

•HOW TO BE A•
HERO
LAND of
LOST THINGS

To Steve, whose boat doesn't smell of toenails

C.W.



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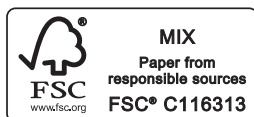
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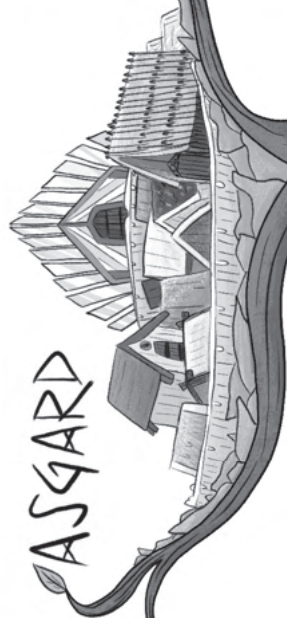


C A T W E L D O N

Illustrated by Katie Kear

MACMILLAN CHILDREN'S BOOKS

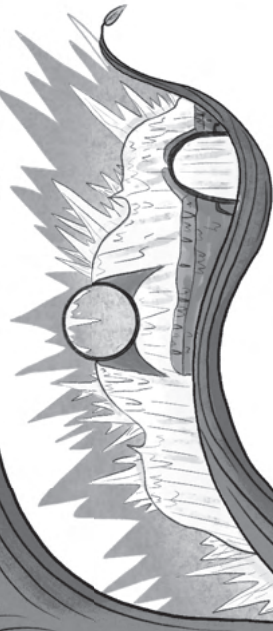
ASGARD



VANAHEIM



JOTUNHEIM



ALFHEIM





MUSPELL

HELHEIM

MIDGARD

SVARTALFHEIM

NIFLHEIM

YGGDRASIL

A Guide to the Nine Worlds

By Blood-Runs-Cold, Leader of the Valkyries

The Nine Worlds

Imagine the biggest tree you can. No, bigger than that.

BIGGER.

BIGGER.

That's Yggdrasil, and it makes your tree look like a bit of wilted broccoli. Nine whole worlds hang from Yggdrasil – *that's* how big it is.

Asgard: Right at the top, because it's the best. Home of the Gods and ruled over by Odin. In Asgard you can find *Valhalla*, Odin's Great Hall, where the greatest warriors come after they've died. There they can fight, feast and drink until *Ragnarok*, the battle at the end of the world. At Ragnarok they will be called upon to fight the Frost Giants for Odin, but until then it's basically party time.

Vanaheim: Home to the Gods who aren't cool enough to be in

Asgard. They're mostly interested in growing stuff; inhabitants of Asgard are more interested in fighting.

Alfheim: Home of the Elves. Yes, they have pointy ears. Yes, they giggle a lot. Mostly harmless, but keep them where you can see them.

Jotunheim: Home of the Giants, including our mortal enemies the Frost Giants. They keep trying to break into Asgard; we keep beating them in battle. Lots of mountains; good for skiing.

Midgard: This is where you can find living humans, living their ordinary lives, with ordinary horses, ordinary farms and ordinary families.

Svartalfheim: Home of the Dwarves. A maze of caves and mines. They love tinkering with gold and making magical gadgets.

Muspell: Land of Fire. Ruled over by Sutr, a Fire Giant. Nice saunas.

Helheim: Home of the Queen of the Dead, Hel. Yes, she named the place after herself. Tells you everything you need to know, really.

Niflheim: Land of the Unworthy Dead. The dragon Nidhogg

lives here and chews on the roots of the world tree. He likes poetry, gold and trampling anyone unlucky enough to be sent there.

Who's Who in Asgard

Odin: The Allfather, the Spear Shaker, the Terrifying One-Eyed Chief of the Gods. The boss.

Frigg: Goddess of Family. Odin's wife. Knows the future, but won't tell anyone.

