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Mythic Circle #36

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Mythic Circle #36



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Editor: Gwenyth E. Hood

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Who Would Wear The Ring?

by

Philip Miller

Who would wear the Ring
If they found the blighted thing
Lying in a river or buried in the snow?
Who would in their pride
Embrace their darker side
And watch the creeping evil grow?
And who, thinking to do good,
To cleanse the stream, preserve the wood,
Would be corrupted by its fatal glow?
All, all into the trap would fall
From the great down to the small
All we only think that we well know
For the lure of our desire
Is like an all consuming fire
And we are fallen angels here below.



The Scream

by

Dag Rossman

It was a crisp autumn day in 1892 when my life was transformed forever. Two friends and I had just finished a companionable supper together and decided to take a leisurely stroll along a path overlooking the Oslofjord. After a time, I began to feel unexpectedly tired and ill, so I stopped walking and leaned against the fence in the hope of regaining my composure. Alas, it did not seem to help, and as I looked across the fjord at the setting sun, the clouds turned blood-red and began to pulsate in a dizzying *danse macabre* across the evening sky.

I had often observed the awesome displays of our beautiful Northern Lights, but never had I seen anything like this! Being something of a sensitive soul-and mystically inclined, as well, I began to wonder if I might not be witnessing the onset of Ragnarok itself, the "Twilight of the Gods" foretold in the tales of Norse mythology. The very notion that it might literally be true took my breath away and overwhelmed me with a feeling of dread. Then to my ears came the most horrifying sensation of all—an ever-mounting moaning and groaning that culminated, at last, in a blood-curdling shriek that seemed to go on and on. So penetrating was the sound that even clapping my hands over my ears failed to muffle it. I felt as if I were about to lose my mind!

Meanwhile, my friends continued on their way, seemingly oblivious to the bleeding sky, that horrible scream, my obvious discomfort, and even the fact that I was no longer walking beside them. How

could that be? Had I already gone mad?

A mysterious young-old woman, clad in a leafy cloak of fall colors, suddenly appeared at my side and spoke to me: "Take heart, Edvard Munch, you are of sounder mind than your friends. They have hardened their hearts and minds to my world of nature that surrounds them and are deaf to my pain."

Astonished by her appearance and puzzled by her words, I could only blurt: "You know my name . . . and you speak of *your* world of nature. Who *are* you?"

Reassuringly taking my left hand between hers, she said: "Every ancient culture speaks of me—each by its own name, but most of them would translate as Mother Earth. To your ancestors, I was Jorth, and it would please me if you would call me that, too. As for my knowing your name, why should I not know the names of all my children?"

Nodding my head, I replied: "Dear Mother Jorth, I think I begin to understand. But what is causing you such terrible pain, and can anything be done to ease it?"

"Whenever my mountainsides are stripped bare of forests for timber, and of topsoil for mining, the run-off defiles my beautiful streams and lakes-and my soul weeps. And whenever men slaughter wolves for 'sport,' a much-loved voice of the wilderness is forever silenced-and my soul cries out. Humankind is the cause of my pain, Edvard, and humankind must provide the cure . . . if there is to be one."

"Oh, Mother Jorth," I said in a quavering voice, with tears running down my cheeks, "I



am so very sorry . . . but why has this vision been revealed to me? What can I—one man—possibly do to change things in any meaningful way?”

The earth goddess gave a gentle smile as she replied: “You are a true artist, Edvard, for you paint not only what you see but what you feel. Render what you have just experienced as best you can and I promise you that people will be talking about your painting-and its meaning-for generations to come. I ask no more of you than that . . .

and yet no less. Will you do that for me?”

Sympathetic for her plight—and emboldened by her promise—readily assented: “With all my heart!”

Mother Jorth kissed my forehead, then faded from my sight as the first stars of evening began to appear in a now calm sky. Pausing only long enough to take a deep breath of the crisp autumn air, I hastened homeward, beginning all the while to plan out the canvas I just knew—somehow—I would have to title “The Scream.”

Author's Note: The earth goddess was as good as her promise. The first version of “The Scream” (known as “The Scream of Nature” in Germany”) appeared in 1893, and three more were executed over the next seventeen years. It has remained the best-known Norwegian painting ever since, and Edvard Munch (1863-1944) that country's best-known painter-as well as one of the leading lights in the expressionist movement. Despite the artist's leaving detailed notes about the event that triggered his painting “The Scream,” art critics have continued to debate its inspiration and meaning to this very day. For some reason, Munch failed to explicitly mention his encounter with Mother Jorth, which is now being revealed for the first time.

The pen-and-ink drawing of Munch's painting that accompanies this story was rendered by Sharon C. Rossman.

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Odin Wins the Mead of Poetry

by

S.R. Hardy

Odin set out, from Asgard he fared.
He waded across a wide river;
to Jotunheim he hastened at once.
He had one goal: to get Suttung's mead.

He met nine slaves scything ripe hay;
Odin could tell their tools were dull.
He offered to turn their tools to sharpness;
the slaves agreed and gladly so.

Odin used a stone, he angled it well;
the scythes then shone, sharp and bright.
The slaves began to scythe still more;
they wondered at the whetstone of Odin.

The slaves then bid to buy the stone.
Odin agreed, but asked a fee:
only so much as was right.
The slaves agreed and granted his wish.

Odin then flung, far into the sky,
the wondrous whetstone wanted by the slaves.
The slaves scrambled, scythes in hand;
they caught the stone but cut their throats.

Odin then fared, farther still.
He came upon a cold dark house,
high and wide, the home of a giant.
Baugi was his name, brother of Suttung.

Baugi was vexed, vilely he swore.
He told his guest his tale of woe:
all nine of his slaves had slit their throats.
His fields lay empty, yet full of hay.
Odin spoke:

“Perhaps I can help by handling your fields.
I am Baleworker, best of farmers.
I offer to bale all of your hay,
to fill the shoes of your fallen slaves.

“I ask for my fee just one small thing:
a single drink of Suttung’s mead.
I have long heard heady tales;
the fame of this mead goes far and wide.”

Baugi spoke:

“You must be warned, wandering one.
Suttung is wary; he wards the mead.
He greets few guests, with glad hailings;
he shies from hosting, sharing with none.

“But I agree to grant your wish;
I will bring you to my brother’s hall.
We’ll see if we can cadge a drink;
my hay will not hoop itself.”

Baleworker agreed to begin his work.
Best of farmers, to the fields he went,
day after day, dripping with sweat.
Baugi had no need of nine dead men.

At summer’s end, all was done;
the harvest was in, the hay was baled.
Baleworker asked of Baugi one thing:
he wanted his drink of wisdom’s mead.

Baugi agreed, so they began to trek,
far to the east, faring long.
They came at last, looking for shelter,
to Hnithjörg, home of Suttung.

Baugi was greeted, Baleworker also;
Suttung was cross, seldom did he host.
Baugi then told his tale of woe;
he hoped his brother would heed his words.

Baugi spoke:

“Keeper of the mead, mighty brother,

I come to you with yearning need.
This summer I hired a hand for my fields;
he stands before you, the strongest of men.

“When I met him, I made an oath;
an oath I wish was otherwise sworn.
His fee would be a boon in truth:
a single drink of Suttung’s mead.

“Now I must ask, awesome brother,
if you would grant my greatest wish:
to give my friend, faithful Baleworker,
from your sweet mead, the merest drink.”

Suttung was still; he stared at Baugi.
His head was thick, heavy with drink.
He was not used to any guests;
he did not like letting them speak.

Suttung spoke:

“Now I can see your nasty thoughts;
you schemed alone, long did you plot.
Long have you sought Suttung’s mead.
It shall not be owed, oath or no.”

Baugi left his brother; Baleworker followed.
They did not know what next would come.
Outside the hall they sat together;
they talked of naught but needing the mead.

Baleworker spoke:

“I know it seems bleak, brother of Suttung,
but we must try to win the mead.
Two oaths were made; mine is fulfilled.
Yours must follow, or fate in its stead.

“If kinship won’t win Kvasir’s blood,
then we must try what tricks we can.
I have in my sack a helper of men:
Rati my friend, fastest of drills.

“Take this drill and turn it with speed;
the shortest of times should be needed.
Suttung’s great hall safe in the mountain,

shall soon be opened or I am a liar.”

Baugi began to bore a hole;
he turned the drill, with dread in his heart.
He bored away, bending to the task,
until he had made a tiny shaft.

Baugi spoke:

“Baleworker my friend, your fee is paid;
I have now drilled a deep shaft.
Your way is clear to crawl inside;
the mead is yours if you can take it.”

Baleworker bent and blew into the hole.
Dust blew back out; his eyes were stung.
Baleworker was angry; the borehole was short.
He hated tricks when tried on him.

Baleworker spoke:

“I thought you a friend; a fiend you became.
You think to trick me, try as you might.
I am no fool, friend or no.
Bore yet further, Baugi Gillingsson.”

Baugi once again bent to the drill;
he pumped his arms up and down.
Rati was sharp; shards flew all over.
Baugi stepped back, the borehole was done.

Baleworker bent and blew into the hole.
No dust blew back out; his eyes were not stung.
Baleworker knew the borehole was good;
his way was clear to climb inside.

He othered himself; a snake he was.
He slithered his way inside the mountain,
to a dim cavern dripping and wet;
the light was soft but he saw things well.

He met a girl, a grinning lass;
a giant maiden but meet nonetheless.
On seeing the snake she swooned and cried;
long had she lain, lonely in the mountain.

Gunnlod spoke:

“What snake is this that slides within,
silent and quick, quite by stealth?
I do not know by name or sight,
what type of fiend before me lies.”

Baleworker spoke:

“I did not hope to haggle with you,
Lady Gunnlod, beloved of Suttung;
a giant’s daughter I deem you to be,
but comely as an Aesir maid.”

Gunnlod spoke:

“You speak with fair and flowery words,
words that tell me no tale of you.
You know my clan, the kin of Suttung,
but you are a rune; I can read you not.”

Baleworker spoke:

“Surely you can guess, smart as you are,
what name I carry when called aright?
I have but one eye to see,
and when aroused my wrath is hard.”

Gunnlod spoke:

“Now I know you; never will I doubt.
Why have you come to my cave tonight?
I am still just a giant maiden.
What does One-Eye want with me?”

Baleworker spoke:

“I am a owed a drink, oathed by Baugi,
of Suttung’s mead, the mead of poetry.
It must be drawn this draught of mead:
your uncle’s debt is due for payment.”

Gunnlod spoke:

“What do I get if I grant your wish?

I know what I want, now that I think.
The drink will be yours, but you must be mine;
three draughts you can have, a drink for each night.”

Baleworker slid boldly forward.
He lay with Gunnlod, gaining her trust.
Three nights long they lay together;
long did they lay, in lust entwined.

As the fourth day’s dawn was breaking,
Gunnlod then filled, full to the brim,
a bowl of mead for Baleworker;

Baleworker tipped back the draught;
he drank with glee, gulping the mead.
In one long drink he drained the bowl.
Bliss filled his body; he bore no hurt.

Gunnlod then gave to grateful Baleworker,
a second draught of sacred mead,
this time in a cup; it was called Boden.
Baleworker drained this draught with glee.

Baleworker felt good; bliss filled his mind.
Gunnlod was worried; she wanted to please.
She knew his thirst was not yet sated;
she knew she owed another draught.

Gunnlod then gave to grateful Baleworker,
a third draught of thirst-quenching mead.
He drained the cup; she called it Son.
His fearsome thirst was fully quenched.

Gunnlod spoke:

“You have now drunk three draughts of mead;
it is all gone, every drop.
My father will be wroth, ready to fight.
You must now flee far away.”

Baleworker wormed away from the cave;
he fled back out, onto the mountain.
He othered himself, an eagle he was;
all then knew him: Odin Borsson.

Odin leapt up, an eagle in flight;

he flew with haste, heading for Asgard.
He knew he must make it home;
his belly was bursting with Baugi's folly.

Suttung was wroth, bereft of his mead.
He saw the eagle: Odin he knew.
He othered himself: an eagle he was.
He flew in haste, following Odin.

The eagles flew far above ground.
The Aesir looked from Asgard's walls;
they threw down cups three in number,
to catch the mead carried by Odin.

As Odin flew over the walls,
he spit the mead, his mouth agape.
Odin was able to aim the mead;
three cups were filled overfull with mead.

A few small drops, driven by the wind,
went outside the walls of Asgard.
They lay on the ground, the lot of skalds,
the last few sips of Suttung's mead.

Once he was safe inside the walls,
Odin then stored the strongest of meads.
He gave the mead, the gift of Odin,
to the Aesir, Allfather's kin.

Suddenly I Lost My Way

By

R. L. Boyer

When I had journeyed half of our life's way,
I found myself within a shadowed forest,
for I had lost the path that does not stray.
—Dante, “The Inferno”



It happened in the springtime,
In the flowering month of May.
One night, alone in a darkened wood,
My feet were led astray ... *Oh ...*

My feet were led astray.
And charmed by the light
Of a radiant moon,
I suddenly lost my way.

2.

On the dark ground blazed a golden
Ring, luminous as day.
I stood in rapt amazement and
Watched the circling faeries play ... *Oh ...*
I watched the faeries play.
And charmed by the light
Of a radiant moon,
I suddenly lost my way.



3.

Imprisoned in that magic ring
Where the Druids go to pray,
Faeries danced around me, and
Enchantment ruled the day ... *Oh ...*
Enchantment ruled the day.



Lilith and Eve Discuss Human Origins

by

Joe R. Christopher

Within the rose-lined walks of Eden paced
Two women, talking deeply, not in haste;
Their bare feet on the path were used to soil
From nature's traces, not forced by heavy toil.
The younger gestured with hands quite freely;
The older listened, murmuring a "Really?"
And so it went, by stream, by trees, by field;
They walked and talked. The younger still appealed
For judgment to her elder; the older nodded,
And then replied with query—an answer prodded.

The younger, Eve, then said, "From Adam's rib
Was I betaken—I'm sure it's not a fib;
I think it was a dream that Adam had,
A vision in a dream, which made him glad;
He told me all, and then I dreamed it too.
He said, or else I dreamed, it was a clue
For Adam's and my relationship—a symbol
That we were equals, as we this garden ramble:
Not from his head, that I should rule above;
Not from his foot, that I should lowly serve."

