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The King of the Fomor's Grandson

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The Head Steward shook his head. "No," he told Laura, "obedience is only the key. But, if you keep using it, you will find the secret."

Laura was disappointed. "But I hate the jobs you're giving me," she whined.

"Then stop thinking about the jobs," he answered, handing her a new list.

One of the jobs on the list was fixing lunches for some of the princes to take with them when they went out into the city to work. Laura decided it would be fun to surprise them with special lunches. She made roast beef and mustard sandwiches, orange and pear salad, with berry turnovers for dessert.

The princes must have enjoyed their lunches for each of them thanked Laura when they got home from work. Laura began to see that work was more fun if she thought about the people she was doing the work for, instead of the job itself.

She didn't even notice that the lists were getting shorter. She did her jobs because she wanted to, not because she had to do them.

At the end of a month, she spoke again to the Head Steward. "I think I know the secret now; love." She smiled. "Will I be a princess soon?"

"Soon, perhaps," he answered, "but not yet. Love is the doorway to the secret, but you must continue through that doorway to find it. You need not come to me any longer, though, to learn how to serve. Just follow your heart."

At first it was difficult, without any list at all, for Laura to know what jobs to

do. She tried to remember the things she had done that had made her friends happy.

Soon, it was like a game, trying to guess what would make others happy before they had even thought of it themselves. Serving in love was such fun that she felt like she was dancing instead of mopping the floor--and maybe she was!

One evening the Head Steward found her as she was just putting the dinner dishes away for him, so he would have some extra time to read his favorite book.

"It's been a year since we've talked about you becoming a princess," he said. "What's happened?"

"I've been enjoying helping my friends so much," she answered, "that I haven't had any time to think about becoming a princess. I'm having such fun that it really doesn't matter anymore."

The Head Steward smiled at her. "So, you have learned the secret to being a true servant."

For a moment Laura was surprised. Then, when she thought about it, she realized what the secret was.

"I suppose wanting only to be helpful is the important part. I became a true servant when I stopped wanting to be a princess."

The Head Steward nodded. Laura could not tell whether the twinkle in his eye came from pride in her accomplishment, or from some other secret he might be pondering.

"Becoming a princess or prince," he said, "has nothing to do with wanting. I imagine you will learn that, as well, one day."

THE KING OF THE FOMOR'S GRANDSON

by
Janet P. Reedman

"I will help you kill the King of the Fomors," said the big, ugly man in the corner of the rundown tavern.

Ilmenaur and Tyrai, who had been speaking in whispers at their rickety table, fell silent and turned to stare at the man in the corner.

A great broad fellow, his ugliness was appalling. His bald head gleamed in the torchlight, as did the raised purple scars that marred his flat, expressionless face. His clothes hung in tatters about his massive frame.

"Your ears are keen," said Ilmenaur, a coldly handsome young man with flint-grey eyes and unkempt black hair. He fingered his dagger. "Too keen for my liking! How would you like them cut off?"

The big man made a choking noise and rose, eyes bulging.

Tyrai, slender and white in the folds of his dark mantle, gripped Ilmenaur's arm. "You should not have spoken so. The stranger is angry."

"I am not afraid," said Ilmenaur haughtily.

The ugly man strode over, his meaty fists clenching and unclenching. "I offered you my assistance. Why do you treat me like scum?"

Drawing his dagger, Ilmenaur picked at his strong white teeth. "I do not like eavesdroppers."

Beneath the table, Tyrai kicked Ilmenaur's leg. "Come join us," he then invited, extending a hand to the glowering stranger. "Let me buy you a mug of ale. Then mayhap you can tell us why you wish to slay Bolg, King of the Fomors."

The huge man thudded into a chair, while Tyrai called out to a serving wench, who brought three flagons of ale on a tray.

When the stranger had drained his cup, Tyrai folded his hands and leaned across the table. "Now tell us your name, and why you are interested in Bolg."