Loki: The Trickster. Enjoys a 'joke'. Approach with caution. Technically a Fire Giant, but Odin lets him live in Asgard because they're blood brothers.

Thor: God of Thunder. Do not touch his hammer. Seriously.

Freyja: Goddess of Love and Sorcery. Likes cats. *I'm not kidding about the cats. She has cat ornaments, cat jewellery and is usually covered in cat hair. She even has a pair of giant cats for pulling her chariot.*

The Valkyries: Elite female warriors, Valkyries are servants of Odin, Chief of the Gods. They bring the greatest warriors and Heroes to Valhalla on their flying horses. At Ragnarok, the battle at the end of the world, they will lead the Gods and warriors of Valhalla in the final clash against the Frost Giants.

Travel between Worlds

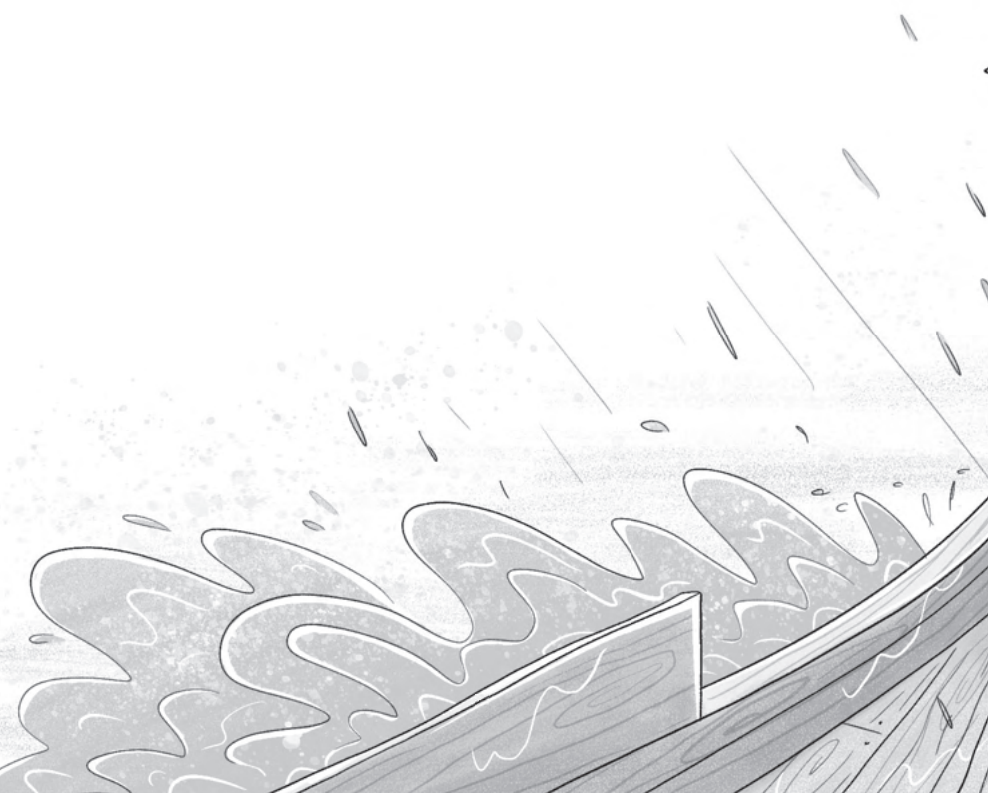
It is possible to travel between worlds by flying or climbing through Yggdrasil's branches. Not easy, but possible. Only the Gods (and Valkyries) have really got the hang of it. The Giants have managed it a few times, more through luck than anything else.

Valkyries and Odin travel by flying horse, Loki has special shoes and Freyja uses a magic cloak. The Bifrost Bridge links Asgard and Midgard. When humans on Midgard see it, they call it a rainbow.

