

The Son of Death *by* Robert Moore
WILLIAMS

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ADVENTURES

244
PAGES



The
**DAUGHTER
OF THOR**

By

EDMOND HAMILTON

AUGUST 25c

fantastic

ADVENTURES

TRADE MARK REGISTERED

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The Editor's Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

ROBERT GIBSON JONES—that's the name. You'll want to know it anyway, so we'll tell you right off. Yes, you guessed it, he's the guy who painted that swell cover this month. How do you like him? We, the editors and the art director, feel happy enough about this cover to brag about it—and you'll forgive us.

The cover is the author's idea, and was painted first (as are most of our covers). Then a photostat was sent to author Edmond Hamilton, who has been an ace fantasy writer for a good many years, and today, unlike many of the old-timers, has managed to stay ahead of the young-bloods, and rank among the top writers of the land. We also sent him a title, and with our faith in his ability, plated the cover.

When "The Daughter Of Thor" came in, we were justified in that faith. This story is, we feel, one of the finest modern fantasy yarns penned since the world war number two began. We feel that it portrays, too, the spirit of Norway that is now ground under the iron heel of the Nazi, but nevertheless surges stronger than ever in that mountainous land.

We must congratulate these two men on a very fine job!



With the coming of the Nazi invaders, war came once again to the gods; who loved to fight. But how could they know which was the right side? Should they fight Nazis?

The **DAUGHTER** **OF THOR**

by **EDMOND HAMILTON**

FROM far in the north, colossal banners of cold radiance streamed up across the brooding night sky. They pulsed in a shifting glory of red and green, waving stronger and reaching higher toward the zenith. Beneath that weird, quivering glow of the Northern Lights, the snow-clad mountains were like cowed white giants guarding the black reaches of Narvik Fjord.

Mart Fallon watched from the barred window of his dark prison. His lean, tired faced, haggard and unshaven, showed deep lines of fatigue in the shifting glow. His black eyes were dull and somber, and his shoulders sagged inside his torn RAF uniform jacket. He was feeling a bitterness of despair that was not his alone in these first fateful weeks of the Nazi invasion of Norway.

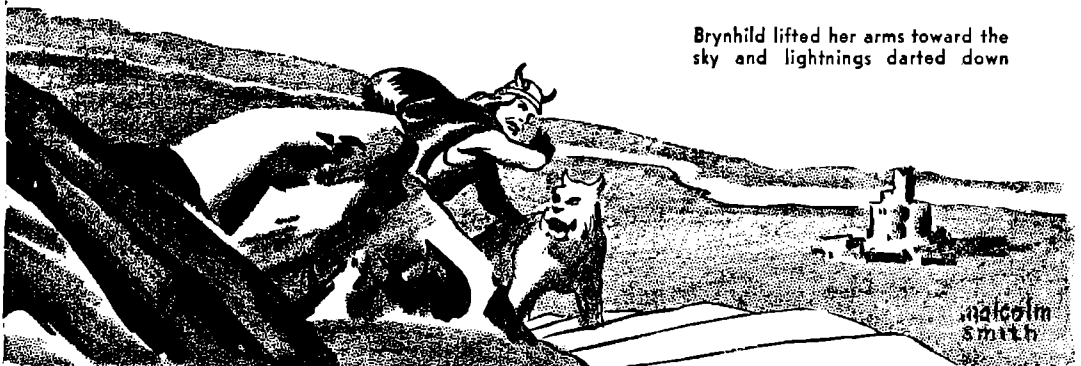
The heavy, rumbling voice of his fellow-prisoner came out of the darkness behind him.

"There will be battle and death tonight," Helverson muttered. "When those lights flame in the sky, the Valkyries are riding."

Fallon turned to peer at the other. "What are you talking about, Nels?"

He spoke, a little haltingly, in the Norwegian that his fellow-prisoner had taught him during the weary time of their confinement.

Nels Helverson had risen to his feet. More clearly even than Fallon, he showed the effects of terrible ordeal. A Norwegian soldier of giant frame, beneath his shock of yellow hair his massive face was gaunt, his blue eyes wild and burning.



Brynhild lifted her arms toward the sky and lightnings darted down

"The Valkyries," Helverson repeated, staring out fixedly at the unearthly flare of light. "The warrior-maids, the messengers of Odin, who bear those slain in battle to Valhalla."

Fallon looked at him a little uneasily. "You surely don't believe those old superstitions."

"They are not superstitions," rumbled the Norwegian gutturally. "The old hero-gods of my people still live! They will come to our aid—Odin the one-eyed, Thor of the lightnings, and all the others. They will sweep these treacherous invaders into the sea."

Helverson's eyes were blazing, his gaunt face wild with passion. He towered huge in the quivering glow of the shifting rays outside.

The young American pilot felt deepened dismay. His big fellow-prisoner had been increasingly strange and moody of late. Dazed by the hammer-shocks of sudden invasion, exhausting battle and disastrous defeat, Helverson's half-crazed mind was turning now to the ancient beliefs of his race.

It was not to be wondered at. All Norway was dazed and reeling. Without warning the Nazis had struck, sweeping in from the sea and in a single night seizing nearly a thousand miles of coastline from Oslo to this far northern port of Narvik. Their tanks, planes and guns had shattered the bewildered defenders, and now the invaders were ruthlessly and rapidly marching up the valleys to complete their conquest.

Britain had been equally unprepared for the audacious Nazi stroke, but had rallied to counter it. Big patrol bombers of the Royal Air Force had roared northward to reconnoiter the invaded Norwegian ports and ascertain at which ones an Allied counter-invasion could best succeed. Mart Fallon, American volunteer pilot, had flown one of those

bombers to this Nazi-held port of Narvik, far north of the Arctic Circle.

HE had not flown it back. He had been shot down over Narvik Fjord, and ever since had been caged in this improvised prison which the Nazis had established on the heights above the town. And here, for day after day, he had been mercilessly questioned about British preparations by Victor Heysing, the wolf-like young Gestapo officer in charge.

"I know how you feel, Nels," he told the Norwegian. "Heysing's prodding has nearly driven me crazy myself. But don't let it get you."

Helverson's bull neck corded, and his eyes were fanatic as he glared out at the witchery of the Northern Lights above the snows.

"Comes soon the time when the old gods rise against these spawn of Hell," he muttered. "The sword of Odin and the lightnings of Thor will blast them."

He pointed a quivering hand at the shifting rays. "Already the sign is in the sky! The Aesir are awake, and shield-maidens ride this night! Blood and vengeance are near!"

Fallon saw the madness in the giant Norseman's flaming eyes. The ancient faith of a race had awakened to life in him. The young American groaned inwardly. This monomania of his friend was almost the last straw.

"Nels, get a grip on yourself and forget those myths," he begged. "The Northern Lights aren't any omen. They're nothing but—"

Boom—*crash!* Like a burst of sudden thunder, the nearby sound struck Fallon silent. It was followed by more thunderous reverberations.

"By Heaven, that's guns!" the American yelled. "Big guns, too! 'It's from down in the fjord!"

He ran to the window. But it faced

away from the fjord. He could see nothing but the eerie light upon the snow outside, and the stockade of barbed wire that enclosed this make-shift warehouse-prison.

Nazi soldiers were running out there, dark figures against the snow. The thudding of guns from the west was rising to a crescendo. A siren began its warning scream at the Nazi airfield near the prison.

"Those are British ships that are shelling the town!" Fallon yelled excitedly. "Twelve-inchers, too! There must be a battleship in the squadron!"

He and Helverson, pressing against the barred window, saw searchlights stab into the heavens from the nearby airfield. Anti-aircraft guns coughed frantically out there, at planes swooping from overhead.

Then came a sound of a gigantic door slamming, and a great gout of red flame exploded at the edge of the air-drome. Another British bomb exploded two seconds later, much nearer the prison. Fallon, from his experience as bomber-pilot, knew the third bomb of the stick was coming.

"Down, Nels!" he yelled, throwing himself and the big Norwegian to the floor.

As they hit the cement, the whole world seemed to go up in the explosion of the third bomb. The floor heaved and rocked under them, there was a shattering crash of falling masonry, a clang of iron on stone.

Wounded Nazis were yelling thinly somewhere nearby, when Fallon dragged himself groggily back to his feet. The stone outer wall of their cell was cracked above and below the barred window. The bomb had evidently hit one end of the prison, or near it.

Nazi fighter-planes were roaring up from the neighboring field, into the

swinging sweep of the Northern Lights. Machine-guns stuttered up there in the sky, hardly audible over the thunder of the distant shelling.

"Did I not say that blood and vengeance were near?" shouted Helverson. "The sign in the sky was true!"

Fallon was scrabbling with sudden furious hope at the bars of the window. The bomb-blast had blown in the glass, and the split of the stone wall had wrenched half the bars loose in their sockets.

"Nels, help me! If we can get out of here before Heysing and his devils get over their surprise—"

HELVERSON'S fanatic excitement did not prevent him from grasping immediately the opportunity of escape. The giant Norwegian brushed Fallon aside, and exerted his great strength to bend the loosened bars. His hunched back cracked audibly—but the bars gave inward.

In a second, Fallon and he were outside the window. They crouched a moment in the shadow of the wall, knee-deep in snow and shivering to the icy wind. They could see now that the whole western end of the long, low stone building had been smashed in.

Beyond it, they glimpsed the battle going on down in the fjord. The darkness down there was constantly torn by red gun-flashes. By that uncertain illumination, Fallon glimpsed a British battleship and a half-dozen destroyers pouring shells into moored Nazi destroyers and into the Nazi batteries that were fiercely answering from the town.

The British planes were now swooping down to spot and bomb those batteries, hampered by a savage swarm of Messerschmitts. The battle was nerve-chilling in this uncanny setting of snowy peaks and dark sea lit by the

flaring Northern Lights.

Fallon perceived that a section of the stockade had been levelled by the bomb. He dragged Helverson with him through the snow, in a run.

"Can we reach the British ships?" gasped the Norwegian as they ran.

"No chance of that," Fallon panted. "This is just a raid, not a landing-party, for there's no transports. But that airfield is near, and if we can get our hands on a Nazi plane—"

A rifle *blam-blammed* behind them and a hoarse German voice shouted the alarm. The prison-guards, recovering from the demoralization caused by the bomb-hit, had sighted the two fugitives.

Fallon and Helverson flung themselves behind a snowy hillock as more rifles went off. As they stumbled on through the hip-high snow, the American heard Victor Heysing's clear voice blaring orders.

He judged from the sound of voices that the Nazi guards were making for the fjord, assuming that the escaped men would try to reach the British ships still shelling the town. Fallon breathed a prayer of thanks for that, as he and the Norwegian pitched on toward the airfield.

There were only three or four Nazi planes left on the snowy field, he saw when they reached its edge. But they were in luck, for one of those planes was near them. It was a Messerschmitt whose pilot was hastily hammering and cursing at something in the cockpit. The motor idled.

"I'll take him," Helverson rumbled as they crept out across the field, keeping that nearest plane between them and the Nazis farther away.

The Norwegian's great hands reached in and clamped the neck of the Nazi pilot, before he knew they were behind him. In terrible silence,

Helverson drew the squirming man out of the ship. There was a dull cracking sound. The Nazi's choking utterances ceased, and Helverson dropped him.

"There's one of Hel's children who will blast no more of our villages!" flamed the giant.

Fallon had scrambled into the cockpit. "Quick, Nels—squeeze in here! Unless we—"

The clean crack of a pistol punctuated his words, and Helverson staggered with blood suddenly spouting from his shoulder.

THE American turned, and saw a single man racing from the direction they themselves had come, his pistol raised for another shot. In the eery rays that painted sky and snow, there was no mistaking that slender, black-uniformed figure, that blond, wolf-handsome face.

Victor Heysing had not made the same mistake as the Nazi prison-guards who had taken it for granted they would head for the fjord. The Gestapo officer had trailed them through the snow.

Helverson's right arm hung useless. With a frantic movement, Fallon tugged the staggering Norwegian into the cockpit, jamming the narrow space. A second bullet from Heysing's pistol slammed into the thin armor around the pilot's seat, as Fallon gunned the idling motor.

The Messerschmitt roared down the field and took off so heavily that it barely cleared the hillocks beyond. Almost instantly, Fallon found himself flying out over the deep fjord. Down there the battle was drawing to a close. The British warships, their guns still thundering, were steaming out to sea. Two Nazi destroyers and a half-dozen transports had been reduced to flaming wreckage.

Fallon banked around and headed northward, into the full flare of the Northern Lights. Fighting for altitude, he won over the nearby snowy peaks and laid a course slightly east of north.

