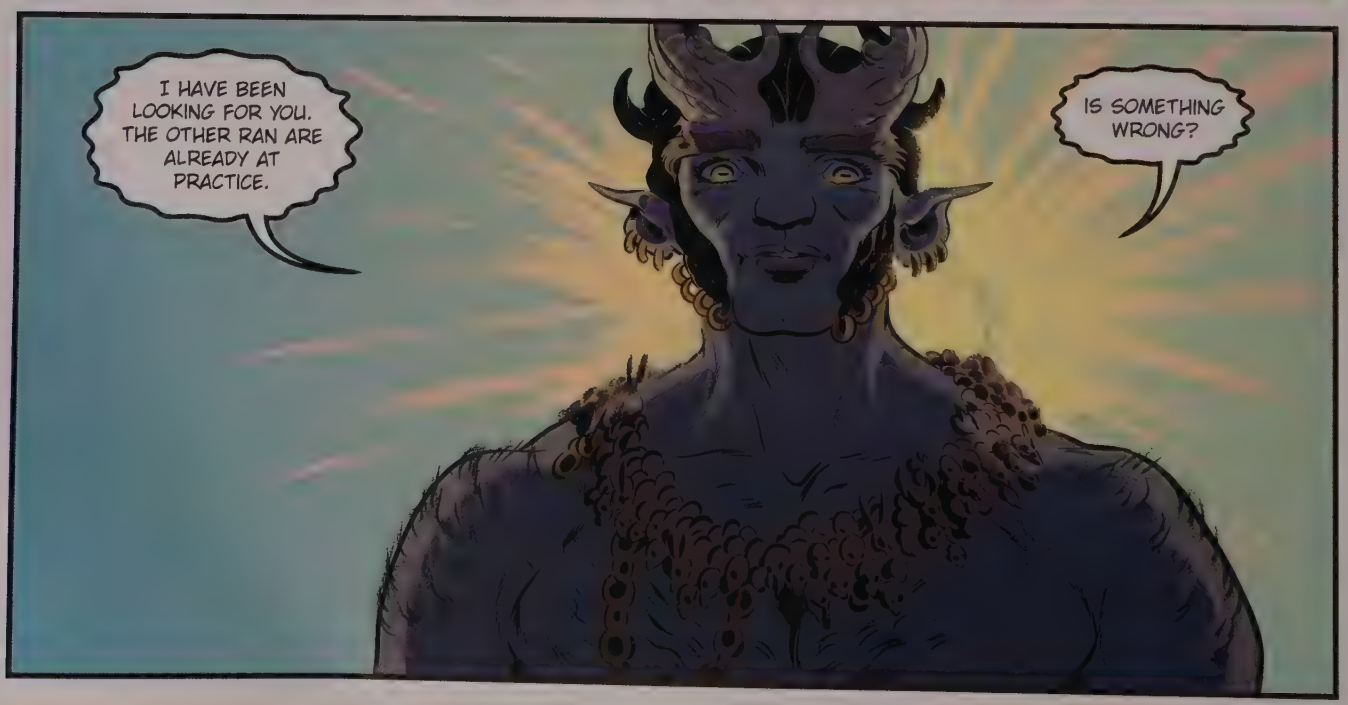

FOR THE QUEEN!
FOR THE JOTUN!
WHAAM


IT'LL WORK OUT SOMEHOW.
IS THAT ALL YOU HAVE TO SAY?
IT DOES NOT MATTER, NOW...
VEIDAR!
YOUR HANDS ARE STAINED WITH JOTUN BLOOD.
NO! HE DIDN'T KNOW!
SILENCE!
I NEVER THOUGHT YOU WOULD BETRAY ME THUS, VEIDAR. NOT YOU.
MY QUEEN, I AM FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH.
PROVE IT. SLAY THEM.


NO.
RETRIBUTION WILL GET US NOWHERE.
WE CANNOT DEFEAT THE LINDWORMS ON OUR OWN. WE MUST JOIN FORCES WITH THE ÆSIR ONCE MORE.
CALL ON ODIN, MY QUEEN.


REF

VEI!


I HAVE BEEN LOOKING FOR YOU. THE OTHER RAN ARE ALREADY AT PRACTICE.
IS SOMETHING WRONG?