Magic

It's simple: magic can only be created by magical creatures – Dwarves, Elves and, to a certain extent, Giants. All other magic comes from magical objects *made* by magical creatures, usually the Dwarves.

Except for Odin: he learned how to do magic by hanging upside down from Yggdrasil for nine days to discover the secrets of the Runes. Fancy doing that? No? Then no magic for you.



Chapter One

Deadman's Cove

'HEAVE!'

A rope was pressed into Whetstone's hands and he joined the Vikings struggling to drag the longboat to shore. Rain lashed down on the massive hairy men, their boots



slipping on the pebbly beach. Inch by painful inch the boat crawled closer, fighting the wind and tide, which seemed determined to keep it out at sea.

Whetstone's boots slithered on the rocks, nearly sending him tumbling. He gripped on as the rope burned his pale hands. He didn't want to die in Deadman's Cove – it was far too predictable.

'COME ON – PUT YOUR BACKS INTO IT! WE'RE NEARLY THERE!' bellowed Awfulrick, the Viking Chief of Krud, his face red with effort. The waves pounded, mixing sea spray with rain to create a cold, salty soup.

'We'll never make it,' panted Whetstone, scrubbing salt water out of his eyes with his sleeve. 'It's too rough. You'd have to be mad to go out in weather like this.'

Awfulrick shrugged, Vikings weren't generally known for their sensible decision-making.

It was thanks to Whetstone that the longboat had been noticed at all. While mooching along the cliffs, he had spotted it clearly in trouble amongst the foaming waves. Whetstone had been looking for a way to get out of Krud for weeks now, but strange weather had plagued the village. This was the first and only boat he had seen, the powerful wind and raging tides keeping everything else away from the shore.

Out at sea the ship had looked tiny, tossed on the waves like a child's toy. But up close it was *huge* and dangerous. Sleek sides were lined with circular shields, and a carved dragon figurehead snarled from the front.

With the crunch of wood on shingle, the longboat reached the beach. The Vikings onboard jumped off, joining the effort

to pull the boat above the high-water mark. Whetstone's heart thudded in his chest: this boat was going to be his ticket out of Krud. All he had to do was talk his way on to the crew, prove himself useful and . . .

'Get out of the way, weasel,' said Bragi, a young Viking with longish red hair and a biggish nose. He gave Whetstone a shove, knocking him into a rockpool.

'WHETSTONE!' Awfulrick bellowed. 'STOP MESSING ABOUT. GET BACK TO THE VILLAGE AND TELL ETHEL TO GET A STEW ON FOR OUR VISITORS!'

'Fine.' Whetstone pulled a nosey crab out of his tunic and tossed it away. Slimy seaweed clung to his hands; he sneakily wiped them on Bragi's cloak. 'It's not as if fighting with wet wood and getting covered in splinters is my idea of a good time.'

Dodging out of the way as the boat was dragged up the beach, Whetstone started the long trudge towards the cliffs and back to Krud. He would find an opportunity to speak to the longboat crew later, when everyone was dry and in a better mood.

At the top of the cliffs, Whetstone's spine prickled. He turned to look down on the scene below him. The ship was safely on the beach now, the crew hurriedly unloading chests as the rain bucketed down. But in the centre of the action one man stood motionless, watching Whetstone. A man who had the bushiest red beard the boy had ever seen.

Whetstone raised his hand in a wave. People often stared at Whetstone these days. Stories about his adventures had been spreading, and if he was lucky the sailors might have already heard of him – that would make convincing them to let him

join their crew easier. Wind caught what was left of the ragged sail and an image of a sea serpent with gaping jaws billowed. Whetstone shivered and lowered his hand, pulling his cloak in against the biting wind. He was sure he could still feel the eyes of the bearded man on him as he walked away.



Back at the Great Hall, Whetstone was met by great excitement. Fires had been built into infernos, fresh sawdust was spread on the floor and someone had even brought out the *fancy* plates – you know, the ones without the gnaw marks. He nodded pointedly to Ethel and she dropped something scaly into the pot. The smell of fish rolled across the room catching in Whetstone’s throat and making him cough.