"We can't make Scotland in this fighter—not half enough fuel," he jerked over his shoulder to Helverson. "And even if the Allies have counter-invaded in the south, we can't reach those ports either. We'll have to make for the fishing villages on the far northern coast, that are still in Norwegian hands."

Helverson, holding his hand over his wounded shoulder, nodded his great head. His blue eyes still held that fanatic glare.

"We go toward Odin's land—the north. That is well!"

Fallon glanced around worriedly at his half-crazed comrade. He stiffened as he glimpsed a black speck far behind them in the aurora sky.

"That's a Nazi fighter following us!" he cried. "That devil Heysing! He didn't have time to get word to other pilots to follow us. He must be in that plane himself!"

Fallon knew the young Gestapo officer was a pilot—Heysing's technical questions during that long torment of inquisition had shown that. And he knew that Heysing thought he possessed valuable information, and was determined at any risk to prevent their escape.

The relentless singlemindedness of the Nazi in his pursuit woke new rage in Fallon. Remembering those days when Heysing had bullied, slapped and hectorred him for hours on end, Fallon was tempted to turn back and meet his pursuer in combat.

But he knew that his chances in such a fight would be slim, for his overloaded plane could not maneuver to match

the other. And it was his duty to make good his escape to those far Arctic coastal villages beyond the northern wilderness, for from them he could reach England with information on Narvik's defenses that would be vital to the Allied cause.

HE opened the throttle to the limit. But the plane behind crept closer. At a roaring pace of miles a minute, pursued and pursuer rushed above the vast, almost uninhabited wilderness that is north Norway.

Fallon saw it as a forbidding vista of towering, jagged white mountains and somber shadowed valleys, and great glaciers creeping like glittering serpents toward the distant sea. Nowhere was there a light of house or village. Not even the wild Lapps who herded their reindeer on the barren plains far eastward would come into this lifeless, icy land.

And over snow-clad peak and glacier shot and shimmered the stupendous brilliance of the Northern Lights. The whole sky ahead was a palisade of luminous splendor, from which the wheeling rays stabbed south across the frosty heavens. He had never seen such an aurora.

Helverson made an archaic gesture of reverence toward that blazing sky, his eyes burning.

"The old gods have awakened this night! And we go toward them."

Fallon could not find utterance for disbelief, this time. He felt hypnotized by the aurora. Its fierce rays were still growing in intensity. It was as though they were flying into the sun.

Tingling forces seemed thrilling through his exhausted body. He felt somehow on the edge of tremendous revelation that made him forget the relentless pursuer behind. Like the fanatic Norseman, he too was feeling a

strange, wild eagerness of superhuman expectation as they flew on.

CHAPTER II

The Valkyries

BRUTAL interruption drove all uncanny feelings from Fallon's mind. Machine-guns yammered behind him, and a stream of tracer screamed past the left wing of his plane.

Instant awareness that Heysing had overtaken them tripped the trained reflexes in the American pilot's brain. Without a second for thought, he slammed over the stick and kicked the rudder to bank sharply around. He caught just a glimpse of Heysing's plane, leaping around after him with relentless swiftness.

"The Nazi devil!" he thought ragingly. "He'd follow us to hell rather than see us escape."

Helverson was bellowing in stark fury. But Fallon's mind became ice-cold and clear as he tensely maneuvered for position.

He knew this battle was to the death. His overloaded plane could not escape Heysing. One or the other of them had to go down. The Nazi's lighter ship had superior maneuverability. But Fallon was hoping that the Gestapo officer might be rusty as a combat pilot.

Like two circling hawks, they clawed for position in the supernatural splendor of that incredible aurora. Down below, the howling wilderness of snowy ranges and creeping glaciers sheened in the wheeling rays. They must be far, far north, Fallon thought fleetingly, far up over the wild, unvisited Finmark mountains and near the Arctic Ocean coast and its few fishing villages. If he could down Heysing, they could—

No time to think of the future now! There wouldn't *be* any future if he let Heysing get on his tail as the Nazi had now almost succeeded in doing. Fallon gunned his heavy ship into a bewildering corkscrew, screamed steeply upward until his plane was almost hanging on its prop, and then looped back and down and found himself roaring a hundred yards behind the baffled Nazi.

In a split-second he had Heysing's plane in his sights, silhouetted blackly against the tremendous aurora. His finger savagely triggered. But there came no answering roar from the machine-guns of his ship. The fire-control of this Messerschmitt was jammed and dead.

Appalled, Fallon suddenly remembered the Nazi pilot of this plane had been hammering and cursing in the cockpit when they seized it. He knew now why that pilot hadn't been up in the fight over the fjord. But the knowledge came too late.

"No guns, Nels!" he shouted to Helverson. "We can't fight, and I don't think we can get away."

Heysing had already discovered their presence behind him and had banked startledly away. But now the Nazi came rushing back in from a rear quarter, with all guns spitting.

"He cannot kill us," Helverson's great voice was booming with fanatic confidence. "The old gods fight with us tonight."

FALLON had no such confidence, and his heart was cold with foreknowledge of doom as he flung the plane all over the sky to escape the Nazi. Seeming to sense their helplessness, Heysing was boring in recklessly at every opportunity, flinging bursts at them from every possible range.

Up into the mad dance of dazzling

rays in the aurora-painted heavens they thundered, and down again toward the wild, snowy peaks and valleys. It was only a question of time, Fallon knew. But the time ran out even sooner than he had expected.

A gust of rising wind smacked him as he zoomed steeply. As he fought frantically to avoid stalling, Heysing swooped from above. The Nazi's machine-guns flung a whiplash of lead that tore across Fallon's motor. His engine choked, coughed and died. His instruments showed him that at least two oil-lines were gone.

"Got us!" Fallon cried, his raging shout loud now that the motor was dead. "Hang on, Nels—we're going down."

A dead-stick landing down in the snowy mountains below was a hundred-to-one chance, he knew. But it was the only chance left.

Rising winds screamed past his wings and buffeted the crippled ship as he rushed down through the twitching auroral glare. Heysing came down over them and loosed another burst that tore through their fuselage. Fallon knew bitterness at not being able to take the Nazi with him.

He was aiming for a long, snowy gorge walled by marching ridges of icy peaks. Keeping the nose of the plane as far up as he dared, he craned tensely to estimate distances in the unreal illumination. Now the wind was a whistling shriek, and the floor of the gorge was slamming up toward him with appalling speed.

Fallon felt the wheels hit the snow and the frozen ground close beneath it. The plane, traveling at express-train speed, bounced crazily back up from the floor of the gorge. Then it smacked down again, hit deeper snow, and heeled over on its nose with a crash that stunned him.

He did not know exactly how long he had been unconscious, when he awoke. Dazedly, he felt around and found Helverson still unconscious. He squirmed weakly until he got the door of the jammed cockpit open. Then he hauled the senseless Norwegian out with him into the snow.

Freezing winds hit him in the face, blowing up the gorge from the west with increasing violence. To north and south rose sheer, icy cliffs. The sky above still flamed awesomely with that supernatural splendor of Northern Lights.

"Nels, wake up!" he cried hoarsely, slapping the unconscious giant's face. He could see now that Helverson had lost much blood.

The Norwegian stirred weakly, opened dazed blue eyes. He seemed not to see Fallon bending above him.

"Listen, they come!" he exclaimed huskily. "I hear them above the wind, riding toward us."

His eyes flared in exaltation. "The Valkyries come! We are dead and the messengers of Odin ride to bear us to Valhalla!"

SO WILD and eery their surroundings, that the staggering Fallon himself seemed to hear thunder of rushing hoofbeats and a stabbing of silver-clear cries above the screeching wind.

Snow suddenly kicked up a yard from the American, and a shot rang through the uproar of tempest. He whirled, and stared unbelievably.

Victor Heysing was coming up the gorge toward them, his black figure clear against the aurora-lit snow. The Nazi triggered his pistol again and the slug whistled past Fallon and hit the Norwegian's lower arm.

Fallon could have admired the Nazi's relentless devotion to duty, at another

time. It was clear that Heysing had watched their plane land, had seen that they could have escaped injury, and had himself landed down the gorge and come on foot to finish them while they lay unconscious.

Blind rage at the merciless pursuit exploded in Mart Fallon's brain. He flung himself with a crazy access of strength toward the other.

Heysing's gun kicked twice and searing flame grazed the American's temple. He was upon the Nazi before he could trigger again. He tore at the man's gun, his other fists weakly smashing at Heysing's face.

"You weak fool!" snarled the Nazi, contemptuous of the strengthless blows as he sought to free his gun-hand.

Heysing's blond, devilishly handsome young face had not a trace of apprehension in it. The superbly muscled officer had a wolf's tough strength, and Fallon knew that he himself was going fast.

That knowledge, and the red sting of hate, convulsed his body for a final effort. He jabbed both hands savagely into Heysing's chin. As the Nazi struggled to keep his balance, Fallon snatched fiercely at the gun.

He got it. But before he could use it, Heysing was charging back in at him with a snarl of fury. His cap had been knocked off and his blond hair and contorted, handsome face were clear in the spectral brilliance. Fallon's arms felt like lead as he struck clumsily with the clubbed gun.

The weapon rang on the Nazi's head, and he pitched into the snow. Fallon turned back toward the Norwegian, and as he did so, fell forward on hands and knees. He knew consciousness was running out of him but he crawled blindly forward through the snow.

But why, above the shriek and whistle of the winds, did he still seem to

hear the thunder of nearing hoofbeats and the squalling cry of a hunting beast? Why did the unearthly flare of the aurora seem waxing in brilliance all along the gorge?

Helverson was on his knees in the snow, his massive face flaming wildly as he pointed back down the gorge.

"The Valkyr-maidens!" he was shouting in a hoarse cry against the wind. "They come!"

Fallon tried to turn to look behind him, but everything seemed spinning around him now. His brain refused to credit what his eyes saw.

Rushing up the gorge was thundering a wild troop of riders. They *were* Valkyries, warrior-maids of ancient legend, mailed and armed and with their pale gold hair flowing from beneath their winged helmets. Their silver cry streamed out on the shrieking wind.

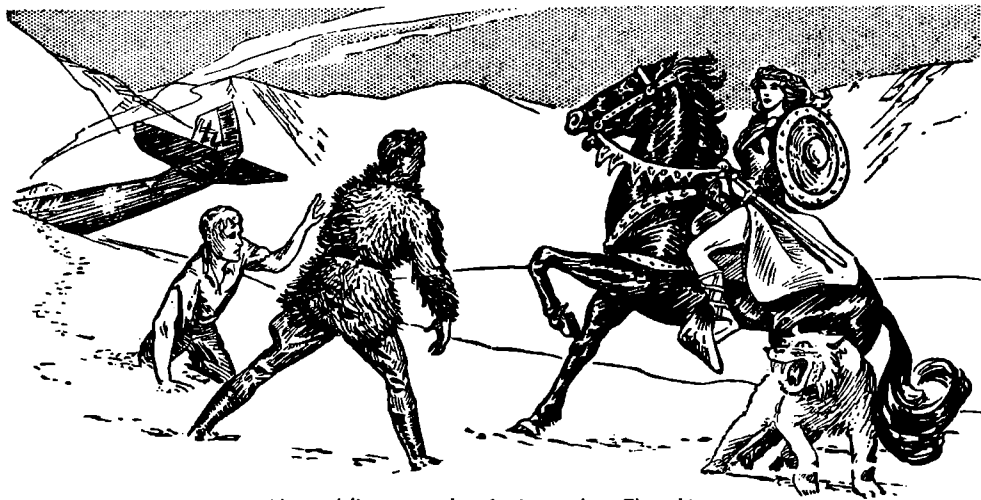
"*Yo to ho! Yo to ho!*"

The messengers of Odin, the choosers of the slain, riding fast toward him through night and wind and flaming Northern Lights!

FALLON knew it was delirium as those incredible riders rushed upon him. In their lead, upon a black stallion, rode a mailed girl who wore no helmet and whose gold hair streamed back in the wind like flame. And by her knee, like a hunting dog, loped a huge white lynx.

This Valkyr-leader had seen the little group—the prostrate Nazi, the raving Norwegian, the drunkenly swaying American. Her voice pealed in a cry of command as she drew rein beside Fallon.

An incredibly beautiful white face looked down through the dark mists that were closing over Fallon's mind. It was a face fearless and dynamic, whose most wonderful feature was the



Her red lips uttered a ringing order. The white lynx padding toward Fallon snarled and stopped

stormy blue eyes in which little lightnings seemed to flash.

Her red lips uttered a ringing order. The white lynx padding toward Fallon snarled and stopped. A Valkyr-maid spurred to the senseless Heysing and stooped low and pulled him across her saddle-bow. Another took the Norwegian in similar fashion. And Fallon felt the unbelievably strong arm of a third girl hook his shoulder and pull him onto her horse.

