



Runes

for



Writers

An Introduction

Marc Graham



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Thunder Runes Card Sets (Regular and Rustic)

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INTRODUCTION



This introductory booklet is intended to usher you into the world of *Runes for Writers*, and provides a brief presentation of the runes of the Elder Futhark, their interpretation, and their uses in various spreads (runecastings) for character sketches, story development, and troubleshooting.

The information here is partially reproduced in the instruction sheets that accompany the *Runes for Writers Card Set*, *Runes for Writers Tile Set*, and *Runes for Writers Dice Set: Odin's Lots*. A deeper exploration of the runes and their uses may be found in the companion book, *Runes for Writers: Ancient Tools for Modern Storytellers*.

While the focus of this series is on helping writers to unleash their creative potential, the Runes may be used for the more traditional oracular and divinatory purposes for which they are best known. I encourage you to explore their potential and your own.

The Runes serve as a powerful tool for connecting to the runecaster's subconscious, as well as to the collective unconscious described by Jung. This is, in fact, the power and nature of all divinatory and creative practices: to reach into the realm of ideas, the Source of Story, and to bring back into the Ordinary World something extraordinary and previously unknown.

I hope you derive as much fun and inspiration from using these cards as I did in developing them. Please feel free to share your experiences and any ideas for additional runecastings or interpretations.

May the power of the runes inspire you.

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Castle Rock, Colorado - Samhain 2018

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THE RUNES



FEHU

Sound: Fire

Meaning: Cattle

Level: Physical

Element: Earth

Realm: Niflheim

Image: An ox with upraised horns

Keywords: Wealth, money, resources, support, potential

In agrarian societies, cattle are an obvious expression of wealth. While they can provide great resources, on the hoof cattle provide mostly dung and dairy products. They can also be used for hauling plows, wagons, and so forth, turning their energy and strength into potential benefit for their owners.

Dung is great for sealing log walls, and for making fire. If you stable cattle in the lower level of your home, you stand a good chance to keep warm through the long northern winters,

And dairy products can be a great source of nutrition. However, after thousands of years of adaptation, the human body still has difficulty processing bovine milk products. As the Norse tribes were early adopters of milk as food, lactose intolerance was a very real thing for the ancients.

Cattle can become shelter, clothing, feast-worthy food, weapons, tools, musical instruments, and more. They offer great potential, but action must be taken to turn that potential into reality.

While Fehu is generally associated with wealth and resources, to the runecaster it is better regarded as unmanifest potential.

Fehu reversed suggests a lack of resources and support, or the disbelief in these on the part of the subject of the casting.

URUZ

Sound: Moon

Meaning: Aurochs (European bison)

Level: Physical

Element: Earth

Realm: Asgard

Image: An aurochs preparing to charge

Keywords: Strength, motivation, desire-to-action, procreation

The aurochs, or wild Eurasian ox, is generally acknowledged as the forebear of today's domesticated cattle. Far from its docile progeny, the aurochs was a fearsome and dangerous creature. Standing as high as seven feet at the shoulders, and with a horn-span of nearly the same length, this was no animal to be trifled with.

For a young man among the Norse tribes, the aurochs would likely have been the target of his first hunt, his initiation into manhood and the hunter/warrior class.

Compared to cattle, the aurochs offered even greater potential benefit, given its larger, more powerful stature. It also required a much greater commitment and risk to bring that potential into manifestation. And once the decision was made to face the aurochs, the choices were generally success or death.

While Uruz also represents unmanifest potential, this is energy that is on the cusp of realization. Like the aurochs lowering its horns before charging, the energy behind the rune is about to be released.

Uruz reversed suggests indecisiveness, hesitancy, or unwillingness to move forward with a certain course of action. It may also indicate physical or sexual impotence.

THURISAZ

Sound: Thorn

Meaning: Giant

Level: Physical

Element: Fire

Realm: Jotunheim

Image: War hammer, thorn

Keywords: Boundaries, defense, organization

Germanic lore is filled with giants, from the ancient pagan Eddas to the more sanitized stories of the Grimm brothers. Sometimes intelligent and winsome, at other times mindless and brutish, the races of the giants were ever to be treated with a heavy dose of caution.

The very forces of nature are the outward expression of the giants. Tornadoes, squalls, earthquakes, volcanoes, and even more passive forces like gravity, the tides, and aging—all these fell under the guise of the giants.

And waging war against these forces, standing in the gap between destruction and humanity, is the god Thor (or Thunar). With his famed war hammer Mjolnir, the son of Odin and the giantess Jord (Earth) wages constant war against the powers bent on destruction.

Thurisaz in a runecasting represents the presence of or the need to establish boundaries. Separation from opposing or parasitic forces is called for.

Reversed, Thurisaz suggests codependency, usurpation of personal power, or outright abuse.

ANSUZ

Sound: Ahh

Meaning: Deity

Level: Physical

Element: Earth

Realm: Svartalfheim

Image: Odin's cloak and beard billowing in the wind

Keywords: Inspiration, guidance, communication

Omens abounded in the world of the ancients. From the shape and path of clouds to the flight of birds, the pattern of falling sticks to the spatter of blood, the influence of the gods was seen everywhere. And from those influences, their will or guidance might be gleaned by those who paid attention.

Variously interpreted as *god*, *Odin*, or *mouth*, Ansuz represents this willingness and power of the gods to reach into the natural world, to offer hints at future events and suggestions for action. Whether to avoid an outcome or to take the best advantage, those who could recognize the omens, the god-speak, were sure to fare better than their deaf and blind neighbors or adversaries.

Ansuz stands for this divine inspiration, whether it be in the form of a burning bush, the whisper of the Muse, a spark of intuition, or simply a gut feeling. Its appearance in a spread suggests that the subject is open to these communications, or would benefit from being so.

Reversed, Ansuz suggests cold rationality, a rejection of any notion of the non-physical. It could also mean the subject has been abandoned by higher influences and left to her own devices. Another possible interpretation is of deception or misinformation.

RAIDHO

Sound: Ritual
 Meaning: Ride
 Level: Physical
 Element: Earth
 Realm: Muspelheim
 Image: Horse's hindquarters
 Keywords: Right-action, ritual, true path

The horse was key to warfare and commerce among the ancient Norse. Though generally limited to the knightly *Jarl* class (or the wealthiest of the *Carl*-class tradesmen), the ability to move surely and swiftly between points ƚ and ƚ could spell the difference between success and disaster.

Derived from the proto-Indo-European root **rta*, Raidho forms the basis for what became our words *ride*, *right*, and *ritual*. Taken together, these suggest correct action taken toward a specific goal or destination.

When Raidho appears upright in a runecasting, it suggests that the subject is on the right track. Alternately, it may be that right action or a dedicated, intentional approach will lead to success.

Reversed, Raidho indicates wrong-doing, either by or toward the subject. It could also mean inappropriate procedure, cutting corners, or other detrimental shortcuts.

