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Mythic Circle #37

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Mythcon 51: The Mythic, the Fantastic, and the Alien

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The Mythic Circle



37/2015

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- L. C. Atencio: Cover illustration; also p. 4, 27, and back cover.
- Raquel Finol-- p. 18.

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Fulfillment

by

Nicolo Santilli

It might be that we who sit at this smooth table
in the soft light
have travelled through many realms
brilliant with strange stars
and exotic eyes casting spells
of enchantment and desire,

and ascending mountain slopes
and layered palaces of dreams,
attained to new heights of beauty
and abysses of depths

before we returned
to this warm layered depth
of shared intimacy

whose quiet love
is textured with hidden landscapes
and a history of finding and seeking
which now finds fulfillment.

Call me Leda

by

Chelsi Robichaud

Call me Leda,
For that is who I am in all but name.
I, too, was taken by Zeus,
And cries like hers tore from my throat
As we rose in the air, white plumage
Dancing round my head.

Call me Leda, for I too have met a swan.
His head reclined gracefully, peering into my eyes,
His wings wide, his body transforming
Into a creature from Hades.

No longer was he the docile bird
That had enthralled me. His claws
Dug into my wrists, piercing to the bone.
No, I whispered, but he could not hear me.
His talons drew blood, and I was silenced.

Leda, too, must have cried
When she fell to the ground
Only to see Zeus enacting this
Violation
On others.

But I am not she.
I will not speak of Jove, of Zeus, of metaphors.
The plumage scattered 'round my feet
Will become the fletching to my arrows,
And I will watch as Zeus falls from the sky,
Shed of his will to power.



Ornery Corn

by

William H. Wandless

Mr. McCorkindale sized up Tim with a squint. He muttered to himself, rubbing his chin in an agitated way that made his fingers look like jittery worms when they popped through the froth of his bushy white beard. At last he crouched down, his gaunt body a stack of odd angles, and delivered his verdict.

“I reckon you’re big enough for me,” he said, “but you’ll have to be big enough for Ol’ Huck.” He gestured toward the plywood guardian that stood between Tim and the corn, the cutout of a straw-hatted, freckled boy with a thin smile and lifeless eyes that held one arm straight out to the side and carried a sign in the crook of his opposite elbow. *You Must Be This Big to Enter the Crazy Maze*, it read. Tim nodded, fidgeted, and looked over his shoulder to his folks.

“Give it a try, Timbo!” his father called between sips of cider. He was perched on a bench made of hay bales, and his feet dangled inches above the ground. “You’re as tall as you need to be! You’re the biggest of the Littles!” His mother nodded and smiled, steadying

Ginger, his little sister, as she tried to get the better of a caramel apple as big as her head.

Tim swallowed hard and turned to face Ol’ Huck. Mr. McCorkindale stepped to the side of the plywood boy, leaned against the forbidding sign, and watched with undiminished skepticism. Tim squared up to the outstretched wooden arm; it seemed impossibly high. He was wearing four pairs of socks and had pulled the strap of his baseball cap so tight that it sat high on his head. Would it be enough?

Tim straightened up, crossed his fingers in the pockets of his jacket, and took three big steps forward.

Ol’ Huck knocked his cap clean off.

Tim looked to Mr. McCorkindale. The rawboned farmer grinned toothily; and when he left his post beside Ol’ Huck, the plywood dropped back into its rut with a dusty thump. “Well, young fella,” he said, rubbing his hands together like they had never been warm, “if it’s okay with your folks, you’ll be the last to brave the Crazy Maze this season.”

“Way to go, Timmy!” his mother cried, and his father shot him an emphatic thumbs-up. Tim flipped his cap back on and wheeled toward the entrance, but Mr. McCorkindale caught him by the shoulder, his fingers light and spidery. He crouched down beside Tim, his knee digging a divot in the dirt. Gray eyes sparkled from the crags of his leathery face.

“You look like a smart boy to me,” Mr. McCorkindale whispered, albeit at a volume Tim was sure his parents could hear, “so you must have heard about the satchel full of money Ma McCorkindale lost in the maze. I’ve told that woman time and again that the Crazy Maze is no shortcut to anywhere, but she don’t never listen. She says she’s sure she left it out on the deck in the middle, but no one’s been able to find the deck, much less the money. My guess is that the corn decided to keep it, but what corn could do with five thousand dollars I’ll never know.” Tim’s mother chuckled, and Ginger yelped as the caramel apple bopped her in the nose.

“Young fella,” Mr. McCorkindale said, shaking his head, “I’ve given that money up for lost; if you find it, it’s yours to keep, okay?” Tim nodded so eagerly his cap fell off again, but the farmer held up a cautioning finger. “You’ve got to hold up your end of the bargain and keep it fair and square, though. Before you head in, you’ve got to make me three promises.”

Tim nodded again anxiously. The cornstalks beckoned, and he looked with concern at the descending sun.

Mr. McCorkindale pressed a shining tin whistle into Tim’s palm. “First thing: if you get lost--when you get lost--just blow this whistle. We’ll go round up some bloodhounds and see if we can’t find you by Christmas. You promise

you’ll blow this whistle if you get yourself in a pickle?”

Tim looked to his father, but he was trying to unstick Ginger’s caramel apple from the sleeve of his blue windbreaker. Ginger clapped her hands, considered them with a frown, and wiped them clean on the front of her gingham dress. Tim turned to Mr. McCorkindale, whose lips were twitching so much that his beard shivered. “I promise,” he said.

“Second thing,” Mr. McCorkindale continued, passing Tim a penlight. “It gets gloomy in there once the sun dips down behind the rows. Won’t be long from now. You can use this flashlight if it gets too dark, and it might even scare off the groundhogs if they’re none too hungry.” He turned to Tim’s folks and winked. “If you get caught in the dark, promise me you’ll turn this light on and wave it around, okay? We’ll come fetch you if you do.”

Tim looked to his mother, but she was busy tucking her hair back under a blue polka-dotted hairband, replacing the black one Ginger was chewing. His father was trying to interest Ginger in the caramel apple, but she was more fascinated by the spectacles balanced on the tip of his nose. Tim turned to Mr. McCorkindale, whose crow’s-foot wrinkles stretched all the way back to his ears. “I promise,” he said.

“Last thing,” Mr. McCorkindale said, leading Tim at last toward the maw of the maze. His voice dropped down low, so low Tim could barely hear it above the rustling of the rows. “This here is ornery corn,” he began, “a kind of corn that’s no good for nothing but mazing. My daddy’s granddaddy brought back the seed with him from Crete, an island where the first and finest maze was ever built. You see how those stalks grow real, real close together? That’s because

they're a tight-knit bunch and like to share those old Greek secrets, ear to ear. This corn knows the wickedest tricks that have ever been played, and it won't think twice about using them if you do the rows wrong."

Tim nodded, but the whooshing of gusts through the stalks had obliged him to guess at every third word. "I promise?" he ventured.

Mr. McCorkindale laughed a dry, rustling laugh, but when he looked down his expression was grave. "Here's what you've got to promise: whatever you do, promise you won't break the rows. This corn takes mazing frightful serious, and if you cheat to make it to the middle, there's no telling what it'll do. You promise to play it fair and square?"

Tim nodded, tucked the whistle and light into his pockets, and stepped over a fallen stalk that marked the threshold of the maze. "I promise," he said.

Tim waved to his parents, and they waved back. "Good luck!" they cried, and his father held the caramel apple while his mother helped Ginger to wave as well. "Apple!" she cried. Tim waved to Mr. McCorkindale, too, and the old man nodded back, his thumbs hooked in the straps of his overalls, his suntanned skin turned pumpkin orange as he gazed dreamily into the uncanny light of the late October afternoon.

"Have a care, young fella," he said, his vision fixed somewhere beyond the maze to the west. "Out here we're in the business of saying one thing and meaning another, but those rows take every word they hear real serious." He cocked an ear toward the corn and cupped a hand behind it, listening, then chewed his lip and nodded once again. He seemed so lanky that he practically swayed in the breeze. "Promises are ours to make," he said, "but they're the corn's to keep."

Tim backed into the maze; with every step Mr. McCorkindale looked scrawnier, more skeletal. The voices of his folks were softened when he was bracketed by the cornstalk walls of the opening row, but they bustled in a familiar, harried way that made him feel safe and brave. By the time he rounded the first corner and they had vanished from sight, their customary noise had become one with the rustling.

Tim darted down a straight passage that ran parallel to the hay bale benches. The stalks were close together, but he could see stragglers leaving Ma McCorkindale's Cider Shoppe between them. The path took a gradual right turn that ran along the perimeter of the maze, and Tim jogged along, his feet kicking up dust and papery husks. The wall of stalks grew denser as the path sloped inward, and before long he could not see the world beyond the rows.

At last he arrived at a right-hand turn that split into a three-way branching. Each of the paths snaked into the heart of the maze, but their curvature made it impossible to guess where they would end. A weathered wooden sign was propped against the stalks where the avenues met; it read *Welcome!* in stenciled white letters. Beneath it, in faded characters, Tim could make out an older greeting: *Kalós Orísate!* He paused to root around in his pockets and filled his lungs with crisp autumn air.

"It's Timmy Time," he breathed.

From his right pocket Tim produced a coil of blue fishing line. He turned to the wall facing the spot where the three paths branched, tied one end of the line to the stoutest stalk he could find, and looped the rest around his wrist. He was a little afraid of losing his way, and the line would help him find his way back. Better yet, it would tell him where he had

already been, so he would not waste daylight retracing errant steps.

From his left pocket he produced a photo of the Crazy Maze that had appeared in the newspaper. The image was grainy, and much of the maze was eclipsed by the McCorkindales, who waved from a platform in the foreground between the photographer and the first rows. The far side was out of focus, but the picture revealed two critical details. First, Tim knew the rightmost path at the branching where he was standing ran almost all the way back to the entrance; he had traced it with a pen, and it led to a tangle of dead ends. More importantly, he could tell that the deck where the satchel was supposed to be was decidedly not in the middle of the maze but tucked closer to the north wall. If Tim could keep the sun to his left and work his way toward the northern border, where Possum Hollow Road ought to be, he stood a fighting chance of finding that satchel.

Tim stuffed the picture back into his pocket, chose the leftmost path, and headed west. He held his right arm out behind him, letting the fishing line unspool through the loop of his thumb and index finger. Too much time had been wasted at the petting zoo and in the pumpkin patch. If he was going to find that satchel before dark, he would have to hurry.

"Five thousand dollars," he whispered, shaking his head in wonder at the sum. He reached a fork in the corn, chose the left path, reached a dead end, and doubled back. Tim had only a hazy awareness of what so much money might buy, but he knew it was more than he could earn by mowing Mrs. Brewster's enormous lawn two hundred times. All the things he wanted--a new bike, a tree fort, a pet iguana--would be within reach;

maybe he could buy a car for his folks or a swingset for Ginger. He would work out the details when he had the satchel, but he knew one thing for sure: five thousand dollars would change everything.