The unhelmed girl leader shouted another command and spurred forward. And the whole troop galloped on up the snowy gorge, with the wind at their backs and their silver cry pealing in the Northern Lights.

"Yo to ho!"

Fallon knew that all this must be the delirium before death, yet he struggled to remain conscious as he jounced on the galloping steed.

He could dimly hear Helverson's voice raving near him. "I told you the old gods lived! We are dead, and they bear us to Valhalla!"

Fallon's darkening mind wondered if the Norseman could be right. He might, indeed, be dead for his body seemed

now to have lost almost all sensation.

He opened his eyes for a last time. They had galloped up the gorge to a narrow, snowy pass. Beyond its crest lay a great valley cupped by towering, icy peaks.

But he could not see down into that valley. Was it his dimming vision or was it magic that made the whole valley seem an unseeable blind spot? His sight seemed to curve *around* it. The entrance to it was an uncanny blank in his vision.

Yet the girl leader was riding fearlessly forward, and the other Valkyries followed. Fallon felt a sudden sharp, wrenching shock as though he had fallen from a great height. He was now inside the blind-spot valley.

And now, he could see its interior. It stretched miles away, a dim vista of forests and fields and stone castles, toward a distant sheer cliff against which bulked the frowning mass of the biggest stone citadel.

He could no longer sustain consciousness. As he sank into darkness, his last sensation was hearing Helverson's mad, exultant cry.

"Valhalla! Valhalla!"

CHAPTER III

Daughter of the Gods

FALLON woke from heavy sleep, with a feeling of extraordinary lightness and well-being. He looked around bewilderedly. He was lying upon a bed made of hides stretched on a massive wooden frame whose four posts were carved into wolfsheds. It occupied a corner of a dusky stone room that had no other furniture except some hide chairs.

There were two windows, tall, narrow and slit-like. They were wholly unglazed and unshuttered, and admitted air so sharply chill that it set Fallon to shivering. At one window bulked the massive figure of Helverson, gazing eagerly forth into the gray daylight.

"Nels!" exclaimed the American, sitting up. "I thought you were nearly dead. Those two wounds you got—"

Helverson turned. His blue eyes gleamed with a curious exaltation as he approached.

"Why, I *am* dead," said the Norwegian simply. "So are you."

Fallon felt a gust of impatience. "What are you talking about? You're as alive as I am."

"We are dead," Helverson repeated with firm conviction. "We died in that snowy gorge, and the Valkyries came and bore us here to Valhalla."

Fallon suddenly remembered. The crash of their plane, the fight with Heysing — and then that incredible troop of wild Valkyr-maids who had galloped up the gorge and had carried all three of them into an uncanny hidden valley that could not be seen from outside.

Surely that had all been delirium? Yet if so, where were they now and how had they come here? Fallon stumbled

hastily to one of the narrow windows. Astonishment and awe fell upon him as he looked forth.

His window was high in that massive, square stone castle which hugged the looming cliff at the head of the valley. He could look straight down into paved courts and smaller stone buildings. Down there were mounted men and men afoot. But they wore armor and horned helmets and short fur jerkins. And they carried swords and shields and axes!

Fallon's dazed eyes lifted to search the distance. The gray daylight had a curiously pale, cloudy quality but by it he could see far back down the valley. Dark forests of shaggy pine and fir clothed its floor and the lower slopes of the bounding precipices. He glimpsed other, smaller stone castles out there, miles away. Most upsetting of all, he could nowhere see out of the valley, now that he was in it.

"I don't understand this," Fallon gasped. "There's no one at all lives in the wilderness of north Norway. What is this place?"

"It is Valhalla, the home of the old gods," Helverson said with absolute faith. "The paradise to which are borne all who die in battle.

"Was it not the Valkyries who brought us here?" the Norwegian continued. "Was their leader not Thor's daughter, the warrior-goddess Brynhild herself, she who is magic mistress of lightning, wind, and storm as her father was?"

"Thor's daughter?" Fallon remembered now the beautiful girl who had ridden unhelmed at the head of those wild warrior-maids, with a great lynx loping at her knee.

"Aye, the daughter of Thor, the god of lightnings," affirmed Helverson. "She it is who always leads the messengers of Odin."

The American exploded. "Thor and Odin and the other old Norse gods are only myths! You must be out of your head from those wounds. Here, let me look at them."

HE OPENED Helverson's blood-stained jacket. A chill amazement shocked him to find that the Norwegian's two bullet-wounds had disappeared. There were only two livid scars to mark their place.

Stunned, Fallon raised his hand to his own temple. The furrow that Hey-sing's grazing bullet had cut there was gone. He could feel nothing but a healed scar.

"This is insane," he choked. "Our wounds couldn't have vanished like that. It's magic!"

"Aye, magic of the Aesir, of the old gods," rumbled Helverson devoutly. "Now that we are dead and in Valhalla, no wounds can harm us."

Fallon's Twentieth Century mind shook beneath the impact of unexplainable mystery. His skepticism wavered. What if they really *had* died back in that gorge?

He knew the legends of the old Norse gods. Legends of their fabulous home in Asgard, the castle Valhalla to which were borne all warriors who died in battle and who there lived immortally on. Legends that for thousands of years had been firmly believed by the fierce Vikings of the North. What if those stories were not legend, but *truth*?

"I won't believe it!" Fallon shouted, seeking to prop up tottering reason. "This is the year 1940, not the dark ages. And I'm not dead—I'm living. If I weren't living, would I feel cold?"

He was, indeed, shivering from the sharp chill of the air from the open windows. Looking around, he noticed fur jackets hanging from pegs in a cor-

ner of the stone room. With relief, he donned one of the short, jerkin-like garments.

In doing so, Fallon discovered inside his own uniform the heavy pistol he had wrenched from Heysing in the fight. Its magazine was still half full, and it gave him a sudden new feeling of confidence.

"Listen, I want you to get over that crazy notion that this is Valhalla, and get down to earth," he told Helverson urgently. "We're going to go out and find out where we are and how we got here, and what the shortest route to the northern coast villages is."

The Norwegian shook his yellow head. "We can't leave here. Those whom the Valkyr-maids bear to Asgard never return to men."

"*We'll* return to men," Fallon promised grimly. "The information I have about the Nazi defenses at Narvik will be vital if I can get it back to England, and I'm going to get it there."

He tucked the pistol inside his fur jacket and started toward the heavy plank door of the chamber. It opened suddenly before he reached it, and two men strode in.

They were figures out of history and romance. For they were Vikings, big, burly men whose yellow hair flowed to their shoulders and whose pale eyes were bleak as the northern ice. Each was armed with a heavy sword and round shield. Each wore a horned helmet, and a fur jacket over a mail shirt and tight breeches of soft leather.

ONE of the two Vikings, a man of over middle age with iron-hard, weather-seamed face, spoke curtly to Fallon and Helverson. He spoke in an archaic form of the Norse tongue, strange but comprehensible.

"The princess Brynhild commands your presence, strangers," he barked.

"We will lead you."

"Brynhild! Thor's daughter!" cried Helverson. He turned excitedly to the American. "Said I not that it was so?"

Fallon was staring bewilderedly at the two Vikings. "You two are not men of the outer world!"

The older warrior shrugged. "We were of the outer world once. I am Tyr, captain of the Aesir, and this is Heimdall."

Helverson gasped, his eyes dilating with awe. "Tyr, the god of war? And Heimdall, the watcher of the gods?"

Fallon looked incredulously from the one warrior to the other, from the iron-hard face of the man who called himself Tyr to the alert, keen, middle-aged face of Heimdall.

The young American felt caught in a nightmare of unrealities. These men were as real as himself. Yet they claimed to be of the Aesir, the ancient Norse gods who had been legend for thousands of years.

Fallon struggled against the crumbling of his skepticism. "Then this *is* Valhalla?"

Tyr stared at him. "You stand in Valhalla castle, citadel of the Aesir and stronghold of Asgard."

He and Heimdall led the way out of the door, and the American pilot followed with Helverson as numbly as in a dream.

They went along a shadowy stone corridor and then down massive stairs. Fallon glimpsed men and women in the chambers and passageways of the castle. They seemed all of the same big, fair-haired race as his escort. The warriors wore armor, and carried sword or axe. Some of the lithe young girls were in glittering mail also. Others wore white gowns.

He and Helverson were conducted to a long stone hall of giant dimensions. Its only occupants were a group of

towering chieftains of the Aesir who were gathered near a raised stone dais at the farther end.

As they neared that group, Fallon went tense with recognition and re-awakened hatred. For Victor Heysing stood there. The handsome, blond young Nazi officer, looking oddly out of place in his black uniform, was watching Fallon's approach with narrowed eyes.

"So that devil was brought here too," Fallon muttered tautly. "Then I'm not dreaming. *He's* real, anyway."

"Thor's daughter!" Helverson was gasping. "I told you that it was she!"

FALLON followed the Norwegian's eager, reverent stare, his eyes lifting to the girl who sat on the dais in a black marble chair.

He thrilled to a shock as of tangible force. All thought of his bitter enemy was swept away by the tumult of his emotions. His first thought was that this girl who was looking down at him *was* a goddess.

She did not now wear the shining mail that she had worn as leader of the wild Valkyries. That had been put aside, and almost her only garment was a short black kirtle held by a jewelled girdle, and high-laced sandals of soft leather. Her only upper garment was the long hair that fell like a torrent of golden flame around her high, white breasts. A queer, lambent light seemed to glow from her body.

It was the unearthly, dynamic beauty of the face that held Fallon's eyes. The royal beauty of perfectly chiselled features and sweet red lips was a frame for eyes whose blue gaze met his like a sword-shock. Those eyes, clear azure depths in which tiny lightnings seemed constantly to flash and play, held him hypnotized.

A low snarl woke him from the spell.

Beside the marble chair of Thor's daughter, crouched the white lynx. The beast was huge beyond the custom of its kind. And it was showing menacing fangs and talons as its slant green eyes blazed at the American.

Brynhild's voice rang impatient, silver command to the animal. "Be silent!"

The lynx settled back upon its belly obediently, but it continued to glare at Fallon.

The eyes of Brynhild ran over Fallon's tall, lean figure and black hair, glanced at the eager, massive face of Helverson, and then returned to the American.

"You do not look like one of our northern races, dark one," she said to Fallon with musing interest. "What is your name?"

Unsteadily, he told her. Brynhild repeated it, her sweet red lips forming it oddly. Suddenly she asked, "Why were you and this other outlander battling in the gorge?"

Fallon shot a bitter glance at Heysing. "He is our enemy. Our peoples are at war."

The result of his statement amazed him. A flash lit Brynhild's blue eyes. And from the towering Aesir chieftains came chorus of eager and excited exclamations.

"War?" cried the fierce-eyed Tyr. "War in the northland again? You bring good news, outlander!"

A murmur of exultant agreement came from the other Aesir chieftains. The fact of war in the outer world seemed to stir them like a trumpet-blast.

"It has been long that the outer peoples have slumbered in soft, fat peace," Brynhild declared. "Tell me of this war, stranger."

Fallon pointed accusingly at Victor Heysing. "His people, the Germans, began the war. They have invaded the

northland and attacked its people without reason, and my own outland countries seek to help the Norse defenders resist."

Heysing took a step forward, speaking hastily to the listening daughter of Thor.

"It is not so, princess!" denied the Nazi. "My people are of the north themselves, blood-cousins of the Norse. We came into the northland only to protect our Norse friends from the degenerate outlanders who would have used them as tools for their own purposes."

Helverson uttered a roar of anger. "The German lies! We Norse wished none of his 'protection'!"

FALLON spoke earnestly to the girl, whose brilliant blue eyes were searching their faces during this hot dispute.

"Is it possible to leave this valley?" Fallon asked. "I have information that would help my people drive the invaders out of the northland, if I can get it to them."

He waited tensely for the answer. He could not, in spite of everything, believe that he and Helverson were really dead. If they were not, it deepened the mystery of this unearthly fulfillment of the ancient legends of the gods. But it also meant that he was duty-bound to escape this uncanny place and get his information back to his commanders.

Brynhild spoke decisively. "You cannot leave the valley of Asgard, outlander. At least not until we have learned all the truth about this war of which you speak."

She brooded, her chin upon her white hand. "We Aesir are tired of peace. Now that war has come again to the northland, it may be that once again we shall know the joy of battle!"

That electric flash came and went again in her eyes, fleeting revelation of a wild, fierce, untamed spirit.

Fallon protested. "But I *must* get out of here and get back to my own people!"

Brynhild's blue gaze darkened stormily. Her silver voice flared. "No one here in Asgard says 'must' to the daughter of Thor, outlander!"

Helverson plucked at Fallon's sleeve and whispered frantically. "Do not anger the goddess!"

