



# *Tales from the Prose Edda – III: Thor's Journey to the Land of the Giants*

Folk-Lore And Legends: Scandinavia

Scandinavian

---

*Intermediate*

*22 min read*

One day the god Thor set out with Loki in his chariot drawn by two he-goats. Night coming on they were obliged to put up at a peasant's cottage, when Thor slew his goats, and having skinned them, had them put into the pot. When this had been done he sat down to supper and invited the peasant and his children to take part in the feast. The peasant had a son named Thjalfi, and a daughter, Röska. Thor told them to throw the bones into the goatskins, which were spread out near the hearth, but young Thjalfi, in order to get at the marrow, broke one of the shank bones with his knife. Having passed the night in this place, Thor rose early in the morning, and having dressed himself, held up his hammer, Mjölner, and thus consecrating the goatskins; he had no sooner done it than the two goats took again their usual form, only one of them was now lame in one of its hind-legs. When Thor saw this he at once knew that the peasant or one of his family had handled the bones of the goat too roughly, for one was broken. They were terribly afraid when Thor knit his brows, rolled his eyes, seized his hammer, and grasped it with such force that the very joints of his fingers were white again. The

peasant, trembling, and fearful that he would be struck down by the looks of the god, begged with his family for pardon, offering whatever they possessed to repair the damage they might have done. Thor allowed them to appease him, and contented himself with taking with him Thjalfi and Röska, who became his servants, and have since followed him.

Leaving his goats at that place, Thor set out to the east, to the country of the giants. At length they came to the shore of a wide and deep sea which Thor, with Loki, Thjalfi, and Röska passed over. Then they came to a strange country, and entered an immense forest in which they journeyed all day. Thjalfi was unexcelled by any man as a runner, and he carried Thor's bag, but in the forest they could find nothing eatable to put in it. As night came on they searched on all sides for a place where they might sleep, and at last they came to what appeared to be a large hall, the gate of which was so large that it took up the whole of one side of the building. Here they lay down to sleep, but about the middle of the night they were alarmed by what seemed to be an earthquake which shook the whole of the building. Thor, rising, called his companions to seek with him some safer place. Leaving the apartment they were in, they found on their right hand an adjoining chamber into which they entered, but while the others, trembling with fear, crept to the farthest corner of their retreat, Thor, armed with his mace, remained at the entrance ready to defend himself, happen what might. Throughout the night they heard a terrible groaning, and when the morning came, Thor, going out, observed a man of enormous size, lying near, asleep and snoring heavily. Then Thor knew that this was the noise he had heard during the night. He immediately girded on his belt of prowess which had the virtue of increasing his strength. The giant awoke and stood up, and it is said that for once Thor was too frightened to use his hammer, and he therefore contented himself with inquiring the giant's name.

"My name," replied the giant, "is Skrymir. As for you it is not necessary I should ask your name. You are the god Thor. Tell me, what have you done with my glove?"

Then Skrymir stretched out his hand and took it up, and Thor saw that what he and his companions had taken for a hall in which they had passed the night, was the giant's glove, the chamber into which they had retreated being only the thumb.

Skrymir asked whether they might not be friends, and Thor agreeing, the giant opened his bag and took out something to eat. Thor and his companions also made their morning meal, but eat in another place. Then

Skrymir, proposing that they should put their provisions together, and Thor assenting to it, put all into one bag, and laying it on his shoulder marched before them, with huge strides, during the whole day. At night he found a place where Thor and his companions might rest under an oak. There, he said, he would lie down and sleep.

“You take the bag,” said he, “and make your supper.”

He was soon asleep, and, strange as it may seem, when Thor tried to open the bag he could not untie a single knot nor loose the string. Enraged at this he seized his hammer, swayed it in both his hands, took a step forward, and hurled it at the giant’s head. This awoke the giant, who asked him if a leaf had not fallen on his head, and whether they had finished their supper. Thor said they were just about to lie down to sleep, and went to lie under another oak-tree. About midnight, observing that Skrymir was snoring so loudly that the forest re-echoed the din, Thor grasped his hammer and hurled it with such force at him that it sank up to the handle in his head.

