

## Thor in Minnesota

The weather gods don't like all the attention people pay to science. They appreciate the few left who still worship the old gods, and failing that, Evangelical Christians, who at least describe inclement weather as "God's Will." Climate change deniers are welcome in Valhalla. Thor and his minions are frankly offended every time a bunch of Ph.D.s and weatherman get together at some international congress and try to convince a group of politicians that weather is the mere mortals' own fault, that the various elements of carbon dioxide, particulate matter, and toxic waste are conspiring to overturn centuries of belief in higher powers who could simply clap or sneeze a storm into being with their mere desire. It's all true, of course. Things are getting out of control. For every horrendous electrical ice storm Thor launched from the heavens, for every tsunami Poseidon hurled across the sea, for even the whirlwinds Zeus whipped from the heavens, a hundred or more could be blamed only on the petty humans trifling with their own environment. When was the last time somebody had even bothered to sacrifice a goat, much less a vanquished captive, in the name of Thor? They still made comic books and films, sure, but even those sat orphaned on the newsstands and bombed at the box office. And there in Duluth sat an evil mastermind infected with the spirit of Loki, daring to write and inspire a movement of writers, making light of the weather, writing strange and insulting, cryptic little stories to insult him, to make of the divine power of weather a plaything for their little tapping fingers. Thor flew into a rage the likes of which Minnesota nice was unfamiliar with. The skies clapped with fury and the winds whipped like screaming harpies. Trees were uprooted and went crashing into domiciles. Their power would be shorn away and they would sit in heat for days without light, without comfort. Ha! Mr. Rob, where is your impish smile now? Trifle with the gods! Feel my anger! There is only one who can save you from this, and his name is THOR. Beg for my forgiveness. Write my name on the side of your "skyscrapers" and casinos. THOR is the leader! THOR is the power. Say my name.

—Scott Rettberg, July 23

## A Man Needs a Goat

**H**ello? Hi! Hi my name is Rob Wittig and I'm calling to ask if you, if you ever, um, sell your goats? I mean like after they get too old to produce usable milk? We're big fans of your cheese, by the way, we get it in the Duluth co-op. Yeah! You're welcome.

Yes.

Yes, I know.

Yep. Yeah I actually have some experience with goats when I when I was a kid.

That's right! Yeah, I only let one get behind me once! That was, that was enough.

Yeah, tough fencing for sure yeah.

Yeah, they can, they can dig, actually, actually we, we aren't going to be keeping it, keeping it that long actually.

Yep, pretty much right away.

Yeah, we know what to do with it. Kind of a, kind of a traditional Scandinavian thing, butchering, traditional Norwegian thing.

Monday, Monday after, afternoon? OK. Three-ish?

OK.

No, no thanks the price doesn't matter. We pretty much gotta, gotta do this no matter what.

OK, thanks! Thanks bye!

—Rob Wittig, July 23

## A Goat's-Eye View

**N**obody asks goats about these things. What's a washed up thunder god going to do with an animal carcass, anyway? As a live goat, I could give him milk, yogurt, cheese. He could watch me frolic. I'm even willing to eat a tin can (actually, just the paper label, and only as a joke). I could eat weeds in his yard, which is useful. Does he have a yard? What am I doing? It's not like he will ask me for input. A guy is going to kill me. Thor will take my meat. Maybe make "his" chili (which he got off a website) for his Asgardian friends. Next week, if he's lucky, some other goat will get killed. But it won't make a lick of difference. The weather will keep changing. People will keep checking for weather updates, hoping to make it all change differently. I wish I could talk. But nobody ever listens to goats.

—Davin Heckman, July 23

## About the Thunder

**N**obody asks goats about thunder. The weather will keep changing. People will keep checking for weather updates, hoping to make it all change differently. I wrote a phd dissertation on the quantum aspects and fluid dynamics of chaotic system and the atmosphere as a flux model. I even made my own charts and diagrams as animations and augmented reality apps to prove my most cogent points. I even did mathematical models for the causalities within things like rains of frogs and waterspouts and of lightning distribution in hurricanes being against common assumptions and the first deep textual analysis of lightning tied to the magnetosphere.

but nooooooooooooooooooooooo don't listen to me...I am just a goat.....

—Jeremy Height, July 23

## A Most Sincere Sacrifice

**THOR!** Rob, shirtless, cried out into the thunderstorm and the lightning splitting the heavens above. "I do this in your name!"

"Sorry, old Billy goat." He whispered, "sorry my friend." The goat whinnied, as if understanding. "I do this for Minnesota."

Rob swung the machete swiftly in a movement he had studied in Tai Chi, "The Wind Sweeps the Plum Blossoms" and severed the head of the animal from its neck with one graceful coup de grace. The headless goat stood for a moment, torrents of blood spouting from the stem and splattering Rob's bare chest in scarlet plasma.

"THOR!" He cried. "Accept my offering! Spare Duluth, I beg of you!"

Tears streamed down his cheeks as he fell to his knees in the bloodied mud, as the lightning flashed in the clouds and the rain continued to furiously pelt his flesh. The animal fell on its side and Rob fell prostrate, cheek in mud, weeping in the rain.

\* \* \*

Röskva rubbed his shoulders, sore from casting lightning bolts and rolling thunder. She fed him grapes and honeyed mead and tried to soothe his wounded ego.

"I'm not the god I used to be."

"Thor, you are still mighty and powerful."

"I used to be able to do that in my sleep. It takes a lot out of me now."

"You yet electrify the flesh of man."

"They don't respect me. There is no respect. Perhaps I have gone the way of the dinosaurs."

"You single-handedly slaughtered the dinosaurs, mighty Thor!"

"I know, I know, right? And now I have trouble sustaining even a middling storm in Duluth!"

"I will rub and soothe you."

"If only they loved me like they used to!"

Þjálfi burst into the cloud chamber.

"Mighty Thor! They have offered a goat! Taste its blood!"

Thor took a sip from the chalice.

"Not bad."

"The Rob man slew it just moments ago."

"A single goat?"

"A sincere offering, sire."

"What about the buildings? Did they put my name on the tall ones?"

"Sorry, mighty Thor. That has not yet been—"

"Arrrrgh!" Thor let out a scream that lit the sky from Minneapolis to Duluth. "I will show them the fury of THOR! Minnesota will cry out in pain and drown in sorrows!"

"But Thor, mighty Thor. I beg of you, accept this sacrifice."

"A goat? One goat? Why would I?"

"Errr— to be honest, Thor, we need to keep Minnesota on our side. You're polling very well there and to be frank with you, there are very few regions that still have so many believers."

"THE BUILDINGS! MY NAME! ON THEM!"

"We have another plan, one that will increase your market share. We have a tremendous plan. Fantastic. Absolutely fantastic. Through the roof. But please let up on Duluth."

"Alright, alright. Tell me about this plan."

"There is another..."

—Scott Rettberg, July 24

## A False Sighting

"Oh my gosh, I think that's the Mighty Thor!"

"I know, right? That blonde hair, those muscle!"

"No, I mean, seriously, Thor! The god of thunder!"

"OK?"

"Didn't you hear him? I heard him talking to one of the cashiers. He said, 'I'm Mighty Thor!'"

"Sure, in Duluth. The Norse god of thunder, walking around Target."

"We did just have those storms. Could be. Look at him. If he looks like Thor and says he's Thor....."

"Either that or he's on drugs. Why not just go and ask him you can help him. He looks lost."

"OK."

"Excuse me, sir. I couldn't help but notice you. Can I help you find something?"

"Why, yeth you can. I bit my tongue and am looking for thome athpirin or ibuprofen or thomething for the pain. I'm mighty thore."

—Davin Heckman, July 24



# A Tremendous Surge of Hope and Safety for America, First

Feb 1, 2017, 4 PM

Washington D.C.

“**W**heeeee! The people.” President Trump spun around in his new swivel chair and settled into the polar bearskin draped over its back, a gift from Vladimir. Eleven days into his administration and things were already going fantastically well. The purge was already well under way. All political appointees from the Obama era were being washed out of the system if they refused to take the loyalty oath and the polygraph.

