

PROLOGUE: DAWN OF THE GODS!

Once, there was **NOTHING**...
neither the **EARTH** nor the **SKY ABOVE**,
nor **SUN**, nor **MOON**, nor **LIFE**!

There was
only the
endless
ABYSS.

But, in time, **TWO WORLDS** came to being, on **OPPOSITE SIDES** of the void! One, to the **NORTH**, was named **NIFFLEHEIM** -- a world of **CLOUDS** and **SHADOWS**...



...in whose
CENTER surged
the fountain
HVERGELMIR, from
which flowed
TWELVE RIVERS
OF **ICE**!

On the **OTHER** side of the gulf, to the **SOUTH**, lay the Land of **FIRE**, **AUSPELHEIM**. It, too, teemed with rivers...



...but these were
filled with a
strange **POISON**
which **BURNED** all
it touched and
glowed **CHERRY**
RED in the infinite
dark!

Each land's rivers ran toward the **OTHER'S**, till they met halfway between in **CATAclysmic GRANDEUR**--

--whereupon the northern **ICE COVERED** and **SOLIDIFIED** the southern streams, so that their combined mass partially **FILLED** the abyss... for a **TIME**!

Before **LONG**, the **WARM AIR** blowing in from the south began to **MELT** the all conquering ice...

...and from the half-frozen mixture which **RESULTED**, stepped the first form of **LIFE**--

-- **THE FROST-GIANT, YMIR!**

Ymir was the **FATHER** of **ALL GIANTS**. Later, when he chanced to **SLEEP**, the warm winds melted **HIM** somewhat...

Moreover, as the slumbering ymir **CONTINUED** to melt, a **COW** was conceived, and this was **AUDUMBA** the giants' **WET-NURSE**. From that day forward, all giants quenched their thirst on the four streams of **MILK** which they sucked from her udders...

...while audumba **HERSELF** was content to find sustenance in licking the endless **ICE**. So it was that, in time, she **WORE DOWN** the ice...

...and from his form were born the **FIRST** of his many **CHILDREN!**

...to reveal a **NEW** being, called **BURI**-- the **FIRST** of the **GODS!**

Buri **INTRIGUED** the giants, so they allowed him to **LIVE** -- much to their future **CHAGRIN**. For Buri had a **SON**, named **BOR**, and BOR married one of the giant's **DAUGHTERS**. This union brought to life **THREE SONS** they called the **ASIR**, and whose **GIVEN** names were --



--VE--

--VIII--

--and
ODIN!

Odin grew to **HATE** the giants of his mother's race! when his brothers reached **FULL GROWTH**, he led them in a **WAR** against their ancestors!



The **FIRST** giant they attacked was **YMIR** **HIMSELF** --

--and after fierce struggle, Odin **SLEW** the aged creature!

Ymir **FELL**, and the seas of **BLUE BLOOD** which had filled his mighty frame **COURSED** into the **ABYSS**, drowning all **OTHER** giants --



--or so it was **THOUGHT!**

At the **END**, however, a giant named **BERGELMIR** and his wife found a **SMALL BOAT** bobbing on the stormy waves and **ESCAPED!** The race of giants would **LIVE ON!**

But Odin and his brothers knew **NOTHING** of this, for with **YMIR'S** death, they turned their thoughts from the **DESTRUCTION** OF THE **OLD** to the **CREATION** OF THE **NEW!**

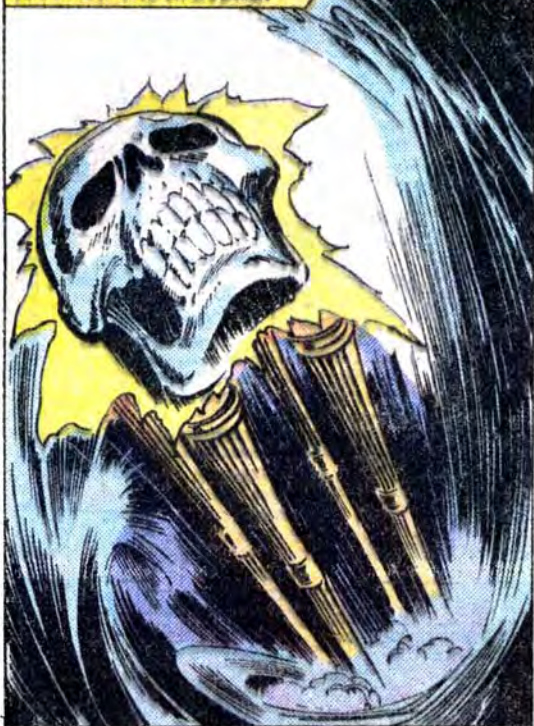


They raised the **frost-giant's** **BODY** from the **SEA**, to form a land they called **MIDGARD** -- the **"MIDDLE ABODE"** between **NIFFLEHEIM** and **MUSPELSHEIM** --

