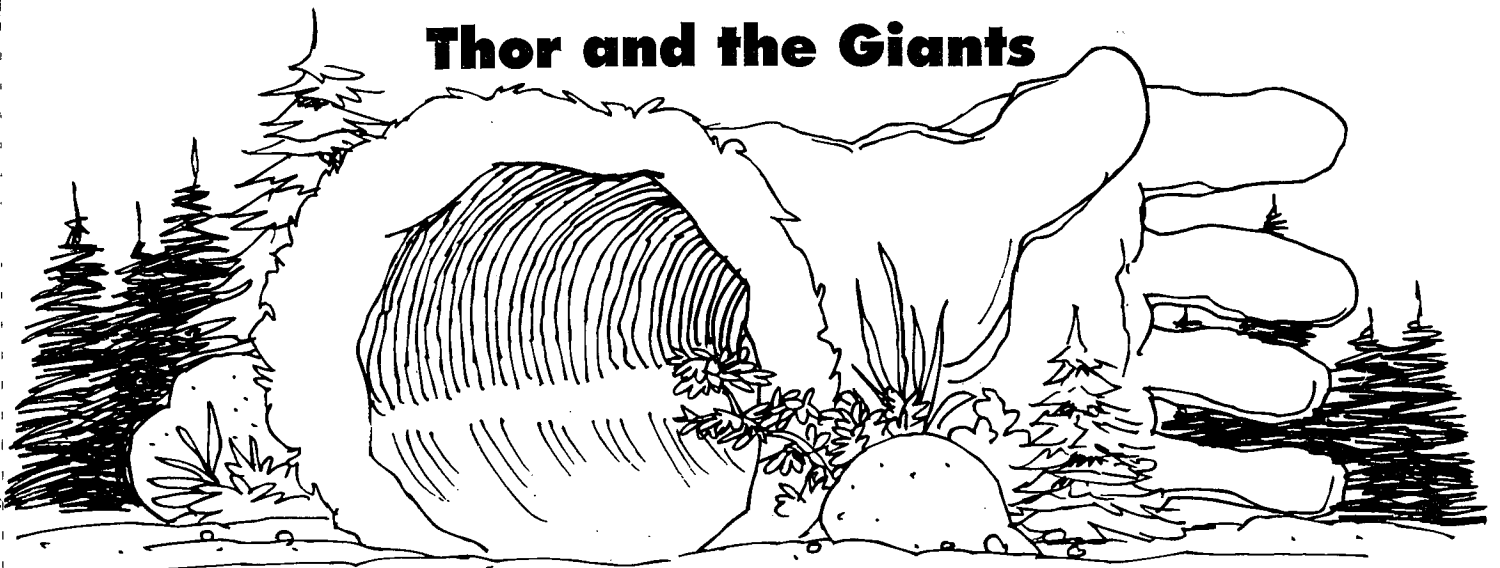


Thor and the Giants



Thor, Loki, and Thialfi, a swift runner, set out for Utgard, the Land of the Giants. When night fell, the travelers went inside a cave to sleep. All night they heard loud noises. As they left in the morning, they stumbled into a snoring giant. In the morning light, they discovered that their cave was really the giant's glove.

When Skrymir, the giant, awoke, he agreed to guide them to Utgard. He stuffed their food into his knapsack and strode off. The travelers had to run to keep him in sight. At sunset the giant stopped and told them he was too tired to eat. He gave them the bag of food and went to sleep. Neither Thor nor Loki could open the iron ties on the bag, so the travelers had no dinner.

Skrymir snored so loudly that no one else could sleep. Thor got up and swung his magic hammer at the giant's head. Skrymir sat up. "An acorn must have fallen from the tree and hit me on the head," he said. He lay back down and began to snore again.

Thor swung his hammer a second time. Skrymir yawned. "A leaf must have fallen on my nose," he said. "Thor, I see you're awake too. No one can sleep with acorns and leaves falling from the tree. It's a long journey to Utgard. Let's be on our way."

Thor couldn't believe the giant had survived his blows. The travelers walked the rest of the night and the next day. Skrymir stopped when he came to two different paths.

"I'm going to the left. If you follow the other path, you will be in Utgard before dark." The giant strode off with their food.

The travelers walked until they came to a gate that touched the clouds. It opened and they entered the giants' city. They went inside a building that was larger than any building in the land of the gods.

"Guests!" shouted a giant seated at a table. "We have few visitors. You are welcome, but you must prove your strength if you stay with us. I recognize you, Thor, but I didn't think you were so scrawny. Those stories about you killing giants must be false."

Thor raised his hammer to strike the giant, but he remembered that his blows to Skrymir's head had not harmed him.

"What can the three of you do to prove you are worthy of our company?" the giant asked.

"I am the fastest runner in Midgard," said Thialfi. "I challenge one of the giants to a race."

A long-legged giant appeared. Thialfi and the giant raced on the road that circled Utgard. The giant ran around twice before Thialfi was at the halfway mark.