The elder, Lilith, then replied, "That's folly—
The truth has tripped and fallen flat, all sprawlly.
When you and Adam spend some time caressing,
Before the mutual great acquiescing,
Then count his ribs—you'll find each side the same.
I tickled them, and found no sign of maim.
He hasn't lost a rib! The world of dreams
Will fill your life with *isn'ts*, with merely *seems*."

She stopped her walk to touch a deep-red rose—
Then knelt to smell its bloom; perhaps a ruse
To blunt her blunt and strong assertiveness,
To so digress by action, to decompress.
She said, "I wonder why a rose has thorns—
Here in our park, it doesn't need such forms."

Said Eve, "Perhaps it spends its time in dreams,
And visions all tomorrows as extremes."

They both laughed then, at such absurdity—
Lilith got up, they hugged with great esprit,

And chose another direction for their walk,
Continuing their subject in their talk.

Said Eve, "If not from rib, whence came I here?"

Said Lilith, "That rib is but a euphemism, dear,
For I suspect our husband dreamed his phallus—
That he's so proud of, its pleasure should never fail us—
Is for us too the origin of all;
And thus the origin of us befalls—
At least in dreams. The logic there is stirred:
A hippopotamus in mud be-mired."

Asked Eve, persistent, "But what's my origin?
How came I here to walk this garden in?
Am I, like Adam himself, shaped out of dust?
Is that the source of all, when all's discussed?"

Lilith replied, "In ways beyond our ken,
It may be so, for all the Earth is one.
But more immediately, that's just a dream,
Based on a likeness, based on things that seem.
Do you remember when we shaped of clay
Those figurines of animals to stay,
But then they melted poorly in rain's downpour—
We thought reshaping daily too big a chore.
However, in dreams, the figures come alive,
Ourselves included, and through a rain survive.
Daydreams or nightdreams, it does not matter much:
We dream that life comes flowing from our touch.
Or else, our God has changed some statued mud
From inward dirt to nerves and bone and blood:
That's magic—why bother with a statued shape
If all one needs is a finger-snapping cap?
No, no, not you, not Adam, and, no, not I
Were shaped of dust or mud to vivify,
Not literally."

She stopped beside a rose,
Impulsively, for use of eye and nose,
And delicate touch—a pale-hued rose this time;
She brushed aside a bee t' achieve her whim,
But soon allowed it back.

Said Eve, "Its stinger
Is like the rose's thorns, though slightly stronger.
I won't repeat my joke, but it seems odd
That, if the bee's upset, it threats its prod."

"And sometimes stings," said Lilith, rising up;
"This garden seems, at times, the strangest trope."

But Eve went back to what she'd asked before,
About the source of human life as lore.

Said she, "You were alive when I became—
If neither rib nor dust, what start's to claim?
You saw my origin, so tell it me—
Forget 'Not this, not that'; with truth be free."

Lilith replied, "I'll tell you what I saw—
The strangest thing, perhaps a thing of awe.
You don't have to believe its truth I say,
So odd it seems, but I will facts convey.

"You know the lowest bit of our whole park,
Which touches a sea, where we have gone to lark.
And still more, those partly hairless apes
Who dwell there, swimming much and playing japes;
They have the barest bit of webbing stretched
Between their thumbs and index fingers attached,
As if they meant to turn aquatic mammals—
And so escape all land-based, traumatic trammels."
She suddenly stopped, surprised at what she'd said.
What trauma occurred in Eden? What, indeed?

"That is to say, as if they somehow meant
To turn sea-creatures, and always waves frequent.

"You also know our God, whose coming teems
With fear and awe, although he friendly seems;
We drop to knees and touch our foreheads down,
Although he's never said we should them ground.
What else can we, at holiness extreme?
How else express the gulf, the gap, supreme?

"Now bring these two together: I saw our God
Down by the apedom; how strange, I thought, how odd."

Eve nodded sympathetically, unvexed,
With friendship—but quickly asked, "What happened next?"

Said Lilith, "Next, he chose a single ape,
A youngish, female one, out of the troop,
And spoke to her. She paused, to choose her route,
Him saying, 'Come out of your tribe; right now, come out.'
He breathed on her, and then she straighter stood—
That breath was blown, lips rounded, her to stead.
He touched her forehead, saying, 'Think deeply now;
With reason and with feelings find the *tao*.'
He put his hands on either side her throat—
'And be a talking beast, of words not mute.'
He paused, then said—at least he said in part—
'Seek knowledge and seek wisdom and seek art.
I give you all this world, all lesser beasts—
Be gentle, be gentle, when all to you's released.
Awake and love: agapē is the prize.
Be happy: since happiness in virtue lies.

Do not return to life as lesser beast:
Your call is fragile, by your decision lost.’
Oh, more he said, or less—I am not sure—
But something like these words, if words they were.”

She stopped beside a yellow rose and knelt,
But gazed both long and steady, nor ever smelt.
“Look at the blackish spots,” she said and frowned.
“I asked our God just what they were, here found;
He said that some small critter grows on leaves,
And causes leaf to fall, the plant aggrieves.
He didn’t say what we should do about it.
Should we dig up the plants and burn them, to rout it?
Or should we think the black spots also live,
And so we should encourage them to thrive?
I don’t know what to do, since life is good.”

“But what about the ape?” Eve then renewed,
Ignoring all concern for roses maimed.
“What happened to the ape?” That she exclaimed.

Surprised, said Lilith, “Why, the ape was you.
I thought you understood the aperçu.
Don’t you remember when he called you forth?
It’s not the sort of tale to trust by faith—
It’s too extreme.”

Said Eve, “I *don’t* remember—
Of course, he’s asked me questions, light *or* somber,
Sometimes with irony. I’ve had to speak in answer.
But just to speak? In tongue I’m no advancer—
With you and Adam, yes, but not with him.
But still I can respond—I’m not a mime.
And think? How can one help but think?—
Or fast or slow; with order or with kink;
In memory or in dream; in gard’ning, yes,
In friendship, and in passion’s breathlessness—
And when I meet the Numinous a-walking,
Why then I think—and often end up talking.
These facts you think you give just can’t be facts!
I don’t remember them, there’s nothing fixed.
Oh I went swimming often, in some dreams,
But times like those weren’t *truths*, but merely *seems*.
It’s not from apes I came, called out or not—
A special creation was I—all else is rot!”

“Let’s walk,” said Lilith, “this path will lead us back
To where we started, and it’s a pleasant track.
I’ve told you what I think occurred back then,
But, as I said, you needn’t believe my ken.
The dust and rib were proved by modern dreams,

For inspiration comes asleep, betimes.
But who has ever dreamed of beasts a-changing—
Of gaining voice or mind?—the thought's estranging.
Although my memory is sharp and clear,
Perhaps I'm wrong: my sureness can't cohere."

And so they walked, by roses, trees, and fields,
Seeking for truth, or else what pleasure yields.
The younger gestured with her hands quite freely;
The elder listened, murmuring a "Really?"

Editorial: This Issue

In this issue, we welcome some new writers with a variety of tastes and techniques. Ron Boyer has three poems and a short story with fairy tale settings. Alex B., a youthful writer, presents us with "The Breach," a dark fantasy excerpt introducing one episode in a long conflict in an imperiled world. S. R. Hardy retells an old myth in a story-poem using ancient Norse style with a light heart. John Taylor's story-poem brings us to ancient Babylon in more traditional English rhyme, while Nicolo Santilli offers his fantasy vision without rhyme. Philip Miller and Jeremy Hachey present more introspective and philosophical verse.

We also welcome back some previous authors, namely Dag Rossman, with a new perspective on a well-known work of art, his selection enlivened by a pen-and-ink drawing from his wife, Shannon. Joe Christopher also returns with an intimate view of conversations in the Garden of Eden, and David Sparenberg once more evokes the mythic consciousness and the love of nature. Ryder Miller tries another new direction, this time virtual reality and its power to affect actual reality.

L. C. Atencio once more provides a cover and some highly imaginative illustrations, this time trying out the method of William Blake in linking picture to verse.

I Walk into Darkness

by

Jeremy Hachey

I walk into the darkness,
A blunt dagger in my hand.
A fog covers all the earth,
And blackens all the land.

I stand inside the forest,
The forest strewn with doubt.
I listen for the voice of hope,
But cannot hear a sound.

I am eager for the journey,
And yet my blade is blunt.
I feel I know the way it seems,
My blood boils for the hunt.

I strike a match and hold it high,
Yet still barely see the way.
The light burns dimly for a while,
Until all sinks back to grey.

What if I find the beast I seek
And cannot win the fight?
It matters not how thin the lot,
I must go greet the night.

I climb upon stone pillars,
In the hope to find the road.
They crack and break under my weight,
As to reject my heavy load.

I walk into the darkness,
A blunt dagger in my hand.
I hold it high against the sky,
That blunt dagger in my hand.

About This Publication

The Mythic Circle is a small annual literary magazine published by *The Mythopoeia Society*, which celebrates the work of C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien, Charles Williams, and other writers in the mythic tradition. (For more information about the Mythopoeic Society, contact **Edith L. Crowe, Corresponding Secretary**, The Mythopoeic Society, PO Box 6707, Altadena, CA 91003. E-mail: correspondence@mythsoc.org)

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The Mythic Circle exists primarily for the benefit of writers trying to develop their craft in the Mythopoeic tradition and publishes short fiction, poetry, and artwork (mostly illustrations of stories and poems.) We have, as yet, no hard and fast length limits, but we as a small publication, we must think very well of a story more than 5000 words long to publish it. Shorter stories have a better chance. By editorial policy we favor our subscribers.

Submissions and letters of comment should be sent to: Gwenyth Hood, English Department, Marshall University, Huntington WV 25701, or e-mailed to mythiccircle@mythsoc.org. Paper submissions should be double-spaced and should include a stamped, self-addressed envelope. E-mailed submissions are preferred.

ZOHAR

by David Sparenberg

Let sun come up on eastern horizon
Let sunlight infuse the tree of life
Let rainbow intensify sky
over crown of the mystic tree
Let blossoms on bountiful branches
give birth
to countless spiritual beings
and myriad life forms
Let these descend into the world of time
to beautify Earth
and lift creation into primal ecstasy
Let what was in the beginning return
to enlighten us now.



Nights Like This

by

R. L. Boyer

On summer nights like this, the Moon grows full,
Grows thick with faery light, with fragrant depths
Of roses. The soul wakes then upon a bed of
Dreams, sets out from the lost islands of sleep
Through pathless forests to wrest from unyielding
Hands of angels the numinous treasure-spoils of
Ninevah. Beneath footprints grown deep like
Roots of ancient trees, the mystic path is lit by
Golden boughs as the underworld groans
Through the molten cores of island-forming
Stones. On nights like this, the soul descends in
Spirals, plummets down the vast abyss—falling,
Dreams of roses and the music of the sea.



The Boy Who Didn't Know Who-He-Was
(An Existential Fairytale)

By
Ron Boyer

1

Once upon a time, in a land faraway, a little boy grew up in the care of kindly old foster parents who loved the child as if he were their very own. The boy—named “Hans”—naturally believed himself to be the son of these simple older folks. It never occurred to him to question his origins or parentage, though it always seemed a bit strange to him that his folks were so much older than the parents of his little friends in the village where he grew up in what was called the American “Midwest.” There Hans lived in a sparsely populated countryside where most people, including his adopted parents, made their living in the old ways as farmers, growing their own food and raising diverse populations of barnyard animals, including pigs, chickens, cows, goats, ducks, and horses, accompanied by roaming feral cats and farmyard dogs to chase them.

Hans loved his life on the family farm and, while still a mere toddler, he grew strong from his labors, starting early in the pre-dawn darkness milking cows and goats in the shadowy stables, long before the cock crowed announcing a new day. Every morning in the wee hours, Hans assisted his old father with his milking chores. The old man, who devoutly loved the boy, was a simple peasant for whom this rural life seemed perfectly suited. A jolly fellow fond of telling the most amazing stories, he was also a physical brute, a bull-of-a-man with the kind of strength needed for laboring long days harnessed to his mules, ploughing fertile, rock-strewn fields from dawn till dusk.

When the tiny lad rode on the old man's thick shoulders, which happened often when taking breaks together from the hard work, he

felt his tiny warrior's heart grow large. Hans imagined that the powerful old man was a great warhorse as they herded cows in the lowlands and sheep in the high pastures. And sometimes, Hans would perch on the old man's shoulders as he strode through fields and forests, gun in hand, stalking fresh game for their dinner table. Rabbits, squirrels, and deer were favorite prey, along with diverse game birds, from pheasants nesting in the cornfields to the swift-flying partridge and tiny, zigzagging timber-doodles that populated nearby swamps. And from this tender age, the precocious lad acquired not only the heart, but the attitude and skills of a warrior, hunting and fishing in the nearby woods, learning the primitive arts of self-reliance. At the age of two, Hans slew his first pheasant with an arrow. At the age of three, he shot his first rabbit. And at the age of four, he killed his first deer, a handsome buck he trailed expertly through the deep woods, where every path was known to him from frequent romps through windswept fields and surrounding forests where, communing with the wonders of earth and sky, Hans felt most naturally himself.

From the time he could barely walk, Hans desired nothing so keenly as the joys of aimless hours spent wandering through forests nearby. While the old man taught the lad skills of the hunt, it was the free, wild life, wandering alone in the great out-of-doors, which truly called him. A vision of mist gliding over the forest floor at dawn, or over the mirror-like surface of one of the many small lakes and ponds found throughout the region, inspired his soul with rapture. For Hans was a moody and thoughtful lad, and the sounds and odors and sights of the deep woods

engendered delicious feelings inclined to his poetic sensibilities. He knew himself early on to be different, in this way, from the old farmer, who was purely a man of the earth, muscles hard as the stony ground he toiled on. And while the boy was remarkably strong for his age, and skillful in the hunting arts, he was also sensitive and wise beyond his years. Hans sensed that his real self was not at all like that of his parents, for—whenever he was finished with his chores and his father was busy elsewhere—Hans rejoiced in solitude and idle hours, passing long summer days gazing in reverie at his reflection in a deep forest pond, idly watching fish and turtles and water-snakes and all kinds of wild creatures emerge from, then disappear into the shadowy, sun-dappled depths of his favorite woodland pond. There, on the grassy banks beside the heart-shaped pool, Hans whiled away long summer hours lying on his back in the shade beneath the forest canopy, gazing up at the tops of ancient trees so tall they almost blocked the sunlight. Here and there a glimpse of azure sky broke through, where golden sunlight streaked down to the forest floor, illuminating the sparkling depths of the still forest pool and warming the boy's face in the sun. His nostrils filled with the musty odor of damp earth, and all around him sang the primeval language of buzzing insects and full-throated songbirds.

