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## *Bed of Og*

John Kuhn

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## *Bed of Og*

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# Bed of Og

By John Kuhn

He had been right to fear disorientation. He could not find the chamber in which he had built his campfire. He had gone a bit too far, had made one turn too many, and the more he attempted to correct the problem, the worse the problem became. In trying to undo the wrong turn he had made on his way back to the campfire, he made three more wrong turns. At length, he admitted to himself that he was irreparably lost, and he considered lying down to die. He shortly concluded that waiting to die would be far more torturous than falling blindly over a ledge, and he continued shuffling forward into the pitch.

He walked for an endless age, unaware of time or space. The only thing he knew was that he was generally and gradually descending, down into the belly of the mountain. He shuffled among its roots, doubtful that he would ever find his way out. He began to grow cold, but he refused to light the little bit of fire he carried in his pouch. He couldn't imagine what he might be saving it for, but it seemed wise to save it.

Peregrino began to count his steps, if you can call them steps. He decided to stop and rest when he got to 60. He

wished very badly that he had a nugget of food, something to sit down and eat as a last supper. But he had nothing with him besides his clothes, his razor-sharp knife, flint, and a tiny handful of dry moss.

Just after he took a slow 46<sup>th</sup> step, he paused. It seemed colder here than just moments ago. Then he took the step that changed everything.

Down he tumbled, through open space for an unknown interval, finally landing rudely against a sandy protrusion that sloped gradually from a cavern wall. He hit and slid, and the sand tore the skin from his arms and back. When his body came to a rest, he was not dead, but he was not moving. He was unconscious, laying on cold dirt and rocks in the deepest bottom of a cave no man had ever seen.

He awoke to the sound of sniffing. Something was sniffing him. It wasn't a rat. By the sound of it, it was unmistakably larger. It sounded bigger than even a man. Suddenly, it began to talk, but in a voice and a language unlike any he had ever heard. He stayed very still, for some senseless reason afraid to open his eyes.

He had been terrified many times over the past two days, but never as much as at the precise moment when he

heard the big beast's sniffing: then, horrifyingly, he felt its breath against his neck. He was frozen. He was blind. He prepared to scream, but he was too afraid. Nothing came from his mouth. And the thing grabbed him.

The hands holding him had opposable thumbs and felt human, but they were huge. Unintelligible words had come from its mouth, somewhere far above Peregrino, words that were without question language. It was not truly a beast, but something intelligent. This made it somehow more frightening. Peregrino wondered how the creature had found him in the darkness. It must have heard his fall. The thing gripped him as tightly as he had ever been held, stopping just short of causing him pain.

A thumb the size of a sausage lay against his left shoulder blade, and four substantial fingers curled fatly around his right shoulder. He could feel, as he stood, that the thing stood with him, the arm of his captor pressing down from above. In his mind, the only place he could see anything at all, he pictured the creature to be an ugly, muscular troll, perhaps double his size in height and girth. As they walked, his captor often emitted a nauseatingly fearful howl that echoed off the cavern walls. The howls seemed to guide him, and after much walking, they began to be answered with more howls from distant places. Peregrino vomited from fear.

They were very deep in the earth. It had gradually grown very hot and humid.

As a boy, Peregrino had heard stories of giants, titanic fighters of old clad in the skins of oxen. Their size, relative to humans, had varied depending upon the teller of the story. He had never believed they were real. And, if real, he had never believed they could be this big. Without ever expressing it, he had

always believed they were merely stories of tall humans, perhaps heroic ones, their size exaggerated through the years of telling.

Peregrino was brought, after much downward walking with his captor, to an underground city, a center of population, as evidenced by the sounds of many giants moving about. He could hear them all around, but he never saw a hint of illumination anywhere. They lived blind. There were many of them. He wondered if they had ever seen fire or sunlight. He had been led through caverns immense and merely large, ever in utter darkness, and he had heard voices, hundreds of them. At one point, he was led into a space that felt huge, though he could see nothing, and he heard the eager voices of a great assembly. The throng was hushed by a voice of Authority, and that same Authority addressed them in very somber gibberish. His speech was long, eloquent and thoughtful nonsense. Peregrino was all but certain that the giant arbiter, somewhere in the middle of his lengthy oration, had declared that he should die. They took him away from there and put him in a stone niche. He kept looking around desperately for light, but never with any satisfaction.

