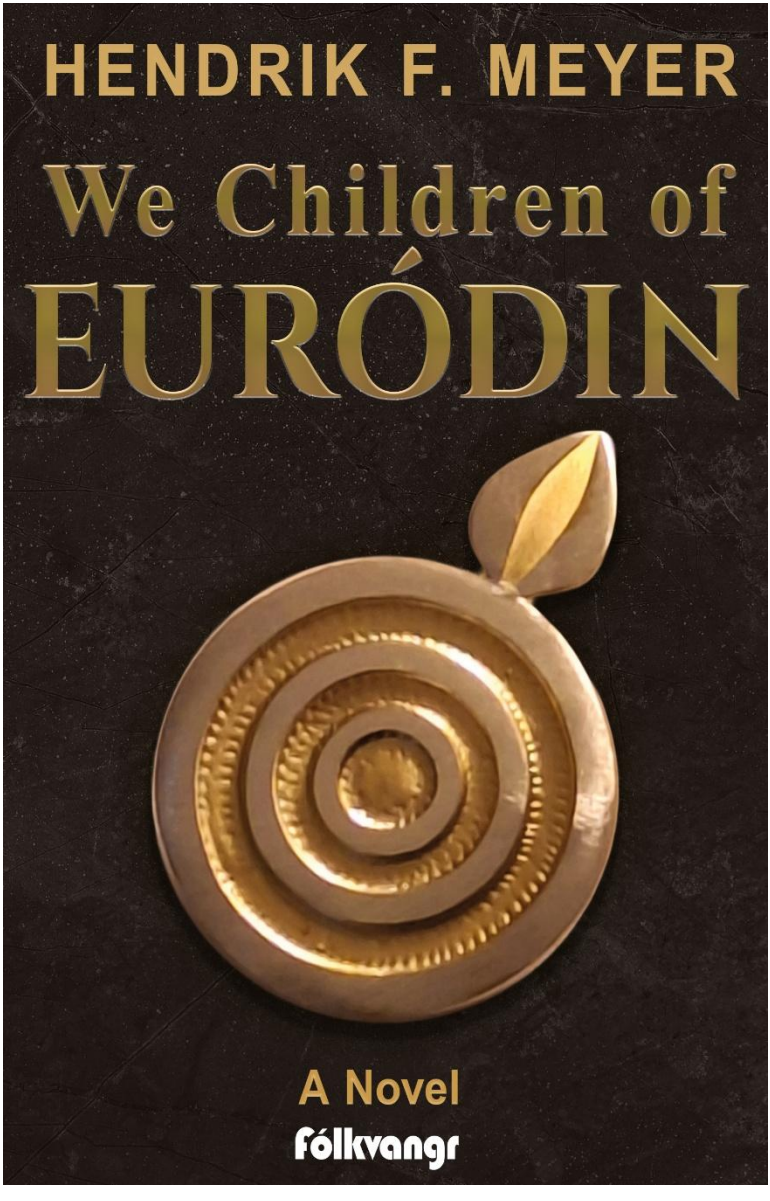
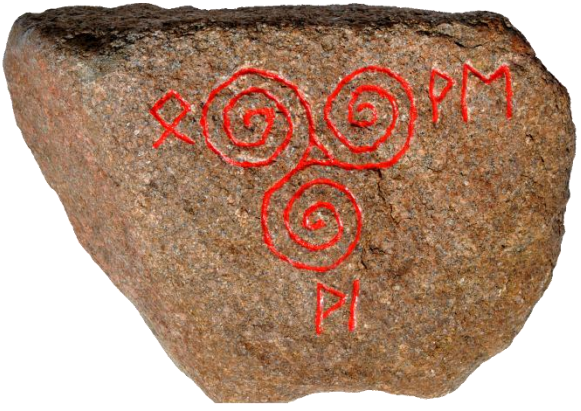

HENDRIK F. MEYER
We Children of
EURÓDIN
A Novel
Fólkvangr

The stone with the inscription that started it all



Hendrik Meyer, the author

Formerly an atheist, his life was turned upside down when he found a stone with a mysterious drawing on a Baltic Sea beach. As soon as the meaning was revealed to him, he learned to write novels so that he could create “We Children of Euródin”.

Description

„Since the dawn of times, these three gods have existed in the universe: Euródin and the foreign gods Vili and Vé.“

According to the Edda, Odin and his two brothers Vili and Vé created the world together and rule it. But this is only partly true, learns the former investment banker Siebenthal at the end of his lifelong search for God. For neither did they create the universe, nor do they rule it together. Instead, each of the three spirit beings creates a connection to the newborn souls of their own primordial people: Vili thus consecrates the souls of the Africans, Vé those of the Asians, and Odin, whom Siebenthal therefore now calls Euródin, takes care of those of European descent.

But realizing that is not enough. Euródin appoints Siebenthal as his prophet and commissions him to found a church and exhort his soul children to unite and preserve themselves until Ragnarök - the apocalypse predicted by the Edda, from whose ashes a new and better world for all men of European descent will arise one day.

Siebenthal is to be helped by Armin Weskamp, a family entrepreneur who has been struck by a private disaster. But he hesitates for fear of being pilloried as a racist. When his adolescent daughter Anngrit then secretly founds a cult at her school, it almost leads to a catastrophe. Armin has to make a decision that will change his life - and perhaps that of all Europeans.

Extract from

We Children of Euródin

Hendrik F. Meyer

A Novel

Fólkvangr Verlag

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For Irina

The Stranger within my gates,
He may be evil or good,
But I cannot tell what powers control—
What reasons sway his mood;
Nor when the Gods of his far-off land
Shall repossess his blood.//

This was my father's belief
And this is also mine:
Let the corn be all one sheaf—
And the grapes be all one vine,
Ere our children's teeth are set on edge
By bitter bread and wine.

—Rudyard Kipling, "The Stranger"

1

If only he understood the drawing! Ever since he had dreamt about it, he believed to possess with it the key to everything. However, try as he might, he couldn't make sense of it.

It was early morning, and Siebenthal was walking along Boltenhagen Beach, which at this time of day he had to share only with seabirds and a few dogs and their owners. He used to get his best ideas here, by the German stretch of the Baltic Sea; but lately his mind had been as infertile as the sand between his feet.

