

Ars Magica

# Ultima Thule



## Mythic Scandinavia

by Paul Williams

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### The Beginning

When the universe began, there was only a chasm, of such immense size that even the gods would become dizzy looking into it, known as the Ginnugagap (Open Void). It was here that Yggdrasil (the World Tree) would lay down its roots.

Prior to Midgard (middle land), the land of men, Nifleheim was born. It was a bleak land, a world of perpetual fog, snow, and ice. Yet even Nifleheim was not the first land, for Muspellheim was old when Nifleheim was new-born. Muspellheim was the opposite of its colder neighbor, a realm of fire so intense that none not born there, whether man or god, could survive it for long.

It was in the gap between these lands that all life was to be formed, for there the heat of Muspellheim melted the snows of Nifleheim. The melted water vapor rose into the air and fell as dew that formed Ymir, a giant who spanned the Ginnugagap. A cow named Audumla was also formed from the dew, and from her teats ran four rivers of milk that sustained Ymir. After a time, other beings formed from the dew, and Ymir married one of these to become the progenitor of the race of frost giants.

Audumla ate only the salty frost that she licked from stones exposed by the melting ice. One day as Audumla licked at the stones, the hair of a man appeared where her tongue had rested. By the end of a second day of licking, a man's head had emerged from the stone. On the third day, the complete likeness of a man had grown from the stone, and he was known as Buri. Buri and his giantess bride had a son named Bor, who in turn had three sons, Odin, Vili, and Ve.

When they had grown, the sons of Bor slew the giant Ymir and the rush of his blood drowned all the giants except Bergelmi and his wife, who escaped in a boat to a land they would name Jotunheim.



In the middle of the Ginnugagap, the sons of Bor threw Ymir's body, creating the lands of men and the gods. The earth was formed from his flesh, the mountains from his bones, the rocks from his teeth, the forests from his hair, the sea from his blood, and the heavens from Ymir's skull, positioning four dwarves (who sprang full-formed from the giant's flesh) named Nordi (North), Austri (East), Suthri (South), and Vestri (West) at its corners to hold it in place. Sparks from Muspellheim were placed within the skull and they became the stars.

Other powers soon came into being. Odin took a giant named Day and gave him a horse known as Skinfaxi (Shining Mane) to ride across the sky. Light from the horse's mane would fall upon the worlds to be known as sunlight. Day's mother, Night, was given a horse named Rimfaxi (Frosty Mane); the light from Rimfaxi's mane was called moonlight, and the spittle that came from his mouth fell upon the earth to form dew. At first the course of Skinfaxi and Rimfaxi through the sky was erratic, but in a later day the giants charged two horrible wolves, Skoll and Hati, with chasing the sun and moon until the end of time, and this kept the wondrous horses from changing their courses or stopping in place.

The World Tree grew up to unite the many lands within its branches and roots, but no one saw its birth.

After some time had passed, the sons of Bor found two trees and shaped them into humans. Odin gave them life, Vili gave them the power to move and the gift of knowledge, and Ve gave them speech and the senses. The newly created humans were given clothes, and the man was called Ask (Ash), while the woman was called Embla (Elm); the parents of mankind.

## Overview

The lands we know as Scandinavia were a cypher to Europeans until some time after their Christianization in the 9th through 11th centuries. Many early writers ignored them, and those who did make reference to them called them collectively **Ultima Thule**,

the furthest extremity of the world, a region of little interest except to mark the unexplored northern limit of maps.

The Vikings have long held a fascination for modern man. Their exploits as raiders and settlers are well known, but the early Norse left few written records, and so most accounts of them come from their victims or those further afield with whom they traded, and are thus understandably biased or vague, especially with regard to their home life and native customs.

By the 13th century, when written records become more plentiful, Scandinavia had been Christianized and much of the pagan culture prevalent in the Viking Age had disappeared, but there were still those who practiced pagan rituals in secret or in the hinterlands, and those who believed monstrous otherworldly creatures continued to interact with mankind. And while the Norse had generally stopped raiding, they were still a force to be reckoned with in other respects.

The aim of *Ultima Thule* is two-fold: to present Mythic Scandinavia, a land of rune magic, monstrous trolls, and great adventure; and to tell the true story of the Norse culture.

Throughout *Ultima Thule* some terms in Icelandic (the nearest living language to Old Norse) are used for flavor, but the English equivalents are given in parentheses. Many spellings have been simplified for convenience. Explanations for terms in **bold print** appear in the Glossary, beginning on page 133.



## Aura Interactions

The runic magic of the Norse drew its power from the magic and faerie realms, and was affected very strongly by the divine power of the Church. Instead of the normal Realm Interaction Table, Norse magicians (including Finnish wind wizards) use the following:

### Norse Aura Interaction Table

Magical	+ (aura)
Divine	– (3 x aura)
Faerie	+ (aura)
Infernal	– (aura)