



BROTHER WAR

A Modern Myth for Those of
European Descent

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OVERTURE THE WOE-MINDED

It began with a contest. But a contest must have players, so perhaps it would be better to say that it began with them. That there are forces at work in the universe beyond our understanding is something only fools would deny. Few who admit it, however, would guess that these forces have wills and intentions of their own. But such was the understanding of our ancestors, and I would suggest to you, dear reader, that our ancestors were more familiar with nature than we are.

They spoke of a race, much older than our own, that tends to the fertility of the earth and its beauty. Our ancestors saw that there was an order in the world, a pattern and a design, that could not be explained otherwise. They had many such words for the creatures behind this, but the peoples of the North called them Elves.

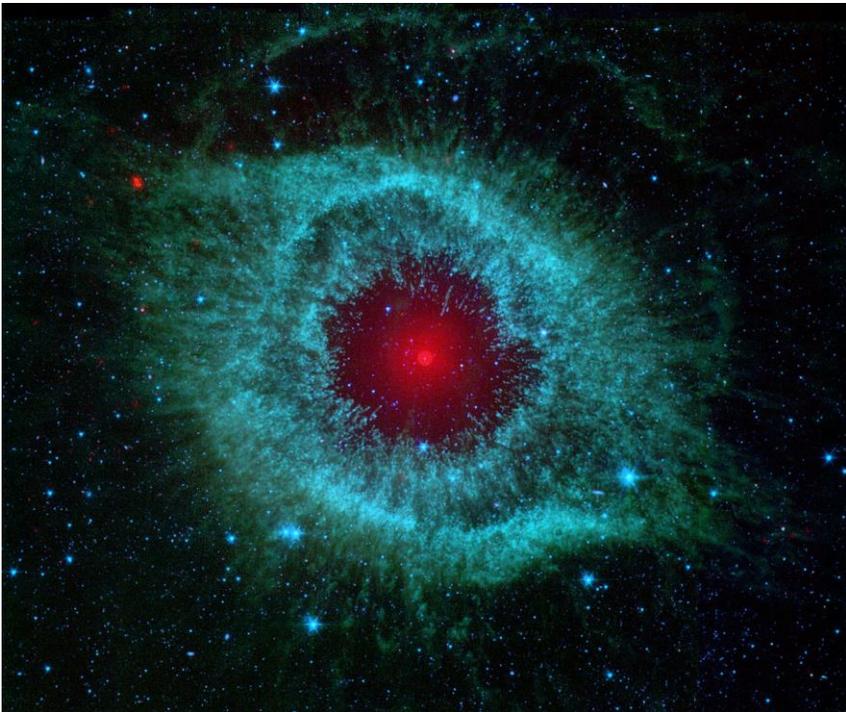
Most of the Elves, they maintained, delighted in working in that which grows and generates, in leaf and flower, branch and bud. But some preferred to work in stone and metal, and the basic elements out of which nature is formed. Down they dug, further each day, until one day, they no longer returned. Carving their realm out of the very bones of the earth, over time they became a race apart, the Dark Elves or Dwarves. From all that gleams they made wondrous objects of beauty and might: adornments that would complement the most

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beautiful woman, and weapons that would faithfully serve the strongest man. A few of these fell into the hands of mortal men, and none failed to astonish and stupefy the most skilled of craftsmen. Some have changed the course of history.

Nature, however, whether animate or inanimate, is not the passive thing we men of latter days like to think it is. Sometimes it bites back. Every embodiment of matter and energy has a dynamic quality that the ancient ones deemed to be self-aware. Every mountain and meadow, every tree and breeze, every fire and flowing stream, even the void of space itself, is the manifestation of a consciousness so alien, so primordial, that we shrink to admit the idea. But our ancestors had the courage to admit that the oldest form of life was nothing we might even be able to comprehend.

Giants, they called such. Whereas other creatures might seek to direct nature for their own ends, Giants *are* these natural forces. There was, and is, nothing inherently good or evil about them. Some



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possess great beauty – a river flowing between green fields, a gentle snowfall. Men and women of our own race have often felt a kinship, even a love, for such things, and have even imagined them taking a form like our own whom we could speak to and or ask questions of, since these beings possess great wisdom.