Captive. He lost track of time, though he was sure he had been in their possession for days now. His cell had a cold, hard, grainy slab covering the entrance. He figured he was being held while they prepared some grisly form of execution for him. Perhaps they would cook and eat him, he thought. Food could not be plentiful in their sunless world.

The cell door was not really necessary. He couldn't run anywhere. He was totally dependent for survival upon his guard, a different troll than the

one that had caught him, he thought, though he couldn't be sure. The guard checked on him often, bringing him ridiculously large portions of smelly food which consisted always of slightly warm fish and some kind of soggy substance, also slightly warm and unbearably salty. Both tasted remarkably like sulfur. Peregrino wondered if the giants fished above ground, or if there was a lake full of fish in their underground city. He wondered how they heated these foods without fire, or if they indeed had fire and simply refused to utilize it for its illuminative qualities. Wood for fires must certainly be scarce down here. Perhaps they emerge on occasion from their caves into our world and gather wood, he thought. Perhaps this is where the stories of giants come from.

The worst thing about this place was the darkness, the oppressive darkness. It was tenacious, all-encompassing, ever-present. It invaded his space, pressing up against his skin and useless eyeballs. He forced himself to stare, to open his eyes wide and strain to see some speck of light. But he was a thousand miles down in an ocean of stone. Occasionally, his mind played tricks on him and he would see a spark, a tiny flash. He would sit up straight, looking in the direction where he had seen the flash, eventually realizing that it hadn't been real.

After the passage of unknown and unknowable hours, or days, or weeks, he was joined in his cell by one of them; luckily, it was one who seemed friendly. The visitor's first act had been to take Peregrino's tiny hands and press them against his own massive face, then head, then neck, torso, arms, hands, legs, and feet, allowing Peregrino a notion of the appearance of his hosts. Peregrino had never had to use his sense of touch as a means of perception, but he felt that the

beasts looked almost human. Next, he touched Peregrino from head to toe with his immense hands. Then he sat with Peregrino and began to talk to him, in gibberish, of course.

After hours of listening and occasionally talking, Peregrino had learned the name of his visitor, the name of this race of creatures, the name of the place, and the job of his visitor.

The visitor's name was Golep, and he was a Nefilis. The place was Invereen. Golep's job was to learn the prisoner's language, as evidenced by his tireless habit of placing Peregrino's hands on different objects and saying, "Niv," a word Peregrino quickly associated with, "What is this?"

Peregrino began to get a notion of time thanks to his new friend, Golep. Golep came to see him regularly and stayed talking for hours. The prisoner learned to associate Golep's arrival with morning and his departure with evening. He realized, too, that his meals were brought at regular intervals. He began to count "cave days," as he called them.

As Golep learned more of Peregrino's tongue, Peregrino grew more and more relieved. He realized that this race found him to be interesting and valuable for learning. He would certainly not be killed until Golep had learned more of his language. And if Golep was to learn his language, surely it was for the purpose of communicating with him and learning other things. The Authority certainly would want to know where this tiny intruder had come from. Perhaps they had long been searching for a way out of the cave, and perhaps he could lead them to believe he knew the way.

After 60 cave days, Golep had developed an impressive vocabulary. On the one hand, he was clearly intelligent,

and on the other, he stayed for long stretches of time, forcing the prisoner to teach him. Peregrino wondered if Golep worked as hard as he did due to curiosity, a strong work ethic, or fear. Regardless, as Golep continued developing his new language Peregrino began to learn a great deal about the Nefilis.

The Nefilis were a race of ancient heritage. They did not believe they were large, but they found it incredible that anyone could be as small as Peregrino. Their features were almost identical to those of humans, except size, save for two facts: their faces were long with narrow chins and very wide cheekbones, and each of their two eyes was covered by a thin layer of skin, an eyelid that could not open.