Brynhild was continuing haughtily. "It is not often now that I ride forth into the outer snows with my Valkyrmaids. It has been our custom, when we do so, to bring back wounded men we happened to find, and give them life here. But none of them leaves this valley thereafter!"

Victor Heysing gave Fallon a taunting smile, as the German understood that the young American could not get away with his information.

The triumph in that smile infuriated Fallon. He felt desperate. He must somehow get out of this mysterious valley of ancient gods. The fate of an Allied attack on Narvik depended on his doing so.

His hand slipped inside his fur jacket and grasped the butt of his pistol. He suddenly flashed out the weapon and covered Brynhild with it. His lean face was dark and tense.

"This is an outland weapon," he told her harshly. "It can kill you in an instant. You are going to allow me to leave this place."

A roar of rage broke from the Aesir chieftains, and their swords rasped from their sheaths. The white lynx crouched and snarled, gathering itself to spring upon the American. Helverson, appalled by his action, seemed petrified by superstitious horror.

"Keep back, all of you!" Fallon

shouted. "Your princess will die before you can touch me."

It was bluff on Fallon's part—wild, desperate bluff.

BRYNHILD was laughing! Sheer amusement rippled in her silver laughter as she looked down at Fallon. With a gesture, she had restrained the crouching lynx and the furious Aesir.

"Do you really think you could kill the daughter of Thor with that toy?" she mocked. "Why, stranger, you are mad, I think. Watch!"

And she levelled her hand in a swift, thrusting gesture. What followed was almost beyond Fallon's comprehension.

Lightning seemed to leap from her hand, a flashing bolt of electric flame that struck his pistol and sent it flying through the air.



Electric flame struck Fallon's pistol

Fallon staggered, his whole arm suddenly numb from shock. He felt half-stunned, wholly unable as yet to *believe* that the girl above had actually wielded such force. He saw the awe on Helverson's face, the amazement and sudden calculation on Heysing's. But clearest in his dazed vision were the contemptuous blue eyes of Brynhild.

Magic-mistress of lightnings she might be, but that cool contempt in her face swept Fallon to a climax of unreasoning rage and despair. Heedless of consequences, he rushed forward at the girl on the dais.

CHAPTER IV

Magic Menace

BRYNHILD instantly moved her white hands faster than the eye could follow, in a curious weaving gesture. Her whole body seemed to *flame*.

Dancing brands of lightning blazed from her hands to form an awful, dazzling curtain of electric fire in front of her. Crashing thunder shook the great stone hall. Fallon recoiled staggeringly from that curtain of lightning—and swiftly, it was gone.

"Good God!" husked the American, staring at the girl with unbelieving eyes.

Roars of anger came from the Aesir captains. One of them, a tall, fair, sullen-faced chieftain, raised his sword to lunge at Fallon.

"Wait, Thialfi!" rang Brynhild's silver command. "I said not that the man was to be killed."

The chieftain called Thialfi halted, but protested angrily. "And why should he not be killed, when he has dared threaten one of us Aesir?"

"I rule the Aesir, cousin Thialfi," she reminded imperiously. "You grow too presumptuous, I think—too much as

your father Loki was."

She laughed softly, eyeing Fallon. "This outlander has courage, even though he is not of the northern folk. He shall not die—yet."

Fallon stood, still literally stunned by the incredible phenomenon that had almost cost his life. Was this wildly beautiful girl human? Could any human have evoked that crashing blaze of lightning?

Could any but a goddess have loosed such forces? A goddess who could control the very elements of nature? Magic of superhuman powers clung about this girl like a tangible and terrible aura.

Helverson's awed whisper echoed his whirling thoughts. "She is, indeed, daughter of Thor, the storm-god of lightnings."

Brynhild heard the Norwegian, and nodded her fair head. "Yes, Norseman. I am daughter of Thor and granddaughter of Odin, and though Thor and Odin are gone now, I hold their wisdom and their power."

Victor Heysing stepped forward. The amazement on the Nazi's blond, handsome face had now been replaced by a breathless eagerness and excitement.

"Princess, I never doubted your power," the German said quickly. "Yet I am bewildered by all these things. My own people have for three thousand years revered the names of Odin and Thor and the other Aesir, yet we dreamed not that any of you still existed. Are you really the ancient gods?"

Brynhild mused. "Are we gods? You of the outer world always thought so. I remember how your world hailed me and my Valkyr-maids as goddesses when we rode forth, a thousand of your years ago."

"A thousand years ago?" gasped Heysing. "Your pardon, princess—I do not presume to doubt. But if you

Aesir are immortal—”

“I said not that we were immortal,” Brynhild answered impatiently. “A thousand of your outside world’s years equals but ten of *our* years. Time is slower in this valley—a hundred times slower.”

THE shock of that revelation woke Mart Fallon’s numbed mind to life. Was it possible that that was what underlay all the awesome mystery of this valley of the gods?

“You would not understand if I were to explain to you,” Brynhild was continuing, half-contemptuously. “Your outland wisdom is only a practical science of matter and machines. You have nothing of the deeper wisdom of cosmic powers and forces which we Aesir learned here.”

Her brilliant blue eyes brooded. “This much, I will tell you. Time is an attribute or dimension of space. And space, as you may be beginning to learn by now, is not static but is a curved, expanding sphere. The strain of expansion causes faults or weak spots in that space-time sphere—spots where time is foreshortened. This valley is such a spot. A year in our valley equals a hundred years outside it.

“It was three thousand of your years ago that my people, the Aesir, found this magic valley. They were but one of the Norse races of that time, warlike Vikings who followed their chieftain Odin through the northern wilderness in search of a new home. They came upon this valley and settled in it, and named it Asgard.

“Three thousand of your years ago that was—but only thirty of *our* years! Here, under the wise leadership of Odin, my people built their homes. And here Odin and his son Thor delved deep into the cosmic forces that are brought to a focus in this fault of the

space-time sphere, and won for themselves such powers as your outer world knows not.”

Brynhild’s face was dreaming. “I was born in this valley Asgard, twenty years ago by my time—two thousand years ago by yours. I was but a little child when my grandfather Odin and my father Thor taught me the first rudiments of their wisdom. We Aesir were great, then. Rumor of our powers and our superhuman length of life drifted to the outer world, and the northland races out there worshipped us as gods.”

Bitterness came into her voice. “But pride and ambition brought tragedy among us, when I was still but a child. My own father’s cousin, the brilliant and evil Loki, aspired to replace my house as ruler of the Aesir. Dreadful battle came from Loki’s rebellion—battle in which not only he but Odin and my father Thor also met their deaths.”

The Aesir chieftain named Thialfi made angry protest to Brynhild. “Can you never forget my father’s rebellion? All that is dead and past now.”

The girl’s eyes flared at him momentarily, but then she relaxed. “Yes, all that is of the dead past now,” she admitted. “You know that I have never held your father’s evildoing against you, Thialfi. You were but a child then, as I was a child.”

HER golden head lifted in pride. “But even as a child, I succeeded to the rulership of the Aesir, and inherited the powers of Odin and my father Thor over natural forces.”

“And you have ruled us with wisdom, niece Brynhild,” the stern-faced Tyr declared loyally. “It is not your fault that life has grown tame and wearisome for us in this peaceful valley.”

“This flat and featureless peace wears *me*, too!” Brynhild exclaimed al-

most fiercely. "We Aesir were made for war, not for soft living. We rust and rot away our lives here, without the joy of battle."

She made a scornful gesture. "But it would have been no use for us to have left our valley for the outer world. Until now, tame and ignoble peace has reigned out there in the northland for hundreds of their years."

Mart Fallon had listened in deepening bewilderment and dismay. So this was the incredible reality behind the age-old legends of the Norse gods and their immortality and superhuman powers over nature?

It was logical enough, his dazed mind admitted. Granted that this secret valley in the northern wilderness was really a fault or weak spot in the space-time continuum, it followed that time here *could* be foreshortened so that a hundred days outside were but a day here. It followed, too, that this spot could well be the focus of tremendous natural forces whose mastery had been won by the rulers of these Aesir.

But, and this was what dismayed Fallon in his first realization, if that were true, then the hours he had already spent in this valley amounted to weeks or months in the outer world! By this time, the battle of Narvik would have been decided long ago. His plan to take his vital information back to his commanders was now hopelessly obsolete and useless.

Fallon became aware that Victor Heysing was speaking to the Aesir princess. The young Nazi officer seemed possessed by excitement.

"Princess, not all the outland peoples are tame and soft," Heysing affirmed. "My own German people, who are blood-kin to you Norse, reject like yourselves the soft blandishments of peace in favor of the stern ideals of war."

The Nazi's voice had a ring of fanaticism. "We have a Leader, the greatest in the outside world. He has brought war back to the world, though the cowardly southern and western nations pleaded for peace. He has made of us a race of warriors who stride to conquest of all the world."

Heysing leaned forward, his eyes glowing. "You Aesir could join us in that mighty battle, princess. A battle whose loot will be the world itself! You are a northern race like us. If you joined us, your powers over natural forces would sweep the soft peoples of the world before us!"

Fallon was thunderstruck. The Nazi, like himself, had realized that this valley was the focus of cosmic natural forces which somehow the daughter of Thor knew how to harness and use.

WITH characteristic opportunism, Heysing was seeking to enlist the unguessable power of those weapons upon the side of Hitler's legions! He had proposed flattering alliance to the Aesir princess, meaning without doubt to use her and her powers as the tool of his conquest-minded country.

Brynhild's eyes had flashed as she listened. "It is good to hear that one race of the outer world has remained hard and warlike!"

And the Aesir chieftains had become suddenly tense with fierce excitement.

"Princess Brynhild, I favor this man's plan!" exclaimed Thialfi, a savage light on his sullen face now. "With you and your powers to lead us, and the hordes of his German race to follow us, we *could* loot the world!"

"At least, it would mean battle and action again instead of rotting away in this valley," muttered the tall Aesir captain, Heimdall.

Appalled, Fallon burst into interruption. "Do you realize what this Ger-

man would have you do?" he cried to Thor's daughter. "He would have you join a leader whose hands are red with the blood of slaughtered nations, a nation that without pretext has attacked unoffending peoples."

Brynhild looked down at the American with an expression of disdain. "I thought you were a warrior, outlander. Yet you talk as though war was horrible."

"It is horrible," Fallon declared from the depths of his feelings. "It is to end war forever that my people are fighting the German race."

The daughter of Thor and the Aesir chieftains stared at him with a cold, biting contempt, as though he had said something shameful.

"By the Norns, the German spoke truth when he said that the other outland races are degenerate!" exclaimed Thialfi scornfully. "This fellow is fit only to be a thrall."

"My people do not hold such cowardly beliefs," put in Heysing proudly. "We exalt war and the warrior above all else."

He looked up eagerly at Brynhild. "Will you join us, princess? Will you ally your powers to the only true warrior race of the outer world?"

"I say, let us join these Germans," Thialfi declared, and there was a quick chorus of agreement from many of the Aesir lords.

"I remind you again that *I* rule the Aesir," Brynhild flared at Loki's son.

Until now, Helverson had stood beside Fallon, bewilderedly listening to the excited discussion. Now, for the first time, the big Norwegian spoke in his rumbling voice to the girl on the marble seat.

"You would not join the Germans?" he asked incredulously. "You are the Aesir, the ancient hero-gods of our Norse race. And the Germans are our

enemies."

Heysing hastily intervened. "We are not enemies of the Norse people," he denied. "As I told you, we seek only to protect them from the cowardly western nations who would trick them for selfish purposes."

The Nazi added quickly to Brynhild, "Once you Aesir appeared and joined us, all the northern peoples would fall in behind us. For your names have an ancient power in the hearts of the north."

Fallon knew that the Nazi was right in that last claim. The appearance of the Aesir of ancient legend, led by Thor's daughter herself, *would* swing age-old Scandinavian beliefs toward the side of the Germans.

BEFORE the American could protest Heysing's other falsehoods, Brynhild rose to her feet. Her blue eyes were brooding and thoughtful as she looked down at them.

"Lords of the Aesir, the decision on this matter is not to be made lightly," she told them. "Before I decide, I shall take counsel of all the chieftains of our people. Summon them here for council tonight."

Thialfi pointed to the Nazi. "With your permission, I'll keep this man with me today. I wish to hear more of his plan."

Brynhild nodded curtly. "But bring him to the council here in Valhalla tonight."

Her eyes rested a moment on Fallon's dark, desperate face. "See that this man and his comrade make no attempt to leave the valley," she ordered. "I make you responsible for them, Tyr."

Her slim figure disappeared through a curtained doorway beside the dais, the white lynx padding silently at her side.

