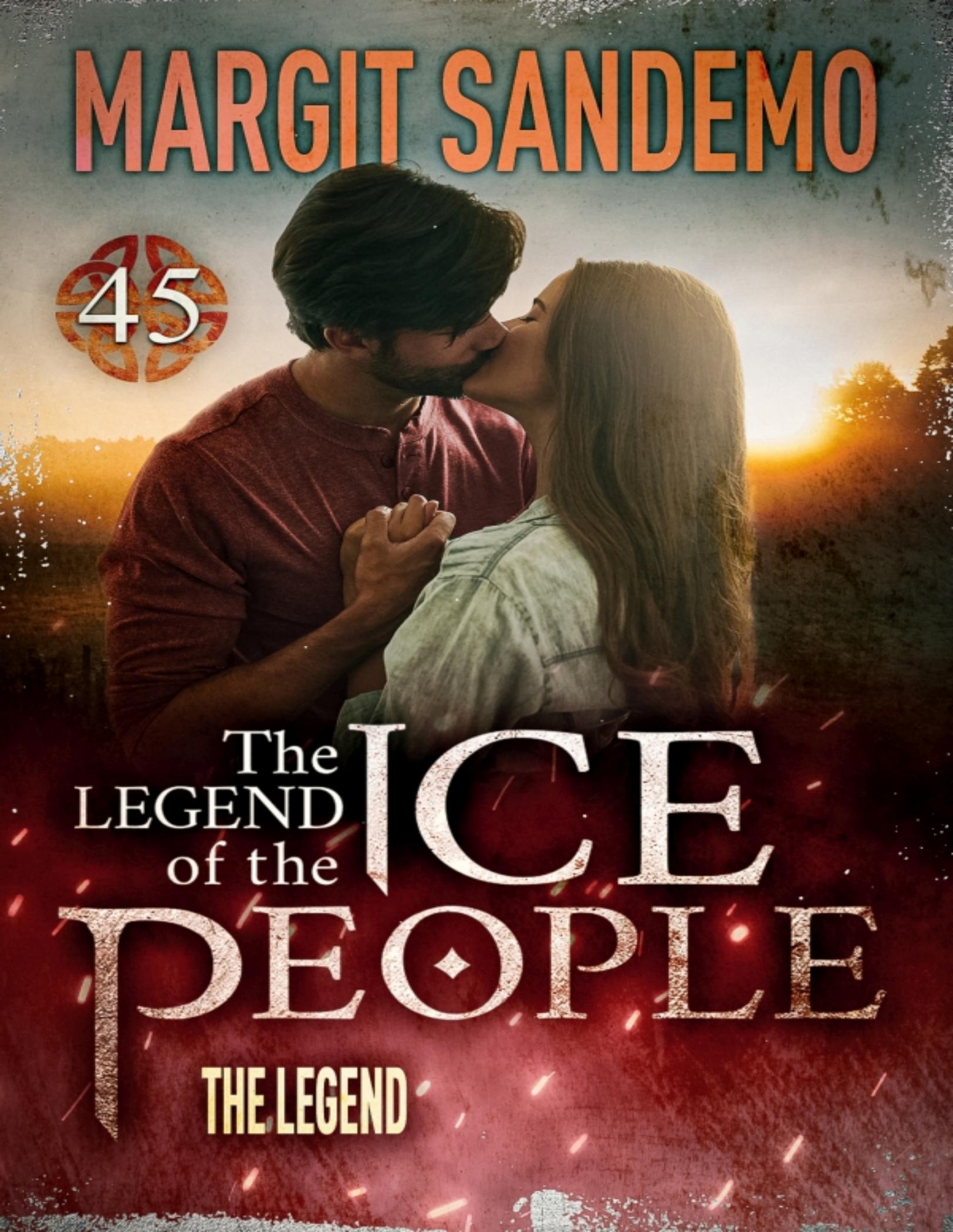


# MARGIT SANDEMO

45



The  
LEGEND  
of the

# ICE PEOPLE

THE LEGEND

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The  
LEGEND  
of the  
**ICE**  
**PEOPLE**  
THE LEGEND



# The Legend

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# Acknowledgement

*The legend of the Ice People* is dedicated with love and gratitude to the memory of my dear late husband Asbjorn Sandemo, who made my life a fairy tale.