The right corridor dead-ended as well, concluding in a hay bale bench flanked by inflatable owls. Tim frowned, glanced at his picture of the maze, and raced back to the welcome sign. He picked the middle path, chose another wrong fork, and was turned back by a scarecrow that had lost a lot of straw. The other fork brought him to the intersection of four paths that whorled out of sight, and Tim picked one that looked like it might curl northward. Instead it returned him to the crossing, and Tim winced when he saw his blue line drawn taut between two stalks. He picked a new path, one that tended eastward, and found himself balked by another bench ringed with the browning meat of smashed pumpkins. "Darn it!" he spat.

Tim kicked a chunk of pumpkin rind, jogged back to the junction, and rushed down the last path. The sun had dipped lower, leaving half the avenue in shadow; worse still, it was directly to his right. He was heading south. "Please turn," he murmured, rushing down a corridor of corn that seemed impossibly long. The stalks to either side swayed lazily, beckoning in the direction Tim was taking, but the path concluded in a solid wall of corn, an angled shadow spilling across yet another hay bale bench.

Tim grimaced and slackened his pace. He had lost a lot of time, and he was sure he had traveled every path he had come across. He studied his picture and scuffled forward, hoping he had overlooked some avenue. Two dozen listless steps brought him to the end of the corridor, and when he raised his gaze

from his makeshift map his heartbeat fluttered. The path concluded not in a wall but in a curious crinkle, a set of tightly-packed turns like a squashed W. At the end of the zigzag a new row opened, one that headed north, and a cutout crow waved to him with a black wing. A sign was slung over its shoulder: *Fair and Square, Halfway There!*

Tim approached the crow, jumped up, and slapped its wing a resounding high-five. "Tiny" Tim Little would not be beaten by the Crazy Maze after all! A single step down the new corridor, however, brought him to a skidding stop. The fact that he could deliver a high-five to a plywood crow meant he had exhausted his supply of fishing line.

Although the exertion had warmed him, Tim shivered. He knew his parents were nearby, maybe even in earshot, but the thought of walking the maze in the dark made him feel a little sick. He turned back to the crinkle, considered the crow, then glanced down the long corridor. He imagined returning empty-handed or, worse yet, blowing his whistle and waiting for grown-ups to come to his rescue. "Don't be a baby," he spat, his face flushed. He screwed his cap back on, turned away from the crow, and strode down the lane with renewed determination.

At the end he came to an intersection, and he identified one dead end after another, marching purposefully down every new turning. With his heel he carved occasional exes and arrows in the dirt, hoping they would guide him in the absence of his fishing line. Tim felt like he had covered miles of maze, but he would cover every last inch if that satchel was at the end.

Another north-south corridor ended in a bench, one flanked by twin stands of unlit grinning jack-o'-lanterns. That

these pumpkins were intact struck Tim as a promising sign, but the length of the shadows was worrisome. He climbed atop the bench and squinted to the west, where it looked like the sun was impaled on a tall stalk like an orange lollipop. He turned north to see if he could spot the edge of the maze, or maybe even hear cars leaving McCorkindale Farm down Possum Hollow Road. He stood tiptoe and cupped his ear; he heard nothing. When he turned north again to jump down, however, what he saw surprised him so much that he toppled face-first into a bed of scattered straw. Dusty and dazed, he climbed back on the bale to be sure.

Before him, between the fluttering tassels of two yellowing stalks, he could see a wooden railing. The deck was less than fifty feet away.

Tim whooped and ran back down the path, fixing the location in his memory. Five turns and a second check told him he was closer, and a third check from a bench between scarecrows with overstuffed burlap heads convinced him was closer still. At the next dead end, a climb atop a cylindrical bale the McCorkindales had turned into a giant spider with long, bendy legs told him only twenty feet of corn stood between him and his prize.

He looped inward along new avenues, turning and reversing as pumpkins and scarecrows and cutouts taunted him from dead ends, guarding their stacked bale benches. Tim imagined himself as the tetherball at the playground, spinning in smaller and smaller circles as the rope coiled around the pole. Despite his giddy sense of progress, recalling the playground awakened new anxieties. What if Randy Lennox was right, and the satchel was a story the McCorkindales cooked up to get people to visit their

farm? What if Bobby Perkins was right, and a girl from Appleton found the satchel the first day the maze was open? Tim grimaced as he imagined an empty bag and a long walk back in the dark.

He orbited around the location of the deck, nervous circuit after circuit. His eyes were itchy, and he groaned a dozen times as each new bend led him to a dead end well short of his goal. He had begun to entertain the terrible idea that he had somehow spiraled away from the deck when he spied a sight that dismayed him. Up ahead he discerned a design in the dust--his own scattered footprints. Another turn confirmed his fear: the giant bendy-legged spider loomed before him, its pie-pan eyes downcast.

Tim struggled to maintain his composure. Was there another way to the center? Had he missed a turn? As he stood before the spider, drawing in ragged breaths, an appalling thought occurred to him. What if there was no way to the deck? What if Mr. McCorkindale warned him about breaking the rows because that was the only way to get to the middle?

The notion made Tim queasy, but he consoled himself with a practical, unhappy thought. "Anyone who made it this far," he muttered, "would have cut through the corn." If searchers had cheated, of course, the satchel was gone. Tears welled in Tim's eyes and carved trails down his dusty cheeks.

He had come so far; he had to know. He trudged toward the spider, wiping his nose with his sleeve as he ducked under its legs. He examined the corn, searching for signs of passage, certain he would see broken stalks. What he spotted instead caused him to blink, rub his eyes with his clean sleeve, and blink again. He reached in and parted two stalks to be sure: the corn in the rows was tightly knit not

because it was Greek, secretive, or ornery, but because Mr. McCorkindale, at least here near the center, had drawn stalks together with chicken wire. The prize of the maze was enclosed in a cage.

"You *sneak!*" Tim cried. "'Fair and square' my butt!"

Tim pressed the chicken wire and found it rigid. No wonder no one had claimed the money! Even searchers who discovered the deck and decided to cheat would be turned back by the reinforced cornstalks. Tim dropped down and tried the bottom of the fence; it curved upward when he pressed it, and the neighboring stalks shook. He lowered himself to his belly and smiled. For once he was glad to be the littlest Little.

Inch by inch he edged his way through the corn, and the stalks rustled and snapped as he pushed his way past them. He clambered to his feet as soon as his knees cleared the fence, toppling a half dozen stalks that fell across the pristine path before him. Tim dusted himself off, darted first to the right, peered down the row, and reeled back to his left. Two tight turns brought him to the foot of a flight of stairs that rose steeply up to a wooden deck.

Tim scaled the steps two at a time and lurched to a stop. On the floor of the deck, spruced with a blue ribbon, was a battered satchel with a rusted clasp. Tim wiped his palms on his knees; he could hear his pulse in his ears. The ribbon came free with a tug, and Tim unfastened the clasp with shaking hands.

Inside, bundled with rubber bands, was a pile of five-dollar bills.

Tim jumped up and raised his fists overhead. "I did it!" he hollered, "I did it!" Beaming, he looked to the east, where he imagined his parents and Mr. McCorkindale must be, but all he could see was an ocean of swaying stalks. With

sudden concern Tim wheeled to the west, where a crimson sliver of the setting sun was scarcely visible above the rows.

Tim grabbed the satchel and bolted from the deck, moving so fast that he skittered halfway through a gap in the corn at the foot of the stairs. Surprised, he backpedaled out and sat down hard on the bottom step. With the satchel clutched to his stomach, he peered down a tapering path that curled between the fallow stalks.

Curious, Tim ventured down the path, step after hesitant step. No chicken wire impeded his progress, although the row was narrow, half the width of all the others he had walked. It snaked through the corn, and the tassels above him seemed so close together that he felt he was walking down a tunnel.

The path concluded in a double-cutback, and Tim stepped sideways into a clearing, coming in from a diagonal alley tucked away in a corner. He turned to survey his surroundings, afraid he would have to go all the way back and squirm under the fence behind the giant spider. What he faced, however, was a hay bale bench, one flanked by twin stands of unlit grinning jack-o'-lanterns.

Tim's cheeks flushed with uncomfortable heat. Setting the satchel down, he climbed on the bench and peered north. The railing of the deck was visible in the deepening dusk; below him, he could see sneakerprints where he had kicked up the straw following his earlier fall. "Mr. McCorkindale did play it fair and square," he whispered. "I'm the sneak; *I'm* the cheat." A gust of wind roared across the rows, and it sounded to Tim like a long, disappointed sigh.

Tim hopped down and retrieved the satchel. The weight of the bag soothed him, but he felt woozy. Spots swam at the fringes of his vision, and the shadows

around him sputtered and squirmed. With fumbling fingers he withdrew the penlight, yet a dozen rapid clicks yielded no illumination. The moment he gave up, however, the clearing flared into brightness, forcing him to shield his eyes. Dazzled, Tim saw all the jack-o'-lanterns burn with eerie orange fire, their round faces scowling and turned toward him.

Tim ran. The cornstalks hissed and undulated all around him, and he stumbled down the rows as his eyes readjusted to the unwelcoming dusk. He scanned the path for the exes and arrows he had dug with his heel, but he could read nothing in the dust.

He arrived at a dead end and whirled, feeling as though eyes were watching him from all sides. He pulled the whistle from his pocket and blew a long, piercing note; his signal was answered by a far-off howl. As Tim stood at the end of the corridor, knock-kneed and trembling, he heard something coming toward him, crashing through the corn.

Tim sprinted headlong down the rows, making turn after turn with no sense of distance or direction. Twice he tried to burst through the stalk walls; twice he caromed off the hidden chicken wire. His ribs ached from the exertion, and he could not catch his breath. The satchel slowed him, but he could not let it go.

The Crazy Maze came alive. At the ends of some rows huge crows flapped and snapped at him, their beaks gleaming; at the ends of others, scarecrows tottered toward him, stick fingers grasping. In adjacent rows he heard whining and whomping, growling and groaning. Inky little shadows spilled from spaces between the stalks and scurried across his path, chittering and snickering.

Tim tripped and tumbled to the ground. In the sky above him something

shrieked, and he instinctively covered his head. He staggered to his feet and fell again--something had his ankle! Only as he crab-walked backward, kicking and flailing, did he realize he was tangled in his own fishing line.

Tim followed the line, crouching and shuffling as quietly as he could. He could scarcely see the blue filament but it was reassuringly taut, which convinced him he was heading out of the maze rather than toward the slack end somewhere in the middle. The thought that he might be blundering in the wrong direction made his stomach turn somersaults.

Tim was so intent on following the line, trying hard to keep low and ignore the wailing and baying behind him, that he bounced off the chicken wire once again when he reached the stalk to which the line was anchored. He regained his feet, whirled around, and held the satchel up to ward off any pursuer ready to pounce. When nothing did, he peeped through the loop of the satchel's handle. Before him, in white letters bright enough to see, a sign propped against the stalks said *Begone!*

If there was more writing underneath, Tim did not stay long enough to read it. He bolted down the row, gulping air and pumping his arms. A painfully gradual turn brought him back in sight of the entrance to the maze, and he expended the last of his energy bursting from the corn, barreling headfirst into the back of Ol' Huck, knocking the cutout flat.

Tim's mother gasped, Ginger clapped, and Mr. McCorkindale and Tim's father rose up startled from their seats. They rushed over to him, and Tim considered them dreamily.

"That must've been some scary maze," his father said, plucking Tim's cap from the ground. "I've never seen

you move so fast."