But there is another side to nature, a different clan of Giants as our ancestors would have it, for Giants, like all creatures, have families and lineages. *Jötnar*, or the *Devourers*, these were called: nature let loose, tearing at itself from within. These included the wild forces of sea and storm, the fire and the flood, the earth's quake and the hurricane, the biting blizzard and the dreadful drought. The word Giant makes one think of things titanic and awe-inspiring, but they could come in smaller guises, as well: the cruel advance of disease, the deformed cell that divides and multiplies. They are the running down of the world, the rot and the decay, the unraveling.

All that lives shares in Giant-nature, since it underlies the primal forces of the universe and courses through all the matter and energy within it. We can choose to rise above it, however, for matter and energy do not exhaust all that exists in this world, nor is this world the only one that exists. Our ancestors spoke of a world for the Elves, and one for the Dwarves, as well as realms of Frost and Fire where these Giants ruled supreme.

Our own, they said, was a kind of middle world, a battlefield amidst which an even stranger race wandered. This race – the sons of Arius as the Elves called them, the sons of the Shining One – was forged in ages of ice, when the Frost Giants nearly consumed the Earth. The features of these men and women were carved as surely as the landscape around them. Their skin was fair, to aid survival in the Sun-deprived North, and their eyes and hair showed a stunning range of colors, even within the same family. Like the Elves, they delighted in the works of nature; like the Dwarves, they were born craftsmen. They, too, had a Giant-nature that must be tamed if man is to be master of himself. There was a wildness about them, the sons of Arius, as if some of the first forces in the universe had kept

themselves hidden for just this moment.

The sons of Arius were not the only race upon two legs to walk the earth, and their own questing nature brought them into contact with these others. Occasionally, these encounters were friendly, but more often, they ended in violence. But far more destructive than any war were the compromises that ended in a mixing, a blending that obliterated the unique characteristics of either side. It was as if one person were to maintain that clear water was the most beautiful of substances, while another held it to be the rich soil of earth, and they were to decide the matter by mixing both and producing mud.

Facing such challenges, one would think that the sons of Arius would not seek out reasons to fight one another. Yet it was so, and no reason was more deadly than the idea that they must all be alike. While the rest of the world has its diversity, nowhere will you find as much variation as within our own race. And truly, what we see now is but a faded memory of the variety that once flourished before the fascination with uniformity began.

The thirst for objects of beauty, you see, degenerated into a greed for efficiency, which makes cheapness an idol. The tool, once servant, became machine and then master. The love of craftsmanship, which once rendered the everyday object into a thing of beauty, has become stunted and thwarted, diverted into the dark pursuit of bringing about the death of millions. Our fathers were rich in weapons, but rich, too, in valor. We have exchanged their spears, which took strength and skill to heft, for buttons that a coward can push in order to end, in an instant, millions of lives nobler than his.

One day, the sons of Arius will awaken from their stupor to find that the machine, far from augmenting their power, has made weaklings of them, ripe for conquest and slavery. Nature is beautiful but not kind, and she does not favor those who ignore her truths. Awful is the reckoning when it comes, and all the more terrible for its delay. One can easily see how our ancestors ascribed to those truths a mind and a will of their own.

But it was not the love of uniformity or the greed for efficiency



that compelled the Elves and Dwarves to engage in a contest of craftsmanship. No, it was pride in what is well-wrought, the glory of the unsurpassed deed, that led to a challenge that nearly rent the universe apart.

On one side stood the sons of Ivaldi, an Elf-clan of great might and skill, and foremost among them, the smith Anund. Weighed in the balance against them were Dwarf-smiths and warriors of great renown, the sons of Mim, and none more expert than Sindri.

It was Anund's nature, like the Light Elves of his kind, to fashion objects through his command of what is already animate. Everything that grows, you see, follows a pattern, but it is given to Elves to change that pattern. Anund had mastered this to such a degree that he could do things that even other Elves found unaccountable. Thus, he could fashion a spear so that it would always crave its target, no matter how poorly it was thrown.