They were not all giant muscular trolls as Peregrino had imagined them when he was captured. Some were strongly built, to be sure, but others were long and sinewy, graceful beings. All were tall, however. The shortest of them was taller than the tallest humans by two feet or more. Peregrino was the size of a small Nefilis child.

The population of Invereen was less than 100 families, and there was only one other village that they were aware of, named Halolid, although tales of expansive cities abounded, and their explorers (like the one who found Peregrino) were constantly seeking more settlements. From the accounts of Golep, Peregrino gathered that the underground caverns were endless, stretching out in every direction for miles upon miles.

The Authority who had mandated that Peregrino be imprisoned was named Disalis. He was something like a mayor or a king. He was respected and obeyed by all the inhabitants of Invereen, and those from the other village often came to pay him tribute.

The giants ate a variety of fishes and aquatic plants from an underground salt lake found precisely halfway between their village and the neighboring one. They cooked their food in one of a number of underground pools where boiling water bubbled up from deeper in the earth.

When Peregrino asked about fire, he found that Golep did not understand his question. He understood heat, but he did not understand fire. "What is it?" he kept asking. Peregrino was tempted to build a fire with the match and bit of fuel he still had (they had taken his knife long before), but he chose not to, in case he might need a fire later. He would simply explain it.

Peregrino could not explain fire fully because every explanation included things that Golep did not understand. Light is what you see, he had explained, but Golep did not understand the concept of sight. He made Golep touch his eyes, Peregrino's eyes, an act that made Golep gasp. Golep admitted that his people found the idea of the foreigner's eyes being exposed disturbing. Eyes, to them, were internal organs of uncertain function, and they were not sure how Peregrino survived with his eyes exposed.

Peregrino tried to explain sight and light and fire and color and bright and dark and focus and blur. He tried on several occasions, on many different days, in many different ways, but never with any real success. He explained sight scientifically, poetically, childishly. He compared it to the four senses the Nefilis had: touch, hearing, smell, and taste. He talked about colors. He told Golep that the only color he could see in the cave was black.

"That is the color you see, friend," he told his student. "You see black."

“You speak I no see,” Golep replied.

“Yes, that is true. But those who can’t see, I assume, see black all the time. Seeing nothing but black is blindness. Blindness means you can’t see.”

“You speak in circles,” was the reply. Golep had decided he had no hope of understanding.

The human was driven to make his student understand the idea of sight. He wanted Golep to know what sight was. He noticed, after several attempts at explanation, that his visitor began to respond to his efforts with less enthusiasm and less attention. He finally greeted lessons in the visual arena with a polite and immediate acquiescence that really meant he had given up. Sometimes Peregrino wondered if Golep even believed that sight was real. Some of his comments revealed that he associated Peregrino’s concept of sight with the Nefilis’ concept of belief. Golep felt that sight was something Peregrino’s race *believed in*, not something they engaged in, not something real.

“Someday, you will see,” Peregrino had told him. He meant it literally. He wondered if Golep’s eyes, buried his whole life under a sliver of skin and a mile of dirt and stone, would even work.

“Yes, someday” Golep had responded. But he had really been thinking, “Niv ‘see?’”

The teacher had more luck explaining art and beauty, for the Nefilis had both of them; only they experienced them with their hands instead of their eyes. He told Golep that humans experienced art and beauty with both senses, but mostly with sight.

As his language improved, Golep began to express an insatiable interest in Peregrino’s homeland. “Tell me where you are from? Are there more like you?

How did you get here?”

Peregrino explained that he lived outside, in a land on top of the land of the Nefilis. Golep seemed to be offended at the notion of there being a land above his own. He had trouble believing this, just as he had struggled to accept the idea of sight.

“My land is up. In my land there are mountains. I found your land by going into a hole in a mountain, and then getting lost deep inside the mountain. You live inside the earth. The earth is a giant piece of dirt and rock. Here in Invereen, there is earth beneath you, beside you, and above you. Where I am from, there is earth beneath us. But not above us. There is nothing above us. We build houses out of stones piled up, much as your people sometimes do, but we must put tops on our houses, like a hat.”

“Why?”

“Because it rains.”

“What is rain?”

“It is water that falls down from the sky.”

“What is the sky?”

“It is what is above us.”

