

The Games At Utgard



A gust of cold wind and a flurry of snow burst through the door as the old man entered the cabin. Almost as soon as he had closed the door behind him he was surrounded by three jumping shouting children.

"Grandpa Olaf! Grandpa Olaf!" They shouted.

He closed the door behind him, removed his bearskin coat, hugged the younger two grandchildren, and playfully punched the seven year old in the arm.

Grandpa Olaf nodded to his daughter-in-law across the room, and proceeded directly to the chair in front of the fireplace where he sat down. The three children crowded around him, talking all at once.

"Daddy is away plundering England!" said Erik.

"Look! I made a sword!" said Ragnar as he brandished a mildly sharp stick.

"Tell us a story, Grandpa Olaf!" Said little Nora.

The old man smiled. "One at a time. I can't listen to all of you at once." He looked to Erik.

"Daddy went viking last month! He's going to sack the British! He's going to burn their villages and take their gold!" Erik exclaimed as he pantomimed smashing a noble with axe and taking his purse.

Grandpa Olaf ruffled his fingers through his oldest grandson's hair, and said "That's right. And when you are older, you'll be right there with him, following in his footsteps." A tear welled up in the corner of Olaf's eye. "I remember the first time I took my son viking. He took out three Gauls in his very first raid. You should be very proud of your daddy. He is a true Norseman! Now. What did you have to say, Ragnar?"

Ragnar waved around his sharp stick. "I made a sword! I made a sword!" He shouted.

"And a fine sword it is!" Said Grandpa Olaf. "Worthy of Freyr!" He removed

his horned helmet, and placed it on Ragnar's head. "There. Now you look like a warrior."

"Tell us a story!" repeated Nora.

The boys chimed in, "Yes! tell us a story, Grandpa Olaf!"

"Why certainly!" said the old man. "Hmmm... What story should I tell you... Have I ever told you about Odin's eye?"

"Yes!"

"Have I ever told you about the death of Balder?"

"Yes!"

"What about Ratatosk, the squirrel who carries bad news up and down the world tree?"

"Yes!"

"Hmmm... I know! I know a story I have never told you! A story every Norse child should hear. A story about Thor."

Olaf shifted his frame to a more comfortable position in the chair, and began his story.

"Thor was the strongest of all the gods. He was so strong, that when he would swing his mighty hammer, Mjollnir, that never misses and always kills, he could crush small mountains in a single blow. And not only that, he had a magical belt that would double his strength! Double it! But despite all that power, when he would go on adventures, he liked to bring friends with him. One time, Thor was traveling through Midgard just for the fun of it. With him were three companions. His brother Vidar; who was almost as strong as him, but mute, The mischievous god Loki; who wasn't up to anything evil at the time, and had decided to tag along, and also a mortal human named Sven.

"Tell me again Thor, where exactly is it that we are going?" asked Loki as he trotted along behind his companions.

Thor turned around to face Loki and walked backwards as he spoke. "We are on an adventure!" He joyfully shouted in his booming voice. "We will explore the mysteries of Midgard for the glory of Valhalla!"

Loki snorted. "Yes, yes. You have already told me that several times. What I want to know is where specifically we are going."

A confused look crossed Thor's face. "Where specifically? Umm.. I hadn't thought about it..."

Loki smiled darkly.

"...But it will be great when we get there!" Thor continued, the confused look vanishing from his face

"What exactly do we plan to do that will be so great when we get wherever it

is we are going?" Asked Loki.

Thor knew the answer to this question. "We will do heroic legendary things! We will move mountains, slay giants, stop rivers, and smite twisted evildoers of every kind!"

Loki stopped in his tracks, and clenched his fists. His eyes turned blood red, and smoke leaked from his ears and nostrils as he stared angrily at Thor. Vidar and Sven stopped walking.

"Thor!" Whispered Sven the mortal. "Loki's mother is a giant, and all of his children are twisted evildoers!"

Thor stopped and thought for a moment. "...Well, naturally we won't be slaying or smiting any immediate family members..."

Loki's eyes reverted to their normal black, and he shrugged. "Oh. Well, in that case it's fine with me. Lets get moving."

Just as the party was about to continue on their journey, Vidar began gesturing wildly, and pointing upwards.

"What is it, bro?" said Thor. "Are you trying to dance?"

Vidar shook his head.

"Are you being attacked by invisible bees?" asked Loki.

Vidar shook his head again and continued gesturing to the sky.