Then one fine summer day, while Hans sat idly on the bank of the pond, bare feet dangling in the water while watching fish circle about his worm-impaled fish hook, the largest bullfrog he'd ever seen leapt suddenly from the shore nearby and landed with a PLOP!—scattering the fish and startling the boy from his reveries. Hans watched as the giant bullfrog, with just a few long breaststrokes, swam gracefully down into the deep shadows and disappeared beneath a log. Inspired by the sudden appearance of the frog, Hans wondered if he might use his fishhook to catch the frog instead. After all, he had always loved the taste of frog legs above all the other

wild game his family typically feasted on, preferring them even to his favorite bluegills and perch. But as Hans watched his wormed-hook resting beside the fallen log and waited for the frog to re-emerge, he could hardly believe his eyes when, from the shadows beneath the log at the bottom of the pond, a beautiful maiden with long golden hair emerged and ascended from the depths towards him. The little boy's heart leapt at sight of her, for never had he seen a more strikingly handsome figure. As the numinous creature rose quickly to the surface, Hans felt himself swoon with giddy joy and, for a moment, he felt he might fall into the depths and disappear, just like the bullfrog.

"Hello, little Hans!" the mermaid cheerfully called as her face broke the surface of the pond where his own reflection had been a split-second before. "What brings you here on such a fine summer day?"

Hans wondered how this mysterious, fair-haired nymph knew his name, and he could not answer her, tongue-tied by the most beautiful face he'd ever seen. Still, though he'd never seen anyone like her, the Nereid's face seemed oddly familiar, as was the sense of enchantment this fleeting dreamlike memory stimulated. Hans wondered how he could possibly know her. As he pondered, the beguiling water-nymph reached out and touched him tenderly. Her smile warmed his heart, awakening sensations of an extraordinary and subtle kind. And mingled with her unearthly charms, which he found irresistible, Hans felt comforted, sensing in her a nurturing, kind, and protective nature.

Instinctively, Hans knew that she knew him better, and loved him more, than even the old woman who had raised him, who—until this very moment—he had adored above all women, the old crone who, beginning while Hans was still a babe in his cradle, doted on him as if he were her darling, royal prince. The old woman, whom he knew only as "mother", cooked great feasts of wild game, and washed

Hans tenderly every evening before bed in the old wooden tub where she poured steaming water from a pot, heated on a nearby woodstove, and read the boy fairytales like “Mother Goose” and “Uncle Wiggly” at bedtime. Such were the charms of this golden-haired lady of the pond that Hans completely forgot his dear old mother, for no attraction in the world could rival this strangely intimate woodland nymph.

As she stroked his hair gently and glanced into his eyes, her voice lured him like a Siren’s song, though her lips never moved. To Hans, her form spoke a language of enchantment, a primordial language without words that called to mind his deepest yearnings. As he gazed at her, the lady’s shining countenance tugged at the boy’s heartstrings. In her silent singing, he gradually recognized the musical inner shape that called him from the depths of his most private reveries. In his mind’s eye, Hans suddenly witnessed a string of images tracing back to his earliest forgotten memories, until he saw himself floating inside a luminous sack, a twisted fleshy cord connecting him to the wall of his tiny liquid home.

“Yes, little Hans,” the water-nymph’s voice sang softly. “This tiny pond was once your home. It is time to come home and learn who you really are.”

“Please tell me: Where did I come from?” Hans heard himself ask in reply.

But when he opened his eyes, his numinous visitor was gone. With a sigh, the small boy picked himself up and shuffled home, moping, through the dark woods. He arrived home at the tiny cottage farm house just in time for evening chores.

That night, just before sleep, Hans worked up the courage to ask the old woman: “Mother, where do I come from?”

The old woman smiled indulgently at the innocent five year old, and told him the well-worn tale of the stork and how it dropped him in her lap one cold winter’s eve. But Hans wasn’t satisfied with her answer. He knew

instinctively that she was lying.

“Mother, I don’t mean that. I mean: *Where do I come from?*”

The old woman grew pensive: “Why do you ask such a question, Hans?”

At first reluctantly, he told her about the beautiful lady with golden-hair who lived in the pond in the woods. At mention of her, the old crone grew anxious. For the first time in his life, the little boy realized he had hurt his mother’s feelings. Her tone and the expression on her face told him he’d disappointed her and made her anxious and afraid.

“Shush, now! You are too young to worry about such things,” she scolded as she tucked him in bed. “Just promise me you’ll never go alone into those woods again. Now, promise me!”

Anxious, he shook his head “yes”, but Hans already knew he would break his promise. A twinge of shame wrenched his little heart. The voice of conscience he knew so well warned Hans that he’d better do as she asked or something terrible might happen. He fell asleep, for the first time he could recall, in the grip of galloping panic.

That night, as he slumbered, Hans had a terrible dream. He found himself back in the same deep forest, but now it was night there, too. Gone was the comfort of the dappled sunlight on the pond. All was swallowed in darkness, and no light broke through except for a few stars shining in the gaps of night sky that opened between the tree tops, high above. The sounds of the forest were no longer familiar but grew pregnant with danger. Even the familiar PLOP! of the great bullfrog startled him and froze his tiny heart with horror. Then the ominous hooting of a great horned owl nearby warned him that something strange was about to happen.

Hans glanced nervously through the darkness in the direction of the pond, where he heard a splashing sound. In the shadows, the dark shape of a woman emerged from the waters, dripping wet, approaching him. He

wanted to run, but his frozen little legs refused to cooperate. And with growing awareness of his paralysis, his terror grew stronger still. He couldn't lift his arms, either, to protect himself and keep the shadowy figure at bay. In fact, he couldn't move at all, and waited helplessly in the darkness as the malevolent presence drew near.

"Where do *you* come from? Where do *you* come from?" the dark stranger rasped. As she drew close, Hans dimly made out the face of an old hag, the sort of face he'd imagined from the stories of witches in fairytales he'd heard so many times from the old crone who had raised him.

"*You* shouldn't ask too many questions, if I were *you*!" the crone warned, bending down and drawing near, mere inches from his face. At sight of her face so near, and as the rotting stench of her foul breath engulfed him, little Hans swooned with terror ...

Just then he woke up terrified, struggled to catch his breath, and whimpered in the night.

His old mother, awakened by the commotion, approached and comforted him. "You've just had a nightmare. There, there boy. Everything is all right now."

Then she carried him to her bed, and tucked him safely between her large, soft-bellied body and the powerfully-built old farmer, whose snoring shook the rafters of the tiny cottage and quickly sang the child to sleep.

2

The following day, Hans slipped away into the forest again. Everything had changed. For the first time, the joy he always felt in the forest was gone. Everywhere a dark feeling permeated the woodlands. The farther he entered the forest, the more ominous it felt. An eerie stillness filled the wood. The birds stopped singing. The creatures of the forest were nowhere to be seen. The deep shadows of

evening had already descended at noon, and so dim was the early afternoon light that it reminded him of the setting in his frightening dream. The skies overhead darkened, threatening to rain. Still Hans fought the fear bravely, waiting patiently beside the pool for the golden-haired maiden to appear. Time slowed to a standstill as he waited. And, as many children do, he gradually grew impatient after what seemed like many days had passed.

Just when he thought his quest might be in vain and was about to give up, Hans glanced up along the bank. There he saw the great bullfrog sitting. The creature stared at him, bulging eyes riveted to his, as if knowing some deep secret. Then it leapt again into the pond with a splash— PLOP! And once again, just like the day before, the lad fell instantly into a deep reverie. Suddenly, Hans noticed a flashing movement in the watery depths. Before he could even catch his breath, the golden-haired princess of the pond appeared. At sight of her, his anxiety—and the bone-deep chills after so many hours waiting in the rain—instantly melted away. As if Nature itself were magically attuned to her, the clouds disappeared, and the forest was once again filled with warm sunlight and birdsong, as it had been the day before.

"Hello, my little Hans," murmured the woodland fairy of the depths. "What brings you here again today?"

Reluctantly at first, he told her of his terrible dream, and how sad he felt for having disappointed his dear old mother, and how he was disappointing her further by returning just now, secretly, to the pond in the wood. But, in spite of his guilt, and his old mother's stern warning, he couldn't resist the charm of the water nymph's call. In fact, Hans confessed, he felt that he had no choice at all. The lady of the pond smiled and laughed, and this was the most beautiful sound the boy had ever heard. Her laughter seemed a fairy song. And gently stroking his face and fine yellow hair, she told him there was nothing more to fear.

After a moment, Hans summoned his courage and asked her where he had come from and also who he was.

"My little Hans," the nymph replied, speaking in riddles, "you must keep asking the questions if you truly seek an answer. Some questions you are meant to live with for a long while before the answer comes. But you must be patient and keep asking. After all, how will you ever know who you truly are, unless you know where you come from?"

Before he could ask what she meant, the fairy vanished beneath the pond's surface again, and with a few quick and graceful strokes, disappeared as swiftly as she'd come.

Alone once more, Hans heard the soft hooting of the wise horned owl in the nearby forest, as if answering his question with an echo.

"Who? Who? Who?" asked the owl, seemingly privy to his inmost thoughts.

3

That night, as she prepared the boy for bed, the old woman noticed that something in Hans had changed. His attitude seemed somehow different. Sensing an unexpected maturity and detachment emerging in her little son, the crone's heart shrank with fear.

"Boy, did you obey me? Or did you break your promise to me after all?" his mother asked with an unusually stern tone. Her inquisitive eyes locked on his, probing and testing.

Hans grew tense at the surprisingly sharp tone of the old woman, and at the hint of coldness with which her eyes now beheld him. At first, he couldn't quite put his finger on it, yet there was something at once familiar and uncanny about his old mother. Suddenly, Hans realized that she looked and sounded just like the horrid old witch in his dream the night before.

Then, the old farmer intervened with his wife.

"Dearest, now dearest, don't give the boy such a hard time," the old man pleaded. "He

was only doing what comes natural to him. He loves the fields and forests, just as I have taught him."

The old woman's expression warmed as she smiled and agreed. "I just want him to be safe and take care." But, glancing down sideways at the boy, coldness flickered in her eyes, warning Hans. "I just don't want anything to *happen* to him out there."

She quickly tucked Hans into bed, and began to read his least favorite bedtime tale, a story of the Baba Yaga that reminded him of "Hansel and Gretel," lost in the woods and about to be baked and eaten by the witch. His little heart beat fast as Hans fell into a deep sleep and began to dream. For the crone had forced him to drink a bitter potion made of herbs and roots, the better to ease his passage into sleep.

In the dream, Hans found himself again in the dark late-night forest near the pond. He heard the old owl's haunting "Who? Who? Who?" as he watched the water anxiously, not knowing if the golden-haired nymph or the terrifying witch would emerge. At the sound of a voice behind him in the dark, the startled boy almost leapt out of his skin.

"Who? Who? Who?" rasped the witch, imitating the owl. At the sound, the wise old bird, sitting on a large low-hanging branch nearby, repeated: "Who? Who? Who?"

"Oh, shut up!" she scolded the bird, pointing threateningly in his direction with a crooked stick. Being wise, the great owl took wing and vanished quickly into the dark woods. Then she turned to the boy: "I thought I warned you not to come out here again."

As he listened, heart pounding, Hans recognized the voice of the old woman he had always known as his mother.

"I thought I told you not to ask so many questions!" the witch-crone warned.

Hans noticed that she looked much fiercer than before. He also noticed, for the first time, that her eyes were sightless; two filmy, pale-white orbs stared blindly in his general

direction. Then he noticed her mouth gaping wide, her few jagged, fanglike teeth dripping blood. The malodorous orifice, only inches away, opened wide to swallow him.

Hans, startled, woke up in a sweat, the rank stench of the witch's hot breath lingering in the air around his bed. Nearby, his old foster parents slept soundly, a chorus of snores alternating between them. Silently, on tiptoes, the boy snuck into their great warm bed and snuggled safely between them. With a wary glance at his old mother, who no longer resembled the witch, Hans fell back to sleep.

4

On the following day, after finishing his pre-dawn chores and eating a stout breakfast of bread and porridge, Hans set off again for the deep woods, vowing to himself to find answers to his questions or never return. As he made his way across the lowland pastures to the edge of the wood, the skies grew dark, gathering force. Soon a thunderhead formed in the skies above the forest, which grew preternaturally quiet, except for the loud raindrops that fell to the forest floor through the wet leaves high overhead. The pitter-patter of the rain on the leaves and ground all around him—a song of the forest that lightened his mood—was quickly transformed as heavy winds shook the treetops and thunderclaps rumbled, shaking the ground.

At the side of the pond, Hans watched and waited as before, his eyes searched for the bullfrog, whose presence reliably signaled the nymph's otherwise unpredictable appearance. The bullfrog was nowhere to be seen. All day long Hans waited in the rain, but the water-fairy failed to appear. As the long hours passed, Hans grew evermore despondent and restless, until he rose and impatiently stalked the margins of the pond, staring wild-eyed into the murky depths for any sign of movement. His small body shivered and trembled, soaked by the cold, drenching rain.

Suddenly, a loud thunderclap shattered the skies high above the leafy canopy directly

overhead. A bolt of lightning streaked and sizzled, piercing through the small opening in the treetops and striking the surface of the pond. As the instantly expanding circle of electricity sizzled outwards, spreading out along the water's surface over the pond, Hans noticed too late that his foot had slipped into the water. The electric current engulfed him, making his aura one with the pond. Hans swooned, encircled in an aureole of light, and fell headlong into the depths. Nearing the bottom of the pool, on the verge of being drowned, he heard the Nereid's flute-like voice, singing nearby in the enchanted depths.