The boy slid on to the bench furthest from the cauldron and tipped water out of his far-too-big boots, his mind still on the longboat and the strange, bearded man. The crew would be staying in Krud tonight, and tomorrow he could be on his way to start his quest. He had wasted too much time hanging around already. His stomach churned at the thought of getting on the boat. Whetstone told himself it was excitement, not queasiness. He was sure he wouldn’t get seasick, not this time.

A few minutes later, just as Whetstone had started to dry out, Awfulrick led the visitors into the Great Hall. There were about thirty men, all tired and wet. They dropped on to benches gratefully, puddles soon forming by their feet as rain and seawater dripped off their hair and clothes. The man with

the red beard caught Whetstone's eye and winked.

'LOVELY DAY FOR A SAIL!' bellowed Awfulrick, slamming a cup of mead into the man's hand.

The man nodded, his beard bouncing up and down. 'We had fair winds until we got within sight of Krud. You must've done something to anger Thor.'

Awfulrick laughed. 'IT'S NOT THOR WE HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT.' He peered around the room. 'WHETSTONE! GET UP HERE AND TELL THEM WHAT YOU DID TO THAT DRAGON!'

Whetstone froze midway through wringing water out of his cloak. Awfulrick's magical cup bounced up and down

on the Chief's shoulder like a



demented metal parrot. It squeaked and then began to speak in a voice that sounded like a stuck cutlery drawer:

*Whetstone came to Krud with a feeling
That he just had to go stealing.
He took this fine cup,
But a colossal mix-up,
Left him stranded in Asgard and reeling.*

*A Valkyrie named Lotta was to blame,
But Whetstone thought it a game.
He was in for a shock,
It was a long drop,
To send him home once again.*

The crowd started to elbow each other and mutter. This story was a firm favourite with the Vikings of Krud. A few of them even started mouthing the words along with the cup.

*Whetstone wanted to find Glory and Fame,
To have us all knowing his name.
So with Loki a deal he struck,
To swap their freedom for Awwfulrick's cup,
But the Trickster was playing a game.*

Whetstone felt his heart speed up. He would still wake up in a sweat remembering Loki's dark eyes and twisted smile.

*Lotta agreed to help out with the quest;
She wanted to prove that she was the best.
They climbed down the tree,
But things weren't easy,
And they woke a dragon who wasn't impressed.*

Whetstone swallowed his fears. He flattened his scruffy hair. He had always wanted to be famous – he just thought he would be a famous thief, not a Hero.

*The dragon was looking for food;
A tasty Valkyrie and Viking would do.
But instead the cup was dinner,
Till our Hero played a winner,
Beating the dragon and Loki too!*

The crowd burst into applause. A large hand clamped round the neck of Whetstone's tunic, yanking him out of his memories and also off the bench. Oresmiter, Awfulrick's second-in-command, wheeled the boy to the front of the hall, Whetstone's boots leaving long muddy streaks across the floor.

Awfulrick stood silhouetted in front of the fireplace, the cup gleaming on his shoulder. 'THERE YOU ARE!'

Oresmiter released the boy and the Vikings cheered. The longboat crew eyed him with interest.

'SLAYER OF DRAGONS!'

'Actually, I didn't slay it, and there was only one dragon,' Whetstone began modestly, massaging his throat.

‘SAVIOUR OF THE MAGIC CUP!’

‘Well, yes, I suppose—’

‘DEFEATER OF THIEVES!’

‘I’m not sure that—’

‘FAVOURITE OF THE GODS!’

Whetstone tried not to grin as the Vikings of Krud started to stamp their feet and chant his name: ‘Whet-stone, Whet-stone, WHET-STONE!’

‘Don’t forget that Odin, Chief of the Gods, decided Whetstone was officially a Hero and gave him a mighty quest!’ the cup squeaked over the racket.