I'M TIRED OF FIGHTING AND FIGHTING. WHAT'S THE POINT ANYWAY?
JUST BETWEEN YOU AND ME...
SOMETIMES I WONDER THAT TOO.
CAN'T WE JUST STAY HERE A WHILE?
VERY WELL...
WE'LL STAY HERE A WHILE.
AAAAAAAAAAAAAAA
THE PEST THAT HAS INFESTED MY HOUSE.


NGGH...
KNA-KNAK
WHAT IS THAT LIGHT?
IT'S COMING RIGHT AT ME...
WE RUSH INTO THE SKY AT BREAKNECK SPEED.
ILL-FATED CHILD.
FREYJA, I...
CRAVEN VERMIN!


IT ALL CAME TO PASS AS IT WAS MEANT TO.
COUGH...
RUMBLE
I HAVE KNOWN YOUR FATE FOR A LONG TIME. THAT IS WHY I LET YOUR MOTHER PUT YOU IN MY ARMS, LOKI. THAT IS WHY I PROTECTED YOU.
ODIN KNOWS IT TOO.
WHEN HE SACRIFICED HIS EYE IN MIMIR'S WELL TO GAIN KNOWLEDGE AND POWER, IT WAS THE FIRST THING HE SAW.
HE SAW HIS REIGN COME TO AN END.
AND YET HE REFUSES TO COMPREHEND IT.


NOW DESTINY IS AT A CROSSROADS. THE WORLD MIGHT FALL WITH ODIN. BUT IT DOESN'T HAVE TO.
CAN WE... COUGH... STOP RAGNARÖK?
RAGNARÖK HAS WEAKENED DURING HER CONFINEMENT.
SHE CAN BE HARMED BY THE LINDWORMS' OWN MAGIC. THE MAGIC IN YOUR SWORD, VEI.
ONE CUT NEAR HER HEART, ONE CUT NEAR HER BRAIN. THAT IS WHAT IT TAKES.
REMEMBER THAT EVERY CUT WILL COST YOU.
REMEMBER THAT THE FATE OF THE WORLD IS AT STAKE.
I TOLD YOU IT WOULD ALL WORK OUT.
YOU MUST HELP HER, LOKI.
I'VE ALWAYS WONDERED WHAT FIGHTING A LINDWORM WOULD BE LIKE.


YOU!
THIS WILL COST YOU DEARLY, GILLINGUR!
THE BLAME IS *YOURS*, ONE-EYE!
SO LOST WERE YOU IN THE CAWING OF YOUR RAVENS THAT YOU FAILED TO NOTICE THE TRAITOR IN YOUR HALL!
YOUR OWN FLESH AND BLOOD!


LOKI COULD NEVER HAVE DONE IT WITHOUT HELP. YOUR CHAMPION'S FOOLISHNESS IS AT THE ROOT OF THIS. I LET THIS STALE PEACE LAST FOR FAR TOO LONG.
TODAY, ASGARD WILL TRIUMPH ONCE AND FOR ALL!


YOUR BROTHERS CANNOT PROTECT YOU THIS TIME!




CHOMP
GILLINGUR IS DEAD AND JOTUNHEIM BELONGS TO ODIN, LORD OF THE ÆSIR! SWEAR FEALTY TO ME AND TURN YOUR WEAPONS AGAINST RAGNARÖK! YOU WILL BE RICHLY REWARDED!
ODIN'S VOICE ECHOES ACROSS THE ARENA, AND MY BLOOD RUNS COLD.


GILLINGUR'S ASHES WHIP AT MY FACE.
I FOLLOW THE SNAKE'S FORM.
THERE!
LOOK OUT FOR HER POISON SPINES!
UNNF!
SHE KNOWS WE'RE HERE.
HER BODY LURCHES.
IF RAGNARÖK DIES AND ODIN LIVES...
KRACK
UFF!
ONE THING AT A TIME, VEI.
I'LL DEAL WITH THEM!


HURRY! THERE'S MORE OF THEM!
HA!
WHAMF
THE SWORD HISSES IN TRIUMPH.


