



THE RUNESTONE



- The Jelling stone, "Denmark's birth certificate."
Photo courtesy the Danish National Museum.

THE RUNESTONE is a journal of the pagan Norse religion and is dedicated to the revival of that religion as epitomized during the Viking Age, and to the revival of the values of courage, freedom and individuality which are associated with it.

THE RUNESTONE is the official publication of the Ásatrú Free Assembly and is published quarterly. Subscriptions are \$3.00 per year. Write Stephen A. McNallen, 1766 East Avenue, Turlock, California 95380.

Please make checks payable to "Viking Brotherhood" as we are still involved in the paperwork which will officially change our name to "Ásatrú Free Assembly."

NORSE NOTES

A RELIGIOUS CALENDAR - JUNE THROUGH AUGUST

This is the first installment of what will become a regular feature, to promote the widespread observance of our holy days among our readers.

JUNE 8. LINDISFARNE DAY. On this date in 793 C.E., three Viking ships swept down on the isle of Lindisfarne, off the coast of Northumbria, and more or less officially began the Viking Age. The repercussions of this raid shocked all Christendom. Celebrate this Day of Remembrance in your own way--perhaps by drinking a toast to these brothers of ours from long ago.

JUNE 21. THE SUMMER SOLSTICE - MIDSUMMER--one of the holiest days of Ásatrú. This is the longest day of the year, and marks the gradual turning of the seasonal wheel which will culminate months from now in Jól.

JULY 29. Olaf the Lawbreaker, known to history as Saint Olaf of Norway, was killed by his enraged countrymen at the battle of Stiklestad on this date in 1030 C.E. Olaf acquired a reputation for killing, torturing, maiming, or exiling his fellow Norwegians who were not interested in becoming Christians, and for carrying an army with him about the countryside in violation of the law to help him accomplish these deeds.

AUGUST 9. On this date we honor a hero of our religion who actually predates the Viking Age by a few years--one Radbod, king of Frisia, who died in 719 C.E. Radbod was one of the early targets of Christian conversion efforts, and it looked as if they had succeeded. Just before the baptism ceremony, however, the king asked the clergy what fate had befallen his ancestors who had died as heathens. The missionary replied that Radbod's pagan forefathers were no doubt aflame in Hell, to which the king responded, "Then I will rather live there with my ancestors than go to heaven with a parcel of beggars." The baptism was cancelled, the churches were burned, the priests were killed, and Frisia remained free. As the actual date is unknown, August 9 was chosen arbitrarily to honor Radbod.

Days of Remembrance, which comprise all the above days except Midsummer, are celebrated by an informal act of commemoration such as drinking a toast or performing some worthy deed.

There they are, kinsmen--mark your calendar, lest you forget!

MIDSUMMER!

Midsummer, the summer solstice which falls on June 21, is one of the great seasonal festivals of Ásatrú. This is the day which marks the height of the Sun's power, and a gradual decline of her might is imminent--a decline which in time will result in winter's darkness. Because of this pending gloom, Midsummer has overtones of apprehension and its rituals are oriented around the idea of helping the Sun, of aiding it against the gathering darkness, and of working in concert with the proper cycle of the natural seasons.

There is a wondrous, magical atmosphere surrounding this festival of the longest day. It is a time of omens and divination, and of mysterious powers which walk the Earth. The dead are near us, in the eternal kinship of the clan, for the wall between the worlds is thin at this time. The Sun, in northern latitudes, never goes to bed on this night, and neither do those humans who celebrate this festival. The roots of Midsummer affect the most profound depths of our psyche.

This is a festival of light and fertility, and honors are given to Balder and to Frey. We will not give a programmed formula for the celebration of Midsummer rites, but will instead refer you to your guides to the collective unconscious, your instincts. To provide you with the proper forms, though, we offer these hints. A May Pole is proper, because in the frigid clime of Scandinavia the first of May is still dreary, and much of the festivity allotted in warmer lands for that day is transferred to the Scandinavian Midsummer. The pole should be erected by men and decorated with garlands by the women present.

