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Mythic Circle #23

Gwenyth E. Hood

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MOON CIRQUE

WINTER 2000

The Mythic Circle # 23
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The Small Press Question

Among genre market reports, I found occasional resentment toward the small press that can not pay beyond contributor copies. Obviously, this opinion disturbed me. So I asked those who are involved in this issue and have published professionally. -- Trent Walters, M.C. co-editor

Margaret Carter, novelist and *The Vampire's Crypt* editor:

I am surprised to hear that anyone considers payment only in copies "stealing from the author." If the writer knowingly enters into such an agreement, "stealing" can hardly be accurate. Do writers who advance the claim of "theft" seriously believe that the editors who publish their fiction are making a profit thereby? Would it be preferable for every publication to pay for all materials? No doubt, and I do pay a token pittance for fiction contributions to my own fanzine, *The Vampire's Crypt* (<http://members.aol.com/MLCVamp/vampcrpt.htm>), because I like to help writers at least recoup some of their postage costs. But, then, I continue to lose money on the zine. I realize, though, that many editors would prefer not to lose money, or at least not quite so much money. If most of the small press periodicals that now reimburse writers only with copies could somehow be forced to pay for stories, most of them would probably not be able to publish at all, and how would *that* benefit authors?

Academic journals customarily don't pay at all; however, that's a whole nother can of dragon droppings. These publications seem to think their contributors should be so thrilled to have another item for their vita that they should never think of asking for something so mundane as cash. That system is unlikely to change, though, since scholarly journals probably run even further in the red than fanzines (possibly being kept afloat by subsidies from their parent institutions).

Now, I don't deny that I'm in this racket at least partly for the money. I can identify with Peg Bracken (author of *The I Hate to Cook Book*, *The I Hate to Housekeep Book*, etc.), whose grandfather advised her with his dying breath, "Dinna give it away, lass." But sometimes I have to give it away or not get into print at all. I love seeing my words on the page, I benefit from the name exposure, I enjoy reading my contributor's copies, and (being a fanzine editor myself) I know full well that the editors who "pay" only in copies do so because they can't afford to do otherwise. As much as I would like to get cash for everything I write, I have no quarrel with the existing system.

* * *

Gwenyth Hood, novelist and M.C. editor:

Of course, when artists succeed, they want to be published in large print runs by the mainstream press. But not everyone starts that way. Young writers need to develop

their craft and build an audience, and small press is one of the ways to do it. J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis wrote and published their poetry for a small group of people long before they became famous. Another successful writer who first published in small press is Richard Adams, author of *Watership Down*.

* * *

David Kopaska-Merkel, poet and editor of *Dreams & Nightmares* and *Star*Line*:

I like the small press. (Duh. I'm here, ain't I?) Some people don't know what we've got--the biggest literary "family" in the world, an extension of the huge family that SF fandom still is, after all these years. And not counting "news", most literature is small press--bad and ugly yes, but good too. Check it out.

* * *

Christopher McKitterick: short story writer for *Analog*, *Artemis*, and *Tomorrow*:

Simply put: If I could sell everything I wrote to SF's big three, I would. But not everything of mine is appropriate for them. That's why I submit to low-paying (or copy-"paying") magazines, because the important thing for me is publishing the stories that I like. People read all sorts of magazines!

* * *

Gene Stewart, short story writer for *Aboriginal*, *MZB*, *The Year's Best Fantasy and Horror*, among others: "Looking Beyond the Words"

When marketing one's writing it's best to start at the highest-paying and work down. Also, selling rights for less than 3¢/word means the sale won't count as a professional sale according to various writers' associations.

Many still accept lower rates, and some even opt to trade rights for contributor's copies and exposure. This can be a valid approach if the distribution in question is broad enough or garners the kind of attention one seeks from higher up the food-chain.

There are many small-press and semi-pro zines that pay less than 3¢/word but which are routinely surveyed by *Year's Best* anthologists, book editors, and agents.

These days there are also ezines, some of which pay above the base rate, but most of which offer little more than exposure on a web-site the ownership of the contents of which may be in dispute. Consider Yahoo's recent declaration that it owned all rights to all contents on all its sites, for example.

Until the electronic and internet rights are sorted out by Congress -- and don't hold your breath unless blue's your color -- it's best to stick with established electronic publications that pay competitive rates and offer snail-mail contracts.

Having said all this, keep in mind, too, that those top markets are flooded by unsolicited mss. They see so many submissions that are utterly wrong that their slush piles are often automatic rejection factories. Unless your goal is to waste postage and envelopes, some pre-culling ought to be done.

By all means start at the top, but before sending off a ms make sure it not only fits the specifications of your targeted market, but is also good enough to get passed up the chain from first readers to actual editors.

Getting to an editor's desk is the first hurdle, after all.

In my experience, the more established and better-paying markets do indeed tend to treat writers more professionally. However, that can be a detriment when one is starting out. A cold, professional standard rejection slip tells one nothing, after all, about what was wrong with the submission or how to correct it.

On the other hand, lower-paying markets often provide some feed-back. Some of it is rote, on a checklist, or otherwise automatic, but even these categorical kinds of rejections at least tell you something about what the editor saw. How an editor sees your work matters more than how you see it, if your goal is to sell, so knowing even generalities such as "...plot failed me..." or "...characters flat..." or "...clichéd idea..." can be of enormous help to beginning writers.

There are, of course, many markets that pay in small stipends or contributor's copies. Most of these are journals focused on one aspect of writing, as can be seen in any Writer's Market Guide, for example. These are the markets that might offer a certain kind of exposure or a certain level of personal attention. Some, such as those affiliated with college English departments, are even famous and carry a certain prestige. Again, it depends on one's goals. A genre writer is better off avoiding such markets, whereas a literary writer might benefit immensely by being showcased in the right non-paying literary journal.

As has been stated, there are different kinds of pay.

In this writer's experience even high-paying markets can have dishonest, cruel, and whimsical editors, but this isn't the venue for writer's horror stories.

Not all non-paying venues are non-professional in outlook or behavior. Some seasoning and some experience helps curb this perception. As stated, many of the finest literary journals, with very professional staffs and records, don't pay. Their lack of pay usually bespeaks either a lack of funding or a non-profit status, but it doesn't imply non-professional attitudes.

Indeed, thinking ahead of time will save you much grief and postage. Why submit blindly? Know your market, read samples, and send for guidelines. Saves time.

Writing's an art, not a profession. Unless you're on staff at a newspaper or magazine, paid a salary, then it's not a profession, it's a calling. Making a living remains an elusive dream for most published writers. Getting rich is equivalent to being struck by lightning.

And if the writing part's an avocation, the marketing part is distinctly professional, all business, with no room for sentiment or sentimentality. Romanticizing either a shoe repairman or a writer is a big mistake, if common enough. What's needed is a practical, no-nonsense approach combined with tenacity and, most important, a willingness and ability to learn.

The object of marketing one's writing is not to avoid possible pain or potential conflict, it's to sell copyrights. That's it. Emotionalism doesn't work for professionalism, only against it.

Sneering at a pay-rate after one has submitted to a publication is immature and accomplishes nothing practical. Also, seeing one's ms copy edited can often send neophyte writers into shock. They feel insulted and can't get past the emotion, which taints them. Fact is, correcting galleys is part of the job, and clarifying prose to suit editors comes with the territory of professionalism. Complaining about this is, yes, unprofessional.

However, one never knows why an editor does or doesn't buy a story. As John Carr once told me, it can come down to not liking a particular font, or a bad lunch, or the way a bird sang on the walk from the subway. One never knows because it's subjective. Many award-winning mss were rejected outright by a string of editors before one saw merit. And many more semi-competent works of near dreck have been accepted and even touted by enthusiastic editors. What were they thinking? Darned if anyone knows, least of all them.

In other words, don't project guilt, dread, or insecurity on the editor. Don't try to second-guess motives. That's emotionalism, too. Take things impersonally and work always in a businesslike manner.

Just remember that no submission need be out to a specific market any longer than the publicized response time. All one need do after that is withdraw the ms from submission and send it elsewhere. It's easy. No fuss, no muss.