Sindri, being a Dwarf, worked in that which does not grow, in stone and metal. None of his brethren, as skilled as they were, could claim the perfection to which he had brought his craft, bending the

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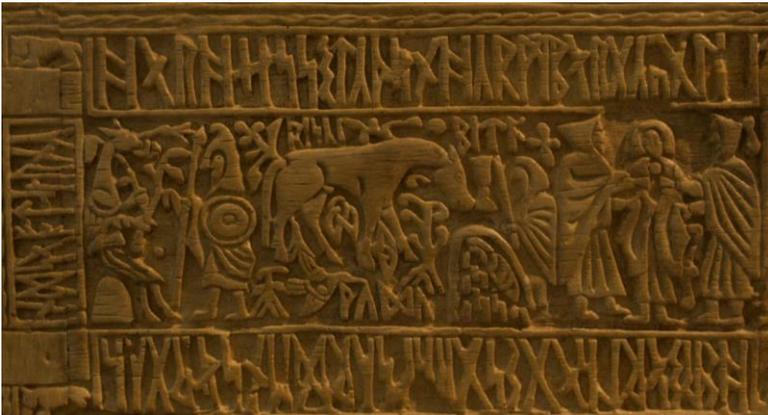
very laws of nature to serve his purpose. Thus, he forged a golden ring which, each ninth night, would drip eight rings of its same size.

Such was the pitch to which these two had brought the smith's craft that each appeared to be approaching the mastery of the other's skill. The creations of Anund, though vegetative in nature, began to look like artfully designed machines. Sindri's work, even when mechanical in operation, took on the aspect of nature. Some say this is because Anund had once studied under Sindri as an apprentice, and each had learned from the other.



Who it was that convened this contest, I do not know. But if he had any notion of Anund's pride, his purpose could only have been to sow discord.

The Elf devised a ship capable of voyaging between worlds on currents of water or air alike. It could carry a mighty host, yet be folded inside itself until it fit in the palm of the hand. Sindri, for his part, fashioned a mechanical boar, capable of moving on its own, needing no direction. From its golden bristles shot out rays of light that would quicken the life in all that grows.



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Judging between two such creations was no easy task, and the Dwarves and Elves chosen to do so were not in an enviable position. The Dwarves, evidently holding Sindri's craft to be the better, withdrew themselves from the judgment. This left the matter to the Elves, but these, instead of siding with their kinsman, after much deliberation awarded Sindri the victory.

How this rankled in the heart of Anund! Every kind word of Sindri's, called to mind now from years of work in the Dwarf's smithy, sounded condescending to the Elf. But he reserved the greatest hatred for those of his own race, and in this, his brothers stood by him. They felt that a great injustice had been done merely to please the Dwarves.

There are hints of a shadowy figure behind all of this, of dark thoughts planted, like tiny seeds, before the contest. When the judges conferred, some say there were whispers, born by the wind, that only a few could hear. What Anund heard no one knows, but it must have stoked a great fire in his heart.

Those present hoped the incident would pass, but their hope was misplaced. The sons of Ivaldi returned to their father, who felt that the clan had been taken for granted. For ages, you see, they had kept watch from their fortress along the ice-cold waters of the river Elivágar, which borders the world of Frost and the Devourers who make their abode there. The Ivaldi clan had been entrusted with keeping these forces at bay, within their natural bounds, for these Elves were great warriors. There was Ivaldi himself, a chieftain terrible to behold in his wrath, and his son Orvandil, the best of archers. Irung, another son, was skilled with spear and sword, and then there was Anund, the smith whose weapons never failed, and himself no mean warrior.

Now, however, they made ready to leave their ancient halls. Emptying their treasure chambers, they secured their weapons and jewelry in deep caverns and riverbeds across the worlds. Those treasures which lie in our own are there still, save for those which heroes claimed, wresting some prize from the monstrous guardian set

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to watch over it.

The Frost Giants were only too pleased to hear of the defection of the Ivaldi clan. They could now move without hindrance, as the border was now unguarded. Their terrible onslaught brought about an ice age in our world, and ultimately led to the forging of our race. But that story I have told elsewhere. Some say that our race itself is a weapon, fashioned to serve in this cosmic war, for the forces of chaos threaten to destroy all order, and in defending it our race has a role to play.

Other Elves were dispatched to shore up the defenses at the Elivágar, but alas, in the confusion of the fight, as the sons of Ivaldi were departing, their father was hit by an Elf-shot arrow. The arrow disintegrated at once, and thus there were no marks by which one might discern who made it. For this reason, men and beasts who are felled by invisible arrows are said to be “Elf-shot.”