ONE CUT IS ALL IT TAKES.
EVERY CUT WILL COST ME.
MY BODY GROWS NUMB.
MY VISION DARKENS.


UHH...
I'VE GOT YOU!
VEI!


HOW BAD IS IT?


I JUST NEED TO CATCH MY BREATH.


SHE WAKES THE MOUNTAIN.

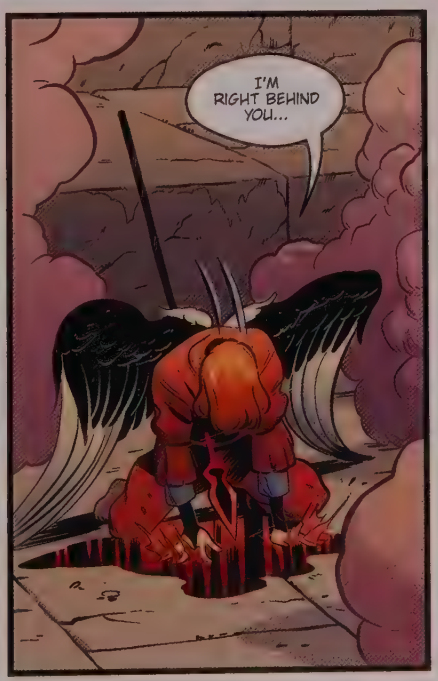

YOU SEEM TO HAVE VEXED HER.
RUMBLE
RUMBLE


RUN!
MOTHER... VEIDAR...


HNGH!
WHAT...


FLEE...
ODIN'S SPEAR...


DO WHAT YOU MUST!


I'M RIGHT BEHIND YOU...


TRAITOR.


DEEP UNDERGROUND I WILL BIND YOU. A SNAKE WILL DRIP ACIDIC VENOM ON YOUR BODY. YOUR TORMENT WILL NEVER END.
YOU CANNOT SHACKLE ME, ALLFATHER.
ROPES WILL FRAY AND CHAINS WILL RUST.
YOU CAN'T STOP CHANGE, FATHER!
YOU CAN'T STOP ME!
SILENCE!


I...I HAVE PLAYED MY PART. THE ONE YOU KNEW I WOULD PLAY.
POOF
I AM NOT DESTINY'S THRALL. I AM A GOD. THE SUPREME.
MY ONLY MISTAKE WAS LISTENING TO FREYJA THAT TIME.
I SHOULD HAVE LET MY RAVENS RIP YOU AND YOUR MOTHER APART.
YES, YOU SHOULD HAVE!
RAK


THEY SAY SKADI'S ARROWS DON'T STING. A SHIVER OF COLD AND IT'S OVER. A MERCIFUL DEATH FOR THE ALLFATHER'S MURDERER.
VENGEANCE DOESN'T INTEREST ME.


I MUST... UNGH... HELP VEI...
I DON'T UNDERSTAND.
THE WORLD HAS BEEN PLUNGED INTO CHAOS, JUST LIKE YOU WANTED.
DO YOU REGRET YOUR ACTIONS?
I WANTED TO SEE ODIN AND GILLINGUR FALL. I DON'T MIND IF THE WORLD REMAINS.
BESIDES, I DON'T LIKE RAGNARÖK.
GUNGNIR'S WOUNDS ARE HARD TO HEAL.
ALLOW ME.
I CALL UPON...
...THE SPIRITS OF THE WILD HUNT!


RAGNARÖK'S HOT BREATH STINGS MY SKIN.
CHOMP
TOO CLOSE.
WAY TOO CLOSE.
SOMEONE IS DIVERTING THE SNAKE'S ATTENTION. I HOPE IT'S LOKI. THAT LOKI IS ALIVE.
THERE'S MY TARGET.
THE MOUNTAIN RUMBLES IN RESPONSE.


RUMBLE
RUMBLE


THE AIR GROWS HOTTER. THE VAPORS MAKE MY LUNGS BURN.
ALMOST THERE. ALMOST...
ARGGH!
SKRATCH
THE SHOES... NO WAY BACK NOW.
THAT'S A PROBLEM FOR LATER.
I'VE REACHED MY GOAL.
IT LOOKS LIKE...