It had been five years since he gave up his job as an investment banker to pursue the answer to the question that had tormented him since childhood: Was there a God? Even as a three-year-old, he had stared up at the starry sky through the skylight of his attic room and asked himself: Who was up there and what did He want from people? What did He want from him in particular? It had been the beginning of a search continuing to this day. A quest during which he finished school, studied, fell in love, got married, made a career. But the nagging question inside him had always remained.

Why did it plague him, of all people? If only he knew! Gerold Siebenthal had been brought up as a Roman Catholic but could never believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, even though, as a child, he had dutifully painted Him under the ever-watchful eye of his religion teacher riding into Jerusalem on a donkey. At least not in the sense of a Son of God miraculously born by a virgin and awoken from the dead. All this had seemed absurd to him before he could even spell the word.

Not to mention an ethic that demanded unconditional love of one's neighbor to the point of utter self-abasement. To treat every stranger like a member of your own family. To turn the left cheek as well and beat your own sword into a plowshare. To love your enemies. Life as constant self-denial to be rewarded with a blissful twilight state in the afterlife. Why had God created humans in the first place if they weren't meant to also conquer and assert themselves? Then He could just as well leave every newborn in some kind of

coma, and peace would reign on earth. Or He could have spared Himself the trouble of creation altogether.

Siebenthal had long ago buried the question of God inside him and exorcized the last remnants of his faith with the help of the famous book *The God Delusion* by the atheist Richard Dawkins. He finally accepted that there was neither a supreme being nor a paradise, nor a hell, and he would simply slip into nothingness after death. Instead, he devoted himself to his career in investment banking, first at Goldman Sachs, then at Deutsche Bank—convincing himself that he could be happy without religion and lead an ordinary, middle-class life like any of his friends and neighbors.

At some point, however, the question still nesting inside him had burst out like pus from a wound. It had made his princely-paid job, his marriage to Dolores—his whole life—seem stale and pointless. As if there was a yawning hole inside him that he couldn't fill with the distractions that sufficed for other people.

Since then, Siebenthal had been systematically studying religion and soon came across a fundamental problem that nourished his doubts anew: if there was one, and only one God—why did people's ideas about Him differ in such fundamental ways? He had even published a book about it, *The Phenomenology of God*, in which he tried to distill the image of the one and only true God from the concepts of divinity and religious practices of all human cultures. At first glance, this did not seem difficult, as there was something like an evolutionary history of religion.

It all began in prehistoric times, with the worship of the souls of ancestors—the idea of an immortal soul being common to all human religions. Later, the souls became spirits that were hidden under every stone and in every river and wanted to be appeased and summoned. The spirits, in turn, became gods at some point; first local, then tribal ones. In the course of settling down ten thousand years ago, these gods were combined into a panel with different deities for specific functions, pantheons, which gradually were responsible not only for the tribe but also for an entire people, a culture—a civilization, even. At length, one of the gods in this pantheon was declared the main god, or sky god, and the "secondary gods" were eventually omitted

altogether. In the end, there was Abrahamic monotheism as the belief in a single, personal creator god, first as Judaism, then as Christianity, and finally, in the form of Islam—the highest and final stage of religion, it could be argued.

At this point, however, Siebenthal encountered the first problem: obviously, not everyone agreed with this religious evolutionary story. Anyone who described idolatry as a superstition overcome by monotheism, such as Jews and Christians, logically had to accept as well that Muhammad was the last, and therefore authoritative, prophet of that single God—unless he was decried as an impostor, which nobody would dare to do nowadays. Following this logic, the Jews would have to close their synagogues and the Christians their churches, and they should all throw themselves at the feet of Allah in the nearest mosque.

The Koran as the final word of God: end of story. Siebenthal could have concluded his book with this—and entirely in the spirit of the Muslims, for whom Islam naturally had to rule the whole world.

But something inside him insisted that this was not true. And if it were, it would be horrible for him and far worse than if there were no God at all. Then he would rather that Dawkins was right, and man's innate religiosity was merely a by-product of the evolution of consciousness, and religion just a figment of his imagination.

For he found the sycophantic, submissive natures of both Christianity and Islam too repulsive. The former believed in something as absurd as an original sin that had to be redeemed. The gaze of its priests was clouded, their demeanor effeminate and evading, their pride derived from penance and self-abasement. Their hands folded in prayer represented the gesture with which serfs had once sealed their servitude to their liege lords.

Muslims, on the other hand, prostrated themselves at their god's feet in prayer like their ancestors, who had been allowed only to approach their worldly ruler on their knees and with their eyes fixed on the ground. Obedient like slaves but also all the more merciless when they gained power over those even lower than themselves.

Under the sign of Allah's love, Muhammad's murdering and plundering troops had trampled throughout Asia. Meanwhile, the last

Scandinavians adhering to "paganism" had been convinced of the merits of the merciful Christian God with a sword at their throats.

It was this apparently despotic nature of God that had raised Siebenthal's doubts. For he could not reconcile it with what he perceived as the nature of the various peoples of the earth.

In Asia, for example, adherents of the most diverse religions have coexisted to this day. They range from ancestor worship and belief in spirits, to polytheistic Hinduism, then Buddhism—with its intangible image of God that embodies only the essence of being itself—right up to Confucianism, a purely philosophical social doctrine. And yet all these very different systems of faith shared at their core an image of man and God you could express like that: *thou shalt be a whole and not an individual*. Harmony and unity were the goal, not individualistic self-expression.

In Christianity, on the other hand, the community hardly mattered, and in Islam, only in a minor sense. Here, as there, it was primarily about the relationship between the individual and his God. Of course, those who wanted to ascend to paradise also had to be good to their earthly brothers. But it was always about the salvation of one's own soul: in one case, to be gained through self-denial and loving one's enemies; in the other, through submission to God. People prayed in a community, but alone as well—and not solely for others but just as naturally for themselves.

Those who know only the present might take this for granted. But Siebenthal knew it was by no means the essence of every religion. The ancient faiths of the Greeks, Romans, Celts, and Germanic tribes always revolved around the salvation of the community, be it one's own family, the village, the clan, or the tribe. No one would have thought of invoking one of the old gods alone and only for himself. If you asked for a good harvest, it was for the entire village, not just for your own strip of land.