KENNAZ

Sound: Keep

Meaning: Torch

Level: Physical

Element: Fire

Realm: Helheim

Image: Torch casting a shadow

Keywords: Knowledge, understanding, creativity, skill

Seen as the torch of knowledge that casts its own shadow, Kennaz lights the way for the subject of the runecasting. Related to the words *ken*, *know*, and *can* (as in, “Can I do such-and-such?”), Kennaz suggests intellectual mastery.

But it’s in the word *can* that the power of this rune is found. Any middle school student knows the derision that will greet the question, “Can I go to the restroom?” While the word choice is often corrected, the question in itself is correct. *Can* requires intellectual ability, physical capacity, and moral authority. All three of these are activated by Kennaz.

When upright, Kennaz suggests that the subject has mastery of the situation, or has the wisdom and other necessary faculties to succeed. Study, intellectual pursuits, or a quest for enlightenment (literal or figurative) may also be inferred.

Reversed Kennaz implies ignorance, confusion, or action in contradiction to the subject’s knowledge, ability, or agency.

GEBO

Sound: Gather

Meaning: Gift

Level: Physical

Element: Æther

Realm: Vanaheim

Image: Hands clasped in greeting

Keywords: Generosity, balance, fair trade

The laws of hospitality were paramount in Norse culture. In fact, most tribal cultures have or had similar codes regarding the conduct and mutual obligations of guests (whether invited or not) and their hosts.

In the political and geographic climate inhabited by the ancient Norse, one never knew when he might find himself lost, alone, and in need of warmth, food, and shelter. Such codes of conduct—however loose or legally binding—helped weave the fabric of Norse society.

Literally meaning *gift*, Gebo implies fair exchange, whether physical, energetic, or in the realm of good will. All parties are acting in honor and integrity, recognizing the needs and merits of themselves and one another.

One of the most benefic runes, Gebo's appearance suggests a happy encounter, fair treatment, or the delivery of a hoped-for outcome.

The first of the Æther or Water runes, Gebo cannot be reversed.

WUNJO



Sound: Wisdom
Meaning: Joy
Level: Physical
Element: Earth
Realm: Ljossalfheim
Image: Tribal banner
Keywords: Joy, achievement, completion

For our hunter-gatherer or warrior ancestors, there can have been no more welcome sight after a long hunt or raid than the tribal banner flying over the home encampment.

Meaning *joy*, Wunjo beautifully expresses the gladness, relief, and satisfaction the ancient tribalists must have felt on returning home with food or other boons for their families.

Positioned at the end of the first *aett* (or row, where the runes are arranged in three sets of eight), Wunjo signifies completion. When appearing in a runecasting, it suggests happiness, satisfaction, or the reward for a job well done.

Reversed, Wunjo implies depression, neglect, or ingratitude.

HAGALAZ

Sound: Hheavy

Meaning: Hail

Level: Psychological

Element: Water

Realm: Niflheim

Image: Bridging of Mist-Home and Fire-Home

Keywords: Cleansing, purification

In the ancient Norse cosmology, physical creation began with the emergence of Muspelheim (Fire Home) and Niflheim (Mist Home) out of the nothingness of Ginnungagap (Yawning Abyss). Flames leaped across the void, melting and evaporating the frozen mists, which refroze and again melted in a dance of fire and ice. This cycle repeated for countless ages until the first living being emerged from the trickling snowmelt, the frost giant Ymir.

Hail forms in a similar manner. Within a storm cloud the semi-solid water-ice seed rises and falls, accreting more material with each cycle. When its mass exceeds the capacity of the storm's updrafts, the hailstone plunges to earth, clearing all obstacles from its path.

The first of the so-called disruptive or negative runes, the appearance of Hagalaz in a runecasting is often met with wariness or chagrin. This outlook comes from a limited and overly narrow perspective.

Hagalaz represents cleansing and purification, the removal of that which no longer serves the subject of the runecasting. When met with graceful acceptance, this process can be as gentle as snowfall. If resisted, the force of the hailstorm may be required.

Hagalaz cannot be reversed.

NAUTHIZ

Sound: Normal

Meaning: Need

Level: Psychological

Element: Water

Realm: Asgard

Image: Bow drill for fire-starting

Keywords: Necessity, emergency, innovation

Compared to our early ancestors, modern western society has only a passing familiarity with the concept of need. Yes, we need food, shelter, clothing, etc., but these are to be found in abundance. Even for those of limited means, charities and government programs abound to ensure that the fundamental needs of existence are made available.

For the ancients, however, need was a daily visitor. Fresh water, food and fodder, fuel for fires—all of these had to be located, gathered, and stored as best as possible.

Out of the pressure of these needs emerged a spirit of innovation and experimentation. Tools and methods for obtaining and securing the fundamental needs of existence eventually led to greater and greater resources and the means of higher and more complex social order.

As with Hagalaz, Nauthiz is often seen as a negative rune, suggesting an emergency or crisis on the horizon. But like Hagalaz, the import and severity of Nauthiz lies in how it is met.

Nauthiz in a runecasting may suggest an urgent need or deprivation. Alternately, it may imply a creative solution to a seemingly insurmountable obstacle.

Nauthiz cannot be reversed.

ISA

Sound: Seed
 Meaning: Ice
 Level: Psychological
 Element: Æther
 Realm: Jotunheim
 Image: Icicle
 Keywords: Individuality, integrity

Formed from the continual thaw-freeze cycle of the interplay between Muspelheim and Niflheim, the frost giant Ymir (𐌵𐌿𐌿𐌹𐌺) was the first individual being to come into existence. This method of creation would have been familiar to the ancient Norse as they observed icicles seeming to grow from trees, cliffs, and eaves.

Isa, then, demonstrates the emergence of a distinct entity out of infinite unmanifest potential (a snow pack) through the interplay of the cosmic cycles of heat and cold. In psychological terms, the self (ego- or I-consciousness) emerges from the field of potential through the interaction of soul and body.

Certain interpretations of the runes portray Isa in a negative light. These focus on the nature of ice (freezing, a halt to plans, a cooling of relations) or the negative aspects of individuality (self-centeredness, egoism). As with all things, context is key.

Isa's appearance in a runecasting refers to the subject's individuality. It may suggest isolation or personal retreat. It may also imply self-reliance or a turn to personal integrity (in the sense of both wholeness and moral rectitude).

Isa cannot be reversed.

JERA

Sound: Yesterday
 Meaning: Year
 Level: Psychological
 Element: Water
 Realm: Svartalfheim
 Image: Sickle scything into a stalk of grain
 Keywords: Harvest, full cycle, patience

Timekeeping for the ancients was not a matter of clocks and calendars and Google reminders. Enmeshed with and reliant on the cycles of nature, earth and sky formed the basis for tracking the ephemeral passage of time.

While the Norse borrowed the Roman seven-day week and twelve-month year, these were used for ceremonial purposes and for dealing with the neighboring outsiders.

For the practical Norse, the year was divided into the Dark Days of winter and the Nightless summer. Nightless could be divided into sowing time (when the ground had thawed enough to plow), warring time (for something to do while the crops matured), and harvest time.