"Hey there, young fella, are you okay? You're white as a sheet." Mr. McCorkindale peered at him, his head cocked. "But would you look at that!" he said, pointing to the satchel. "It looks like your boy will be none the worse for wear for that little scare."

Tim at last recovered his senses enough to drop the satchel, duck under the farmer's offered handshake, and put the grown-ups between him and the Crazy Maze. He clutched his father's legs and listened, but there was no howling or crashing or shrieking. The corn rustled drily in the breeze. All he could hear were his father's exclamations as he opened up the bag and Mr. McCorkindale's wheezing laughter.

Tim's father tousled his hair, and his mother cheered him from the bench as she gathered up Ginger's things. Tim opened and closed his mouth like a goldfish, sorting through all the words he needed to say, his gaze fixed on the maw of the maze. Before he could speak, however, he felt Mr. McCorkindale's spidery fingers on his shoulder and caught a snatch of the farmer's conversation: "--and he went in there and bested the Crazy Maze, fair and square. Didn't you, young fella?"

Tim peeped around his father's legs and saw Mr. McCorkindale grinning, but he could not bring himself to meet the old man's gaze. He managed only a sheepish "Yessir" in reply.

"Want to know how I know?" Mr. McCorkindale asked, giving Tim a significant wink. "If you had cheated, that ornery corn would never let you off so easy." He shook hands with Tim's father and sauntered toward the rows. "Don't spend it all in one place, young fella," he called over his shoulder. "A heap of money like that changes just

about everything.”

Tim held his father’s hand and walked toward the hay bale bench, feeling queasy. Only when he was swept up in the bustle of departure did he begin to feel safe from the maze. His mother shook out his jacket and attacked him with wet-nap, and his father bounced Ginger on his knee and sang her an impromptu tune about sticky children. Although he felt an urgent need to talk about something, anything, the experience of the maze began to feel hazy, like it had happened to somebody else long ago.

Tim’s father scooped up Ginger, and she nestled her head on his shoulder, chewing on the collar of his brown jacket. His sleeve and her plaid dress

were stained with the vivid red of a candy apple. When his mother knelt down to wrestle Tim back into his coat, Ginger snatched her red hairband and tried putting it on.

Tim’s mother straightened his jacket, patted his pockets, and withdrew the tarnished copper whistle. “What’s this, Timothy?” she asked. Tim considered the whistle and turned toward the spot where Mr. McCorkindale was waiting.

Smiling slyly, the old farmer rubbed his beardless chin with one hand and waved with the other. “Y’all come back next year!” he called, and vanished into the corn. The wind kicked up again, rousing the rows of willowy stalks, and the sun beat down on Tim Little, high in the noonday autumn sky.

Editorial: This Issue

In this issue, we welcome some new writers with a variety of tastes and techniques. In fiction, C. F. Cooper and Kevan Bowkett debut with excerpts from their respective invented mythologies. In poetry, Chelsi Robichaud and Adam Massimiano offer new interpretations of the traditional “Leda” and “Undine” myths, while Kevan Bowkett gives us a different view of Saturn, monarch of the Golden Age. Joseph Murphy also provides three poems exploring the life and vision of a shaman. Among illustrators Raquel Finol offers a striking illustration of Boyer’s poem, “I am a Witch.”

In all categories, we also welcome back some previous authors. In fiction, William Wandless, who published “The Third Mercy” in *MC31* (2009), is back with magic (or is it?) in a contemporary setting. October Williams, whose previous contributions were three poems published *MC32* (2010), is now back with a short story, not without poetic adornment. Ryder Miller, who explored the relationship between modern life and virtual adventures in *MC36* (2014), has moved on to “Laser Cell Phones” and the exploration of Mars. In poetry, Nicolo Santilli, author of “On a Sea Wind,” *MC36* (2014), presents more poetic vignettes of the life of Saliessen, the bard of that series, and David Sparenberg, whose poems evoking the mythic qualities of nature, have appeared in the last five issues, offers us “The Wild God” for this one.

L. C. Atencio once more provides a cover and three illustrations. He also offers his invaluable help as associate editor, without which, very likely, this issue would not be appearing.

The Shaman's Craft

by

Joseph Murphy

I speak of a boat with a beak at its bow.

Its hull an oath churned from my drum's skin;
Decks caulked by song
Rising from the wreath within a mountain's tongue.

I raise a mast whittled from a root my kin
Pressed between my mother's teeth
As the birthing began.

Tonight, I graze the sky's banks
As branches burst from the husk of my keel.

Only a fool would think I lie at your feet
As a flame's bud opens through the stalk of my chest,
Seeds fall from my rudder's quill,
And a new moon's tentacles
Hone my oars.

Rolling and twisting,
I rise and weave through a conk shell's song:
The smashed bone of my cap
Hissing and wailing;
My spiked club
Jabbing at coiled shards.

To and fro, I rise from a star-chipped stream,
Rowing as I beat on the sail of my lungs;
As I scent from a wolf's snout;
Fixed in a puma's stare and stance,
Seeking that soul
I've been sent to find,
Seeking a cure.

BY CALLING

by

R. L. Boyer

Our echoes roll from soul to soul,
And grow forever and forever.
—Alfred, Lord Tennyson

By calling, I belong to that race, that strange race ...
Men and women with blind eyes, who see too much
Men and women who soar on broken wings
The race of stammering tongue and wounded thigh
The race of those who labor in sorrow
The lost ones, whose strength is their weakness
Whose words are darts aimed at the hearts of the mighty
With names like Hesse, Dickinson, Rimbaud
Rilke, Basho, Shakespeare and Neruda
Eliot, Homer, Machado and Goethe
Whitman, Holderlin, Virgil and Blake
Emerson, Dante, Taliesin and Heine
Novalis, Black Elk, Baudelaire and Rumi
Lawrence, Milton, Byron and Yeats
Bards of England, bards of France
Bards of Germany, bards of Spain
Bards of Asia, Africa and the Land Down Under
Bards of Palestine and the Fertile Crescent
Bards of the Americas, north and south
Bards of the frozen wastelands
Bards of whites and bards of blacks
Bards of the brown, red and yellow races
Bards of the steppes and the tropics
Bards of the forests and mountains
Bards of the deserts and seas
Bards of heaven, bards of earth
Bards of the circling sun and moon
Bards of the intergalactic spaces
Bards of the papyrus scroll and the Internet
Bards of shadow, bards of sunlight
Bards of war and bards of peace
Bards of the cradle, bards of the grave
Bards of the world—this world and the next

Bards of all times and all places
Bards of the here and now—*always* of the here and now
Bards of the inner and outer mysteries

Great Souls who labor in sorrow and verse
Great Souls who love deeply, then perish
Great Souls who own nothing and know nothing
Great Souls who stand alone, like sentries, seeing

Far-off things, and listen for the Voice that
Spoke to Elijah ...

Undine

by

Adam Massimiano

I've been told
that I do this because
I just want a soul.

Is it that simple?
Pouring myself out
to those men, again
and again for the promise
of what?
Good feelings and maybe
a place in an afterlife
that I don't believe in?

I'd have to believe in souls
to really want one. No,
I've only been told what I want.

I'd rather watch men drown.

I AM A WITCH

by

R. L. Boyer

We live, so to speak, like spiders, and never see the light.
—Chekhov

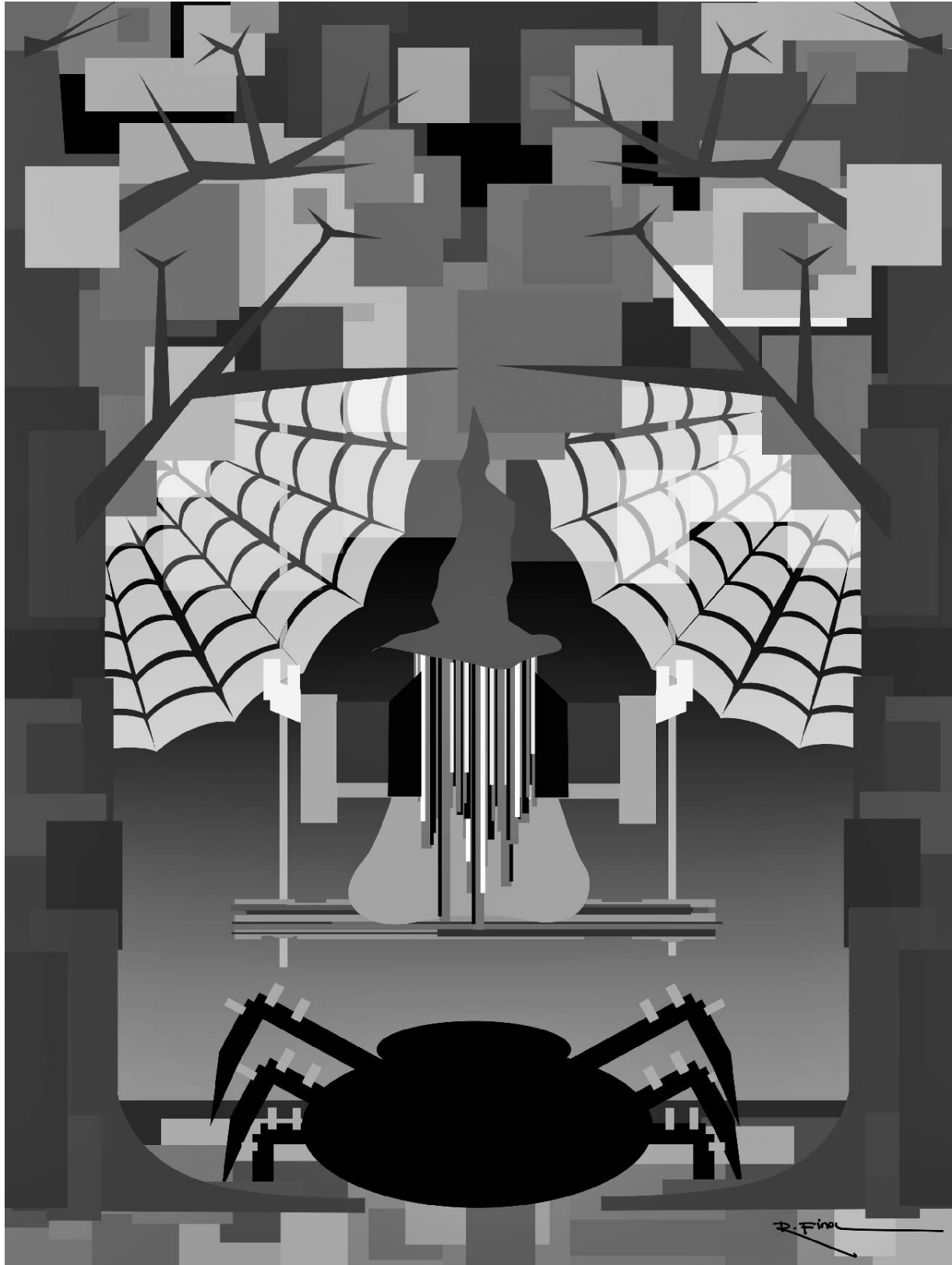
I am a witch.
I live alone in a deep, dark forest.