Heysing went with Thialfi, glancing back with covert triumph at the American. Fallon found Helverson plucking at his sleeve.

"I cannot understand," the Norwegian said, his massive face anxious and puzzled. "These are the old gods of my people. Surely they would not join with the invaders who now devastate our land?"

"They won't join the Nazis if I can help it," Fallon said tautly. "Nels, we've got to stop that somehow! My God, that girl can control the lightning and forces of nature itself! If the Nazis get hold of her powers—"

The dreadful possibilities unreeled in his mind. They held disaster for the Allied cause. That disaster would not come from the mere addition of a few thousand fierce warriors to the Nazi legions. Not even though the appearance of the legended Aesir as allies of the Axis might well superstitiously influence the northern peoples into following Hitler also.

The real menace was in those tremendous and mysterious powers of which Brynhild was mistress. This unique fault in the continuum of space-time was the focus of cosmic forces unknown to the outer world. The ruling house of the Aesir had learned how to wield those forces. If Germany learned that also, its scientists would be able to forge weapons that would blast the armies of the democracies from existence.

"Heysing must not persuade Brynhild to join the Nazis!" he said feverishly. "They'll use her and her warriors as tools, and as soon as they have learned the secret of her powers, will throw her aside."

Helverson groaned. "How can *we* stop it? These Aesir long for war and battle. They are tempted by the German's promise of fighting."

"They're a race with the Viking war-like traditions of centuries ago," Fallon agreed. "They think war is all that is manly and admirable."

"Thor's daughter seemed to like you, Fallon," the Norwegian said doubtfully. "I could see that you interested her. Maybe if you made love to her, you could turn her against Heysing's proposal?"

"Don't be a fool," the American retorted. "She and all the rest of these people think I'm a coward now because I said I hated war. We've got to find some better plan than that to beat that damned Nazi—"

He broke off. The chieftain Tyr was approaching them, for now the great hall of Valhalla was almost empty except for themselves.

TYR had a half-disgusted expression on his hard, grizzled face. "Now I have you on my hands to guard," he growled. "Let me give you fair warning—at the slightest attempt to escape, you'll be killed."

"That's clear enough," Fallon admitted. "But you don't have to lock us up in that chamber again, do you?"

Tyr shrugged wide shoulders. "You can come out with me to watch our warriors at their games, if you wish. Or perhaps the sight of even friendly fighting would sicken a lover of peace like yourself?"

Fallon flushed at the gibe, but answered evenly. "We'll go out with you and watch."

As they accompanied the armored Aesir chieftain down a long stone hall, the American asked him a question.

"Is that fellow Thialfi very close to the princess Brynhild?"

Tyr looked at him quizzically. "He hopes to be her bridegroom. Though I do not know why that should interest you, outlander."

Fallon was dismayed by the information. He knew the sulky-faced Thialfi strongly favored Heysing's proposal. If the man were that close to Thor's daughter, he would surely influence her toward the plan.

The situation seemed more and more hopeless, but the American refused to surrender hope. Somehow, he told himself desperately, he *must* find a way to defeat the Nazi's evil scheme.

They emerged from the massive face of Valhalla castle into the chill day. Looking back upward, he was struck by the way in which the citadel hugged the sheer, frowning rock cliff that rose far overhead.

Helverson was staring puzzledly at the gray sky. "I cannot understand why there is day and night in this valley," he muttered. "If the time here is a hundred times faster than outside, there should be daylight and night every few minutes."

"You're forgetting that this is the midnight sun country, far north of the Arctic Circle," Fallon reminded him. "The day and night are each months long, outside here. In here, they're only hours long."

"Then it's already been months since we entered here!" gasped the Norwegian. "What has happened out in my country since then?"

Horsemen were galloping away down the valley toward the other distant castles, spurring along narrow roads through the dark forest.

"They go to summon all our chieftains to the council tonight," grunted Tyr. "Niord and Bragi and Hermod and all the rest will be here."

The grizzled captain led the way to a small natural amphitheater near Valhalla castle, in which a crowd was gathering. Tall Viking warriors, lithe Valkyr-girls in glittering mail, older women in long white linen gowns, even children

—all had come to watch the games.

FALLON was astonished by the character of the contests. Aesir warriors fought with padded battle-axes that were still highly dangerous to skulls. They wrestled furiously, with many bruising falls until one or the other was senseless. They sparred with sword and shield until both contestants were bleeding from serious wounds. The crowd applauded wildly.

"You Aesir have rough sports," the American commented in amazement. "I'd think that you would all kill each other in these games."

"Now and then a man gets killed but not often," Tyr answered casually. "Many are wounded, but Brynhild's magic makes them whole again."

He added discontentedly, "But we're tired of this mock fighting. There's nothing else to do—nothing but hunt occasionally in the forests and supervise the thralls who till our fields. We'll be joyful if Brynhild leads us forth to taste real war again!"

From nearby, the chieftain Heimdall launched an ironical invitation at Fallon. "Would you care to join in the sword-contests, outlander?"

A roar of insulting laughter went up from all the Aesir. Fallon turned dull red, knowing what these fierce, warlike men now thought of him.

He rose to his feet, determined to accept the satirical invitation and prove that he was no coward. He remembered enough of sabre-fencing from military-school days to make at least a showing.

But a sudden inspiration crossed his brain. It was the idea for which he had been seeking to defeat Victor Heysing's plans. It might work, and if it did, it would crush the Nazi's scheme.

Fallon sat down again, slowly and unwillingly. He hated doing so, but he

dared take no chances until he could carry out his idea tonight.

"I thought that you would think twice before entering the games," Heimdall said scathingly to him.

Tyr turned and glared at the American. "By the Norns, you love peace indeed. The one who calls himself a German was right about the softness of your race."

Fallon ventured no reply. But on the way back to the castle later with their disgusted guard, he found a chance to whisper to Helverson.

"I've an idea for ending Heysing's devilish plans," he said rapidly. "If that Nazi *dies* tonight, his scheme will die too!"

DARKNESS came softly and slowly down on the valley Asgard. It was strange to think that this slow nightfall was really the coming of the long months of Arctic night to the lands outside.

Torches flared in Valhalla's halls and passageways. Chieftains of the Aesir were constantly riding up from the castles farther down the valley, by now. Each brought with him retinue of excited fighting-men.

Tyr conducted Fallon and the Norwegian into the great council-hall. In its red torchlight, hundreds of the Aesir lords were gathered. Thialfi was there, near the throne-dais, and Victor Heysing was with him.

"Homage to the princess!" roared the shout of fierce throats as Brynhild entered and faced them from the dais.

Pride and consciousness of power were brilliant in her blue eyes as she faced them. The white lynx crouched beside her, whining softly.

Before she or anyone else could speak, Mart Fallon put his desperate idea into execution. He took a step toward the dais and raised his voice

loudly.

"Princess Brynhild, hear me before your council opens!" he demanded. He pointed at Victor Heysing. "That man has said that I lied when I told you his Leader and his purposes are evil. I maintain that he lies. That forms blood-feud between us, by your own Viking traditions."

His voice rose louder. "I claim warrior's right to settle that feud here and now. By tradition, you are bound to give swords to my enemy and myself and let us fight to the death!"

CHAPTER V

Storm Sorcery

IT WAS Fallon's desperate inspiration. He had dimly remembered that ancient Viking custom of permitting a warrior to settle a personal feud by public single combat. And he had seen in that a hazardous chance to avert Heysing's evil schemes by ending the Nazi's life.

How hazardous the chance was, he fully realized. Heysing, like most German officers of his class, would in all probability possess more skill with the saber than Fallon's own rusty practice. But the American's desperation was such that he would almost have welcomed death for himself if he could be sure of taking the Nazi with him.

The torchlit hall was in an uproar. The fierce Aesir chieftains had instantly warmed to the prospect of a death-duel.

But Thialfi was on his feet, glaring at Fallon. "It is a trick!" he accused. "The dark outlander is a coward who has no wish to fight."

Victor Heysing himself spoke up confidently. "I am ready to meet him," affirmed the Nazi loudly. "We Germans do not dodge battle."

A roar of applause greeted his boast. In this brief interval, Brynhild had been staring down at Fallon with a puzzled light in her eyes.

"I cannot understand—," she murmured perplexedly, but then broke off, and spoke in clear, chill tones to the American. "You have claimed Viking right and you shall have it, outlander. Heimdall, give them helmets, shields and swords."

A wide space was hastily cleared for the duel, in front of the dais on which Brynhild sat. Expectant excitement pervaded the throng of Aesir warriors as the preparations were made.

Helverson was expostulating with Fallon. He paid little attention, for Heimdall now had brought him the gleaming horned helmet, the small, heavy metal shield and long sword he was to use in the combat.

Tyr showed him how to hold the shield upon his left arm. "You'd best handle a sword better than a shield or you're dead now," he grunted.

The helmet felt heavy on Fallon's head, and the shield was an awkward encumbrance as he gripped his sword and stepped to meet Heysing.

Brynhild's voice rang clearly. "The fight is to the death, or until one combatant shall admit himself vanquished," she told them.

Victor Heysing had a thin, triumphant smile on his handsome blond face as he turned to face the American.

"It is too bad," he mocked Fallon, "that when you got this crazy idea, you did not know I was saber-champion at Heidelberg."

Fallon set his teeth and said nothing. The daughter of Thor, leaning forward, spoke sharply. "Begin!"

IT WAS almost death for Fallon in the first minute. Heysing had not lied when he had boasted of his skill

with the saber. The Nazi came in with a rush, his pale eyes gleaming behind his lunging blade. He was obviously determined to finish the fight as quickly as possible.

Fallon tried to parry that blow with the shield, and nearly lost his life. For his clumsy use of the unaccustomed shield merely caused it to deflect the lunging blade toward his heart. Only a frantic sidestep saved him, but the sword of his enemy slashed his sleeve as it grazed him.

Fallon stabbed back, uncertainly at first and then with rapidly increasing sureness as his rusty skill came back to him. But Heysing deftly parried the thrusts, and came back with wicked, slicing sweeps before which the American had to give ground.

Heysing knew himself the superior swordsman for certain now, and exultant satisfaction shone in his eyes.

"I am glad you challenged me, Fallon," he said mockingly under his breath as they fenced. "It will greatly increase my prestige with these people when I kill you."

Fallon made no answer. Cold premonition of imminent failure and death were chilling him. He could not get through the German's guard for a moment, and the other's sword seemed thrusting from everywhere.

As they circled and struck, blade ringing against blade or against a clanging shield, he glimpsed the torchlit, fierce faces of the Aesir throng watching the fight in delighted silence. And he had momentary vision of Brynhild's white, beautiful face and widened blue eyes.

"Take it!" hissed Heysing suddenly, and his sword-point came in like the head of a striking snake toward Fallon's heart.

Fallon frantically tried to raise the heavy shield but was only able to de-

flect the thrust. He felt the white-hot stinging of steel searing along his left shoulder, and sprang back with blood wetting his jacket.

Roar of excitement came from the watching Aesir throng at the sight. And now Heysing was coming in with wolf-savageness, thrusting, lunging, slicing, using all his skill to beat down Fallon's guard.

Another roar from the crowd, as steel whizzed past Fallon's head and inflicted a grazing cut on his cheek.

"Finish him, now!" the voice of Thialfi was shouting in adjuration to the German.

And Fallon, red with blood and dazedly fighting off the Nazi's savage attack, glimpsed Brynhild's eyes looking at him in *pity*.

Crimson rage exploded in the American's brain. He'd be dead in a minute and this damned crowd of wolves would yell with glee. By Heaven, he'd do his best to take the Nazi with him!

Furiously, he flung away the encumbering shield and helmet. Bareheaded and with his lean, dark face raging, he flung himself forward and struck like a madman at the German.

"The outlander is berserk!" rose a yell from the watching Aesir crowd.

FALLON hardly heard it. He saw Heysing through red mists. The German's face was startled. He recoiled from the crazy attack.

No fencing or scientific swordsmanship now! Fallon was possessed by the rage to kill. And the furious sweeps of his sword were an unpredictable attack against which Heysing had no immediate defense.

The convulsive strength of his strokes beat down the Nazi's parrying blade. As Heysing staggered, Fallon slashed fiercely in again. The German tried to raise his shield. It caught the first im-

pact of the American's sword, but the sword flashed off it and bit into Heysing's side.

The Nazi swayed, dropping his sword and then falling heavily. His helmet hit the stone floor with a resounding clang. He lay still.



The sword bit into Heysing's side

"The outland berserk has conquered!" cried Heimdall incredulously.

Thialfi rushed out, his sullen face furious. "The outlander did not conquer cleanly! The German slipped in the blood on the floor."

Voices disputed that assertion of Thialfi's, but other voices supported it. The uproar in the torchlit hall of Valhalla was tumultuous.