"My--my name is Baranek," stammered the man. "Above that, I can tell you little about myself. My origins lie in shadow...You see, I have been tortured, ruined by Bolg." He rubbed his scarred face. "The King, blast

him, tried to make me into a Fomor."

"How dreadful!" cried Tyrail. "How long did he hold you prisoner?"

"I cannot remember; my mind is cloudy from the sorcerous elixirs he forced me to swallow. My only clear memories are of Bolg's final attempts to transform me, and of the pain and anger that caused me to lash out violently and escape.

"I also recall a lady held prisoner in Bolg's tower. She treated me kindly, and even tried to help me escape, though her own life must have been grim. I often heard Bolg beating her. I want to kill Bolg to avenge myself and the lady."

"Fair enough," said Ilmenaur, nodding. Cool-headed now, he saw Baranek in a new light. The big man knew the Fomors' dwellings, and therefore might prove useful.

"Now," said Baranek, "tell me why you seek Bolg's death."

Ilmenaur tossed back his long black hair. "I am Prince Ilmenaur of Turannos Archaim, younger brother of King Tuoralinnen. My brother bade me end the Fomor peril, which endangers the safety of his realm."

Tyrail sniggered into his hood. "As if you care about Turannos Archaim's safety."

Ilmenaur flushed; his grey eyes glittered. "Personally, I don't care less if the Archaim and Tuoralinnen sank into the sea! But I am in disfavour, Baranek, because of a youthful indiscretion, and I must wield sword for the realm in order to receive my allowance from my brother. If I abandoned my quest tomorrow, I would be a penniless pauper."

"Ah..." said Baranek, "but what of you?" He pointed at Tyrail. "Why do you journey on this quest?"

Tyrail cast back his hood, revealing silver-pale locks and a tapering white face crowned by jade-green eyes. A jewel glimmered on his lower lip; another shone in a depression on his brow. "I am Tyrail of the Asrai," he said. "My people, who dwell upon the Isle of Tir Na Mhara, have long been plagued by the Fomors. Three months ago, my sister Amlí was felled by a Fomor dart. I demanded the Asrai seek revenge, but King Pryderi would not muster an army, so I set off alone. Upon nearing the Fomors' Isle, a sorcerous storm arose, blowing me to these shores, where I met the Lord Ilmenaur."

Baranek nodded toward Tyrail. "Well, you and I certainly have ample cause to hate the Fomors. I shall do everything in my power to see the evil King dead."

"Good," said Ilmenaur, tossing back the last of his ale. "Let us now seek our pallets, so that we may rise early tomorrow."

The next day the three men paid the innkeeper and trudged into a snowing morning. In silence, they journeyed toward the sea, following a crumbling road built by the North Kings in the morning of the world.

By eve, they stood on a lonely beach bordered by a scruffy birch-wood. The wind howled through the trees, and the sand eddied and gusted in confusion. Out across the sea, a single light glowed.

"See that light?" Ilmenaur asked Baranek.

Baranek nodded.

"Tell me what it is."

"I know only too well," said Baranek gravely. "'Tis the watchlight atop Bolg's sea-tower."

"Well done. You do know the Fomor realm. So come, help me build a coracle to bear us over the waves." Ilmenaur began picking at the driftwood that littered the beach.

Bewilderment filled Baranek's face. "I-I cannot help you," he stammered.

Ilmenaur looked vexed. "Why in the Gods' name not? You must contribute to the effort, Baranek!"

"I know not how to build a coracle." The words burst from the bald, ugly man's lips. "I know nothing, Ilmenaur! I am like a babe, a tiny babe! Bolg did this to me, he must have! Ah, I am just a child, despite my size." He began weeping.

Ilmenaur scowled. "Oh, stop your bawling. If you cannot build, so be it. Tyrail and I can manage."

Baranek toppled onto a log and continued sobbing. Ilmenaur cursed, and then turned his attention to constructing a seaworthy coracle. Tyrail went to help Ilmenaur, but his green eyes kept travelling to the rocking, shuddering figure of Baranek.

