



## **Northern cosmology and a really big tree...**

The cosmos of Northern mythology is divided into nine worlds that are connected by a huge tree – The world tree called Yggdrasil, the cosmic axis. Yggdrasil's branches and meandering roots connect the nine worlds from Asgard – roughly the Viking concept of heaven – to Helheim the underworld where the souls of the peacefully departed dwell. These nine worlds are the homes of mankind, deities, dwarves, elves, giants and many even stranger creatures.

An eagle rests at the very top of Yggdrasil with a hawk sitting between its eyes. Four stags eat leaves from the tree.

Sun and moon circle around Yggdrasil's top, each one being chased by a wolf. When Ragnarok the end of time comes, these wolves will finally catch and devour sun and moon.

The huge Midgard serpent Jormungand encircles Midgard, the realm of humans.

Another huge serpent Nidhogg injects poison into the roots of Yggdrasil while she gnaws at the roots at the same time.

And then there is Ratatosk, a squirrel who trades insults between the eagle and the Nidhogg serpent.

Strange beings indeed and I will have the pleasure to introduce you to them one by one if you are inclined to read the tales that will follow this one. Fair warning: if you know Nordic mythology only from the Marvel movies you are in for a few surprises. But you might just like them...

## **Strange places too...**

**Asgard:** home of a tribe of deities known as the Aesir (male) or Aesir (female) where Valhalla the golden hall of Odin's warriors is located. The rainbow bridge Bifrost connects Asgard to...

**Midgard:** the world of humans. Encircled by the Midgard serpent who holds the waters of Midgard together this is the mythological earth, the spiritual counterpart to our physical reality

**Alfheim:** the place where the elves live, a place of sunlight and beauty but also a place of trickery and fools gold if you don't know the place and don't have a guide

**Svartalfheim:** "Dark Elves Home" is where the dwarves – artisans and craftsmen who have no equal. Even gods and goddesses commission work from them. According to the Voeluspa - The Prophecy of the Seeress – another golden hall named Nidavellir or Nidawellir.

**Joetunheim:** Land of the giants, wild, untamed and dangerous like its inhabitants and equally full of strength and unfettered power. That can be used for good or evil. It is an amazing place even if you are not a God of War from a popular computer game.

**Muspelheim:** Land of fire, home of the fire giants, when Ragnarok comes King Surt of Muspelheim will march against Asgard to set the place aflame. At least that is how it is foretold. But not all destiny is carved in stone.

**Niflheim:** in many ways the mirror image of Muspelheim, this is the realm of ice, snow, fog and cold, the home of the frost giants. They are cousins of the other giants of Joetunheim and Muspelheim, equally dangerous and powerful.

**Helheim:** This is where the souls of those go who die a peaceful not-so-glorious death in bed rather than in boots. Often depicted as a hopeless place the queen of Helheim Hel or Hela holds surprising compassion for those in her realm.

**Vanaheim:** Situated west of Asgard, Vanaheim is the home of another tribe of deities known as the Vanir. They are gods and goddesses of the earth rather than of the skies like the Aesir. For a long time Vanir and Aesir were at war with each other but finally reached a truce and made peace.