"Where are you going?" the voice asked repeatedly. "Where? Oh where?"

"I don't know! I don't know!" the boy heard a familiar voice within him reply, as he sank through the watery depths.

"Of course," said the laughing golden-haired lady, "if you don't know where you come from, you cannot possibly know where you're going." She laughed again, louder this time. "And if you don't know where you come from, you can hardly know who you truly are!"

Hans heard her voice clearly and felt strangely comforted by her words, even though he failed to fully grasp her meaning. To him, her voice sounded like a lullaby; she spoke in a musical language that seemed to issue from the depths of his soul. While he was still dreaming, the water-nymph told him—in a whispered phantasmagoria of fleeting images—of the mysteries of his origins, the forgotten secrets of his original nature before the world was made.

Once again, Hans found himself floating in a small bag of sunlit flesh and waters as he listened.

"Once upon a time, in a faraway land," he heard her voice say, "a Prince and Princess conceived a child, their first-born son.

"The Prince, a great warrior, had returned from war in distant lands. He won the Princess' hand in a contest of arms. They

prayed for a child, and in a dream an Evil Spirit told the Prince that he would have a son. But there would be a price: He would have to die in order for his son to be born.

“The Prince was sad, but desiring above all things the continuing legacy of his family name, agreed to the accursed pact. Soon thereafter, in the middle of night, in the depths of winter—while the Earth still slept, dreaming of spring—a son was born. The Prince, wounded by a sorcerer’s poisonous dart, died shortly thereafter.

“The widowed Princess, stricken with grief, nearly died of a broken heart. But her late husband’s parents, a King and his Queen, offered to raise the child secretly as their own son. To persuade her, the King and Queen made great promises to the Princess concerning the infant’s royal inheritance, and the greatness of the noble destiny to which he would now be sole heir. So the Princess, reluctantly, after many months grieving—first for the loss of her husband, and now for the loss of her son—finally conceded and gave the infant into their care. But on the day the child’s mother, the still-grieving Princess, left to begin her new life, the old Queen, who was secretly an evil witch, sent her familiar—a great

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bullfrog—to cast a spell on the Princess. And in the depths of an enchanted forest nearby, the frog cast a spell that turned her into a lonely water-sprite. There, for many years, she dwelled in loneliness under a log in the depths of a heart-shaped forest pool until, one day, a very special little boy appeared beside the pond, dreaming unknowingly of her, his true mother. And hearing his dream song, she rose to the surface to greet her lost son, who had already grown into a sturdy little lad.”

As the golden-haired nymph smiled, Hans woke up. He was no longer in the wild forest, as he supposed, not even in his own bed. He found himself in a favored place, the bed of his old parents, beside a large warm body that awakened within his sleepy heart the silkiest threads of comfort and feeling. He opened his sleep-filled eyes to look, but his old foster father, the farmer, wasn’t there. Then he turned to his old mother who, snuggling, held him securely from behind, arms wrapped tightly about him. But, as he turned to look at her, to his great surprise, the old crone was also gone.

There, in her place next to Hans, lay the sleeping water-nymph, his beloved Princess with Hair of Gold. And, for the first time in his life, little Hans actually knew *Who-He-Was*.

A Touch of Song

by

David Sparenberg

I must sing songs that have never been sung before. Or else songs sung so often, yet never attentively heard.

Oh beyond hearing! Felt-songs, core-songs, songs felt in the surging marrow of vigorous bones, and deep ocean and the dark loam of soul; fruited songs, apple rounded, grape succulent, fig leafed with morphic resonance. Songs

giving rise to renewing forms of enchantment. No: not entertainment songs, but enlightenment! Rooted in the living coral of archetypes, in numberless shapes and species and the generations of planetary memories. I

must set my song-voice free, to howl with wolves, to graze with caribou, roar with lions, growl with bears, to fly in circles-crying with hawks, with appointment of ascending sun, of serenading full moon, and to float with lotus on Buddha-water, caressed and smiled and kissed by Jesus-wind. Much

the same as when I tender my fingertips gentle over and around the delicate cherub cheeks of infants and euphoric toddlers. Children become revelations on a touch of song: those calm and butterflied heaven faces!

True...

And I must sing songs to overcome fear; adult lullabies--melodies these, not to lull to sleep but to awaken--and erotics too; songs aired to help make life stronger than time. Messiah songs at an end of time. And

what a time this is! What songs I must sing!

The Legend of the Wild Man

by John Taylor

The bazaar of Babylon fell silent as he stepped into the square,
an ancient time-worn hunter, wild eyed and gray of hair.
Barefoot with a wooden spear, clothed in skins of beasts,
His features dark and savage, as in the lands northeast.
The merchant people whispered tales of men from long ago,
who dwelt in caves and savage things did hunt with club and bow.

Throwback! Barbarian!
Gray of hair and face.
This lone wild man remains
of a lost and bygone race.

He spoke no word, the Wild Man, nor uttered any sound,
but took his ancient wooden spear and etched into the ground;
a portrait of a horrid thing, a dragon without wings,
feasted on great warriors, its gut the tomb of kings.
He pointed at the image of the beast from deepest Hell
and gestured curiosity of where the creature dwells.

Ignorant! Illiterate!
To believe a wild tale.
But then a traveler spoke a name
and his mockers all grew pale.

The SIRRUSH-cave of Belthshazar, the ancient throne of fear
where heathen lords once sacrificed a maiden twice a year,
unto fiends who fed on men like the image in the dust.
And on this traveler's account the Wild Man put his trust.
And ventured forth still westward, toward the nearby SIRRUSH-cave,
joined by those men of Babylon too bold to fear the grave.

Impossible! Incredible!
The Wild Man's quest did seem.
But was it but a moment ago,
he himself was but a dream?

They followed him for hours, up the grim and rocky path
strewn everywhere were bones of men, slain by primal wrath.
Through this barren rocky grave, a chill, fell wind now moans.
Its whispers name the unhallowed place; it is the Vale of Bones.
Ahead an altar black and grim, forged in an elder age,

bore upon it the bloodstains of a great and elder rage.

Unsettling! Unnerving!
The dead among the stones.
But even not so dreadful as
the cave above the bones.

The SIRRUSH-cave of Belthshazar silenced them in awe.
That graven arch and elder runes that formed a fearsome maw.
Surely greater hands than men's had hewn such giant stones,
and surely far more vile jaws had filled the Vale of Bones.
The Wild Man then charged ahead and on the altar stood
and with his elder spear in hand, revealed a flute of wood.

Enchanting! Enticing!
His melody fills the air
now answered by a hellish roar
within the fearsome lair.

The beast broke forth, a scaly fiend, upon two legs like towers.
Thick of hide and bony snout, its hunger was its power
With flailing tail and raging jaws ready to devour.
The Wild Man, last of his kind, faced his finest hour.
Approaching now before him through the graven ring,
was the dreadful shadow of the Tyrant Lizard's king.

Saurian! Reptilian!
Dread fiend of bygone age!
Dark lord of the carnivores,
Ravenous with rage!

The Wild Man, he trembled not, nor showed the slightest fear,
but uttered forth a battle cry and raised his honored spear.
He struck like lightning, drew first blood, the Tyrant roared in pain,
and the awestruck Men of Babylon knew his quest was not in vain.
But the Tyrant knew no fear that day, upon the Vale of Bones,
and lashed out with fearsome talons to forge wounds of its own.

Brutality! Savagery!
Man and beast trade blows.
Feral strength and primal wrath
Consume the ancient foes.

The Wild Man was fearless still, though cut by jagged snout,
gave no quarter, not an inch, in this his final bout.
Both alone, both the last, vanished are their kind.

But for the glory of the hunt, he'd end his rival's line.
The elder world, and savage times, would be at last laid low.
And for the honor of his tribe, he'd strike the final blow.

Valor! Honor!
His courage paves the way
to glory now and evermore,
smite the beast, seize the day!

For bloody hours the battle raged, until the light began to fail
When in despair, the Wild Man charged and seized its scaly tail.
Across its back he ran and leapt, with feral hunter's skill.
And with his spear he rent its throat, behold the epic kill!
With a final raging cry, the blow of death found home,
And the Tyrant's ruin was writ in blood upon the Vale of Bones.

Triumphant! Magnificent!
The Wild Man prevails.
His savage bane lies cold and dead,
by mighty spear impaled.

Triumphant, torn, and ragged, his nightmare foe now past.
His quest fulfilled, his life complete, the Wild Man breathes his last.
The Men of Babylon stood in awe of their hero slain
And took a vow upon his grave that he had not died in vain.
To ever live with courage, and right what wrongs they can
And fight with honor to the end, as did the Wild Man.

Destiny! Integrity!
The Men of Babylon
swore with their dying breath
to ever carry on.

For the Wild Man weep not, be not distressed nor scared.
For by tales of his courage, fair Andromeda was spared.
For him Saint George fought dragons, and Arthur's men were brave.
For knighthood was born of an oath, upon the Wild Man's grave.

Blazerock

by

Ryder W. Miller

If only he could be big and brave like Conan or one of those other fantasy heroes, wished Tim Morton. Instead he was just a low level computer technician and was afraid of going to the gym because most people were bigger there. He was one of those guys who got angry at those holes on the bus who made a lot of noise and threatened people, but usually did nothing about it. That was part of the sacrifice of being non violent. Then again if everybody was violent there would be a lot more problems. He was not quite the peaceful warrior or at least not the warrior part either.

It was fun when he was younger reading those fascinating fantasy novels. He had read the greats. He had read Tolkien, Moorcock, Donaldson, Brooks, LeGuin, and others. But life did not turn out very dangerous or adventuresome for him. He was just a boring guy who went to work and went home and read his genre stuff. He had a quiet life. He actually could not move out of his parent's home even though he had a job. It was just too expensive. Something was missing even though he should not complain. There were frustrations still in this future, but things were okay. He was living the good life and not having adventures.

He knew his computers and computer games though. He was probably better off that the world was not really like it was in fantasy books. He was better off, but he would like to have gone on some adventure sometime like they did in those fantasy novels. He would like to be tested. An idea was beginning to dawn on him.

He had been part of some of the virtual reality seminars and was amazed at the

progress that had been made in that field over the last few generations. Maybe he could try out some of their adventures? He probably could do so without getting his hands dirty. He got interested once when he read "We Can Remember It For You Wholesale" by Philip K. Dick. Not all of the future had caught up with him yet. It had not become a time where memories could be planted in one's mind. The Cyberpunks, however, were on to things more modern. Some of their ideas had become possible.

There now were these great interactive virtual reality games. They had progressed a great deal over the last one hundred years. He could afford an adventure because he was willing to work during the weekend. He had been saving some money. He probably could have moved out of his parents house, but that might not have been a good financial move. Maybe he could become the man he always wanted to be in the game? Maybe he could even pick his own hero name.

"Morton" sounded a bit much like Mordor, but it was actually significantly different. He could be "Captain Morton". Maybe it could be an ocean adventure? He could sail the seven seas not looking for fish, but instead, adventure. He imagined that since the systems connected with the nervous system that there might be some discomfort associated. It was not likely that he was going to die from it.

Rather than an ocean adventure maybe he could go and fight some despicable monster. It could be a Dragon or maybe a giant spider. The spiders unfortunately seemed a little bit too popular these days. He had learned what it

felt like to hold a sword in his hand at a recent Renaissance Faire, but he did not know what it would be like to have one's life depend upon it.

He remembered at the Faire learning how to swing one. It was a special feeling. It was more interesting than banging on the keyboards, even if that made him feel more secure and comfortable.

Why the net had changed the world and now he could search out his adventure offerings on the world wide web!

He decided to do some of that surfing which had become very comforting in a way. He was not quite connected into computers, but they sure had changed the world and the way people lived. It was not quite "The Matrix" but some were more connected than others. Some even could buy brain implants where they could access large amounts of information.

He just wanted to enter a fantasy land like they did in the holodecks in old Star Trek shows. Maybe he should go on a prescribed adventure and pretend he was someone? Naah he thought. Better to not know what the outcome was going to be, going in. He could pretend he was a famous hero and go on some adventure he had not read. Or he could just see what was available now. He figured there were a lot of options now in 2165. He could have something tailored to him. These things could be so sophisticated. A fantasy adventure could be like a nice walk through a chill Fall breeze. It could change his life. He would have to see what the providers of such things had to say. He would now have to see what was available.

After searching on the web he decided to approach one of the Virtual Quest companies. Some were generalists and could offer you all sorts of genre adventures. There were many games he could play. He could be a Gumshoe or Space Explorer? It could be a Halloween adventure? He wanted to fight a Dragon or something like that. He wanted to test his skills and cunning against a monster that was terrorizing the countryside.

He decided to go and talk with Monster Quest to see if they were the right fit for him. They were located in a run-down part of town. There were the big players—the ones with a lot of money, but there were also the independent who were more affordable. There was all this conflict now about what people should be allowed to do in cyberspace. There were regulatory agencies. Many people decided to try out the girls there. There were cases now where young people pretended that they were older in order to meet older lusty ladies.

The operators could get in trouble for such things. There were a few incidences where gaming companies were shut down. Most complied with the sexual restriction rulings. Not being able to do whatever they and their customers wanted to do cut down on the profits.

The results were that some companies could only operate in sleazy parts of town to save money. In such places they were more able to hide their adult games and experiences. Morton wanted something adult if he could afford it. Not that he was searching for what most people referred to as adult content. Rather he wanted something that was just a little more realistic than some of the mainstream gaming he had seen. Those programs were limited to younger people.

He was not sure if he was capable of playing the more realistic games. He wanted to feel the action. He wanted to hear the sounds and notice the smell in the air. He wanted to swing the sword and notice when it crashed into other things. He worked out a bit and was in okay shape. He figured he could handle it.

Monster Quest was located in an okay part of town during the right hours of the day. The sessions, once you got plugged in, were in real time and one could be locked in for a couple of days. He wanted a real adventure, hopefully one with a love interest. Maybe there could be a damsel in distress? Maybe instead a woman warrior as a companion or colleague? He did

like how those women looked in those outfits and old world dresses.