"Something is very odd about that man," he said softly, a frown creasing his brow, and then his worried gaze turned to Ilmenaur. But, busy with his coracle, the young Prince did not notice his stare.

At moonset the three men set off in their hastily-made coracle. Baranek sat like a lump at one end of the flimsy craft, his ugly head bowed, while Ilmenaur and Tyrail paddled with flat spears of driftwood.

Ere long they caught sight of Tech Duinn, isle of King Bolg. A small jut of black volcanic rock, Tech Duinn was crowned by a pointed greenstone tower. The lanterns in its windows shone as pale as corpse-candles, and cages filled with skeletons dangled from the rim of the mighty parapet.

Ilmenaur stared up at the tower, his breath whistling through his teeth, then he said, "Well, we are here at last. Yonder rocky outcrop looks to be a likely landing spot."

Tyrail moored the coracle, and the three men clambered onto the dread isle, pulling their hoods over their faces to avoid detection. Then they tramped across the rocky ground to the door of Bolg's tower.

No Fomor guarded the door, and the companions entered the stronghold unchallenged, climbing the long, winding stair inside the tower. At the top of the stairs, they paused on a freezing platform. Lightless corridors wound away on either side of them.

"Which way to Bolg's throne room?" whispered Tyrail. "Do you remember, Ilmenaur?"

Ilmenaur shook his head. "No. It's been ten years, Tyrail. Baranek, do you know where Bolg's chambers lie?"

Baranek shuffled toward the right. "This way," he mumbled. "Bolg often changes the layout of his tower to avoid capture, but I doubt if he's moved since I escaped a week ago."

Baranek led the other men through the dank, stinking corridors. No Fomors were to be seen; Tyrai theorized that most of them had entered winter hibernation in caverns beneath Tech Duinn. Stealthily the companions moved through the shadows, brushing aside vast cobwebs, choking on the thick, fetid air. Silence reigned.

Then, suddenly, the quiet was shattered by a woman's scream.

Baranek started; his bald head shot up, glistening with sweat. "The good lady!" he gasped. "Bolg is abusing her again!"

Ilmenaur's head also shot up. His face was tense and pale.

"Easy, friend," said Tyrai, placing a gloved hand on the young man's arm. "Don't act rashly."

Slowly the trio moved forward, seeking the source of the screams. Soon they discovered an open door leading into a chamber. The sound of the cries and smashing furniture came from within the room.

Baranek began to shake and quiver; tears oozed from his small eyes. He clutched his torso with big, unwieldy arms. "I--I can't go in," he wailed. "I just can't. I want to help the lady, but I'm too afraid."

Ilmenaur scowled at him. He felt sick and angry, and, strangely, fearful of Baranek. "You miserable coward," he snapped. "A lot you've done for us, you great babel! Stay behind then, and keep out of trouble!"

Drawing their swords, Tyrai and Ilmenaur entered the chamber. Inside they found Bolg, dread king of Winter's Isle, leaning over a woman who, though fallen, still shouted defiance at him.

Nigh as tall as a giant, Bolg was dreadful to behold. One eye glowed in his forehead, and a double row of shark-like teeth jutted from his mouth. A long, double-jointed arm sprouted from the middle of his chest.

The woman lying at his feet was young, with long greenish-dark hair and smooth, blue-tinged skin. Dark eyes smoldered balefully in her shapely face as she strove to fend off Bolg's blows.

She ceased fighting when she caught sight of Tyrai and Ilmenaur. Her eyes widened in surprise, and she cried, "Ilmenaur!"

"Ethli..." White and trembling, Ilmenaur stumbled forth. "Bolg, you bloody..."

"Keep back!" Grinning, King Bolg yanked a mace from a bracket on the wall. "So you've returned, Ilmenaur Ap Turyalaynen! About time, I dare say! But I am glad. I have waited long to kill you, Sea-King!"

He rushed at Ilmenaur, whirling the mace above his conical head. Ilmenaur dashed under his single arm, shouting for Tyrai to attack from the other side.

