

LO: Comprehension

must bring the fallen heroes back to life somehow – otherwise how could they fight for him?

But he had no flying wolf to take him to Valhalla. He didn't even know where it was, or if it was possible to get there by some other means – none of the old stories went into that kind of detail. Then he remembered what Brunhild had said – *you must pray to Odin for anything more*. Well, if anyone knew where Valhalla was it should be Odin, the God who had created it.

Gunnar looked up. The sky was beginning to lighten, a pale glow seeping into the darkness. He thought quickly; he could pray to Odin here in the forest of course, but there was a better place, somewhere he had been for the midwinter ceremony at Yuletide, for the blood sacrifices before the spring planting, for the harvest festival – the temple they called the God House.

He rose to his feet, found the track once more, and headed into the gloom. By the time the sun had risen fully he was out of the forest and on the track towards the mountains. After a while he came to the top of a ridge and walked down into a valley. The

with pictures of Gods and giants, elves and dwarves, men and strange beasts, scenes from all the old stories. An altar stood at the far end, a flat-topped rock stained with the blood of sacrifices. In his mind Gunnar could see the bleating lamb, the knife flashing and the blood pulsing out, while the people of his steading looked on and chanted prayers.

Now some of those people were dead and the future for the rest was bleak, unless he could do something about it. A prayer on its own might not be enough, not without an offering of some kind, and Gunnar had no lamb or goat to sacrifice on the altar. Other kinds of offering were sometimes made, things that were important to someone or had a value, however small. From his pocket, Gunnar pulled the only thing he had brought with him – Father's amulet.

It was a simple image of Thor's hammer carved in black stone, his last link with Father and home, with the life Skuli had stolen. He laid it on the altar.

"Hear me, great Odin," he said softly. "I beg for your help in the task that lies before me. But most of all I ask you this – how can I get to Valhalla?"

track took him through a grove of ancient oak trees, scraps of morning mist clinging to their branches, and then into a broad clearing.

He shivered at the sight of the wooden building in front of him. The God House had always made him nervous. It looked like a dragon, its walls painted to resemble scales, its entrance a mouth with fangs carved into the curved doorposts, a pair of yellow eyes above. And to complete the picture, leading up to the door was a red flagstone path like a fiery tongue.

Suddenly Gunnar heard squawking and he glanced up. Two crows were staring at him from the roof, heads tipped to one side – the sheen of their black feathers reminded him of Brunhild. They squawked again, and flapped their wings and hopped about, making Gunnar feel even more uneasy. He frowned at them, took a deep breath ... then stepped over the temple's threshold.

The wooden floor was smooth, polished by the feet of those who came to worship there. Huge up-rights – each one the trunk of an enormous tree – held up the roof beams, and every surface was carved

"Well, the usual way is to die in battle with a sword in your hand," said a quiet, deep voice behind him. "But you look a little young for that."

Gunnar turned round. An old man stood in the doorway. He was tall, his face powerful and striking. His beard was white, and he wore the clothes of a traveller – a hat with a wide brim that dipped over one eye, a black cloak and tunic, thick trousers and strong boots. He had a bag slung over one shoulder, and he carried a wooden staff.

"You look tired and hungry too," the old man said. "I'd be happy to share with you the food I have."

For an instant Gunnar wondered if he should run. But the old man seemed friendly enough, and the mention of food had made the juices flow in his mouth. He needed to eat and he needed to rest. So he shrugged, and the old man walked out of the God House, beckoning him to follow.

A low byre stood near by. Gunnar recognized it as the place where beasts were kept tethered before they were sacrificed. The old man ducked inside and set about making a fire with straw and twigs he found

### Retrieval

- 1) Who created Valhalla ?
- 2) Why was the wooden floor smooth ?

### Words in context

- 3) Find and copy a word which means 'make a gesture with your hand to encourage someone to follow'.
- 4) Find and copy a word which means 'a place where animals are kept'.

### Inference

- 5) Why did the God House make Gunnar feel nervous and uneasy ? Give two reasons.