Even the White House staff was being cleansed of toxic elements, and all the new hires only helped to prove he wasn't a racist. He had blacks all over the place in the White House—in the kitchen cooking the food, butlers in the hallway, maids in the bathrooms. He had Mexicans—good, legitimate Mexican-Americans with papers, tending to the gardens. He hired in Italian-American electricians and interior decorators, Polish-American plumbers. They were installing marble sinks with gold faucets in all the bathrooms, granite tiles in the hallways, zebra and leopard skin patterned wallpaper (Melania's suggestion, very nice, very classy) in the Lincoln bedroom. He had a gay secretary at reception and lesbian security guards at the gate. Never let it be said again that the Donald was a racist. It was a rainbow coalition in here. He appointed a Jew head of Treasury and some kind of Asian-American—a woman at that—to Commerce. He had made a point of appointing a Trump University graduate to the Department of Education, and he was doing very important work there, dismantling the federal grant programs and setting up a voucher program for mail-order universities.

The domestic agenda was going fantastically well. He was just back from the border, where the digging had begun. It was already a massive and growing erection. A good friend had won the contract and a Trump subsidiary was supplying the cement. It was an outstanding deal and he would make a bundle on it. He had signed an executive order and they were in the process of re-opening Ellis Island and installing water boards for the immigration tests.

In a way he still couldn't believe his luck. All the hurricanes and freak storms in August and September, the paralyzed and weak response of the Obama administration (SAD!), the massive power outages, the continuous terrorist attacks. It had all played into his hand. The last thing America needed when things were like this was crooked Hillary, a woman and lapdog to a wisecracking professor, in the Oval office. He called the NATO troops back from their overseas posts and had them sandbagging and patrolling the streets. He didn't even blink when Vladimir massed troops at the Polish border. They should have paid their bills. It was a good day in the Oval. Just one thing was missing to polish it all off.

"Christie!" bellowed Trump. The Secretary of Transportation did most of his work from a small wooden desk outside of the Oval, where he could still take care of small errands.

"Get Melania down here. Tell her to wear one of those lacy red French numbers. And tell her to bring a vibrator. I want her to twiddle my arsehole as I finish."

The former governor of New Jersey scarfed down the last bite of his chocolate donut and wiped his hands on his suit, the pig.

"Right away, Donald."

"Mr. President, Christie. Don't you forget that. And lose some weight. Jesus."

—Scott Rettberg, July 25

## A Storm Surge of Pure Genius and Fear

**P**resident Trump bit down on the little blue pill, unzipped his trousers, and awaited his blushing bride. He spent a moment feeling morally superior to Bill Clinton. While one could not deny the seductive power of the Oval office and every politician's fantasy of taking a lover on the Resolute desk, Trump had no need for interns or cigars. He was a married man, and he was married to a woman who from the get-go had willingly catered to his every desire. A supermodel. He prided himself on supermodels, he always had, a man of great charm, a man of great wealth. He had never married a dog, not once. And it was a moral thing about to be done here, a thing with family values. He felt a surge of power coursing through him. Outside the office, a man carried a football, and Trump himself had the nuclear codes, the final keys. He felt the supplement beginning to take effect, "We will rise, America" he muttered to himself, "we will rise!"

By now Melania should be changed and ready for ravishment. The Secret Service should be escorting her from the East Wing and down the elevator. She would start right here, under the Resolute and, after an appropriate interval, he would position her up here, he would lift her skirts... he tapped his fingers on the desk, growing impatient, and his eyes scanned over the architectural drawings on his desk, the plans for the expansion of Guantanamo. Six stories of cages stacked on top of one another, a ten-fold increase in capacity. This was good, but it bothered him a bit to have to squeeze it all in like that. He shouldn't have to rely on his sharply-honed skills as a real-estate developer just to fit the prisoners on a postage stamp. Then it came to him in a flash. The Art of the Deal. His Lyndon B. Johnson extended with his latest stroke of genius.

The door opened. He prepared himself for his Amazonian queen.

"Mr. President! Daddy! We need to talk."

He scrambled to zip up and turned round towards the windows as Ivanka Trump, White House Chief of Staff, entered the room. He adopted a pose he had practiced many times during his campaign, chin jutting out, breast pigeoned forward, hands clasped behind his back, staring off into the distance as if contemplating serious matters of state and

diplomacy. He turned slowly, positioning himself behind the polar bearskin so that his daughter would not take notice of the Washington Monument concealed behind it.

Just then, Christie came in, trailing Melania in high heels and a white mink coat. My god, the milky cleavage— he was looking forward to that meeting. He put his finger to his lips and then waved them out. Ivanka raised an eyebrow and Donald tried to convert the gesture into a move as if he were dusting something off his lapel.

"Ivanka, my dear, you look absolutely stunning. What a knockout! And so smart. So, so intelligent and poised. You are something. Isn't she something?" The Secret Service agent trailing behind her nodded lightly.

"Ivanka, I'm glad you're here. I have just had an outstanding idea. A FOREIGN POLICY idea—"

"Daddy there's a teensy bit of a crisis we need to address—"

"CUBA! Not just the Guantanamo expansion, the WHOLE ISLAND. Now Vladimir is massing troops on the Ukrainian border with Poland—"

"That's probably just posturing."

"He wants Poland. He's told me as much. And frankly I don't give two shits about Poland. But we can't just GIVE him Poland and get nothing in return, can we? And I'm thinking about this and it occurs to me, CUBA! I'll recover CUBA. I'll be the first American President in modern history to liberate CUBA from the communists. And think about the value, the return on investment, the beachfront hotels alone—"

"Daddy, pay attention. This is important. We have a crisis on our hands!"

"Ok, ok, Ivanka. What is it? Is it your office? Your limo? I can get you a better one, do you want a pink one—"

"No, Daddy. It's the weather again. We've got some big storms coming in. Several of them. REALLY big storms."

—Scott Rettberg, July 26

## Subasgardian Homesick Blues

**T**hor always considered himself to be the god of the common man. While many of other immortals in Asgard had little time for the humans of Midgard, Thor often made the journey from the fortress of Asgard, down through the skies, to cast lightning with his silver hammer Mjöllnir, cracking the sky, rolling thunder, and blessing the humans with rain, which, together with his lovely wife Sif, goddess of fertility, helped make possible bountiful crops and prosperity. And from the time of the Germanic tribes until the glorious height of the Viking age, Thor was worshipped and respected from Rome to Uppsala.

Thor was the strongest of the gods, and the god of safety and security. When the giants launched their attacks on Asgard, who was there at the walls to protect the gods? Only Thor. Streaming through the clouds in his goat-drawn chariot, Thor smote many a giant whose arrogance sought raise them beyond their place. If not known for his wit, Thor was not guileless, as illustrated by the time he travelled to Jotunheim dressed as a bride, to retrieve his stolen hammer from Thrym. When Thrym, thinking Thor to be Freya, pulled back the veil to kiss his stolen bride, Thor snatched back his hammer and smashed the giant's head, along with those of all the wedding guests. Though he was not fond of cross-dressing in a general sense, Thor would stop at nothing to protect his fellow gods and to keep the giant horde which constantly threatened their beloved and divine kingdom at bay. If he was not so clever in his own right, Thor always knew to surround himself with the best of advisors, and when Heimdall conceived of dressing as a bride to regain his hammer, Thor swallowed his pride and followed through with the plan.

Strength, security, power, compassion. Loved by wife, mistress, children, minions and companions, Thor was a true leader. During the Viking Age, worship of the Thunder god surpassed even that of Odin, and for about 300 years he had a fantastic run, both in Midgard and in the Kingdom of the gods above. Sadly, around 1080 or so, as Christianity took hold across the Viking kingdoms, Thor saw his power diminish and his popularity decline. Though many of the common people resisted, and wore hammer amulets about their necks in response to the vile crosses of their martyr-worshipping compatriots, this new god was a jealous god, who called himself "one true god" and would tolerate no others.

The democracy of polytheism was gradually but progressively crushed under the heels of monotheistic dictatorship, and Thor spent many centuries in sadness, obscurity, and gloom, in his new apartments in the sub-basements of Asgard. He was rarely seen in company of other immortals and hardly ever ventured down to Midgard. His wife, mistress, and children went neglected. All that could be heard from him was the occasional hammering below. Yet the blows of the basement hammer every day grew more and more between; and each blow every day grew fainter than the last. He could take some comfort that on the fifth day of each week, Thor'sday, his name was still remembered, though most of the mortals had forgotten what that even meant.