Jera represents this harvest. While Wunjo stands for the joy of achievement, Jera suggests the good fruits of patience. The seeds of desire have been planted (either through natural processes or personal effort), and the forces of nature have developed these into the grain of fulfillment.

In a runecasting, Jera implies a long-awaited reward, the return on a long-term investment, or a karmic reckoning. Depending on context, this could be seen as positive or negative, though a positive meaning is generally inferred.

Jera cannot be reversed.

EIHWAZ

Sound: French u

Meaning: Yew tree

Level: Psychological

Element: Water

Realm: Muspelheim

Image: Branching yew tree

Keywords: Transformation, death-and-rebirth

Long before Christianity arrived in the northern lands, the ancient Norse saw in the Yew tree a symbol of death and rebirth. While the leaves and seeds of this evergreen are poisonous, in skilled hands they can become potent medicines.

The tree's branches can burrow underground to emerge as the trunks of neighboring trees. It is not unknown for one of these branches to grow up within the trunk of the parent tree, so that when the elder tree dies, the offshoot emerges from within it.

Yggdrasil, the world tree of Norse cosmology, is generally cited as being an Ash tree. Credible theories, however, have been put forward to suggest that this cosmic centerpiece may have been none other than the mystical Yew. Emitting psychotropic fumes, the Yew may well have afforded Norse shamans (*thules*) the opportunity to journey to other realms, just as the trunk of Yggdrasil could be used to travel among the Nine Worlds.

Generally unwelcome in a runecasting, Eihwaz signifies radical and involuntary transformation, even so far as death. As with Hagalaz, how this is received by the subject can spell the difference between destruction and new opportunities.

Eihwaz cannot be reversed.

PERTHRO

Sound: Pot

Meaning: Lot cup

Level: Psychological

Element: Fire

Realm: Helheim

Image: Lot/dice cup on its side

Keywords: Fortune, fate, chance, randomness, orlog/dharma

Gambling and games of chance were common pastimes for the ancient Norse. According to the Roman historian Tacitus, Germanic tribesmen would take their gaming so far as to wager their very freedom when they had lost all else.

The Perthro rune is very closely associated with the Norse concept of *hamingja*. This can be seen as an impersonal force of luck or fortune, or as a sort of familial guardian entity.

Perthro holds a sense of random chance, but in keeping with the Norse idea of Wyrð, even seemingly random events have a causal pattern if you look deeply enough. Of interest to note, this idea has its correspondence in the quantum theories of modern physics.

In a runecasting, Perthro may indicate fate, serendipity, or a seemingly random occurrence. Upright, this is generally construed as working to the benefit of the subject. She is in alignment with her orlog, her destiny.

Reversed Perthro suggests a string of bad luck, lost items, random misfortune, or cheating on the part of an adversary. Actions are out of alignment with the subject's purpose and inner meaning. Alternatively, a karmic debt has been fulfilled, and the associated situation or relationship has served its purpose and should now be ended.

ELHAZ

Sound: Zebra

Meaning: Elk

Level: Psychological

Element: Air

Realm: Vanaheim

Image: Elk's antlers

Keywords: Protection, shaman, mentor, attunement

The ancient Norse lived in close harmony with their environment. The unseen cosmic forces found expression or correspondence in natural events, plant life, or animals.

The Eurasian elk corresponds to the American moose, rather than the large deer commonly referred to as elk. This huge, aggressive creature uses its broad antlers to protect itself or its young. Adult elk are known to kill their would-be predators, including wolves and bears.

As a protector of the tribe, Norse shamans frequently wore headdresses made of elk horns, and this image can be seen in the shape of the Elhaz runestone. Another interpretation is of the shaman standing with arms raised, interposed between the tribe and the gods.

In a runecasting, Elhaz represents the primal powers of protection. This can imply defense on the physical, psychological, or spiritual levels. Elhaz may suggest an outer protective force in the form of a mentor or guardian, or may signify the subject of the runecasting as filling that role.

Elhaz reversed suggests vulnerability, misalignment, or attack. Defenses are down, and the subject is exposed to danger, possibly by one in a position of trust.

SOWILO

Sound: Source

Meaning: Sun, Soul

Level: Psychological

Element: Water

Realm: Ljossalfheim

Image: Lightning bolt, rays of the sun

Keywords: Energy, soul, motivation, success, optimism

Among the ancient Germanic tribes, the sun as the soul of the cosmos had its expression in the inner light or soul of the individual. That the physical sun and the soul were related can be seen in the linguistic derivation: Sowilo (proto-Germanic) becomes Sawul (Old English) becomes Soul.

After the long nights of winter, the appearance of the springtime sun sparked the revival of energy and optimism for the Norse. The world was reborn and hopes renewed. Crops could be planted, homes could be built, and plans could be made.

Similarly, Sowilo's appearance in a runecasting signifies the empowerment of the soul in the subject of the spread. Darkness and confusion are dispelled, energy and vitality are brought to the fore, and motivation is activated. As with Harry Potter's *Felix Felicis* potion, the recipient of this rune cannot fail, and all the forces of the universe are lined up in support.

Sowilo cannot be reversed.

TIWAZ

Sound: Tuesday

Meaning: Tyr/Tiw

Level: Spiritual

Element: Air

Realm: Niflheim

Image: Spear point, or canopy of the sky

Keywords: Honor, self-sacrifice, ordered conduct, directness

Tyr is among the most ancient of gods, with roots stretching deep into proto-Indo-European mythos. His older name, Tiwaz, is linked to Dyeus, which in turn spawned the Greek Zeus and Roman Jupiter (*Deu/Tiw Pater*, or Sky Father).

Though the invading Romans associated him with their war god Mars, Tyr's role extended far beyond the battlefield. As the ancient sky god, Tyr represented the order of the Cosmos.

Tyr's most famous mythic episode involves the great wolf Fenrir. So insatiable was the beast's appetite that the gods feared he might consume the entire universe. Feigning a test of strength, they brought forth a thread magically crafted from pure subtlety. Fenrir sensed a trick, and agreed to be bound only if he could grasp the hand of one of the gods in his mouth. Only Tyr stepped forward to place his hand between the wolf's teeth. When the binding proved true, Fenrir bit down and the great warrior god lost his sword hand as the price of saving all of creation.

Tiwaz in a runecasting suggests standing up for the right, even in the face of personal sacrifice. It also promotes direct action rather than subtlety.

Reversed Tiwaz signifies cowardice, self-preservation, or succumbing to cleverness and low tricks.

BERKANO

Sound: Berry

Meaning: Birch

Level: Spiritual

Element: Fire

Realm: Asgard

Image: Twin-lobed birch seed, a mother's breasts

Keywords: Nourishment, care-giving, growth, new life, endurance

The birch is a robust pioneer species plant, able to establish itself in harsh environments where few other lifeforms could survive. As the great European glaciers retreated at the end of the last Ice Age, the birch tree was one of the first plants to take root and begin the process of converting frozen wasteland into a viable ecosystem.

To the tribes of northern Europe, the birch stood as a symbol of tenacity and a welcome source of fuel. The wise healer also found in the birch tree beneficial medicines and unguents.