"Is a flying fortress hovering above us?" asked Sven.

Vidar nodded violently. All eyes instantly turned upward to see a huge stone castle soaring through the air.

"That is where specifically we are going!" Shouted Thor with glee.

"How?" asked Loki, "It's flying. We can't get to it."

"Just watch." Said Thor. He threw back his head and took in an enormous breath, and then shouted in a voice so loud that it shook the ground and scattered the surrounding trees like dry grass. The castle paused for an instant in midair, and then quickly dropped almost to ground level before it stopped. The front gate swung open, and a short, muscular man with pointed ears and a pointed beard walked out and peered down at Thor and his companions.

"Hey you noisy kids! You almost made us crash! Whats the big idea?" He shouted. "I oughta come down there and—"

"Kids!?" Bellowed Thor. "Kids!? I am Thor! I am the son of Odin! I am the strongest of the gods! Do I look like a 'Kids' to you!?"

The man squinted. "Oh. So sorry. You must be a bit farther away than I thought you were at first. Perspective you know."

Thor frowned, slightly mollified.

The man continued. "Son of Odin are you? Well! We don't often meet such important people! Won't you and your friends come in? We will have a feast in your honor!"

"A feast! A feast!" Sven repeated, jumping up and down.

"In my honor? Well! Certainly! We would be glad to come in!" said Thor, now smiling broadly.

The castle lowered to the ground, and the man ushered Thor and his companions inside. The castle then lifted off the ground again, and continued on its flight.

"Welcome to Utgard!" said the man as he led them into the crowded main hall of the castle. Tables were already set up, and servants were bringing out food "My name is Utgard-Loki. I am the king of Utgard. This is my wife, Utgard-Helga,"

A short muscular woman with pointed ears and remarkably long golden hair came up beside Utgard-Loki and smiled at her guests.

Utgard-Loki continued, "and these are my sons, Utgard-Snori, Utgard-Beornkell, and Utgard-Bob."

Three short muscular boys with pointed ears each nodded in turn as their names were called.

Thor was about to speak, but Loki cut him off.

"How come you are named after me?" he growled with suspicion.

Slightly taken aback, Utgard-Loki looked at Loki and said, "I'm not entirely sure who you are..." Then turning to Thor, "Perhaps you should introduce your friends."

"Oh. Um, yes!" Said Thor. "As you know, I am Thor— er... Valhalla-Thor, and this is my brother, Valhalla-Vidar, and this is Jotunheim-Loki, and this is... Wherever-the-Nifelheim-He-Came-From-Sven."

"Most pleased to meet you all." Said Utgard-Loki. "Now, it is time for the feast!"

"Wait." said Ragnar, "I don't get it. How many Lokis are there?"

"Two of them." replied Grandpa Olaf, "Regular Loki, and Utgard-Loki."

"Why do they both have the same name?" asked Nora.

Olaf leaned forward to explain. "They don't. The god of mischief is named Loki, and the king of Utgard is named Utgard-Loki. See? It's easy, Loki, Utgard-Loki, Loki, Utgard-Loki."

Nora nodded.

"Now where was I?" Olaf settled back into his chair. "Ah, yes. The feast was delicious, and when Thor had eaten his fill, he asked Utgard-Loki what the Utgardians had planned for after-dinner entertainment."

"Well, Thor," said Utgard-Loki, "After a feast, we like to play games of skill and strength. Are you gods any good at games? We could compete against you."

Thor laughed. "Are we any good? I happen to be the strongest of the gods! We will be glad to compete against you, if you don't mind losing!"

Utgard-Loki smiled and said "Don't be too sure. I think we Utgardians stand a chance." Utgard-Loki stood, and the the great hall became silent. "Prepare for the games!" he shouted.

Servants quickly removed all of the tables from the room except for one, which they moved to the center.

"The first game," said Utgard-Loki, "is called dessert."

The servants brought out huge trays of food, and piled them on the table. Within a few moments, the table was covered with more food than the whole feast put together.

"For this game, Utgard will be represented by Utgard-Hugi." said Utgard-Loki as he indicated a thin man with bright red hair standing next to him.

Utgard-Hugi bowed, and stepped up to the table.

"And who will represent the gods in this eating contest?" asked Utgard-Loki.

Thor groaned and looked to his companions. He had eaten his fill at the feast. Vidar Shook his head and patted his stomach.

Loki cracked his knuckles and stepped forward. "I'll take care of this little snack." he said.