“What is the matter?” asked he, awakening. “Did an acorn fall on my head? How are you going on, Thor?”

Thor departed at once, saying that it was only midnight and that he hoped to get some more sleep yet. He resolved, however, to have a third blow at the giant, hoping that with this he might settle everything. Seizing his hammer, he, with all his force, threw it at the giant’s cheek, into which it buried itself up to the handle. Skrymir, awaking, put his hand to his cheek, and said—

“Are there any birds perched on this tree? I thought some moss fell upon me. How! art thou awake, Thor? It is time, is it not, for us to get up and dress ourselves? You have not far, however, to go before you arrive at the city Utgard. I have heard you whispering together that I am a very tall fellow, but there you will see many larger than me. Let me advise you then when you get there not to take too much upon yourselves, for the men of Utgard-Loki will not bear much from such little folk as you. I believe your best way would even be to turn back again, but if you are determined to proceed take the road that goes towards the east, as for me mine now lies to the north.”

After he had said this, he put his bag upon his shoulder and turned away into a forest; and I could never hear that Thor wished him a good journey.

Proceeding on his way with his companions, Thor saw towards noon a city situated in the middle of a vast plain. The wall of the city was so lofty that one could not look up to the top of it without throwing one's head quite back upon the shoulder. On coming to the wall, they found the gate-way closed with bars, which Thor never could have opened, but he and his companions crept in between them, and thus entered the place. Before them was a large palace, and as the door of it was open, they entered and found a number of men of enormous size, seated on benches. Going on they came into the presence of the king, Utgard-Loki, whom they saluted with great respect, but he, looking upon them for a time, at length cast a scornful glance at them, and burst into laughter.

"It would take up too much time," said he, "to ask you concerning the long journey you have made, but if I am not mistaken that little man there is Aku-Thor. You may," said he to Thor, "be bigger than you seem to be. What are you and your companions skilled in that we may see what they can do, for no one may remain here unless he understands some art and excels in it all other men?"

"I," said Loki, "can eat quicker than any one else, and of that I am ready to give proof if there is here any one who will compete with me."

"It must, indeed, be owned," replied the king, "that you are not wanting in dexterity, if you are able to do what you say. Come, let us test it."

Then he ordered one of his followers who was sitting at the further end of the bench, and whose name was Logi (Flame) to come forward, and try his skill with Loki. A great tub or trough full of flesh meat was placed in the hall, and Loki having placed himself at one end of the trough, and Logi having set himself at the other end, the two commenced to eat. Presently they met in the middle of the trough, but Loki had only devoured the flesh of his portion, whereas the other had devoured both flesh and bones. All the company therefore decided that Loki was beaten.

Then Utgard-Loki asked what the young man could do who accompanied Thor. Thjalfi said that in running he would compete with any one. The king admitted that skill in running was something very good, but he thought

Thjalfi must exert himself to the utmost to win in the contest. He rose and, accompanied by all the company, went to a plain where there was a good place for the match, and then calling a young man named Hugi (Spirit or Thought), he ordered him to run with Thjalfi. In the first race Hugi ran so fast away from Thjalfi that on his returning to the starting-place he met him not far from it. Then said the king—

“If you are to win, Thjalfi, you must run faster, though I must own no man has ever come here who was swifter of foot.”

In the second trial, Thjalfi was a full bow-shot from the boundary when Hugi arrived at it.

“Very well do you run, Thjalfi,” said Utgard-Loki; “but I do not think you will gain the prize. However, the third trial will decide.”

They ran a third time, but Hugi had already reached the goal before Thjalfi had got half-way. Then all present cried out that there had been a sufficient trial of skill in that exercise.

Then Utgard-Loki asked Thor in what manner he would choose to give them a proof of the dexterity for which he was so famous. Thor replied that he would contest the prize for drinking with any one in the court. Utgard-Loki consented to the match, and going into the palace, ordered his cup-bearer to bring the large horn out of which his followers were obliged to drink when they had trespassed in any way against the customs of the court. The cup-bearer presented this to Thor, and Utgard-Loki said—

“Whoever is a good drinker will empty that horn at a draught. Some men make two draughts of it, but the most puny drinker of all can empty it in three.”