When Berkano appears in a runecasting, the subject can be assured of receiving just what is needed to meet the demands of the moment. This could show up as thriving in a new location, receiving medical care, or being emotionally or physically nourished.

Reversed, Berkano suggests physical or emotional needs are not met. It might mean emotional distance, physical illness, becoming orphaned or abandoned, or—in the extreme—death.

EHWAZ

Sound: Pleasure

Meaning: Horse

Level: Spiritual

Element: Air

Realm: Jotunheim

Image: Horse's head; bridle and reins

Keywords: Intuition, innate knowledge, trust, instinct, gut feeling

As mentioned under the description for Raidho, the horse was very important to the ancient tribes of northwest Europe. Where Raidho suggests the physical, active aspects of riding, Ehwaz—located on the third level of Odin (spirit)—implies the intuitive connection between horse and rider.

When paired with a well trained horse, the rider can drop the reins and still give perfect direction to her mount. A simple intention can set the horse in motion, establish its direction and speed, and bring it to a halt. Subtle cues delivered between mind and body facilitate the ride at least as well as the physical direction provided by reins and bridle.

In a runecasting, Ehwaz suggests the subject can trust her hunches and gut feelings. Her inner guidance is tuned in, and following those intuitive leads will pan out.

Reversed Ehwaz implies confusion, a failure of the internal navigation system, or self-doubt. It may also mean that external forces talk the subject out of what she knows is the correct course of action.

MANNAZ

Sound: Moon

Meaning: Human, Mind, Moon

Level: Spiritual

Element: Air

Realm: Svartalfheim

Image: Reflection; Union of two equals

Keywords: Unity, cooperation, mind, meditation

As the proto-Germanic language developed from its Indo-European roots, links between specific notions of human development resulted in similar words. *Man* (human species, not specifically male), *mind*, and *moon* all share a common descent from Mannaz.

As the moon reflects the light of the sun, so the mind of the individual reflects the light of the soul. (See Sowilo, above.)

Gazing directly into the sun is ill-advised, whereas we can stare at the moon indefinitely. In a similar manner, the soul can usually be glimpsed only under specific conditions. The mind, however, can be observed through action, thought, speech, and a number of other expressions. It is through the sum of these outer expressions that the nature of the individual's soul can be observed.

Mannaz in a runecasting suggests a true reflection of the soul through the mind and its expression. The subject also recognizes his reflection in others and in the world around him.

Reversed, Mannaz implies a disconnect between the subject's inner being and outer expression. Further, connection with others is hindered. This may be the result of mental illness, sociopathy, or some other form of psycho-spiritual trauma.

LAGUZSound: Lagoon

Meaning: Lake

Level: Spiritual

Element: Earth

Realm: Muspelheim

Image: Wave crest, fishing gaffe

Keywords: Emotions, personal connection, life-force energy, ebb-and-flow

Standing on a lakeshore, the ancient Norse faced a deep mystery that could at least be encompassed, if not plumbed. Unlike the great sea, which could never be fully explored, the lake could be mapped and understood, at least on the surface.

Fed by pure glacial melt, the lake's waters offered nourishment and purification. The early-morning mists resting atop the lake surface called to mind the realm of Niflheim, the Mist World, that—when joined with the active force of Muspelheim—brought the manifest world into being.

In a runecasting, Laguz indicates that the subject is in touch with her deepest emotions, she's in balance and alignment. The deep waters of her psyche will help nourish healthy crops of inner peace and personal relationships.

Laguz reversed suggests emotional disconnect, either within the subject or with those around her. Her actions do not reflect her emotional state. She may be denying them out of fear to face them, or she may be suppressing them so as to gain acceptance from others. Balance and forward progress will be stalled until a healthy connection to her emotions is restored.

INGWAZ

Sound: Sing

Meaning: Yngvi/Ingunar-Frey

Level: Spiritual

Element: Æther

Realm: Helheim

Image: Spark; burning ember

Keywords: Inspiration, Inner drive, incubation

The Norse god Frey (known in ancient times as Yngvi) hailed from the Vanir, the earthly gods of time and space. Associated with masculinity and fertility, Frey bore within himself the divine spark of creation.

To the ancient Norse, fire meant life. With it, ice and snow could be melted, water purified, meat cooked, and shelter warmed.

While the innovative tribesman might be able to carry with him the tools to make fire (see Nauthiz, above), those less prepared might have to rely on a lightning strike or, if lucky, the smoldering remains of a dying fire.

Whatever the mechanism, it is the first tiny spark or glowing ember that plants the seed for the flame, just as Frey's masculine sexual energy plants the seed of life. With the proper fuel, once the spark takes hold, success is ensured, if not immediate.

The appearance of Ingwaz in a runecasting should always be welcome. This is inner fire, inspiration, motivation. The subject of the reading has received the inner spark to make things happen. It may take time, or it may be immediate, but he will accomplish his goals.

Ingwaz cannot be reversed.

DAGAZ

Sound: Dig, There

Meaning: Day

Level: Spiritual

Element: Æther

Realm: Vanaheim

Image: Sunrise/sunset

Keywords: Cycle, awakening, fun, luck, blessing, reward

For the ancients, daybreak marked a time of hope and optimism. Particularly in the far northern climes, the first light of spring marked the end of the long night of winter. Life could begin anew, the ground could again bring forth crops, and the tribe might survive for another year.

Dagaz represents this transition from night into day, the first rays of light bursting above the horizon. The gloom of night is past, and the world comes aglow with the hope of possibility.

Dagaz shares a sense of optimism with Wunjo (see above). However, where Wunjo suggests an earned reward, the joy of a job well done, the bliss of Dagaz comes from simply being in the moment, rejoicing in the eternal now.

When it appears in a runecasting, Dagaz is a potent symbol of joy and hope. The stars have aligned, the sun has risen, and optimism and hope abound. Whether the subject has earned it or not, good fortune is hers for the taking.

Dagaz cannot be reversed.

OTHALA

Sound: Boat

Meaning: Inheritance

Level: Spiritual

Element: Air

Realm: Ljossalfheim

Image: Homestead; house framing

Keywords: Home, family, security, reward, continuity

The homestead served as the central focus of community for the tribal cultures of northern Europe. The Roman historian, Tacitus, noted with surprise that the Germanic tribes eschewed cities in favor of remote farms. Even where homes might be collected in small villages, each house had ample space around it, in contrast to the densely packed houses and apartments of Rome.

The homestead marked the continuity of the nuclear family. Three or four generations might inhabit the same home. On larger steadings, multiple siblings might claim parcels of the land. Alternately, it served as a point of embarkation for the younger men to set out upon the seas to claim land and homes of their own.

When Othala appears in a rune-casting, the subject has come into his inheritance. While his received blessing may not be fully a result of effort or merit, at the very least he hasn't been disowned. He now possesses his own means to prosper and carry on the family name.

Reversed Othala suggests displacement, being disowned or abandoned. The comforts of home are stripped away and the subject is forced to start over from scratch.