"On my mark you both start eating," said Utgard-Loki, "the man who eats the most is the winner... Go!"

Loki grabbed at the food with both hands, and began to eat as fast as possible. Utgard-Hugi leapt onto the table with both feet. He ducked down and seemed to inhale the food. Within a matter of seconds, he had cleared the table, leaving Loki with nothing but the leg of mutton he was holding, and an astonished expression on his face.

"Utgardians one, gods nothing." Said Utgard-Loki with a laugh. "Prepare for the race!"

Servants quickly cleared away the table, and the Utgardian onlookers backed up to the walls, leaving the great hall completely clear.

"The race is simple," said Utgard-Loki, "from this wall, to that wall. May the fastest win. Utgard-Thivald will run for Utgard." Utgard-Loki pointed to a wiry man who was already jogging in place to warm up.

Thor turned to Vidar. "This is right up your alley, bro. You have the strongest legs of any god."

Vidar nodded. He ducked down and removed his massive solid bone spiked war-boots, which weighed almost half as much as he did.

Vidar and Utgard-Thivald lined up side by side with their backs against one

wall of the great hall.

Utgard-Loki raised his hand. "Ready... Set... Go!" He dropped his hand, and they were off. Vidar's huge, overdeveloped legs propelled him forward with incredible speed, but by the time he had reached the opposite wall, Utgard-Thivald had traveled back and forth the length of the room half a dozen times.

"Utgardians two, gods none." said Utgard-Loki. "Is this too hard for you? Shall we stop playing games?"

"No." Thor growled. "Let me try one."

"All right. How about wrestling?"

Thor threw his head back and laughed loudly. "Wrestling! Let me at the poor fool! I won't even have to use my belt!" Thor began to unbuckle his belt of double-strength.

"Keep it on," said Utgard-Loki, "you are going to need all the strength you can get if you hope to stand a chance against Elli."

"Don't you mean Utgard-Elli?" Sven pitched in.

"No, Just Elli." said Utgard-Loki.

"Where is this Elli?" asked Thor.

"Right here." Utgard-Loki pointed.

"Where? All I see is a little old woman."

"Yes. This little old woman is Elli."

Thor frowned. "Is this some kind of joke?"

"Take him, Elli." said Utgard-Loki to the old woman.

With a bloodcurdling scream, Elli launched herself forward, and knocked Thor to the ground. With one hand he forced her away, and quickly got back on his feet. She tackled him again, but this time he was ready, their arms locked, and each strained to force the other down.

After several minutes, neither had gained an inch, and Utgard-Loki called out, "All right. Let's call it a tie."

Elli immediately loosed her grip, turned, and walked back into the crowd of Utgardians. Thor sat down on the floor, profoundly embarrassed.

"Don't feel bad, Thor." said Utgard-Loki with a laugh, "Up until now, Elli has killed every man she has fought! Now, It is time for the final, and most difficult game."

A door opened, and a small cat walked into the great hall. The Utgardians quickly stepped aside and let it pass as it proceeded to the center of the room. It looked around for a moment, licked its paw, and then curled up on the floor and fell asleep.

"This game is perhaps the greatest challenge in all of Midgard," said Utgard-Loki, his voice trembling with awe, "Few have dared to try... and none have ever succeeded... in picking up the sleeping cat!"

Thor rolled around on his back laughing. When he finally stopped, he sat up,

looked at Utgard-Loki, and fell down laughing again.

"You think it is easy? Then you have never tried." Utgard-Loki walked up to the cat, grabbed it with both hands, and tried to lift. The cat stretched, and went limp, sliding out of his grasp. "You see? It is impossible."

Thor broke out in another fit of laughter.

"Try it!" said Utgard-Loki, "try it and see!"

Thor finally suppressed his laughter. "Come here, Sven the mortal. I think we have found a quest worthy of your greatness!"

Sven too was laughing. "Sure, I'll do it, Thor. These Utgardians sure are wimps!" he said, choosing for the moment to ignore Elli.

Sven stepped up to the cat, and tried to lift it. It purred, and slipped out of his hands. He then slid both arms under the cat's midsection, causing it to purr luxuriously, and lifted. The cat simply stretched. "What the? Thor, I can't do this. You had better try."