Margit Sandemo

# The Ice People - Reviews

‘Margit Sandemo is, simply, quite wonderful.’

**- The Guardian**

‘Full of convincing characters, well established in time and place, and enlightening ... will get your eyes popping, and quite possibly groins twitching ... these are graphic novels without pictures ... I want to know what happens next.’

**- The Times**

‘A mixture of myth and legend interwoven with historical events, this is imaginative creation that involves the reader from the first page to the last.’

**- Historical Novels Review**

‘Loved by the masses, the prolific Margit Sandemo has written over 172 novels to date and is Scandinavia's most widely read author...’

**- Scanorama magazine**

# The Legend of the Ice People

*The legend of the Ice People begins many centuries ago with Tengel the Evil. He was ruthless and greedy, and there was only one way to get everything that he wanted: he had to make a pact with the devil. He travelled far into the wilderness and summoned the devil with a magic potion that he had brewed in a pot. Tengel the Evil gained unlimited wealth and power but in exchange, he cursed his own family. One of his descendants in every generation would serve the Devil with evil deeds. When it was done, Tengel buried the pot. If anyone found it, the curse would be broken.*

*So the curse was passed down through Tengel's descendants, the Ice People. One person in every generation was born with yellow cat's eyes, a sign of the curse, and magical powers which they used to serve the Devil. One day the most powerful of all the cursed Ice People would be born.*

*This is what the legend says. Nobody knows whether it is true, but in the 16th century, a cursed child of the Ice People was born. He tried to turn evil into good, which is why they called him Tengel the Good. This legend is about his family. Actually, it is mostly about the women in his family – the women who held the fate of the Ice People in their hands.*

# Chapter 1

Five lonely people in the wilderness.

Spring had followed the holes in the ice northwards, gliding silently around the summits that encircled the Valley of the Ice People. On the other side of the lake, high in the air, the raven shrieked its loneliness.

The wind tore at their hair and clothes as they stood in the barren, rugged mountain pass with the glacier behind them, looking out over the valley of their relatives; a place where nobody dared to go.

Spring and the warmth of the sun always came early to the Valley of the Ice People. Nevertheless, the five hikers were unprepared for the sight they encountered.

After days of trudging through the snow, it was almost a shock for them to look down into a valley whose entire northern side lay parched and seemingly very hot. They couldn't see the lake and its shore because the fog banks were dense. The southern side was still covered in snow. But this didn't matter because it wasn't where the hikers wanted to go.

As they took in the view of the valley, they felt fear mingled with respect. Finally, they were here. This time, the descendants of the Ice People had brought their chosen relative, Nataniel, with them. The stricken members of the Ice People had waited for him for centuries. Many had attempted to reach the source of evil in this wilderness, so that their people could throw off its yoke, but nobody had succeeded. They hadn't been strong enough.

Now the time had come. Nataniel had all the qualities needed for the task. What was more, he had brought Tova with him, of

whom it had been prophesied that she would be born at the same time as him, yet in a different generation.

Quite unexpectedly, another member had joined them. He was a healer so powerful that they had no idea of his full strength: the enigmatic Marco.

Young Gabriel, who was twelve years old, was also there. He didn't possess any particular qualifications. He was with them only so that he could tell posterity about their bitter struggle with Tengel the Evil, the scourge of the Ice People.

Ellen had been the fifth member to be chosen. But Lynx, the mysterious helper of the Ice People's evil ancestor, had caught her and she had disappeared, engulfed by the Great Abyss.

A quite ordinary man who had chanced to cross their path now replaced her. He was an Irishman called Ian Morahan. All those who supported the chosen members of the Ice People in their quest had accepted him and had given him the protection he would need in the shape of the potion from the Demon's Mountain.

The five chosen ones stood for quite a while without saying a word. They gazed at the steep cliff wall and couldn't fathom how Tengel the Good and Silje had managed to pull their horse across it in the late 1500s when they fled from the scorched valley. It must have been a struggle. Along with the shock and the sorrow. It had truly been an incredible feat.

"What should we do first?" asked Ian Morahan.

The others were happy to note that he counted himself as one of them and that he accepted everything that was happening.

"We've no time to waste," said Nataniel in his pleasant voice. "We need to begin looking immediately for the place where Tengel the Evil's vessel is buried. Can we establish the direction from here?"

