

Ragnarök

Guide based on:

Evelyn Fishburn & Psiche Hughes, *A Dictionary of Borges*

Various reference books

Ragnarök (also Ragnarök, Ragnarøk) ("Doom of the Gods"), also called *Gotterdammerung*, means the end of the cosmos in Norse mythology. It will be preceded by *Fimbulvetr*, the winter of winters. Three such winters will follow each other with no summers in between. Conflicts and feuds will break out, even between families, and all morality will disappear. This is the beginning of the end.

The wolf *Skoll* will finally devour the sun, and his brother *Hati* will eat the moon, plunging the earth [into] darkness. The stars will vanish from the sky. The cock *Fjalar* will crow to the giants and the golden cock *Gullinkambi* will crow to the gods. A third cock will raise the dead.

The earth will shudder with earthquakes, and every bond and fetter will burst, freeing the terrible wolf *Fenrir*. The sea will rear up because *Jormungand*, the Midgard Serpent, is twisting and writhing in fury as he makes his way toward the land. With every breath, *Jormungand* will stain the soil and the sky with his poison. The waves caused by the serpent's emerging will set free the ship *Naglfar*, and with the giant *Hymir* as their commander, the giants will sail towards the battlefield. From the realm of the dead a second ship will set sail, and this ship carries the inhabitants of hell, with *Loki* as their helmsman. The fire giants, led by the giant *Surt*, will leave *Muspell* in the south to join against the gods. *Surt*, carrying a sword that blazes like the sun itself, will scorch the earth.

Meanwhile, *Heimdall* will sound his horn, calling the sons of *Odin* and the heroes to the battlefield. From all the corners of the world, gods, giants, dwarves, demons and elves will ride towards the huge plain of *Vigrid* ("battle shaker") where the last battle will be fought. *Odin* will engage *Fenrir* in battle, and *Thor* will attack *Jormungand*. *Thor* will be victorious, but the serpent's poison will gradually kill the god of thunder. *Surt* will seek out the swordless *Freyr*, who will quickly succumb to the giant. The one-handed *Tyr* will fight the monstrous hound *Garm* and they will kill each other. *Loki* and *Heimdall*, age-old enemies, will meet for a final time, and neither will survive their encounter. The fight between *Odin* and *Fenrir* will rage for a long time, but finally *Fenrir* will seize *Odin* and swallow him. *Odin's* son *Vidar* will at once leap towards the wolf and kill him with his bare hands, ripping the wolf's jaws apart.

Then *Surt* will fling fire in every direction. The nine worlds will burn, and friends and foes alike will perish. The earth will sink into the sea.

After the destruction, a new and idyllic world will arise from the sea and will be filled with abundant supplies. Some of the gods will survive, others will be reborn. Wickedness and misery will no longer exist and gods and men will live happily together. The descendants of *Lif* and *Lifthrasir* will inhabit this earth.

Ragnarök does not mean "Twilight of the Gods"; that phrase is the result of a famous mistranslation. "Ragnarökr" or "Ragnarøkkr" means "doom of the powers" or "destruction of the powers" (where "powers" means "gods"). [from: *Encyclopedia Mythica*]

Coleridge, Samuel Taylor English lyrical poet, critic, and philosopher. His *Lyrical Ballads*, written with *William Wordsworth*, heralded the English Romantic movement, and his *Biographia Literaria* (1817) is the most significant work of general literary criticism produced in the English Romantic period. [from: *Encyclopedia Britannica*]

Henríquez Ureña, Pedro (1884-1946) A critic and teacher from the Dominican Republic, once considered the foremost Latin American literary historian. He spent most of his later life in Buenos Aires where he was one of the original contributors to *Sur*, the literary magazine founded by *Victoria Ocampo*. *Henriquez Ureña* was a long-standing friend of *Borges* and collaborated

with him in the publication of *Antología clásica de la literatura, argentina* (1937). Aleph 22(30)
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Bajo, El The unhealthy low-lying swamp land by the waterfront of Buenos Aires, always considered a rough and dangerous district. It was subject to floods and epidemics due to poor housing and associated with smuggling and prostitution.

Janus is the Roman god of gates and doors (*ianua*), beginnings and endings, and hence represented with a double-faced head, each looking in opposite directions. He was worshipped at the beginning of the harvest time, planting, marriage, birth, and other types of beginnings, especially the beginnings of important events in a person's life. Janus also represents the transition between primitive life and civilization, between the countryside and the city, peace and war, and the growing-up of young people. [...] Janus was represented with two faces, originally one face was bearded while the other was not (probably a symbol of the sun and the moon). Later both faces were bearded. In his right hand he holds a key. The double-faced head appears on many Roman coins, and around the 2nd century BCE even with four faces. [from: Encyclopedia Mythica]

Thoth is the name given by the Greeks to the Egyptian god Djeheuty. Thoth was the god of wisdom, inventor of writing, patron of scribes and the divine mediator. He is most often represented as a man with the head of an ibis, holding a scribal palette and reed pen. He could also be shown completely as an ibis or a baboon. As with most Egyptian deities there were many different stories regarding the parentage of Thoth. Many sources call him the son of Re, but one tradition has him springing forth from the head of Seth. This latter story is reminiscent of the birth of the Greek goddess Athena, who like Thoth was the patron divinity of wisdom.

Myths concerning Thoth show him as a divinity whose counsel is always sought. His most significant role is during the battles of Horus and Seth. Thoth is a staunch supporter of Horus and his mother Isis, maintaining that Horus' claim to the throne is just and the murderous Seth has no right to the kingship of Egypt. Elsewhere Thoth is a reliable mediator and peacemaker. When the goddess Tefnut had a dispute with her father Re and absconded to Nubia, it was Thoth that the sun-god sent to reason with her and bring her home. Thoth was also present at the judgement of the dead. He would question the deceased before recording the result of the weighing of the deceased's heart. If the result was favorable Thoth would declare the deceased as a righteous individual who was worthy of a blessed afterlife.

Thoth was also a lunar deity, and whatever form he took he wore a lunar crescent on his head. Some Egyptologists think that the Egyptians identified the crescent moon with the curved beak of the ibis. It is also suggested that the Egyptians observed that baboon was a nocturnal (i.e. lunar) animal who would greet the sun with chattering noises each morning.

As he was messenger of the gods Thoth was identified by the Greeks with their own god Hermes. For this reason Thoth's center of worship is still known to us today as Hermopolis. [from: Encyclopedia Mythica]