Bolg roared angrily. "Your plan won't work--not if you have any feelings for this whore." Dropping his mace, he reached down and snatched up the girl at his feet. He held her in the crook of his arm, a honed nail pressed against her jugular.

Ilmenaur lowered his sword. Sweat dampened his hair.

"So--you still love sluttish little Ethli," leered Bolg. "I am rather surprised.

After all, you haven't seen her for ten years. Would it bother you if I..."

He scraped across Ethli's throat, drawing blood. Ethli shrieked in pain. Ilmenaur gave a strangled cry. "Drop your weapon," ordered Bolg.

Ilmenaur's fingers loosened on his sword hilt.

Suddenly a roar like that of a maddened bull reverberated through the tower, and into the room charged a crimson-faced Baranek. "You mustn't hurt the lady anymore!" he bellowed, his voice breaking with anger.

Bolg laughed, and swung Ethli out of Baranek's reach. "So, Ilmenaur, I see you've met up with Baranek. Ah, yes, I am so pleased he found you."

Ilmenaur's brow grew dark as a thundercloud. "Found me? Did you plan this?" He whirled to face Baranek, who was puffing and shuddering with rage. "Traitor," he snarled.

Baranek stared at him as if he had gone mad.

"Oh, Baranek's no traitor to you," smirked Bolg. "He doesn't know the meaning of the word, Prince Ilmenaur. Besides, children can't be traitors, and he's but a child. A big, mutated child. Your child, Ilmenaur of Turannos Archaim!"

"No!" Ilmenaur turned ashen-grey. "You lie! Ethli, tell me that he lies!"

Tears dripped from Ethli's eyes. "Alas, he speaks truth, Ilmenaur. On our last night together I conceived a child: Baranek. Bolg took him from me at birth and began experimenting on him. Baranek is the only male of Bolg's line and therefore his heir, but Bolg thought Baranek's appearance too human, so he attempted to give him Fomorian size and features. You can see the results of the experimentation: a huge, deformed child, larger than most men but with a boy's brain."

Bolg smirked. "I failed to make the boy a true Fomor, but I am not unhappy. For the hideous halfling is your heir, as well as mine! Your noble brother has no sons, does he? If Tuoralinnen should die, you would be King, and if you died, Baranek. I laugh to think of Bolg's half-Fomor grandson upon the throne of Turannos Archaim!"

"It will never happen!" Ilmenaur cried. "No one would accept him!"

"Who else would be King?" hissed Bolg, inching closer. "Tell me who, Sea-King! You will get no more byblows, man, for you will be dead!"

"Ilmenaur, look out!" Tyrai cried out and flung himself forward as Bolg released Ethli, whipped a dagger from his belt, and hurled it at Ilmenaur.

Ilmenaur whirled at Tyrai's shout, and the knife missed his heart, striking deep into his right shoulder. "Gods!" he cried, clutching the blade.

"Ilmenaur!" Ethli screamed, and she rushed to Ilmenaur's side and flung her arms around him. Leering, Bolg retrieved his mace and swung it threateningly.

"Now I can kill two birds with one stone," he said. "A bloody Sea-King and a faithless daughter."

At that moment Baranek blundered forth, waving great red fists. "You mustn't kill

them! That be my mother--and my sire!"

"Get back, you fool!" Spittle flecked Bolg's foul green lips. "Do you not realize I kill them for you? If Ilmenaur dies, you will become Crown Prince of Turannos Archaim! You shall inherit a kingdom one day!"

Baranek paused. "I'll be a King? With a crown?" He touched his bald pate as if feeling for an invisible crown.

"Yes, yes," said Bolg. "A rick King crowned with gold!--but only if Ilmenaur dies. If he lives, he'll prevent you from inheriting, by not acknowledging you. He thinks you hideous--can you not tell?"

"Yes." Baranek's eyes were half-lidded. "He does not like me. He spoke cruelly to me."

Bolg's grin widened. Stepping back a pace, he used a hooked finger-nail to yank a double-handed sword from a weapons display on the wall. He tossed it to Baranek, who caught it clumsily.