...AN EYE!
I CAN'T MOVE, CAN'T LOOK AWAY.
PRIMORDIAL DARKNESS. TERRIBLE CHAOS. CRUEL BEAUTY.
GINNUNGAGAP, WHERE RAGNARÖK WAS BORN.
IT CALLS TO ME. SOON I'LL BE THERE...
SOON...


VEI!
DON'T... LOOK...
CAN'T CONTROL... MY HAND...
HNGH!
ONE CUT...
WHAMF




SLEEP THE ETERNAL SLEEP, RAGNARÖK! REST ON A BED OF EMBERS AND ASH!
SQUASH
FSSS

CHAPTER 11




THE RUMBLE FROM THUNDER MOUNTAIN FADES.
MY EARS ARE RINGING.
MY BODY GROWS FEEBLE AS THE POISON SPREADS.
VEI?
ANSWER ME!
GIVING UP WOULD BE SO EASY.
NO. NOT WHEN I'VE SURVIVED FOR THIS LONG.
LOKI... COUGH... PUT ME DOWN...
MY ARM... COUGH...
CUT IT OFF!


HURRY...
HHAAAH!
KLANG
NO, NO, NO...


VEI...
WHAT...?
SHE WILL LIVE.
FREYJA?


NO.
I AM VANADIS AGAIN.
ODIN IS DEAD AND THE ÆSIR'S POWERS ARE WANING.
IDUN, LOOK AT THE BIRD!
KVITT
WHAT A PRETTY BIRDIE, BRAGI!
PRETTY, DITTY, WITTY... WHAT RHYMES WITH BIRDIE?
HAVE YOU SEEN MY APPLES ANYWHERE?
THE ÆSIR CONQUERED THE VANIR, BUT OUR POWERS HAVE DEEP ROOTS.


WE ARE LIFE AND DEATH.
DESTRUCTION AND RESURRECTION. THAT IS WHY WE WILL ENDURE.
AND HOW COME I HAVEN'T SHRIVELLED INTO A BABBLING OLD FOOL?
YOUR MOTHER DAGRUN WAS MORE THAN HUMAN. SHE WAS OF VANIR LINEAGE. MY BLOOD RAN IN HER VEINS.
THEREFORE YOUR POWERS WILL NOT DIMINISH--ON THE CONTRARY.
AND YOU WILL NEED THEM.
YOU FULFILLED YOUR DESTINY, LOKI. THIS IS ALL GOOD AND WELL. ODIN, GILLINGUR, AND RAGNARÖK HAVE FALLEN.
BUT YOU LET DEATH SWEEP FORTH OVER THE WORLD, AND FOR THAT YOU HAVE TO ATONE.
THE WORLD IS BLEEDING, AND YOU WILL HELP ME HEAL IT.


THAT SOUNDS INCREDIBLY BORING, VANADIS.
DO I HAVE TO?
SIGH.
COUGH...
LOKI...
VEI... ARE YOU IN PAIN?
NO. HELP ME UP.
THE WIND SMELLS OF SNOW.
MY HEART FILLS WITH LONGING.
I WILL GO TO MY PEOPLE NOW.
FAREWELL, LOKI.


HERE IS WHERE WE PART WAYS, FOREVER.
HOME.
THE TRANQUIL BEAUTY OF BIRCH VALLEY.
THE ROOFTOPS SPARKLE WITH FROST.
I WONDER IF THE VILLAGE WAS HIT BY RAGNARÖK'S FIRE.
IF SO, I'LL REBUILD IT.
SÓL...
OH. IT'S YOU.


THE HUMANS ARE OVER THERE.
WE SAVED MOST OF THEM.
THANK YOU.
VEIDAR'S SWORD.
I'M LEAVING.
WHERE ARE YOU GOING?
I DON'T KNOW. THE WORLD IS A BIG PLACE.
I WONDER IF SHE WILL EVER FORGIVE ME.
IF I DESERVE TO BE FORGIVEN.
IT'S VEI!
SHE'S ALIVE!


VEI, THE TRAITOR!
YOU CONSORTED WITH THE ENEMY! YOU ARE TO BLAME FOR THE DEATH OF OUR GODS!
EVERYONE CALM DOWN!
SHE BETRAYED THE GODS!
GO AWAY!