But it didn't end with that. No European would have thrown himself into the dust before his god, be it Zeus, Jupiter, Teutates, or Odin. You stood respectfully but upright before them, worshipped them, followed their rules as far as you knew them, and fought for them if you had to. You may have been rewarded for this in life and

afterward, yet you did not see yourself as a mere subject of God but as part of a family. And the welfare and salvation of the individual were always linked to that of the group.

Siebenthal had thought about this for a long time. Was the pagan Europeans' proud character—their sense of being a people of upright equals and not just a mass of subordinates—merely a delusion, to be overcome by turning to the true faith, today Christianity and tomorrow possibly Islam?

Perhaps. But two weeks ago, when he had been about to give up, out of nowhere the drawing had appeared to him in a dream.

He was now halfway through his usual walk, between the cliffs at the western end of Boltenhagen Beach and the pier opposite the spa gardens. And it was precisely there that he began to feel a tingling sensation and a shapeless thought arose in his mind. He stopped abruptly, stroked his beard, and stared out to sea. Then he pulled from his trouser pocket the crumpled sheet of paper that he had been carrying with him for several days.

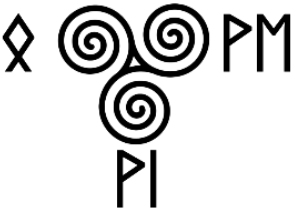
For the hundredth time, he studied the drawing, which he had scribbled hastily on the paper after his dream: three spiral circles inscribed with runes—the ancient Germanic characters—the meaning of which had remained hidden from him.

But now he groaned and slapped his forehead.

For suddenly, he knew the answer.

4

After what he considered to be his first revelation, Siebenthal immediately rushed back from the beach to his house directly behind the dunes. There he hurried into his study. He swept aside a copy of his *Phenomenology of God* lying on the desk, as well as folders full of printouts and unfinished texts. Then he pulled the folded-up drawing from his trouser pocket. He smoothed it out carefully and spread it on the table. Sitting down, he looked at his dream image with completely fresh eyes:



The separate elements he had already identified right after his dream: runes of the Elder Futhark—the earliest version of the ancient Germanic alphabet—and the three arcs of a triskele; except that the latter was upside down, because usually the single arc was at the top and the two parallel ones at the bottom. The rune at the top left represented the sign Othala, which stood for the letter *O*. The two runes at the top right read "VE" and the two at the bottom center "VI." He had already assumed the Othala to stand for the god Odin. At least, it was used that way by several neo-pagan groups.

However, the meaning of the other runes and the triskele had remained a mystery to him. Until just now, when a few inconspicuous lines from the ancient lore book Edda, which he had stumbled across some time before without attaching any importance to them, had appeared in his mind. He stood up again, walked to his bookcase on the opposite wall, and pulled out a copy of the famous collection of Nordic myths.

He leafed through it feverishly until he finally found what he was seeking: it was in the Gylfaginning, part of the Younger Edda. It tells

the story of the Swedish king Gylfi's journey to Asgard, the heavenly home of the gods, in the guise of an old man. There he wanted to find out what the mighty Aesir, the gods of the Norse pantheon, were all about—which Odin explained to him in a question-and-answer game. What Siebenthal was looking for specifically was in the sixth chapter:

> "His Name was Buri. He was beautiful in appearance, big and powerful. He begot a son called Borr. He married a wife called Bestla, daughter of the giant Bolthorn, and they had three sons. One was called Odin, the second Vili, the third Vé. And it is my belief that this Odin and his brothers must be the rulers of heaven and earth."

While he had already associated the *O* with Odin, he now realized that VE stood for the god *Vé* and *VI* for the god Vili. This alone didn't have to mean anything; after all, Norse mythology knew hundreds of gods. But now Siebenthal looked at the world map hanging above his desk and combined it with the symbolism of the triskele: the circle at the top left, he realized, obviously stood for the West, or Europe; the one at the top right for Asia; and the one at the bottom for Africa, including the Middle East. Odin was therefore the god of the Europeans, Vé that of the Asians, and Vili that of the Africans. Nevertheless, the circles were connected, because all human races and their cultures once originated from the same prehistoric African people.

But this was not the crucial point for him. Rather, he knew now the answer to his question about the true God: *He did not exist. Instead, there were three.* For this reason, and for no other, the religious concepts of African, European, and Asian cultures differed so fundamentally. They reflected nothing other than the character of their respective gods: Vili's nature resembled that of a Middle East ruler who expected unconditional submission. Vé demanded devotion and becoming one with the whole, the dissolution of the ego.

And Odin? Of course, he as well demanded allegiance. But submission? Siebenthal shook his head. No, he was sure that wasn't true. Odin was concerned, he felt, with the pursuit of a common good, but

through proud, free men, not slaves. It all became clear to him now. How blind he had been all this time!

He sat down again, his thoughts whirling, and he had to first organize them. Three gods instead of one. This explained some things but raised new questions, too. For example: Why wasn't there just one God? And why three, of all possible numbers? He didn't understand that yet. Almost all religious cosmogonies were based on a single creator god. If there were several, the additional ones were more like sidekicks to the One and True. According to the Edda, however, the three brothers governed heaven and earth together and were therefore equal. Could this also be understood to mean that they divided the world into three kingdoms, each of which they ruled separately?

Siebenthal leaned back in his chair, sighed, and looked out the window of his study at the sea, which seemed to be brooding, like himself. What had appeared to him initially as a solution posed new problems as well. But one thing had changed: until now, his search had been a lonely one. Now he felt he was no longer alone. His God had heard him, He had told him something, and they would walk a path together that was only just beginning. This filled Siebenthal with a warmth and contentment he had not felt for a long time. Perhaps never.

And who was his god? Odin, of course. After all, he was European and not Asian or African. But when he thought about it, two problems arose: Odin was only *one* god, albeit the main one of the Germanic pantheon. But what about all the others he was familiar with? For example, the goddess of love, Freya. Or the weather god and protector of mankind, Thor. Or Tyr, the god of war and guardian of justice. If he interpreted what he now saw as his revelation correctly, it could only be a misunderstanding. They had to be merely incarnations—or rather emanations—of one and the same god. In each of these, He embodied a different role assigned to Him by humans. Odin remained Odin, whether he was wearing the veil of the goddess of love or the helmet of the god of war.