So when Þjálfi that day told him of Heimdall's clever and devious plan, Thor felt a new power surging through him. A chance to revisit the glories of the past. Though Thor had for the most part long ago abandoned meddling in the affairs of man, and had never even considered intervening in an American Presidential election, the plan was too good to resist. A plan to restore him and bring him back to his rightful place, a plan every bit as clever as dressing as the goddess Freya to destroy the giant Thrym.

—Scott Rettberg, July 27

## An Electrical Intervention

**T**hor spared Duluth, once a respectable number of goats had been slaughtered. The Rob man had to make several more trips to the farm, as a Valkyrie instructed him, before Thor would stop flooding the basements of the houses close to the lake "Superior" (HA! Even their lakes were arrogant before the eyes of gods). But Thor and his advisors recognized in doing of this that the real power was not in the skies above, nor in the waters that rained down, but in fact in the grid and cables the mortals used to light their homes and strange devices.

You could cast a whirlwind, knock down their dwellings, you could fry two of their neighbors with direct lightning bolt hits from great Mjöllnir, leaving behind nothing but a pile of blackened bones and an ashy sidewalk smudge and still they would rise the next morning and get on with their lives, they would rise as if nothing had happened. They would rise and rebuild and forget the power of Thor and what he could do them. The tenacity of their hope astounded even Thor.

But take down their grid and something else happens. Some sit in the darkness, weeping and lamenting. Most take to the streets, clutching their smart phones in their hands, raising them to the sky, begging for a "signal" — any kind of sign from the heavens. And here, Thor and his council recognized, he could find his constituency. He would grow stronger from their desperation. His goats would grow as they searched for their "updates" and "tweetstreams" and "friends." What they sacrificed on the altar of technology, Thor would take for his own. Once again he would ride glorious over the worshipping mortals of Midgard, once again they would chant his name with reverence. It would be the way it used to be, in a better time, when a god's home was his fortress, and his subjects would kneel before him.

The climate is more powerful than Thor, and he could not claim the largest of the storms. But through that August and September, the mortals felt the light touch of a mighty god, as powerful electrical storms savaged the locales where Heimdall suggested he land them, on data centers and "cloud computing clusters", on power plants and transformers,

on "surveillance centers" and "financial hubs." Their traffic snarled and drew to a halt. Their firewalls were broken. They cried out for their "social media" and "YouTube", their "virtual worlds" and "Pokemon Gos." The clouds had themselves become anti-social media.

Their anger rose with their lamentations, and though Thor could feel his power grow and a few new followers added to his accounts, it was an orange-skinned mortal who profited the most from these acts, a prophet of fear and division. This little man Trump, a demagogue of tiny hands and few plans, gained from every assault on their data infrastructure. The anger rose and swelled, and it was clear who would soon be their President.

This was all as anticipated by the gods.

—Scott Rettberg, July 28



## Tweetstorm

@realDonaldTrump

Can i just say two words? You suck, America.

@realDonaldTrump

The #ObamaSucks campaign is gaining some followers as a result of this horrendous crisis mismanagement.

@realDonaldTrump

Donald Trump would have the National Guard out there shooting the looters. Shoot on sight of any looting. Savages.

@realDonaldTrump

Oh and suddenly Google is down do you think #CrookedHillary might have something to do with this?

@realDonaldTrump

Obama #YoureFired America can't take four more years of Democrat mismanagement from #CrookedHillary and your kind.

@realDonaldTrump

Security apparatus is falling apart in this country. Mexicans and blacks taking TVs from Best Buy.

@realDonaldTrump

How many Mexicans are floating over the Rio Grande tonight with no security cameras operational #ThanksObama.

@realDonaldTrump

Donald Trump supplies Trump brand bottled water to first responders. Great act of charity. Trump steaks for homeless people.

@realDonaldTrump

#CrookedHillary doing photo ops with homeless people while Facebook goes offline. Can anybody say "entitled"?

@realDonaldTrump

Has anybody even stopped to wonder if massive data center outages might have something to do with #CrookedHillary's 30,000 missing emails?

@realDonaldTrump

Two words: these people are wimps. SAD! Time for martial law!

@realDonaldTrump

Hey FEMA: YOU'RE FIRED!

@realDonaldTrump

Donald Trump feels for all working class Americans without Internet access tonight.

@realDonaldTrump

Trump charities promises \$250,000 for #BlueLivesMatter. Thanks to all you brave police fighting looters and rapists.

@realDonaldTrump

#CrookedHillary calling for unity. Joe Biden is retarded.

@realDonaldTrump

Slow response to suburban areas proves misleader Obama and #CrookedHillary don't care about middle class. Trump loves middle class, LOVES them.

@realDonaldTrump

Attacks on Twitter. UNFAIR! Trying to rig. UNFAIR!

@realDonaldTrump

Hardworking Americans screwed while Obama sends boats to criminal minorities.  
UNFAIR! SAD!

@realDonaldTrump

TOO UNREAL to just be "weather." Americans disappointed. #FAIL #OBAMASUCKS  
#GETALIFE

@realDonaldTrump

Evangelical communities last to receive needed aid. #ThanksObama

@realDonaldTrump

How many wetbacks, how many racists, how many terrorists taking advantage of huge,  
pathetic Obama, Hillary #FAIL? LOSERS.

—Scott Rettberg, July 30

## A God Pregnant with Doubt

**T**hor was sore. He thought he might have torn a rotator cuff when he launched the three-day storm that flooded the Ohio River. Swing stage. And his wrist was sprained from the storm that knocked out all the electricity in the Magic Kingdom and rose the levels of all the swamps so high that gators were walking in suburban streets from Miami to Jacksonville. It was tiring work, and he wasn't so sure that it was all that rewarding. He needed to rest and re-evaluate. Heimdall sent him a fruit basket and a get-well card. It seemed that all of the polls were pointing in the right direction, and it was fine if he took a break until after the general election. Thor is not a complex god. You could say he's a god's god, a straight shooter. He wasn't sure all the subterfuge and gamesmanship was really up his thunder road. He decided to seek the council of those he trusted most.

\* \* \*

It was not that Thor and Sif had had a falling out, per se. It was simply that as the mortals of Midgard has lost their faith in him, Thor had felt all of his godly powers diminish, and he retreated increasingly into his own storm clouds. Time had passed, and where there had once been electrifying passion which begat wondrous god children, as Thor had grown less omnipotent, his desires for companionship and the warmth of a fertility goddess's bed had diminished to a certain degree. It was longer than he could remember since he had twirled her golden locks about his sparking fingers and tasted her fecund breath hot upon his own.

"Thor! It's been ages!"

Sif stubbed out her cigarette in a half-full ashtray and rose to greet him. She embraced him, and there was still warmth in her bosom and her kiss, but something was off. She tasted of aquavit and elderberry, and seemed a bit unsteady on her feet.

"Sif, my dearest and truest love, mother of Þrúðr and goddess of the wailing child and the waving grain, it is good to feel you in my arms."

"You feel strong again, Thor. I haven't seen you in oh..."

"It's been a while, ah..."

She broke from his embrace.

"It has been more than a century, Thor."

"Has it really been that long?"

"Ye gods!" She threw her cocktail glass to the ground where it shattered. Each shard seemed to scream with the cry of an abandoned child.

"It's not yet noon! Have you been drinking?"

"I've been drinking for seventy-five years, you selfish bastard."

Sif did not look well. Her youthful vivacity seemed to have faded somewhat and there were wrinkles about her eyes. She lit another cigarette.

"You fare poorly, Sif. Gods! You are the goddess of fertility, you should not drink at this hour."

"Fertility? Fertility says the god who has not kept my bed warm since the last time the Cubs won the World Series—"

"Sif, Sif, I have not come for a fight. I come to ask your advice."

"Shoot, Romeo."

"It's this thing I've been doing. I have been thundering through Midgard, shattering the skies and flooding the seas, charging the air and blasting the wind, making men tremble with fear and awe, raising high the roof beams and—"

"Thor, just get to the point."