"Do the deed," he said. "Slay the bastard who begot you then wanted to forget you. Kill his faithless leman, too."

"But why must I kill the lady--my--my mother? She never did me any harm! She was always kind!"

"Do you think so? She told a lie just now, Baranek. I did not rip you from her arms to turn you into a Fomor--until she begged me to."

"He lies!" screamed Ethli as Baranek stepped forth, raising his long, cold sword.

Bolg laughed darkly and lurched along behind his grandson, eager to see murder done.

Suddenly Baranek swung around to face the grim King. "I have you now, Bolg!" he screamed through gritted teeth. "You are the liar, not my mother! You claim that she told you to transform me--why then did she weep when you injected me with your potions? And why did she once try to smuggle me from the isle? Bolg--grandfather--I may be a child trapped in a huge, ungainly body, but I am not a total simpleton, and I am going to kill you!"

"No!" shrieked Bolg, retreating a step. "You are wrong, Baranek! The whore hates you; only I care! I would see you King!"

"You would see me dead!" Baranek descended on Bolg, wildly swinging his sword. Bolg retreated, snarling, holding his mace up before him.

"Don't try, Baranek," begged Ethli. "Bolg will slay you!"

"I will try!" roared Baranek. "And if I die, what loss? None but you, lady, care if I die!" Dropping his sword, he sprang at Bolg, his blunt-fingered paws outstretched. His enormous bulk slammed into the taller, thinner Fomor, knocking him backwards out one of the tower's big, curved windows. Bolg scabbled uselessly at the stonework, then, fast as a striking serpent, flung out his long, muscular arm and looped it about Baranek's knees, dragging him into the window frame.

The boy-man gave a child-like wail, and then he fell, plummeting down like a stone.

"Gods!" cried Tyrai, kneeling on the sill and staring after him. "I must go and see..."

"Don't bother with that creature!"

yelled Ilmenaur, who had plucked Bolg's knife from his shoulder and was bleeding profusely. "Attend to me!"

"You have Ethli to help you!" cried Tyrai, and he sped from the tower to find the King of the Fomors' grandson.

Tyrai found Baranek lying in a pool of greenish blood at the foot of the tower. At first he thought he was dead, but then he heard him groan. Rushing forth, he rolled the big man onto his back, relieved to find that most of the blood had come from Bolg, who lay underneath Baranek, his skull crushed by his grandson's gargantuan body.

Tyrai tore his cloak apart and swiftly bound Baranek's wounds: a slash down one arm and a gash on his forehead. Then the Asrai dragged the unconscious man over the rocks to the coracle.

Minutes later, he was joined by Ilmenaur and Ethli, who were both holding a wad of cloth to Ilmenaur's shoulder. They clambered into the flimsy boat and Tyrai began to paddle with a strength that belied his frail appearance.

Ilmenaur, sitting in the prow, refused to look at the slumped form of Baranek, or at Tyrai, whom he considered to have acted treacherously in tending the wounded Baranek instead of him. Ethli, seeing her old lover's stony expression, the way his eyes skipped over Baranek, began weeping quietly.

"When we land, we must find a warm, dry place to rest," said Tyrai, as they neared the green coast of Essarnadon, "or I fear Baranek may die."

"I hope he does!" cried Ilmenaur. "He is an abomination, and, as things stand, heir to Turannos Archaim!"

Ethli let out a loud sob. "How could you be so heartless, Ilmenaur?" snapped Tyrai. "He saved your life, and he killed Bolg!"

Ilmenaur crossed his arms defensively and would say no more.

When the coracle landed, the resourceful Tyrai built a birch-framed shelter and placed Baranek in it, under the care of his tearful mother. Then he roughly hauled Ilmenaur up the strand, paying no heed to the Sea-King's injured arm.

"Ilmenaur, we must talk," he said, pushing the Prince onto a log. "I take it you still desire Ethli."

"Yes, of course I do. Having her, after so long, is like a dream come true."

"If you want to keep her, you must accept Baranek, too."