SMACK
CHINK


HOME.


WE'LL KILL YOU IF YOU RETURN!
SIGRID!

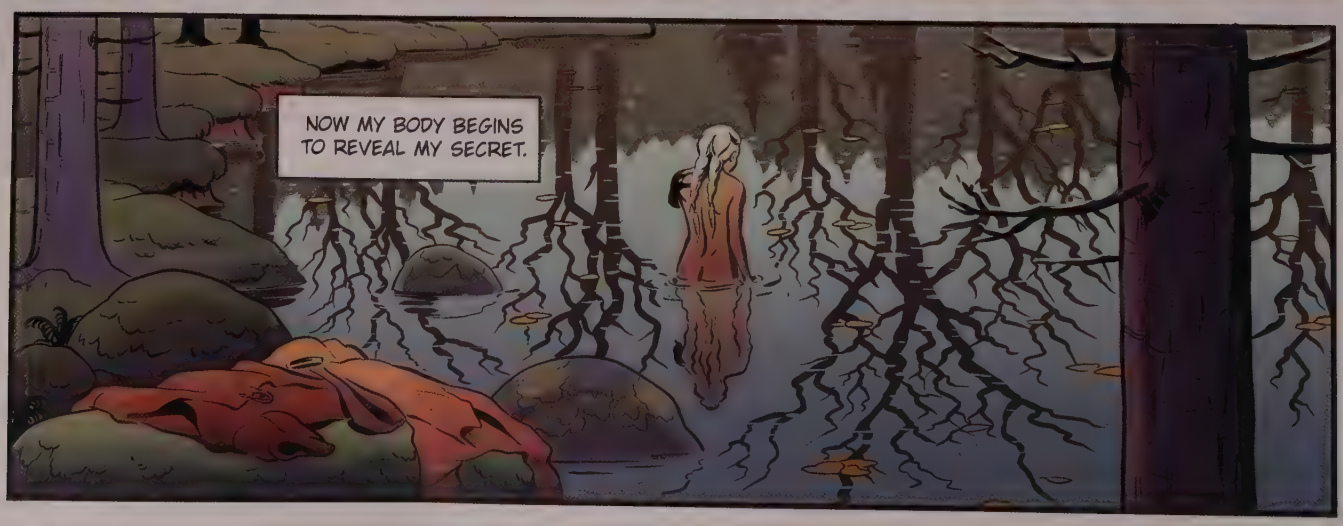

A FEW OF THEM COME WITH ME.


MORE FOLLOW AFTER SIGRID HAS PROCLAIMED HERSELF RAN OF JOTUNHEIM.
BUT MANY LEAVE AFTER THE BIRTH OF MY CHILDREN.
I NAME THEM ROWAN AND HAZEL.
THEY HAVE YOUR EYES.
WE KEEP TO OURSELVES. SOMETIMES RUMORS REACH US. SOMETIMES WE INTERVENE.
THEN OUR TROUBLES BEGIN ANEW.


SOON, THEY ARRIVE.
THE SICK.
THE ONES WHO LUST FOR POWER.
THE ONES WHO SEEK NEW GODS.
THE ONES FULL OF FEAR AND HATE.
THEY ALWAYS FIND US.


I TRY TO TEACH MY CHILDREN TO USE THEIR POWERS RESPONSIBLY.
ROWAN! HAZEL!
TEEHEE HEE!
I HOPE MY WORDS TAKE ROOT IN THEM.


I WILL NOT BE HERE TO REPEAT THEM.
THE CHILDREN OF THE JOTUN USUALLY BECOME VERY OLD; I WON'T.
FOR MANY YEARS I HAVE KNOWN THIS IN MY HEART.


NOW MY BODY BEGINS TO REVEAL MY SECRET.


I HIDE IT FROM EVERYONE.
MY FRIENDS AND LOVERS.
MY CHILDREN.
THIS IS A SICKNESS THEY CAN NOT CURE.
PERHAPS MY DEATH WILL BE PAINFUL AND SLOW.
PERHAPS I'LL TURN TO ASH IN AN INSTANT.
IT'S BETTER FOR THEM TO REMEMBER THAT I WENT HUNTING ONE MORNING.