“You said there was nothing above you.”

“Yes. I meant nothing hard, like rock or earth. The sky is like nothing. The sky is just air. It is blue.”

“That is one of your colors that you see with your eyes?”

“Yes. The sky is blue. And we have plants, like the things you eat from the lake, not the fish but the lake plants. We have plants that grow from the dirt. We eat them. They are green. The plants you eat are probably green, too, but there is no light, so you cannot see it. Or maybe it is white. We have more animals than you have here. Here I have heard of fish, insects, and a couple of small animals, quite rare. When you

speak of them, I think you speak of rats and moles, but I am not sure. We have hundreds of animals, some small like those, and some larger than you.”

“Do you eat them?”

“Yes, we cook them on fires and eat them. There is more food there.”

“We do not have enough food here. That is why we are dying away. Once there were more of us, but we are dying away now. Every generation, we are fewer. We will be gone someday.”

“Then you must come to my land. I can take you there.”

Golep was silent.

During the next several conversations, when he began to delve more deeply into the concepts of sky and sun, Peregrino could tell that Golep began to feel that there might indeed be some truth to what he had told him about the plentiful food in his land, the salvation awaiting up above, and perhaps he even believed in the mystery of sight.

“Are you a god?” Golep asked Peregrino one day.

“No, I am a human.”

“Are humans gods?”

“Some think they are, but they aren’t. We are a race of creatures, like the Nefilis, only smaller. We work and marry and die.”

“What happens when you die?”

“We bury our dead. We believe they go to heaven.”

“Bury them? In the dirt?”

“Yes.”

“So your dead are near us?”

“I suppose they are nearer to you than our living are.”

“We place our dead in the hot water, but not where we cook. It is a holy place. You cannot go there. They go away, into the deep.”

By this time, Peregrino was no longer a prisoner. His door was left

open. He never left alone, although Golep had taken him around Invereen several times, and many people had touched him, curious yet friendly.

“We are all descendants of Og, a great king.” the giant reported. “He is our most famous hero. He brought us here, they say, in a time of great persecution. No one knows where we came from, but they say it was a place of plenty. We had more than we needed. Our teachers say we grew lazy and selfish, and we are being punished. We live in poverty now. There is not enough for us to survive here.

“In our temple, there is something that was his. It is a holy object. It is made of a material that no one has ever found here. It is hard and cold, like flint or quartz, but it is perfectly straight and smooth. We often touch it. It is very cold, and it is not soft. It is long, and low, a rectangle. I will show it to you. We do not know what it is. When I show you, you must not tell anyone. It is holy.”

Several days later, the giant took the prisoner to a new chamber and made him touch the holy object. Peregrino knew immediately what it was. It was a bed frame, made of metal.

“Your people came from above, from earth. You are from my home. We have legends of your ancestors. We call them giants. We fear them.”

“We came from your land?”

“Yes. This material is called metal. It is made from stones melted in fire. Your people once lived on the earth. They must have moved into the earth sometime long ago. Perhaps they were persecuted by my ancestors.”

“But you are small and weak.”

“Yes, but we have strong weapons, weapons made of metal. And we have a history of killing, even killing each



other.”

“You spoke of a place called heaven. Where is it?” the giant asked.

“It is up, in the sky.”

“Up, like your people are up?”

“It is far higher, beyond the sky, beyond the stars. It is up.”

“Stars? Is heaven a good place?”

“Yes, a perfect place. Paradise.”

“All good things are up. We have explored for years, looking for more lakes, more food, more Nefilis. We have looked, but we never knew to go up. It grows cold as you rise. There have been more discoveries in going down. Down is where they found our newest cooking lake. Invereen, it is said, began after a band of Nefilis fled the high, cold places. This was long ago. Our explorers go up, and they go straight, but when they do, they are looking for places to go down. We have been taught to go ever lower. That is where we have been taught to search for the good things. We never knew that up was better than down. There is an old saying here, ‘Death waits above.’”

“The place where I was captured was not far from the entrance to my world.”

“The place where you were found is very high. The one who found you is famous now. Many explorers have traveled there after him, even though it is cold. Even now they are searching for your home, but they do not know where to go. There is a great wall there, and they have gone all along the wall in both directions.”