RUNECASTING



The following runecastings may be done with cards, tiles, stones, or whatever style of runestaves you please. The first layout is intended specifically for the *Runes for Writers Dice Set: Odin's Lots*, but may be adapted to other rune styles or standard six-sided dice.

When using rune cards, it is important to shuffle the deck completely, randomizing both order and orientation. Overhand or riffle shuffles are acceptable, so long as the cards can be sufficiently randomized without bending or scoring. Three to five shuffles will fully randomize the deck.

If a card slips out or appears faceup during the shuffle, it should be placed in the spread in the order and orientation in which it appears. This generally implies a strong subconscious hit, akin to the Muse hitting you over the head.

Referring to the following layouts, place the cards faceup in the numerical sequence shown. Each card position represents a specific story or character element, as described below.

The runecastings presented here are specific to story, plot, and character development. With practice, you should feel free to modify the layouts and interpretations as you see fit.

There is no one, right way to interpret any given card or casting. As with writing itself, the joy (and the challenge) of runecasting is in the process and in the discovery. In any given reading, if a particular rune doesn't feel right or you can't fathom its meaning, feel free to pick a new card or exchange it with another card in the casting.

This is a creative, intuitive process. There are no hard and fast rules. As such, you (and your Muse) have complete control. The runes are here to serve your story, to make the process easier, not harder. Use the runes and these castings as best fits your nature and your story.

Above all, enjoy!

ODIN'S LOTS



In Norse mythology, the chief god Odin is said to have two brothers, Ve and Vili (sometimes called Honir and Lod). These three individuals can be interpreted as a threefold nature, the Norse trinity.

The Eddic poem *Voluspa* (*The Seeress's Prophecy*) includes an account of the creation of the physical world. According to the poem, after the brothers created Midgard (Earth) from the body of the primordial giant Ymir, they stumbled upon two creatures, Ask and Embla. To these Odin gave breath, Ve (Honir) gave soul, and Vili (Lod) gave hair. In this manner, the trinity can be associated with the three aspects of humanity:

body (Vili), mind (Ve), and spirit (Odin). Alternately, from a psychological perspective, these may represent the subconscious, ordinary consciousness, and higher consciousness.

The Odin's Lots runecasting applies this threefold nature to character development. Each eight-sided die contains the runes of one of the three aetts and is associated with one of the Odinic aspects. This casting is intended to be used in the preliminary stages of characterization, defining the character's inner conflict, and should not fundamentally change during the story.

Focus on the character in question. Shake and roll the dice. The reading may be interpreted as follows.

(1) Vili - The Wound

The first aett of Vili (**ƒ ᚢ ƒ ƒ ƒ < X ƒ**) relates to the character's wound. This represents some trauma or tragedy experienced by the character—usually in childhood—that has shaped her view of the world and the way she responds to it. The character may be unaware of the wound or, if aware, she mistakenly believes she has dealt with and overcome it. The rune for this position is generally interpreted in its reversed position (with the exception of Gebo, X).

(2) Ve - The Identity

The second aett of Ve (**H ƒ I ƒ J ƒ Y ƒ**) signifies the character's identity. This is who we meet at the beginning of the story, the persona or mask the character has put on—consciously or subconsciously—to enable her to cope with her wound and navigate the world around her. Living within her identity keeps the character safe, but unfulfilled. As Michael Hague of *Story Mastery* explains it, the story the character tells herself in adopting this identity is always logical, and always a lie. This rune may be interpreted as upright or reversed.

(3) Odin - The Essence

The third aett of Odin (↑ ƒ Ṁ Ṁ ↑ ◊ 𐌆 𐌆) stands for the character’s essence. This is the best and the highest aspect of who she truly is. This nature is in direct conflict with the identity, and completes the setup for her inner struggle. As she moves through the story, this is the person she must become in order to achieve her outer goal, her inner need, or both. This rune will generally be read upright, but could be interpreted as reversed.

Alternate Methods

If you do not have a set of *Odin’s Lots*, this runecasting may be made using cards, tiles, or standard dice.

If using cards or tiles, separate them into the three aetts. Shuffle and turn up a card or tile from each set independently, and interpret as described above.

For standard dice, roll two dice for each aett. If rolled at once, each pair of dice should have a distinct coloring or pattern. Alternately, roll for each aett separately.

If the dice come up 1+1, 1+6, or 6+6, these combinations are void and the dice should be rolled again. Rolls totaling 3 or 4 (excluding double-2) indicate the first rune of the aett. Rolls totaling 5 through 9 (excluding doubles) indicate the second through sixth runes, respectively. A roll summing up to 10 or 11 (excluding double-5) points to the seventh rune. Finally, a roll of doubles (excluding 1+1 and 6+6) results in the eighth rune.

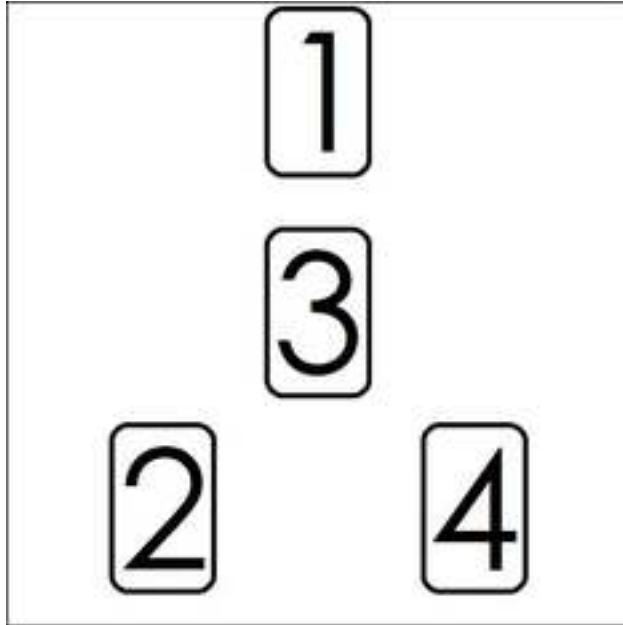
| Roll | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| 1 | | ƒ·Ṁ·↑ | ƒ·Ṁ·↑ | Ṁ·↑·ƒ | ↑·Ṁ·Ṁ | |
| 2 | ƒ·Ṁ·↑ | ƒ·Ṁ·↑ | Ṁ·↑·ƒ | ↑·Ṁ·Ṁ | Ṁ·Ṁ·Ṁ | Ṁ·Ṁ·Ṁ |
| 3 | ƒ·Ṁ·↑ | Ṁ·↑·ƒ | ƒ·Ṁ·↑ | Ṁ·Ṁ·Ṁ | Ṁ·Ṁ·Ṁ | Ṁ·Ṁ·Ṁ |
| 4 | Ṁ·↑·ƒ | ↑·Ṁ·Ṁ | Ṁ·Ṁ·Ṁ | ƒ·Ṁ·↑ | Ṁ·Ṁ·Ṁ | Ṁ·Ṁ·Ṁ |
| 5 | ↑·Ṁ·Ṁ | Ṁ·Ṁ·Ṁ | Ṁ·Ṁ·Ṁ | Ṁ·Ṁ·Ṁ | ƒ·Ṁ·↑ | Ṁ·Ṁ·Ṁ |
| 6 | | Ṁ·Ṁ·Ṁ | Ṁ·Ṁ·Ṁ | Ṁ·Ṁ·Ṁ | Ṁ·Ṁ·Ṁ | |

Further Options

The use of Odin’s Lots is not limited to character development. Any threefold story challenge may be tackled by using this roll of the dice. Examples include Goal-Motivation-Conflict, Past-Present-Future, a threefold choice, and so on.