And keep in mind that there are as many approaches to writing as there are writers, or moments in a writer's day. After all, some seek to meet readers' expectations, such as erotica writers, some of whom, by the way, meet Aristotle's axiom head-on, both instructing and delighting. Some are less pedantic, such as Borges. Some are concerned only with exploring the limits of their art, such as James Joyce. Some want permanence and seek the

unchanging basics, such as Hemingway. Some prefer to flit from current trend to contemporary fad, such as Tom Wolfe. Updike focuses on carving word-shapes while Stephen King wants to make your flesh creep like the Fat Boy in Pickwick.

All are good writers. Each is different. Each good in a different way. Each appreciated by some, loathed by others. Way of the world, this variety, and it enhances us. Better this than dull conformity.

Being didactic, pedantic, or discursive is a choice and neither right nor wrong. Depends on each ms. There is no set of basics that applies to all stories, any more than there is a set of basics that applies to all painting, sculpture, music, or fashion design.

And every assertion can be rebutted by an equal and opposite assertion. Way of the world again. Grow to appreciate it for its diversity and, if you disagree with an annoying point of view, write examples that contradict it, rather than bothering to debate. Lead by example. Demonstrate. Show, don't tell.

Now there's a misunderstood and over-used writing rule if ever there was one.

But that's fodder for another grind of the grist mill; my arm's tired now.

Be soon and write well.

Gretel has Little Red Riding Hood to Tea at the Ritz

by Sarah E. Skwire

The china clinks. No gingerbread is ordered.
We eye each other warily, we two,
Who separately have gone through much the same
Ordeal, but who have nothing beyond that
To bind us to each other. Drinking tea
Beneath the burning crystal chandeliers
That look so much like sugar candy...No.
I do not think I will go into that.

Instead I ask her why she wandered off.
I mean, I know about her granny, sick
And all alone. She was to bring the cakes
And wine. I know that part, but why she left
Protection, left the path, I'll never guess.
If anyone had cared what might become
Of me, or knit me cheerful scarlet hoods,
Or warned me, worried, not to go too far
I might have never done the things I did.
I might have never hoped the things I hoped.

You see, the witch was better than my mother.
I thought it would be nice to stay with her,
Just for a little while. But Hansel, well,
He longed for home so badly, marked the paths
So many times, I couldn't let him stew
About it any longer. She died...No.
I have to be the subject of that clause
Like it or not, I've learned I have to be.

I killed her. Killed the wrong one. I have thought
So many times so late at night that she
Was not the one who should have died.
I store that thought away for later brooding.

My therapist assures me that I did
The only sane thing that I could have done.
I murdered her, saved him; I got him home,
And now I'm here with her, tea at the Ritz,
White gloves, all ladylike, and sugar...No.
I will not think about that craving now.
Instead I lean towards her, and I ask,
"Why did you leave the path? Adventure? Lost?
Or mere stupidity? Why did you go?"

She looks up, cookie crumbs around her mouth,
Considering. Her tongue catches a crumb,
And my hands curl against the tablecloth.
I will not do this. I will not be tempted.
I will not put to use the things I've learned
From mothers, witches, wolves, and forest paths.

I smile sedately, drink my tea, and nod,
As she politely tries to answer me,
To struggle with the sense of all her nonsense
To see what makes her different from me.

I wonder how she'd taste with honey glaze.



Horse Feathers

Gene Stewart

In a world where myths were called horse feathers and worse, Desma awoke itchy. She scratched her arms, shoulders, and belly, then rolled off the straw and jumped into the barn's common trough. A bird flew by, one of the crows, and the girl wondered what it might be like to be free.

Soaked and gasping at the cold water, but no longer itchy, Desma climbed from the trough and shook the water from her hair as best she could by twirling while nodding. It almost became a dance but she did not allow such frivolity. Not while she was forced to live and work on her owners' farm.

She wrung the excess out by twisting the long black hair into a braid. Her shift dried on its own as she did sunny chores, such as feeding the chickens, slopping the hogs. As she worked, she hummed and remembered her mother's gentle voice telling her grand stories she'd called myths...

Urania let down her hair.

Youngest of the muses, she possessed perhaps less restraint. Her beauty radiated as enchantingly, however, and so the beast fell spelled.

What rough beast, you ask?

When Perseus gazed in his angled mirror-shield, it let him watch Medusa askance. It let him see Medusa without turning to stone. It let him, as he dodged and leapt and even hovered on Hermetic, mercurial winged sandals, fight the snake-haired creature.

When Perseus slew Medusa, blood spilled, and from that monster's blood arose Pegasus, white and pure, a winged steed worthy only of the bravest, or of the fairest.

And Urania fell in love with Pegasus, and rode upon him for one beguiling night of swooping, soaring joy.

They descended to a spring, and drank of sweet waters which called forth song in place of speech. Such were magics then, and such were genius loci, those spirits of place so rare now, so buried beneath our high-rises and concrete roadways.

After checking the water in the troughs, and hauling several buckets from the well in the center of the farm, Desma wandered into the stable, where she found her bowl of porridge set out. As usual it was cold at first bite, but that morning a small heart of warmth surprised

her as her wooden spoon reached the center of the bowl. Also, the carrots and field onions were fresher than usual, and for a drink she had fresh cider.

The smell of coffee percolated through the misty air from the farmhouse, where the real people sat clinking silverware and laughing over a morning's conversation. Desma listened to them for only a few moments that morning, then hurried to the stable, where straw needed changing.

As she entered the stable and inhaled the scents of hay, manure, and old wood, she almost dared to smile. Instead, wondering if she'd ever find the nerve to flee this place of drudgery and begrudged food, she thought more about the myths, how free they seemed...

When Urania and Pegasus slept Athena was able to place her hand-wrought golden bridle upon the flying horse. She led it, by following dreams of heroism and service to the world, to the place where slept Bellerophon, a handsome, strong mortal youth.

Bellerophon's dreams offered horrific glimpses of Lycea, where a three-headed monster held sway, clawing, devouring beast and man alike in a frenzy of blood. To rid the cursed land of such a monster would, indeed, fulfill Bellerophon's ideas of heroism, and so he awoke with a mission.

And there beside him stood Pegasus.

Bellerophon rode the winged steed into battle against the monster of Lycia, and slew it by bravery and finesse and by benefit of his mount's airy agility.

Many adventures had they, while time's mistresses wove their patterns dark and light. And with the woven passage of time and events came Lethe's blessing, that of forgetfulness. And so the perils, deeds, and joys of Bellerophon and Pegasus faded into the mists of myth.

What happened to that fabulous winged horse?

The pitch-fork Desma used was small, cut short to fit her size. It was not for her comfort, she knew. Such considerations made a great difference in the amount of work she could do. If only she'd one day receive a gift that wasn't entirely and unmercifully utilitarian, she often thought, sighing.

The stalls all needed cleaning, and as she placed the second-to-last pitch of fresh straw down one of the farmhands poked his head in, blocking part of the bright sun streaming in now through the stable door. "When



you're done in here there's fruit to be picked in the north orchard."

Desma nodded, not daring to look at the man, for fear of drawing some sort of punishment or harsh treatment. The hands were usually rough men, and often as not considered her little better than a toy, or an amusing but frivolous pet. Most frightened her.

She worked steadily, in no hurry for the orchards. Finally she came to Peggy's stall. The horse, an old male despite its feminine nick-name, let its head loll down to nuzzle Desma behind the ear. It tickled and tingled and felt wonderful, something close to affection. "Hi, Pegasus" she said, suppressing her thoughts of the myths. "Here, I saved this from yesterday's pickings." She offered the small apple she'd secreted in her tunic's single pocket.

The horse, the special one they'd bred with gene-spliced wings to mock the very myths Desma remembered, whinnied and whickered a bit, then took the apple and munched it almost delicately.

"I'm sorry it's not gold," Desma said, stroking the horse's flanks, preparing to bring it out so she could clean away the straw. She enjoyed touching it, feeling the strength still growing in it, and often caught Peggy's eye as if the horse understood her silly references to forgotten stories.

Her hand, as it did every morning, travelled along the slender, graceful neck, then stroked the pure white silky flank before encountering the spot where muscles bunched, where the wing sprouted. She usually stroked outward on the leading edge of wing, savoring the strength there, feeling cartilage beneath the skin, and letting her fingertips touch ever so lightly the roots of the huge feathers...

She gasped. She pulled back her hand as if scalded.