--a land we call the **WORLD!**

From Ymir's **BONES** they **CARRIED** the **MOUNTAINS**, and from his **HAIR**, they **MADE** the **TREES!**

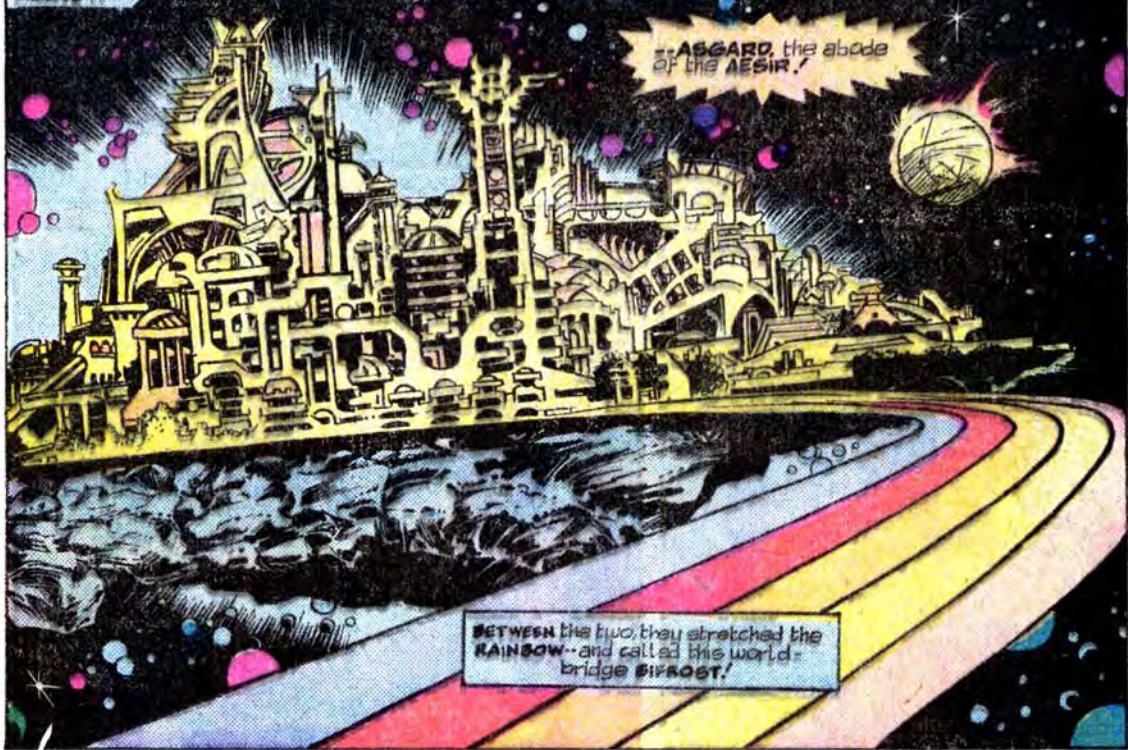
Then, they took his **SKULL**, and placed it atop **FOUR PILLARS** which they raised to the sky, to form the **VAULT OF THE HEAVENS!**



Within that vault, they confined the random **SPARKS** which blew out of **MUSPELSHEIM**--and thus created the **SUN**, the **MOON** and the countless **STARS!**

SONS passed as they **REGULATED** the passage of these heavenly fires to fix the succession of **DAY** and **NIGHT** as well as the length of the **YEAR**...

...and when **MIDGARD** was **COMPLETED** they built **THEMSELVES** a home **ABOVE** IT.



--ASGARD, the abode of the AESIR.

BETWEEN the two, they stretched the **RAINBOW**--and called this world-bridge **SIFROST!**

In time, there came to be **MANY** gods in Asgard, though **NONE** more powerful than mighty **ODIN**, whom they named their **CHIEFTAIN!**



Still, they were not **CONTENT**. They felt **ALONE** in the abyss, and longed for **OTHER BEINGS** like **THEMSELVES...**

...so they assembled in **ODIN'S GREAT HALL** to debate their course of **ACTION!**

Looking down on **MIDGARD**, they saw that **GRUBS** were beginning to form in **Ymir's rotting CORPSE...**

...and these they made **TROLLS**, to dwell, like **GRUBS**, beneath the **STONE** the giant's body had become!