"We're standing in an awkward place," replied Marco. "We

know that the vessel is buried at the foot of a tall cliff with two pinnacles that look like monoliths. But the nearest mountain ridges here cast their shadows over vast parts of the higher plateaux. The most significant landmark in our search – the promontory from which Kolgrim plunged, and where Heike and Tula later met Tengel the Evil – is enveloped in fog.”

They all felt it: when Marco mentioned Tengel the Evil’s name, the ground under the rock trembled. This was *his* valley to a much greater degree than it was theirs.

Or *was* it the reason for the roaring in the mountains? They looked in amazement at Marco’s gaze, which suddenly turned watchful.

Then everything was quiet and Marco didn’t look so intense anymore.

The five hikers felt pretty small, face-to-face with the enormous panorama in front of them. Young Gabriel was clutching his notebook under his arm, trying to appear brave. He doubted that he was succeeding, because the Valley of the Ice People was so intimidating. So beautiful and desolate. Far away from the world of humans, hiding a horror whose scope and strength they didn’t yet know.

It was a cold day. The ice-old wind from the glacier rushed past Gabriel so that he shivered from head to toe. He turned around to take in the glacier one last time.

Then he started, because he saw a black dot far out on the Arctic Ocean. He hoped it was not a new danger. Then he saw that the figure was moving away. It was limping.

Rune, he thought, and he felt a banging in his chest. He looked so lonely over there. So dejected. He couldn’t enter the valley. He would have to navigate all the way around it. All by himself.

Rune, who was so kind and loyal. Taciturn, enigmatic, unfathomable.

Gabriel could feel that his eyes were brimming with tears. He felt that they had let Rune down far too often, whereas *he* had always been loyal and compassionate towards them.

Tova was looking at Ian. She was trying to catch his eye but he merely studied the deserted landscape in front of them. Right now, she had to admit that she wasn't feeling on top of the world. All her old complexes had returned in full force as she admitted to herself how attractive he was. At this moment, confronted with the superhuman task in front of them, she could have done with his support and to know that, despite her shortcomings, he was fond of her.

But Ian Morahan wasn't sensitive to telepathy. He didn't pick up her unspoken, desperate prayer for him to turn around and smile in the way he did now and then, tenderly and lovingly. So Tova felt that she was all alone in an empty universe.

Nataniel appeared grim. Now his life's task was about to be accomplished. Everything would depend on how much he had learned and how strong his abilities were ...

"Should we wait until the fog has lifted?" Ian asked.

Marco answered: "At this time of the day, it's impossible to tell whether a fog bank is lifting or settling, or moving at all. I suggest that we find shelter from the wind and wait a bit. Rushing into the fog and perhaps being unable to see anything would be folly and a waste of time."

"Yes, let's do that," said Nataniel. "Let's wait, I mean."

It was a blessing to shelter from the ice-cold wind. Gabriel felt as if he was being wrapped in warm cotton wool, and he rubbed his frozen ears. Marco wondered whether they should try to walk a little way along the foot of the mountain wall to see if they could catch sight of the monolithic peaks, but Nataniel advised them not to. The mountainside was impassable to the right and to the left. The only way was directly down from the

pass.

So they waited.

“I think the fog is rising,” said Tova.

“Yes, it seems to be,” answered Marco.

Gabriel said: “I can still see Rune.”

The others followed his gaze. It hadn't occurred to them to look back across the glacier. Their hike across it was in the past now.

Tova said: “You mean that tiny dot very far away? Almost right on the other side?”

“Yes.”

“Poor Rune,” she said spontaneously.

That was what all five of them were thinking. The lonely, very, very lonely ...

Then, all of a sudden, Marco stiffened.

“Look!” he exclaimed, horrified.

Three other dots had now appeared on the glacier and they were closing in on Rune with remarkable speed.

Tova gasped. “That short figure there ... Can it be anybody else but Tengel the Evil?”

“And the other one is Lynx,” said Ian. “But who's the third?”

Marco replied slowly: “I've no idea. But it must be someone who has solved the magic runes of the black angels.”

“Who can do that?” asked Nataniel.

“Not many,” replied Marco. “I know only a few in the world of evil who can.”

“Who? Please tell us!”

“One belongs to an obsolete religion. The other is Ahriman.”

“Do you think it could be him?”

“I don't know what Ahriman looks like. And we can't really tell at such a distance.”