As she'd stroked the long left wing, feathers had begun dropping to the ground, like leaves falling in Autumn.

"Help," she called out, running from the stall, forgetting to lock it. She ran to the farmhouse, where the farmer's wife met her, on the porch, with arms akimbo. "Help," Desma cried, "Peggy's sick."

She never once thought of blame, only for the welfare of the special hybrid worth so very much more than she could ever earn.

"Sick, huh? What have you done now, you unreliable little - ?" The farmer's wife stomped down off the porch and made shooing gestures, meaning for Desma to lead the way. Although Desma several times urged haste, the farmer's wife took her time, stomping on the ground as if to hurt it, kicking at clumps of mud, pausing now and then to glare at curious farmhands until they'd been properly cowed.

Reaching the stall, Desma danced impatiently by the

door, allowing the farmer's wife to catch up to her and go in first.

The farmer's wife bellowed for her husband, then turned and, as Desma entered the stall to see what new horror afflicted her beloved Peggy, the farmer's wife whacked Desma on the side of the head.

Desma fell over, hit the ground, and grunted in stunned pain. "What?" she asked, afraid Peggy had fallen down or broken a leg or otherwise done something horses weren't supposed to do. She crawled to the stall, taking a few kicks from the farmer's wife in order to see.

What she saw hurt her worse than the kicks and punches: There, where once Pegasus the Winged Horse had dwelled, now lay only a small pile of off-white and grey feathers, atop a heap of dungy straw.

"You've let him out, and now he's gone," the farmer yelled when he came dashing in to assess the situation. He struck Desma, who still hadn't gotten to her feet, once very hard across the shoulders with the hoe he carried. The handle actually cracked, so hard was the blow.

"Damn you, always trouble, always problems," the farmer raged, his skinny, wrinkly face going red, his bad teeth seeming to wobble in their gums as fury wracked his frame. "You've let him out, eh? Well, now we'll let you out. Yes, that's the only fitting punishment to this last mocking of our rules. Out, out. Get out. Get out and go away and never come back, do you hear me? You're as worthless as your mother, get off this farm."

Desma got to her feet, evaded one last kick from the farmer's wife, and ran from the stable. She dodged through a crowd of curious farmhands, some of whom laughed, and moved past the last fence as fast as her bruised, battered limbs could carry her.

She paused in a field far from the farm, where the woods started getting seriously thick. She paused and looked back, seeing the entire farm for the first time. It looked small and neat, like a toy. It looked wrong, too, because all around it nature tried to cover the wounds ploughed by the yoked horses. "No," Desma said, her voice weak and mostly stolen by a brisk Autumn wind, "damn you."

She stood and walked down the opposite slope, into the wildwood. Brigands, killers, and worse lurked there, Desma knew. Where else might she go? Having no choice, and feeling that maybe she would be accepted among criminals for having lost the last of the mythical beasts to remain alive in captivity, she squared her shoulders and told herself to be brave.

Bravery had nothing to do with fear, however. And her fear increased with each step into the trackless wilderness. Dense shrubs crowded before her as if trying to block her way. Shallow depressions proved, when stepped upon, to be jarringly deep, nothing but traps disguised by leaves.

Desma shivered, her burlap tunic hardly enough now that dense bare limbs clattered overhead, now that the sun eased itself behind the mountains, now that she was utterly alone and without comfort. She was hungry, too, and thirsty. Finally she stopped walking.

She'd been kicked off the farm in the middle of the morning. Freedom wasn't as sweet as she'd imagined, she found. She'd walked until well after dark, her stomach aching with hunger. She found herself wishing she'd eaten the apple Peggy had so enjoyed. That thought soured her mouth, and she grimaced at the bitterness, shook her head. No, she didn't begrudge the apple, but she did wonder where Peg had gone. She fell asleep beside a mud puddle which had begun to freeze along its shallower edges

She awoke because something tickled her nearly-numb cheek. She brushed it aside, then sat up to find a huge, silky white feather in her lap. She looked up, and her mouth dropped open in amazement.

There in an oak, perched delicately on its hind legs, with its front legs braced against the trunk, there was Pegasus. The feathers had almost entirely fallen out by now, and the horse whinnied and whickered with excitement.

Desma wondered how it had found her as she looked around for a way to climb up to the animal.

She was about to try leaning a hollow log against the oak's trunk as a make-shift ladder when Pegasus let out a horse-laugh, drawing her attention. The girl gazed up, frowned, then smiled.

New feathers grew even as she watched, with the timeless and appropriate speed of magic. They flexed and fluttered, strengthening visibly even in the wan morning light.

"You were molting," Desma said aloud, remembering the words from having cared for the chickens, geese, ducks, and pigeons kept by the real people at their farm.

It was still morning when Pegasus gave a mighty leap, and sailed down from the tree on huge, new wings.

They kicked up a breeze that warmed Desma, and she stopped shivering as she placed her arms around the graceful beast's neck.

Pegasus knelt.

Desma gasped, fearing for an instant that something had hurt the magnificent horse, but then Peg turned his head to her and nudged her against him, and she understood. "Really?" she asked, unable to believe such an offer.

Pegasus neighed, and Desma climbed onto his back, hooking her heels up under the muscular knobs where the wings sprouted, and holding the silky tresses of mane with firm but gentle hands. "Ready," she whispered.

Trotting from beneath the trees to a clearing where dark green moss caught gold and silver apples falling from a spectacular glittering metallic tree, Pegasus tossed back his head, then raised his forefeet and, with a single effortless leap, bounded upward, into Autumn's breezes.

Desma, warm against the animal and safe on its wide back, smiled and watched the ground fall away beneath her. Her heart sang. Her skin tingled, more alive than ever before in her life.

They flew in a gradually-widening spiral, and soon soared over the farm, where both had spent so much hard, thankless time. "Maybe we belong up here," Desma said. Pegasus flapped his fresh wings and carried his last, best believer higher, seeking the pinnacle of Olympus, where Zeus, Athena, and beloved Urania, too, with all the others, awaited the last one's return.

Desma had passed a test of the Gods and, as the cherished guest who had proven to the Olympians, by recognizing Pegasus for what he truly was, that faith in them was not entirely gone even now, was permitted to wear a gown woven on a Fateful loom from silken strands of Pegasus's mane, was given a place at the banquet, and was allowed to stay as long as she wanted, which was only forever, after all.



Last Call

by E. R. Stewart

Our inner planets whirled
Against the dark,
And no one stumbled
Backwards down to Earth.
Our bravest made
New homes on barren rocks.
They fashioned cities to
Fit the air supply.
They fought the vacuum,
Died in frozen silence.
As travel dwindles
And stars run out of fuel
And skies go dark from
Bang to final whimper,
We learn the skills to
Save what little's left.

We light the stars we use,
Turn off the rest.
This way, we'll live a
Few millennia longer,
Eke out a lasting end
With dignity.
And when, at last, the
Final radiance fails,
Aware of how the dregs must feel,
We lift up our cup and song
And celebrate the
Wealth around us.
Soon enough, the heat-death
will take us all.

A Storm in Gundrin

Jon Camp

Jon writes "[T]he story grew from the poem 'Night Storm'... written in the 70's." If you'd like to see a chapbook of Jon G. Camp's Two Worlds write him at 110 Margaret Dr. Monroe LA 71203.

It is a cold Yuletide Eve and Gaffner is watching the winter storm from his window. As the wind grows stronger, the frozen branches of the trees begin to bend and snap. The limbs fall to the ground. Icy twigs break away and scurry along with the pounding gusts. They fly along the snow piled along the pathway that separates the two rows of houses.

Now, the wind picks up twigs, dried leaves and the smaller limbs and drops them onto the roof. Masking his fear of what is even now approaching the town, Gaffner seeks to soften the somber mood that is filling the room. He looks at his little daughter and asks, "Listen, Helma, there's something scratching up on the housetop. Maybe it's Father Yule. Should we let him in?"

Caren, Gaffner's wife, snaps, "Stop that Gaffner. Let's have no games on such a night. You'll frighten Helma."