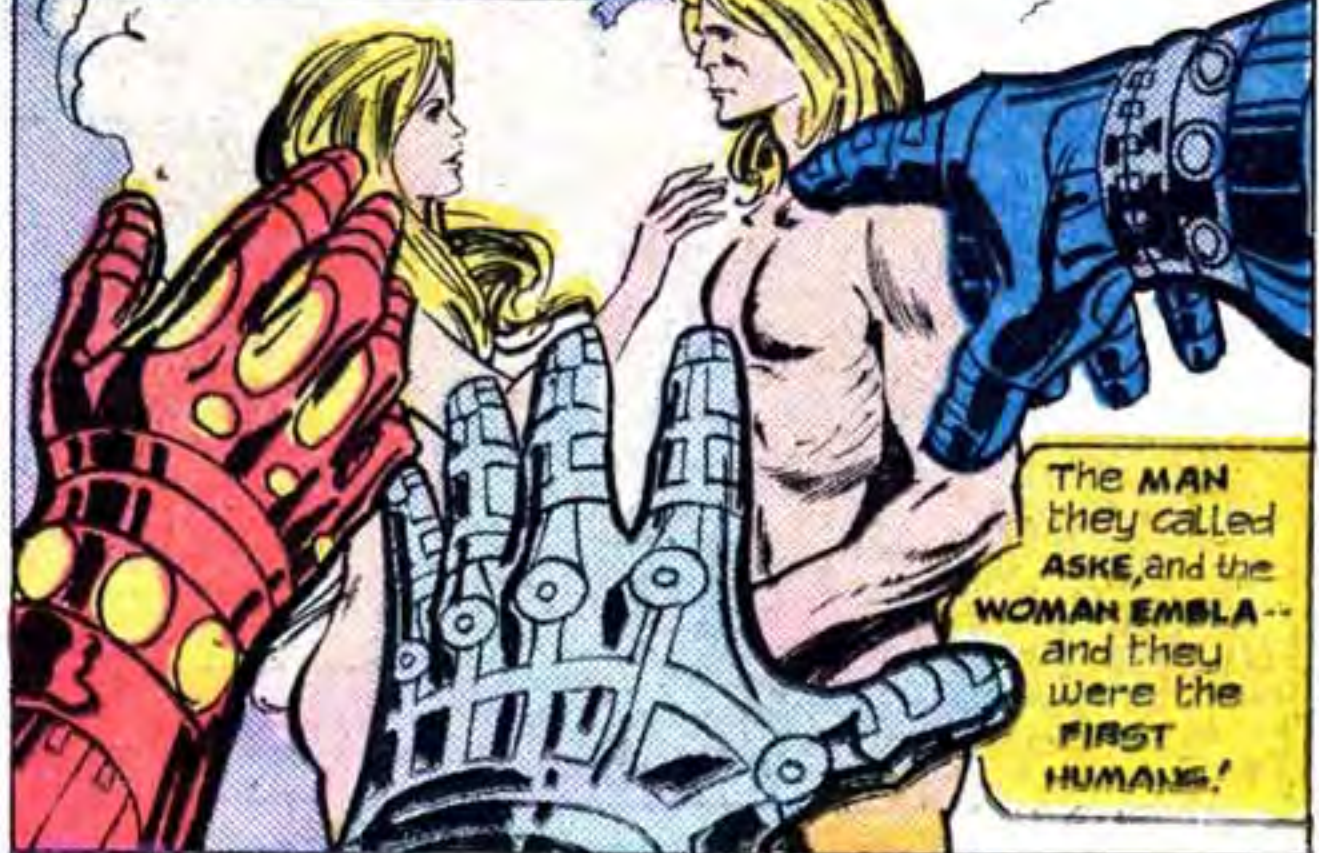
But this was not **ENOUGH.**

Still, the **SOLUTION** to their solitude **ELUDED** them, until the day **ODIN** and two other **ASgardians**, **HOENIR** and **LODUR**, went **RIDING** on the **MIDGARD PLAINS.**



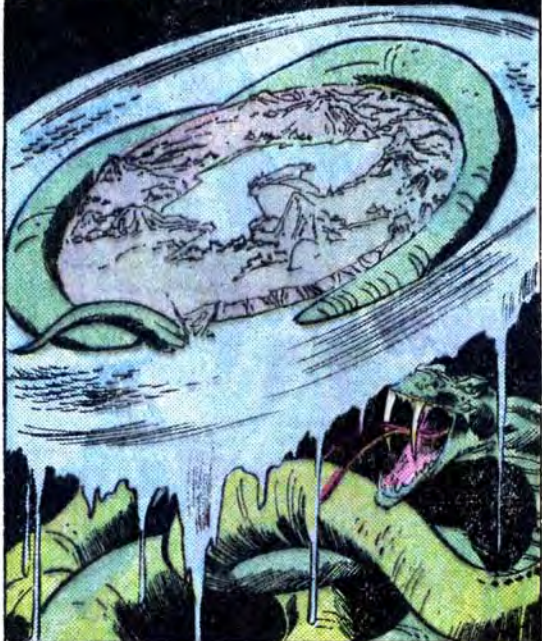
They came upon two **TREE TRUNKS...**

...and **ODIN**, in his wisdom, decided to give them **BREATH!** **HOENIR** then honored them with **SOULS** and **REASON**, while **LODUR** touched them with **WARMTH** and the colors of **LIFE!**