Another feature of the Midsummer celebration should be a bonfire, symbolizing the Sun and its warmth and light. Around it stories may be told and songs sung, and the story of Balder repeated for the benefit of the celebrants. Thor may be ritually invoked to bless the fire, for this is his domain.

Other ceremonies and rituals may be devised by your own ingenuity. How about a blazing Sunwheel? Or a torch ritually carried about the area of celebration?

Let the spirit of the festival and its eternal sense of wonder fill all that you do, and invite into your soul that fulfillment which has been the lot of those who have followed our faith since time immemorial.



CHOOSE OF THE SLAIN

A Short Story by Dwight R. Decker



Frantically, Warren Drake fought against the painfully tight ropes holding him immobile in the wooden chair. His head still ached where he had been struck from behind, and a dirty cloth gag had been crammed into his mouth. Perhaps it was useless to struggle, but--

In front of him, near the doorway, lay his wife, less than half-conscious and moaning softly. Her clothes were shredded ribbons, much of her body was turning blue with bruises or livid red from the cigarette burns, and her face was a mask of drying brown blood from her nose and mouth. She had been a pretty brunette in her early forties.

From the next room Drake heard muffled whimpers, harsh panting, muttered threats and curses, and a rhythmic heaving of one body on top of another. Susan... Susan! Seventeen, lovely, and before today untouched by pain or ugliness.

The thought of what was happening to her and what had happened to his wife was enough to open the floodgates deep within Drake's body and send seething adrenalin surging into his blood. In one ultimate effort, Drake strained against the binding cords, his teeth clenched, tendons and veins bulged pulsing from his flesh, sweat beaded and coursed down his face--and one of the arms of the chair snapped. He ripped himself free of the ropes and the gag, cast wildly about the room for a weapon, then tore off the loose chair arm and sprang to the doorway.

Half an hour ago he might have been Warren Drake, a reasonably fit and trim businessman of forty-five years with neatly styled, greying hair, but not now. That man had disappeared and the maddened berserker replacing him in the ruined suit was something other than human. What he saw only fired his rage all the hotter.

Nearly blotted out by the grunting and heaving young man on top of her, Susan Drake lay trembling on the rug in the middle of the living room floor, too terrified by the knife at her throat even to sob.

Froth flecked Warren Drake's lips. With a cry of anger that rattled the windows, he grabbed the rapist's shoulders and yanked him out of Susan. Stunned by the sudden reappearance of the man he thought he had left unconscious and tied to a chair, the youth was slow in bringing up his knife. The chair arm slammed into his jaw, scattering teeth and cartilage and great gouts of blood; he staggered backwards, tripping over the slacks hanging loosely around his ankles, and fell. Then Drake leaped on him, swinging his club.

The youth dodged the first blow, but the second smashed into his skull, then the third. Spurred on by blind fury, Drake brought the chair arm down again and again--

He did not notice that the rapist still clutched his knife.

With a dying spasm, the rapist jabbed upwards and caught Drake in the chest, than died. Seconds later, Drake collapsed on top of the corpse, driving the knife still further into his body.

He had avenged his wife and daughter, but the price was his own life. He paid it gladly.

Somewhat later, he wasn't so sure.

The rapist's name was Willie; he had been a psychopath, and this had not been the first time he had broken into a private home for recreation--though he said it was to "get even", in an abstract sort of way, with those people who had fine cars, beautiful women, good jobs, and money in the bank. That they had it and he didn't, seemed to be all the justification he needed.

Or so much Drake had learned since his death, but that was now the least of his worries.

He stood on a luminous cloud, no larger than his front porch back home had been, in a starry night sky, and he wore a white robe and sandals. Before him stood a tall, lean-looking man of uncertain age but much dignity, also dressed in white robe and sandals but further outfitted with wings and a halo. His lawyer.

With a sinking heart, Drake learned that the preachers he had tried to ignore all his life had been correct. This was the scheme of the Universe.