Or was this just a guess on his part? Siebenthal did something, which he vowed to do always from now on: he listened inside himself. Because there, somewhere in the depths of his consciousness, or his

soul, He was within him. Perhaps not always or often unnoticed, but he had to look for Him there and ask for a signal as to whether what he was thinking was true. And he now heard a kind of approving hum.

Siebenthal had never thought about what a religious revelation would feel like. His intention had been to approach the divine solely through gathering knowledge and the work of his mind. Suddenly he realized how all the stone tablets, the voices from burning thorn bushes, the flaming inscriptions on walls, the archangels entering the cave at night for holy dictation were just hocus-pocus intended for a superstitious audience. Genuine revelations always represented a silent—often, he suspected, laborious—dialogue between the mind, the soul, and the God who was a guest in it.

His thoughts returned to the content of that inner dialogue. So just one god, not a pantheon. Well, everything else would have surprised him. But what should he call Him? "Odin" was the North Germanic name variant of the god the South Germanic peoples called "Woden," which was still preserved in the English word *Wednesday*. However, it turned out to be about not just the Germanic tribes but all Europeans. Zeus had been the main god of the Greeks, Jupiter that of the Romans, and for the Celts probably Teutates. The name of a Slavic god wouldn't spring to his mind just now. So how could it be made clear that Odin was the name of the only god for all Europeans? "*Ozeujutes*"? No, this sounded terrible. Then Siebenthal had an inspiration. As so often, the solution lay in the obvious: Europe and Odin. "Eurodin," he said aloud to himself. How did that sound? He listened into himself again and heard no contradiction.

He was just about to write down the name on a piece of paper when a *meow* distracted him. Fortuna had sneaked in through the patio door, which was always open in summer. That's what Siebenthal had named the animal, because he didn't know her owner or her real name. The petite creature with the black and white spotted fur visited him from time to time and let him cuddle her and take her on his lap. He picked her up affectionately and said, "You've brought me luck, little kitty. In return, you'll get a piece of fish."

Siebenthal carried her in his arms into the kitchen and took a defrosted piece of pollock out of the fridge. He put it on a plate and left Fortuna to her unexpected treat.

Back in the study, he wrote down the new name of his god and realized something was still missing—and it had to do with the enunciation of the word. "*Eu*rodin," emphasized on the first syllable, sounded more like a European Union authority than a god. Then it occurred to him how often an acute accent in the Old Norse original of the Edda determined the stress of a word. So, he added the diacritic above the o, resulting in "Euródin." This not only looked better and gave the name something unmistakable, but it also was now pronounced "Eu*ro*din," or, preferably "Jur*ou*din"—after all, English, not German, was the *lingua franca* of modern-day Europe.

And what did He have to say about it? Someone inside him seemed to shrug. His God probably didn't care as long as He knew He was meant, and it didn't sound disrespectful. After all, all "names" for gods merely paraphrased the nature of the divine. *Odin* meant "the inspired one" or "the angry one," depending on how you read it; *Yahweh*, "the one I am"; *Buddha*, although only a human being, "the awakened one"; while *Allah* was simply the Arabic word for *God*.

Siebenthal leaned back once again and allowed himself another sigh. The god he had been searching for so desperately since his childhood at least had a name now. Even if there was still a lot he didn't understand about Him.

The ringing of the front doorbell snapped him out of his contemplation. A hawker or a fundraiser, he assumed. Otherwise, no one visited him unannounced, which was why he usually didn't answer the door at all. But in his current exhilaration, Siebenthal waived that principle. Perhaps luck had knocked on his door a second time today.

However, when he opened the door, a middle-aged lady he had never seen before stood in front of him. She wasn't selling frozen food or magazines but said, "Hello! Is my cat with you, by any chance?"

That embarrassed him. He had never considered the fact that Fortuna might have an owner who was missing her. There was no point in denying it, because the object of inquiry was already sneaking

toward the door between his legs, still licking her mouth clean from her meal. She had probably recognized her owner's voice.

The lady lifted her up, cuddled her in her arms, and stroked her fur. "Jasmin, there you are, my little vagabond!"

He had liked the name Fortuna better. "I'm sorry, I didn't know that! She comes into the house via the patio door, and I give her a bit of milk or fish now and again. I hope you don't mind."

"Good gracious, no! We're just a little spoiled, aren't we?" She looked a little reproachfully into Jasmin's dark green eyes and cuddled her some more. Then she looked at Siebenthal: "As long as I know she's with you, it's not so bad. My name is Jensen, by the way, and I live up the street in the yellow house."

Siebenthal had been living here for several years, and now he realized once again how isolated his life was. He didn't even know the neighbors down the street. His marriage had been over for quite some time. And after leaving Deutsche Bank, he'd tried his hand as a wine merchant in nearby Wismar. But the business never really took off because he did no networking. He'd since given it up and was living off his savings.

He held out his hand to his visitor. "Well, Ms. Jensen, nice to meet you! Perhaps we'll see each again now and then on feline matters."

It would be the right moment to invite her in for coffee, and for example, ask her about Jasmin—alias Fortuna. But not right now, when . . . If he was honest, not even later. He was afraid she would waste his time with trivia about an ex-husband, a son, a back problem, or whatever. Well, that was just the way it was with him.

"Yes, maybe," she replied. "Well, then, have a nice day," she said with some disappointment in her voice.

Alone again, this time without even a cat, Siebenthal sighed and went back to his study. There he created a new Word document on his PC, titled "The History of the Gods and Men."

Because the hot feeling of anticipation in his chest he had felt on the beach this morning had returned.

10

Siebenthal didn't even stop to correct typos as he feverishly recorded in the Word document what streamed from his soul into his consciousness as if through a wide-open floodgate. "The History of the Gods and Men." It had begun thirteen billion years ago with the creation of the universe. As far as they themselves could tell, the three gods named in the Edda had also come into being then: Odin—whom Siebenthal now called Euródin—and Vili and Vé, whose names were of no importance to him. They are beings of pure spirit; they are knowing, but not omniscient, nor omnipotent. They were created in the big bang from matter and energy, but they are neither the one nor the other, but something . . . that we humans cannot comprehend—at least not as of yet. They are not creators, but created ones, from the essence of the universe itself. Their spirit is immeasurable for humans, but not infinite. They cannot see into the future because it is not predetermined. They observe the universe but cannot change it because they are pure spirit. Because they are not matter, they do not age or die. They need neither space nor energy, so there is no entropy for them.