"And what about you?" the leader asked Loki.

"I can eat more than any giant," said Loki, who hadn't eaten for two days.

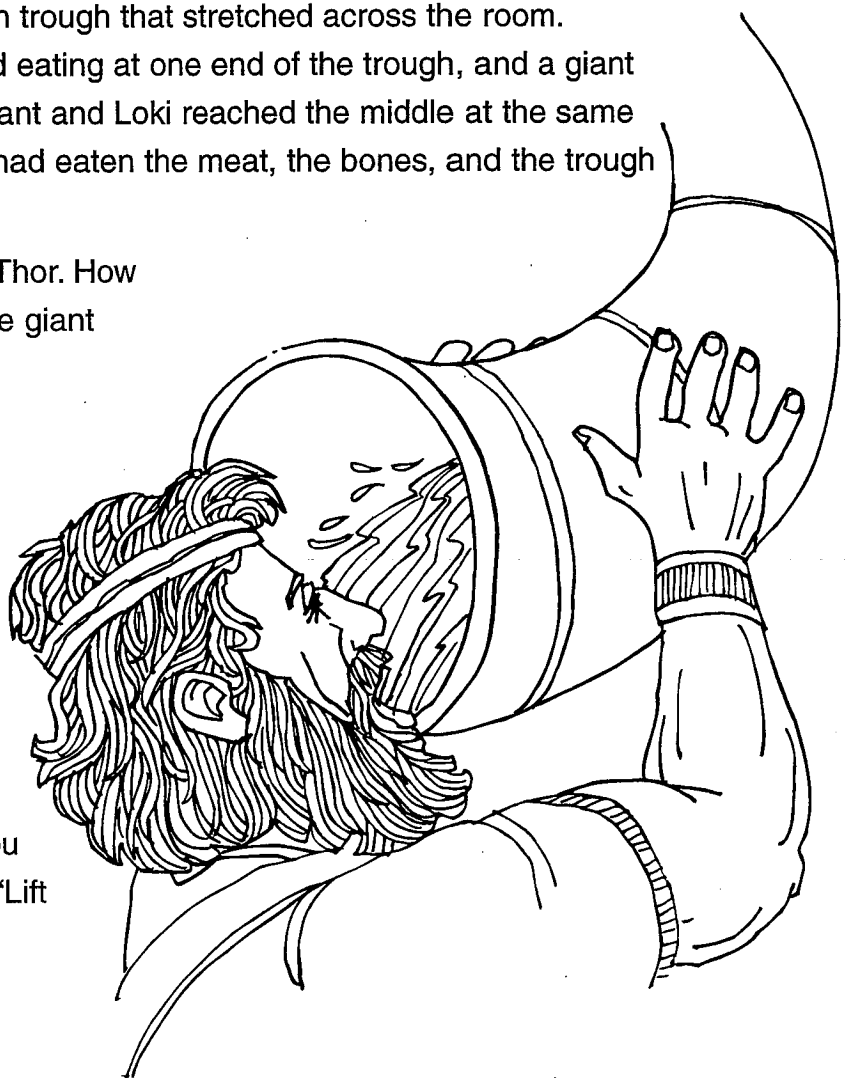
The giant set up a wooden trough that stretched across the room. He filled it with meat. Loki started eating at one end of the trough, and a giant began eating at the other. The giant and Loki reached the middle at the same time. The giant won because he had eaten the meat, the bones, and the trough itself.

"Your friends have failed, Thor. How can you prove your strength?" the giant asked.

"I can drink more than anyone," Thor said.

The giant brought out a hollow horn and handed one end to Thor. No matter how much Thor drank, the horn stayed almost full.

"The mighty Thor isn't as great as I thought, but I'll give you another chance," said the giant. "Lift this giant cat."



Thor tried to lift the animal. Only one of the animal's front feet left the ground. Humiliated, Thor gave up.

"No one at Utgard will wrestle a god as weak as you," said the giant, "but you may wrestle with my mother."

An old crone with a cane hobbled into the room. She put a hammerlock on Thor and floored him.

The giant led the defeated travelers out the gate. Thor said, "I brought shame to the gods."

"Things are not always what they seem," their host said. "I am really Skrymir, the giant from the forest. Indeed, Thor, you are mightier than any giant. When you struck at me with your hammer, I rolled to the side and you made deep valleys in the earth. Your blows would have killed me.

"The giant who ran the race was Thought, who travels faster than any runner. The one who challenged Loki was Fire, who eats wood as well as bones and meat."

"That may be true," said Thor, "but I didn't win one contest."

The giant laughed. "Your drinking horn was attached to the sea. No one can drink the sea dry. As for the cat, it was really the sea monster that circles Midgard. No god or giant can lift it. The woman you wrestled was Old Age. No one wins that contest!"

Thor turned to strike the giant with his hammer, but the giant and the city had disappeared.