He decided to take the trolley to speak with the game designers in person. They allowed him to take a few days off work for this cyber adventure.

At work people who knew what he was going to do were calling him Captain Morton or Morton the Brave. He could wear whatever he wanted to, but in the game he probably would be wearing armor and a sword. He preferred chain mail to armor because it would be less heavy and more flexible.

The man at the counter was friendly and knew who he was when he walked through the door. All over the walls of the outfit, which was the size of a large corner grocery store, were pictures of some of the adventures people could have with them. There were monsters, dragons, houses at the top of the hill, mysterious islands.....

"Mr. Morton is it?" the man at the front desk asked.

"Yes. It is I."

"We already saw your specs. Come inside and speak with Rick. He will set you up for the right adventure."

Morton approached the man sitting at the desk who got up to shake his hand.

"Hello. I am Rick. I am here to find the right adventure for you."

"Great," said Morton.

"We can't do everything we like, but we still have some flexibility to do unconventional games. The censors don't really bother us in this part of town."

Rick walked over to a small refrigerator by his desk.

"Would you like something to drink?"

Morton said yes and was given an energy drink.

"This will be the last drink you will have for a few days. We do keep your vitals going while you are hibernating in the adventure. According to your response I understand that you want a traditional fantasy quest?"

"Yes. I would like to be a hero. I would like to save a village and win the love of a beautiful woman."

"We have some of those available. It is best not to go into too many details, so that you will be surprised by what follows."

"I understand."

"There will be a Monster and a woman. The rest will be a surprise."

"I could not ask for more."

Rick pointed at a booth with a chair that had a lot of cords and wires.

"That will be your room, bed, for the next few days. We already have your specs, but there are a few contracts you need to sign first."

Morton smiled, knowing this might be too good to be true. Soon however he would be in the fresh air with maybe a sword in his hand to swing and a mount below him. There might also be romance. They would have heard of Morton the Brave where he was going.

He buckled up and attached the cords with relish and they decide to fall asleep into the program.

Morton woke up in a large room with armor on and a sword by his side. He sprung awake without memory of how he got there. Before him was a banquet hall that was almost empty. Before him sitting on a throne was a woman of extraordinary beauty. She was arrayed with fine cloth and jewels. A few stood before her. They were mostly courtiers, but there also were a few soldiers.

Morton figured he would find out soon what this was about. He also was kneeling and his knee was bothering him. He decided to stand up and shake his knee.

"At your service," Morton said figuring that he was among royalty and that is what they expected to hear. It was a common phrase from the past, he figured. He had read it in some great books.

"You already said that," said the woman on the throne. "There are already many at my service."

"What would you have me do, milady?" Morton asked.

"Why, kill the monster that has been terrorizing the countryside."

"Are you a lady in distress?"

Morton noticed now the rings in her ears and the jewels on her arm and neck. She spoke like they did in Shakespeare here. Her hair was a wondrous orange red, but she was too far away for him to see the color of her eyes.

"That is not the sort of question to ask a queen," she said. "You come highly recommended. We understand that you have done such things before. This creature must be stopped. It will take someone with unusual talents."

"Nice to hear that I have been talked about well before," said Morton in a more subdued voice. "This is my only line of work, and you needed a warrior who has done such things before."

"Yes," said the Queen.

"What manner of beast is this," said Morton with some trepidation.

"It is a dragon, actually a jade one which has made its way to our kingdom from the South. It does not talk much and belches hot acid and sparks. It is a not Firedrake which will destroy and burn our forests, but instead a poisonous sort of thing that eats our livestock and kills everything it encounters. There are one hundred Archers who are guarding the castle and it knows to keep away," she said.

The courtiers around her became grim and looked at him now with worry in their eyes.

"Why is it here? What is it called?"

"It has been called Blazerock because of its shining color. It seeks to terrorize us, but we don't know why. It is not like we can talk with it very much."

"When it flies through the air it makes a screaming noise," said one of the courtiers.

"We sent a few men to speak with it in its lair, but they have not returned."

"We had decided to guard the tower, but it must be stopped."

"Well, I am your man," said Morton who figured that this sort of thing tended to work out in these cyber fantasies. He was worried that his knee bothered him until he straightened it out. There might actually be some real danger here. There might be some pain and discomfort.

These systems also seemed to be unpredictable. It would depend upon what decisions he made. It did seem a little cartoonish right now, but this was gaming. These things and adventures were not possible any more in the "real" world of this "bright" future.

"It will fall on your shoulders, Morton, to save the kingdom from this foul creature. We can supply you with some trusted men if you are interested," said one of the crowd.

"Yes. That would be helpful. I will leave with them tomorrow. Tonight I need to get some rest and some food in me to get some strength for this ordeal."

"Why, we have slaughtered a lamb for this occasion."

"That will more than suffice."

Morton realized that he should have paid more attention to the videos and read more so he would have a better idea of what he was doing here. But on second thought he realized that this would be more of an adventure if he learned things as he went along. Here was a new world to explore. He also like the feel of this sword in his hand. There were designs on the handle.

He was awakened again the following morning after a night of feasting. Those in the court realized this might very well be his last meal. He ate and drank wine and mead, but not to excess. They tasted strange to him and he

was a bit afraid they would not agree with his system.

Stepping out of his bed and putting on his armor he felt his feet firmly on the ground. He shook his shoulders and gave his sword a few swings with each arm. There were two men with him. They identified themselves as Oin and Glomer. They would assist him on this quest to rid the countryside of the horrific beast Blazerock.

It was a bright day with large cumulus clouds dispersed in the blue skies. He enjoyed the green scenery. Many of the men on the tower guard, the archers, nodded to him as he made his way out of the gate of the tower. They pointed east and figured he could find the monster there.

The world was lush and green like he had only seen on clear days in some of the parks he would go to in the city. The wind was refreshing and put Morton in a lively mood. He and the few with him made their way into the hills. They were rolling and green this time of year. Morton realized that he was really getting his money's worth with this. But despite the wonders that surrounded him, there was trepidation now. He never faced a dragon before.

Blazerock had scared everyone already. Here he was on a special mission to save the day while none had succeeded in the past. He thought back to his Tolkien reading now. Dragons were poisonous so even if he was able to stab one he would need to worry about the blood. They also had tough skin so even if he was close enough he might not be able to puncture one. A dragon would have soft spots-like its eyes-but if he got that close he was likely to be burned or bitten.

He had a bow, but he had not used that very often. There were also a few stout warriors with him who might come in handy. Blazerock, however, might be too much for them. They might all die in this. Then the game and program would end. He could fail in this. It was part of the agreement that he

signed. That would be a big bummer, but that would not mean he would die in real life. It would just be a disappointment and he would not get his money back.

He would not be called Morton the Brave back at work if he died. He would be a failure. But now, like in many of these adventures, he was an underdog against what was probably an unforgiving foe.

Blazerock has wandered far and wide. He might be a few days away. Morton had heard that he liked to torment and ridicule his opponents. Maybe if brawn would not work, this could become a game of wits? Maybe he could out-think this vile creature. Maybe riddles. Vile was what he wanted from the get go, but now he was not sure that he was really getting what he wanted.

He turned towards his companions Oin and Glomer and was impressed by how fierce they looked. They weren't quite hardened, but they clearly were seasoned. There were three of them here against this abomination. But would that be enough? Morton realized that he was really scared about this. He had never done this before in real life. Here though he should trust his instincts. They were programmed into him and the game. He would just need to stay stout of heart.

He was a hero here and he had to remind himself of this. His first step was to find this monster and then he would figure out how to do away with it. He pulled out his sword again to shake it and see how it felt in his hand. His grasp was strong and firm.

Half a day's walk away from the castle they decided to stop for lunch. There was a nearby stream and a pear tree. The fruit was pure and delicious, more than could be expected.

"Not a lot of damage here," said Glomer. "Blazerock knew not to get too close to the castle for too long."

"This one is supposed to be an odd one," said Oin.

“Well let's get a move on it,” said Morton. “There will be time for celebration and discussion when this is all over.”

“That's right. We have a monster to kill,” said Oin.

Morton realized that they would want praise for doing this also, but much of this really fell on his shoulders. These were somewhat common mercenaries, but he was the hero. They would be depending upon his might and shrewdness.

He figured there would be damage up ahead and that might lead them to Blazerock who apparently was different from some other dragons. He was not sitting on a pile of gold like others. Blazerock would probably storm and take over the castle for that if it could. But at the castle, he would have the defenders to contend with. Morton would like to be preventive. He would like to ensure that this never occurred. He would like to match wits with it in the field. That, however, might not happen for a few days.

Meanwhile there was wonderful weather to enjoy. He was happy that it was spring. Morton enjoyed the breeze and the flowers. It was a beautiful country, this land he did not have a name for yet or maybe he forgot. It did not matter now. It was green and luscious and he needed to take care of it.

A day later they found a something that was a bit more than a hill and decided to climb it. From there they might be able to see the creature. From the top they saw what looked like a snake with wings in the distance. Morton was happy that they had found their quarry. They would just need to get to it before it flew away.

Morton had a plan. They would taunt it so it would venture toward them to attack. Then they would disable its wings with their bows so that it could not fly away. They could then either charge to try to damage it some more from a distance. Maybe they could reason with it or maybe they would bludgeon it. For now they would make their way towards it. It could

only be a few miles away from them at this point.

Morton stopped to take a close look at the creature before them. It was green and long like a snake, but his also had small black wings that could catapult it into the sky. He was amazed that such small wings could give this creature flight. Airplanes astounded him also, but that was what science could do. It was quirky in its own way. The dragon, however, was a magical creature and it was not surprising that it could do magical things.

Those wings he figured could probably be damaged easily. It was the vile mouth and thick skin that they really had to contend with. Also the malice and cunning of a dragon could be formidable. Blazerock might not be as talkative if it could not fly away anytime it wanted to.

For now they would need to approach the dragon in such a way that it would not be compelled to fly off. It might also leap out at them when it saw them. It was not likely to be skittish.

Morton figured they were about two miles away now. Once they were seen approaching, the dragon might wait for them or might fly at them. He could not see if it was awake or asleep from this distance. He figured they could make some noise to get it's attention. First they would need to get a little bit closer for this.

Oin and Glomer looked apprehensive now, but there was also a gleam in their eyes that looked as if they wanted to get this over with. Morton told them that they should aim for the wings. De-winged the dragon would be angry and in a lot of pain. It might be more willing to compromise then.

The armor did seem to weigh down on him more heavily now, but soon they would be noticed and then they would be in striking distance. Morton figured the dragon would not anticipate that they would aim for its wings.

They walked closer for a mile and the dragon did not move. It might be resting

thought Morton or maybe it was just waiting. He could not see if its eyes were still open or not. He decided to make some noise.

"Blazerock" he yelled, but nothing happened.

Closer they walked with all three bows drawn. If they could not negotiate they would need to be closer for the first volley of arrows. They were walking slower now, they were apprehensive, but the dragon did not notice them for some time.

"Why do you walk so slow?" was the first thing Blazerock said, surprising them.

"We come to talk with you if we can," said Morton not sure what he would say next.

"What for?"

"You have wreaked havoc and now you must stop," Morton said angrily.

"And who are you to beseech me?"

"I am Morton the Brave. If you do not listen to reason you will not be accommodated."

Morton realized the he had not used the best word choices here, but the dragon responded.

"Why, I am free to do whatever I want."

"At your own peril," countered Morton.

Meanwhile Glomer and Oin had found places to stand and their bows were ready.

"Give us the order," said Oin quietly.

The dragon contined, "At my own peril. You think you can stop me?"

Blazerock was now standing on its back legs. He loomed in the sky and had angry look on its face.

"We are here to reason with you."

"You are?"

"What is it you want, Blazerock?"

"You think I would tell the likes of you?"

"Do you wish to plunder and gather wealth you will never use?"

"That is usually the case with my kind. I like to sleep on gold and jewels rather than grass or rock."

"You will be safer in a cave, I think."

"And you would deny me?"

"I would kill you if necessary."

Blazerock gave a holler and fire shot from its mouth. They, however, were out of range to be bothered by it.

Not losing an opportunity to say something before it decided to fly away, Morton yelled, "Let's talk about this."

"What do you have that I could not take?"

"We can offer you peace?"

"Do you think I want peace? I have already made enemies."

"That can be rectified."

"You think I can trust you," cried Blazerock.

"You have no choice."

"There are only three of you."

"We are here to end this problem!"

Blazerock was now angry and they could see its full might. Morton and the others knew instinctively that they would need to injure it before they could kill it. It knew only malice now and thought it was invincible.

"Let them fly," said Morton and three arrows were in the air.

If it could be said that Blazerock had expressions, it looked surprised now. Both arrows hit its wings and pierced them. Morton's arrow hit one of its eyes.

Blazerock screeched in pain.

"Another volley," yelled Morton.

Blazerock now inhaled and tried to produce fire, but two more arrows hit its wings and a third landed in its mouth.

The shriek grew louder and the wings trembled, but Blazerock could not pull himself off the ground. He tried and fell to the ground with a thump.

"Too late to negotiate," Morton yelled and three more arrows pierced it. Its wings were full of blood. Morton's arrows lodged in its nose and throat.

Blazerock now lay there on the grass making no movements.

"Its heart," yelled Oin.

"We will share it," said Glomer.

“No,” said Morton. “It will be poisonous.”

“But it might give us special powers?”
said Oin.

“No. It might give you death. Look,” said Morton showing them that the grass was wilting where the blood of the dragon was draining out. He remembered that Oin and Glomer would not have read Tolkien.

“Any last words,” said Morton to the dragon with another arrow pointing at the beast.

“I wanted everybody else to be miserable also,” Blazerock croaked and then closed its eyes for the last time.

Morton stood there sadly looking at the monster that was no longer moving. He thought it sad that such a creature would cause so much damage. That there could be vice and anger in the world. This creature that burned with fire probably could never be satisfied. Why was it that the only emotions it could offer were hate and greed? It would be a problem no more because of Morton the Brave and his companions. He was not sure he should get all the credit, but he had come up with the idea of how to down it.

“This valley needs to be let alone. We might also need a fire here,” said Morton.