"Anyway, I've made some weather. It has felt great. Heimdall's plan to get me back in the game. Still there is something that bothers me—"

"Do tell."

"It is all to the advantage of this man, a man with an ego so elephantine it dwarves even my own—"

"Improbable."

"He is a horse's ass, a dungheap, a loathsome creature, and yet he seems to be their natural leader."

"The mortals?"

"The mortals of America, yes, and therefore in some sense, the leader of all of the mortals of Midgard. Heimdall tells me it is to my advantage, but still I want to crush this bug of a man. I am the god of the common, beloved by my subjects. I would not wish to bring them harm—"

"Reality check, Thor, it has been about a thousand years since you were so revered."

"But still—"

"But still what? Let me tell you something about the mortals of Midgard, Thor. They are lost."

"Lost how?"

"You ask me about fertility, Thor? I have missed your warm— touch —to be sure, but the real reason my powers have dwindled has little to do with our personal issues. Have you heard of GMOs? They make seeds that DIE within one GENERATION. They PATENT LIFE FORMS. And FRACKING! Have you heard of FRACKING? They poison the very water table to fuel their cars and SEGWAYS. HAVE YOU HEARD OF SEGWAYS? They have killed off half of the animals on the planet from only two generation ago. These people have no need

of a FERTILITY GODDESS. They are committing bloody suicide and taking everything else with them. My work there is done. The mortals of Midgard? Screw them."

"Perhaps they only need a strong leader, a return to reverence for the gods, a chance to renew their world and—"

"Good luck with that, Thor. Wake me up when it's over, if the rats haven't taken over."

"So you agree with the plan?"

"Thor, Thor, Thor, as far as I can tell the cockroaches will win whatever we do, so go for it."

"Well, thanks for your counsel."

"It's ok, Thor, it's ok." She brushed her fingers lightly to his cheek. "We'll always have Asgard."

—Scott Rettberg, August 1

## In the Situation Room

"Six hurricanes? All at the same time? On both coasts?"

"It's highly unusual Mr. President."

"It's phenomenal!"

"It's inexplicable Mr. President."

"President Trump, this is unheard of, it's scientifically implausible. Storms just don't come towards the West coast like this, and the pattern—"

"Don't talk to me about science."

"These immense storms on either side, and then the two large but not as large ones on each coast, it's never been—"

"It's a pattern, isn't it?"

"Symmetrical."

"Daddy, this is serious. You can see the big one on the West coast is heading towards—"

"That's LA, isn't it? That's a huge storm."

"And on our side, even larger, headed towards—"

"Us?"

"That's right, Mr. President, there is a storm the size of Texas heading towards Washington D.C."

"And those other—"

"Looks like New York, Boston, San Francisco, Seattle."



"This is enormous. Has Newt seen this?"

"The Secretary of State has been briefed."

"This is a crisis, isn't it?"

"Daddy, I've been trying to tell you—"

"This is my first Presidential crisis. Get the photographer in here."

"We will likely need to evacuate."

"We've got some pretty good bunkers here, am I right?"

"We should be secure for anything short of a thermonuclear—"

"We can handle this. I can handle this. I've been preparing for this sort of thing my whole life."

"We trust you Mr. President."

"I'll need the Secretary of Defense. Get Clint down here."

"Right away Mr. President."

"Hell get me the whole cabinet. If there's room. And we'll also need the head of the ah, what's it, FDA. Federal Disaster Agency."

"That's the Food and Drug Administration, Mr. President."

"No, not those regulators. The CDC, Center for Disaster Control."

"They're focused on disease, Mr. President. But you may want them."

"The whatever, FEC?"

"Do you mean FEMA, Mr. President?"

"Right, FEMA. Who do we have on that?"

"Rick Perry, Mr. President."

"Rick Perry?"

"He helped you take Texas in the general election."

"That's right, and Texas is a disaster, so he ought to know."

"Should we get the Vice President here sir?"

"Two Pence? Don't we have him off in—"

"The Himalayas, Mr. President."

"That's right, no, leave him there with the missionaries. He's doing good work."

"We have maybe three hours until landfall."

"This is exciting. My first crisis! We'll manage it. We can tackle this. It's a weather situation. We ran on the weather. How do I look? Do I look Presidential?"

—Scott Rettberg, August 2

## Thor Needs a Mouthpiece

**T**hor's mistress Jarnsaxa was more welcoming than Sif even though it had been just as long since he had last warmed her furs. They had a strong bond which had been tested many times, and she was the mother of his two sons. There was no small controversy involved in their coupling. She was a giantess of the Frost Giant clan, and he one of the Gods of Asgard, but their seemingly star-crossed love nevertheless flamed brightly whenever it was rekindled. Well before taking up with Thor, she was one of the wave maidens, so whenever they got together, she and Thor made stormy weather. Once they had reunited and made several tidal waves in bed, Jarnsaxa listened carefully to his plan and his worries.

"To be honest Thor, there is one thing Sif and I agree on. The mortals of Midgard are fucking everything up. Have you taken a look at the oceans lately? Have you counted the fish of the sea?"

"Not so good?"

"Awful, Thor, awful. You remember when oysters were the size of chariot wheels and suitable for a giant's slurping tongue? Now a small child could eat them in one bite. And as the oceans warm, so many species are dying off. The coral is bleached and withered. There are gyres, gyres of trash, and more plastic in the ocean than life. They have poisoned the seas, and so quickly. The whales sing mournful songs on any waves that will carry them."

"And yet without humans we are forgotten."

"It is sad but true."

"The serpents of Ragnarök constrict ever tighter on the mortal sphere."

"So Heimdall's plan makes sense, I will call in some favors. You will need some help. Though you are stronger with vim and vigor and your passion has returned in its undulating majesty, God of Thunder, your powers are not yet strong enough. You must have a coalition. A coalition of the willing, and many will you find willing weather gods in

Asgard and beyond for many are those who would see the mortals return to reverence for the powers of the earth, skies, and sea."

"We must show them again our powers, we must make them tremble and shake, if only for their own sake."

"And you will need a spokesman."

"A spokesman?"

"Thor I hope you will not be offended but your English is quite poor and few of the poor fools can even read Old Norse."

"Hmmm—"

"For this sort of diplomacy, you need someone who is what they call 'sunny.' Someone with a positive outlook. Someone who can 'spin.'"

"Do you have someone in mind?"

"I have chosen one of the mortals for you, my love. He is a professional rhetorician, from a land of interminably beautiful weather. He has worked with reality television stars, is an avid social media tactician, a cunning linguist proficient in our tongue, and he is so smooth that he could sell a used car to a headless horseman."

"Who is this spokesman?"

"His name is Markino."

—Scott Rettberg, August 2

## Cold Near Lake Superior

January 20, 2017, 5 PM  
Cornucopia, Minnesota

**W**T urn that frown—upside down!"

Mark burst forth, on snowshoes, into the late January firelight where Rob sat on a compression-packed sleeping bag, burning a few sticks and tinders by the shores of Lake Superior, in Cornucopia, Minnesota.

"Oh hey, Mark." Rob said, slightly startled, "The light is dwindling, though there is yet a bit of warmth here. Come, come, sit down. You want some coffee?"

"I would be delighted, Rob. So this is winter. Winterrrr... Brrrr. It's so refreshing!"

"It's cold. You want a balaclava, so you face doesn't freeze and bleed?"

"Oh thanks!"

Mark affixed the face-mask and then began dancing about the fire.

"You know where I'm from, there's only two seasons. Warm and dry. Warm and dry. They alternate."

"Yeah, it gets cold here."

The ice on the lake groaned and cracked as it stretched another meter.

"I've been thinking about ice fishing. But only thinking. Maybe we could write something about fishing on the ice. And maybe there's a giant fish, and maybe everyone could write about the giant fish, and only the fish isn't only one fish, maybe it's a whole school of fish, and maybe some of the fish are mermaids, or the lost souls of Atlantis, or pirates trapped in the bodies of fish. I'm thinking maybe we could get some Snapchat filters, and—"

"Stop, Mark."

"Rob?"

"..."