Seeing their father fall, the sons of Ivaldi were in a rage, and none more than the one responsible for this situation, Anund. “I shall not rest,” he vowed, “until I have destroyed the order which Elves have made.” The brothers then crossed the Elivágar into the enemy’s camp, and with them the host of their retainers, as the Ivaldi clan was well-manned for its mission. There, in a world of ice, Anund built a forge that would bring many tears.

The Golden Age then passed, and the Long Retreat began. So formidable were Orvandil and Irung in the fight, and so terrifying were the weapons that Anund devised for them, that even the seven sons of Mim had to retreat before their awesome power. Thus the cataclysm deepened, for Sindri and the other sons of Mim had long kept watch along the river of fire that borders the Dwarves’ world and that of the Fire Giants, the Logandafljót. Forced back, the Dwarves found themselves fighting a steady retreat. The sons of Mim, bleeding from many wounds and close to death, found refuge in a deep cavern in our world. Pricked by sleep-thorns and seated on their thrones, there those seven dwarves await the final battle. And thus the Dwarves lost Sindri, for a time at least.

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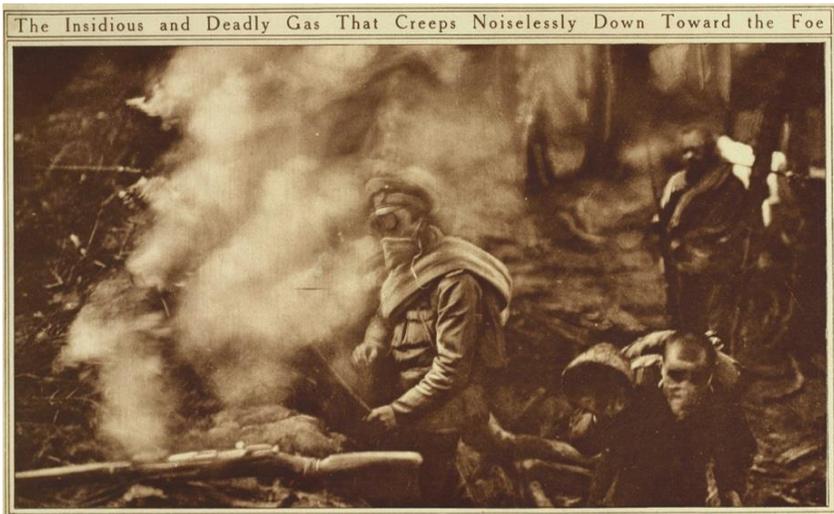
Anund now set out to forge a weapon more dreadful than any he had made: the Sword of Vengeance. Thenceforth, he was called Volund, or the Woe-Minded. Even the hammering of that sword has caused our world to tremble, setting off earthquakes and volcanoes.

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*In the fires of his fury he forged it,
Hating, he hammered it, shaped it,
In cold contempt he cooled it,
In wrath unquenchable, he quenched it.*

*The edge he ground, the hilt he bound,
Tempering the sword, but not himself.
None but Volund could know the woe
the Sword of Vengeance would bring.*

With patience more than mortal man can fathom, for millennia Volund worked at the sword. Reaching the end, he felt one thing was lacking, yet knew not what it might be. But when the sons of Arius began the mutual slaughter known as the Great War, the clamor attracted Volund, and he ventured into our world, to the Western Front. In the searing heat of flame throwers he placed the sword, then quenched it in the deadly waters infused with poison gas. Thus, the Dwarves call that sword Trench-Born.



They say that to no one, not even his brothers, did Volund open up the deepest recesses of his heart, except to his beloved bride, the

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Elf-maiden Swan White. She had always had considerable power over flora and fauna, and much devastation could she cause when her husband was threatened. Men remember these periods as terrible famines and plagues, while the Elves call her Scathe. Volund and Swan White had a son, whom the Elves call Odd, because they thought it strange that amidst so deep a hatred a love should spring up between the Elf-smith and his lady. But I do not find it odd at all.



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To aid him in his work, which required materials from far and wide, Volund had fashioned wings for himself. These he constructed so that the slightest movement would propel him through the air, to soar high above and to dive down at frightful speeds. From a distance, he appeared as a giant eagle, but those unfortunate enough to find out otherwise soon fell before his dreadful blade.