“That's for later. Now it is time to celebrate,” said Oin.

“Yes. Time to celebrate,” said Glomer.

This was too good to be true thought Morton. Now for the fun part. He might even be rewarded by the Queen or one her ladies. They were likely to give him gold and jewels, but he could not take them home with him. He certainly could go for a drink now to settle his nerves. He had earned one. He felt stronger and more competent now. This adventure had given him a break from the real world. This story could almost be a myth about how to think through one's fears and monsters. He now had a bigger chest.

Now he could relax and enjoy the party. Hopefully there would be festivities instead of court intrigue.

There would still be the bus on the way home tomorrow. Morton decided to take a self defense class. If somebody bothered him he then could solve the problem more easily after one. He would like to be ready if he could not negotiate.

END

Honoring

By

David Sparenberg

pick something up along the way
a stick, a stone, a feather dropped
by passing crow—or shell
if your walk is along a
shore of the sea

lift your gift up
make offering to the four directions
to the sky over us
and the spirit on high watching
who is more than we are

pray with your gift of nature
then give your gift
back to all mother Earth - pray
for all mother Earth

we have learned to be so shallow
that we no longer feel the
depth of our suffering
a suffering we impose on life
a suffering felt
throughout all of creation

pick something up
like a child would do at play
like a person
on a long pilgrimage
of many life times

The Breach

by

Alex B.

Dedication: To my Mom and Dad, Irina and Vladimir

Jacob kept the first watch on the towers. He was a tall, fit Arlandrian man in his early thirties with sharp eyes and keen intellect. Since the day that Arlandria had clouded over with Darkness, the men of their small city had been keeping a diligent watch over their borders—fighting back whatever came there way.

When the assault upon the Arlandrian homeland first started, no one within Jacob's city knew what was happening as they were located well inland and protected on each side by the ancient grey mountains. Their peace, however, ended suddenly when the women and the children from beyond the mountains began flooding in through the main gates—seeking refuge from the coming storm.

There were so many refugees and the wounds upon their bodies were vast and cruel. Jacob was a strong man but even he could not stomach the torn and deformed limbs of the guests. It seemed as though the frail were targeted specifically and the young commander often wondered, when he made his rounds in the infirmary, whether they were fighting something less than human.

Those who did not die within the first couple of hours spoke to Jacob and the elders of the horrors they had seen among their own city gates. They spoke of the twilight that had come upon them and of the monsters that came out of it. They spoke of dogs that would come out in the night and drag the men away, of vile things with chains, hooks, and cages who always came for the children. Most importantly, however, they spoke of the Black General—a man in dark clothing that that would always stand on top of the cliff, watching the slaughter unfold in front of him.

At first Jacob tried to determine the identity of the

Black General but it was always to no avail. None of the scouts ever came back.

#

It was Monday again and Jacob kept the night watch. He was looking over the horizon, his heart filled with uncertainty when he heard his name being called from the courtyard below. He looked down and saw his wife, Rachel, standing there. She held a small parcel off food in her hand.

"Jacob" she called to him again "I've brought you some food."

"Go home Rachel" he called down "it is not safe for you here."

He looked down again in a few minutes and saw that she was stubbornly waiting for him to unlock the door to the tower so that she might take the stairs to come to him.

"I am not letting you up," he said.

"I will remain here until you do" was her stubborn reply.

He sighed but it was more for show than for annoyance. He signaled to the men around the four watchtowers that he was leaving his post and made his way down the long staircase and to the courtyard below. When he opened the door, she stepped inside. Her golden hair was braided and her blue eyes betrayed signs of both love and exhaustion.

"Rachel, darling," he said to her, "you should not be doing this."

"I wanted to spend some time with my husband," she said as they began to make their way up the stairs "that and you need to relax Jacob. I'm only four months pregnant."

Jacob let out a sigh but this time it wasn't for show.

"I love you Rachel, and I am worried sick over

you. You heard what those refugees said—what they are doing to the women and the children.”

She turned around and took his hand. The action calmed his spirit a little but his heart continued to be in turmoil. They finally made it up the stairs and cold air filled both of their lungs. Rachel looked down upon the forest.

“It is very black,” she said as she watched the trees stretch out before her. She followed them with her eyes as they went up the hill and into the horizon.

“It *is* very black” he said “ and unsettlingly so. Do you remember it ever being so dark?”

“No” Rachel replied and she could feel him pulling her closer. She leaned her head upon his shoulder and he put his hand over her stomach. She put her fingers over his and squeezed them. There was just so much death around them.

One of the men in the third tower suddenly gave an alarm and it startled Jacob right up. The alarm ran through the night watch and the lights upon the outer walls flared up. Rachel hid herself in one of the doorways etched into the tower and Jacob braced himself for an attack.

When no attack came he looked down below and saw that some of his men had made his way down. Below them and right before the town gates was a party of about twenty men, all in Galandrian uniform. The Arlandrian men waited patiently as Jacob descended down the stairs and into the courtyard below. The men were talking among themselves and when Jacob descended, one of them asked: “What should be done about them?”

“I don’t know,” said Jacob as he looked towards the gates and then towards his wife. She had come out from the room and was now watching her husband below her. He gave her one more concerned look and turned his attention back towards his own men.

“We can use more men” Jacob said.

“And I’m sure they can *use* our food “ said Brian. He was the one that had spoken up originally. “We barely have enough for ourselves.”

“That and they are Galandrian,” said another, “never trusted them or *their prince*.”

“It is your call, Jacob,” said a third.

Jacob thought long and hard. He then told his men to wait there and climbed back to the tower where Rachel was waiting for him.

“Galandrians” he called out to them “why are you

here?”

“We have food!” yelled the man at the head of the small Galandrian battalion. He held up the head of a large boar.

“We have enough of our own food” yelled Brian back, much to the chagrin of Jacob.

“We have intelligence” yelled back the man “we have been to the west of the Mountains. We have seen the Black General.”

“Let them in!” yelled Jacob.

#

Jacob sat around the table watching the Galandrians eat. He looked over to his own men and saw the concern and the distrust in their eyes. The boar that the Galandrians brought in was left untouched.

One of the Galandrian men looked over at Jacob and saw that he was watching them intently. He then wiped his mouth and replied: “What is your name, Arlandrian?”

The table grew quite.

“I am Jacob. I am the highest ranking officer here. And you are, soldier?”

“I am Caleb and this used to be Lieutenant Adrian’s regiment but he got *dark* some time ago so these men are now mine.”

Jacob took the wine and drank it. He saw that Rachel had come in and found a spot with the other women at the end of the hall. Though she did her best to blend in with the dark of the corners, Caleb noticed her. When the Galandrian looked over once more at Jacob, he saw an unwelcoming look in the man’s eye.

“So I take it, she is yours?” said Caleb with a smile as he drank the wine.

“She is.”

“You know they take the women to be their whores?”

Jacob didn’t say anything for a moment and Caleb let the statement sink into the man’s heart.

“The beasts?” said Jacob.

“Yeah, the beasts” answered Caleb. “The ones with the chains and the traps come for the women and for the children. They chain and trap the women and carry them away on caravans, dogs, whatever else they come upon. They take them deep into the mountains, into the bowels of the ground and finally into the Dark Fortress where they breed with them to create the very same perversions that we are fighting....”

The small talk in the corners of the hallway stopped completely.

"How do you know this?"

"I have followed them" said Caleb "and I have seen the Dark Fortress."

Caleb took another glass of wine. It went down heavy and his eyes darkened from the weight of the memory. "And I have seen the carnage that they leave among the way. I have spoken to some of the women they discarded, after they were through with them..."

"Enough" said Jacob "I think we have all gotten the point."

Jacob looked over to where Rachel was standing. He could see the whiteness in her hands.

"And the children?" asked Jacob though he wasn't sure whether he wanted an answer.

"They take them by the wheelbarrows and into the dark fortress as well. And it is not just Arlandrian children. It is Adridarian, Galandrian, Santirian, Marian..."

"So the countries of the North..." began Jacob.

"Have all fallen" finished Caleb "we have found piles of bodies all in different uniform assortments."

"And what of the East, the West, the South?" exclaimed Rachel from the corner. She was unable to bear it anymore.

"And what is your name?" said Caleb.

"You talk to me. Galandrian," said Jacob coolly "remember you are guests here."

"As you wish" said Caleb but not before he gave Rachel one final look.

"We have been across the Southern, Western and Eastern border" continued Caleb "and there is nothing but darkness."

An anxious murmur went throughout the hall.

"We are all that there is left" said a man sitting next to Caleb. His name was Danny.

Jacob could feel his heart growing sick. "Who is this witch that keeps swallowing these countries?"

The murmuring suddenly went dead.

"We don't know exactly" said Caleb "but what we do know is that she was once human, just like you and me. And then *something* happened. *Something evil* came inside of her and now IT seeks to devour the whole world."

"We have seen it" said Danny. Caleb gave him a look but Anthony just shrugged.

"They might as well know what is coming their way. The Marions didn't. And look what has

happened to them."

"When they capture you" said Caleb "assuming they don't take you to breed and eat, they will take you down to the working fields. There the beasts with the whips and the chains hold you down and make you drink a black water. If you don't drink it, they break your body but if you do---everything begins to change. Whatever is inside this Dark Queen enters you and begins to transform your spirit. You forget who you were and remember nothing but your allegiance to your new masters. And over time, this sickness begins to corrupt your body as well and you begin to resemble the very same beasts you started fighting. Long jaws, arms, and all."

"How..." started Jacob.

"Because John Nathaniel De Este has been taken," said Caleb "and he now heads the Dark army. *Our* prince and *once* fearless leader is now the Black General."

The words were like a punch to Jacob's stomach and it was so strong that he did not hear the wailing of the women at first.

"Looks like they know of John's skill even in this remote shit hall."

"Know of him?" said Joshua "he was the last commander putting up a fight with the witch. He was everybody's last hope..."

"Well everybody's last hope tried to get us to convert" said Caleb "but the few of us here managed to escape before we entered the confines of the castle. Danny here escaped right from under John's nose."

"So all is lost" said Jacob quietly to himself but Caleb and the rest of the men heard him.

"All is lost" said Caleb "especially with John in charge of the Dark Army now. He is responsible for all the mutilations and atrocities. It is his responsibility to collect as many men, women, and children as he can and bring them back to the fortress to serve the witch-queen, Isabella."

"And he is the reason that your king is dead and the Darkness entered Arlandria" added Danny.

Rachel turned around and walked outside. She stood there for a little bit until she could hear footsteps behind her. She turned her head and saw that Jacob had come up beside her. She could tell that he also was upset and she reached out her hand and touched him. He looked at her and even in the night around them, she could see how red his eyes

were.

“We will make it out of here, Jacob” she said to him “I do not care what these swine say.”

He didn’t say anything, he just took her hand into his and held onto it tightly. He stood next to her for a long time but he did not look at her. She, however, never took her eyes off her husband.

“Come on Rachel” he said to her quietly “I will take you home.”

“And where will you go?”

“Come on darling. Just come on. Don’t look back, darling, the elders will handle the accommodations for these men.” He took her hand and led her on through the dark streets of their little, barricaded town.

As Rachel walked on, she would run her hand upon the walls. She had lived here all her life and had taken this same route home countless times before. When she was a little girl she would play alongside these stones and her heart would laugh. But now, as she walked them once more, her heart grew weary and she tripped over the very same crevices that she played on all her life.

When Jacob saw that she was hurt, he pulled her closer to him and when he saw that despair had taken hold of her—he carried her the last couple of feet home. He placed her down gently on their porch and opened the door to their small, concrete home. He then carried her back in and laid her down upon the bed. He lay down besides her, taking her into his arms.

“We will be all right love,” he said to her now as he could feel her body shaking from the tears “I will let no harm come upon you—I promise.”

She continued to cry but when she calmed a little, Rachel replied: “Where are we to go Jacob? This darkness is everywhere.”

“We will go towards Adridaria. Surely, we would have heard if the capitol was taken.”

“And then what?”

“I don’t know.”

She felt him move away from her and saw him sit up.

“Where are you going?” she replied, with her eyes suddenly glistening.

“I have to finish the night watch.”

“Finish the night watch?! For what purpose Jacob?”

“For my own peace of mind Rachel. I’ve been doing this since the war started and I cannot stop

now.”

He turned around and tried to kiss her but she had pulled away from him. His eyes filled with both pain and tears. He got up fast and was about to leave when she came for him. She wrapped her hands around him and kissed the back of his neck.

“I love you Jacob,” she said to him and this time he kissed her. He then kissed her stomach and replied: “stay inside. As soon as I wrap my head around what is to be done, I will come for you. Do not open the door for anyone but me.”

She nodded and kissed him on the forehead. He then stepped outside and closed it behind him. The air around him was cold and heavy; As Jacob walked down the small alleys he began to feel very uncomfortable. He had walked this way since he was eleven years old and Rachel was twelve but something was different about alley tonight. He could not understand what it was but the very hairs on the back of his neck stood up.

Jacob drew his sword and he stood there silently, listening to any sound upon the pavement. When he couldn’t hear anything, he continued forward until he reached a small square. It was a square in the middle of the town and it led to four separate alleyways.

In the middle was a fountain and all around it were benches, plants and a few abandoned toys. Jacob stopped by the fountain and waited again, his mind going to the alleyways surrounding him. As he stood there, he felt an uneasiness come upon him. As his eyes trailed to one of the alleyways he suddenly saw a pair of red eyes glaring at him.

The wolf did not give Jacob much time as it came for him, pinning him down and reaching for his head. The animal would have succeeded in biting the man’s face if not for a sudden sting of a cool blade opening his side. The wolf jumped back a few feet, growling angrily at his not-so willing prey.

Jacob sat up painfully with his eyes constantly on the wolf before him. All around them the alarms screamed and the man could hear shouts in the distance that the city walls had been breached.

Jacob got himself up, his heart beating rapidly in his chest. His thoughts went back and forth between the beast before him and Rachel. At that moment the wolf smiled and launched once more, but Jacob’s sword flashed and the beast fell upon the ground, crying severely from the pain. Jacob stepped upon the severed paw as he began to slowly advance

towards with a sword in his hand.