The winter gale pushes the snow along, all the way to the edge of the village. Then, up the hill it rises to the circle of stones that lie in a little clearing among the trees. Under their white blanket, the stones lie quietly, waiting for Spring. In the Springtime, the people will come, singing and feasting. But now, there is only a dead world of ice for the stones to contemplate. Gaffner steps across the room and sits down near the hearth with its Yulelog burning warm and bright. "Caren, Helma, let's have a little song. After all, it's Yuletide Eve." Caren says, "First, let me fix some tea. It will be good on such a cold night." She gets the kettle, fills it, and sets it on the hearth to heat. Gaffner and Helma move closer to the warmth of the fire, and wait. Soon, the kettle sounds its whistle. Caren prepares the tea and pours three cups. She brings them and sits near the fire, herself.

Gaffner says, "Now, let us sing."

Singing at Yuletide is a tradition in all the families of Gundrin. Huddled by the fire, the three sing a few of the songs that have been sung since the ancients first sang them. Then, they settle down in front of the fire to wait out the night.

Helma asks her mother, "Why do you and Father stay up on the night before Yule?"

Caren answers, "There is always a storm in Gundrin on Yuletide Eve. So your father and I stay awake in case there is any damage to the house. In winter, we must make

repairs at once."

Helma cannot remember many Yuletide Eves so the explanation satisfies her. It is not long before Caren's brew has its effect and Helma's eyes begin to show the need for sleep.

A rattling at the window startles everyone. Helma is once again wide awake. The sound frightens her. She can only whisper, "What was that, Father? What was it?"

Gaffner tells her, "It was just some icicles falling from the roof and hitting the window. That is all. Now, why don't you go to sleep? Tomorrow is Yule and we have a wonderful day waiting for us."

Helma says, "I'm just not-sleepy;" but the hot tea, made with the dried herbs saved from Caren's fall garden, continues to impose its will on the child. It is only a while longer before Helma is asleep on her pallet in front of the fire.

Caren breaks the silence that has settled around them, "I hate to do that, but if the animals break in, she won't know." Many times, Gaffner has seen Caren trying to busy herself into forgetfulness. He knows she is a strong-willed woman. But her face often betrays the concern and guilt she feels for her part in what is to come. Nevertheless, even with the agony of each Yuletide she keeps them to herself and trembles with fear in private.

Gaffner assures his wife, "I am glad that you have the wisdom to help her sleep through such a night." Then, the obviously worried father rises and goes to look out the window again. There are no stars, no moon. The sky is black with frigid clouds over all of Gundrin. They coat everything with an icy glaze. Without the fire, the house would be a cold and dreadful place.

Caren, almost to herself, says, "If we had sons, it would not be so bad."

"Don't say that. Helma is all a father could ever hope to have."

"It's not the same. If you had sons to help . . ."

Gaffner breaks in, "Perhaps . . . but I am happy with Helma. I will guard her always."

"I know you will, Gaffner." It is as much a plea as a statement.

Gaffner says, "Caren . . . , the night's not yet over."

Even with the screaming of the wind, the Ravens can be heard cawing to the wolf pack. Nothing else that flies can withstand the wind. All other winged creatures flee

the winter gale. It is the Ravens' lot to call, obeying the ritual cast into them by the town's sisters.

Now, the storm rises. The larger branches are torn from the trees and even the trees themselves bend almost to the ground. The wind becomes a deafening roar.

Caren is becoming more openly concerned, but there is really nothing to be said, or done. The waiting has now begun. "Why do we stay here in Gundrin? Yuletide isn't like this in other towns."

"It was twelve of Gundrin's own women . . ."

"I know that!" interjects Caren, not wanting to hear what her husband was going to say. Then she adds, "Everyone in town thought it was a good idea. No one wanted to see a child - not even the worst kind - be sent up the mountain if the sickness came. Something had to be done. We all thought it was a practical solution. If I had known it would come to this, I would have left the circle."

"It's too late now. It was just a good idea that got out of hand. As for the sickness, it's just part of our people. Some children. The worst thing is not knowing. As bad as having to kill your own child was, banishment to the mountain was worse. That is either a slow death or a violent one. This way, it is quick. And with the tea, it is painless. The sisters were wise to provide a solution, and no mother's throat is going to be ripped out by her own demented child." Gaffner is silent for a few moments, pondering what he has said, and then remarks, "Maybe we're all sick."

Caren murmurs, "Maybe." Then, almost nonchalantly, she notes, "I believe Antra Gorsen was planning to leave one out."

Gaffner cranes his neck against the window and looks down the path. "Yes, one is out. It's that little devil of theirs. He gets worse every day. It is good to let him go with the pack."

"Sarishta believes that one of us simply wasn't sure we should be doing it. Maybe that's it. Maybe we just didn't have the will. Maybe the herbs weren't right."

Gaffner suggests, "We'll just have to deal with it."

The doors and windows are straining under the battering of the wind-blown snow. When the onslaught increases even more so, Gaffner knows it is almost time. He gets his axe and returns to the window. "Caren, get the small axe. Stand beside the other window. I believe the door will hold but the windows are weak."

Looking out again, Gaffner sees the wolf pack coming down the pathway between the houses. They stop at the Gorsen house and turn toward the door. They snarl and fight among themselves as each beast pushes forward to get a taste. Even with the roar of the wind, Gaffner can still hear the sounds of bones being crushed in powerful jaws. He thinks to himself, "Surely Antra used the tea."

Satisfied momentarily, the animals leave the Gorsens' house and head straight toward the window where Gaffner

is standing. The snow has completely covered the yard fence. It is no longer a barrier to the animals' advance. They stop on the porch at the window and wait. There is nothing for them here. They bare their teeth and begin their ominous growling. After a moment, they dash straight at Gaffner's window.

As the leader crashes through, broken glass flies across the floor all the way to where Helma is sleeping. The great head protrudes into the room. Before the brute can claw its way inside, Gaffner swings his axe down on its forehead. Its skull splits open and brains spill. The pack brothers pull their dead leader out of the window and prepare to attack again. One goes to the other side of the door and looks up at the window that Caren is guarding. Apparently, Caren's window appears too small so it comes back.

Frustrated with their initial failure to break in through the windows, most of the wolves head down the path to try the other houses. Three remain and turn their attention to the door. They stand side by side and then rush straight ahead.

The loud strike at the door is ominous. "They are trying to break it down," screams Caren, "Oh, Mother Earth, they were never supposed to enter the houses."

Gaffner shouts, "Move to the door with me. Maybe it will stop them."

Another smash by the pack weakens the door posts. Gaffner sees one start to give and again shouts to Caren, "It's not going to hold! Move back to the hearth."

The beasts make a third attack on the door, and one of the posts fails. The opening is just enough for one animal to get through at a time. Luckily, this opening satisfies them. They abandon their attack on the door, itself, and begin clawing their way through the new opening.

The first one gets inside the room. It sees Helma and immediately heads for the hearth. Gaffner and Caren are standing in front of their daughter and their axes speak. The first beast falls to the floor in a spreading pool of its own blood.

A second beast breaks in and rushes to the attack. It comes closer to Caren, so she makes the first swing. Her small axe only manages to wound the creature. This makes it even more determined. So, after a quick retreat to the center of the room, it dashes forward again. Luckily, the wound from Caren's axe has slowed it a little. Gaffner and Caren both strike. Their axes do their work and this creature is also soon dead in another pool of blood.

The first two have widened the opening between and door post and the wall. This allows the third one to get through. When Gaffner sees it, his heart sinks. This one is fully twice as large as any he has ever seen. He raises his axe and waits. He is determined that the monster will not feed on Helma.

The beast stands for a moment, apparently assessing

the situation before attacking. It sees Helma, inclines its head to the side, and for a brief moment, it responds with just a flicker of a gentler underlying nature. However, the hunger for the flesh of the child soon becomes overwhelming. The beast cannot resist the curse of the sisters. Baring its fangs and screeching a wild and ancient howl, it streaks for the hearth, ignoring the danger of the axe..

Gaffner braces himself for the attack. When the beast is almost at Helma's throat, Gaffner brings his axe down on the beast's neck. It severs the its head from the shoulder. The head flies forward, tumbles across Helma's sleeping figure, and comes to rest in the fire. Its great jaws open once in a silent scream of death and then the flames end the agony. Its body lies on the floor, the still beating heart spurting a meaningless crimson flood over the sleeping child.

Helma awakens early the next morning. She does not

realize that she is wearing a different nightgown and is on a new pallet. Nor does she notice any of the few faint red stains that remain on the floor. Her father is just finishing the repair to the window. The door is already back in place. Helma asks, "Father, was there much damage to our house?"