“I came from the top of the wall. I fell from a great height. I must have fallen from the top of that wall. Up. They must go up. They must scale the wall.”

“Yes, I think so. Our explorers do not scale walls often; the walls usually

lead to a dead end, a top. Perhaps this wall leads to somewhere, to a chamber that borders your land. The land with no hat. All good things are up. They must go up.”

On Golep’s next visit to Peregrino’s cave, he sounded very serious.

“I have shared everything you have told me with Disalis, the leader. That was my job. Until today, he had told no one of the secrets you shared. Today, he gathered us together, and he told what we have learned. Your land is our hope of survival; he had to tell them. Now there is a great division in our land. There is great trouble.”

“What trouble? Have I caused it?”

“No. Well, yes. I mean, the things you have told me have caused it. Many do not believe in what you say. It is against many of our greatest teachings. We have always believed that only our God was above us; he inhabits the endless mass of stone that stretches ever up. Now you tell us that the stone ends, that there is a land of tiny people on top of our god and his home. You say you trample our god and bury your dead in the locks of his hair. You talk of things that we have never known. Seeing and colors. These things make no sense. These things are silly; they are magic; they are witchcraft. Many Nefilis think you are a devil, come to lead us astray. You teach that our faith is wrong.”

“I don’t mean to.” Peregrino was afraid. “I merely told you what I know and what I have seen. I am from above. I can take you there.”

“There are those who believe the stories you have told. They are few, though.”

“What about you, Golep?”

“I think you are sincere, but you speak some difficult things. You say there is nothing above your home, but at

the same time there is something above your home called 'sky.' You say we do not see, then you say we see 'black' and that is like seeing nothing. Who can understand these things?"

"I know who can."

"Who?"

"One who has seen them can understand."

"Then show me. Take me to your land."

"I can show you here."

"How?" There was a fearful excitement in the words. "Why haven't you already shown me? You must have known that I doubted your words."

"I have to tell you a secret, and you have to promise not to tell anyone."

"Yes. I promise."

"I can make a fire. I have kept a pouch for making fire with me. I have a bit of fuel and a flint. These are the things one must have to build a fire. A fire makes light. And, in the corner there," he grabbed Golep's hand and pointed it toward a corner of his niche, "I have saved the lake plants I have saved from many meals. It is dry now, and I think it will burn. You must dry a great deal more and bring it."

"You speak strange things."

"I can show you. Fire is not magic. It is real. But for you to see it, I will have to open your eyes. I will have to cut them open."

A sucking sound pierced the darkness. It was Golep expressing great discomfort, or doubt, or both. He was as conflicted as he had ever been. Life had been so much simpler before the stranger came.

An agreement was reached and Golep left. He returned several times over the next few days with armloads of dried seaweed.

"This is dangerous. You are

hoarding food, and we have very little."

"Trust me," replied the human.

After bringing enough seaweed to burn for a significant length of time, the giant came back to the human's cell, this time with Peregrino's knife.

"There are others who want to see your fire," he told the human.

"I will have to cut them," Peregrino replied.

"Yes. They know. You must prove yourself soon. Many are speaking against you to the leader. You must prove that there is light. The leader is neither a skeptic nor a believer. He is merely desperate to find food. If you can prove yourself, they will believe in you. They will believe in your land, the land of many beasts and many meats."

As he spoke, the giant heard the human scurrying about like a rat. He wondered if the human was truly preparing a fire, or if he was merely moving about, carrying out a charade to convince him that it was all real. Then there was a noise. It was small at first, but it grew larger. It crackled and popped. He felt heat and grew afraid. This was powerful magic. He worried that this little imp was indeed a devil.

The giant laid his immense head at the human's feet. The warmth from the direction of the noise was very pleasant. He reached his hand toward the heat. It grew unbearably hot, and he pulled his hand away.

"It is like the hot water, but dry."

"Yes."

Peregrino's eyes adjusted slowly to the tiny light of the fire. He had seen nothing for so long. When he could see, he wanted more light, but he knew his fuel would not last long if he built a large fire. The moss burned fast and he had to feed the fire frequently. He looked all about his cell, practicing the art of vision,

and he looked closely at the giant.