Thialfi was appealing to Brynhild. "Let the duel be fought again when the German's wound is healed! That is but justice."

Fallon leaned on his bloody sword, panting for breath and with those red mists only now dissolving from his brain. Brynhild, Tyr, all the Aesir, were eyeing him now with a perplexed respect.

They knew he was no coward now,

he thought with grim satisfaction. For they thought him a "berserk," most dreaded of Viking warriors, a man who flung away his armor when possessed by blood-madness in battle.

Brynhild raised her hand imperiously to still the clamorous dispute about the fairness of Fallon's triumph.

"I did not see the German slip, cousin Thialfi," she said curtly. "But since you claim he did, he shall be allowed the chance to repeat the duel when he is fit to fight again."

Fallon, standing a little weak and dizzy from loss of blood of his own wounds, made no objection to that decision.

"It's all right," he told Helverson, who had sprung to his side anxiously. "Heysing will be unable to hatch his scheme until he recovers, and that will give us time to figure a way of beating him."

But he was soon to discover that his calculations had reckoned without the fantastic powers of which Brynhild was mistress.

Thor's daughter had come down from the dais toward him. That new, puzzled respect was strong in her dynamic face as she spoke.

"Outlander, I shall soon heal those wounds of yours," she told him. "I see now that we misjudged you. Come with me."

"And the German?" Thialfi interjected urgently, gesturing to the prostrate man.

Brynhild nodded her golden head. "He, too. Bring him, Tyr."

She raised her clear voice to the Aesir throng. "We cannot hold council now, chieftains. It must wait until the morrow."

BRYNHILD moved through the curtained doorway beside the throne-dais, with the white lynx padding softly

at her side. Fallon unsteadily followed her, and Tyr came after them, carrying the unconscious Nazi.

Fallon found himself with the daughter of Thor in a torchlit stone corridor that led toward the rear of Valhalla castle. It ended in a heavy door of massive bronze, beyond which was a spiral stairway tunnelled out of the solid rock of the cliff.

"Where do we go?" Fallon asked doubtfully, as they entered the dark stairway.

"To heal your wounds," Brynhild answered impatiently. "I have the power to do so. Come!"

She grasped his wrist, leading up the twisting rock steps. It was the first time Fallon had experienced her touch. It sent a thrilling, faintly electric shock through him, as though life and energy flowed into him from the contact.

And Brynhild's slim white body glowed in the darkness of the stair with that dim lambency that had been only barely noticeable in the lighted hall. It made her seem more eerily unhuman—and yet the warm, tingling clasp of her fingers was far from that.

The lynx snarled from the darkness above them, and Brynhild laughed softly. "Inro is jealous of you, outlander."

Fallon felt a queer thudding of his pulses. He could hear Tyr grunting below them as he climbed with his senseless burden.

They went higher and higher inside the cliff. Fallon estimated vaguely that they must be near its top. A dim uproar of winds came to his ears from above, and gusty currents of freezing air smote his face.

They emerged suddenly into darkness and cold, buffeting winds. Fallon stopped short, momentarily appalled by the giddiness and danger of their situation.

This was a small, flat platform hewn out of the solid rock at the very peak of the lofty cliff. It was only a dozen feet across, and completely unrailed and open to the winds. Far, far below gleamed the torchlit windows of Valhalla castle. Overhead pressed the dull black canopy of the magic valley's night sky.

Poised above the solid rock floor of this dizzy perch was a massive silver ring nine feet in diameter, carved with strange runic symbols. It hung mysteriously in midair. Moving with fearless lightness, Brynhild led him inside this queer circle.

"Put the German down here, Tyr," she bade, and the old Aesir obeyed and laid the senseless German inside the silver runic circle.

Then Tyr hastily stepped back out of the circle. He muttered, "I'll wait down inside the stair. I do not much like your healing magic, niece Brynhild."

FALLON found himself swaying on his feet, partly from the dizziness of his precarious situation and partly from the wounds that were slowly draining his strength. Brynhild touched him steadily, and again, tingling strength seemed to flow into him from the touch.

At her direction, he stripped off his jacket and stood with bare, blood-stained torso shivering in the freezing wind. He also removed Heysing's jacket, exposing the deep wound in the senseless Nazi's side. The white lynx had retreated to the stair, snarling uneasily.

"Now stand close beside me, outlander, and move not out of the rune-circle for your life," Brynhild warned him. "The forces I am about to summon can heal swiftly—but they can kill swiftly too."

Standing just outside the circle,

Thor's daughter raised her naked white arms toward the night sky. Her blue eyes shone brilliant through the wind-swirled torrent of her pale gold hair. And the uncanny lambency that invested her fair body deepened to a glow.

Great gusts of wind suddenly buffeted them furiously, howling and shrieking in their ears as though seeking to tear them from the lofty cliff. The chill night was suddenly roaringly alive with rising storm-voices. Fallon felt a shivering not wholly born of the cold.

Brynhild's silver, ringing laughter pealed out on the raging wind. Her face was turned toward the zenith, and from her upstretched finger-tips seemed to dart tiny threads of light. The American's hair rose on his head. He sensed the ominous gathering of vast forces.

Crash! He staggered, dazed and blinded by the terrific bolt of lightning that stabbed down at them. That flaring bolt seemed to strike down toward Brynhild's upstretched hands, and then to be deflected toward the silver ring. Another awful bolt followed it, and another and another. Electric flames danced dazzlingly on the silver rune-ring.

Fallon shouted hoarsely to the girl, his voice thin and puny against the rocking thunderclaps. "If that lightning strikes us—"

"It will not, for I am its mistress," pealed Brynhild's voice. "But keep here within the ring!"

The scene was mind-shattering, to the American. The almost continuous bolts of lightning striking all around the ring, each sheeted flare throwing into wild illumination Brynhild's glowing figure; the deafening thunder; the shrieking winds that swept their dizzy perch.

Electric flame now completely encircled them in a slowly rising wall. Fallon felt the thrilling shock of electrical or other forces that pervaded every cell of his body. His brain spun with vertigo.

"Stand fast!" warned Thor's daughter over the crashing tumult. "It will be but a moment."

IT SEEMED more like a timeless eternity to Fallon's stunned brain that he stood with the Aesir girl and the unconscious German in the heart of a blazing, inconceivably powerful sphere of electric force.

The thrilling tingle in his body was almost unbearable. He looked down and saw violet electric brush spraying from his own body. He heard Brynhild laugh above the smash of crashing lightning.

"It is enough," she seemed to be saying. And she lowered her arms.

Magically, the bolts of lightning ceased. And as the rocking reverberations of thunder ebbed away, the wall of flaming force around the silver runer sank and died.

Fallon, coming slowly out of his daze, found himself standing with Brynhild in the windy darkness. Her body still shone uncannily bright, and her brilliant, laughing blue eyes mocked his stupefaction.

"Look at your wounds now, outlander," she told him.

Fallon did so, and felt the shock of increased amazement. The stab in his left shoulder and the cut upon his cheek were both incredibly healed, as though by weeks of time. No trace of the wounds was left except two faint scars. And he felt none of his former weakness, now.

He looked down at Heysing. The Nazi still lay unconscious, but that deep sword-slash in his side was healed to a

smooth scar too. And his breathing now seemed easy and normal.

"He is completely healed, as you are," Brynhild nodded to the unbelieving American. "He will wake in a few hours, as well as ever."

She raised her voice. "Ho, Tyr! Come and take the German—my magic is ended."

Tyr came reluctantly up onto the windy place, with the white lynx bounding ahead of him to rub its fierce head against Brynhild.

"I heard you at it," growled the old Aesir chieftain. "Hel take me if I ever liked it, niece. I thought the lightnings would split the whole cliff this time."

He shouldered Heysing's senseless weight as though the man was a straw, and returned with him to the stair inside the cliff.

Fallon looked earnestly at the radiant face of Thor's daughter. "Brynhild, is this how Helverson and I were healed of our wounds when we were first brought here by you?"

She nodded. "Yes, by the healing magic of the lightning. I have so healed more than one wounded or dying warrior whom my Valkyries and I found outside and brought here, in past years."

HIS dazed mind groped for possible explanations. He could understand that the terrific bombardment of electric radiation to which he had been subjected might by concentrated therapeutic power cause unprecedented acceleration of the processes of cell-regeneration. But how was it that Brynhild was able to summon lightning at will?

She smiled cryptically at that question. "Can you not guess an answer? You have heard that this valley represents a fault or weak spot in the fabric of space-time. Is it not possible that the vast electric forces outside our uni-

verse could easily be admitted here? And could not Odin, and Thor, and I, use those forces to convert our living bodies into powerful electric accumulators which could attract the lightning?"

Her smile deepened as she continued teasingly, "Or perhaps that is only dust that I throw into your eyes. Perhaps there are strange spirits of force inherent in the elements of nature, and maybe I can control those elementals. What think you to be the truth, outlander?"

"I can't guess," Fallon confessed. "Helverson, my comrade, thinks that you are a goddess and he explains all so."

"Then you do not think I am a goddess?" she exclaimed, with mock indignation in her voice but with taunting humor in her eyes.

"I thought you were a goddess when you called down that blaze of lightning just now," Fallon admitted. "But right at this moment, you look like a girl, the most beautiful I've ever seen."

Brynhild looked up at him demurely. "Are there no fair girls in your outer world, then?"

Her brilliant blue eyes were provocative, challenging, more than a little amused and yet a little breathless too. The royal beauty of her perfect young face stood out in the darkness with that uncanny faint radiance that was inherent in her body.

The American's throat tightened with emotion. He had lost all awareness of time or place or of anything else except those wonderful eyes in which the little lightning-sparks were now all muffled by new softness. He told himself desperately that he was losing his head, that Brynhild was only flirting with him because he was new and different to her, that he must not—

His hand went out and touched her bare shoulder, unsteadily. The tingling emotion that thrilled through him from

that touch completed the demoralization of his will. Fallon's arms went around the daughter of Thor and he bent and kissed her parted red lips.



Fallon kissed the daughter of Thor

THE dizzily sweet shock of it set the blood roaring in his ears. He felt the torrent of golden hair against his cheek like soft flame. And Brynhild did not draw back from his clasp. When he breathlessly raised his head, she looked up at him with a strangely youthful and shy eagerness in her shining eyes.

"This is crazy," Fallon gasped. "I didn't mean to do it, but—"

"I am glad you did," Brynhild said softly. "Outlander, I was drawn to you when first I found you. But until tonight, I thought you a coward as we all did. I ask pardon for misjudging."

"You ask *my* pardon?" Fallon choked, still holding her. "It should be the other way around. I'm only a man, and you're a goddess or something near it—"

There was sudden interruption—a voice speaking in fierce anger.

They both turned. Old Tyr had

come back up the stair and had emerged onto the dark, windy crest of the cliff to see them in each other's arms. The Aesir's chieftain's iron face was suddenly raging.

"You lying outland dog!" he spat at Fallon. "You dared lay your vile hands on the princess of the Aesir!"

"Tyr, be silent!" ordered Brynhild imperiously. "You know not what you are saying. 'This outlander loves me, and you may as well learn now that I love him.'"

The frank avowal set Fallon's pulses racing wildly. But it seemed to increase the fury of Tyr to a point at which the chieftain's weathered face crimsoned.

"He loves you?" Tyr repeated furiously to the imperious daughter of Thor. "He has told you that? Now I see that it was well I came back up here to keep watch upon him."

The old Aesir levelled an accusing finger at Fallon. "He does not love you. He only seeks by professing love to influence you against becoming an ally of his enemies, the Germans. I overheard his comrade today, advising him to make love to you for that purpose!"

Appalled, Fallon suddenly remembered what until now he had entirely forgotten—Helverson's naive advice to make love to the Aesir princess.

And he remembered now too that Tyr had been close to them when the Norwegian had proffered that advice. It was only too evident that the old Aesir chieftain had overheard.

Brynhild saw that sudden dismay on Fallon's face, and her own white face stiffened.

"Is this true that Tyr tells me?" she asked the American with dangerous softness.

"Let him deny it if he can," Tyr bel-
lowed.

Fallon's voice was hoarse. "It's true that Helverson said something foolish like that. But I paid no attention to him. Brynhild, you can't believe that I had that in mind just now—"

Brynhild's small hand flashed and the stinging slap stopped the words in Fallon's throat. He stared at her unbelievably.

Wild anger blazed in the face of Thor's daughter. The little lightnings in her blue eyes flashed out ragingly. As though sensing its mistress' mood, the crouching white lynx sprang up and snarled horribly.

"I see that I did *not* misjudge you, and that the German was right!" flared Brynhild. "Coward you may not be, but false-hearted trickster you *are*!"