In the beginning, they were alone with themselves. But then, at some point, another spirit emerged alongside their own, somewhere in the universe. More precisely, in living beings on some of the planets they had observed for a long time. Their spirit, like that of the gods, had emerged from matter and energy; however, it is not free but bound to time and space.

Here Siebenthal paused, because he first had to understand something important: the spirit that he himself obviously possessed—otherwise Euródin would not be able to speak to him—was it identical to what scientists called consciousness? No, he heard within himself. Consciousness is a necessary precursor, but it is not enough. Higher animals on earth also possess it in a weak sense; however, the step that only Homo sapiens has accomplished is missing: the spirit as an emergent but new property of consciousness, which is still entirely attached to matter. What we call the soul. Only this soul, which can

transcend matter, makes us companions of the gods. From matter (the body) to consciousness; from this to spirit (the soul)—only the crossing of both bridges leads from life to animated life and thus to the gods.

Unlike the spirit of the gods, that of man is still bound to matter like the pattern to the fabric of the carpet that realizes it. But it is precisely through this connection, as through invisible threads, that it can change matter. *Man*—as presumably other intelligent species somewhere—*can change the universe. The gods cannot.* That is his gift and at the same time his curse. For whatever is connected to matter must perish with it. So, at the end of life, there is inevitably that entropy, which we call death. Everything we have ever done, felt, and thought, everything we are, is extinguished with our body.

And the gods have understood that animate beings fear their death, of which they are aware, unlike an animal. This is why we bury our dead. So, the gods came up with a plan: over the course of billions of years, they created the possibility of establishing a connection between their spirit and the spirit of animate beings. A bridge over which they can reach our souls; and at the end of which a lock to a door awaits, to which they have made themselves a key. It is—Siebenthal searched for a suitable religious term—a kind of . . . consecration; indeed, a consecration of the soul. For every newborn must first be provided with a lock and a suitable key and thus be consecrated—a key, too, something inside him said, which granted access to only one of the three gods, not to all of them.

Through this door, they can give us humans advice during our lives, comfort us, lend us courage and strength, and save us from despair. If we let them, that is, because it is a lock with a key on both sides. The gods visit us only if we let them in. They have adopted us; they are our Soul Fathers, and we are their Soul Children. And just as some children turn a deaf ear to their parents, so too do some people ignore their heavenly Father.

But that is not all. The gods are able to support us during our lives—however, without performing miracles, as some holy scriptures would make us believe. Over time, they have also found a way to capture our souls after death and harbor them in their own

spirits—what we call "eternal life," or paradise. This enables them to take away the fear of death from those who believe in them, and it doesn't even cost them much. For the spirit takes up neither space nor energy; and so, in principle, they can accommodate an infinite number of souls.

And in this paradise, of which every god maintains his own in his spirit, those who have not transgressed against their own and thus against the children of their god are rewarded. There they can watch their loved ones down on earth and savor again all the good things they have encountered in life as often as they like—until one day they close their eyes of their own accord. For them, it is a place of peace and happiness.

But for those who have done evil to their own, there is that other, dark place where they must suffer in their own minds what they have done to others. Euródin's place of happiness is called Valhalla, and that of darkness, Helheim, and it is the Valkyries who bring the souls to Him, and they are angels and instances of His own spirit.

But what do the gods themselves have to gain from all this, Siebenthal suddenly asked himself and again paused writing. Are they doing it only for our sake? Strangely, the question initially remained unanswered inside him, as if He were hesitating. After a long pause, though, it did seep into his consciousness: *because we were alone with ourselves; and because we couldn't change anything.* Suddenly it stood before Siebenthal's eyes: the gods need us as much as we need them! Without us, they are powerless—mere observers of a universe they cannot change. But when they connect with living beings on earth and presumably elsewhere, their spirit enters into a connection with matter via the souls they have consecrated, and thus they can shape the universe.

However, that was not all, it dawned on him. The gods—he hesitated to write it down—had simply been lonely, for they had no one but themselves. With the souls they began to consecrate, they created a family of their own and could share in the fate of their "children": help them, rejoice with them, and suffer with them. And plan a common future for themselves and their family.

But what could this future look like? Silence reigned in his head again for a while. Then he heard Euródin's voice inside him: *I want to become one with you, so you are in me as I am in you. And create a world with you in which you no longer must suffer.*

And the other gods? This time He remained silent. Vili and Vé could not speak to him, and Euródin did not speak about them. Be it that, in his opinion, he didn't *need* to know or *shouldn't* know.

But how do you divide the people among you, Siebenthal asked. And when did it happen? He understood that a few conditions had to be fulfilled first. To begin with, a species had to have developed a consciousness, a mind, in the first place. He knew this already. But it also had to be worth the effort, so to speak, by not being in danger of dying out again soon, which was bound to happen frequently in the universe. In the course of his work on religion, Siebenthal had studied the history of human evolution too. *Homo sapiens*, at that time native only to Africa, almost became extinct as recently as seventy thousand years ago; only a few thousand of them were left, according to studies of the genetic primordial Eve, the so-called Mitochondrial Eve.

Not long afterward, a small group of the recovered population of African prehistoric humans set off northward for the second time, the first time having led to Neanderthals in Europe and Homo erectus in Asia. The second time, however, what in paleoanthropology was called the Second African Migration, this time of Homo sapiens, beginning about fifty thousand years ago—that had been the beginning of everything, Siebenthal realized. The prehistoric humans had migrated across North Africa and the Arabian Peninsula to Central Asia. Some had stayed there, others had migrated farther north across the Bering Strait to America, others again had been drawn eastward toward Asia, the rest westward to what is now known as Europe. This is how not only the three major human races came into being, but also the *Urvölker*, the Primordial Peoples of the gods.

A name popped up in Siebenthal's mind: Ararat. The mountain of Noah's ark, sacred to all three Abrahamic religions and located roughly between Africa, Asia, and Europe. Not there exactly, but in this area, it had happened. The first, or Primordial, Consecration of humans by the gods. The *Urweihe*. They had divided up the humans

among themselves as they had moved on, with the later Europeans becoming the children of Euródin; the Asians, the children of Vé; and the Africans, the children of Vili.