Feel free to experiment with different story challenges. Share your personal favorites and outcomes at www.marc-graham.com or on the Runes for Writers Facebook page.

THE WEB OF WYRD



The Norse idea of destiny centered on the divine figures of the three Norns gathered about the Well of Urdh (Old English, *Wyrd*). Similar to the Greek Fates, the Norns collectively spun, wove, and cut the threads that formed the Web of Wyrd.

The first of the Norns is Urdh, associated with the past, with foundations or primal energy. Verdandi stands for the present. Finally, Skuld (Shuld) represents outcome or debt.

Contrary to the fatalistic view that many have of the Norse/Viking mindset (“If I die, I die...”), the Norns represent a very practical notion of how the universe works.

Urdh is etymologically associated with *origin, orlog* (𐌺𐌹𐌿𐌺), which has a close connection with the Vedic *dharma*, meaning destiny or life-purpose.

Verdandi represents not simply the present, but that which is becoming. Specifically, she stands for the development from the origin, through the sequence of choices and circumstances, to the present unfolding of events.

Skuld is closely linked to the word *should*. Rather than a carved-in-stone declaration of the future, she represents an extrapolation, a projection into the future of the current course of events and pattern of choices. Skuld can be seen as a welcome banner (see Wunjo, above) or as a warning beacon.

This runecasting is based on Odin’s visit to the Well of Urdh, preceding his discovery of the Runes and the furtherance of his mission to humanity. The spread is best suited to scene- or sequence-level development, providing a snapshot of the character at a specific moment in the story. It may be used multiple times throughout your story development as a tool for enriching the story or getting unstuck.

Focus on the character or scene in question. Shuffle and cast the cards as described above. The reading may be interpreted as follows.

(1) Odin - Self

This rune represents the character in the specific situation. It describes her mindset, her emotional condition, even the physical circumstances in which she finds herself.

(2) Urdh - Origins

This rune represents the series of circumstances that have brought the character to where she is. Whether real or perceived, this is how she believes she got to be where she is. It informs the past and/or her view of it.

(3) Verdandi - Becoming

Philosophers and self-help gurus broadly proclaim that there is only the present moment, the ever-becoming Now. The ancient Norse held a similar view. This rune stands for the experience, the present realization of the character within her situation. This is the *Now*, the *Becoming* of all the forces and events of the past into the present moment.

(4) Skuld - Probable Future

As with Karma (an Indo-European cousin to the Norse mindset), Skuld represents the likely or deserved outcome of the preceding, defining circumstances. This rune represents the trajectory of the previous two runes.

Expansion

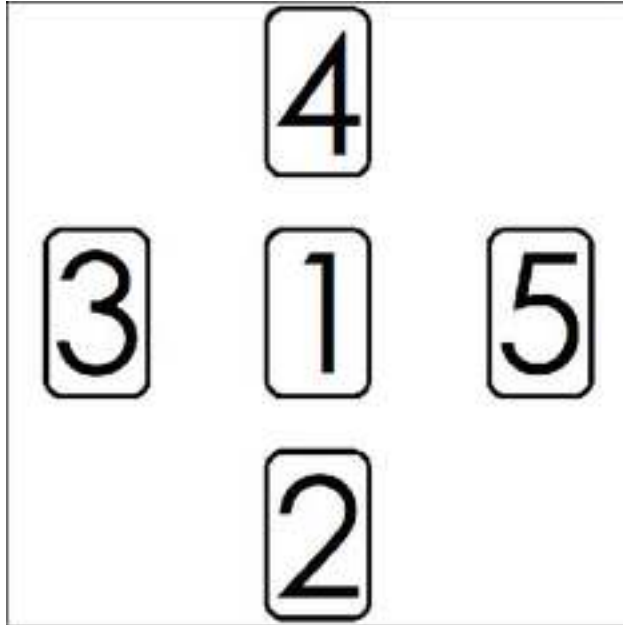
If the initial runecasting is vague or otherwise unsatisfactory, feel free to play around. For a specific casting, I recommend leaving the Odin, Urdh, and Verdandi cards (1, 2, and 3) as initially cast.

Since the Skuld rune indicates the likely outcome, this offers some flexibility. To play with alternate plot points, try the following:

Flip over a new card and place between the (3) and (4) positions. Then flip another card and place it over the (4) card. This represents a new choice or action on the part of your character, and the likely, revised outcome.

Repeat this variation as needed. This offers a means to create suspense and surprise for your readers.

THE FIVE ELEMENTS



While Classical Mediterranean cultures recognized four primal elements, the original Indo-European cosmogony included the fifth element, or quintessence.

For the ancient Germanic wise-ones, these elements (in order of increasing density) were Æther, Air, Fire, Water, and Earth. These correspond to the elements in Chinese and East Indian (Vedic) modalities, with the transposition of Wood for Æther, and Metal for Air.

Æther is the rarest of elements, and represents the first expression of raw cosmic energy into manifestation. This is the element of expansion, of becoming.

Air is the first of the tangible elements, directly perceptible by touch, hearing, and smell. Only its effects can be observed by the other senses. This is the element of contraction, as the ethereal condenses into physicality.

Fire adds the sense of sight to direct perception. It is the rising element, even as flames rise from the hearth.

Water brings taste to the equation, as saliva awakens taste buds upon the tongue. This is the descending element, running downhill from source to sea, where it always finds its level.

Finally, Earth stands for the completion of the preceding elements. The most dense of all, it represents the center, the fixation of what has gone before.

The Five Elements runecasting is intended for a broader view than the Web of Wyrd, and is best suited to the Act or whole story. The order of the runes is based on directional associations, rather than density as presented above.

(Note that the directions of this casting are based on the ancient Indo-European worldview of North as down and South as up. If you are more comfortable with the modern convention, you may place the second card above the center, and proceed clockwise.)

Focus on the sequence or story in question. Shuffle and cast the cards as described above. The reading may be interpreted as follows.

(1) Earth - Character

As in the Web of Wyrd runecasting, the first card represents the character in the particular situation, the experiential world. Though relatively dense and fixed, it can be impacted by the workings of the other elements.

(2) Water - Restraining Forces

This rune stands for those elements (characters, circumstances, etc.) that seek to maintain the status quo. This is water seeking its own level, those forces that seek equanimity, stasis. As water combines with earth to form clay, this rune represents those forces that seek to keep the character and/or situation as-is.