"Rob, are you OK?"

"You know what happened the last time."

"The last time was phenomenal! It was outstanding! It was the mother of all netprovs, the netprov to begin all netprovs."

"It was a disaster."

"Oh come on Rob. It was great. I mean we got written up in the Economist! Who would have thought that our little thing would distract people from the Brexit? I mean—"

"I had to kill four goats, Mark. With my own hands. With a machete. I killed four goats. The warm blood splattered on me, and I wept. And the storms kept coming."

"Who says an ant—can't—pull down a rubber tree plant?—cause he's got—hiiiigh hopes, oh he's got—hiiighighigh hopes!"

"Hasn't it even occurred to you? We start writing about bad weather, and monstrous weather comes. And this election—"

"Ok, so Trump won. He won. Bad things happened. So what? We're writers. We write. We're here. In Cornucopia. It's winter. We make snowmen and things. We have snowball fights and we dance around and play drums and stuff. We write. Life could be worse. So tell me, where does a guy get a big horn full of fruit around here?"

"Lately I've been thinking about mortality."

"We've got this day, Rob. We've got this day. And life is— life is magical. I revel in the unabashed abundance of it! Look around you. This is amazing! I've never seen an iceberg before, and yet look at that thing rising out of that frozen lake! To think that only yesterday,

I was waterskiing in the wake of a supersonic motorboat as whales breached and dolphins leapt alongside me, and here I am now seeing my first iceberg! On a writer's retreat! How amazing is that?"

There was a tremendous boom in the sky and a blinding yellow light. Rob covered his eyes and shrank into a fetal crouch, screaming "No more goats. No more bloody hands. I can't do it anymore! Make it stop! Make it stop!"

Two Valkyrie stepped from the brightness of clouds, resplendent and magnificent, they chanted in choral unison:

"Markino, you have been summoned. Come with us."

—Scott Rettberg, August 4

## Mark is Stardust, He is a Voyager

"Disrobe!"

The Valkyrie had marched him off, away from the shoreline and the sobbing Rob, to a clearing in the woods.

"Now wait just one minute here!"

"Unclothe thyself!"

Hilde, the larger of the two, unsheathed her broadsword.

Mark stripped down to his underwear.

"Everything!"

"But it's cold!"

Ranghild raised an eyebrow and cocked an arrow in her bow.

"Ok, ok. Geez."

"A bit scrawny, isn't he?"

"But taut of belly, for a mortal of his age."

"Furry."

"Excuse me, please, I'm starting to feel just a little bit objectified here."

"Unarmed, anyway."

"He'll do."

"Step into the circle, mortal."

Mark noticed that there was a circle dug into the dirt, covered with what seemed to be pagan symbols.



"Just one gosh-darned minute here, ok? Can you tell me what this about?"

"It's about a job offer."

"Thanks but no thanks. I'll have you know I'm gainfully employed at the University of Southern California. I could do with a raise and more job security but the campus is outstanding, and the students are just great, and I can get away with teaching almost anything I want, within reason. I mean I did a class on selfies. So I'm fine, I have to say no, no thanks, and if this is your idea of a job interview—"

"It is a non-negotiable job offer, mortal. And there is an outstanding benefits package."

"Step into the circle, Markino."

"And another thing, that's not my real name— oh alright, alright. Geez."

Mark, naked as a jaybird, reluctantly stepped into the magic circle. He stubbed his toe and reached for his foot. He was in a kind of runner's starting line crouch when electricity began shooting through the air. Metal rings rose from the earth and began spinning around him. Blue bolts of lightning crackled about him and he felt immense pain. A high pitched sound grew to a deafening roar as he was transported through time and space, through torrents of rain, through solar storms, through clouds of molten plasma starstuff, away from the mortal realm and into the astral night.

—Scott Rettberg, August 4

## Do You Feel Stormy?

“I’m gonna ask you one more time, Storm. Do you feel lucky?”

There was a daft silence in the room. Somebody almost sniggered.

"Did you like that Mr. President? How did you feel about that? Will that put a bullet in their brains? Will that slow them down, Mr. President? We'll have men with guns. Men with guns out there, Mr. President. Put a bullet in their heads. What do you think, Mr. President? Do you like it? Do you like me now?"

"Thanks, Clint. I'm over here. Would you, could you, stop, stop talking to the chair, please? Talk to me. Talk to Mr. President. Talk to the Donald. Thanks very much for your counsel. As you say, we will put men on the ground. Men. on. the. ground. We will not have looting situations in this presidency. The federal response will be strong, and swift, and determined. Everybody clap. I'm serious. Clap for Clint!"

The rest of the cabinet gave Secretary of Defense Clint Eastwood a warm round of applause.

"What a great American! A patriot! Finally getting the respect he deserves."

"140 minutes to landfall, Mr. President!"

"I'll be ready. I'll be ready soon. To address the American people. Situation awareness. Total deniability. Who's up next? FEMA. Who's on FEMA?"

"I am, Mr. President." Rick Perry stepped forward in snakeskin boots. "I am ready to report for duty."

"Perry what have you got? What does FEMA have for this situation you've stepped into?"

"Mr. President, we have few resources, as we planned, but we will deploy them. And we also have a message for the American people."

"Dynamite, Rick, fantastic. I'm liking your style. Give us the message!"

"In times of crisis, Americans pull together. And we remember what we are made of. Sure, the Federal Government can help you. We have bottled water. We have property rights. But what we most need to remember is that America is country of rugged individualists. Be rugged. Be ready. Be individual. Protect yourselves and your families. Run if you need to, but remember your survival skills, and most of all, pray for each other. May God Bless America!"

Donald led another round of applause.

"What an outstanding, and I mean superb, team we have put together! We are going to whip these storms in the ass and come out with even better numbers than we had before. I mean just exemplary! I think I'm ready to address the American people."

Just then there was a loud explosion that could be heard and felt even in the bunker. Secret Service agents went scrambling. Views of the West Lawn appeared on the situation room tile wall display. Agents running towards a large foreign object. A missile? How could it have gotten past the air support? An asteroid? Near the crater, agents stood looking down. They looked puzzled. A voice crackled through the intercom.

"It's an object, sir, a large object. Doesn't seem to be a bomb. Covered in writing, or—runes. It's a hammer sir, silver. A very large silver hammer."

—Scott Rettberg, August 6

## Live from the Bunker

**A**fter the bomb squad confirmed the hammer was neither explosive nor radioactive, a team of archeologists were sent down into the pit to study the extraterrestrial object and to try and decipher the runes carved in its handle. Although the television trucks were lined up outside the White House gates, by this point all of D.C. was a no-fly zone, so the administration was able to keep the spectacle shielded from at least one set of eyes in sky. In the meantime, it was 130 minutes until landfall and the President needed to address the American people. President Trump was coiffed and scrubbed, make-up applied, show time.

\* \* \*

"My fellow Americans, as you probably know if you have tuned into CNN or the Weather Channel, today we face storms of unparalleled magnitude. Not one, not two, not three, not four, not five, but six, six hurricanes have formed unimaginably quickly and are about two hours away from slamming into a number of our nation's largest metropolitan areas: Los Angeles, San Francisco and Seattle on the West Coast, and Washington D.C., New York and Boston on the East. Obviously we are concerned, and you should be too. I'm not going to lie to you. I'm going to give it to you straight. These are huge, huge storms, and it is almost certain that a lot of people, hundreds of people, perhaps thousands of people, are going to die. Many of you listening to me right now will be dead three hours from now. Dead. Now it may have occurred to you that these storms are hitting areas that did not vote Trump in the last election but instead supported Crooked Hillary. And that my friends is a hell of a coincidence. But I want to assure you that my administration had nothing to do with these storms. They are an ACT OF GOD. What that says about what God thinks of these cities, I don't know. I truly don't. But I want to assure you that we, everyone in my administration, we are going to do all we can to save as many lives as we can and I can assure you that we will restore order and the rule of martial law to these areas as soon as we can after these storms hit. You will see tanks and men in uniform with powerful guns in your neighborhoods, there to help and to shoot any looters. I need to very strongly encourage all