Above and off to the right was another, larger, and much more radiant cloud. Drake could faintly hear voices from it.

"Thither must we soon repair," said the Defending Angel, "for today is thy day to be judged."

Drake swallowed. "What are my chances?"

The Defending Angel shook his head. "Unless the Lord thy God shall in His infinite mercy forgive all manner of sin and blasphemy unto you, there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth this night."

Drake went cold. "You mean it's Heaven or Hell? Nothing in between?"

"Verily I say unto you, even were there such a place thou wouldst not be received into its number by thy virtue alone. The charge against thee is murder most foul."

"What?!" Drake exclaimed, feeling the rage begin to come back on him. "The louse was raping my daughter! He broke in and knocked me out from behind, then raped and tortured my wife! What did I do wrong?"

"Thou didst not turn the other cheek," said the Defending Angel sadly.

Drake could only sputter helplessly.

Suddenly there came a roaring voice from the cloud in the distance, and the cloud's radiance increased to the point of blinding white glory. "Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels!" The

white light changed to blazing red for an instant, then settled back to its former quiet glow.

"Come," said the Defending Angel, extending his arm. "It is almost thy time." He sighed, and there was a regretful but kindly tone to his voice. "Wouldst but that thou had repented thy sins ere thy last hour had struck, but for thine own sake, I shall struggle as I best can to win mercy for thee." He did not sound hopeful.

When the Defending Angel and Drake touched down on the cloud where the Court of No Appeal was in session, the fate of Willie's soul was then under consideration.

Drake and his Defending Angel stood with a crowd of white-robed spectators, most winged and haloed angels of apparent high rank in the celestial hierarchy, at the bottom of a steep, smooth upward slope in the cloud. At the summit, silhouetted against a glare of white light, stood Willie, humble and head bowed. Flanking him were his Defending Angel and the prosecutor, an angel who wore a flaming sword at his side and a trumpet slung over his shoulder. Of course, Gabriel. A little way down the slope sat the Recording Angel, immortalizing the proceedings on an inexhaustible supply of scrolls.

The Drake heard what was being said up the slope and again his blood threatened to boil over.

"This boy never had a chance!" declared Willie's Defending Angel with heated passion. "Seed of adulterers and fornicators, doomed to roam the streets as a homeless waif knowing not love, his entrance into the toils of sin could have been foretold from the hour of his birth! Yea, as was the sowing, so was the reaping! I beseech Thee, o Lord, grant this stripling, cut down before the fruits of understanding did ripen, a boon this day!"

The voice like thunder roared out of the white glare. "How sayest thou, Gabriel, my good and faithful servant?"

"The Defending Angel for Willie is exceeding wise," said the prosecutor, "and I doubt not that what he says is like unto the truth, my Father. Therefore I join my voice with that of my brother Angel and beseech Thee, o Lord, to grant that this unhappy youth might have a chance to repent of his sins and enter amongst the ranks of the Blessed."

"Raise thy head, Willie!" ordered the voice.

With a start, Willie looked up, shaking.

"Willie, thou hast but to repent of thy sins here and now and thou shalt be cleansed of them!"

"Er..." stammered Willie, "what happens if I don't?"

The slope behind him suddenly heaved and tore apart. A monstrous tongue of scorching red flame seared up through the rift.

Willie screamed, falling to his knees and wringing his hands.

"I didn't mean it! Oh Lord, I'm sorry, I really am! I repent, I repent!"

The flame died out and the crevice closed without even a scar in the cloud's fluffy whiteness.

"Enter thou into the joy of the Lord, Willie!"

Willie rose and followed his Defending Angel into the white light, and both were soon lost from view.

Drake's feelings were mixed. If anyone deserved to be sent to the flames, it was Willie. After what he had done, the fire could not be too hot. But if Willie had instead been granted a last-minute pardon, perhaps Drake had a chance to escape eternal damnation, too. It was even possible that no one really went to Hell, that hellfire was only a threat to encourage proper conduct on Earth and all souls had a final opportunity to repent and be saved. Drake started to feel a little better.