Whetstone made a grab for the cup, which jumped on to Awfulrick’s other shoulder.

‘Shut up! You can’t tell *anyone* about that.’ The boy looked around in a panic.

‘The way you got rid of that dragon was brilliant!’ cried a short, round Viking, wiping tears out of his eyes. ‘Best thing to happen in Krud since Bjorn Brown Trousers was bitten on the bottom by a bear!’

The man from the longboat stroked his enormous beard. ‘You sound like the sort of adventurous young man we could use on our crew.’

‘YOU CAN’T HAVE HIM!’ Awfulrick bellowed, squeezing Whetstone’s shoulder in a move that was both comforting and a tiny bit suffocating. ‘HE’S STAYING IN KRUD. HE’S OUR GOOD-LUCK CHARM.’

Whetstone winced.

The cup jumped off Awfulrick’s shoulder and landed

in Whetstone's hands. It peered up at him with ruby eyes. 'Why won't you let me tell them how the adventure ends?' it complained. 'That was the best bit. You, me, Lotta, Odin, the riddle . . .'

Whetstone wiggled away from Awfulrick and wrapped his hands round the cup to muffle its voice. 'Shhh!'

The cup narrowed its eyes. 'But it was amazing! Odin ordered you—'

Whetstone tightened his hands round the cup's mouth, but odd words still escaped:

'Skera Harp—

Dwarves—

Loki—'

Thinking the cup had finished, Whetstone relaxed his hands.

'SAVE THE NINE WORLDS!' the cup squealed loudly.

The Vikings gave a massive cheer. Cups of ale were thrown into the air. The dogs dozing in front of the fire woke up and started barking. Arrows were shot into the rafters, knocking down dust, cobwebs and an unfortunate squirrel.

Whetstone slunk into a corner by the fireplace. 'You have to shut up! I *know* about the quest. I was there, remember? I have to return the cursed harp strings to the Dwarves before Loki finds them. But it's not exactly *easy*, is it?'

'No one ever said being a Hero was easy,' the cup replied tartly. 'Otherwise anyone could do it. Besides, I'm here to help you.'

'Yeah, thanks,' Whetstone grumbled.

‘It’s no use getting stroppy with me.’ The cup pouted. ‘I didn’t steal the Skera Harp and curse your whole family. That was *mostly* Loki.’

‘*I know,*’ Whetstone hissed, squeezing the cup again. ‘And *don’t tell me* that Loki will be back, because I know that too. He’s a shapeshifter, so being eaten by a dragon won’t stop him for long.’

The cup snickered. ‘He’s just got to wait until the dragon poos him out!’

‘Poo!’ yelled a tufty-haired Viking, waving his mug in the air. Whetstone huddled deeper into the shadows.

‘You do remember the riddle I gave you, don’t you?’ the cup asked, oblivious to Whetstone’s discomfort. ‘When I told you your fate?’ The cup took a breath, and recited:

*You will seek to find those who have been pulled apart,
A journey high and deep, into Yggdrasil’s heart.*

Whetstone gritted his teeth. The cup could tell the fortune of anyone who held it, and that was the reason Loki made Whetstone take it in the first place. It had told Whetstone that his fate was to reunite his family, but Loki knew that by finding his parents Whetstone would also reveal the location of the cursed harp strings, and Loki wanted the harp strings more than anything . . .

*One you will find below, in an ice-locked land,
Still living but alone, for Hel holds him in her hand.*

‘That’s enough,’ Whetstone gave the cup a little shake. ‘I remember. It’s not exactly something you forget.’

The cup fell silent. Whetstone unpeeled his hands. He had been holding it so tightly the pattern from the cup’s sides was imprinted on his palms.

‘I don’t know why you’ve been hanging around here,’ the cup complained. ‘The sooner you start looking, the sooner I can make up more fantastic poems about your valiant quest!’