My only companion is the large black spider who lives in my room.
We are kindred spirits — she and I — born of the same clan.
Most of the day, we hide in our many-legged silences without moving.

Then, in sudden bursts of energy ...

We are spinners!
We are hunters!

Our eyes are blind, and our mouths are always hungry.
Hurry up now! We are waiting for you to start dinner.



Laser Cell Phones

by

Ryder Miller

He was always mad that he needed one. In fact this was an inherited genetic problem with his father being angry that he needed one also. His father never got one, but he died of cancer anyway. Brian Futargh eventually got one so he could stay in contact with the rest of the human race.

They could cause cancer when they came out, they both thought. They could mess with one's brain. One might get a tumor from one or a growth on one's ear or eye. There were all sorts of things to worry about out there, but the manufacturers said they did not pose a health problem; that there was no conclusive proof. People were getting cancer for all sorts of other reasons. There were all sorts of things out there that could cause a problem. They argued that there were all these strange things going out through the air now. One just needed to stick a receiver out their window to get something, Futargh thought. Some of the broadcast signals had gone beyond the distance of the solar system. The cell phones were not doing anything very different than TV or Radio. Imagine if one could just tune into the air waves like a radio. Maybe they could someday control a bunch of people who had antennas built into their heads. They could just stick their heads out of the window and see what they found in the radio

waves. In the future one might just need to stick their head out the window to get the news.

For their time these cell phones were amazing devices. Some were initially reminded of Star Trek which showcased the idea on television forty years earlier in the late 1960s. That was one hundred years ago now. Futargh was happy those folks from Star Trek remained icons. Especially Spock. They became commonplace to use like the Internet two generations later. Nobody predicted all these things generations earlier. They suddenly showed up and changed the world. All contemporary literature would have them now. They would be cultural baggage that had changed things. They would be something that was frequently used, but not necessarily something that was thought about too much. Some might have forgotten to put them in stories, but there was not a lot of close examination about how they would change things. There were not a lot of people who wrote about new brain tumors or eye problems, but some doctors noticed the effects of these things and would talk about it. Like Tobacco Companies, they had deniers and apologists. They also had tough lawyers. They had become part of the historical technological juggernaut.

Futargh, though, was worried that he

might have inherited a genetic weakness that made it easier for him to get cancer. His mother had also caught cancer. His father worried about it, then caught it, and then died also. Now he was out here in space on his way to the Red Planet. Who would have imagined what the cell phones had turned into? They were more a tool now than they had ever been. It was impossible to live a full life if one did not own one. Anyone going to Mars had to have one. They were no longer a status symbol; they were necessary and a survival tool.

There were so many new apps over the years, even some cell phones that could be used like a Light Saber. There was a beam of energy that could be pointed out of it and two duelers could sword fight with them like the light sabers in Star Wars. They were now called Laser Cells. They were more of tool than a weapon, but it was reasoned that it was possible that someone would need to be able to defend themselves on Mars. It had become like some of the most successful science fiction from a century ago, ie. bringing the sword fight into the future. Edgar Rice Burroughs did it on Mars. The ship they were taking was named after him. They were also in DUNE (where they banished nuclear weapons), and more memorably in the Star Wars franchise. Sword fighting reminded one of a purer and more clean time where people could find conquest and defend themselves based on their personal merit. Anyone could shoot a gun, especially if one was not ready for it, but real men and women would want to duke it out with their fists or with a sword instead of shoot guns. It was purer in a way.

One was not supposed to use them in the

space-ship, though. There were too many gadgets, cords, and wires that could be damaged. The Laser Cells could actually punch a whole out into the exterior of the ship. That could result in the death of the entire crew. This app was turned off until they landed on The Red Planet.

Once they reached Mars, the Laser Cells could do some great things. They could be a great tool on Mars allowing the explorers to cut things up to look inside, especially big stones and boulders. The astro-geologists loved them. The hot laser could boil sections of the rocks they found, and with the more advanced versions, they could also alert the scientist to the composition of the rocks. The gas from the burnings give signatures of the chemical components of the rocks. Something heated could be studied for answers to questions they have not determined yet. Heated rocks might give off chemical traces that could reveal interesting things about the geology of Mars. One might find evidence of a water source on the planet. They also could be a means to protect oneself if the explorers were not alone on Mars. They could provide the warmth of a fire. With them one could light things on fire.

A man could even light his Laser Cell and swing it around while imagining that he was a science fiction swashbuckler of old. Such play might be therapeutic and provide exercise, but was likely to be frowned upon now.

The planet was probably barren with nothing to worry about, like the space probes had detected so far. The early settlers had not discovered anything of the dangerous extraterrestrial sort, but they

might not have told everyone everything. Maybe there was something below the surface of the planet, but that was likely to just be extremophiles if anything. It was likely not multicellular, but even microbes could cause a problem. H.G. Wells pointed this out in *The War of the Worlds* now almost two hundred years old. Such a discovery however would be amazing. Who knew what we could learn from life on another planet, even if it was just a microbe. The scientists thought the search for extraterrestrial life was the most pressing question concerning Mars and they had stopped the early plans to terraform the planet until a thorough search had been done. Now, however, there were a bunch of folks on the way that did not always get along with each other all the time.

It was a new wilderness out there and we were going to explore it and maybe someday settle there. After all the war at the early part of the century the public was happy that our DNA would not all be stuck on Earth by 2100. Precautions were taken so that it was not fried in space for the journey.

But not everybody agreed with each other on the spaceship. "Crazy," thought Futargh. It was like a suspense thriller between him and Randy Merkens now. One could say they had a failure to communicate. Tension could grow high and they sometimes could not even hear each other, even when they were yelling. Futargh usually got along well with the other members of the crew. There was Elsa Steinburgh who was charming, Jill Beemer who was accepting, and Jack Hardy who usually kept to himself also. None were married at home, but most had a few people they corresponded with on the Home

Planet.

One time while they were eating Merkens taunted Futargh. "Hey fatty. Save some food for the rest of us," said Merkens not quite jokingly. Futargh was actually thin.

Futargh was surprised by this man's willingness to start a fight.

The mission to the Red Planet was really about salesmanship. People were finally convinced that Peace was a "win-win" situation. It was hard to send people who represented the whole planet while everyone one was fighting. When things died down, a Mission idea was presented that most people agreed with. The public was not able to take a jump into an unknown without a plan. The mission designers sold the plan as an international plan with the possibility of putting people on another planet. After the public had examined the plan they agreed to an International Mission for the betterment of humankind. Fighting seemed out of place.

"Leave me alone," Futargh had said before the assembled.

"Well, leave us some food," Merkens replied.

"I was only eating till full," said Futargh.

"So does everybody else. There is a ration for everybody," said Merkens.

"There is food for us to share, and I waited until everybody had already eaten," said Futargh.

Merkens did not reply. Futargh was annoyed about how communication could sometime become a weapon.

"What is this really about?" Futargh followed.

Merkens did not say anything and walked away.

There were no new episodes after that for a few weeks. They would give each other dirty looks in the hallway, but usually they could manage some banter between them. The crew was undecided about whose side to take on the few occasions. Futargh was angry to be in a position where he needed to decide between being hungry and being annoyed. Most of the girls on the flight would not eat their full ration anyway and he was seeing to it, though in a fun way, that food would not be wasted. Most of the crew understood this. Futargh would try to forgive Merkens, but at times it sure did seem as if Merkens had gotten his goat.

The next confrontation was a bit worse.

"Don't you go hogging the food," said Merkens during a communal meal.

Futargh almost pulled out his Laser Cell but thought better of it.

"Don't talk to me that way," Futargh said instead.

"There is only so much food," said Merkens.

"The way you folks eat you will be wasting food for everybody," responded Futargh. He took his cell phone out of his pocket, but did not light up his phone.

Merkens also did so.

"Stop it, you two," said Elsa Steinburgh.

"Maybe we can solve this like men when we reach The Red Planet," said Futargh.

"You light up those things in here and you will risk endangering us all. You two will never see space flight again," said Jack Hardy.

"You better stop riding me," said Merkens.

"If you want to do that when you get to Mars that is okay, but not in here," said Jill

Beemer.

After that, Futargh and Merkens would scowl at each other every now and then, but they seemed to be on better terms. They would need to wait until the ship landed or could wind up in prison.

The planet was the color of dried blood. The cold might be relentless. They got some sun there, but that might not make a difference. The Red Planet's imaginative stories were usually about war or survival. Dark were the tidings for this planet with moons named after fear and panic. Astronomers had shown that there was once running liquid on the planet and probably seas. There were photographs from space probes that showed dried river systems. The planet did not have running rivers now. Water had been found at the poles of the planet, but some thought the planet might have once been wet and more habitable in the past. It was not determined yet if the remains of the riverine systems once carried water or some other liquid.

Ice on Mars meant that all the water necessary for the trip did not need to be carried on the space ship. One could also refill the ship with water for the trip back to Earth. One might find all the water necessary for a successful round trip to Mars. Maybe there would even be bathes and showers there because of the ice they could find. The ship could melt ice and heat water, but they would not have a lot of water again until they landed on the surface. The spaceship recycled the water they had. Water would be available certainly at the poles.

For now they would need to be careful with their small daily allowance of water. They also had to preserve their urine so the

water could be taken out of it when they were done with it. Even the dirty water that was used after the limited bathing and dish washing was recycled. They did have to get used to the taste of the water that had become less and less pleasant the longer they had been in space. Maybe they could get some clean ice from the surface of Mars. They could use their Laser Cells to heat up the water to a boiling point when they started fires there.

They could also battle like in the stories of Mars of old. When they got back to the planet the duelers, even the winner, would probably be put in jail. Maybe he would just decide not to head back. Mars might just become a prison for the rebels.

For now, Futargh just missed the conveniences and beauty of home planet Earth. Mars, however, would be an interesting experience. Having been there would make him unique in a lot of different communities. People might idolize him and want to shake his hand.

The space ship was cramped though. There were a few windows that looked out into the void, and the only scenery was the stars in the distance and the occasional floating rock. It was wondrous in a way, the vast emptiness. One could dream about what would result from this “conquest” of space. The surface of Mars was likely to be more lovely. There would be an alien sunset. The mountains were likely to be picturesque. Futargh could not wait until he could be out there alone without any of the crew in sight. The Environmentalists of old might really be jealous of him when he attained this.

Futargh wanted to stretch out, but he

would have to wait to do that. He would also have to wait to kill Randy Merkens if he decided to. This man had undermined him. He probably would be better able to control his temper if he had more space to move around in. He laughed about the pun. He didn't need more land like the Nazis of old, though. He was from Norway, he protested for himself. He just was finding the space ship cramped. As it was, he was very restricted and frustrated. He had to go out of his way to stretch his legs and back. There was also only one television room. They took turns picking what would be on television, but each had different tastes. When Merkens picked a show he would usually walk out of the room to his bunk and read a book instead. He would have to find the time to be alone in the room to watch what he individually wanted. They did gather regularly for the news. He had passed the psychological profile necessary to be on this ship. The psychologists expected for people to have some aggression. They needed it to defend themselves. Anger could be a great motivator. It could help one through difficult situations. One could ignore things, like pain, while they were angry. He would have to control his anger with Merkens for the benefit of the expedition. He figured they quarreled only a few times.