"The next case!" announced the Recording Angel. "Let he who was Warren Drake draw near and be judged!"

Nervous but hopeful, Drake walked up the slope and stood before the light. His Defending Angel joined him and they watched as Gabriel took the stand.

"He was in many respects a good man, o Lord," Gabriel told the light. "His sins were few and most were unremarkable. However, two he did commit were unforgiveable. For one, he did not accept the Lord Jesus Christ Thy Son as his Saviour despite ample opportunities for his heart to be opened and believe. He was baptized as a Presbyterian on the fourth day of the sixth month of the year counted as the one thousand, nine hundred and thirty-second since the birth of Thy Son, and many were the Sundays when he took part in church services with his family. Woe be unto him, the simple faith of the innocent child was soon lost and in his fifteenth year, this fool said in his heart, There is no God, and no more honored the Sabbath. My Father, the Powers of Heaven were most generous in granting Warren Drake opportunities to repent of his grievous sins. As an example I may cite the instance of the twelfth day of the ninth month of the one thousand, nine hundred and sixty-ninth year, when an evangelist of the True Faith pressed a tract into his hands at the crossing of the streets of Madison and Clark in the city of Chicago; had he read it and accepted its teachings to his heart, he would have been counted among the saved in that moment, but instead he did crumple up the tract and cast it forth from him. My Father, he died unrepentant."

The light seemed to flicker in anger. Drake felt an ominous foreboding; moreover, he did not even remember the incident of the tract. "Say on, Gabriel!" boomed forth from the light. "What more infamies hath this man wrought?"

"My Father, he standeth accused of the murder of Willie of the case preceding. Thou knowest already the facts of the matter from what hath been disclosed before."

"Defending Angel, what knowest thou that might stay My hand from consigning him to the outer darkness?"

Drake looked pleadingly at the Defending Angel. Make it good, he thought.

The Defending Angel's expression was heartbroken and pained. "My Father, this man always strove to do what was right even though he knew Thee not."

"That," blasted the voice, "sufficeth not! Warren Drake, thou hast sinned and come short of the glory of God--the glory that is Mine! Because thou knewest Me not, thou art cursed. Thou smotest a young man so that he did die, even though thou wert advised to forgive and forgive yet again; inasmuch as thou hast done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, thou hast done it unto Me. Thou art henceforth cast out; let everlasting punishment be thy fate! Tonight, thou shalt sup on brimstone!"

The rift opened behind him; Drake felt the scorching heat of the eternal fires on his bare neck. "Wait a minute!" he shouted desperately. "You gave Willie a chance to repent, and his sins were worse than mine!"

"Thou hadst opportunities that he did not to repent at thy leisure! The hour is verily now far too late, so begone, thou base wretch! To the flames with thee!"

Gabriel drew his fiery sword and pointed it grimly at the flaming crevice behind Drake. The Defending Angel looked mournful and his eyes welled up with tears.

Frustrated and angry but somehow resigned to his fate, Drake turned to step over the edge into the burning pit. Why, he wondered in his last moments, were we given intelligence that would surely reject the tenets of this faith as childish and primitive? Why were we expected to accept and believe on utterly blind faith, even though our rationality rebelled at every step? Why weren't we given evidence more substantial than the murkily esoteric and often incomprehensible writings of prophets long dead and badly printed tracts handed out on street corners? Why?--

He hesitated at the edge. Some kind of trick was being played with space here. The cloud was not quite as large as a football field and had not looked more than ten feet thick, yet the rift opened on a cavern that would have dwarfed the Grand Canyon. Far below, he saw the inky black surface of what seemed to be a sea of oils; a spire of flame burst up through the thick, viscous liquid and almost into his eyes. He staggered back, his face feeling as though it were on fire.

Gabriel took a menacing step toward him, flaming sword at ready. "The choice is no longer thine! Go thou, into the fires!"