Thor looked at the horn, which seemed very long, but was otherwise of no extraordinary size. He put it to his mouth, and, without drawing breath, pulled as long and as deeply as he could, that he might not be obliged to make a second draught of it. When, however, he set the horn down and looked in it he could scarcely perceive that any of the liquor was gone.

“You have drunk well,” said Utgard-Loki; “but you need not boast. Had it been told me that Asu-Thor could only drink so little, I should not have credited it. No doubt you will do better at the second pull.”

Without a word, Thor again set the horn to his lips and exerted himself to the utmost. When he looked in it

seemed to him that he had not drunk quite so much as before, but the horn could now be carried without danger of spilling the liquor. Then Utgard-Loki said—

“Well, Thor, you should not spare yourself more than befits you in such drinking. If now you mean to drink off the horn the third time it seems to me you must drink more than you have done. You will never be reckoned so great a man amongst us as the Æsir make you out to be if you cannot do better in other games than it appears to me you will do in this.”

Thor, angry, put the horn to his mouth and drank the best he could and as long as he was able, but when he looked into the horn the liquor was only a little lower. Then he gave the horn to the cup-bearer, and would drink no more.

Then said Utgard-Loki—

“It is plain that you are not so mighty as we imagined. Will you try another game? It seems to me there is little chance of your taking a prize hence.”

“I will try more contests yet,” answered Thor. “Such draughts as I have drunk would not have seemed small to the Æsir. But what new game have you?”

Utgard-Loki answered—

“The lads here do a thing which is not much. They lift my cat up from the ground. I should not have thought of proposing such a feat to Asu-Thor, had I not first seen that he is less by far than we took him to be.”

As he spoke there sprang upon the hall floor a very large grey cat. Thor went up to it and put his hand under its middle and tried to lift it from the floor. The cat bent its back as Thor raised his hands, and when Thor had exerted himself to the utmost the cat had only one foot off the floor. Then Thor would make no further trial.

“I thought this game would go so,” said Utgard-Loki. “The cat is large and Thor is little when compared with our men.”

“Little as you call me,” answered Thor, “let any one come here and wrestle with me, for now I am angry.”

Utgard-Loki looked along the benches, and said—

“I see no man here who would not think it absurd to wrestle with you, but let some one call here the old woman, my nurse, Elli, and let Thor wrestle with her, if he will. She has cast to the ground many a man who seemed to me to be as strong as Thor.”

Then came into the hall a toothless old woman, and Utgard-Loki told her to wrestle with Asu-Thor. The story is not a long one. The harder Thor tightened his hold, the firmer the old woman stood. Then she began to exert herself, Thor tottered, and at last, after a violent tussle, he fell on one knee. On this Utgard-Loki told them to stop, adding that Thor could not desire any one else to wrestle with him in the hall, and the night had closed in. He showed Thor and his companions to seats, and they passed the night, faring well.

At daybreak the next morning, Thor and his companions rose, dressed themselves, and prepared to leave at once. Then Utgard-Loki came to them and ordered a table to be set for them having on it plenty of meat and drink. Afterwards he led them out of the city, and on parting asked Thor how he thought his journey had prospered, and whether he had met with any stronger than himself. Thor said he must own he had been much shamed.

“And,” said he, “I know you will call me a man of little might, and I can badly bear that.”

“Shall I tell you the truth?” said Utgard-Loki. “We are now out of the city, and while I live and have my own way, you will never again enter it. By my word you had never come in had I known before you had been so strong and would bring us so near to great misfortune. I have deluded thee with vain shows; first in the forest, where I met you, and where you were unable to untie the wallet because I had bound it with iron-thread so that you could not discover where the knot could be loosened. After that you gave me three blows with your hammer. The first blow, though the lightest, would have killed me had it fallen on me, but I put a rock in my place which you did not see. In that rocky mountain you will find three dales, one of which is very deep, those are the dints made by your hammer. In the other games, I have deceived you with illusions. The first one was the match with Loki. He was hungry and eat fast, but Logi was Flame, and he consumed not only the flesh but the trough with it. When Thjalfi contended with Hugi in running, Hugi was my thought, and it was not possible for Thjalfi to excel that in swiftness. When you drank of the horn and the liquor seemed to get lower so