Now he just needed to keep his cool and try to forgive.

If he got into a fight it might make them all look bad. Honor sometimes conflicted with free speech, it seemed. He had to remember that they did not all need to be friends. They did need to be colleagues though.

There would be some happy people waiting for them on Mars. This was not the first expedition and it was not likely to be the last. Most trips had met with success. Most people who took this trip had lived through it. They had created some amazing art on The Red Planet. Some of the views were bound to be spectacular. There were permanent settlers on Mars, but not that many of them. He forgot the exact number, but it was around fifty. Most of them were scientists. There were also a few administrators to help support the human team there. Most had come not thinking they would be able to make a return journey. They were there for the glory many of them. Some however just wanted to get off the planet Earth and might bring their problems with them. It was amazing who had shown up. All sort of people with all sorts of talents. It was also a successful political experiment where society started again and re-envisioned itself. Maybe there were other creatures there like the ethereal eldils that C.S. Lewis had written about who could fly through space? They had not been discovered yet. The ghosts were probably just imaginary. A Laser Cell would likely be a defense against something like them.

Brian Futargh was happy when they got to Mars. It had been months of anticipation. He was happy to be off of a space ship, especially one named after Edgar Rice Burroughs. He would be able to stamp his feet, walk, and jump into the frozen air. He could jump higher into the sky than he could on Earth here. He could also jump farther. Mars was smaller than the Earth and had less gravity. There were health concerns for the crew because of it, but it might be

wonderful for those with bad legs.

He liked being in empty and quiet places and The Red Planet had many of them. There were all sorts of mountains and valleys to explore and name. He figured that he would have his name on something at some point. He would be able to explore. There were also people on the planet that would take him to some of the scenic places they had found. He, however, wanted to go alone for some of these expeditions. He figured if there was a God he would be out here in one of his/her places.

He, however, was agnostic, but found wonder and inspiration in the wild. Those experiences could be spiritual. Those places also need to be protected. He doubted that they would ever be terraformed like imagined in science fiction. It would just be too much stuff necessary to bring to the planet. It would be so hard that there would always still have wild places even if life no longer existed on the surface of Mars.

"Do you still want to have the duel?" asked Merkens the day before the ship landed on the planet.

Futargh was surprised by how straight forward Merkens was.

"Yes I do, but we are colleagues here," said Futargh. "We need to keep to higher standard for the sake of the space agency."

"I know. The Red Planet should be big enough for both of us," said Merkens.

"We need to set a higher examples. Space can be a place where people can leave each other alone. Where people can get along," said Futargh.

"We don't have to be looking forward to seeing each other. We just don't need to embarrass the space community by trying to

kill each other," said Merkens.

"That would set a bad example," said Futargh.

"Let's shake on it," said Merkens.

Futargh reach out his hand first.

Merkens's hand joined him. It was not a hard hand shake, but it was not a phony limp one

either. Maybe they should have fist bumped Futargh thought, but that communicated less.

They would always be colleagues though. Futargh would use his Laser Cell for Astrogeology. Maybe he could find signs of life where the water once was.

DELIVERANCE OF DREAMS

by

Nicolo Santilli

The wolves ran swiftly
over the gently undulating ground,
the wind stirring their grey fir,
tall pine trees casting stark shadows
across their path
and fleeing forms.

Salaiessen's awareness moved among them
like a fleeting ghost,
sensing the swiftly passing world through their shadowed eyes,
following intricate scent streams woven through trees
and leaf scattered ground.

At times the twilit landscape would resound with distant howls,
and one of the running wolves would take up the call,
conveying with his resonant voice and intonation
a subtle message,
received and transmitted down a long line of running wolves
interspersed over miles of ground.

With each howl and response
Salaiessen's consciousness would leap from wolf to wolf,
landscape to landscape,
now watching flickering flames dance among the huts of a village,
now reaching the snowline and skirting caves
heavy with the scent of bear.



A snowy owl passed overhead
and he felt her familiar dual consciousness,
spreading messages from flight to flight,
from tall tree to moonlit sky,
and further afield to the silver woods,
from which a vast pulsing and receptive dream
continually emanated.

And then he stood alone on a lofty pinnacle of stone
surveying the vast twilight landscape
with his own sea green eyes,
looking up and seeing above him
a familiar grey hawk form,
descending in arching spiral flight
and alighting on his outstretched wrist,
now silver grey and dragon scaled,
with silver flashing eyes and lashing tale.

“The forest is aroused,
the river is flooded,
the fair folk have summoned a storm,
and dragons fly,”
she showed him in flashing succession,
the images vivid,
and traced with the thought of other minds
echoing distant visions and messages.

Finally he saw before his inner vision
a great host of marching men,
their torches flaming in the growing dusk,
and their metal weapons shining in the torch light.

Even as their vanguard emerged from the narrow gorge
and caught sight of the river and the forested slopes beyond,
a great surge of wind and snow assailed their host,
and stones began to tumble down from the high cliffs
that flanked their rear passage.

Soon the whole host was arrayed
on the snowy windswept plain,
and tents and shelters were hastily erected
amid shouts and curses,
and shiverings with cold and fear.

Then as night fell,
a dark dream arose from the forest,
moving like a tapestry of mist and smoke,
and descended on the sheltering encampment,
bringing to each a cold fear,
a thought of home,
and the threat of imminent madness.

Wolves howled amid the wind of the howling storm
and men dreamed of home and loved ones,
or writhed in night terrors,
battling desperately with invisible forms
that bent their thoughts and wills upon return.

Bending his eye to the future,
Salaïessen beheld an empty snow swept plane,
and beyond the stony gorge,
scattered fleeing forms,
blades sparkling in dawn light
beneath the flight of swooping dragons,
scales shimmering more brightly than steel.

The Shaman Comforts the Fledgling's Soul

by

Joseph Murphy

I descended beneath blood-spattered stone,
Circling through root and star
Until I reached the top-most limb;
Found the fledgling's soul.

Strands of light uncoiled from my down.

I grasped them in my beak and built a nest
No claw could reach.

The fledgling's soul answered my full-throated call
As I placed it in the nest.

Sky-colored bark shimmered beneath my talons
As the tiny soul's wings healed,
Taking the bark's color.

As its strength grew, so did the reach of its dream:

It entered a seed
Another's beak had cracked open.

Within string and twig-weave, an egg would be set;

Crest and wings sprout
From the dream's furrows.

I promised to keep close by that fledgling
Until its cloud-roads opened.

About This Publication

The Mythic Circle is a small annual literary magazine published by *The Mythopoeic 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)

Copies of the next issue, *Mythic Circle*, #38, scheduled to appear in the summer of 2016, can be pre-ordered through the Mythopoeic Society's website, www.mythsoc.org/mythic-circle/preorder/. Back issues are available at www.mythsoc.org/mythic-circle/history/. Any trouble with the website may be reported to Gwenyth Hood at mythiccircle@mythsoc.org.

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.

In the 1700's, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu introduced into England a practice called 'variolation', which she had observed in Turkey while her husband was on embassy there. It involved infecting a healthy person with smallpox. The infected person was then isolated until they recovered from the milder form of the illness produced: this protected others and themselves from uncontrolled exposure to the disease during that period. Once recovered, they were immune. Lady Mary's children received this procedure. As the practice caught on in England, people began to hold 'variolation parties' in which they were isolated together. Though some aspects of this story are loosely modeled on these events, the story is not meant to be strictly historical in any of its details. It takes place in the realm of fairy tale.

Characters in the story:
the king
Arturo, the king's friend
the king's mother
Ava, a lady in waiting
a princess
a child

The Diamond Face

by October Williams

for Holly

Leaves flew around him — amber and emerald, ruby, russet. Fugitive jewels turned around him; and he turned. There was something in them: a pattern — a face — a voice. The colors changed to wings. As if an archer drew them on a single string, they flew away, circled, and returned. They

settled in the treetops — common brown birds like a crown of thorns in the bare branches — and they sang. It was a song he recognized, but could not remember. They spread their wings, and their feathers turned to light. The trees were wearing a tracery of light like a prismatic shawl. There were so

many chandeliers in the forest: the colors of the sky deepened above them, and the branches held the colors in their light. And then the prisms began to fall. It was raining. His head was bare, and his eyelashes and lips and nose began to drip with rain; rain traced down his jaw like tears. He was empty, and cold, and hungry — so hungry with all the years of his ageless wandering. The rain blew around him like a veil blowing over a face: he could almost see the face through the silver blowing, beautiful with diamonds. He hesitated, and reached out his fingers . . .

He blinked. Light splintered along his lashes. He propped himself up and rubbed a sluggish hand over his face. He yawned, and looked around.

There was a coil of dogs on the rug, before a fire grate; bedcovers trailing over the floor. A shaft of light groped over the stone windowsill, over the dogs and the bedclothes: he sat up into it and rubbed his eyes. And then his pulse faltered — he remembered. What? The dew on the stone sill blinked — a swift sparkle like the edge of a sword flash — when he did. Oh, what? — a pattern he had always known and accepted; the invisible ink of some other consciousness suddenly revealed in his own. A face in the light. He groped over the blankets.

The light shifted upwards and the dew stood still. The room in the cold bath of morning was empty. His fingers closed over nothing.

The diamond face had only been a dream.

##

There was an outbreak of plague that year. The countries surrounding his kingdom were rife with what had been nicknamed “White death”, for its pale pox. One of his first acts on becoming king had been to

establish quarantines at the borders; but his friend Arturo returned that day from the provinces with news that plague had crossed the Northern border — near the orphanage funded by crown lands.

It was also the year of his mother’s efforts to negotiate a marriage for him: she had invited a princess. “You’re so concerned about all these present needs, dear, but what about the need for an heir? It’s so terribly short-sighted to let one need after another crowd out the future of the entire kingdom. And the people like pageantry immensely. Their world is beggared for lack of it — life is so little worth without the sort of thing we represent. The people want to see us dancing . . .”

“The people may go blind,” Arturo interjected.

“Pardon me — ?”

“This disease — if it leaves one alive, it often scars and blinds the eyes.”

His mother shook her head. “So distressing.”

His father had once taken him to see the aftermath of plague. His mother had never witnessed it. “Ava was raised in the orphanage, wasn’t she?” he asked. Ava was one of his mother’s ladies in waiting. “We will want her help.”

##

“Shall I tell you a story?” Ava asked.

The library was littered with maps and open books and calculations. The king was outside with the captain of the guard. Arturo was drumming his fingers on the desk. “I’ve always liked stories,” he said.

She stood. She was thin and plain and her dress was plain, but it seemed full of shadows. She swayed slightly, as if in a low wind, and her voice bowed and turned words through her narrative.

“There was a child long ago who lived

for ages in a dark cavern. How many ages, I cannot tell. She and other children who lived there never knew. In the cavern lived a sleeping dragon: sometimes it would wake, roar to life, and shake the darkness. Smoke would bellow from its nostrils, and stone would crumble from the cavern's roof. Many things are easily crushed beneath falling stone." She paused. "The children were often left without the small light they ever knew – the light of candles, under the earth."

"What were they looking for?" Arturo asked.