Sick at heart, Drake lifted a foot to plunge into the depths...

"HOLD, I SAY!"

A beautiful young woman strode forcefully and determinedly up the slope. Although she wore a white robe like everyone else, she had neither wings nor halo, and her long blonde hair was braided. Drake was struck most by her height; she was at least as tall as he was, and that was six feet.

"What meaneth this interruption?" Gabriel demanded.

"I say this trial is illegal and the sentence is invalid!" the woman answered angrily, walking around the fiery pit and standing defiantly before Gabriel and the light.

"On what grounds, heathen idolatress?" Gabriel barked.

"Warren Drake is not your jurisdiction!"

The light broke in before Gabriel could reply. "Thou speakest madness, where of false gods!" it seethed. "His record of baptism is plain enough for fools to see, though I now fear not all fools."

The woman remained calm. "Do you believe your own equivocations? You thought you could get away with it by listing this case on the docket as a simple murder case, and indeed, we almost failed to notice it, which accounts for my delay in coming here. But no, it is much more than simple murder. This man, Warren Drake, died in battle. Therefore, he belongs to us."

"Nonsense!" the voice retorted. "There was no war declared, he was part of no army, and there was no battle! This is meddling in our internal affairs, thou mother of harlots and abominations!"

"On the contrary!" the woman shot back. "Warren Drake's home and women were under attack, and he did not shirk his duty as one of your versifying cowards babbling prayers and forgiving the unforgiveable might have done! Instead, he girded up his loins and swung into battle against one who would have destroyed him and his. Warren Drake died in battle, keepers of the court of kangaroos; he died a hero, protecting those he loved. You would send such as him to your furnaces? You would break your own solemn word and forget so conveniently the Treaty of Teutoberg Forest?" She sighed wearily. "Perhaps you would. Perhaps that is to be expected. But I am here to remind you of the agreement you made and to claim the rights of my lord. Do you intend to abide by your word, slayer of innocent Egyptian firstborn and inspiration of social workers, or is the sword to be unsheathed one more time?"

The light was silent for a while, at length grumbling: "He is not worthy of wasting any more time. Take him and vanish from My sight."

The rift to Hell closed once more and the woman took Drake's arm, leading him down the slope. Gabriel had looked supremely outraged, but Drake thought he saw his Defending Angel smile and wink.

They stood at the edge of the cloud, with nothing beyond but stars and void. Drake turned to the woman. "I'm grateful, but what is this all about?"

She raised an arm to space, and in the night a flying horse appeared, streaking towards them. Then she smiled at Drake and removed her robe. Beneath it she wore a full suit of exquisitely crafted golden armor.

"Warren Drake, I am a Valkyrie, or, in your language, a Chooser of the Slain. My sisters and I gather the spirits of heroes fallen in battle and bring them to Valhalla. There, in Odin's great hall, they may enjoy the pleasures of feasting, drinking, and jousting until the end of the world, when they shall stand at Odin's side and do battle against the destroyers and bringers of chaos. If you would join Odin and stand with him at Ragnarök, then accompany me to Valhalla."

One theology would send him to Hell and another would make him a warrior. Was there really a choice? Drake grinned. "Odin has a new recruit, Miss. I'm signing up for the duration."

"Then let us be off!"

The horse alighted and the Valkyrie leaped to its back, pulling Drake on behind her. He clasped his hands around her slim, armored waist and the horse launched itself into the sky.

Starlight reflected iridescently from the Valkyrie's burnished armor as they hurtled across space. On Earth, men would have called this strangely flashing, flickering glow the Northern Lights, but no, this time it meant that Warren Drake was on his way to Valhalla.



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BOOK REVIEW

BALDUR AND THE MISTLETOE: A MYTH OF THE VIKINGS

All too often we neglect the world of children's literature when examining those writings pertinent to our faith. A more serious error would be hard to discover, for it we cannot protect our own young from the powerful religious bias of the society which surrounds us, we are indeed in trouble. It has been a couple of years since we reviewed Clyde Bulla's *Viking Adventure* in these pages, and a book review for the younger set is long overdue.