Tova moaned: “Ugh! They're closing in on our Rune! He's

stopped suddenly. We must help him.”

She wanted to get going, but Nataniel held her back. “No, stop! There’s nothing we can do!”

“We can’t let Rune down yet again!” said Gabriel.

Once again, they saw that strange expression on Marco’s face. A mixture of vigilant tension and baffling anxiety.

They stood stock-still, taking in the far-off tableau with deep sorrow in their hearts.

Tengel the Evil was full of triumph as he stepped out onto the glacier. Actually, he had planned to enter the Valley of the Ice People in the usual way, but the river was so powerful and strong right now in early spring that they would have had to walk pretty high up along the ridges, which were covered in snow and ice. So Tengel decided to follow the route of his enemies. Perhaps he might even overtake them?

They would have to walk further than the others had done because the chosen ones had been carried on the backs of wolves. Tengel the Evil was able to move pretty fast hovering a few centimetres above the ground. Ahriman, who wanted to see how everything went, was also able to move easily in space and time. The one who had the most difficulty was Lynx, whom the other two had to grab and drag between them in the most embarrassing way. Nevertheless, he had maintained his stoic, phlegmatic attitude and kept a stony face.

When they were some way across the ice they let go of him and he quietly brushed the dirt off his clothes. He gave his master a cold, glum look.

Ahriman, who was himself pretty skilled in the labyrinths of evil, had grimaced when he saw Tan-ghil’s enigmatic companion. He wondered what sewer that man had been picked out of.

“Well, I never,” said Tengel the Evil softly. “One of the poor wretches is trudging back across the ice. And he’s limping like a deformed crow. Does he want to run away? Let’s take a closer look.”

“It’s the wooden man,” muttered Lynx.

Ahriman’s black eyes looked puzzled. “What?”

“Oh, he’s just a strange character that my damned descendants carry about everywhere,” said Tengel contemptuously. “And now we’ve got him. I’ve never seen him close up. First of all, let’s shock him a bit. Or have you any other suggestions, my friends?”

If Tengel had chosen to look at the other two, he would have discovered that they were not really his friends. Camp followers and crawlers certainly, but both of them were out to feather their own nests.

He was certainly feared. Even by the disciples of evil. Ahriman thought that he had bought his freedom, which was why he ventured into the Valley of the Ice People, but even so he felt terribly frightened of the squat, abominable lump of dust that led them. He certainly didn’t want that creature as his enemy.

They very soon reached Rune. When they were quite close, the wooden man stopped and waited for them. Running away would have been pointless, and Rune had accomplished his mission. The Ice People no longer needed him. He had lost his good friend, Halkatla, and now he couldn’t care less what awaited him.

“I’ll crush him between my finger and thumb,” hissed Tengel the Evil.

Then he stopped abruptly. They were now seven or eight metres from Rune, who stood quietly with a sad, resigned expression on his face, as if everything they said and did was completely meaningless.

Tan-ghil blinked. “Where have I seen this poor wretch before?” he mumbled, half to himself and half to the others. “It wasn’t in *this* shape ...”

“We’ve met before,” said Rune in his creaky voice.

Tengel the Evil had an uncomfortable feeling down his spine that he didn’t know too well. Could it be fear? No, rather it was insecurity. He hated it when he didn’t have the upper hand. He wanted to be sure about everything! That was the only way to be superior.

Perhaps he was a bit late in thinking like this. Perhaps he should have perfected his skills in this, that and the other. It might backfire if you just practised pure evil and nothing else.

“Who is he? Who is he?” he shouted grumpily to his companions.

All they could do was shake their heads and give him regretful looks.

Tengel the Evil moved closer, his throat stretched out like that of a bird of prey about to attack. He peered at Rune with a look of hatred. “I’ll find out who ...”

Then he let out his shrill, birdlike scream. He tumbled a few steps backwards, but got to his feet immediately, recovering his dignity with a serious expression.

“The talisman,” he whispered hoarsely. “The talisman that betrayed me. That tricked me into remaining in the Valley of the Ice People until it was too late! I *owned* you and you turned against me. Now you will die!”

He fell silent as he recalled all the times he had tried to ruin the mandrake, but without success.

“What are you talking about, Master?” asked Lynx.

Tengel pointed his long, twisted finger at Rune. His hand was trembling. “He’s a mandrake! A simple root with stems and leaves!”