"The dragon's gold." She stilled. "In the darkness, the child would sing. A song is like gold – but more valuable than dragon's gold – and like light, but more fragile than the light of candles. A voice is easily silenced." She closed her eyes. "Yet some songs last for thousands of years – like frail pottery, dug from the earth – and this song was one of those. No one knew how long it went on in darkness, but at last there was another sound. If a song is like gold, this sound was like precious stones. It was the sound of a king, coming to slay the dragon."

Her voice altered to a more hesitant quality. "There was a feast afterwards, and the children sang to the king –"

"It was our own king, wasn't it?" Arturo asked. "I remember when he closed the child mines."

Ava smiled. "My face was so scarred. I had been so long under the earth — and I

was crying. I doubt he recognizes me —"

"He had been urging his father to close those mines for years. His father was too bound to custom . . . But what of the child?" he asked gently. "Did you live happily ever after?"

"Happily?" she repeated. "I had seen hope."

The king returned. "They'll send news of the orphanage: in the meantime, they are establishing the quarantine."

"And what about the procedure?" Arturo asked.

The king was shuffling maps on his desk. "It would require volunteers."

"The plague does not ask for volunteers."

"I can't order men to become sick with this, Arturo— any more than I can order them to blow themselves to bits —"

"Your compassion is misplaced," Arturo argued. "The future of all is more significant than any individual's present suffering —"

"Mother was saying something like that this morning. Thank you, Ava. I think we have a better idea of the situation. You are free to go."

Wait, Arturo signaled. "Ava not only waits on queens and kings. She also sings and tells stories. Won't you sing something for the king, before you go?"

When she sang, she looked even more spare and unornamented. Her voice had a clarity like water.

The color of pain is purple,
The dark, rushing purple of sea:
Joy is a swift flush of silver;
Green as a garland is glee;
Hope is a little blue flower
Pushing through leaden despair;
Deep down runs the red of desire,
Rising to dance a pink air.
And golden and grey are the castles of peace
Overgrown with the moss colored years.
But if you should ask me, what color is love?
I'd answer – what color are tears?

##

The stars were circling. Over his head, the sky wheeled like the shadow of a great bird whose flight was luminous; or like circles from a stone thrown into a dark pool. The ripples in the pool were of light. The moon had fallen, a stone into dark water, and the stars were fractured images of its silent weight under the surface. Or perhaps the moon was only a reflection, thrown back onto the sky. He peered over the dark pool until he could almost see a face shining back at him — covered with water. The eyes were diamonds. Diamonds crusted the lips, the cheeks were glimmering stars. He reached out to disturb the fluid veil . . .

##

The princess his mother had invited could not be diverted in her travels, and arrived before further news of the plague. She was shocked and saddened to hear of the danger to the children: her eyes were clear as glass. He could almost see his reflection in them.

When news came, it was of a quarantine

established around the affected area, with many villages evacuated – but not the orphanage. It was too central to the affected region, and several children had already been taken ill.

Arturo urged the king, “You must order the procedure. It’s the only chance for them.”

“It’s not a chance,” he cried. “It’s a rumor!”

Years ago when he was a prince, his father had entertained travelers from the East. They spoke of how their country had eliminated the plague through a procedure that involved scraping the matter of the pox into a small cut on a healthy person. This produced a period of milder sickness, without death or disfigurement.

Ava had asked permission to speak to the king, on hearing of the orphanage.

“I’d like to go.”

“Are you mad?” he began, then bit off his words. He would have liked to go, too.

“We’ll both go,” Arturo said. “We can start at dawn.”

“I cannot have you finding out if the

procedure works on children, Arturo,” the king raised his voice — “This is not a situation for guessing!”

Ava said, “You may find out if it works on me.”

“Both of us will have the procedure first,” Arturo said. “When we come to practice it on the children – we’ll sound like precious stones.” He winked at Ava.

She stood gazing at the king.

“They have no hope,” she said.

“Do you know the course of this disease?”

“Yes sir.”

“Describe it to me.”

“It starts with fever. Then it makes small marks in the mouth and throat. Then a rash of small boils on the body erupt and spread –”

“Have you witnessed it before?”

“No.”

“Am I to let you volunteer to have this disease?”

She said nothing.

“You’re asking to go off and possibly to die? Perhaps to no gain – simply to add another life to the suffering. And I’m to let you – why?”

She only looked at him.

“And what will you do, if you have to watch them die?”

“I’ll sing to them.”

“Maybe Arturo should learn to sing to you,” he left the room abruptly.

##

Ava was packing linens into a trunk: the king had come to see if she would not change her mind.

“You can’t possibly wear all of those,” he said.

“They’re for the children.”

It was raining. Raindrops on the stone sill were shuddering, pricked with gold from the candles. Her shadow, like reiterate rain, threw patterns of folding and packing

motions over and again on the walls – immaterial things raised, closing, and descending.

“I wish you would stop,” he said.

The shadows suspended. But he said nothing further, and the shadows resumed. The rain seemed to be folding something with blind fingers, smoothing over worn griefs, patiently folding and putting away.

“Do you also interpret dreams?” the king blurted. “I could almost think right now –”

Her motions over the walls again ceased.

“That you’re making it rain,” he half laughed. “That you’re somehow akin to it –”

She waited.

“I have dreams I don’t understand.

Dreams of a journey, and of beauty – a diamonded face — something I can’t find, that isn’t there, when I reach for it.”

“You dream of the princess.”

“Do you think so?” He scratched his forehead.

“All men dream of the princess,” she reached for another linen, “And the kingdom. That’s what the stories tell us.”

“Wait —”

She was still.

“No, no –” he protested. “You’re wrong. The kingdom – the best dream I have of the kingdom, I’m ashamed to confess. The kingdom holds me fast. I wish I could pack up like you and go out – to die, or find whatever it is that shakes my dreams. But I’m trapped under the kingdom like an ant. I’m always struggling to carry it the next step. I can never carry it so far. I wish I could shrug it off – let it sink where it falls, let it crush some other ant, and go out and find whatever men seek, that you and my mother call the princess.”

“Your mother is right that life is of little worth without the sort of thing you represent.”

“What can we possibly represent? We’re imprisoned in this castle dancing, unless we’re being defeated, like everyone else, by

plagues and poverty –?”

Her eyes burned darker and brighter until her face seemed to recede. “Something that enters our place of despair and turns it to precious stones. The vision we long for in death, and are digging into our darkness to find before we die.”

“Freedom?” He jerked out, almost involuntarily. “Justice? Honor? A full meal and a comfortable fire?”

She lowered her eyes.

“That’s what I try stand for,” he spoke tenderly, conscious of pain.

Her lips curved like a wound. “You’re forgetting the princess.”

“I’ll try to remember.” He didn’t know what else to say. “I’ll think of her when you’re –” the candles fluttered. “Don’t let them forget the trunk with your stories and songs,” he joked awkwardly from the doorway. The rain fell beyond the stone windows, folding shadows over stone walls as he groped down the dark flight of stairs.

##

It was Autumn again and rain was washing the leaves away in runnels, whirling them off down a system of dips and hollows in the forest floor. The streams were flowing not to the sea, but to a pattern etched under the earth — visible in their stigmata of veins. The worn leaves were being folded and put away. Further through stripped trees, he could almost make out a sense in the figure of streams. It was like one of the embossed letters in ancient books when he was learning to read: something he ought to recognize, a shimmering gilt calligraphy with a clear gleam. And then he realised his own face was raining — he was weeping the channels of water flowing with dead leaves. The wounds in the forest floor were carrying away a pain welling up in him from under the earth. He was making it rain. The figure of streams was casting him like a shadow — if he traced over it with his hands, he would find his

features . . . He could almost discern eyes in the figure, shimmering clear stones . . . lips limned with leaves, gem colored, already faded, choked with rain . . . he reached out . . .

He woke again empty-handed.

##

Arturo and Ava had crossed the deserted miles into the quarantined area. The wood was dripping in weak light, further stifled by drifting fog and smoke. They passed through patches of fetid air hanging nowhere, like dank clothes scattered over branches. The place was disturbed with sound: raucous barking from a few dogs circling a tree. Arturo had urged his horse forward to investigate.

He had laughed: a kitten! Ava slid from her horse, and picked up a dead branch.

“What under heaven –” Arturo unmounted and blocked her way. The tracery of trees behind her was hung with water drops.

“We should rescue it.”

“No!” He caught her arm. “We should not interfere.”

“But we’re hoping to interfere with the plague.”

“Each fights for their own kind in the realm of Nature. None of the lower animals fight for other kinds.”

The gleaming branches curled around her in a filigree. “Why should we leave a kitten to be torn to pieces by dogs?”

Smog drifted around them, blotting out the plaited trees. Only the glistening drops were visible like a map of stars. “The dogs may grow weary and go away,” he suggested.

“Or they may be terrified away by mercy.” He could not see the color of her eyes: they had disappeared in drift. The map of stars was gone. He was still gripping her arm and could find the outline of her face, but the eyes were blind. “You have forgotten that I too am part of nature.”

“But what would you have dogs eat?” he

insisted.

“Not this kitten.”

“What other animal will be attacked because we rescue this one?” He was becoming impatient. “Nature does not change for individuals! Nature is progress and retreat, balancing and compensating: everything prospers to the harm of something else. We can only seek the future of our own kind, and try not to interfere more than we have to.” Her arm ceased struggling. “Your mercy is blind havoc — suffering somewhere else.”

He still could not see her face: then he heard her weeping. He let go her arm, and groped for a branch.

What he found made him propel her quickly back to the horses — and, taking a knife and quill from his saddlebag: “Wait here”. Before he returned she had shattered

visions, blown in the mist, of a man kneeling over a prone form. Now the knife was between his teeth. Now his arm was bared.

They had traveled a little further when Arturo unmounted again in a clearing of light. He came to help her to the ground, his face unfathomable. There was a small cut on his arm.

“I’m sorry about the kitten,” he said. “It was better to leave the dogs alone. We don’t know what they have been into.”

“Do dogs also die of this disease?”

“No, but it’s unknown to us whether their bite can transfer it from the dead to the living.” He asked for her hand.

She shuddered. “What are we doing?” she asked. “Are we like dogs?”

He knelt in front of her, and asked again for her hand. She gave it to him — but she closed her eyes when she felt his knife.

##

There is a ruined tower by the sea
Where spume of wave is blown
Like glass and shattered easily
As shadows thrown
Within the tower. We

Are like waves, or towers,
Or glass in which unknown
Images seem, until our
Shadows shatter on the stone.

But tears will flower
Anywhere they’re sown,

— she sang, as they traveled on.

##

The candles fluttered with breath under the chandeliers. Light veined over darkness, and from within the darkness he heard music. It was a melody of tenuous pauses and trembling wings. The room was full of dim shapes: animals, children, lords and peasants — all waiting for a dance. He stepped toward the figure who represented a princess, and all the watchers stepped toward her. He raised his arm, and the dim watchers raised theirs. He bowed, and so did they. He was the whole throng of shadows. If he touched her face, their fingers would grope over beauty. If he drew back his hand, their hands would fall to their sides. Now they were still. The chandeliers were circling over them — crossing and recrossing, representing stars — ‘til he could almost fathom the significance of the sky. Cruciforms whirled around a moon. A princess was dancing while he stood still, unable to move his arms . . . Then the stars began to fall . . .