JOTUNHEIM HOLDS MANY DANGERS.
I MUST NOT LOOK BACK.
I CHOOSE ROADS THAT VEIDAR SHOWED ME. I COVER MY TRACKS.
A WHOOPER SWAN STOOD IN THE SWELL, AND THE SWAN SPOKE THUS TO ME...
SIXTEEN WINTERS HAVE PASSED SINCE I CAME TO THUNDER MOUNTAIN CARRIED ON THE BACK OF A GIANT.
"SISTER", SHE SAID, "OVER OCEANS I FLY FREE...",
NOW I AM HERE AGAIN.


WEARINESS OVERTAKES ME.
A WEARINESS THAT NO REST CAN CURE.
THIS IS THE PLACE.
THE SUNLIGHT WARMS MY BODY.
AND I DO SOMETHING THAT I HAVEN'T DONE SINCE I WAS TIED TO THE MAST ON PRINCE EIDYR'S SHIP.
I PRAY.


I THOUGHT YOU NEVER WANTED TO SEE ME AGAIN.
I MIGHT CHANGE MY MIND IF YOU DON'T BEHAVE.
I PROMISE TO MIND MY MANNERS.
YOU KNOW I CAN'T...
NO ONE CAN.
NO. NOT EVEN VANADIS.
THE POISON HASN'T CORRUPTED YOU.
PERHAPS IT'S JUST TAKING ITS TIME.
I GUESS I SHOULD HATE YOU.


SO MANY PEOPLE ALREADY DO.
AND NOW YOU'RE TRYING TO MEND WHAT YOU BROKE.
THANKLESS WORK, AND NOT EXACTLY MY STRONG SUIT.
I CAN IMAGINE.
HONEY AND SPICES.
I'M IN LOKI'S CHAMBERS AGAIN.
THE SOUND OF RAIN. THE SOUND OF FIRE. THE PAIN IS GONE.
YOU DID THAT.
I HOPE YOU DON'T MIND.
NO. SHOW ME EVERYTHING.


I WILL


FAREWELL, LOKI.


YOU FELL IN LOVE WITH ME.
I DIDN'T EXPECT TO.
EVEN YOU CAN BE SURPRISED SOMETIMES.
I HAVE TO TELL...
LOKI... DO YOU KNOW...?
THE CHILDREN. YES. VANADIS SEES MOST THINGS.
I DON'T WANT THEM INVOLVED.
THEY ALREADY ARE. NO ONE CAN PROTECT THEM FROM THEIR DESTINY.
I KNOW.
I'M COLD.
HELP THEM.


I PROMISE.
I'M IN THE SEA AGAIN.
DARKNESS BELOW ME.
THAT'S WHERE I'M GOING.
I'M SINKING.
I'M ON MY WAY.



















Vei is now the undefeated champion of the Meistarileikir. But the brutal gladiator games are far from over, and the constant barrage of death begins to take its toll. As the line between friend and foe becomes harder to distinguish, Vei is forced to question everything she's ever known: What is really worth fighting for? And how much is she prepared to sacrifice?

SARA B. ELFGREN is a best-selling Swedish author, screenwriter, and playwright. *The Circle*, the first part of the Engelsfors trilogy that she cowrote with Mats Strandberg, has been translated into twenty-five languages. Her work has been nominated for the August Prize, the Nordic Council Children and Young People's Literature Award, and the Prix Europa. She won the 2019 White Reindeer Award.

KARL JOHNSSON'S first graphic novel, *Mara från Ulthar (Mara from Ulthar)*, was nominated for an Urhunden Prize, the most prestigious comics award in Sweden. He also illustrates children's books and has worked for many years as a concept and storyboard artist in the film and TV industry.

PRAISE FOR *VEI, VOL. 1*

"*Vei* takes the whole Norse cosmos and turns it on its head and brings it back to life in one stunning masterstroke. You cannot miss it."
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"A mythic tale that feels both faithful to its sources and enthrallingly original. Wonderful stuff!"
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"It is easy to see how *Vei* sparkled a loyal following. Artist-writer Karl Johnsson and coauthor Sara Bergmark Elfgren have brought to life something truly fun and original . . . This is, no doubt, Sword & Sorcery at its best."
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