Gaffner reassures his little daughter, "No, my precious, there was only a little damage. It's already fixed. Go wake your mother and let's be on our way."

Helma goes to her mother's bed and tells her it is time to go. Soon, they are all dressed and anxious to get outside. In the town square, the giant fire is already ablaze, consuming the carcasses of the beasts placed among the timbers before dawn. As they walk to the door, Helma asks her parents, "Did Father Yule take any bad children last night?" Her father answers, "I believe only one . . . from our street. Now, Happy Yuletide, my family. Let's go celebrate.

Jon Camp on "Storm": "...is the opening short story of The Tales of Gundrin. I have finished others, have some in development, and planning still others. All have to do with the town of Gundrin, the people (some strange) who live there, and the ever-present Mount Gundrin. It is on the mountain that the Yookers(near-humans), Greenbacks(very large spiders), and other things live. I do not wish to put it all into one story. My plan is to finish the series and then publish them as a book. Then, each story will reveal more of the town and people as the book progresses."

PERSEPHONE

Sweet Persephone!

Daughter of sorrow and abundance.
Innocent blossom plucked too soon.
Bright spring petal,
In winter's dark garden.

by Louise Webster

THE PERSONALS

Category: Men seeking something

Professional bridge burner/broken angel,
seeks bookish spinster/librarian for
cinematic romance of biblical proportion.
Me: Thirty-whatever, slender, 5'10, grey
eyes, shoulder-length blonde curly hair,
bone-white skin (seraph noir), wear
shadows if they fit. Ex-poet, ex-musician,
ex-artist, ex-assassin, looking for hardcore
redemption. You: Legal, subtle, invasive
beauty, judicious kindness,
eloquent/predatory wit, classic femme fatale
ethos/pathos. Kiss kiss, bang bang. Must
possess strong desire to be adored and
protected. In this graceless city, I have
doubtless seen you many times, both awake
and asleep, and wondered how lovely it
might be to read you stories by the light of
the midnight sun.

by Regent St. Clare

NARCISSUS

The mirror, gold flecked halo,
Reflects the light of objects in the room.
Expanding the horizon
I pass by the glass and look
Hoping to see myself more clearly
But am pulled in.

by Louise Webster

The Demon Lover

by Kelly Searsmith

the princess in her garden

She slides on calluses,
thick as slippers, among
the windjilted tulips.

A black cat, thinking bees
between orange eyes, sprawls,
The stone bench having cooled.

The moon is a pale quest
ion marking the end
of a noon's June sentence.

On its hook she might hang
a slip or her white neck,
if it weren't fishing.

Dreamy, she stops rocks gawks
at the old man leaning
to snare true lovers' hearts.

He has heard they make fine
eating, if one might trap
them young, wild, and beating.

Hers, safe as bumbles from
Mirabelle, opens, shuts
as if trying to catch

red rain which tips two lips.
Dreams, though fairy-whispers
spoiled her crib sleep, saying

the day first kissed, she'll
not outlive; warded fast
in father's virgin yard.

ii the farm boy at his plow

All the day, all the day
he worked his way homeward
one row astray, one back.

Each step, sore bones scraped raw
the soft, peeling belly
of his slow, sunburnt mind.

Man's a mulé, I'm a fool:
so went the song that drove
the plow he hard pressed on.

Relentless the sun seared
earth and youth, both ripened
for the seedtime, though dry.

Mouse and worm, dirt and dream
the blade cut sure, the blade
cut clean; dull steps followed.

A nose full of planting
smelt the same as dying
along the dark lane home.

All the while, a lonesome,
sweat-watered seed shifts, heart
to hand to heart, dormant

until moonlight blooms.

iii theirs was a midnight meeting

Never has he seen so
much light gathered, careless,
it runs thick down the folds

of her dress, pouring o
ver field and lane and lungs,
there, then, he wakes into

intention, parts the hedge,
strides the lawn, breaks quiet
with ardent steps, until

his voice slips warm greeting
in her mind's shell, chilled by
late sleep, early dreaming.

She sees Gardener's servant,
clod-stuck with sweat, until
that voice echoes ocean,

transforms implement to
man – He has asked her name,
gazed with glittering eyes

more starved than a beggar's,
she feels a tidal pull
moonlight magnetizing

blood; closes long, gray eyes,
opens mouth to better
drink in death by drowning.

iv and the boy became a poet

One kiss he took from her
melting face, all the warmth
was in her lips, whiskey

never gave such heat as
he drank in, blazes so
night turns day, flesh to fire,

the moon falls from the sky,
dissolves into mist ere
earth, scatters stars like snow,

the old man lays pierced on
his own hook between them,
they two like statues stand,

he the sun, she shadow
ten years times ten snow and
summer spring and leaf left

them there, an annual ball
to mark the morning they
were discovered dreaming

of eternity, found
in one thoughtless kiss,
until he tired at last,

blinked, broke, woke, found her cold,
parted suddenly, dimmed
shivered, shook, and called her

a lamia who took
the sweetness from his youth;
the youth from his body.

But long ago she'd turned
to stone, and for years he
had kissed himself alone.

Kelly Searsmith on the poem: "*The Demon Lover*," a male Cinderella story in verse (this catalogued tale type usually tells of a poor male lover who seduces / wins a princess; in a version by Laurence Housman, the princess leaves her castle to live in squalor -- mine has a more Tennysonian twist as the lover's chilled romance becomes his misogynous raison d'être for becoming a poet).



S.U. Linville
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Winter Beast

by Margaret L. Carter

Beneath the wind that moaned around the keep, a deep-voiced howl assailed Inga's ears. From the window, she stared down at the massive shape that prowled outside the gate. The nearly full moon showed her a form all too familiar by now, gray-streaked white against the snow, vaguely bear-like but twice the size of any bear. "Close the shutters before we freeze," called her father's weak voice from the bed.

She obeyed and walked over to gaze at him. With the window shuttered, the musty odor of illness thickened in the candlelit bedchamber.

Her father, Lord Aron, raised himself on one elbow and glared at her. "Why do you watch that thing every night? Isn't it bad enough just knowing it's there?"

"I'm through watching, Father. I'm ready to do something about it." She laid the back of her hand against his forehead, dismayed to find him still flushed with fever.

He flinched away from her touch. "Stop fussing over me. What do you mean, do something? We've done all we can, and what good was it? Look at me!" He gestured toward his wounded leg, torn open by the monster's fangs three nights past. Few people who challenged the creature survived. The healer's herb-lore, aided by Inga's spellcraft, had salvaged the mutilated limb, but the fever persisted.

Inga sat on a stool at the bedside. "True, facing the Snowbeast in combat has been worse than useless. It's time to try another way." Her fingers twisted around each other in her lap; she knew how badly her father would react to her suggestion. "I've found a spell to deal with it."

"Magic? Against that?" The words came out as a hoarse croak. His sunken cheeks made him look like an old man, though only in his fiftieth year.

"What else is left? Fighting is obviously hopeless." Arrows failed to penetrate the beast's pelt, so that long-range weapons had no effect. Swords and spears only scratched it, and anyone who ventured within arm's reach risked being ripped apart. It left some challengers bleeding to death on the snow, while others it slew and dragged away to devour at leisure. Trackers often found their bones and shredded clothes on the mountainside. "I'm sure the thing is a creature of magic. Only magiccraft can defeat it."

"And who's to cast this spell, daughter? You, I suppose?" Inga inclined her head in silent acknowledgment. She was, after all, the only mage in the keep. Lord Aron's eyes narrowed. "From a circle in your

tower?"

She swallowed a lump. "No, father. This spell must be cast face to face." Or so she thought, as far as she understood the archaic language in the crumbling volume where she'd found the cantrip. "I have to look into its eyes."

"I won't allow --" The words dissolved in a fit of coughing.

Supporting him with an arm around his shoulders, Inga held a cup of herbal tea to his lips. He accepted one sip, then pushed her away. "Out of the question! I won't let you kill yourself."

"I don't plan to die. Fire holds it at bay. Long enough for me to finish the incantation, at least." She set the mug aside and started to wipe his chin with a handkerchief.

He grabbed the cloth to finish the task. "I'm not helpless, you know. And as your father and Lord, I forbid this madness."