What happened, though, beyond that? After all, new souls to be consecrated were born every day. Did the gods divide them up according to their place of residence, as a kind of divine *jus soli*? Siebenthal listened within himself and learned that this had obviously not proved to be a success because the divine families were never able to develop sufficient stability and homogeneity due to constant migratory movements. Furthermore, the gods could not or would not think in terms of geographical boundaries. Instead, they gave themselves four simple rules, which they have observed to this day: First, if the souls of both parents of a child are consecrated by the same god, the soul of that child also belongs to this god. Second, if they are consecrated to different gods, the child's soul is not accepted by either of them, because then there would be a dispute between the gods as to who it should belong to. Third, the same applies if both parents are not consecrated to any god, because in this case, too, the gods cannot decide without arguing. Lastly, however, if one parent is consecrated to one god and the other to none, because his parents did not belong to any god or belonged to different gods, then the child is assigned to the god of the consecrated parent.

That is how it is decided. But what are the consequences if a child's soul remains unconsecrated—for example if its father is Asian and its mother is European? Well, then it remains in the state before the *Urweihe*. No God can assist its soul while it is alive, and no God can preserve it when its body dies. The soul expires shortly after death and is lost in the universe. Paradise remains closed to it.

Siebenthal translated this into racial affiliation. If two members of the same race have a child together, it was unproblematic. However, if an African and a European procreate, the child remains unconsecrated. This applies as well if two mixed breeds conceive a child together. If, on the other hand, a pure breed and a mixed breed have a child, it becomes the child of the god of the pure breed. This, again, had to lead to a certain amount of genetic mixing of the *Urvölker*. Other than many racists thought, race and belonging to a people of

God were not simply synonymous, they only ran in a similar direction. Moreover, races, which were probably not even the primary concern of the gods, existed in countless fluid transitions. The soul, on the other hand, is always consecrated to a specific god or to no god at all.

Siebenthal now considered what the consequences must be if people were dedicated not to the same god but to different ones—or to none at all. One consequence was certainly that they might live together on earth in a colorful mix, but their fates would separate after death at the latest. Because no matter whether on earth they were related, married, or friends, they would be divided between different paradises or into none. Not even children necessarily joined their parents in paradise, but only if they were consecrated by the parents' god.

Another, equally obvious consequence was that the gods regarded their consecrated peoples as their own family. And a family member was expected to behave loyally toward the head of the family and fraternally toward the others, treating them better than non–family members. Euródin still had to explain to him what it meant in concrete terms. In any case, it seemed clear that the gods expected loyalty—for themselves, but also for the likewise consecrated brothers and sisters.

Which, in turn, led Siebenthal to a particularly difficult question: How did one even know which god's child one was, when this obviously had such far-reaching consequences? If it was not race alone, or the exact race could not be determined? When were you a "half-breed" and when were you still a "pure breed"? As for himself, his soul told him so. He had never felt to be anything other than a European, so he had to be one. But that didn't have to apply to everyone.

He obviously could not give him a better answer than to question his own soul. And this thought led Siebenthal to the next: How could Euródin still be the head of an *Urvolk* if almost no one believed in Him anymore? If there were only a few scattered neo-pagans and the Scandinavians occasionally adorned ship hulls—or, for that matter, cheese packages—with His name out of folkloric nostalgy? Hadn't his *Urvolk* died out as a result? No, Siebenthal told himself. Euródin continued to consecrate the souls of his children according to rules

that were billions of years old, whether or not they acknowledged him or were even aware of him.

However, this led him to yet another question: when he looked at the major world religions, Vé's was a mixture of Buddhism, Hinduism, and Shintoism, supplemented by the philosophy of Confucianism. Quite blurry, but Siebenthal was not concerned with Vé, who obviously could not or did not want to ensure uniformity here.

But what about Vili? The god of the Africans was now obviously the master of three religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, all founded in Africa by the three successive prophets Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad, respectively. If Muhammad was not an impostor but the sincere messenger of his god, then in Vili's eyes he must represent the ultimate version of his religion, and Judaism and Christianity therefore had to be obsolete. Why else would Vili have appointed him? His reflections in *The Phenomenology of God* had already led him this far. But the fact that Jews and Christians now adhered to an outdated religion that their own God no longer accepted didn't concern Siebenthal anymore. Or rather, it wouldn't have to concern him if the Europeans, insofar as they still believed in God at all, were not predominantly Christians, and thus, inconceivably, adhered to the religion of an alien god—namely, Vili's—instead of their own.

Siebenthal remembered what he knew about the spread of Christianity. It had emerged from Judaism and reached Europe via Jewish communities in Asia Minor and Jewish slaves in the Roman Empire. It had become the state religion in Rome in the fourth century and had begun to spread north of the Alps from the fifth century on. The last pagans in Scandinavia had been converted in the eleventh century, not always voluntarily. But how could Euródin have allowed this to happen? Why had He not appointed His own prophet in time? Vé had to ask Himself a similar question, because Vili's Islam had deeply penetrated His empire as well, for example, in Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Indonesia. The same applied to Korea's Christian minority.

What a mess! Siebenthal sighed and rubbed his eyes. He knew so much now. More he wouldn't find out, at least not today, because Euródin remained stubbornly silent in response to his last question

about the spread of Christianity in his realm, as if it were a matter of embarrassment to Him. A rumble of thunder snapped Siebenthal out of his brooding. He hurriedly saved the file and printed it out before a lightning strike ruined everything. Then he went to the window. The storm, which had been predicted for days, was approaching the coast with a tremendous wall of pitch-black clouds. Was it a sign that he had received his revelation on a day when nature was in such turmoil?

However that may be, the little boy who had once asked the heavens what God was and what He expected from him now, decades later, knew the answer: there were three gods, and he, Siebenthal, was the prophet of one of them, Euródin.

That was the meaning and purpose of his life he had been searching for for so long.