Jacob's attack was suddenly interrupted by female screams and thoughts of Rachel and the baby entered his head once more. He gave the wounded beast one more final, disgusted look and headed back.

As the Arlandrian ran down the street, sword in hand, one of the windows flew upon and a half-eaten human body fell out. Jacob put his arm to his mouth and slowly stepped over it---listening constantly to the growls and the screams inside the house. All around him were demon soldiers and he fought them off as best as he could, trying feverishly to reach his house. When he reached his own steps, however, his heart fell and his stomach dropped. From where he stood, he could see that the front door was ajar and that there were claw marks all over the front doors.

Jacob entered slowly, his back pressed against the wall and his sword gleaming from the dim light coming in through the windows. His table was destroyed and there were brown-colored stains on the walls.

"Rachel" he said quietly and listened. There was no response.

"Rachel" he said again and his heart despaired. He sunk to the floor and put one of his hands to his face. He could feel himself crying.

"Jacob" said a quiet voice and he was up to his feet. He looked around and saw a pile of clothes behind the sofa. He then saw a piece of braided golden hair. He ran to the pile and pulled her out from underneath it. She was bruised, terrified but unharmed. He held her close to him, kissed her and said: "What has happened?"

She then pointed to the dark mass lying in the doorway of the living room and the kitchen. Jacob let go of her and went over to the creature. He could see a gash in its belly.

"I did that," said Rachel as she stood up "it came through the door."

"Good girl" answered her husband. His attention was then diverted to the screams and the growls outside. He locked the door and turned towards her, his eyes full of terror.

"They are all over the town" he said, "the walls have given way."

"How could that have happened?"

"I do not know" he said apologetically.

She placed her hand over her belly as they heard crashing outside. He then took her hand and they

headed out the back, Jacob constantly watching the surroundings. They moved quickly but cautiously through the streets and Rachel held onto his hand in a way she had never done before.

"Where are we going Jacob?" she said to him he pressed her against one of the walls.

"We are going to Adridaria."

"Adridaria?" she said with her eyes filling with tears "it is a four days ride and we don't even have horses...."

"Do you want to stay here?" He asked frustrated. Before she could answer, he pushed into one of the narrow alleys in between the houses. He put his hand over her mouth to prevent her from screaming as one of creatures appeared upon the road. His skin was full of boils and he was dragging chains behind him. At the end of the chains were human bodies and some were still living. They cried out from the pain and torture, and Jacob recognized some of his own men among the prisoners.

He then looked towards the distance and saw that the front gates were wide open and that the beasts were just piling in. He then noticed a figure upon the right wall, guiding the demons in.

"That piece of ---" said Jacob as he watched Caleb direct the wolves towards the main square. "You let them in!" He then said more to himself than anyone else: "And I let you in."

When the beast with the chains passed by, Jacob looked away for at that moment, not sure if his stomach could bear the thought that he might be responsible for his city's massacre.

Jacob looked back at Rachel and he could see the answer to his question in her eyes. After seeing Caleb on the wall she was willing to brave anything to get out of this place.

Jacob quietly listened for any more movement and when he heard none, he and his wife made their way across a small back street and towards one of the outer walls surrounding the city.

"Some of these walls have hidden doors in them" said Jacob as he felt the stones with his hand "some of men in the watch used them to get in and out of the city secretly." Within a couple of minutes Jacob found a door and opened it. He then led his wife through it. "Pretty much, they used these doors to sneak out and spend time with their lovers."

He then looked at Rachel and quickly "I just know about it."

She laughed painfully and replied: "Of all the

things to assure me at this moment!”

Jacob realized that she was right. When he first joined the night watch, the debauchery that the other men engaged in used to horrify him. Now it all seemed to him so completely surreal.

Within minutes, they stepped out of the wall and into the dark forest surrounding their small city. As they continued on, Rachel turned around to give one more look to the place that she had spent her whole life in. It was burning and the horror of the flames was masked only by the gut wrenching screams of woman and children being devoured by the beasts within the city gates.

Jacob saw the look on her face and pulled her out of her trance—had he not done so, she probably would have fainted.

“Come, Rachel,” he said to her and they continued in the cold and darkness before them. Neither one of them knew where they were going but Jacob led on, despite the turmoil and the uncertainty in his own heart. It was almost dawn when they suddenly came upon a ravine. At the very edge of it stood a man dressed in black and he smiled as he looked upon the Arlandrian city burning before him.

“Oh no” said Jacob but it was too late and he felt himself brought to the floor by the pull of a whip. Both of his hands were bound instantly and two enforcers stood by him, each holding unto one end of the whip. Jacob couldn’t move his head because his neck was so bound but from the corner of his eye he could see the two large dogs guard Rachel as she sat on the floor, her body convulsing from fear. Next to the dogs and with his eyes fixed upon his wife was the most vile creature that Jacob had ever seen. It was neither beast nor man but a sad perversion of what it once was.

“She is with child,” said the *perversion* as the

Galandrian Prince came over to examine the prisoners. “It is a marvelous bounty. The Dark Queen will be pleased like no other.”

“At ease, Rochelle” said the Prince, but the beast kept his eyes on Rachel.

“We will wait until the child is born,” continued the beast, “and then he will be ground into the finest meat. And she will serve our soldiers like the rest of the women.”

Rochelle then reached out to touch Rachel but John grabbed him by his neck and brought him to the floor.

“You do not touch,” said John as Rochelle gasped for air “without my permission.”

He then let go of the beasts and Rochelle pulled away, his whole body hurting from John’s grip. John looked over at Jacob and could see the tears coming down his face. He then looked over at the enforcers and in their eyes and their grins he could see the plans that they had for the woman.

John then took out his dagger and with one swift motion cut Rachel’s throat. She fell to the ground and had not one of the enforcers pounded him on the mouth, Jacob would not have stopped screaming.

“Enough” said John, as Jacob did nothing but cough up blood and cry from the loss and pain “take him with the rest.”

The enforcers did as they were told though one let out a very disappointed sigh as they passed by Rachel’s body.

“You should not have done that,” Rochelle hissed in the distance. “The Dark Queen will not be pleased.”

“I don’t care” answered John “she has had enough children to eat.”

He then turned his attention to the burning city before him.

ABOUT OUR CONTRIBUTORS

L.C. Atencio holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Creative Writing from the University of Central Florida, with scholarly emphasis on illustrating literary works. Atencio's poems, "Believing in words, not in whoever," and "Staring through the cracks of reality," were published in 2012 in *Nota Bene*, an anthology by The Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society. He has edited and judged college journals such as *Phoenix Magazines*, *The Cypress Dome*, and *The Florida Review*. His poetry and short stories have been published internationally in *Perspectives*, *Taj Mahal Review*, *The Penwood Review*, *The Storyteller*, *Space and Time Magazine*, *Grey Sparrow Press* and others. His illustrations have been featured in college magazines such as *Aries: A Journal of Art and Literature*. Atencio is proud to be an experimental novelist for the everyday person, and a book illustrator. To get in touch, he may be contacted at l_atencio@knights.ucf.edu. For a limited time only, he is providing free illustrations for editors, presses, and literary agents so long as the message of the writing is morally positive.

Alex. B. is very excited to be published in *The Mythic Circle* as she grew up reading *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Someday soon, she hopes to have her first novel completed. She currently lives in Pittsburgh with her husband and her pet hamster.

Ron Boyer is a scholar, teacher, and award-winning poet, fiction author and screenwriter. He is currently an M. A. candidate in Depth Psychology at Sonoma State University in Rohnert Park, California, where he taught his first university course, "Mythic Structure in Storytelling (TM)", a creative writing course grounded in the archetypal theories of Carl G. Jung, Joseph Campbell, and others (syllabus available at www.sonoma.academia.edu/RonaldLBoyer). While completing his graduate studies, Boyer presented an academic paper, "Introduction to the Mythic Orphan: Archetypal Origins of the Hero in Mythology, Literature and Film," at the first Symposium for the Study of Myth, co-sponsored by Pacifica Graduate Institution, OPUS Archives and the Joseph Campbell Foundation. He will begin doctoral studies this Fall in the PhD in Art and Religion program at the Graduate Theological Union and UC Berkeley.

Boyer is also a recent graduate of the Professional Program in Screenwriting at UCLA School of Theater, Film and Television. A widely published author, his poetry has been featured in the peer-reviewed scholarly e-zine of the Jungian and depth psychology community, *Depth Insights: Seeing the World with Soul* (Issues 3 and 5, Fall 2012 and 2013), in *Mythic Passages: A Magazine of the Imagination* (Jan. 2008) and many other publications. His interview with the Hungarian myth-maker and shaman, Ivan Szendro, has been accepted for publication in the forthcoming issue of the peer-reviewed journal, *Coreopsis: Journal of Myth and Theatre* (Spring/Summer 2014, Issue 3).

S.R. Hardy is a poet, fiction writer, and translator whose work has appeared in venues such as the *Eunoia Review*, *Eternal Haunted Summer*, *The Beorh Quarterly* and anthologies such as *Northern Traditions*, *The Shining Cities* and *Beyond the Pillars*. He is currently at work on a variety of poems, stories and translations and blogs at www.anarcheologos.com.

Jeremy Hatchey lives in Allentown, Pennsylvania and is currently studying English literature at Moravian College in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. He spent the fall of 2013 studying at the Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies in Oxford, England. His poem in this issue was inspired by his own critical study of Mythopoeic literature and by his own uncertainties and emotions regarding his personal and academic journey. His main poetic influences include J.R.R. Tolkien and William Ernest Henley.

Philip Miller is a 57 year old publicist living in Double Oak, Texas (where they have succeeded in knocking down most of the oaks).

Ryder Miller is the editor of *From Narnia to a Space Odyssey*. He has published stories at <http://lostsoulsmag.tripod.com/>, and articles and reviews at: *The Internet Review of Science*.

Douglas “Dag” Rossman has been retelling and, more recently, expanding upon the Norse myths and legends for the past thirty-three years, before live audiences across the Midwest. He has four published collections of original short stories (many of which first appeared in this magazine) set in the Nine Worlds of Norse mythology. The three most recent ones, *The Dragonseeker Saga* (2009), *Way of The Elves* (2012), and *The Walker in Shadows* (2013), have also been characterized as young adult fantasy novels. They can be purchased from the publisher, Skandisk, Inc., 6667 West Old Shakopee Road, Bloomington, MN 55438. This new story is a change of pace for him.

Nicolo Santilli is a philosopher, poet, and fiction writer, living in Berkeley, California. He is currently in the beginning stages of writing his first in a series of epic fantasy novels, which have been living and growing in him for many years.

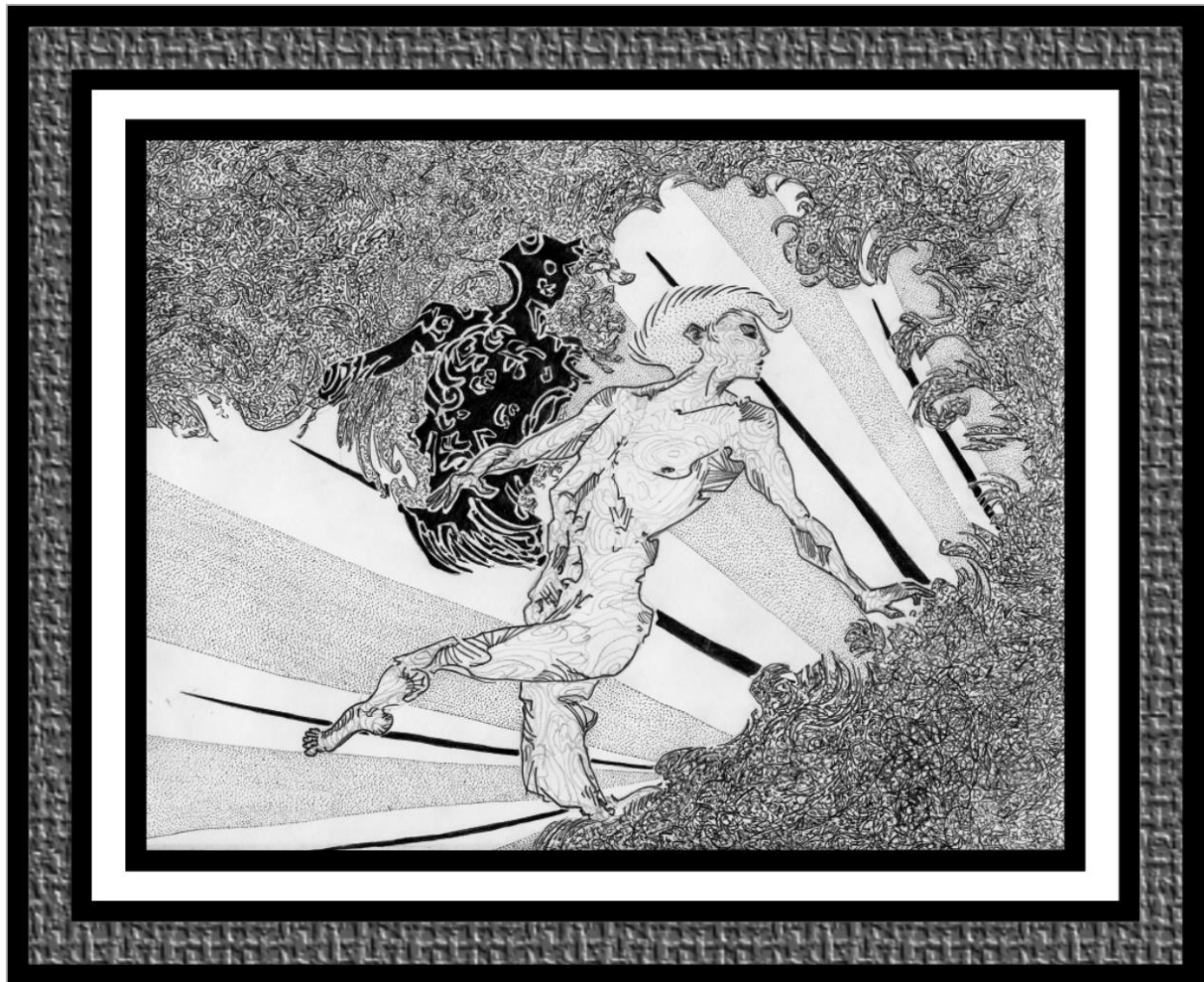
David Sparenberg is creator-director of the Crossing the Threshold Together, an educational video project with 26 original videos available under his name now posted on YouTube. He is also the author of *Life in The Age of Extinctions*, volume one since Nov. 2012 and volume two to be published later in the summer of 2014. These volumes are eco-ebooks and can be downloaded free in the OVI Bookshop using the following link:
<http://ovimagazine.com/cat/56>

John Taylor is a writer based out of Michigan's upper peninsula. His writings have appeared in the *Marquette Monthly* and Dieselpunks.org e-pulp showcase vol.2. He is also an illustrator whose illustrations have appeared in the *Abilene Reflector Chronicle* newspaper (Abilene, Kansas), and on *Swords and Sorcery Magazine's* website. John currently resides in Marquette, Michigan with his wife, Miriam.