"While you're bedridden," she said, "I'm the Lady of this hold."

"You think my men will let you set foot outside the gates against my orders?" The question ended in another cough.

She proffered the mug again, hoping he hadn't noticed the bitter taint of the potion she'd added. This time, he clutched it in both hands and downed the hot drink. "Father, I believe they'll do anything to end this scourge."

Handing her the empty cup, he shook his head and sank back on the pillow. "I've lost your mother and your brother -- my only son. How can I let you throw your life away?" His words evoked the day when the first monster, the She-Beast, had appeared -- and the image of her mother's ravaged corpse on the red-stained snow....

A shriek ripped through the freezing air. Inga rushed out the gate, just behind the guards who responded to her mother's cry. The She-Beast, with bloody tears oozing from its eyes, loomed over the body. Rolf, only nine years old, stared at his mother's twisted form, her small ornamental dagger still clutched in her fist. The snowball he'd been shaping dropped from his hand. Before the guards' charge could reach the She-Beast, it enveloped Rolf in its shaggy forelegs. It -- she -- cradled him against her breast, keening, with her bear-like head bowed, and lumbered away. Not daring to loose arrows at the creature while she carried the screaming boy, the guards could only watch. A howl streamed behind the She-Beast as she fled....

Inga forced the memory into the depths of her mind. Impatient for action, she returned to the window and

cracked the shutters to peer out. The gray-white hulk shambled back and forth, lifting its muzzle to roar at the barred gates. The noise, both terrible and desolate, made her chest constrict and her stomach cramp. The eyes above the dagger-length fangs seemed fixed on her.

Night after night, that roar haunted the darkness. Sometimes, after she finally found shelter in sleep, it invaded her dreams. Just the night before, she had dreamed that the cry melted into words, an almost-human voice calling her name: "Inga! Inga, let me in!"

The Beast charged toward the keep and veered away, as if deflected by an invisible wall. A half-grown cub at its first appearance, soon after its mother's death, it had become larger and fiercer every winter.

"I have to do this," Inga said. "No more innocent people must die like Mother and Rolf." Her brother, snatched six years previously, his body never found. She watched Lord Aron, waiting for the potion to affect him.

His voice grew feebler. "Do magical weapons have any better chance than normal ones? We slew the mother, but--"

"Not exactly," said Inga. "She was dying when she first appeared." The She-Beast had looked sickly from the beginning. Her fur had been patchy, the skin underneath raw with sores, her eyes constantly weeping, her paws leaving bloody prints in the snow.

"The She-Beast would have died that season anyway, I think. This young one only grows stronger every year," Inga pointed out.

"That proves there's no sense in risking yourself," her father said. "No one should challenge the Beast again. We should abandon the keep --take our household elsewhere. In one day, we can get far out of its range."

"How long do you intend to stay 'elsewhere'? And where, exactly, could we go?" She cast a nervous glance toward the window, where the creature's howls still reverberated.

"We could appeal to the Duke --"

"Who isn't in the least likely to bestow a new holding upon you, when -- as he'll see it -- you weren't able to defend this one. Father, do you want our family to become beggars?"

He shifted his head on the sweat-stained pillow. "Better than to stay here and watch that thing kill anyone who ventures outdoors after dark during winter." He sighed. "Where did you find this incantation? Your great-aunt's books, I suppose."

She nodded. Aunt Gerda, who had started Inga down the path of sorcery, had bequeathed her a collection of scrolls and folios, many of them generations old.

"Do you understand what you've read?" he whispered. "Do you even know what this spell will do?"

She turned away from his challenging glare.

"Just as I feared." His eyelids drooped. "Strike it

dead at your feet? Or drive it away, so we'll never know whether it -" His voice trailed off, and his eyes closed altogether.

"Goodnight, Father." She kissed his forehead, then hurried out of the room before tears could blind her.

In her own chamber she changed into thick breeches and tunic, fur-lined boots, and a heavy, hooded cloak. She carried only a torch, fortified by magic. She prayed it would burn long enough to keep the monster from attacking while she recited the brief spell.

The two men-at-arms guarding the door cast dubious looks at her but made no attempt to interfere. She circled to the small postern gate and slipped out.

The beast heard or sensed her, of course, and charged into view with a roar. At a whispered charm from Inga, the torch flame flared to twice its normal size and brightness. The beast slid to a halt in the snow, looking almost comical for an instant.

That illusion ceased when it reared to its full height and howled again. Inga forced her eyes away from the fangs and taloned paws. She couldn't allow fear to tangle her words. The shrieking wind lashed her face with snow. Without magic, the fire she carried wouldn't have lasted more than a few seconds.

Squinting against the sting of the blizzard, she began her chant. After the first line, the creature froze in mid-roar. She stared into its glowing eyes. Their expression looked almost -- puzzled. Almost human.

No, that's an illusion, maybe even a trick. Mustn't get distracted. She raised her voice, shouting the cryptic syllables at the top of her lungs. The beast lunged at her. She thrust the torch at its gaping jaws. It cringed back, just out of arms' reach. The rhythm of Inga's chant didn't falter. *It's afraid -- this is working!* Frightening the creature, though, wasn't enough. Even if it fled, the countryside wouldn't be safe. It might return.

Have faith, she admonished herself, building to the climax of the spell. Yes -- something was happening. The thing doubled over, clutching its belly. *It's in pain.*

Seizing the advantage, Inga closed upon it, brandishing her fire as she invoked the magic. The creature's howl changed to a whine of agony. Its claws raked its own pelt and ripped the flesh beneath. It curled upon itself and rolled on the snow as if its hide were aflame. Finally, shuddering, too spent to struggle, it lay keening on the ground and gazed up at Inga.

Its wide eyes glowed like dying embers. She saw moisture seeping from them -- tears? For a second she felt sorry for it. *No, I can't stop now!* She brought the incantation to a thunderous finish.

Tendrils of smoke arose from the beast's fur. They curdled into a cloud that momentarily veiled the creature from sight. When it began to dissipate, Inga saw the beast's form ripple like an image on wind-ruffled water.

Before her eyes, it melted into a shapeless mass. Would it vanish? Instead, the outline began to coalesce into a new shape. When the smoke cleared completely, a beast no longer lay on the ground.

Instead, she saw an unconscious boy in his mid-teens, naked, with tangled blond hair. In his face she glimpsed traces of her father as a young man and of her dead

mother.

She fell to her knees beside the boy. "Rolf!" She clutched his cold arms.

He opened his eyes, stared at her blankly for a few seconds, and spoke her name.

Margaret Carter [Website: <http://members.aol.com/MLCamp/vampcrpt.htm>] writes: *The image of a castle besieged by a monster was inspired by Beowulf. My ending probably owes something to Gardner's novel Grendel, in which the creature appeals to the reader's sympathy. I have always enjoyed stories in which monsters turn out to be not so monstrous after all. Another reason for writing this tale was for practice in very short fiction, something I have a lot of trouble with. I'm fairly pleased with the final result.*

prehistoric Utah sandbar by Christopher McKitterick

wall of rocky flesh
molded ages before
my eyes
gaze drink imagine...

your hollow eyes
consider my frailty
here soon gone

tower of mass in motion
acceleration slowed by nothing

trees your toothpicks
framed eternally massive
by lush green then
carbon black now
foliage
to bless this day for me

I bow my head for you
reptile royalty
ageless majestic

your tomorrows locked in rock

Atlantis and the Why

by Christopher McKitterick

A long time ago, at night,
a wise god
-- some say a mischievous one --
entered the sleep
of a young man named Lukas and said,
I bestow upon you the Power
of restoration
...that is, Lukas could restore anything
inanimate.

Excited about his new Power,
Lukas resurrected
a rotted pleasure boat
back to rich mahogany and lacquer.

It worked.

That's when his quest began,
for Lukas was a man of no small vision.

After twenty-one sweaty years,
three wives,
two cabin cats,
-- our wise, mischievous god
revelled in this little contrast -and countless restorations
performed to pay the bills, Lukas found the city
drowning beneath miles of gulping ocean.

He hired hundreds of men and ships
to raise the city...
after another ten years
and thousands more restorations
performed to raise

But, oh
he felt it was worth all this effort when he listened to the watery rush
of a thousand sinking ships,
the creak of a million tons of rock; when he smelled the ancient reek
of three thousand years of seaweed, of dust dissolved to mud
and fortunes feasted upon by fish. He watched the city drink sunshine
and gulp sea breezes.