The last words were screamed out in frenetic hatred.

The others looked at him. They didn't understand.

"How have you come to be like this?" yelled Tengel the Evil. "If you think that you look like a human being, you're wrong. You are and will always be a misfit. Who has made such a clumsy piece of work?"

Rune said nothing. If he was hurt, he didn't show it. He just returned the murky, yellow-green glance without so much as blinking.

"Do you want me to ... eliminate him, my equal?" said Ahriman ingratiatingly.

Tengel the Evil turned on him immediately, hissing like a cat: "*Equal?* Of mine? Don't imagine any such thing, you miserable creep."

"Do you want me to?" repeated Ahriman, now slightly more cautious in his choice of words.

"You can't. He's immortal."

"So am I."

"You are certainly not! I'm the only one who's immortal."

"Apart from the talisman," Ahriman reminded Tengel the Evil bluntly. "No, no, never mind," he continued, seeing Tengel's ominous expression.

Tan-ghil turned back to Rune. "I can turn you into a miserable root again, you wretch!"

"I don't think so," said Rune calmly.

"Of course, it will be the same idiot who spun the magic runes around the valley, who has given you this pathetic, humanoid form. But I've solved the runes, so why shouldn't I also be able to ..."

"It was I who solved the runes," said Ahriman swiftly.

"Oh, shut up and go to hell!" yelled Tengel. "Had it not been for my will, you would not be here now."

“I never expressed any wish to come to the cold north,” replied Ahriman cheekily. “But since I am here, I want to give my honourable fellow hiker the benefit of my advice.”

In Zarathustra’s dualistic religion, Ahriman was the master of lies. He was a negative, destructive force, who tried to tempt human beings into materialism. Actually, Zoroastrianism ought to have vanished many centuries ago, before Christ. Yet the cult of Ahriman had been assimilated into various other creeds, so he had survived. And no wonder, because humankind *has* been tempted by materialism.

Now Ahriman wanted to reach the vessel of evil. For what reason it was impossible to say. Perhaps he thought that he could drink himself to global power? But first of all, he had to get to the source of evil. And this was something only human beings could do, not more or less dubious deities.

Tengel the Evil, who didn’t like to be reminded of the embarrassing moment when Ahriman had solved the magic runes rather than himself, had turned away from him in disgust. He spoke very disparagingly to Rune.

“Very well then. So you’re immortal, you wretched root, whoever has helped you to become so ...”

He fell silent. He remembered how he had tried in vain to destroy the mandrake several centuries ago in the Valley of the Ice People. Rune began to puzzle him a lot. Of course, he had heard of other mandrakes when he lived in East Asia. They could easily be destroyed.

So why not this one as well?

That was as far as he had reached in his train of thought when he felt the ice shake underneath him. And this wasn’t the first time that day. Something similar had happened a little earlier.

The others also noticed it. They looked at each other but said nothing. The tremor was over as soon as it had started.

“I’ll spare you, you pathetic root,” said Tan-ghil, “if you tell us who’s behind all this.”

“That’s easy,” answered Rune. “Your own descendants. They’re all of your blood.”

“Well, thank you,” hissed Tengel. “I know that, but there is one who is special.”

“There are many who are special. I don’t know which you have in mind.”

“Mind what you say!” admonished Tengel. “You may be immortal, but what would you say about going into the Great Abyss? You see, you wouldn’t die there. You would live on. I can assure you that you won’t think pretty thoughts when you’re there. Loneliness, mandrake: do you know what that is?”

“Yes, I do,” replied Rune. “Anyway, I couldn’t care less whether I live in this world or in the Great Abyss.”

Tengel was beginning to get really angry. “Well, what about a little torture for a start?”

“That won’t affect me. I don’t experience pain.”

That was a lie, but Rune didn’t want to give Tengel the Evil that triumph.

“Lynx! Seize him! Do with him as you did with the people of your homeland!”

The abominable henchman came forward and Rune stepped backwards without taking his eyes off Lynx. He knew that if this macabre man got a grip on him, he was lost. He would be sent to the abyss immediately. Rune also knew that he had no possibility of escaping, but he would draw out the time and try to find out more about his hunter. This prey didn’t give in that easily.

Rune observed the man as he closed in on him. There was definitely something odd about him, something he didn’t quite understand. Although he seemed quite normal, you couldn’t

help shuddering when you looked at him. Lynx was ... *exceptional*.