Still chuckling, Thor stood up, and walked over to the cat. "Out of the way, mortal. Let me show you how it's done." Thor took hold of the cat and lifted. The cat stretched. No matter how hard Thor pulled, the sleeping cat's feet remained on the floor. Thor continued to strain, stretching the cat's body high above his head. "What kind of cat is this?" he asked. Thor doubled up the elongated body, and wrapped it around his left arm. With his right arm, he continued to pull, soon covering his shoulders with many long coils of cat. Still, the cat remained fast asleep, all four of its paws planted on the floor. Finally, after several more minutes of stretching, one of the cat's front paws lifted by half an inch. All of the Utgardians gasped and backed away.

"Stop! Stop before you destroy us all!" shouted Utgard-Loki.

Thor hefted the tangle of furry torso off of his shoulders. Instantly, the cat snapped back to its original shape. It purred loudly, and rolled over. "You are far more powerful than I ever thought possible!" said Utgard-Loki. "I think it is time that I explain something to you."

"What do you want to tell me?" panted Thor.

"I have been cheating. All of these games were rigged." Utgard-Loki confessed.

"What!" shouted Thor.

"Let me show you," said Utgard-Loki, "Utgard-Hugi here is not really a person at all! He is fire. That is how he was able to consume so much food so fast."

Utgard-Hugi bowed, and disappeared in a ball of flame. For a moment, all of the candles on the walls flared up, and then died down.

"I told you we couldn't trust this guy!" said Loki.

Utgard-Loki continued. "And Utgard-Thivald is not really a person either. He is my thought, and as we all know, the mind moves quicker than the body. That

is why he was able to outrun Vidar."

Utgard-Thivald closed his eyes, and dissolved into vapor. The vapor whisked across the room at incredible speed, and then disappeared into Utgard-Loki's ear.

Vidar stomped his feet in anger, shaking the room.

"And Elli," said Utgard-Loki, "is death. That is why you couldn't beat her. And because you are an immortal god, she couldn't beat you."

Elli rose into the air, her flesh melting away to reveal a bone-white skeleton. The jaw of the skull worked up and down as if in laughter, and she vanished in a blinding burst of darkness.

"You cheater!" Thor fumed, "What about the cat?"

"The cat is not really a cat at all." Utgard-Loki tapped the cat with his foot, and woke it up.

The cat shook itself, stood up, and Utgard-Loki followed it as it walked out of the main hall to the front entrance of the castle. Thor and his companions followed behind.

The cat stopped at the open gate. The castle was now soaring high above the ocean.

"As I said, this cat is not really a cat at all. It is Jormungander, the Midgard Serpent, who has been disguised as a cat!"

Thor growled, and Loki gasped.

The cat's purr turned into a hiss. A long forked tongue darted out of its mouth, and its fur fell away to display the scales underneath. The cat began to rapidly change shape and grow, becoming a giant snake.

"Son?" said Loki.

Jormungander slid out of the gate, and continued to grow as he fell down towards the ocean. By the time the giant snake hit the water, he was back to his full size: long enough to encircle the world.

"You filthy cheater!" Shouted Thor, reaching for his hammer. "I am going to smite you!"

Utgard-Loki clapped his hands, and suddenly Thor and his companions were standing alone on the shore. The flying city of Utgard was nowhere in sight.

"Where did he go!" Thor screamed, "I'm going to grind him to paste, and all of his little Utgard-friends too!"

Utgard-Loki's voice echoed from the empty sky. "I have hidden my city from you. I'm afraid you are not going to get your revenge... And thank you! You were the best after-dinner entertainment we have ever had!"

Thor roared with rage, and struck the sand with his hammer so hard that he created a lump of glass. "Maybe you got away from me, Utgard-Loki! But I know who I can get revenge on!" Thor turned to the sea and shouted "You hear that Jormungander? I'm coming to get you! No great-big-snake-pretending-to-be-a-

kitten is going to make a fool out of Thor!" Thor stopped short, and glanced over to Loki. "Oh... um.. do you mind if I smite your son?..."

Loki sighed. "Do it with my blessing. When he was born as a snake that could wrap itself around the world, I learned to accept it. When he decided to nibble on the roots of the World-Tree in an attempt to destroy the universe, I learned to accept it. But acting like a cute furry little cat? I can't accept that. It just isn't right! I was never good at discipline. If anybody can punish him, it's you Thor. Go to it."

"Did you ever tell Thor to smite Daddy when he was bad?" asked Erik.

"No, no. Of course not." said grandpa Olaf with a laugh.

"Do you think Daddy will ever tell Thor to smite us?" whispered Nora.