slowly, you did, indeed, so well that had I not seen it, I should never have believed it. You did not see that one end of the horn was in the sea, but when you come to the shore you will see how much the sea has shrunk in consequence of your draughts, which have caused what is called the ebb. Nor did you do a less wondrous thing when you lifted up the cat, and I can assure you all were afraid when you raised one of its paws off the ground. The cat was the great Midgard serpent which lies stretched round the whole earth, and when you raised it so high then did its length barely suffice to enclose the earth between its head and tail. Your wrestling match with Elli was, too, a great feat, for no one has there been yet, and no one shall there be whom old age does not come and trip up, if he but await her coming. Now we must part, and let me say that it will be better for both of us if you never more come to seek me, for I shall always defend my city with tricks, so that you will never overcome me.”

When Thor heard that he grasped his mace in a rage, and raised it to hurl it at Utgard-Loki, but he had disappeared. Then Thor wanted to return to the city, but he could see nothing but a wide fair plain. So he turned, and went on his way till he came to Thrudvang, resolving if he had an opportunity to attack the Midgard serpent.

#### HOW THOR WENT A-FISHING.

Thor had not been long at home before he left it so hastily that he did not take his car, his goats, or any follower with him. He left Midgard disguised as a young man, and when night was coming on, arrived at the house of a giant, called Hymir. Thor stayed there as a guest for the night, and when he saw in the morning that the giant rose, dressed himself, and prepared to go out to sea-fishing in his boat, he begged him to let him go also. Hymir said he was too little and young to be of much use.

“And besides,” added he, “you will die of cold, if I go so far out and sit so long as I am accustomed.”

Thor said he would row as far out as ever Hymir wanted, and he thought he might not be the first to want to row back. While he said this he was in such a rage that he had much to do to keep himself from throwing the hammer at once at the giant’s head, but he calmed himself thinking that he might soon try his strength elsewhere. He asked Hymir what bait he should use, but Hymir told him to look out for himself. Then Thor went up to a herd of oxen belonging to Hymir, and capturing the largest bull, called Himinbrjot, he wrung off its head, and went with it to the sea-shore. Hymir launched the skiff, and Thor, sitting down in the after-part,

rowed with two oars so that Hymir, who rowed in the fore-part, wondered to see how fast the boat went on. At length he said they had arrived at the place where he was accustomed to fish for flat fish, but Thor told him they had better go on further. So they rowed till Hymir cried out that if they proceeded further they might be in danger from the Midgard serpent. In spite of this, Thor said he would row further, and so he rowed on, disregarding Hymir's words. When he laid down his oars, he took out a very strong fishing line to which was a no less strong hook. On this he fixed the bull's head and cast it over into the sea. The bait soon reached the ground, and then truly Thor deceived the Midgard serpent no less than Utgard-Loki deceived Thor when he gave him the serpent to lift in his hand. The Midgard serpent gaped wide at the bait, and the hook stuck fast in his mouth. When the worm felt this he tugged at the hook so that Thor's hands were dashed against the side of the boat. Then Thor got angry, and, collecting to himself all his divine strength, he pulled so hard that his feet went through the bottom of the boat and down to the sea's bottom. Then he drew the serpent up on board. No one can be said to have seen an ugly sight who did not see that. Thor threw wrathful looks on the serpent, and the monster staring at him from below cast out venom at him. The giant Hymir, it is said, turned pale when he saw the serpent, quaked, and, seeing that the sea ran in and out of the skiff, just as Thor raised aloft his mace, took out his knife and cut the line so that the serpent at once sank under the water. Thor cast his mace at the serpent, and some say it cut off its head at the bottom, but it is more true that the Midgard serpent is yet alive lying at the bottom of the ocean. With his fist Thor struck Hymir such a blow over the ear that the giant tumbled headlong into the water, and Thor then waded to land.

Read more fairy tales on [Fairytalez.com](http://Fairytalez.com)