(3) Æther - Expansive Power

The Æther rune represents the forces that seek to raise the character to her highest potential. Think Robin Williams's character Sean Maguire in *Good Will Hunting*. Your character may not always appreciate the influence or input of this rune, but the ultimate aim is for her highest good.

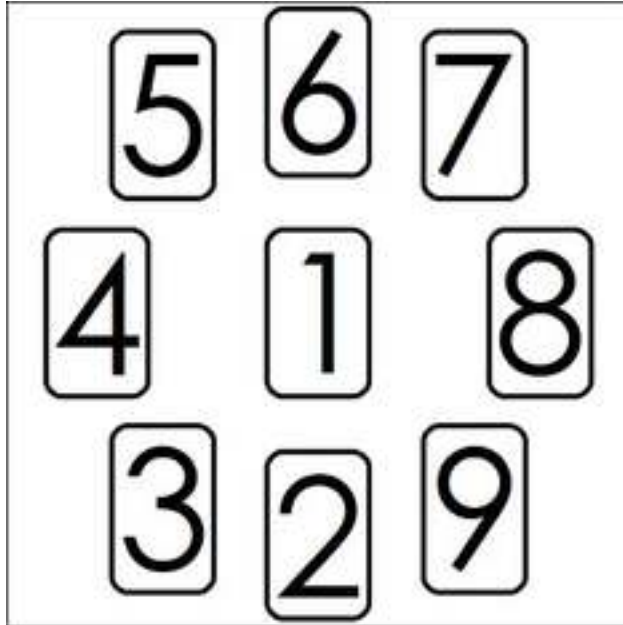
(4) Fire - Activating Forces

Fire is a motive force that changes one condition into another. Wood transforms into ash, metal or ice becomes liquid, liquid turns to vapor. In the process, heat and light are released to provide comfort and guidance, or possibly destruction. This rune kicks the character out of complacency and into action. It could show up in the invigorating strength of a good meal, or in the jarring suddenness of a house fire. Regardless, the character must move, and things will never be the same again.

(5) Air - Contracting Power

Like a cool breeze on a summer evening, the force behind this rune seeks the ultimate comfort and sensual pleasure of the character. This energy is that of the mother who seeks comfort and ease for her child, even if that means he can't quite achieve his full potential—regardless, he'll be safe from harm. Not a bad place to be, but it lacks the ultimate fulfillment of Æther.

THE NINE WORLDS



Norse cosmology centers on the great world tree, Yggdrasil, which contains among its roots and branches the nine realms of manifest reality. From the heights of Asgard—fortress of the Celestial Deities—to the depths of Hella’s Home, the loftiest and lowest aspirations of man or giant or god bear fruit upon the tree.

This casting is best used in the formative stages of a project. Alternately, if you are well into a story and find yourself absolutely stuck—assuming the fear of abandonment is greater than the fear of a major rewrite—it can give a fresh outlook on the story’s potential.

Best used with a premise in mind—perhaps seasoned with a few milestone scenes, but before specifics of character, conflict, or outcomes are established—this pattern combines the Norse cosmology with the hero’s journey, as outlined by Joseph Campbell (and distilled by Christopher Vogler).

The central rune represents a static condition, the situation from which the story begins. The surrounding runes represent major story elements. They may be taken sequentially (for example, 2 & 3 as Act I, 4 - 7 as Act II, 8 & 9 as Act III), or interwoven as you see fit.

As with the Five Elements layout, this runecasting is based on the ancient reckoning of North as down, South as up. If you prefer the modern convention, you may place the second card above the center, then proceed in a clockwise fashion.

Focus on the story in question. Shuffle and cast the cards as described above. The reading may be interpreted as follows.

(1) Midgard - Ordinary World

The central card establishes the protagonist in her ordinary, static circumstances. This is her day-to-day experience of the real world with all its burdens of conflict, ease, and boredom.

(2) Niflheim - Opportunity

Drawing from Michael Hauge’s *Story Mastery*, this rune stands for *Something New*, a break from ordinary reality. This is not the beginning of the new story, but an awakening of the protagonist from her stasis, a glimpse of something new among the mists of her formative existence.

(3) Asgard - Glimpse of Potential

Out of the awakening of Opportunity comes a brand new world: the perfect, timeless home of the celestial deities. In *Wizard of Oz*, Dorothy chases after Miss Gulch, who's abducted Toto, only to be sucked up into the tornado and drawn into Oz, where nothing is as it was before. This represents the inciting incident and crossing the threshold.

(4) Jotunheim - Forces of Adversity

In the Norse legends, the east was the land of giants, or *thurses*, where mighty Thor frequently went for battle and sport. This rune represents those forces that oppose our hero as she sets out on her journey. Not necessarily a sequence in and of itself, it stands for those events and characters that oppose the protagonist's forward progress.

(5) Svartalfheim - Mentors, Allies & Tools

In most action stories, the first half of Act II sees the training sequence. This is where the hero develops the tools, skills, and relationships that will assist her throughout the principal action of the story. This rune, then, represents the way in which these forces build her up.

Svartalfheim is the traditional home of the dwarves and dark elves, craftsmen of the gods. Thor's hammer (Mjolnir) and Odin's spear (Gungnir) both have their origins in this realm. Coincidentally (or not), both were crafted at the instigation (and to the consternation) of Loki, the shapeshifter/trickster who keeps the old myths interesting and relevant.

Upright, this rune may signify a power or alliance that will assist the protagonist through the second act. If reversed, it may suggest a weakness in her character that needs to be corrected before she can become all the awesomeness she is. Wax on, wax off.

(6) Muspelheim - Activating Force

In Norse cosmology, Fire Home provided the activating force that sparked physical creation out of the infinite potential of Niflheim. This rune leads us into the midpoint of the story, the fabled Point of No Return. Here the forces of antagonism, change, and support all culminate in a sequence or moment of transformation. Circumstances force the hero from a mode of reaction to proaction. There is no going back, and things will never be as they were before.

(7) Helheim - Ultimate Transformation

This rune represents the Dark Night of the Soul, the hero's experience of ultimate transformation. Though often equated with the Christianized Hell, the Norse Hel Home was the place of reflection and contemplation between lives, similar to the Greek Tartarus or Hebrew Sheol. This is the realm of abandoning both hope and fear. Allies have fallen away, the antagonist appears to be winning, and the protagonist is faced with stark reality. The choice is between the oblivion of the grave and a new way of viewing and navigating the world.

(8) Vanaheim - Obtaining the Boon

Norse mythology describes a primordial war between the Vanir and Aesir, the elder gods and the celestial deities. Some anthropologists have presented this as a conflict between indigenous northwest Europeans with their older earth-based deities, and invading central-Asian tribes with more ethereal, idealized conceptions of godhead.

Under the competing Paleolithic Continuity Paradigm, these competing viewpoints represent a more highly evolved philosophy of forces associated with time and space (the elder gods, Vanir, linked to physical existence, fertility, and procreation), and those associated with more abstract, conceptual ideals (knowledge, justice, individuality—auspices of the Aesir like Odin, Tyr, and Thor).