Then he sent the men away, each now rich,
and restored what he had taken from the sea.
It consumed six months of his life
spent wandering ruined streets
and most of his Power.

the requisite fortune.

One sun-drenched day,
the city came alive.
Lukas fell to his knees and cried out:
"City! See what I have done for you!"

His voice echoed
along the streets, off their sea-murals.
Lukas did not expect a reply.

Yet his heart heard the dolphin-colored walls weep
in the voice of the waves:
He'd restored their glory
yet they were hollow,
devoid even of bone-chips of skeletons. Stillborn.

Lukas sensed the desolation
and knew what he must do.
He had grown wise;
he wondered what he'd done with his life and regretted all
the wives.

Perhaps all but one.

It consumed the last of his Power
to sink the towers back under:
His Power in reverse
was a great destroyer.
That's why no one can find the lost city.
And why the ocean sometimes
batters little wooden boats
searching

Four Poems by
Father Nikodim

Dysart

What was it I gathered from
Scotland? Uninhabitable wilderness.
The wracking sobs of silent men

forgotten but noble in the face
of abandonment, sucked dry
by their own home-bred affluence.

Tradition. A meeting of generations
of steady decay this century,
as crofter Neil in South Uist.

Lost sheep bleating for shepherds.
Abandoned monasteries. Coenobitic
old-world realities flickering low

in Harris. Broken, endless shores
black, beaten by a restless sea.
Grey lochs. Treeless landscapes,

wintry and isolated, mercilessly
ambushed by sheets of rain
blown up. Shattered stone walls.

Yet amidst stone circles, ancient
cairns, standing stones and duns
in this frigid waste stood planted

Teampull Mholuaidh in Lewis,
Cille-bharraidh in Barra.
Winds blow over these walls

now with no anchorite's song
to reply. It was here that
I drank most deeply, listening

to the springwater pouring
through my soul. I saw
their barely graspable life

in shadows on prayer-worn walls
inside, contoured by the desolation
now so precious and beautiful.

Snowfall

There is value in looking
back how one sculpted a thing
blow by wide-arc'd blow.
But I do not wish to now,

resting under the snow
blanket, warming from what has been
gathered within, anticipating
the spring's limpid thaw.

The Pasture and the Shore

I hear the gong-buoy again
tonight out in the strait
beneath the seugh of spruces.

It is a lonely sound. I wish
I could be closer and hear
clearly what it is knelling.

It seems to be singing to something
breathing low pitched notes on
pan-pipes across the water

just beyond my memory
through the brambles outside
before the pasture and the shore.

Arrival

Rain-drenched, wind-burnt,
clothed solely in shreds,
I've returned to this island.
I've answered Your summons.

Huddled astern between nameless shores
ashamed, small, near-naked within,
I hide my face in chilblained hands.
Have You no one left but me?

The Cryo

Eric Reynolds

The city lights faded to a faint glow on the horizon behind us. The taxi brought me through the gate, to the curved drive at the edge of a long sidewalk that led into the grounds.

"Really is in the boonies, isn't it, Mr. Cox?" the driver said as we pulled up to the curb.

I nodded.

"Good luck, then," he said, accepting my tip. "I'll miss your column. And I have to say you've sold me on the idea. Maybe we'll see each other again, eh?"

I smiled at him politely. "Perhaps we will. But this is likely to get more popular, I doubt we'll ever run into each other."

I stepped onto the curb, my heart pounding in anticipation of seeing Mira again, though it would soon not beat at all. It'd be centuries before she and I would reunite, but I would feel the passage of only a few hours.

The taxi sped away, the automated sentry slid the gate closed and I found myself alone on the grounds. Two spotlights on the sidewalk ahead showed my path to the windowless cryo. The rectangular silhouette rose against the night sky, behind the foreground trees, like a massive tombstone with a tiny lighted entrance the only visible detail. It was a couple hundred meters away--they didn't allow common vehicles near the building. Special services were available to aid those who needed help, but I was in good enough health and I welcomed the walk to help calm my nerves.

The grounds were free of litter as if a groundskeeper had just made rounds, a reflection of how the cryo itself was presented. On my left, silhouettes of tall pines marched along the edge of the property toward the far boundaries and faded into the gloom beyond the cryo.

About halfway to the entrance a breeze puffed into my face, then a whiff of something like burnt grass. A man emerged from the shadows beneath the line of trees twenty or so meters to my left, or perhaps from the woods beyond. A groundskeeper, perhaps. He was barely visible, didn't pay any attention to me, just started walking toward the entrance.

Mira was inside the cryo, my chamber waited next to hers. I hadn't seen her since losing her almost two years ago. They didn't allow visitors to the chambers. She and I had decided she would be frozen before she succumbed to

her illness, hoping the technology of the distant future would save her. But I didn't realize how much it would affect me the moment they flipped the switch. She turned toward me and managed a feeble smile as she faded into hibernation. I was left with that memory as they whisked me away from the chambers area. And now, even though I was in good health, I couldn't wait any longer to join her. But how would I deal with our revival if future technology could do nothing for her? A risk we had decided to take.

The man caught my eye again. He kept pace with me, his dark gown brushed against the grass. I didn't recognize the style of clothing, and hadn't seen anything of the sort worn by the cryo groundskeepers on my previous visits.

But my appointed time was near and I didn't pay much attention to him. During my last consultation a cryo associate had reminded me of the punctuality clause in my contract and I wanted a moment to gaze at my Mira before they threw the switch on me. I started walking faster.

So did the man in the grass, keeping pace just ahead of me as he started to angle his way over toward the sidewalk ahead of me.

I slowed down a little. He slowed down, too, matching my speed.

I picked up the pace again. There was still a lot of sidewalk ahead of me. If only I could get to the entrance before he reached me.

He ran to the sidewalk ahead, stopped and faced me, cutting me off. Part of his face showed in the light exaggerating the roughness the day's beard growth. His eyes were still in the shadow of his brow, empty sockets staring at me, like a skull protruding from the featureless gown.

My arms and legs ached, my instincts urged me to turn and run. But I had no chance of outrunning him, not at my age.

Mira! What if she woke up without me?

"Do I know you, sir?" I said in as deep a voice as I could manage. But it came out high-pitched, squeaky.

He shook his head.

I hoped whatever his intentions he had some amount of humanity and would let me pass. "They told me not to bring anything," I said. "I have nothing of value. Just a small handheld with an image of my wife. She's waiting for me, you see."

He must have been half my age, was much taller. He took a couple of steps toward me.

"I warn you not to go," he said. I couldn't place the accent.

"But they're expecting me."

"There's no more room." He sounded as if suppressing an anger burning inside, fighting to get out.

"I have an appointment. My chamber's waiting."

He took another step toward me, I took a step back.

"Go back home, Cox. Remain in your own time."

"How do you know me?"

"From your publication. Go back to it. Tell the masses to stay away from here!"

"You have no right."

"No, it is you who has no right." He continued to approach me, I continued to back away.

"Somebody please help!" My jittery voice echoed off the cryo and throughout the grounds, into the woods beyond. I looked around, hoping someone from inside would burst through the entrance, or that someone would come running from the grounds. But no one came.

He stepped up to arm's length. I saw his entire face. He had well-pronounced frown lines, more so than normal

for his age. He looked as if he'd lost many nights' sleep, straining to keep his eyes open. But the eyes themselves stabbed into me, vibrant and full of hate.

"You're naïve thinking people of the future will welcome you," he said.

I'd heard of the cults that opposed cryonics. I expected him to retrieve a tract from the folds of his gown.

"They will if we instill the importance of this to future generations. Everyone will benefit when the Cure is finally found. The future is what we and our children make it."

He grabbed my arm. "Leave that future to your children! You have no right to it!" His clench grew tighter.

I wanted to be there for Mira in that future. But I could accept whatever happened to me now if I knew she'd be all right without me.