16

Siebenthal, sitting in the wicker chair on his terrace, drank in the fresh, cool air that had hung over the coast since the thunderstorm three days ago. Across the dunes, he enjoyed a panoramic view of the Baltic Sea, all the way to the horizon. A few sailing ships, a freighter, a ferry—nothing out of the ordinary. But now he beheld everything with fresh eyes. Was it a coincidence that he, a South German from Frankfurt, had ended up here in the North after leaving investment banking? He still remembered how excited he had been when he walked onto the beach on his first vacation here and greeted the waves that crashed against him like old friends. And this despite having traveled the world and stood on the shores of the seven seas.

Directly beyond the horizon lay Denmark. To the north, Sweden and Norway. To the west, Great Britain. And to the east, Poland. It was His sea, the cradle of what Siebenthal, in a flash of inspiration, called the Second European Civilization, after the first Greco-Roman one. And he had immediately felt at home here, among the northern Germans, as if he had always belonged here.

Signs, of which, he reflected, there had been others in his life. One time, when he and Dolores were still married, he astonished her by proposing spontaneously that they lay an Othala rune in the gravel area behind their new terraced house in Frankfurt. Even if he didn't end up doing it, how had he come up with the idea in the first place? At the time, he had no interest in runes or Nordic religion. It was as if someone had tried to nudge him, and he had just been too slow on the uptake.

Siebenthal turned to his text, "The History of the Gods and Men," which he had revised again this morning. He gave the new religion, which it indeed was, the name Tritheism—even if the term was already used in theological circles to criticize the Christian doctrine of the Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And he was not afraid to call it not *a* new religion, but *the* religion itself. It was nothing less than a Copernican revolution in faith. There were neither thousands of gods nor just one, but exactly three. And they had not created the

world but had been created with it. Nor had they created man or given him a soul. They merely lent him their divine breath—described in the Edda as *Önd* and in Hinduism as *Atman*—and thus consecrated him and created a connection.

They neither knew the future, nor could they work miracles; they could only influence matter through the connection to "their" humans. They were therefore not really important for the inanimate universe—but all the more so for humans and other civilizations in space, which they may have taken care of. For we humans were now a member of one of three divine families, unless our parents belonged to different gods or no gods at all and thus left us unconsecrated. And as members of such a divine family, we had rights: for example, to advice and encouragement and entry into one of the three paradises. But we also had duties: loyalty, brotherhood, and certainly some amount of worship.

Of course, these general duties applied to Siebenthal as well—but in his case, they could hardly end there. Euródin had most likely not just taken him into his confidence to satisfy a curiosity that had plagued him since childhood. He expected something special from him, that much Siebenthal was aware of. But what, exactly? What was he supposed to do? Write another book? Despite a long search, he hadn't found a publisher for the first one and ended up publishing it himself through a service publisher. Nobody reviewed it, nobody reported on it, and, of course, it didn't sell. Why should it be any different for a second book, this time "The History of the Gods and Men"? Just because Siebenthal claimed to be a prophet? He could imagine the laughter in the publishers' editorial offices. Or should he copy the text and hand it out on the market square in Wismar, like advertising flyers?

After yesterday's euphoria, Siebenthal felt a little perplexed. Even if he took all of this upon himself, what exactly did his god expect—from his people in general and from him in particular?

The inner voice within him was silent, and this gave him the idea of invoking Him in a ceremony to emphasize his request for enlightenment. Siebenthal drew from the depths of his memory whatever he had read about the Nordic-Germanic cult and considered what he

could accomplish with his modest domestic means. For the time being, unfortunately, Euródin had to do without the sacrifice of a full-grown bull; there wasn't even any blood in the house, unless he drew his own.

Siebenthal made his way to the attic. First, opening a dust-covered box, he fumbled out a metal musical triangle his father had given him as a child. Then, from another box, he withdrew his grandmother's amber necklace. He'd presented it to Dolores after their wedding, but she had worn it only once. To her, a native Colombian, the time-honored jewelry must have seemed even more old-fashioned than it would to a German, and following the divorce, she had returned the piece, especially since it wasn't valuable. Now, however, the family heirloom might come in useful. For Siebenthal, incense was part of every religious ceremony, but he did not own frankincense and found the resin of this plant, which grows only in Africa, inappropriate anyway. Amber, however, was also a resin that could be burned as incense. The gold of the Baltic Sea, the mythical tears of Freya—what could be more suitable?

In the rest of the house, he found what else he needed: a mortar for the amber, a small pan to melt it, a chafing dish to heat it, a red tablecloth, matches, a candle, and, finally, a compass.

He quickly converted a small side table on the terrace into an altar. He covered it with the red cloth, placed the small pan with the crushed amber on the chafing dish, lit it together with the candle, and set out the triangle and compass. As the smoke from the amber bathed the terrace in an aromatic resin scent, without the pungent note of incense, he first picked up the compass and used it to point himself north, the logical direction of prayer for him. What the east was for the Muslim, the north was for the European.

He then opened the ceremony, similar to a Catholic Mass, with two triangle strikes—*ting! ting!*—bowed, and placed his right hand on his heart. *How should I address you?* he asked himself suddenly. He decided on what the Edda had handed down: "Hail, Euródin!"

Siebenthal paused, thought for a moment, then added, "You father of my soul." Because this is exactly what the gods were to humans: not their biological fathers but the adoptive fathers of their souls.

"I thank you for all the knowledge that you have given me, and which fills my heart with joy," he continued. "I want to serve you loyally as best I can, and all I ask of you is to give me an indication of what exactly you expect me to do for you. I will then do it faithfully."

Looking up into the sky, he let his words fade away. Had He heard him? And would He answer him? A kind of holy mood took hold of him, as if he had crossed a threshold from the profane everyday world into a sanctuary with just a few actions and words, thus confirming for Siebenthal that the ritual had at least an effect on him. Even when, to his disappointment, he received no immediate response, he was gripped by the feeling that he had done something extraordinary. He ended the ritual with another bow and a single triangle strike, then solemnly extinguished the candle and the chafing dish.

Afterward, he sat in the armchair in front of his makeshift altar for a long time, lost in thought.

He received the answer that night. Siebenthal woke up as if from a dream, switched on his bedside lamp, and scribbled with a ballpoint in his notepad, which lay always ready on his nightstand:

1. Report the truth about the three gods and their peoples.
2. Found a community for my children.
3. Enjoin them to keep to themselves and preserve themselves until Ragnarök.