This eighth rune stands for the story's climax, the aim of the hero's journey. This is what it all means. All she's experienced, all the trials and tribulations, the victories and defeats coalesce into this moment, scene, or sequence. This is the object of the quest, the boon or balm that will bring health and hope to the tribe.

(9) Ljossalfheim - The Return

The Home of the Light Elves represents the culmination of the story. The Light Elves are variously associated with the Western ideal of Ascended Masters, and with the indigenous notion of the Ancestors who guide and advise those of us still on a physical journey.

This rune represents the denouement and the outcome of the hero's return to the ordinary world (Midgard) with the boon. Reversed, and depending on genre and theme, it may indicate the hero's reluctance, refusal, or failure to complete the return.

RECORDING SHEETS

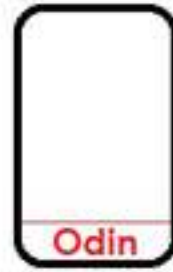
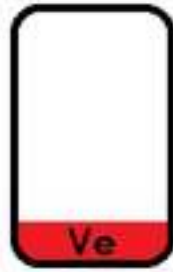
As with all aspects of writing, it's important to record and keep track of your inspirations as they occur. I've learned the hard way that those ideas that are so brilliant I couldn't possibly forget them get misplaced more often than my car keys. *Write them down.*

In a similar manner, I encourage you to keep track of your runecastings. At the very least, snap a picture of the runecasting. This way you can always come back to it after allowing your subconscious to mull over the pattern for a while.

It's also a good idea to record your initial impressions and interpretation. These may change over time as you become more familiar with your characters, with the story, and with the runes themselves. While your initial take on the meaning of the runecasting needn't be carved in stone (or wood, as the case may be), it's helpful to track the progress of your thought processes and the story's development.

Use the following sheets to record your runecastings and interpretations. Revisit them as often as you like to help keep your story focused and on track.

ODIN'S LOTS



Story: _____

Character: _____ Date: _____

Vili Rune: _____ Reversed Keyword: _____

Wound: _____

Ve Rune: _____ Reversed Keyword: _____

Identity: _____

Odin Rune: _____ Reversed Keyword: _____

Essence: _____

THE WEB OF WYRD



Story: _____ Date: _____

Character/Scene: _____

(1) Odin Rune: _____ Reversed Keyword: _____

Character's Situation: _____

(2) Urdh Rune: _____ Reversed Keyword: _____

Character's Past: _____

(3) Verdandi Rune: _____ Reversed Keyword: _____

Present Circumstances: _____

(4) Skuld Rune: _____ Reversed Keyword: _____

Likely Outcome: _____

(3') Verdandi Recast: _____ Reversed Keyword: _____

Alternate Choice: _____

(4') Skuld Recast: _____ Reversed Keyword: _____

Alternate Outcome: _____

THE FIVE ELEMENTS



Story: _____ Date: _____

Character/Scene: _____

(1) Earth Rune: _____ Reversed Keyword: _____

Character's Situation: _____

(2) Water Rune: _____ Reversed Keyword: _____

Restraining Forces: _____

(3) Æther Rune: _____ Reversed Keyword: _____

Expansive Forces: _____

(4) Fire Rune: _____ Reversed Keyword: _____

Activating Forces: _____

(5) Air Rune: _____ Reversed Keyword: _____

Contracting Forces: _____

THE NINE WORLDS



Story: _____

Character: _____ Date: _____

(1) Midgard Rune: _____ Reversed Keyword: _____

Ordinary World: _____

(2) Niflheim Rune: _____ Reversed Keyword: _____
Opportunity: _____

(3) Asgard Rune: _____ Reversed Keyword: _____
Glimpse of Potentiality (Inciting Incident): _____

(4) Jotunheim Rune: _____ Reversed Keyword: _____
Forces of Adversity: _____

(5) Svartalfheim Rune: _____ Reversed Keyword: _____
Mentors, Allies & Tools: _____

(6) Muspelheim Rune: _____ Reversed Keyword: _____

Activating Force (Point of No Return): _____

(7) Helheim Rune: _____ Reversed Keyword: _____

Ultimate Transformation (All-Is-Lost Moment): _____

(8) Vanaheim Rune: _____ Reversed Keyword: _____

Obtaining the Boon (Climax): _____

(9) Ljossalfheim Rune: _____ Reversed Keyword: _____

The Return (Resolution): _____



RUNE CARDS













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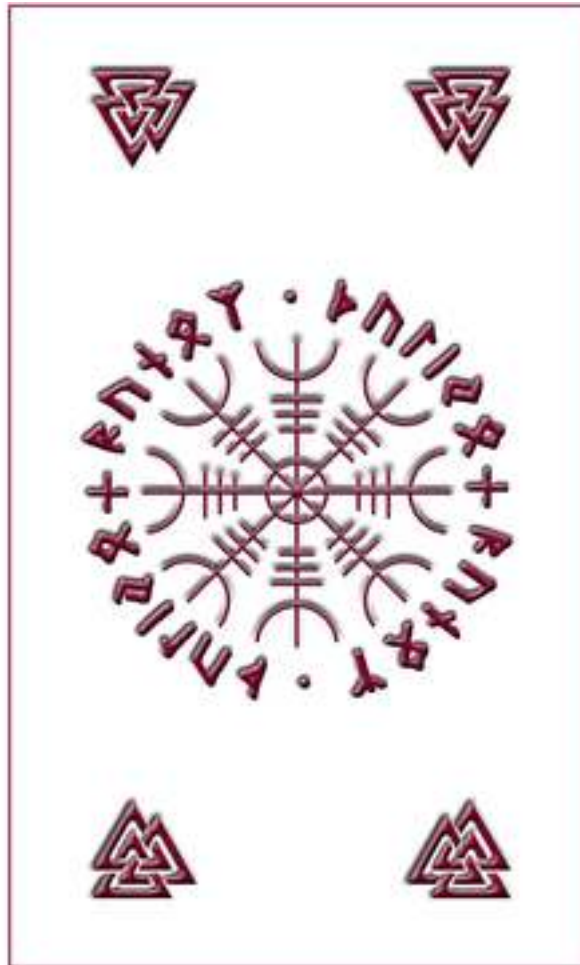
- Jackson Crawford YouTube Channel, <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCXCxNFxw6iq-Mh4uljYvufg>
- Norse Mythology for Smart People, <https://norse-mythology.org/>
- Rune Secrets, <http://runesecrets.com/>
- Source of Story YouTube Channel, <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCkpkBFtDJFUW9wIXtcSbloA>
- Michael Hauge: Story Mastery, <https://www.storymastery.com/>
- The Thunder Wizard YouTube Channel, <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCXQ4wcKooaHfIPCDNIHm8UQ>

RUNES FOR WRITERS: AN INTRODUCTION



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Erulian

Press

Runes for Writers (Runoz Thulijo)
Proto-Germanic translation
courtesy Jackson Crawford, PhD
Director of Nordic Studies
University of Colorado—Boulder