"Don't you worry about that." Said Olaf, as he lifted his granddaughter into his lap. "And do you know how I know? Cause you aren't a gigantic evil sea snake, that's why! Now, Let me finish with my story. I'm almost done. Lets see... Thor left his companions, and set out alone to find Jormungander. As he ran along the shore, he found a giant named Hymir in a rowboat..."

"Hey! Giant!" Shouted Thor, "take me out to sea!"

"Wwwwwhaaaaaat? Aaaaare yyyyyyouuuuuuu Thhhhhhhoooooor?" Drawled the giant in a slow, stupid voice.

"Yes. I need your boat." Thor jumped into the boat, pushed the giant aside and took hold of the oars. "We are going fishing."

"B-b-b-b-buuuuut..." stammered Hymir, "lllll juuusst fffffiiiiishhhhed fffffiishhhhinng. llllll wwwasss oooooonnn mmmmmmy wwwaaaaay hhhooooomme."

By the time Hymir had finished the sentence, Thor had rowed a mile out into the ocean.

"Give me your fishing pole." said Thor.

"uuuummmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm....."

Thor snatched the enormous pole away from the giant, leaned over the edge of the boat, and cast the line straight down with all his strength. The lure traveled quickly to the bottom of the sea.

"...mmmmmmmmmmmmmm... yyyouuuu wwwaaannnt mmmmmmy fffffiiiiisssssshinnnnnnnnngggggg poooooollllllle?" Mumbled the giant.

Thor felt a tug on the line— a powerful tug! He began to reel in.

"sssssuuuuuure yyyyyyyouuuuuu caaaaaaaaannnnn

hhhhhhaaaaavvvvvve iiiiiiiit, Thhhhhoooooorr."

Thor knew he had hooked the Midgard Serpent, no fish could put up such a fight. The sea began to churn as Jormungander tried to escape.

"Oooooohhh! llllll' ssss goooooonnnne! Wwwwwheerrre diiiiiid mmmmyyyy fffiiiiisssshiiinnnng poooooollllle goooooo?"

Finally, Jormungander's head broke the surface. He reared his neck up hundreds of feet into the air, and hissed down at Thor. The writhing of the snake's gargantuan body created tidal waves in every direction.

"Hold this while I get my hammer." said Thor, as he passed the fishing pole to Hymir.

The giant clumsily fumbled at the pole, his eyes riveted on Jormungander. The pole slipped from his hands, and Jormungander's head plunged back underwater just before Thor could aim his hammer.

"You idiot!" Thor shouted, as he bopped Hymir on the head with the hammer. Trembling with rage, Thor peered down into the dark water, trying to see the Serpent. Seeing nothing, Thor threw his hammer anyway. It entered the water with a tremendous splash, and after a few moments, resurfaced and leaped into Thor's waiting hand. Once thrown, Thor's Hammer had never missed its mark, and never failed to kill its target.

Thor waited for Jormungander's dead body to float to the surface. Nothing happened.

"Oooooowwwwwwwww! Mmmmyyyy hhheeeaaaaaaaad!" exclaimed Hymir.

After an hour of waiting, Thor gave up. He jumped out of the boat, and swam to shore.

"And even until this day, Thor searches for Jormungander, still angry over what had happened at Utgard. The End." said grandpa Olaf with satisfaction.

"Wow." said Erik, "How come Thor's hammer missed?"

"We may never know," said Olaf. "Maybe Thor waited too long to throw it. Maybe Odin interfered. Or maybe Thor did kill Jormungander, there was know way he could have known for sure."

"Look grandpa! I'm as strong as Thor!" shouted Ragnar as he carried the family cat across the room.

"Is that story really true?" asked Nora.

Grandpa Olaf was about to answer, when there came a knock on the door. The snow was still falling heavily, and it was now dark outside.

The children's mother put down the fish she was cleaning, and opened the

door.

Framed against the dark night was a huge muscular man with a thick beard. Around his waist was a wide jeweled belt, and in his gloved hands was a hammer almost as big as his body. The snow was piled several inches high on his head and his broad bare shoulders. He cleared his throat.

"Have any of you folks seen a really, really, really big snake?"

Olaf shook his head in stunned silence, and the children whispered in excitement.

The man at the door looked disappointed. "Oh well. thank you anyway." And he was gone.

The contents of this story are words, and as such, they are to be read, and remembered, and above all, shared. These words belong to you who read them, but these words also belong to he who wrote them. Please respect his ownership of them.

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