of you, but especially those of you of a minority persuasion, to comply with any orders that any military or police give you. They are there for your protection, and they are authorized to use lethal force. Now as I said, one of the biggest of these storms is headed towards D.C. and many of you are probably concerned for my safety and for the command and control structures we have in place. I want to assure you that I'm safe here, deep in the bowels of the White House, in our emergency facilities, and they are outstanding, fantastic facilities. There's a full kitchen down here, my personal chef is down here right now making snacks for the cabinet, hot wings and these little cucumber sandwiches that Melania likes, and there's a bathroom with a whirlpool, it's got everything. We are way, way, underground and the walls are like eight feet thick. I'll be safe, my whole family will be safe, my cabinet will be safe. And, as a backup, we have Vice President Pence off in an undisclosed secure location in the Himalayas. So that is all great. You may have also heard that there was some kind of terrorist attack on the White House involving a very large extraterrestrial hammer. Also true. Also true. But this attack did not harm a hair on my head, as you can see, nor did it harm any member of my team. We don't know yet if it was ISIS or the Mexicans or Occupy people or just MIT students playing some kind of prank, but I want to assure you that whoever did this damage to the lawn that my Hispanic gardeners so carefully maintain will be brought to swift and final justice. We are investigating. Now, let's get back to you, and especially to the people living in these afflicted areas. What should you do now? I've got some other experts who are going to give you some good advice on that, some exceptional people who will be coordinating everything with federal, state and local agencies, but some key points: number one, get away from the water. They tell me that most of the people within a few miles of the shoreline are going to get hit really, really hard by this thing, a lot of fatalities are expected there. So if I were you, first of all I would get the hell away from the water. Secondly, get underground, get deep underground, as deep underground as you can get, until these things pass over. Thirdly, take care of yourselves. This might mean bringing a firearm if you have one, and plenty of ammunition, radio, smart phone and charger, water, canned food, and other survival items, Swiss Army knife and so forth. Then hunker down with your family and wait for law enforcement. And now my fellow Americans, I want you to join me in taking a moment, a few seconds if we can, a moment of prayer for everyone who is about to die as a result of these storms. . . . Thank

you. To all of you who are seeing me for the last time, I want to say thank you for your support if you voted for me, and to all of you who will survive this tragedy, I will be seeing you soon. I'll be back. And I can assure you that after these storms, America will be great again! God bless us, everyone, and God bless the United States of America!"

—Scott Rettberg, August 6

## Trump Consults the Experts

**T**he archeologists and linguists came in, scratching their heads, with their reports. The thing could be carbon dated back millennia. They couldn't be sure, but early bronze age at the earliest. Most likely before Jesus. And it could not be moved.

The runes were translatable, if roughly with some uncertainties.

"Orange (*could be bronze*) mortal. The God Thor, Ruler of the Skies, Breaker of the Clouds, God of Lightning, Splitter of Heaven and Earth, Bringer of Rain, Electrifier, Protector of Asgard, Ruler of All Men, Wise and Generous (*could be gifted*) Thor, Fearsome Thor, Terrible (*could be terrifying*) and Loving (*could be rapturous*), Maker of Storms That Befall You, Thor immediately (*could be soon*) demands your presence to kneel (*could be bring gifts*) before him at Uppsala. Reply to @markino\_servant\_of\_THOR"

"Are you people kidding me?"

The researchers shook their heads.

"That's pretty much, roughly, what it says, Mr. Trump."

"The artifact is very old. And very heavy, very dense. I don't think you'll be able to dig it out with a backhoe. Fascinating, actually, the material—"

"Shut up, archeologist. I'm talking to the rune guy. So that last bit, it's a what, a Twitter handle?"

"I'm not sure what Twitter is, Mr. President."

"You don't follow me on Twitter?"

"I'm sorry, Mr. President. Is that something I should know about?"

"Jesus, you fucking academics. It's like you're trapped in the 19th century—"

"Actually, most of my work is focused on the 11th through to the 13th—"

"GET OUT. ALL OF YOU. OUT! Go back to your adjunct faculty positions. Go look at some rocks, or whatever it is you people do, you worthless parasites."

Trump, tasting the bile of his own anger, felt suddenly sorry for the cowering researchers.

"Sorry. I kid, I kid. I was just being sarcastic. Here's a handgun and some ammo, and a pin. No take one, all of you, go ahead, take one, go ahead, head inland. Protect yourselves. Protect your families."

President Trump cracked his knuckles and then his neck. He twiddled his fingers and then pulled out his laptop. It was time to tweet.

—Scott Rettberg, August 6



## Direct Messages from the Gods

@realDonaldTrump

Who are you people? What do you want from me?

@markino\_servant\_of\_THOR

THOR God of Thunder demands your presence at Uppsala for a Thing.

@realDonaldTrump

A thing?

@markino\_servant\_of\_THOR

A meeting. A summit at Uppsala. That's what they call it, I guess. A Thing.

@realDonaldTrump

Why the hell would I do that? Did you put that hammer in my lawn?

@markino\_servant\_of\_THOR

Yes, that was THOR. Also the hurricanes.

@realDonaldTrump

What kind of sick, disgusting game are you people playing at?

@markino\_servant\_of\_THOR

THOR is not a person. He is a god, an immortal.

@realDonaldTrump

Who the hell are you?

@markino\_servant\_of\_THOR

I'm his-- translator. His employee-- technically his-- minion.

@realDonaldTrump

Ok minion. You think I have time for your hijinx? There is a crisis here.

@markino\_servant\_of\_THOR

We can solve the crisis.

@realDonaldTrump

Not unless you can change the weather.

@markino\_servant\_of\_THOR

That's what I'm telling you, @realDonaldTrump, THOR can change the weather.

@markino\_servant\_of\_THOR

He's a weather god. And he demands your presence at Uppsala.

@realDonaldTrump

You jokers. Where the hell is Uppsala anyway?

@markino\_servant\_of\_THOR

Sweden. Temple of Uppsala. Traditional location for mortals to meet with the gods.

@realDonaldTrump

I'll have your head.

@markino\_servant\_of\_THOR

Please don't do that, Mr. President.

@realDonaldTrump

We'll waterboard you at Gitmo. FOR YEARS!

@markino\_servant\_of\_THOR

Please let's be constructive.

@realDonaldTrump

Well look you tell your Swedish Socialist Weather God friend that if he wants to see me, he can come meet me at the White House.

@realDonaldTrump

I'm the President of the United States of America. The most powerful man in the world.

@markino\_servant\_of\_THOR

Yes sir. But he's a god.

@realDonaldTrump

Tell your god he can come see me in the Oval Office.

@realDonaldTrump

I'll come to Sweden if I want some Swedish fish. Or a bikini team. I have a crisis to deal with here.

@markino\_servant\_of\_THOR

Just a second. I'll ask him -- brb.

@realDonaldTrump

I'll show you how we deal with people who fuck up my lawn.

@markino\_servant\_of\_THOR

THOR says ok. We'll be there in a few minutes.

—Scott Rettberg, August 7

## Down to Earth

**70** minutes to landfall.

F-16s scrambled to intercept UFO headed towards the mansion.

Sidewinders fired. No impact.

Bombs away.

Vulcan cannons fired. No impact.

Object continuing on course.

Stinger anti-aircraft missiles fired.

Dazzler laser system activated.

Object continuing descent. No impact.

Alarms sounded. Noise weapons activated.

Black Hawks in the air over the grounds.

\* \* \*

"We have identified another object heading towards the mansion, Mr. President."

"But we should be fine down here, yes?"

The Secret Service agent nodded solemnly.

"But Mr. President, our forces have been unable to intercept or destroy."

"Keep me posted."

\* \* \*

Mark held on for dear life as Thor held the reins. He wished the Thunder God carried barf bags on this thing. Tanngrisnir and Tanngrjóstr spiraled and twisted through the skies, doing loop-the-loops and rolling sideways evasions. Missiles and flak exploded all round them. F-16s buzzed by, flattening Mark to the bed of the chariot. A laser pulsed towards them and for a moment Mark was blinded. Thor raised a finger and laser dissolved to a warm, diffuse, gentle pink light. Mark hugged his flak jacket close to his chest and tugged at the chin strap of his helmet. What had he gotten himself into? An attack helicopter came into view and fired more missiles at them. Its cannons roared and streams of bullets hailed towards them. This is not, thought Mark, how I intended to die. I miss the Earth so much, I miss my wife. The wind whipped at him and Mark felt cold as hell. What will the kids think? He really needed to throw up. Thor did a slight twitch of his neck and the helicopter went spinning out of sight. The White House came into postage-stamp view, men in black suits like ants scrambling all over the grounds, aiming machine guns into the skies. The chariot approached the ground at high velocity. They would surely be flattened.