##

Then it was time for the court banquet. His mother invited the nobility. The princess wore gold and diamonds. Light trembled in her hair, from her ears, on her neck, casting glimmers around her, into her eyes.

She asked if there had been any news of the children. Arturo had been signaling daily to the sentries around the quarantined area: their news at the capitol was delayed. The plague had not spread outside of the quarantine. The princess observed that if the procedure worked, it would be a gain not only for the orphans, but for children in many kingdoms, for years to come. She spoke in an aura of fractured light of a woman who sat in their gate begging, blind and disfigured, who had survived the disease as a child.

It was during the banquet that news came: Arturo’s signals had not been seen for several

days. The messenger was to wait for orders.

“What further orders could he possibly send?” his mother commented. “The poor things. Yet we cannot risk the disease spreading further. We must wait until enough time has passed to presume safety.”

“I think he must surely send an embassy,” the princess said. “If a king can order men into battle, he can order men to the aid of children.”

“But a king leads men into battle.” They both turned to him.

“But a good king,” the princess said at last quietly, “is not as replaceable as a blacksmith, or tailor, or game warden, or common soldier. He leads men into battle because at the head of an army, he stands for something. He has the most skilled soldiers employed in guarding him. All men seek to protect the king.”

“And women too,” he smiled. “Would he be a good king, if he were more careless of the tailor’s life?” Her face was an exquisite pattern, beauty shattered and gathered in her gems.

“A good king affects more men in his death than a good tailor.” She had a gentle voice.

“That is true,” he said. “A king has a greater sphere. So the tailor’s mother or wife may feel that greater risk belongs to kings. I must give orders.”

“Don’t be gone long, dear,” his mother called. “They will be nearly ready for the dance—”

When he returned, she was remarking on the filigree of gold and diamonds in the elaboration of the princess’ hair. Light darted from the princess as she turned her head, flew around her like an ephemeral bird. Men never understand how much sacrifice is involved in beauty, his mother was saying. Her husband always thought she merely appeared in full regalia, but the beauty of queens demands patience and pains.

“Oh, here you are—”

But he had only come to wish them goodbye. The bird of light faltered over a wingbeat.

His mother followed him to the courtyard. “But my child--” she cried with anguish. “This is madness!

“And what of the dance?”

##

Leaves flew around him — amber and emerald, ruby, gold. A few rain-drenched, draggled leaves blew from the nearly bare branches, circling their flying speed. He wrapped his coat more tightly around his neck. His eyelashes and nose and lips dripped with rain, and he was empty: he had eaten nothing since they had seen the orphanage. They identified Arturo, but there was no sign of Ava or of anyone living, aside from recent cart tracks towards the sea. A tower rose ahead through fog.

The fog, turned gold at the edges, seemed almost lit from within when he dismounted in the courtyard. A child ran across stone flags, out of sight. A low door stood open and another child sat in it, holding its head. The king knelt, and it looked into his eyes.

“My head hurts.”

He felt its head with his hand — hot.

“She said to hold still, and think about puppies. It only hurts.” He held out his arm — there was a blister. Another child ran past them, carrying water.

“Did you get a little cut?” the king asked.

The child nodded. “He gave it to me. He made me stand in a line. Then he fell down.”

The king stood up. “Can you tell me where she is?” he asked.

“She told us about a mighty gale.”

He ducked inside. Fog was blowing in through the windows. A voice floated over it, clear as water, a trickle of cold sea down the wall of stone.

The veil is studded here and there with diamonds, the dew.

Far off and faint between the spheres, a bird is calling. . . .

He stepped from the low entrance into a high, round room. A few children lay on a straw mat that filled much of it. A shaft of light fell around the singer, sitting still on the far side. Mist floated over her face like a veil. Gold vapor curled around her shoulders, and her face shone indistinct within. He stepped closer.

. . . the world will gleam anew
Beneath the waters. Lo, the King is here.
His footsteps, soft and crystal clear
Fall on the courtyard where the leaves accrue —

Come, still your weeping.
Heaven is almost blue . . .

“Ava,” — he said.

She ceased, and turned her head. Her eyes were diamonds. Diamonds fell from her cheeks, studded her mouth. The veil of mist drifted around her and she stood —

“Arturo —?” she asked uncertainly.

“Ava?”

She covered her face with her hands.

He stepped closer, and she raised her face again. His pulse faltered. Ava was blind. Tears ran over scars on her face, tracing their pattern like jewels.

A child ran up and clung to her skirt. She fluffed its hair. “The orphanage was too full of sickness — Arturo sent us here. I wasn’t as sick as he: he thought we hadn’t waited long enough before we nursed the children. He said it would work better if we kept the healthy ones off til they recovered --”

The king swallowed: “He was with the children.”

She trembled.

He reached out his fingers: her eyes didn’t flicker. He hesitated, and then his hand closed over her shoulder.

##

Come, watch beside me, while
An early light begins to filter through:
Soundless, it splits the darkness into earth and sky,
Divides the firmament in two —
Far-off and faint between the spheres, a bird is calling.

The grey things quicken, and take on a greener hue:
The veil is lifting, studded here and there with diamonds, the dew;
The day is like a jewel in a forgotten fountain;
He is near Who wakes the sleepers.

The fountains will be garlanded again, the world will gleam anew
Beneath the waters. Lo, the King is here.
His footsteps, soft and crystal clear
Fall on the courtyard where the leaves accrue —

Come, still your weeping.
Heaven is almost blue;
And gentler rain than yesterday is falling.

The End

SEASONS OF THE SOUL

by

R. L. Boyer

To everything there is a season, and a
time for every purpose under heaven.
—Ecclesiastes, 3:1

I

Through everything the
Theme of Nature runs:
There are Seasons of the
Moon, as there are
Seasons of the inmost life—
O Seasons of the Soul!

II

There are Seasons of
Beginning and ending.
Seasons of failure and grace.
Seasons of rising and falling—
O Seasons of the Soul!

III

There are Seasons of
Seed-growth and harvest.
Seasons of heroes and goats.
Seasons of hunger and plenty—
O Seasons of the Soul!

IV

There are Seasons of
Genius and madness.
Seasons of laughter and tears.
Seasons of distance and nearness—
O Seasons of the Soul!

V

There are Seasons of
Gaining and losing.
Seasons of darkness and light.
Seasons of healing and wounding—
O Seasons of the Soul!

VI

There are Seasons of
Loss and renewal.
Seasons of sorrow and joy.
Seasons of nadir and zenith—
O Seasons of the Soul!

VII

There are Seasons of
Danger and refuge.
Seasons of summits and depths.
Seasons of wisdom and folly—
O Seasons of the Soul!

VIII

There are Seasons of
Exile and homecoming.
Seasons of pleasure and pain.
Seasons of dying and being reborn—
O Seasons of the Soul!

IX

There are Seasons of the
Inmost life, as there are
Seasons of the Moon:
Through everything the
Theme of Nature runs—
O Seasons of the Soul!

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 Magazine*, *The Cypress Dome*, and *The Florida Review*. His poetry and short stories have been published internationally in *Westview*, *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 <http://creativewriter0.wix.com/lcatencio>.

Kevan Bowkett has been in the Canadian Reserves, washed dishes, planted trees, sold door-to-door, slept in an igloo, and run for Parliament. He's lectured at universities on the international arms trade, helped draft an International Convention on New Technologies, and worked in a daycare. His work has appeared in *Mythprint* and the *Manitoba Eco-Journal*, and he is currently working on a novel and short story collection set in the fabled land of Cothirya.

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).

C. F. Cooper. A passion for mythic storytelling led C.F. Cooper on a months-long journey through Mexico and South America in search of the roots of magical realism, followed by a nearly decade-long stint as a writer and editor for Marvel Comics, where myth still breathes. Subsequent travels took him from Ngorongoro in the heart of east Africa, to the foot of Uluru

in Australia, to the heights of the Himalayan mountains, always seeking the elusive insights that gods are made of. His book of original mythology, *Songs of the Metamythos* (www.SongsOfTheMetamythos.com), is the culmination of those journeys; “The Gift” is excerpted from that work, Cooper’s first book.

Raquel Finol was born in Maracaibo, Venezuela, in November, 1963. She is an Architect from the University of Zulia (LUZ), Venezuela, and has also been recognized as an Interior Designer, Graphic Designer and Photographer. In her career, she has garnered well known National and International awards.

Raquel worked as an architect from 1990 until 2006 at the Governor’s Office of the State of Zulia, Department of Public Works Project, where she worked as a designer and inspector, in the areas of Security and Defense, Health Dispensaries, Government Offices, Religion, Recreation and finally in Education, which reflected her art through paintings and sculptures, which earned her several awards for their creativity and design skills, expressing her art through paintings, sculptures and logos. She may be contacted at www.RaquelFinol.com.

Gwenyth Hood was born in White Plains, NY, but moved with her family to Brandon, Vermont at the age of seven. She developed a love of reading and writing at an early age, discovering some favorite authors—Rudyard Kipling, Shakespeare, and J. R. R. Tolkien—at roughly the same time, in early adolescence. In 1982, her first novel, *The Coming of the Demons*, was published by William Morrow. She has been the editor of *The Mythic Circle* all the years of this millennium and a few more. She teaches English at Marshall University and is trying to market her Science Fiction trilogy, *Exiles from Distant Stars*, which she recently finished.

Adam V. Massimiano graduated from the University of Redlands Johnston Center for Integrative Studies with an emphasis entitled “Mythology in Modern Fiction.” Currently based in southern California, his work centers around classical mythology, identity, and queer themes. This is his first published work.

Ryder Miller is the editor of *From Narnia to a Space Odyssey*, co-writer of *San Francisco: A Natural History*, and author of *Tales of Suspense and Horror*. Also to be published in 2015 is *Tales of Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow*. He has published stories, reviews, and articles, in *Mythic Circle*, *Mythprint*, and *Beyond Bree*. He thinks of Mars as a wilderness that should be explored, appreciated, and protected.

Joseph Murphy is a professional editor and writer who lives in Michigan. He has had poetry published in a number of journals, including *The Gray Sparrow*, *Pure Francis* and *The Sugar House Review*. Murphy is also a poetry editor for an online literary publication, *Halfway Down the Stairs*.

Chelsi Robichaud is a 21 year old English student residing in Ottawa. In her free time she enjoys blogging and playing the harp.

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 author of the eco-spirituality ebook *LIFE in the AGE of EXTINCTIONS*, v 1& 2 and has 30 videos on YouTube based on his published writings.

William H. Wandless is a professor of English at Central Michigan University, where he teaches and writes about eighteenth-century fiction, the British Gothic novel, and American popular culture. His own speculative fiction has appeared in *Dark Realms*, *Supernatural Tales*, *BFS Journal*, *Dark Eclipse*, and several other journal.

October Williams is a homemaker. She has always loved meaningful stories and poems, and is always learning better how to write.

How the Fire Beings became Slaves of the Mer-People

by

Kevan Bowkett

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

--From an Old Cothiryian chronicle

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

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

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

them."

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

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

"How?"

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

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

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

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

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

"Allowed it?" he murmured.

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

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

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

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

“I am owed recompense for this, Santeth.”