"Brynhild, listen!" he pleaded desperately, but the white-hot flame of her anger brooked no defense.

"Now I see that the German spoke the truth when he said that all your outland western nations are treacherous and evil!" she blazed. "Nations whose men hate honest war, and seek to gain their cause by whispering lying words of love."

She made a furious gesture. "Tyr, my decision is made. We Aesir ally ourselves to the Germans. They, at least, fight by clean war and battle and not by trickery. With them, we'll shatter the western peoples and all their evil!"

Fallon stepped forward, in frantic appeal. "Brynhild, you *can't* do that! If you let the Germans use your powers—"

A swordpoint pricking his back checked his advance, and the harsh voice of Tyr grated a question.

"Shall I kill the dog now, niece Brynhild?"

"No, he shall see the doom of his degenerate race begin, for his greater punishment," choked the raging daugh-

ter of Thor. "He and his comrade shall ride forth with us when we Aesir go to join the Germans."

Her voice flared like a silver bugle. "Lock them up until then, Tyr. And send riders down the valley with orders to gather every warrior of the Aesir here at Valhalla tomorrow night. Tell them we go forth at last to war, that we ride forth then to join the Germans in the great battle for the outer world!"

CHAPTER VI

Wrath of a Goddess

DARKNESS was creeping again across the valley Asgard, like a slow, stealthy tide. During all the long day, there had been ceaseless bustle of feverish activity around Valhalla. The clang of hammers on weapons and armor, the excited shouts of hurrying men, the rattling hoofs of horsemen hastily coming and going, now faded into a tense silence with the coming of night.

Fallon looked sickly down from the narrow window at the swarms of tossing red torches in front of the castle. The torchlight glinted off the gleaming helmets and armor of hosts of horsemen who were gathering down there. There was something ominous and unnerving about the quietness of that warlike host.

His face was haggard as he turned to Helverson. The big Norwegian sat somberly in a corner of the locked room, his wrists bound behind him by hide thongs as Fallon's were. He did not raise his leonine yellow head as the American came toward him.

"We've got to *do* something!" Fallon exclaimed, his voice raw. "They're gathering down there now."

"There is nothing we can do," rumbled Helverson. "All now is in the hands of the Norns."

"Damn such fatalism!" raged Fallon. "If I'd killed Heysing as I intended, things would have been different. And even though I failed there, Brynhild still wouldn't have turned toward the Germans if it hadn't been for your cursed fool's advice that came to her ears—"

He stopped, suddenly. He looked shamefacedly at the somber, stolid Norwegian.

"I'm sorry, Nels—you know I didn't mean that," he muttered. "My nerve must be cracking."

"But we can't let Brynhild lead the Aesir out to join the Nazis," he repeated tautly. "It's not just the Aesir warriors I'm most fearful about, though their appearance will have a superstitious effect that may swing the whole north behind the Axis. It's Brynhild and her terrific powers over natural forces. I *saw* her call down storm and lightning, last night. If Hitler's men get the secret of powers like that—"

He left it unfinished, for his agonized mind had swung to his other and deeper torment.

"And she thinks that I made love to her only as a trick! I couldn't convince her that I do love her and always will, whether she is girl or goddess."

Helverson's thoughts had shifted, for the big Norwegian rumbled: "Many months must have passed in the outside world during the couple of days we've been in this valley. What has happened in the war out there during that time?"

BOTH men jumped to their feet as the lock of their door grated. Red torchlight spilled into the dusky room. Tyr and Heimdall, in full armor, entered with two warriors.

"Are you ready to ride, outlanders?" spat Tyr. "Are you ready to go forth with us and see us join the Germans

to smash your lying race?"

"Tyr, let me talk with Brynhild," pleaded Fallon. "If she'll only listen to me—"

"She's listened to too many of your honeyed lies!" roared the old Aesir chieftain.

Tall Heimdall, glaring at the two comrades, added: "If we had had our way, you'd have been dead hours ago."

For a moment, Fallon's mind lit to a vague gleam of desperate hope. Perhaps the fact that Brynhild had prevented their deaths so far meant that despite her anger she had not completely conquered the love for him which she had admitted.

Then he saw the falsity of that hope. She was sparing them this long only that they might taste the bitterness of seeing the defeat and disaster of their country's forces.

Tyr shoved him roughly toward the door. "Get started, outland dog. The Aesir are ready now to ride."

Hands still bound behind them, Fallon and Helverson walked in heavy silence down the massive stairs ahead of their stalking escort. They emerged from Valhalla castle into cold, windy darkness splashed by the quivering light of many red torches.

Out here in the torchlit night, a great host of fierce-faced Aesir warriors in full armor silently sat their horses. The crimson rays glistened and gleamed from horned helmets and battered breastplates, from huge battle-axes and sword-hilts. A superhuman tension of expectation seemed brooding over the two thousand mounted men.

Thralls held the bridles of a score of unmounted horses. Fallon and the Norwegian were roughly thrust into the saddles of two of these steeds. Their hands were not unbound, and glaring Aesir warriors took the bridles of their horses to lead them.

At that moment, the tense silence of the great host was broken suddenly by a tremendous shout.

"The princess!" crashed the chorus of yelling voices.

Fallon twisted in the saddle. His heart thudded as he saw Brynhild striding lithely out of the castle into the torchlight. She wore the supple, glittering mail, but her pale golden head was unhelmed. Her light sword swung at her belt, and the white lynx loped beside her.

A little behind her came the sullen-eyed Thialfi, and the trim, handsome black figure of Victor Heysing. They were followed by the slim, mailed Valkyries.

Fallon's heart contracted with impotent rage at sight of the Nazi. Heysing showed no sign of ill effects from his wound now, and his pale eyes had a glitter of triumph in them.

"The princess! Homage to Thor's daughter!" crashed the shouts of the hosts, and a forest of swords and axes flashed up in salute.

Brynhild flung up her white hand in acknowledgment of that wild greeting. Her royal beauty was like a thing of leaping flame tonight. Her brilliant eyes swept the fierce host, ignoring Fallon.

"Lords and captains of the Aesir, this night we go forth again to that which you all have longed for—to war!" her voice rang. "Yes, to clean, honest war, man to man, sword to sword, a fair, fierce combat such as we knew and loved before we came to this valley.

"War! Good, clean war again!" yelled the eager host in fierce delight.

"Before this night passes, you shall know battle again," Brynhild promised. She gestured toward Victor Heysing. "This man tells me that the valiant Germans, who are to be our allies, are less than a night's ride from here."

"It is true!" Heysing exclaimed loudly to the host. "I went forth from this valley just now, and communicated by certain means with an army of my countrymen that is not far from here."

FALLON understood. The Nazi had gone out of the valley to his plane in the gorge, and had used its radio to communicate with the nearest German forces.

Heysing's face was flaming with excitement. "I learned that almost two years have passed in the two of your days that I've been in this valley! And during that time, our German forces have conquered all the northland except for one large guerilla band that still resists.

"A German force is even now moving to attack that band. It and the British tricksters who have deluded it into resisting us are holding a coastal village on the shore of the Arctic Ocean, only some hours' ride from here through the mountains."

Brynhild's clear voice concluded. "We ride over the mountains to join that valiant German force in its attack! We shall be their allies henceforth against the traitorous outland peoples. This very night, we Aesir awake from sluggish peace and strike again in clean, manly war!"

Deafening roar of acclamation greeted her fierce promise. As it reverberated, the daughter of Thor vaulted lightly into the saddle of her black stallion. The others were mounting hastily too.

Fallon called desperately to her. "Brynhild, you must listen to me! This purpose upon which you start is evil! You have been tricked into it by lies—"

"*You* are the one who deals in tricks!" she flamed at him. "Now you go forth with us to see the fruits of

your cunning treachery."

She spurred with her Valkyries, and Heysing and Thialfi, to the front of the great host. Her glittering mailed arm flashed up into the torchlight in signal.

"Lords of the Aesir, we ride!"

Trumpeters instantly sounded their brazen horns in a long, thrilling blast. The ground shook from the tread of thousands of hoofs. The Aesir host moved forward, fierce warriors galloping knee to knee as they streamed down the valley.

Fallon, jolting in the saddle as the mounts of himself and Helverson were led by their guards just behind the Valkyries, plumbed a nadir of black despair. And the same emotion throbbed in the hoarse voice of the Norwegian.

"Fallon, did you understand what the cursed German said?" cried Helverson over the roar of rushing hoofs. "It's 1942 by now out in our own world! The Nazis have conquered all Norway except the far northern wilderness, and now they've sent an army to conquer that!"

"And Brynhild's Aesir are riding to help the Nazis do that, and crush the last Norwegian guerillas," Fallon agonized.

"They *can't* do it," Helverson asserted dazedly. "Thor's daughter will surely never use her powers against us Norse."

But Fallon had no hope left. He had lost the game to Heysing, from first to last. The German riding ahead there was on his way to a supreme triumph. It would not be long before the Nazis would penetrate the secret of Brynhild's powers. Their scientists would come to this hidden valley, would pry into the cosmic forces focused here, and forge irresistible weapons.

And Hitler's lieutenants would find a way to dispose of Brynhild, once she

had served their purpose. It was maddening—the thought of how she and her clean love of combat were about to be used as a tool against the embattled democracies.

THEY were riding on down the dark valley, in perfect silence except for the throbbing thunder of thousands of hoofs. It did not seem long to Fallon's overstrained nerves before they were approaching the western end of the valley.

Nothing was visible ahead except a wall of blankness in the dark. It was impossible to see out of this uncanny blind-spot. When Brynhild and her Valkyries, at the head of the host, vanished magically into that blankness, Fallon knew they had emerged into the outer world.

The weird blank barrier loomed in front of his own led horse. Tyr and Heimdall and all the other Aesir chieftains were riding fearlessly on. They reached the barrier. And as he passed through it, the American felt again that sharp, wrenching shock through every atom of his body.

He was outside Asgard valley—back again in his own world of faster time.

"It is winter again, out here," Helverson was muttering, staring incredulously. "*Two* winters, since we crashed here two days ago."

That was hard for Fallon to believe too, that two years could have passed out here. For the snowy white gorge looked just the same.

The sky overhead was ablaze with the brilliant winter stars. But already the first bars and banners of the Northern Lights were wheeling across the nighted heavens as Brynhild led her host of warriors in a rapid trot down the long gorge.

Fallon, looking up haggardly at that quickening dance of the aurora across

the heavens, wondered fleetingly if it could be true that Brynhild called forth those spectral lights to illuminate their way. He had little room to doubt it, knowing her mastery of storm and sky.

For hours, the Aesir host moved through the snowy mountains. Brynhild led the way ever northward, through gorges and narrow passes. They were close, Fallon knew, to the Norwegian villages on the wild Arctic coast which he himself had been making for when his plane crashed.

In silence that had a quality of gathering fierce tension, the warriors of Asgard urged their mounts over the ranges in the teeth of a bitter wind. At last the daughter of Thor halted their host beneath the slope of a last, long snowy ridge.

"Just over this ridge lies the coastland where we shall join the Germans!" she called. "Now give your horses breathing and see to your swords and axes, for soon we clash blades with our enemies."

The blazing excitement in her eyes was reflected by the fierce battle-light in the faces of all the Aesir host.

Fallon tried despairing final appeal. "Brynhild, you can't do this thing—"

He was interrupted. Heimdall had been alertly listening and now uttered a sharp exclamation.

"Listen! There is battle now over the ridge!"

DIMLY to their ears there came dull roar of distant explosions, and a lurid red light paled the aurora just north of the ridge.

Victor Heysing shouted exultantly. "It is my German comrades whom we came to join! Already they are attacking the enemy down there!"

"Then we wait here no longer!" flared Brynhild's silver voice. "Up to the ridge, men of the Aesir! We ride

into battle."

"We follow, princess!" came Tyr's deep, eager shout. "Oh, that your father Thor were with us as again we sweep to war!"

Up the snowy slope spurred the whole great host, led by Brynhild's slim, shining figure and the loping lynx. And the wild war lust of the Aesir thousands broke forth in ringing battle-cries.

Fallon, gripping the saddle with his knees as his own mount was swept along by his guards, saw that Nels Helverson's face was crimson with emotion. The big Norwegian was making mad efforts to burst his bonds, as he heard the roar of battle from over the ridge.

"My countrymen and yours are fighting over there!" he cried hoarsely to Fallon. "I will fight and die with them if I can get free, even against Thor's daughter and the Aesir!"

Spread out in a long mass, the excited Aesir host reached the flattened crest of this last ridge. And there they suddenly stopped.

Brynhild had abruptly drawn rein, and so had all her fierce followers. They seemed stricken into stupefaction by the spectacle which lay before them, and whose ear-splitting uproar now clearly reached them.