Goodbye, cruel world.

They landed on the ground with a soft thud, and Mark vomited over the side of the chariot. Tanngrisnir and Tanngrjóstr grazed on the well-trimmed grass as the sniper bullets tore into the turf all around them. Tear gas canisters rolled towards them spitting clouds of noxious gas. An ear-splitting, wailing noise only increased Mark's nausea.

"Nice ride, eh?" roared Thor over the din.\*

He patted Mark on the back.

"Come, Markino. I am in need of your silver tongue. It is time for our Thing."

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\* NOTE: Thor, obviously, communicates with Mark only in Old Norse—otherwise there would be virtually no plausible role for Mark to play in the narrative. We translate to English here only for the reader's convenience.

—Scott Rettberg, August 7

## A God in the Oval

**Y**ou won't be needing that, Markino." Thor flicked at Mark's flak jacket. "Put on your skins." Bullets continued to fly in their direction but, Mark noted, impressed, whatever kind of electrical force field surrounded Thor still seemed to be working its magic. The bullets slowed and dropped to the ground whenever they got within five feet of the chariot. Mark reluctantly shed the protective armor and pulled his black leather jacket on over his tunic. It matched his black leather pants. "Skins," Thor had said when they were packing for the journey, "the minions of Thor always wear skins."

The eight-foot-tall goats continued to graze, unfazed by the whirlwind of activity around them. Mark slipped on his black Ray-Bans, hoping that might fool the facial recognition software and thus prevent the FBI from turning up at his kids' soccer practice with questions his wife could not possibly answer.

"Come, we fetch Mjölfnir." Thor, a god of remarkable stature, perhaps eight or nine feet tall, red of beard, with fiery eyes, torso like the trunk of an oak tree, biceps as thick as howitzers, thighs like fire hydrants, strode over to the large crater and whistled. The hammer rose from the pit like a monolith, shrinking from the size of a small monument to more workable dimensions as it flew to Thor's outstretched hand.

Thor gave out a deep booming laugh as he surveyed the scene around him. He and his minion then walked across the lawn, Secret Service agents falling aside in midair as they rushed to tackle them, to the front door of the White House. Mark rang the bell.

An African-American gentleman in a white tuxedo and black bow-tie opened the door.

"May I help you?"

"Oh hello, yes. We have a meeting scheduled with the President."

"Is that so? One moment, sir." The butler put his finger to his earpiece and whispered something in his collar. He nodded and then waved them in. "President Trump will see you, gentlemen."

He escorted them through a series of corridors. Thor had to crouch a bit to navigate. At one point the god bumped into a large vase and the butler went diving to catch it, saying "Careful, sir, Mrs. Roosevelt purchased that vase in 1904." Thor grunted, unimpressed. He used crockery far older than that for target practice.

"Please wait here, gentlemen." He pointed them to a long wooden bench. Across from them Chris Christie sat a small wooden desk, with arms folded, looking none too pleased to be called up from the safety of the bunker.

"Thanks, Barry. I'll keep an eye on them until the President is ready." Christie eyed Thor nervously, afraid, if clearly impressed with the sheer heft of the god and his regal bearing. The bench groaned under the weight of the god. Christie regained his composure, and shook his head and fixed them with an assistant principal's disapproving gaze.

"I hope you fellahs got a good story, cause you got some explaining to do. The boss is not happy with you. Not happy at all. What you boys did to that lawn." He clucked his tongue at them.

A buzzer sounded and Christie rose and opened the Oval Office door.

"The President will see you now."

Donald Trump stood behind the Resolute desk, arms open wide, bleached teeth smile like the Cheshire Cat, looking every bit the world leader as the black clouds gathered and lightning flashed in the windows behind him.

"Welcome to the White House. I trust you didn't have any trouble finding the place. Have a seat. Now let's do this thing."

—Scott Rettberg, August 7



## Due Diligence

"Thank you for taking the time to see us, Mr. President."

"Oh no problem, it's not like I had anything else to do."

"So we have a proposition for you—"

"Oh goody. But can you tell me something, Mr.?"

"Markino, they call me Markino."

"So you're the mouthpiece and he's the god."

"I'm his translator, that's right."

"Can you take off your sunglasses, please?"

"Oh I'd really prefer not to Mr. President."

"Take them off, kid. Show some respect."

Mark reluctantly shed his Ray-Bans.

"Markino. Tell me, are you an Arab, Markino? That sounds like an Arab name."

Mark shook his head.

"No, I'm not—"

"Iranian? You look a little Iranian to me."

"Not at all."

"Maybe it's just the beard. Mexican? Hablas español?"

"Si. Yo hablo español, but I'm not Mexican. I'm American."

"Israeli, maybe?"

"No sir."

"Markino. Let me ask you something. If I say 'Allahu Akbar!' does that mean anything to you?"

"Mr. President, we have no connection to Isla—"

"Just a second, just a second." Trump reached into a drawer in his desk and pulled out a bag of Utz pork rinds. "These are the best. No carbs. Made from real pigs. Take a handful, both of you. Go ahead, no, go ahead. Eat, eat."

"Mr. President, is this really necessary—"

"EAT THE PIG. Let me see you eat it!"

Mark popped a couple into his mouth and crunched down on them. Thor shrugged his shoulders and took a handful.

"Ok, ok, so you aren't ISIS. Can you tell me what in God's name—"

"THOR!" said Thor.

"—made you want to fuck up my lawn?"

"THE BUILDINGS! MY NAME! ON THEM!" roared Thor, growing impatient.

"Just a minute, Thor, just a minute. Mr. President, we are here because we can help you with the hurricanes. In fact, Thor has already helped you with the weather. Remember all those storms in August in September, the internet outages, the flooding, the chaos—"

"I remember it well. The acme of my campaign. My poll numbers shot right up!"

"That was Thor."

"Oh yeah?"

"The one and only."

"You two. You two." Trump wagged his finger. "You know what they say? You can't con a con man. You ever heard of Trump University?"

"No, really, Mr. President. Thor made those storms happen. And he did it for you."

"Now look, I know you two have some impressive, ah, defensive technologies or something, but I wasn't born yesterday. You can control the weather? Prove it."

"Prove it? There are six hurricanes, Mr. President."

"So what, opportunist. Prove it."

Mark whispered in Thor's ear.

"THE PLANE!" said Thor.

"The plane, boss, the plane?" asked Mark. Thor nodded.

"Ok. Mr. President. Your plane, Air Force One?"

"What about it?"

Thor squinted in concentration for a moment.

Seconds later, National Security Advisor Wayne LaPierre burst into the room.

"Sorry to interrupt Mr. President."

"Go ahead."

"There's been an— incident. Some kind of a freak electrical incident, maybe terrorist attack— at St. Andrews. Air Force One is—"

"What, what? Spit it out, LaPierre."

"Struck by a number of lightning bolts, apparently, and blown up."

"Blown up?"

"Blown up, sir."

"Ok, Wayne, ok. I'll catch up with you later." He waved him out of the office.

"You two. You're lucky I have a fleet, literally a fleet, of privately-owned planes that are just as good or better than that one. I'm a very, very wealthy man. Otherwise I would be really, really upset about what you just did there. But I'm not like that. I'm not thin-skinned. So, you've proven a point. Now tell me, what is it that you want?"

"Well, for starters, Mr. President: You own a number of office buildings, residential properties, skyscrapers."

"I do. I'm a legendary developer. Huge."

"And they all have your name on them."

"The biggest signage in the world. That way you know it's a TRUMP."

"Thor would like you to put his name on them instead."

"His name on my buildings?" Trump's face flushed red. "My buildings?"