Siebenthal could hardly believe his eyes as he read through what he had hastily jotted down. A glance at the bedside clock told him it was half past two in the morning. But sleep was out of the question. He ran downstairs in his pajamas, clutching the note in his hand, and first went to the kitchen to brew himself a pot of green tea. Then he entered his study, switched on the PC, pulled all the monographs he'd collected on Nordic religion from his bookshelves, and stacked them on his desk. He sat in the swivel chair and read through the dream message a second time.

It was not the first of the three points that irritated—even frightened—him. It almost went without saying that he should spread the message he had received, even if he didn't know how yet. The second, "Found a community," was unsurprising, too. Although he felt that

he, a loner and maverick all his life, was not exactly predestined for the task of founding a church for his god, and nothing else could be meant by this. For example, a few years ago, Siebenthal decided to try to gain a foothold in organized social life by becoming a member of a political party. It seemed the best bet for a man such as him; after all, he had no interest in rabbit breeding or the like. But he abandoned the experiment quickly. The intrigues, the power struggles, the pretentiousness, and the lack of loyalty to the party and supposed party "friends" repelled him too much. Nevertheless, even here Siebenthal would overcome his aversions if he had to and someone helped him.

What stunned him, however, was the third point: "to keep to themselves and preserve themselves until Ragnarök." Each part of the simple sentence was outrageous in its own way. Remain among themselves: Siebenthal regarded the division of humanity into three *Urvölker*—four, if you also counted the unconsecrated—as something divinely given, which only confirmed what he had always felt intuitively. Presumably, people in Asia and Africa would shrug it off like he did; they had never thought otherwise there. But in Europe, especially in Germany, things were different. It was nothing else than the negation of the left-wing dogma that "all men are equal," because now they were suddenly unequal in terms of their membership in a people of God and consequently had to treat one another unequally.

Siebenthal was not an expert in this field, but it seemed inevitable to him that this would lead to accusations of racism and "misanthropy," and therefore being directed against the values of society and the German constitution. After all, discrimination based on one's ethnicity or religion could hardly be justified with a "never-again-Hitler" constitution such as the German *Grundgesetz*. What was He actually thinking when He commissioned a German, of all people, to this task? Was it perhaps some kind of divine joke?

Well, a danger foreseen might be a danger avoided. Here a distinction had to be made with the utmost care between religion and private life on the one hand and politics on the other hand. Siebenthal certainly did not see himself as an insurgent. He was concerned with knowledge, not change, and basically meant well for everyone. Even the non-Europeans had to know they had their own god, and for his

part, he certainly did not demand that they treat him as one of their own.

So much for "keep to themselves." However, the second part of the sentence caused him the greatest concern: to "preserve themselves until Ragnarök." It was comforting, at least, that Euródin "only" told him to "enjoin" his own and did not downright place the responsibility for their survival in his hands. Prophets were the mouths of the gods, not the executors of their will. At least this is how it should be. Ragnarök, the "fate of the gods," was the Norse version of the end of the world, of course he knew that. The gist of it—for this he didn't even need to consult the books on his desk—was that a *fimbul-winter* lasting several years heralded the end. An earthquake then freed the Fenriswolf, once bound by the Aesir, and caused a flood, which brought the Midgard serpent ashore and refloated the death ship *Naglfar*. On board were the giants, the enemies of men and gods since time immemorial. Giants, Fenriswolf, and the Midgard serpent stormed Asgard together and challenged the gods, on whose side the *einherjar*, the fallen warriors in Valhalla, fought.

As he remembered it, the matter had not ended very well for either the humans or the gods. So, what was Euródin trying to achieve with this part of his mission? What was the point of preserving His people if they were to perish in the end anyway?

So, after all, he did look into his books and had to correct himself at least in part: although the world ended with Ragnarök, Odin was reborn, according to the Edda, and created a new one together with the remaining Aesir. The world view of the Germanic tribes differed significantly from the Christian one in this respect: while Christianity depicted a linear course—from the expulsion from paradise, to the apocalypse, to the final establishment of a kingdom of peace by God—the Indo-European peoples, as most peoples, believed history to be cyclical. A constant cycle of becoming, being, and passing away, which is another reason why the number three was sacred to the Germanic peoples. And this, in turn, probably did not just coincidentally correspond with the scientific hypothesis of an expanding universe that would pass away and then—hopefully!—at some point arise anew.

What if Ragnarök was merely an image of Euródin, which he used to describe all sorts of dangers for his *Urvolk*, which had to be endured until a new cycle began? Therefore, He had given them the general task of "preserving themselves," somehow surviving and preserving the seed until better times dawned again, just like in the myth. Or did He have something specific in mind?

Nobody knows what Ragnarök will be and when it will be, not even the gods, he suddenly heard inside himself. *You must prepare yourselves for what you do not know.*

Siebenthal thought about this. How did you prepare for something you couldn't know? Some clues could possibly be taken from the Edda. According to legend, the giants and the Midgard serpent lived in Utgard, the outer world, which surrounded Midgard, the world of men, above which stretched Asgard, the home of the gods. The giants might now be equated with the other *Urvölker*, who posed all kinds of dangers, from creeping infiltration and displacement, to war, conquest, and destruction—something the Europeans were also guilty of in their history. The Midgard serpent, on the other hand, stood for the dangers of nature, from cosmic catastrophes to epidemics.

Which left the Fenriswolf. According to legend as well, he was a son of a giant and of Loki, a dark, ambivalent god of the Norse pantheon. So, he was partly an alien and partly one of their own ranks, which distinguished him from the giants and the Midgard serpent. Therefore, he stood for the inner enemy, who destroyed his own and collaborated with the outer enemies.

All these things might be distant, terrible, and, fortunately, rare events for humans. For the gods, however, who have been going about their business for billions of years, it must have been commonplace. Even the earthly solar system had once emerged from the debris of an older one. But did this help him? It was necessary to arm oneself against wars, natural disasters, and the self-destructive raging of the enemy within. But what exactly did this mean and how should we prepare for it? Unity, if necessary: unification, vigilance, and hoarding whatever would be needed, from supplies and knowledge to

customs and collective memories. That was all he could think of for the time being.

Siebenthal sighed and downed the now-cold cup of tea in one gulp. The light of the coming day filtered through the curtains of his study.

Today, at least, the sun rose once again for him and his own without any preparation. But they had no time to lose.