

### *The Story So Far*

A magic ring was forged by the dwarf Alberich out of gold he stole from the Rhinemaidens. The ring gives its owner control over all the wealth in the world, and Alberich used it to amass a great fortune by enslaving the dwarves of Nibelheim to mine more gold. Wotan, king of the gods, hired two giants to construct the fortress Valhalla. To pay them, Wotan and Loge, god of fire, seized the hoard from Alberich, who put a curse on the ring so that it will bring misery and death to its wearer. The treasure, which also includes the ring and a magic helmet (created by Alberich's brother Mime) that gives its wearer powers of transformation, is now possessed by the giant Fafner. Alberich and Wotan both aspire to regain the ring. Wotan, forced by the laws engraved on his spear to cease intervening in the world's affairs, fathered a mortal son Siegmund, hoping that he would win back the ring for him. But Siegmund fell in love with Sieglinde, his long-lost twin sister, and was killed by her husband Hunding. Sieglinde, pregnant with Siegmund's child, escaped into the forest with the pieces of his shattered sword Notung. During Siegmund's final battle, the warrior-goddess Brünnhilde had tried to save him, against Wotan's orders. Wotan punished his Valkyrie daughter for her disobedience by stripping away her divinity, and leaving her asleep on a mountaintop encircled by flames.

### **Act One**

The dwarf Mime attempts to make a sword that the mighty youth Siegfried cannot break. Mime knows that if he could repair the broken sword Notung, Siegfried would be able to kill Fafner (now transformed into a fearsome dragon), enabling Mime to steal Fafner's magic ring. Siegfried enters, and easily breaks Mime's newest sword into splinters. He despises Mime even though the dwarf has raised him from infancy. Siegfried asks Mime who his parents were. Mime tells him that he encountered a pregnant woman alone in the forest, who died shortly after entrusting Mime with the newborn Siegfried and the pieces of his father's sword. Siegfried leaves, vowing to abandon Mime and go out into the world as soon as he has a sword worthy of him.

A Wanderer approaches, seeking a place to rest. Mime tries to get rid of him by proposing three riddles. The Wanderer easily answers Mime's questions about the dwarves of Nibelheim, the giants of the earth, and the gods in Valhalla. The Wanderer offers three riddles of his own. Mime knows the answer to two of them — about Siegmund and Sieglinde, and the sword Notung — but not the third question: "who will reforge Notung?" The Wanderer tells Mime the correct answer — "one who has never learned fear" — and leaves.

Siegfried returns, eager for his new sword, and resolves to reforge Notung himself. As he does so, Mime plots to poison Siegfried after the dragon has been slain; Mime will then be master of the ring.

### **Act Two**

Alberich waits by the entrance to Fafner's cave, for he knows that the ring's curse will eventually bring death to the dragon. When the Wanderer approaches, Alberich recognizes him as Wotan and rails at him for the theft of the ring. Alberich knows that Siegfried is coming to slay the dragon, but is surprised to hear that the youth knows nothing about the ring. Since Wotan will take no part in the coming battle, Alberich's

only challenger for the ring will be his brother Mime. Wotan leaves, telling Alberich that no one can change the course of destiny.

Mime leads Siegfried toward the cave, telling him that the dragon might teach him what fear is. Siegfried drives Mime away, hoping never to see him again. As Siegfried contemplates what his parents were like, he hears the song of a woodbird. Unable to mimic the melody by blowing through a reed, he plays a horn call instead. The sound awakens Fafner, who emerges from the cave. When Siegfried playfully asks the dragon to teach him what fear is, the dragon prepares to attack. Siegfried plunges his sword into the dragon's heart. When the dragon's hot blood burns Siegfried's fingers, he sucks the blood from them. He realizes that the taste of dragon blood has given him the power to understand the woodbird's speech. It tells him that Fafner's treasure contains a magic helmet and a ring that will make him the lord of the world. Siegfried goes into the cave to find the treasure.

Mime and Alberich both hope to win the ring. They retreat as Siegfried arrives with the magic helmet and the ring. The woodbird warns him of Mime's treachery; the taste of the dragon's blood will enable him to discern the dwarf's thoughts. When Mime returns, Siegfried now realizes that Mime had brought him up for the sole purpose of winning Fafner's gold and plans to murder him as well. When Mime offers a poisoned drink, Siegfried raises his sword and kills his would-be assassin. The woodbird sings of a glorious bride sleeping on a nearby mountaintop, surrounded by flames. Siegfried joyfully rushes off to fulfill his destiny.

### Act Three

Wotan awakens Erda, the all-knowing goddess of the earth, hoping that she can tell him what the future holds. She does not answer and disappears. Wotan determines that the reign of the gods is coming to an end; the world now belongs to humans.

Guided by the woodbird, Siegfried approaches the mountain, where he encounters Wotan, the Wanderer. Restless to continue his journey, Siegfried asks the old man to step aside. When Wotan tries to bar the way with his spear, Siegfried breaks it with his sword. Wotan withdraws.

Siegfried plunges through the wall of fire and finds a sleeping figure covered by armor. He is mesmerized by the sight of the first woman he has ever seen. Brünnhilde awakens at his kiss, enraptured at the sight of the hero she had so long ago sought to protect. When Siegfried vows to love her forever, Brünnhilde bids farewell to Valhalla and embraces him as her husband.

(Synopsis by Mark Lyons)