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

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

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

“Some helped me lift Great Cothirya.”

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

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

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

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

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

The Shaman Meets With the Man in the Moon

by

Joseph Murphy

I grasp rungs of light ascending from a lilac's bud.

Passing the seven-colored mountain's peak,
I draw a dreamer's fingers from my drum's skin:
Through them,
Reach the final rung.

Guided by my ancestors' marks, I step
Through a maze
As others would a stream.

One of my spirits hisses free before The Gate of Bones.

The bolts groan beneath that spirit's bloodied fins:
Hinges splinter;
The dark's gnarled echo
Recedes.

I pass through and perch on a spoke of light.

The Man in the Moon greets me;
Offers a silken thread
Linked to all the souls I am to return
To body and breath.

When I take it in my beak, I awake
In a pine's topmost limbs
Knowing the fullness
Of my fate.

Saturn's Complaint

By

Kevan Bowkett

All Time is passed, there is none left to come.

All images are flat, scents stale, words into babble subside, then silence:
A silence not of gold but of black brass and lead.
Lungs are flattened in the flattened world, fruit yields dried paper's taste.
Unrolls a too-worn panoply of no-longer wonders:
An ivory tower that rises o'er the sea, a hill of awe,
Kine or swine of some drunk god or other,
Songs of elves, horns in the highlands ringing,
Spirits of brook, rock, lilac, and cedar;
Another reforged crown sits on the locks of yet another new-returnèd king,
Whose city glows again between the river and the hills
—All trceries merely in the air,
Which phantoms' forms themselves shall fade
— All shall run out
Into a well that gives nothing,
Festering in darkly-netted woods
Which smother the Four Quarters under the sky.

Yet
Another image loiters:
Above the Western Paradise gleams out
A single somber sigil of a star.

Look! Look keenly!

That star -- its rays bend Melancholy to Möbius,
And back round to Mirth:

And so renews the world again once more.

A WILD GOD

by

David Sparenberg

God turned my way. God spoke before me. God said: "I am tired of these houses of worship, the walled buildings of men. They are beautiful. Some are exquisite; some even sublime. And they have served a purpose.

"But I who am beyond walls am weary of these dividing walls. What is a mind set against itself? Or what a mouth devouring the limbs of its body?

" I long to be out in the wind. And I am the wind.

"I long to be under stars and the deep space cradling stars. And I am stars, the cradle, the cradling, and the dark mystery of surrounding and gestating space and time.

"I long to be in sunlight and moon-glow. And I am the light and the glow--the radiant.

"I long to be out in rain. I who send rain and am falling rain and the weeping of angels.

"I long to be in snow. And I am the scripture of snow and the calligraphy of water. The seasons of holding and the seasons of letting go.

"I long to journey freely in warmth, wafting over many lands. And I am the fire and the breath moving the myriads of creation. The elements and the many walks."

I heard these words. I felt them as feeling words: the words of a wild God. Strongly longing for a change in relationships.

The Gift
an elegy excerpted from
Songs of the Metamythos
by C.F. Cooper

ONCE THERE WAS A GODDESS who lived among the stars, whose voice whispered like an ocean breeze:

“Timeless emptiness, hear my plea
“Tell what only you can see.”

Maia’s call drifted past her stellar brothers and sister worlds, roaming the galaxies in search of something rumored once to have been found at the edges of existence: the void...a nothingness beyond dimension and comprehension. It was said that to look into it was to encounter the deepest of mysteries; that at the beginning of things it had shown the three faces of Unu their true self. Or that nameless terror might lurk within it, waiting. Waiting. Waiting...

And still there was no sign from the void.

Maia—the riot of earth’s life about to burst from her belly—had sought out the void to face her own reflection and beseech it for some hint of her true nature. But now she feared that this strange enigma might no longer exist. Or could it be that it had ignored her call? After all, she was but one of a trillion trillion celestial gods. Or worse, might it not have heard her at all? The stellar winds faltered as her plea left the outermost galaxies far behind, like so much dust in the distance. She heard its final echoes fade past the hem of the Cloak of Space that envelopes the heavens, the last syllables falling into whatever lay beyond.

Only then did the void answer.

It came as a reflection of Maia’s simple sapphire-and-emerald beauty; her sibling stars and worlds, no matter how brightly they shone or magnificently they arrayed

themselves, paled beside it. Even now, as Maia grew round with a million children soon to be born, every slope of her form was fascination; her mane of tangled green, like the tropics in wet season, grew still more vivid and lush; and her ethereal eyes danced with anticipation of the joys of motherhood.

Anticipation... and doubt, doubt that had driven Maia to probe the void in the first place. Dissatisfied with the reply she received, she asked again:

“Lonely emptiness, speak to me
“What kind of mother will I be?”

She saw her own arms and legs, breasts and back and lovely face with questioning lips, and nothing more.

“Come away,” Luna insisted. Ever by Maia’s side, Luna coaxed her twin sister’s attention back from the empty reflection to the familiar folds of the cloak. “From the look of you,” she said, touching her lover’s swollen belly, “we will learn what sort of mother you are all too soon.”

True to Luna’s words, new life flowed from Maia’s womb soon after, in a trickle and then a flood. It was the dawn of an age of contentment, with barren Luna finding joy in her sister’s children as if they were her own, and their father, Cosmos, Lord of the Stars, keeping delighted watch from afar through the flaming right eye he’d plucked from his own head and set in the heavens nearby. Through Sol, by proxy he could linger on Maia’s abundant flesh, soft as tilled soil yet strong as iron. He could marvel as her skin changed from the whites and yellows of sand to the reds of clay to the browns and blacks of richest earth, as the

light from his luminous eye shifted across her face. Maia soaked in Sol's radiance, the light emanating from this one eye—the merest fraction of Cosmos' vitality—nearly overpowering her senses. His glance could sear flesh and incinerate bone, and if she was anything less than the goddess she was, even Maia could not have withstood his presence for long. As their children multiplied and grew stronger, so did the light from Sol, a certain sign that Cosmos was pleased with what he saw and that he would soon be coming in all his majesty to her and Luna. Maia's pulse quickened at the thought of his return, of being taken by those immensely strong arms once again, perhaps to bear more children.

And yet, in this age of contentment, one little thing was amiss. In a universe reverberating with Unu's ethereal song, Maia could hear one of her children was crying.

"Poor thing," she cooed as she picked up the newborn to comfort it, noting with concern that it seemed ill. "To be beset by woes in this age of contentment! What could ail you, with a mother who loves you, and Luna who loves you, and the light of Sol in which to bask..."

Her voice trailed off. The light of Sol. A glance that could sear flesh and incinerate bone. And the Lord of the Stars was fast approaching in all his blazing glory.

Her children, she realized, were in grave danger.

None of them had reckoned for this. Cosmos had set the eye to watch over them, not to wreak havoc; and her mortal children reveled in the light as she did, unaware that their fragile shells would sicken and die from the searing energies before long. For the sake of the children, Maia pleaded with Sol to look away. But Cosmos was still far from them, his attention divided among the other celestials as he made his inexorable way back to Maia and Luna. In the sight of

the eye he had left behind, all seemed well, and so Sol blazed on, oblivious to the harm it caused.

The rush of the stellar wind, which had once carried Maia's voice, now blew cold horror through her, for its every eddy brought a reminder that Cosmos was coming closer. That thought had always quickened her pulse, but instead her heart pounded with desperation. She had to find shelter for her young, but she lived in the heavens among the stars, where there was none to be found. There was only the Cloak of Space, which offered no protection, since it was the very thing that Cosmos used to gather his children to him. He would embrace them in its folds and even dim his presence before them, but by then it would be too late; his love would unwittingly leave nothing of their mortal kin but smoldering embers.

And there was nothing Maia could do about it. She could only watch as her children died, one by one. "Is this the kind of mother I am?" she wailed, her search for refuge fruitless. She turned to her children, playing in the sun, blissfully ignorant of the danger and too young to grasp their mother's fears. "I have nothing to give you, no way to help you," Maia cried, despondent, and buried her face in her hands. And seeing those hands, she suddenly knew that wasn't true.

At last she understood the answer from the void.

Luna caught the flicker of realization across Maia's face and from it grasped her intention. "You are no shapeshifter like Cosmos," Luna warned, her voice quavering with fear for her beloved.

"No. Nothing so easy—nor so transient," Maia replied, resolute, and began her work.

What happened next is legend, for few saw it who can tell the tale. Maia waited until Sol was asleep, as were nearly all the children; and the few who roamed at night didn't understand the scope of what they

saw. Maia's siblings couldn't bear to watch, so all but one of the celestials looked away; only Luna, compelled by her vow and her love to witness her companion's ordeal, saw it all, even through the tears she shed in silence. First, Maia plunged her hands into her back, seized her own spine, and tore it loose, laying the steaming vertebrae down to make a sturdy foundation; then she ripped out the rest of her bones one by one to frame the rest of a great structure. Then she scooped out her womb, dividing it into great basins that she filled with her own blood, every last drop, so that her children would never go thirsty, and spooled out her arteries and veins as waterworks to carry her blood to the farthest reaches. She peeled her flesh off bit by bit—the skin that would bead with sweat when she danced, and the muscles beneath that would never dance again—building walls and floors from the jigsaw pieces. She unfurled the clear substance of her eyes to form a vault above, which would shield her children from the worst of Cosmos' fires yet still let them revel in Sol's light by day and gaze at their celestial kin by night; and she took her hot, beating heart and plunged it into the depths below to form a hearth at the center of it all. Slowly a living palace took shape: Terra, wrought by Maia from her own flesh to be our home among the stars. Within its walls a thousand wonders lie waiting, from the glittering treasures buried in its deepest keep to the curtaining wisps drifting past its highest towers; wonders in halls of sand and heat, halls of blizzard white, halls of sunken mystery.

And when Maia had nothing left to give from her flesh, she reached deep into her soul and parceled out her essence as unique gifts for each of her children: to the insects,

her fecundity became the gift of great numbers; to the plants, the luxuriance of the hair she had pulled out by the roots was deeded as their own lush growth habits; and from among the plants, a touch of her immortality became the gift of long life for a chosen few, and they grew into trees; those plants that she blessed with her beauty and allure burst into flower; to the birds, her lost freedom became the mastery of flight; and so it went, gifts to each so that they could find their own special place in their new home and thrive there. To humankind, she bequeathed her thinking faculties as the gift of reason, so that now our cultures are her personality, our history her memory.

When next Sol awoke, just as Cosmos arrived to revisit the two most favored of his celestials, Maia as she had been was gone. In her place the palace Terra stood, brimming with all manner of life. "What's this?" Cosmos roared in shock and dismay.

"The mother of our children," Luna replied. "Is she not more beautiful now than ever before?"

And as he watched the first dawn break over the towers of Terra, the bright lord felt himself falling in love all over again.

Once there was a goddess who lived among the stars. All that she was is gone, but not lost; her wild spirit soars with every stroke of a feathered wing, the breadth of her vision known to any who have seen the open sky, her devotion as certain as the ground beneath our feet, and her loveliness plain to see, in shades of sand and clay and richest earth in the face of every woman and man, her wisdom dancing in our eyes. She's speaking to us now; listen...

But the only sound is an ocean breeze.