Fallon, close behind her, saw the blazing excitement fade from the face of Thor's daughter. He saw it replaced by a stunned, bewildered expression.

"Why, what is this that takes place?" she exclaimed bewilderedly.

Under the Northern Lights, the scene before them was appalling. From the ridge on which they sat their horses, the snowy terrain sloped downward for two miles to the ice-fringed shore of the heaving black Arctic Ocean. Out on the sea, two small steamers were

struggling bravely through the ice toward the docks of the little village on the shore.

Half the wooden houses in that Norwegian village were burning fiercely. Dive-bombers with the black swastika on their wings were swooping continually down through that lurid glare, and the shattering explosion of bombs was constant. Gouts of bursting flame seemed to engulf houses, streets, and women and children who were fleeing toward the docks.

The land side of the village was protected by low barricades of frozen earth. Behind those flimsy defenses, scattered handfuls of men with rifles were resisting the advance of a mass of several thousand Nazi infantry pressing toward them from the west. The Nazis were preceded by light tanks that already were riding roughshod over the barricades.

"What is this that we see?" exclaimed Brynhild again, seeming stunned like her followers by the hellish uproar.

"It is my countrymen who attack!" cried Victor Heysing triumphantly. "Look, they seek to conquer before those British ships can reach the harbor to take the defenders away. This is how we Germans make war."

"But *this* is not war!" burst out Brynhild. "Not clean, man-to-man war by sword and spear in equal combat, such as we Aesir knew and loved! This is a massacre by machines of iron and fire!"

A DAZED cry of agreement rose from her stunned Viking followers all along the ridge.

Tyr's iron-like face was raging as he watched. "Why, these Germans are not warriors! They are butchers who slay women and children by dropping flame upon them from the sky."

"And those whom they massacre are of our own Norse blood!" cried Heimdall furiously. "The German said that his countrymen sought only to protect the Norse."

Brynhild's face was a white flame of anger and loathing. "We Aesir will never ally ourselves with a race who fight like that!"

She swung toward Fallon. "Now I understand at last why you said you hated war. This war *is* hateful, and so are those who unloose it upon the world."

She spurred close, and her dagger flashed and cut the bonds of the American and Norwegian. Her blue eyes appealed to Fallon.

"Outlander, I beg forgiveness! You spoke truth from first to last. It was the German who lied—"

She swung back suddenly, her voice flaring. "Where *is* the German? Seize that lying plotter!"

The mounted Aesir warriors milled upon the snowy ridge in a confusion of swift searching.

"The cursed German is gone!" yelled Tyr. "He must have seen the way the wind was blowing, and slipped back down over the ridge. And Thialfi is gone too."

"Find and seize them!" cried Thor's daughter. "If Thialfi has turned traitor and deserter—"

But the Aesir warriors who rode furiously back down behind the ridge soon returned—with Thialfi, but not with Heysing.

Loki's son was dying. A gaping slash in his throat bubbled horribly as he looked up at them from the snow in which they had laid him, and tried to speak.

"The German—slipped away from beside me when he saw your horror and rage," Thialfi choked to the princess. "I galloped after to halt him—but he

turned and pretended surrender, then struck suddenly with a dagger—"

Thialfi's head rolled slack. Whatever else he had been, Loki's son had been no traitor.

Fallon saw white, terrible rage gather in Brynhild's face and stormy eyes. And that rage was reflected in the faces of all the Aesir.

"Look!" shouted Heimdall, pointing down toward the roaring battle by the village. "The Germans come toward *us!*"

IT WAS true. The advancing Nazi force had suddenly wheeled away from the barricades it had been attacking, and was starting up the slope toward the crest on which the Aesir horsemen were.

The tanks already led the way, rumbling up the snowy slope with their snouted guns swung forward ready for action. Behind them came the masses of the infantry, in quick, rapid march.

Fallon understood instantly. "Heysing escaped to them and told them of our presence here! They're after *you*, Brynhild. If they can capture or kill you and shatter your Aesir, Heysing knows they can invade your valley and gain the key to great powers there."

"That's been the lying devil's plan all along!" cried Helverson.

A cry of rage went up from the Aesir host as all understood the duplicity with which Heysing had planned to trick them.

"They would invade Asgard, would they?" roared Tyr. He flashed his heavy sword in the air. "It seems that we shall have the fighting we hoped for, after all."

Brynhild's blue eyes were blazing. Her voice rang along the raging host on the ridge.

"From henceforth, the German butchers are our blood-enemies and the

Norse and their allies our friends. Make ready, children of Asgard, for the battle is near."

Wild shouts of exultation answered her. Swords and axes flashed out in readiness. Helverson had secured Thialfi's axe, and handed the dead man's sword to Fallon.

"Brynhild, what are you going to do?" cried Fallon to the daughter of Thor. "You can't stand against those Germans. No matter how brave your warriors, swords and axes are no good against planes and tanks and guns!"

The Nazi forces were already streaming up the lower slopes. The tanks rumbling ahead in the snow would be spitting death from their machine-guns within a few minutes. They and the automatic-riflemen behind them were almost within range.

And the dive-bombers that had been attacking the burning village had turned from it and were banking around in answer to radio commands. Those planes, Fallon knew, would quickly spot the Aesir host and come down upon it.

Brynhild answered Fallon's expostulation with a ringing laugh. "I tell you that despite their machines of iron, we shall shatter them this night. Now keep back from me, and await my signal."

Thor's daughter rode forward, out onto a little promontory of the snowy ridge. Her slim mailed figure and unhelmeted head were silhouetted against the wild glare of burning village and flaring Northern Lights.

SHE raised her hands toward the sky in a fierce gesture. The Nazis charging up the slope had glimpsed her, and the machine-guns of their rushing tanks spat a hail of missiles toward her. But Brynhild remained unmoving upon her steed, hands still reaching

upward.

Fallon felt a great throb of fear as he saw the distant Nazi planes now roaring toward them. In a few moments, those planes would be overhead and would be diving to release their bombs and shatter the Aesir host before tanks and gunners arrived. In a few moments the girl he loved beyond life would be blasted—

The flaring sky suddenly darkened. Clouds like vast black wings closed down upon a moaning wind to blot out the aurora's rays.

"It is the storm-magic," muttered Tyr in a voice suddenly hoarse. "See—"

Fallon felt the hackles rising on his neck. Those vast black cloud-wings that had appeared so suddenly were sweeping with incredible swiftness lower and lower toward the crest of this ridge.

The moaning wind was rising to a whistling, screaming gale that smote from overhead toward the north. The throbbing planes out there were batted like leaves by the raging tempest.

"I am afraid, Fallon," husked Helverson, his eyes dilated in the ghastly dusk. "It is the wrath of the goddess—"

Heaven and earth leaped into blinding light as titanic bolts of lightning seared down out of the descending blackness. The lambent, gleaming figure of Brynhild was revealed, wild hands still raised skyward.

The American glimpsed those dazzling lightning-bolts hitting the rumbling tanks down on the slope, fusing them to scorched metal. He saw the masses of Nazi infantry pause confusedly.

"The hammer of Thor's magic power falls upon them!" yelled Heimdall. "Make ready, comrades!"

Unceasing detonations of thunder

rolled across the blackened sky. Torrents of raging hail were sweeping the lower slopes, and still the dancing brands of lightning struck and struck down there.

Fallon saw the struggling Nazi planes swept from the sky by that appalling storm. Continuous sheeted flares of lightning showed the German troops milling wildly down there in the snow. Out of the infernal tempest, Brynhild appeared suddenly at his side.

She was goddess indeed, now—her figure shining with that eery lambency and her wild white face transfigured in the lightning.

"Sons of the Aesir, *we ride!*" stabbed her silvery voice.

Three thousand voices crashed answer through the thunderous din, and the trumpets clamored as the yelling host spurred forward.

Fallon felt lifted out of himself by superhuman emotion as he galloped beside Brynhild down the snowy slope toward the milling enemy. He heard the blood-chilling, squalling scream of the white lynx as it leaped ahead of the racing steed of Thor's daughter.

HIS sword was in his hand and he was leaning far out over the neck of his mount as they rushed down through the lightning and hail and darkness. And over all the uproar rose the stabbing cry of Brynhild and the Valkyries.

"*Yo to ho!*"

They smashed down into the hosts of Nazi infantry like a thunderbolt. Fallon, seeking to spur ahead of Brynhild for her protection, glimpsed scared, desperate German faces and striking bayonets everywhere.

He hacked furiously down with his sword at men who sought to swing up their rifles to shoot. He saw Nazi soldiers recoiling with screams of horror

from the leaping white lynx, and glimpsed Tyr shouting fiercely as he struck. And close by in the press, Helverson rode and whirled his heavy axe, blood-mad with heat of battle.

But try as he might, Fallon could not spur ahead of Brynhild. The slim sword of the daughter of Thor leaped in blurringly swift and deadly stabs. And always, it seemed, the sheeted lightning struck just ahead of her galloping horse, and advanced with her.

Out of the phantasmagoric, lightning-lit battle, a furious and wofish face rushed toward Fallon. All Victor Heysing's handsomeness was gone as he came riding toward the American with a levelled automatic spitting fire from his hand.

Fallon felt the tug of the bullets at his jacket and through the uproar heard Heysing's raging shout.

"*Gott, I'll at least take you—*"

Lightning rocked the crazy scene as Fallon spurred into the spitting pistol with his sword extended straight toward the German.

He felt the stinging sear of one bullet along his thigh, and then his outstretched blade tore into Heysing's body and he felt its hilt smack hard against the German's ribs. The onward rush of his steed tore loose his sword, and he looked back to see the Nazi fall from the saddle.

The Nazi troops were everywhere fleeing in confusion, now. And after them rode the raging Aesir warriors. Within the half hour, it was all over. The storm was muttering away, and Fallon was almost glad that darkness veiled the scattered hosts of German dead on the snowy slope.

He sat his horse beside Brynhild on the crest as the Aesir host re-gathered and came riding back up the slope. A wild shout crashed from them as they raised red swords and axes in salute

to Thor's daughter.

"Homage, princess! Thanks to your storm-magic, we have left no German living here!"

"Aye, but there are others of the butchers in the northland," Brynhild reminded them. "And now we Aesir shall not rest until they are driven back from whence they came. We shall ride forth again and again from our valley and strike them wherever we find them, until the land is clean of them."

"We hear and we will follow you, princess!" came the fierce answer.

"And *I* will follow you, if you let me," Helverson rumbled, his face flaming.

BUT Fallon was silent. And Brynhild looked at him in sudden anxious earnestness. "I know that you come with us, too."

He shook his head heavily, and pointed down at the distant village where the two ships had now reached dock and were embarking the refugees.

"Those ships go to England, Brynhild," he said slowly. "And I must go with them."

"But you cannot!" she cried. Her brilliant eyes burned into his. "Outlander, you know that I love you. Even when I was angry for what I thought your deception, I still loved you and was sure that you loved me."

He leaned in the saddle to put his arms close around her and to feel the thrilling contact of her lips.

"Girl or goddess, I do love you, Brynhild," he said hoarsely. "But I swore an oath of duty that I must keep. I must go back to England to take up again my part in the war in the sky."

Her white face yearned toward him. "But you will come back, Outlander?"

"I'll come back, Brynhild. Nothing can keep me from coming back."

Fallon stood at the rail of the crowded little British freighter as it and its

sister ship struggled doggedly out through the ice to open sea. He stood looking back achingly at the wilderness of snowy mountains that stretched awesome and forbidding beyond the shore.

The joyful Norwegian refugees who crowded the deck behind him were still excitedly discussing the mystery of their salvation. All they knew was that some terrific battle had taken place on the distant slopes which had destroyed the Nazis who had been on the point of conquering them. Storm had veiled that battle, and the mystery of their saviors' identity was unsolved.

"They must have been a large force of Norwegian guerillas, who went back into the mountains after they destroyed the Nazis," said a man.

A tall Norse woman, her eyes glowing with a strange light, shook her head.

"They were the old gods, come back from Asgard to help our people. Only Thor or his daughter could have blasted the invaders by storm like that."

Fallon, in the months to follow, was to hear that half-eager, half-doubtful assertion time and again, in the strange stories that were to drift out of embattled Norway.

Stories were to come of the old gods reappearing to aid their invaded land, of the mighty Aesir coming down again and again in night and storm in raids upon German posts; stories of the mystification and anger and fear of the Nazis, of the whisper of hope running through that northern land that Thor's daughter and her Valkyries were riding again, a whisper and hope that would keep Norway's people fighting until the tyrants could be overthrown.

Some day, Fallon knew, that overthrow would come. And some day, he would come back again to that wild, weird northern land, and would ride up into the mountains to the valley where the daughter of Thor would be waiting.