On a Sea Wind
By
Nicolo Santilli



Evening winds swirled the growing mist,
but a great sea eagle was still visible in twilight
above the rim of the western horizon.



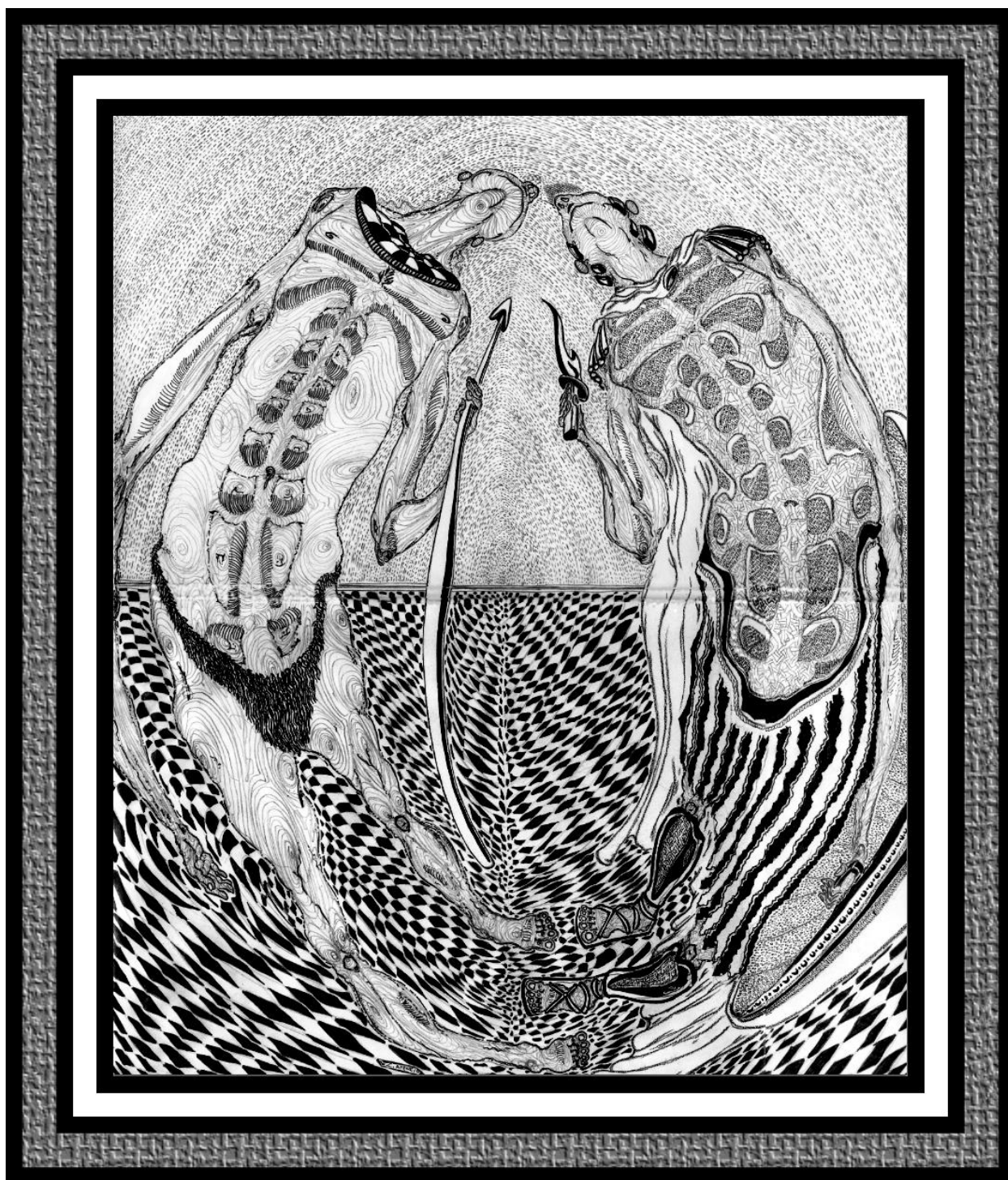
Saleiessen reached out with his thoughts,
allowing his mind to soar on the wind
and approach the great eagle
as lightly as feathers touching feathers
in a light breeze.



The eagle accepted his presence
as one accepts a new idea,
suddenly born,
as though sprung from another mind,
or an inspiration which flows with the freshness
of a melting mountain stream.



Below he could now see smoke blending with the mists
blown inland from the wind tossed sea.
Through both of these the outline of an ancient stone fortress
was here and there visible,
both to sight and inner vision,
which now flickered together.



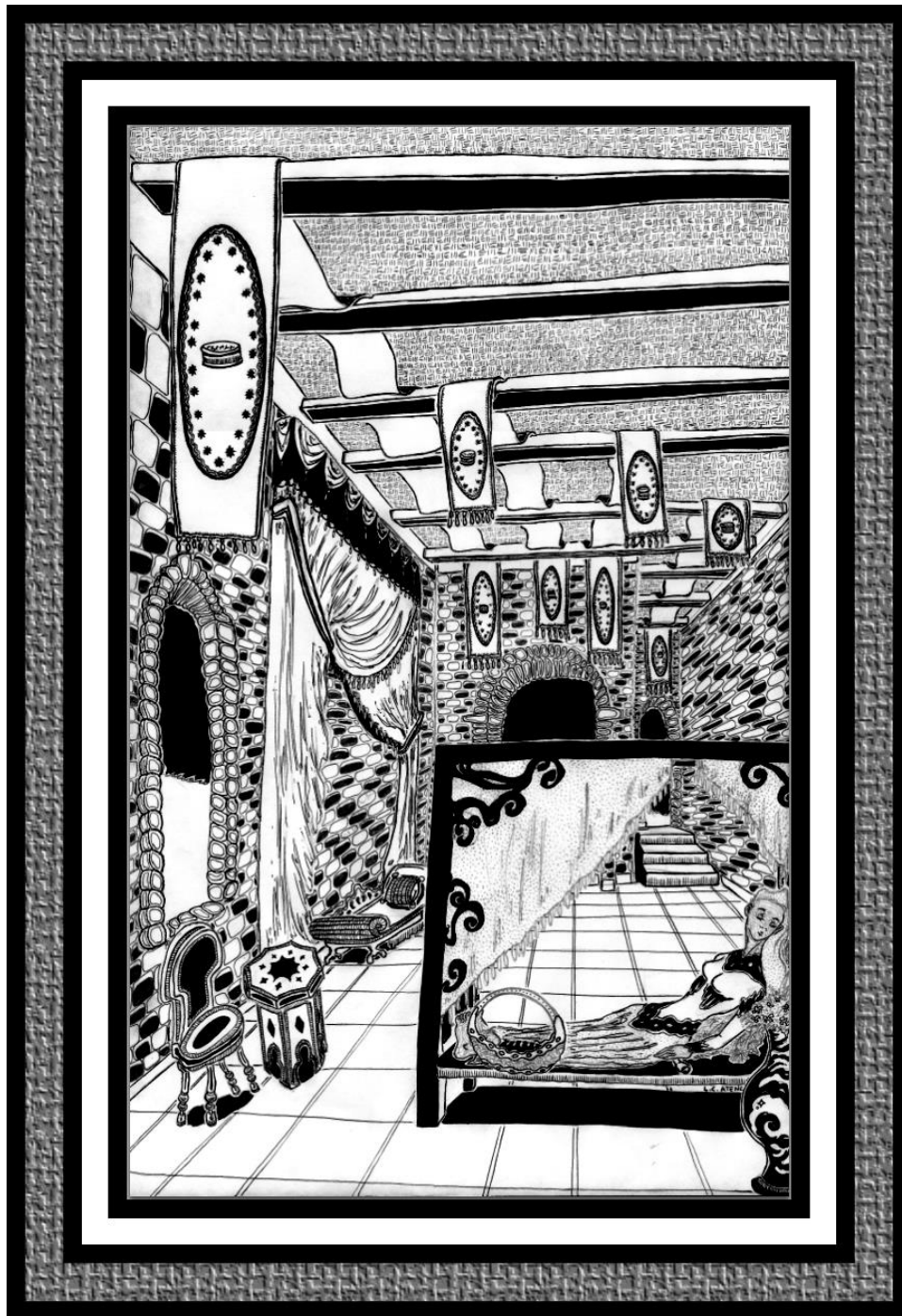
The eagle plummeted suddenly
on a powerful downdraft,
and the misty landscape below
rose up with greater size
and distinctness.



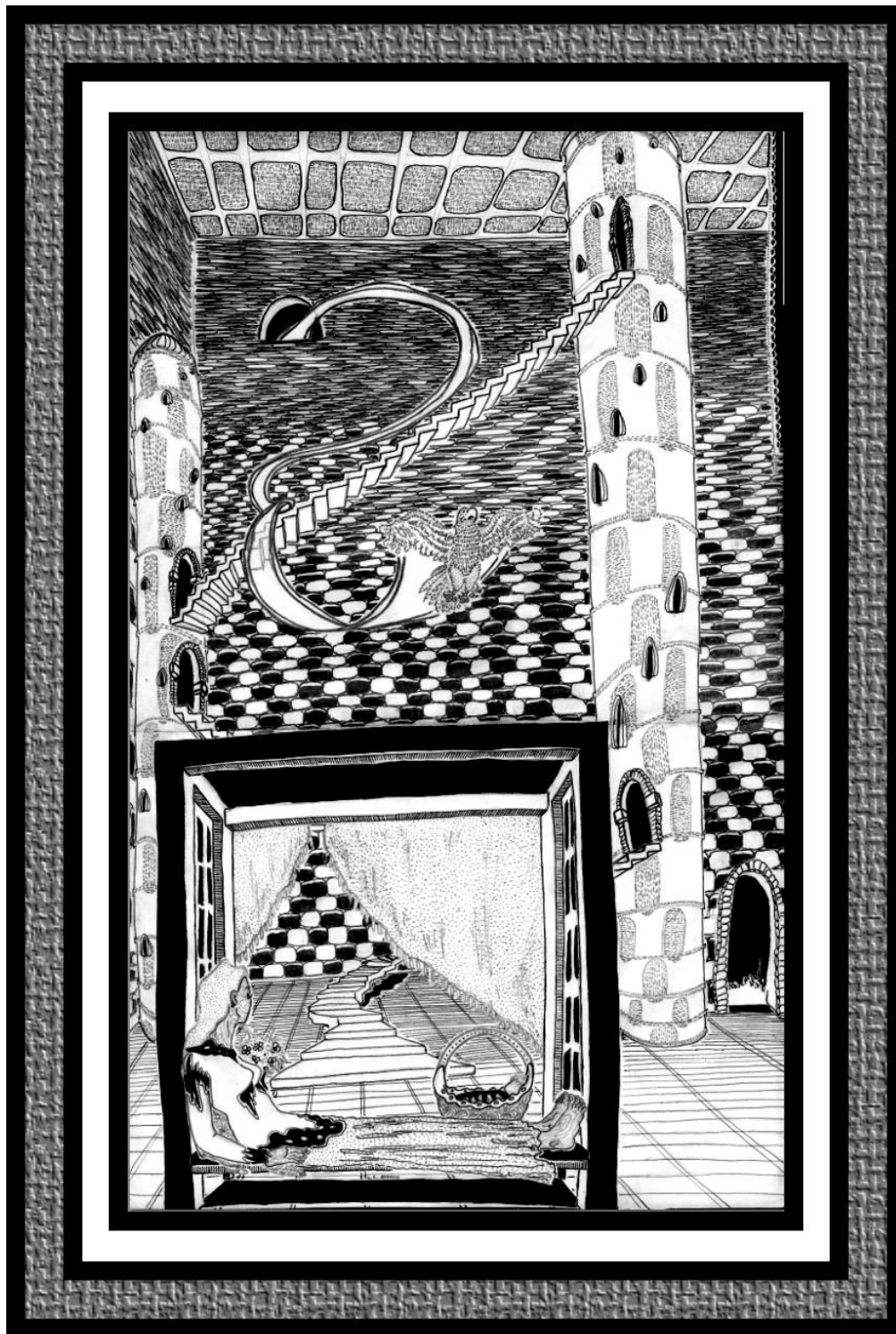
Half-way down the smoke permeated the salty sea air,
and the distant sounds of battle
mingled with the whistling of the winds.



Ravens and crows dotted the grey-green fields,
perching on lifeless bodies,
and on the broken walls of towers.



Beneath the highest roof,
between two towers,
a wide window stood open to the sea.
No fighting had yet reached this place,
but a beautiful woman lay pale and motionless
beside a sleeping baby,
an empty vial in her pale hand.



Through this window the eagle steered his arresting flight,
wings upraised against the wind,
their tips almost touching the stone walls on either side.
Straight to the bed it flew,
and never alighting,



it seized the curved handle of a wicker basket
in which the sleeping baby lay asleep,
and beating its great wings,
rose and passed again through the wide opening
through which so many sea dreams had passed.



Now the eagle gained in height and was observed,
its flight followed by shouts
and the whirring of arrows,
blown off course by the gusting winds.



High into the sky she rose,
spreading her wings wide,
broader than the height of tall men,
and the baby slept and dreamed,
of flying and the sea,
and a beautiful face,
never to be seen again in waking.