To correct this oversight, we offer for your consideration Margaret Hodges' *Baldur and the Mistletoe*. The author does an admirable job of retelling the ancient story as first written by Snorri, and it is apparent that she has read Frazier's *Golden Bough* or commentaries thereon. In one place in her book she tells us of Loki's collecting the mistletoe which is to cause the death of the god Baldur: "With a golden scythe he cut down the mistletoe and caught it in a napkin." As I recall, that was the method attributed to the Druids, not the Norsemen. Such an error hardly detracts from the magnificence of the story she unfolds, however.

Gerry Hoover's drawings deserve special praise. His heroes look every bit the part, and his demons are misshapen monsters reminiscent of Goya. His superb art adds a great deal to the spell cast by the text.

Baldur and the Mistletoe is an excellent introduction to Snorri's version of this ancient story both for children and for adults who seek an easy entrance to the world of Norse myth. One only wishes that someone would write a similar book dealing with Saxo's story of Baldur, but we must bow to the supreme tragedy of the later account, especially when it is tied in with the cosmic scope of Ragnarök.

Baldur and the Mistletoe is thirty pages in length, and is published by Little, Brown and Company. The price inside the cover is \$5.95.

In the near future we will run an article on the state of children's literature dealing with Norse mythology and the Vikings.

NOW AVAILABLE FROM THE RUNESTONE

<i>Skeppslag Organizational Kit</i>	\$2.00
<i>The Prose Edda</i> translated by Jean I. Young	3.00 ea. (paper)
<i>The Elder Edda</i> translated by Taylor & Auden	2.00 ea. (paper)
<i>Text of Odin-Blót</i>	.20 ea.
Leaflet "What is the Norse Religion?"	.05 ea.*
	*single copies free

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Rituals of our Faith (weddings, funerals, etc.) performed for AFA members anywhere in the world, if transportation is provided, at no additional fee.

The Ásatrú Free Assembly is recognized by the Internal Revenue Service as a tax-exempt religious organization, and donations are thus tax-deductible.

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PAN-PAGAN FESTIVAL 1978

The Second Annual Pan-Pagan Festival will be held July 14 - 16, 1978, at Lake Holiday, Indiana. The Festival is being sponsored by the Midwest Pagan Council, a network of covens, pagan temples, and other magickal groups from Illinois, Wisconsin, Indiana, and elsewhere who have joined forces to promote cooperation and sharing of knowledge and energy among pagans from many different traditions.

The Festival will be held in a wooded campground by the lake. Workshops are planned for a variety of topics: Healing, Herbs, Native American Magick, Hellenic Games, Witchcraft, Dance, Ritual Magick, and Tarot -- just to name a few. Workshop presenters include members and leaders from many of the Council's groups -- Calumet Pagan Temple, Parthenon West, Epiphanes, Coven of the Sacred Stones, First Church of the Craft of W.I.C.A. and Sanctus Spiritus, Temple of the Pagan Way, and Circle.

In addition to the Workshops, there will be group songfests and free-form jams, plus concerts of Circle's pagan music by Jim Alan and Selena Fox. Ecumenical rites and workings, open to all Festival participants, will be held Friday and Saturday nights.

Cost of the Festival is \$10 per person -- this fee includes costs of registration materials, the Saturday evening Festival Feast, camping for two nights (Friday and Saturday), and all workshops. To assure a space, pre-registration is strongly suggested.

To receive a free brochure with registration form and more details, send a stamped, self-addressed envelope to the Midwest Pagan Council's publicity coordinator: Selena Fox c/o Circle, Box 9013, Madison, WI 53715, Attn: MPC Festival.

--- And so another issue draws to a close.
I want to thank each of you who wrote to congratulate us on the birth of Erik; he thrives, and each day is a revelation of wonder.

Our next issue will be introducing ideas and techniques we think you'll really like. Don't miss it!

- L.A.Y.

