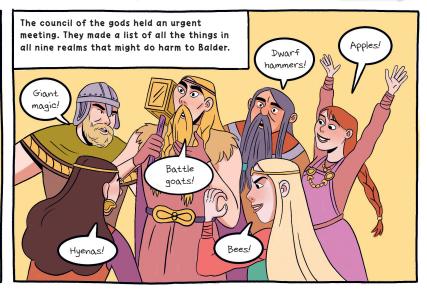






Frigg travelled the nine realms and asked everything in nature to swear an

oath promising not to harm Balder. She talked to every animal, every metal,









When every substance under heaven had sworn the oath, Odin decided that it would be wise to test Balder's protection. Idun lobbed an apple at him... and it bounced off harmlessly.





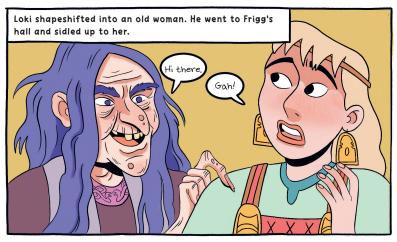
Testing Balder's protection was fun. Round things bounced

off him. Sharp things veered away from him. Snakes

refused to bite.

Loki was the only god not joining in with the merrymaking. He looked on, seething with hatred and contempt.





The old woman told Frigg that some poor soul was being stoned in Odin's hall. Frigg replied that it was nothing to worry about. Everything in nature had taken an oath not to harm Balder.







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Loki slipped the mistletoe dart into Hod's hand, and guided Hod's arm to throw it hard and fast.











Frigg rose to her feet with fire in her eyes. She declared that one of the gods should go and see Hel, Mistress of the Dead, and plead with her for the return of Balder.



Hermod, Odin's son, was strong of arm and fleet of foot. He leapt onto Sleipnir's back and galloped off across the Bifrost bridge.

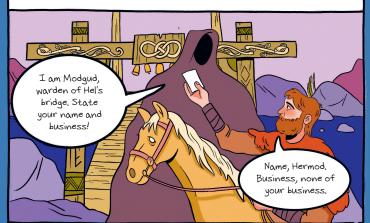


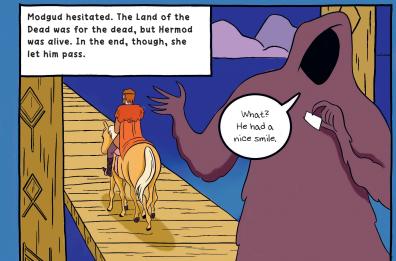
The gods built a funeral pyre in Balder's ship, Ringhorn. They wept and waved goodbye as it drifted out onto the water.

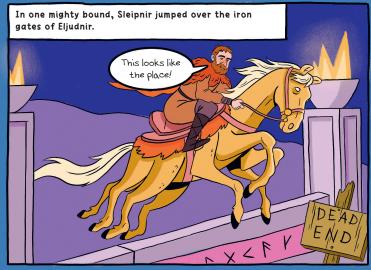
The only god not at Balder's funeral was Hermod. He was still galloping towards HeI, through gloomy mountain passes and pitch-black valleys.



After nine nights of non-stop galloping, Hermod reached the bridge across the river Gjoll. A hooded sentry blocked his path.







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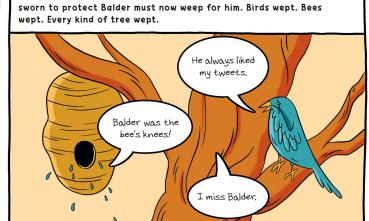




Hermod asked Hel to release Balder back to the land of the living, but Hel refused. Balder had already settled in, and besides, maybe he wasn't as popular as Hermod claimed.



Hel offered a solution. If everything in creation wept for Balder, she would let him return to the land of the living. Hermod had no choice but to accept, and he rode back to Asgard to share the news.



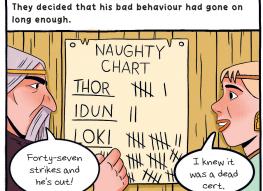
The gods sent messengers to all nine realms. Everything that had





The messengers left Thokk's cave with heavy hearts, knowing that Balder must now stay dead forever. As soon as they were out of sight, Loki shifted back to his true form.





The gods soon realised that Thokk was really Loki.

Loki fled to the coast of Midgard, shapeshifted into a salmon and dived into the plunge pool of a waterfall. Deep in the churning waters, he imagined himself safe from the wrath of Odin.



















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