‘I’ve been busy planning stuff! The Nine Worlds are depending on me – it’s a lot of pressure.’ Whetstone sighed, his shoulders slumping. ‘And I’ve been waiting for Lotta. She promised to come back and help me, but I haven’t heard from her in weeks.’

‘Of course not,’ the cup replied. ‘She’s busy with Valkyrie business. You need to get on with things on your own. Have you figured out where the first harp string is yet?’

‘It must be in Helheim – that’s where Hel lives,’ Whetstone muttered. ‘But how do I get there? I can’t even get out of Krud.’

‘Not with that attitude,’ the cup replied primly. ‘Helheim is the Land of Lost Things. So you should, you know . . . get lost!’ The cup jumped on to a nearby table and vanished among the Vikings.

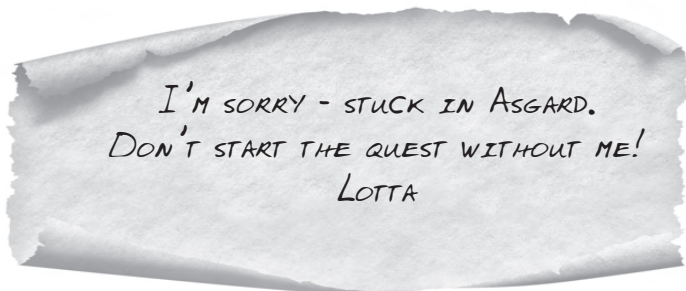
Needing some fresh air, Whetstone sidled to the door of the Great Hall and slipped out. Dark clouds hung above him, filling the sky with the promise of yet more rain. Whetstone pushed his hood down, enjoying the novel sensation of being outside and dry at the same time.

His feet unthinkingly followed the familiar path towards

the field outside the village. He made this journey at least once a day, visiting a boy-sized boulder, which was all that was left of Loki's son, Vali. Loki had transformed him into a rock when Vali finally defied him. Although Whetstone and Vali had never been friends, Whetstone found it reassuring to visit what was left of him. It helped remind him that his adventures weren't some sort of mad dream.

Whetstone stuck his hands in his pockets, fingers feeling for the crumpled *Guide to the Nine Worlds*. It was the last thing Lotta had given him before returning to Asgard. Lotta had got in a lot of trouble for accidentally bringing Whetstone to the world of the Gods instead of a dead Hero like she was supposed to. It was only when Whetstone had proved his worth by getting rid of the dragon that she was able to continue with her Valkyrie training.

Whetstone pulled the tattered pages out of his pocket. Another fragment of paper was stuck to the front cover.



I'M SORRY - STUCK IN ASGARD.
DON'T START THE QUEST WITHOUT ME!
LOTTA

Lotta had sent him that note three weeks earlier. Since then, there had been nothing. *Don't start the quest without me*. It was all very well Lotta saying that, but he was the one left kicking his heels in Krud, waiting for her to show up. He couldn't

exactly march up to Asgard and find her himself. He smiled, imagining the scene.

‘Excuse me, Odin, Chief of the Gods, Spear Shaker, One-Eyed Thunderer, is Lotta the Valkyrie in? I need to talk to her.’ Whetstone sniggered, picturing the God’s expression.

Whetstone rounded the bend, following the path of churned mud to Vali’s boulder. Sometimes when the light was right, you could almost see a face in the rock. Lotta had said that Vali had been transformed into a Troll, not just an ordinary boulder, and when the sun went down he would revert to his usual, horrible self and should be able to move. Except he hadn’t moved an inch so far, so maybe he was just a boulder, after all.

Whetstone glanced up, expecting to see the familiar shape outlined against the horizon.

His feet stopped. His knees locked.

The boulder was gone.

Whetstone spun on the spot, his heart hammering. He was definitely in the right place – there was even a patch of dead grass where the boulder had stood. Vali had gone, but something had been left behind in his place, burned into the grass in tall black letters.

He’S ComING