Golep was probably 10 feet from head to foot, perhaps a bit less. He was completely naked, and his skin was whiter than the dead. He was not strong and troll-like. He looked gaunt and scholarly. Nevertheless, he was truly gigantic.

There was no medication, only the knife, still as sharp as a razor, smuggled to his cell by his keeper. It had been kept by Disalis and had not been used. It was made of the same strange material as the Bed of Og. The leader considered it a sign from the deity.

“This will cause you pain,” said the human in his tiny voice. “Please do not flail. I am small, and you could kill me accidentally.”

The human placed his tiny fingers on the face of his mammoth friend. He felt the concealed orb that was the left eyeball, as big as an orange. He laid the glinting blade against the eyelid and pulled it across. He prayed that he would only cut the skin and not the eyeball.

The giant did not make a sound as the blade crossed his eyelid and exposed bright red blood. He cringed and clenched his jaw. Peregrino made one long cut, and then he went over it again, a bit deeper. There was blood everywhere, but the eye was not truly open. He had not cut deeply enough, and he was afraid to.

Peregrino laid the knife beside the fire and placed the first two fingers of his left hand above the cut in the giant’s eyelid and the first two fingers of the other hand below it. He gritted his teeth, glanced at the giant’s huge and powerful hands down at his sides and prayed they would not strike him, and he pulled with all his might in opposite directions on the upper and lower halves of the dissected eyelid. With a mammoth effort, the

eyelid tore open, and the giant screamed loudly, more loudly than the human had expected, and long.

The roar of the giant’s agony could surely be heard all over Invereen. Other giants would come soon. They already thought he was a witch, and now one of their own lay on his floor writhing in pain, the pungent smell of blood filling the chamber.

Peregrino began to brace his soul for death, much as he had tried to do that morning long ago when he realized he was trapped in the cave.

“Can you see?” he asked, over and over again, the panic evident in his voice. His voice and breath were rapid and shallow. He spoke like a man soon to die. The giant would not answer him. He only moaned. This made the human panic all the more. If only he would answer and say that yes, he could see, he might be able to stop the other giants from killing him. He might tell them all that it is true, all of it; that the human is not a witch or a heretic, and that he knows where there is more food and more light. If only he would answer and say that, yes, he sees.

As the giant rolled about on the floor, alternately clutching and releasing the injured eye, Peregrino caught glimpses of it through the blood and fingers. The eye was white and pale. “He is blind. I have cut him to give him sight, and he is blind,” he thought. “This race is blind, all of them. They have lived too long in these caves.”

As the human feared, a commotion was raised outside. The giants were nearing, those who wished him ill, and he wondered how they would kill him. Perhaps they would grind his bones. He was sure that Golep would join them after his great pain and colossal disappointment.

When the mob arrived, Peregrino could see them. At least, he could see the two that stood in the doorway. Behind the first two Nefilis, huge white faces faded in and out with the dancing fire, their huge useless eyes bulging just beneath thin curtains of skin.

One of the two Nefilis in the doorway was a defender of the human. Peregrino couldn't understand much of what the two giants were saying, and, in the midst of their heated disagreement, neither of them made facial expressions, making the whole scene eerie and incomprehensible for the human. But their stances and tones of voice indicated to him that one wanted to kill him immediately and the other wanted to talk him out of it.

As the discussion escalated, the white faces behind pushed forward. The room was growing smaller. The giant determined to kill him came into the room and tripped over Golep. He fell in the fire and screamed. The crowd of giants fell back.

"What is this magic, human?" cried the burned giant, in his own language. "You have the hot water on land. It is dry; there is no water. You are a devil."

"It is fire, Ral," came a weak voice from the floor. It was Golep. He spoke in the language of the Nefilis, but he substituted the human word for fire, for the Nefilis had no word for it. "It is what the human has spoken of. It is heat applied to dry things, and it produced more heat. And it makes light." He used the human word for light.

The crowd of giants hushed. Their leader, Ral, spoke up. "You are deluded. You are betraying your god and you people."