"That's right, Mr. President. They would still be your buildings, of course, he really just wants the advertising—"

"Just a second, Markino, Thor. Just a second. There's somebody I'd like to introduce you to."

Trump reached under his desk. He pulled out an AR-15 assault rifle.

"SAY HELLO TO MY LITTLE FRIEND!"

Mark dived under the coffee table and put his hands over his ears.

Trump leapt up and fired the weapon in intense, short range bursts at Thor, point blank range. Most fell harmlessly to the floor. One went ricocheting off and shattered the glass on a portrait of George Washington, which fell to the floor with a clunk.

Thor sat calmly through it all.

When Trump had used up the whole clip, Thor raised his pinky finger. A small blue arc of electricity crossed the Resolute and was absorbed into Trump's body. Trump

convulsed and fell back into his chair, his bronze hair standing on end and smoking as he twitched.

After a moment, he came to.

"Ok, ok, that didn't work," he said. "But I had to try. Let's see if we can make a deal."

—Scott Rettberg, August 8

## A Long-Term Relationship

"Markino, you can come out from under there, ok? We're going to work on a deal. Now let's sit together, all of us, like friends."

"I'm glad you feel ready, President Trump."

Thor grunted and nodded.

"I'm ready to try. Now I must warn you that this is an art form, the deal. And I am a master of that art."

"That's good, Mr. President. Now as I said, and let me reiterate, Thor has the power to stop these storms. So let's put that on the table right away, because we only have about what 55 minutes or so until those things hit? We really want to stop those."

"Do we?"

"I've got family that could be affected."

"Many Americans do, many Americans do, Markino. I myself have buildings that could be devastated by such storms. Though, you know what, they're insured, well-insured. And actually, I want to ask you something, Markino."

"What's that?"

"Why would I want to stop these hurricanes?"

"Mr. President?"

"I've already spoken to the American people. They know the hurricanes are coming. They're afraid. So the hurricanes come. Devastation. I put troops on the ground. We rebuild. I'm a hero. To me this all seems good."

"But what about the hundreds, or even thousands of people who might die?"

Trump shrugged.

"We're all going to die someday, son. And I deal well with people who are afraid."

"But you could be the first President to personally stop hurricanes. You could save lives. You would be a huge hero."

"I could leave that on the table, easy."

"But these are innocent people, Americans."

"Let me tell you something about America, kid. Americans thrive, absolutely thrive, on fear. Remember World War II? We invented the atomic bomb. Remember the Cold War? We walked on the moon *and* invented the birth control pill. 9/11? We invented always-on internet surveillance and drone-based warfare. We are a nation of inventors. Whenever we are scared shitless we make new and important things."

"But there are people's lives at stake!"

"Markino, you're young, you're idealist."

"Markino, is he going to put my name on the buildings or should I just crush his skull?" Thor was disliking the orange mortal more the more he spoke.

"Listen, listen, Trump, Thor. We need to work this out."

"Markino, I'll tell you what. I'm listening, I'm listening. But you are going to have to sweeten the pot. Can we see the advantages of stopping the hurricanes? Yes we can. But can I see the advantages to just letting them hit? That also. I'm just saying that right now, you have given me nothing. Nothing that makes me want to stay at the table. I could walk away right now."

"Tell him I will crush his skull and those of all his family and descendants."

"President Trump. I think you need to recognize the power of Thor and the benefits that could come from this for you personally."

"I understand that I benefit when people are afraid. And they should be. Do you know what my presidency represents, young man? It represents another chance. A last chance. Did you know that this house was built by slaves? Did you know that black people were living here, in charge of the place, for the past eight years?"

"That was, that was great, wasn't it?"

"Is that what the founders wanted when they wrote that fantastic constitution upon which this country is based? Do you think they wanted the descendants of slaves, living here, in the White House? Do you think they wanted Muslims waving that constitution in their face, all superior like? They did not. Do you think they wanted women here, running the show? They did not, Markino, they did not. What do you think made America great, Markino?"

"The proposition that all men are created equal? That we all have the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness?"

"Markino, when the founders said 'All men are created equal' do you think they really meant *all* men? Do you?"

"I always thought that was the ideal, yeah."

"They did not. They meant all *white* men. They were wealthy, white men. They didn't give the vote to the women, to the blacks, to the Mexicans. We need to remember."

"Remember what?"

"Remember when America was great. And why it was great. America was great because white men wanted power over their own destinies. And they had it, they had it, before all this political correctness took hold. For generations, even if you were lower middle class, even if you were poor, every white American had one thing to cling to. He had it better than someone. He had it better than the blacks, than the Chinese, than the



Mexicans. You could be living in a shack with barely enough money for a pot to piss in, and yet you still had it better than somebody else. You still meant something. Because you were an *American*."

"We need to talk about stopping these storms, President Trump. We don't have much time."

"So we had better be afraid. We have good reason. There's something to lose. There are people taking things away from us. And these terrorists, these terrorists coming to kill us."

"But look, President Trump, we helped you. And we can help you more."

"How can you help me?"

"We can let him live?" said Thor.

"These storms, these storms that Thor can cause. We've already seen what they can do for you."

"I'm listening."

"That could happen more often, Mr. Trump. Thor could move things in beneficial ways, in addition to calling off these horrible hurricanes."

"Now you're starting to make some sense. You're talking about a long-term relationship?"

"We have some other conditions."

—Scott Rettberg, August 9

## Morning

Once it became clear that the negotiations would likely be successful, Thor put the storms in a holding pattern. Swirling black clouds could be seen in the distance from the Statue of Liberty, from the Golden Gate Bridge, from Venice Beach, approaching Puget Sound, lurking in the Massachusetts Bay, off the shores Virginia Beach en route to the Chesapeake Bay. Angry waves crashed on American shorelines. Mothers and children huddled in basement corners. Crowds massed in fallout shelters, bearing guns and ammunition. Snakes of cars crept slowly along interstate highways, leaning on horns of desperation.

Thor and Trump found common ground even as Markino felt more and more distanced from the proceedings. Empathy was established between Trump and Thor as they bonded over their troubled relationships with their fathers and their common desires for approval and love from the commons. Some concessions were granted. The buildings would bear Thor's name. Temples would be constructed in Thor's name and pantheism openly encouraged. Trump would abandon the voting reforms he intended to pursue ("Half votes for women, quarter votes for blacks and immigrants.") and the country would stay with a one-vote-per-voter policy, though other constitutional amendments could breeze right on through. Thor would campaign for Trump and make certain weather interventions on his behalf during the midterm and General elections. Certain districts would go without power on election day. Heavy storms would come to blue states as voters went to the polls, while red states would see clear skies and sun.

Man and god sat together into the wee hours, carving up the map. The wall would be built, and Mexico would be pressured to pay for it or see Mexico City drowning in floods. Muslims would stay home until they swore allegiance to the gods of Asgard. Trump's detente with Russia and eventually China would assure world peace, while socialist Europe would grow increasingly isolated, and left to its devices to stem the tide of refugees headed North, fleeing war and the ever-expanding deserts. Africa and South America would be left to their internal conflicts until a new age of colonialism could begin. Scandinavia would

belong to Thor. From time to time, London and Paris would be raided of their treasures, and NATO would not intervene.

But Trump—and Mark was proud of this, at least—would become the Greenest president the world had ever known. Interstate highways would give way to high-speed rail. Solar and wind power, hydroelectric and geothermal energy would be harnessed. The EPA would have a sizeable increase in its budget allocation. National forests would not be harvested for commercial purposes. Fracking would cease immediately and offshore drilling would be forbidden. Fast ships, powered by heaven-sent gales, would supplant jets as the favored mode of travel across the oceans. Fleets would harvest plastic from the oceans and rivers would be cleaned of toxins. Fisheries would be protected. Carbon emissions would be sharply reduced and international treaties would be respected. Electric cars would be heavily subsidized and gasoline heavily taxed.

As a new day dawned, god and man, spent, signed a contract in blood and raised a toast to it with mead and ice-cold Diet Coke. They both felt reinvented and renewed. Mark longed to return to the City of Angels and pull his family close. The storms turned Northeast and Northwest and headed back to sea, where they dissipated just as quickly as they had formed.

It was morning in America.

—Scott Rettberg, August 10