"I can't and I won't! He is hideous!"

"What are looks? He is brave, and deserves more than your scorn! He saved you, by the Gods!"

"I won't acknowledge him, Tyrai!"

"Then you will lose Ethli!"

"No! Ethli loves me!"

"Aye, but she loves Baranek, too. After all, he is her child, born from her body. I think she would choose him over you, if a choice had to be made, for she knows you can find other women, but Baranek is loved by her alone."

"I won't let her leave me."

"You would hold her a prisoner?"

Ilmenaur groaned. "No. But surely...Tyrai, what would Tuoralinnen do if

I brought Baranek home? He disapproved of Ethli to begin with: she's the reason Tuor forced me to go questing!"

Tyrai nodded. "He wouldn't be pleased to see your son. But perhaps less angry than you think. He believes you selfish and irresponsible, Ilmenaur--and he is right, I am sorry to say. Prove to him that you are a man responsible for his own actions, who has the courage to acknowledge and take care of his injured bastard son, and mayhap he will warm to you."

The two men tramped up the pebbly beach. They could see Ethli standing beside their rough shelter, her arm around Baranek, who, though conscious, looked dazed and pale.

"Ethli, where are you going?" cried Ilmenaur.

"Far away," she said tearfully. "I know how you feel about Baranek--but I have feelings too, and although I love you, I won't abandon my son. I'll take him into the wilds."

"No!"

"I told you, I won't leave him!"

"You don't have to." Taking a deep breath, Ilmenaur looped his arm about Baranek's thick waist. Baranek stared at him, amazed.

"What are you doing?" Ethli cried.

"My duty. Taking my lover and son to Turannos Archaim."

Slowly they began walking down the strand, a shuffling giant flanked by a tall, dark prince and a green-tressed Fomor princess.

Tyrai watched as they disappeared into the brightening east, hoping that all would turn out well for them, especially for poor Baranek. Then he squatted on the sand, took his Asrai flute from his belt, and made a song about the King of the Fomors' grandson.



THANK YOU to all our letter writers!
Now do it again, okay?

LETTERS O' COMMENT

Thank you for including a generous two samples of my work in your first issue. It is gratifying, to say the least, to finally see myself in print. Despite the modesty of the editors, I was extremely pleased with the illustrations, particularly the larger one, for "The Accuser."

Among the work by other writers in the issue, I was especially impressed with "The Woodsman" by Pendred Noyce (what a marvellous name for a writer of the mythic!). Not only was the idea of retelling a traditional fairy tale from another point of view interesting, but the writing style was evocative, involving, and authoritative. Print more by this person, please.

I was surprised at how many of the stories in the issue were written "tongue-in-cheek." While humour certainly has its place in fantasy, and is immensely enjoyable when well handled, I think one has to be careful of confusing genuine humour with mere silliness or sarcasm. The latter is much easier to produce, and of much less merit.

Angelee Sailer Anderson
Huntington Beach, California

Issue One was quite varied in subject matter. I hope more stories about Agnar the troll and Thomas the Rhymer will be coming. Zychaumurg, the wizard in "Mourning Light," is quite a nut; in all his years as a wizard, I'm sure he must have done something interesting. Several stories were weak in places, but fair.

"The Woodsman" was interesting, since the wolf's side of the story has been told but to my knowledge never the hunter's. Red Riding Hood and her whole family seem to be as bad as the evil Being in "The Accuser." All of them seem angry with the hunter for saving Red and her grandmother. What next, Sleeping Beauty punching the prince out for waking her up?

How about some news concerning the Mythopoeic Society? What else does it do besides put out The Mythic Circle (perfect name)? Good luck.

Ronald C. Morgan II
Norwalk, California

I like Sleeping Beauty punching out the prince - maybe something about interrupting the dreamtime, eh? The Mythopoeic Society is a non-profit organization centered around a deep appreciation for the works of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and the mythic and fantastic literary traditions on which they drew. The Society publishes *Mythlore*, a quarterly journal,