"No. I have seen it! That is why I screamed. The light hurt my eye when it first came in."

"You have exposed your eye to be like this monster? You have disfigured yourself to worship his devils!" cried Ral. A shout of dismay came up from the crowd.

"The eye must be exposed to receive light. Light can help us. Light is real. All he said is true! Light lets us understand our land. With light we do not have to touch a wall or make echoes to know where we are. With light we will see the ledges that have taken so many of our children. Light opens our minds to these things, even from far away. We can explore our land better with this tool. I see the light now. It hurts my eye, but it is . . . real. It is real, my friends. There are colors. He speaks the truth, and I can show you. You must believe. I can see. I can see that my blood is one color, and the fire is another. And your face, Ral. I can see your face."

"You will not lead me to his altar, Golep. You will not touch my eye. Perhaps Golep should meet the same fate as this small devil," growled Ral.

The crowd outside the room had grown. Half the town was listening to the debate between Golep and Ral.

"Color. I see colors. We do not have a word for color. You must see color to understand it. Color is real. Light is real. The land of light must be real, too. He has made light here. You must see it. Come touch it if you don't believe. He has made a small light here, and he says there is a giant light in the sky in his land." Golep constantly inserted human words for new concepts like sky and light. This created a great deal of murmuring among the crowd pressing in on the cell.

"We must go there," Golep continued. "The human says there is food there. Much food. He tells us truth. We must believe. It is our only hope!"

“Lies!” cried Ral. “Lies and heresy!”

“Let him speak,” cried a voice from the crowd.

“Let him burn in the lake,” cried another.

The crowd spilled through the door; the defender of the human fell to the ground and was trodden upon. The back of his hand fell against the human’s knife, which lay on the floor. He felt its cold blade, and he grasped it and tucked it behind his back. The angry Nefilis laid hold of both the human and his accursed convert Golep and carried them to the door, toward the boundless darkness outside. Golep was bloody and lethargic as they carried him. Peregrino was in the hands of Ral. As the light faded, Peregrino saw Golep’s sick, bloody eye roll about. He wasn’t sure, but he thought the dull sphere was looking in his direction.

“I see,” the giant said weakly. He was in the clutches of three strong Nefilis. “You told me the truth. They are making a mistake.” He had had sight for only seconds, but these bright seconds were worth more to him than his lifetime in darkness. “We are not blind. We just do not want to open our eyes.”

The light the prisoner had made in his cell had been very small, just enough to bathe a portion of the room with a faint glow. It was quickly gone from the sight of the two captives as they were carried away. Golep’s bloody face, with one eye still welded shut and the other straining to see through the blood and the thickening darkness, expressionless despite the terror he must have felt inside--this was the last thing Peregrino would see. And the last thing the giant would see, and the first, was a jumble of blurs and colors he could not name, senseless expressionism splashed across

the vast black canvas of a civilization trapped in darkness, with one brief and perfect moment frozen in the storm of his new, untamed vision, a moment in which he thought he saw the face of a tiny human looking tenderly at him.

Both heretics were thrown screaming into a holy lake of boiling water. As they died, they smelled the sulfur and felt their skin melt away.

Meanwhile, two believers had joined the trampled defender of the human in his cell. One by one, in solemn ceremony, they each took the knife and cut themselves open. The cut was only slightly painful, and none of them made a sound. But when they pulled their dissected lids apart and the light poured in, they all screamed as loudly and as long as Golep had done. No Nefilis had ever felt pain anything like the agony of new sight after generations of blindness. They screamed in pure agony, but no one came running this time. Everyone was gone to the execution.

As their eyes adjusted to the new phenomenon of light, their screams became moans. The longer they looked at the light, the less it hurt them. The white flame danced, shrinking by the second. They could see blurry shapes and hints of many colors: the gray of the walls, with brown streaks; the black shadows; the white of their bodies; the red blood that covered their faces and hands; the bright silver sheen of the knife; the orange strings of fiber burning at the base of the flame; and the flame’s blue tips, capriciously appearing and disappearing.

The flame grew smaller. The flame went out. Tiny orange embers remained for a second. And then, suddenly, they were gone. These three believers stood in silence.