Rune was hardly unfamiliar with strange people or creatures, but he had never come across this phenomenon before.

All these thoughts had to pass incredibly fast through Rune's brain, because he didn't have many seconds to think. He tried to establish which type of human being Lynx resembled. A fattish man with dark-brown fish eyes and the short, thin Hitler moustache that had once been the vogue in central Europe ... And once, Rune had heard Lynx bellow the word "Scheisse!" That decided the matter: Lynx was German. The war had been over for years by now, and the world had stopped regarding every German as an enemy. Bitterness had given way to an understanding that many Germans were fine, considerate people, without blame for what had happened in those days.

But this man could well have been one of Hitler's henchmen, though he probably wasn't. His clothes appeared to date from the 1920s. The same could be said of the way his hair was cut, and the hat he had originally worn. Now he no longer wore a hat.

Rune had to curb this train of thought. If this middle-aged man had lived in the 1920s, he would be dead by now. But that wasn't the case. Rune could easily tell whether somebody was a spirit or a living person, since he moved freely in both worlds. This man was no spirit. Neither a ghost nor a superhuman creature.

This was what was so peculiar about Lynx. They didn't understand what he was. He was no spirit, but nor did he belong in the present.

He wasn't like Marco or Rune, who were both immortal and eternally young. He was something else.

During this swift passage of thought, Rune had managed to

register that Lynx was of the fair, stout, Germanic type. He could well imagine this man as the head of a family in lederhosen and a Tyrolean hat, with a tuba in one hand and a tankard of beer in the other. But the man was so obnoxious in his ice-cold misanthropy and his unfathomable identity that Rune took a few steps backwards.

Just as Lynx lifted his arm to catch him in his peculiar snare, Rune whispered: "*Fritz!*"

He had only said it because he wanted to make it clear that he had guessed where Lynx came from. He had used that name because it was a common German name. But Lynx was so surprised that he suddenly froze. That was when Rune realized that his name really was Fritz!

This was as far as Rune had thought when Tengel the Evil shouted, almost in panic: "Well then, for heaven's sake grab him!"

Lynx recovered from his surprise and lifted his arm once more.

At this moment, the ice roared so loudly that all four had to concentrate on keeping their balance. It wasn't the ice that moved but the mountains around them that trembled as if in an earthquake. Who had ever heard of earth tremors in Norway's oldest mountains, among the most stable massifs in the world?

"For heaven's sake, DO something!" Tengel the Evil bellowed, as he always did if there was something he didn't understand. He would always try to blame somebody else.

But neither Lynx nor Ahriman could do anything about what was happening. Rune fell to his knees and could only hope that the glacier would crack right under him. Lynx had fallen over after several futile attempts to maintain his equilibrium and dignity, but Ahriman and Tengel the Evil were still standing, more or less.

What on earth is *this*? thought Rune.

Then the violent roaring and trembling abated.

Everything was quiet, very quiet.

The very next moment, out of the corner of his eye, Rune noticed something dark.

He turned to look in that direction, and so did the other three.

A man, all by himself, was walking towards them from the edge of the glacier. A quiet wanderer in a dark cloak.

Up by the cliffs in the pass to the Valley of the Ice People, Marco instinctively grabbed Nataniel by the arm. His friends looked on in amazement. His handsome face expressed breathless excitement.

Out on the ice, the wanderer had reached the four men. Rune gazed at him with furrowed brow. But Tengel the Evil snorted. He was profoundly irritated.

“What do you want? What are you doing here? Go away immediately. We don’t want any beggars here. Go away!”

The newcomer ignored Tengel. He turned to Rune.

“It’s nice to meet you again, my friend!”

Rune looked at the man: his dark, curly hair that fell down over his shoulders, the smile in his exceptionally bright eyes, not quite as yellow as those of the Ice People, his kindness ...

Then Rune’s eyes filled with tears and he just faltered out: “And you!”

Ahriman just stood there with his mouth open. His whole demeanour showed that the sight of this stranger made him not only extremely ill at ease but also insecure. Was the newcomer really a stranger or was he ... an acquaintance?

Tan-ghil didn’t have any such thoughts. He was just cross because he had been disturbed in exterminating the mandrake.

“Go away!” he screamed in falsetto. “Or I’ll conjure you into dust, you wretched tramp!”