

7-15-2015

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Recommended Citation

Bowkett, Kevan (2015) "*How the Fire Beings became Slaves of the Mer-People*," *The Mythic Circle*: Vol. 2015: Iss. 37, Article 7.

Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mcircle/vol2015/iss37/7>

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How the Fire Beings became Slaves of the Mer-People

by

Kevan Bowkett

Of old, and new, and never-time
The World of the Seven Flames was:
Excoriated in the Courts of the Stars for its apostate reigning house.
Under their rule the realms spread out, Sun-mantled:
Runavea, Mother of People;
Senquaith and Xilampan, of wild mountains and bitter forests;
Yecelenta, tester of humans, land of a hundred kingdoms;
Conadar, domain of the Wise;
Tarabala, the white northland;
Pevonnea, young giant reveling in strength:
And round them all, lapping all shores, the lambent blue fields of Lady Saltskin,
Who raised a new country to vie with the others.

--From an Old Cothiryian chronicle

After the rise of Great Cothirya out of the Southern Ocean, the mer-folk were wroth with Saltskin, the Lady of the Sea; for she had made the new land of Great Cothirya out of their favorite region of the ocean's bed: a region sacred to them, a paradise. But the Sea Queen had taken away their paradise, lifted it above the sea, and given it to her favorites, the hated blue-skinned humans, the Ekothra. So the mer-folk were embittered against the Lady, whose servants they were.

Saltskin knew and felt their wrath and bitterness. And after a time she swam to one of the submarine volcanoes near her palace and went down its shaft, arriving in time in the heart of the seas of liquid stone that lie below the seas of liquid water: and so came to the palace of Santeth Ru, Master of the Underworld.

She came before him as he sat upon his burning throne, and he gazed upon her. She said, "My servants the mer-people are wroth with me because of Great Cothirya, because it was their paradise, and now is lost to

them."

"It is so," said Santeth Ru, his deep voice echoing.

"I wish to assuage their suffering, a little," said Saltskin. "You can help me."

"How?"

"Allow my servants to take some of your people, the fire dwellers, as chattels," she said. "For my servants are bitter and the sight of the suffering of others will give them joy. And it will not hurt your people much, for they are strong."

"It is much to ask," said Santeth Ru.

"I believe I am owed it," said Saltskin.

"Do you?" said Santeth Ru. "It is true I aided you in pushing Great Cothirya above the sea. But it was your action, not mine."

"It is true it was the dearest wish of my heart that the Ekothra might have Great Cothirya," said Saltskin. "But I did not intend it. I knew it would hurt too much the mer-people. I did it only because your father the Prince of this Earth allowed it."

"Allowed it?" he murmured.

“So much of my wish had built up in the crystalline floor of the sea that when he allowed it, and removed the barrier to it, it automatically followed. I had not time to disperse the accumulation of my wish.”

“You might have chosen to not let it accumulate in the crystalline floor,” said Santeth Ru.

“I would have dispersed it in time,” she said. “But your father acted ahead of me, deliberately. Deliberately he permitted Great Cothirya, so that the mer-folk my people would blame me, blame me forever. So every moment I am among my servants I know their blame, even of those that love me. And also I blame myself for letting my wishes so catastrophically accumulate. And he wants me to stew and seethe in this juice. For he hates me, since I bend no knee to him.”

“It is so,” said Santeth Ru in deep tones. “Beware your wishes, when my father may have a hand.”

“I am owed recompense for this, Santeth.”

“Ask your old betrothed, my brother of the Mountain, to intercede for you.”

“Pointless, as well you know. No Santeth, at least let me repair the fortunes of my mer-

people a little, by giving them as slaves the fire dwellers in the stone beneath upwelled Great Cothirya. For those fire dwellers do not deserve to bathe in the cosmic emanations now falling upon the land since it is above sea. They deserve none of those beams, having a bath in them by chance only, not effort.”

“Some helped me lift Great Cothirya.”

“A few. But the others — let my mer-people make slaves of them, and I will not carry my grudge with your father into open war.”

“Lie with me and I will consider it,” he said, though they were kin; for she is beautiful, and well known are the appetites of the Lord of the Underworld, who shies not at incest, but rather regards it as glory.

She spat and her spittle hissed on the hot floor before his throne.

“That is all of me you will get, Santeth Ru,” she said. “Mark well my words. Give me your answer within a moon, or your father shall have war.”

That is how the fire dwellers became slaves of the mer-folk.