The **MAN** they called **ASKE**, and the **WOMAN** **EMBLA** -- and they were the **FIRST HUMANS!**

Humans quickly sprang up EVERYWHERE, to fill the midgard plains-- but they soon saw that they were LESSER than the GODS. In the sea which SURROUNDED the world in the abyss lurked the MIDGARD SERPENT, whose coils were EVER READY to encircle unwary SAILORS...



...and BENEATH the world now rested NIFFLEHEIM, the land of MISTS and SHADOWS, where the DEAD were obliged to DWELL.



The reborn race of GIANTS lived there, too, with renegade TROLLS and renegade GODS, and other LESS NAMEABLE terrors...

...all of them under the iron hand of HELA, who followed in the path of Odin and REAPED what he had SOWN!



NO ONE escaped her final touch! At Niffleheim's bridge to the green world above stood a slaying HOUND -- to INSURE that the dead stayed dead -- for men were not MEANT to be IMMORTAL like their MAKERS!

And yet, the early men were NOT AFRAID! They were WARRIORS, and determined not only to SURVIVE but to FORGE AHEAD!

Thus it was that they turned their eyes back to the SKIES, to find a COMRADE IN ASSAULT--

--a CHAMPION!

CHAPTER ONE:

THE THUNDER GOD!

Now, **ODIN** had crept upon **ODIN**, but in his time, he had fathered **MORE** than mere men.

From his loins had sprung a **SON**, the god of **WIND AND STORM**--

-- THE GOD OF THUNDER, **THOR!**

He was **YOUNG** then, like the men who **WORSHIPPED** him. Also, perhaps, a bit **HOT-HEADED**-- like the men who worshipped him--

-- but he was none the less **NOBLE**, none the less **GOOD**-- for when all was said and **DONE**, he was yet **PRINCE OF THE REALM!**



The early men **REVERED** the Thunder God-- **SOME**, indeed, more so than his **FATHER**. **ODIN** was chieftain over **ALL THAT LIVED**--



-- **GOD OF ASGARD** and **MAN OF MIDGARD** ALIKE --

-- but **THOR** was specifically concerned with the **CONFLICT** that colored the men's **DAILY LIVES**!



In essence, he was **ONE** of them--

--and as the **YEARS** swiftly mounted, his **LEGENDS** grew ever more **GLORIOUS**! **EVERY** midgardian knew of his **VALOR** in the face of **DANGER**--



-- of his **STAMINA**, his **STRENGTH**-- his inevitable **VICTORY**!

And all of this was done with but a **SINGLE WEAPON**! Disdaining others' **SWORDS** and **AXES**--



-- **THOR** chose a great stone **HAMMER**, forged in the furnace of the troll, **Geirrodur**.



He called it **MJOLNIR**, which meant "**THE DESTROYER!**" It never missed its **MARK** when hurled--

--and always returned **DIRECTLY** to his **HAND!**



BLAM!!

Yet war was not the **PRINCE'S ONLY** interest. In times of **PEACE**, the power of the mystic mallet was used to **CONSECRATE TREATIES--**



--and more especially, **MARRIAGES.**

In times of **PEACE**, Thor lived the life of **LUXURY** in his **MANSION**, the palace of **BILSKIENIR**, on the **FIELD OF STRENGTH!**



Its **540 CHAMBERS** made it the **LARGEST** in all **ASGARD!**

And when times of peace became too **STIFLING**, he took to the **SKIES** in his golden **CHARIOT--**



--drawn without rest by two **ROARING HE-GOATS!**

But times of peace never LASTED long beyond the Rainbow Bridge. MISCHIEF-- or, some said, EVIL-- was forever fomenting behind the locked doors of LOKI'S mansion!



LOKI-- Odin's ADOPTED SON, Thor's HALF-BROTHER--

--was a god NO other God could TRUST!

His OPPOSITE NUMBER was BALDER-- noble, kind, beloved of ALL. It was no surprise that Balder came to be Thor's BEST FRIEND!



Together with HOGUN THE GRIM, FANDRAL THE DASHING, and the Voluminous VOLSTAGG, they fought MANY a fine FOE--



-- FOR THE GREATER GLORY OF THE REALM!