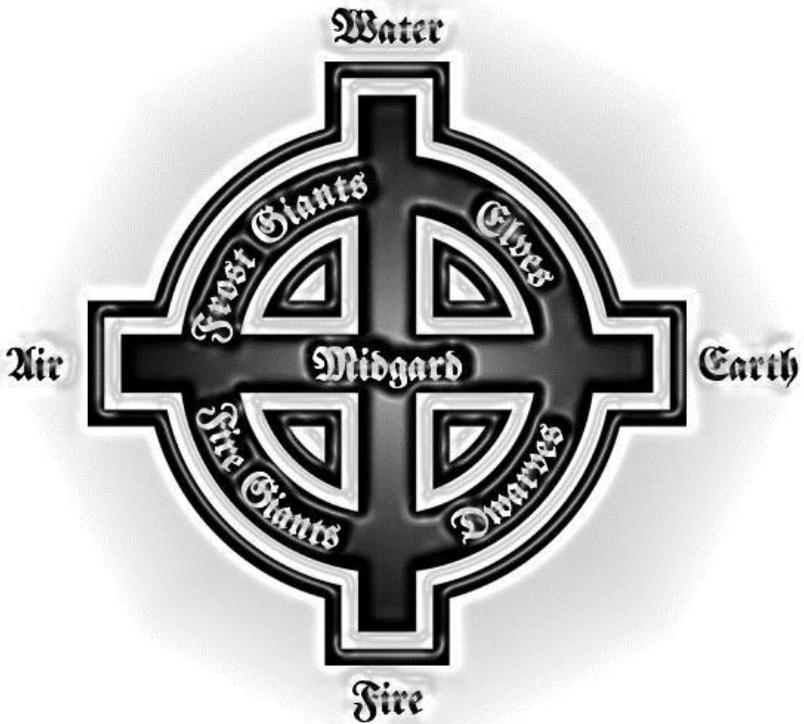
And thus a war began that shook all the worlds, for neither Elf nor Dwarf could stand before him and live, and the Devourers had been roused by his brothers, Orvandil and Irung. Seeing their ancient foes fall before the Elf-smith and his fearsome sword, these forces gained a confidence and daring they had not displayed in ages.

And thus Volund had his revenge, as those who once judged him trembled at his approach, and far away, war rent the world of men. Our world, you see, is not only a part of this cosmic war, but the most contested piece of ground in it. It lies at the axis of these four realms, with gates leading to each. Through one, made of Earth, the Dwarves and Elves pass freely into our world, as they have since the beginning. Two other gates, one of fire and one of water, I have already spoken of, as the Dwarves and Elves man these gates for their own defense as much as ours. But these positions are imperiled.

The fourth gate, which opens into our world through the very air, the atmosphere, that allows us to live, that is our own to defend, and our own to lose. It was not always thus.

Long ago, the sons of Arius stood shoulder to shoulder with the Dwarves and Elves, but now we are on our own, for two reasons. Hard-pressed elsewhere by the Devourers, our allies have had to retreat from our world – most of them, but certainly not all. Yet it can also be said that we have turned our backs on them, disregarding anything that is ancient or numinous. We have made a soulless world, one in which we see the gates, but not what they might lead to, four phases of matter that bind us as tightly as any chain. Our imagination has become cramped and cribbed, our memory short, our will enfeebled.

It is our virtues, above all, that kept the forces of chaos at bay,



but we have abandoned each of these, like a soldier overburdened by his armor. So now we stand, weaponless and exposed, to the full fury of the forces we have helped unleash. Having unbound the savage wolf, we succumb to the savagery of a Wolf Age. No depravity is now too hideous for men to embrace, no deed so base that they do not plot how they may do it. And as virtue disappears, the natural order of the universe breaks down, since it depends on the character of those within it.

Four worlds, and between them a fifth, and over them all Volund flew like an avenging spirit. The Dwarves groaned by the doors of stone, and the Elves wept by the fouled stream. Only with a weapon as mighty as the Sword of Vengeance could they hope to counter Volund, but they despaired of this. The smith had risted runes of power upon the sword, such that nothing fashioned by Elf

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or Dwarf could prevail against it.

But there is a third race, one fallen but still noble. Perhaps Volund should not have held it in such contempt.