"Please, sir, my wife waits for me. We want to be together in that future. A second chance for us--"

He grabbed both my shoulders and shook me. "Don't you understand, Cox? I am from that future! The cryonics chambers fill the cities! *We don't want to revive you!*"

Eric writes: But what would happen if everybody wanted to be frozen shortly before their deaths? Let's say nine billion people live in the world of 2050. Figure a small percentage of the population will have access to cryonics at first because it'll be expensive until it's ready for the masses. Not all cultures will take part, let's make a conservative guess that 500 million people of varying ages will sign up. Where will they keep all those bodies? How much power will it take to keep them cool? Once civilian space travel ramps up they could be shipped off the lunar poles in one of those perm shadowed craters, or eventually we could send them out to the Kuiper Belt. But we won't be ready for that yet.

Medical science continues to improve the human life span at its current rate and a baby born in 2100 can live an average of 120 years. So human population continues to grow. By now we've established a few lunar outposts, and are trying to terraform Mars (good luck!) except the damned Martian weather won't cooperate. Chaos is a funny thing to mess with. So we still haven't established enough of a presence beyond Earth to hold all our dear brothers and sisters who await the Cure. Human population is in the teens of billions plus we've got these cryonics organizations sprouting up all over the place. (Watch out for those cul-rate places!) Another century or two pass and we've got frozen bodies by the billions. Even if human population levels off, the frozen nation continues to grow.

I'll be damned if they don't come up with the Cure in 2407--after all, it's just an engineering problem. No longer does anyone have to die. Good thing we've finally started some serious colonizing beyond Earth because there's going to be a whole lot of us real soon, what with all the reproducing still going on (albeit at lower rates) and none of us dying.

And then there's all those frozen bodies. Getting to be a nuisance, they are. What incentive do we have to bring all them back? Well yes, we do still have compassion in the 25th Century, but what a monstrous undertaking it'll be reviving all those people. Where are we going to put them? Most are frail. The problem isn't the Cure, just the logistics of it. Even their descendents consider them more of a curiosity, even a nuisance. Sure I'd like to meet my great-great-great grandfather, but is he (and his mother, and his children, the their children) my responsibility? Better work that into the contract and bind your descendants to it.

Now this doesn't mean I don't want to be frozen any less than the next guy. (In fact I sent in a short message to a French company a couple of years ago that was creating a time capsule to be launched into Earth orbit, which will then be retrieved in the year 50,000. My message states where to find my remains so that they can revive me. But that assumes they can read (I was going to say, assumes they can read English or French, but 50,000 years is so far away who knows how humans will interact. One thing's for sure--they won't be speaking English or any other known language of today.) So let's do some planning first. Once the Cure is found we'll stop freezing people so the number of years, or centuries, we go through this exercise is finite. Yeah, maybe the Kuiper Belt is a good place to stick 'em. We don't have to revive them all at once, just do it over a period of, say, a couple of centuries.

But we'd better start looking beyond the Solar System for a place to live. At the rate we're going, if we stop dying, one person's offspring will eventually fill the Known Universe. By the ninth millennium, there'll be just a few orders of magnitude less than one googol of my offspring alone crammed into the Known Universe. It's going to get pretty crowded and I wonder where they'll put yours.

Light-Adapted Eye

by Chris Willrich

When I was eight I took the jumbo box of Crayolas Grandma kept for me and drew a colorstorm. Burnt orange crisscrossed hazel; plum choked out sky blue. It was kid-chaos -- my fidgety wish to get home from Grandma's was scribbled straight to paper.

Last Friday there was chaos out the window of Grandma's hospital room, but it was a hushed, pale kind of randomness. White mist wrapped itself around dim evergreens. Fenris Wolf, I thought, would have looked at home padding through.

"Mama, are you awake?" Mom said, bending over the bed. I couldn't see well from where I hesitated in the doorway. In the hall my daughter tugged on Lori's hand and shrieked. All nerves, I hissed for Katie to be quiet, and she hushed at once, giving me a toddler's measuring look.

"Mama, Jay's here."

I caught a glimpse of Grandma's wide eyes above the yellow of her oxygen tubes. Dad warned me she'd have moments of complete confusion before she recognized family. Part of me wanted to merge into the whiteness outside. The rest of me stepped forward.

When I drew my full-color muddle Grandma picked up the paper and beamed. "It's beautiful, Jay." But it wasn't. I'd added crayon after crayon, until the picture looked like 52-color pick-up, darkening in one corner to purple-black.

"It's just a bunch of scribbles," I told her. Teachers were already filling my head with talk of my drawing talent. I was a proud little kid, and I knew beautiful from junk.

"No, it's beautiful," Grandma insisted. "I'm going to frame it and put it on my wall." It was just the sort of thing that made me anxious to leave Grandma's Seattle house. Grandma could be strange sometimes. In those days she was a short, feisty, well-weathered sixty-two, and though she had a wandering right eye and a heavy way of breathing (she'd lost one lung), her age and health didn't bother me. It was her way of looking at me, like I was something totally different from what I was.

Now Grandma's eyes narrowed and found me above the bed. "Hi, Grandma," I said. She was shrunken, slumped on her side like a comma under sheets.

She was silent a moment, as if the fact of a new visitor was something that had to be taken in quietly.

Then she smiled.

In that moment she changed herself from a withered,

confused bundle of bruised and dying flesh, to Gerta Grytness, born on the cold top edge of North Dakota to hard-eyed Norwegian farmers, a woman who had winter wrapped up in her bones, enough to live alone as a widow for thirty years and toss icy spite at family -- and who could suddenly shed tears at your going, and stare after you from her doorway while you retreated to the car.

"Hi, Jay."

She raised her hand, and I took it. Mom pushed up a chair, its legs groaning on the smooth grey floor. Grandma's fingers were cold, and though her grip looked tight from the outside, I barely felt the pressure.

I sat down and nearly said How are you feeling, bit it back. For once I wasn't going to say the wrong thing.

I remembered taking her to see the movie *Gandhi*. I think I was seventeen. We were late, and we missed fifteen minutes. When it was over Grandma said, "Let's let the show start and see the beginning."

I was a kid who went by the rules then. People like Grandma taught me that. How could she break them? "I really don't want to," I said, looking at my feet.

She towed me out of there looking like I'd never seen her before, swearing at me, at people I don't think were there: *Saying I'm a cheat, a goddamned cheat...*

Now she said something in a quiet voice, the words blurring together.

"Sorry, Grandma, what?"

"You're a number-one guy for coming."

"It wasn't hard." Not with Dad buying the tickets.

Even San Francisco-to-Seattle flights were expensive for a small-time painter.

But I would've come -- even if Lori hadn't offered to pay, even if I'd had to knock on a loan shark's door -- after Dad called. Tumor. Liver. Doctors didn't catch. Month to live.

"How's Lu... Lyn..." Grandma enunciated, frowning.

"Lori. It's okay, Grandma." She hated forgetting or being wrong. So did I. That was something we could share.

When we drove home from *Gandhi*, rain spattering the windshield, I buckled under Grandma's fury and started bawling. And she changed. *Don't cry*, she said over and again, watching me with her wandering eye, her anger gone. *We've got to talk to each other. That's what it's all about.* I was her little grandson again, who drew the beautiful mess. That was hard for a seventeen-year-old boy. I apologized for that day; I don't think she ever did.

"Lori's fine, Grandma, she's out in the hall with Katie. Want to see them?"

"Yes."

Katie was quiet at first. I lifted her onto Grandma's bed while Lori hugged Grandma. I remembered worrying about Grandma and Lori.

Lori's Mom is Chinese. Losing a cousin at Leyte Gulf had given Grandma a blanket dislike of all Asians, or so it had seemed. Grandma phoned Lori's Mom last year during our separation, urging her to lobby Lori to take me back. You need her, she told me. I know you. Her meddling made me furious.

And Katie was her darling. Grandma soaked up energy from her great-grandkid like Katie was a piece of the sun, burning off the morning fog.

Grandma smiled, and Katie pealed, "Gee-Gee" and sprawled onto her chest. Grandma winced. I yanked Katie up and said, "No. We are careful with Gee-Gee. We are not careless."

Dad had said Grandma would be okay for the time being, so wait a few days before flying up, while they found her a nursing facility. I made small, ill-conceived corrections on the canvas I planned to show the postcard company, trolls beneath the Golden Gate Bridge. Then Dad called again. *We think she's losing touch. If you want her to recognize you, come soon.* We were on the plane the next morning. I would do this one thing right.

"It's all right," Grandma's voice drifted from across the bed, from the edge of the world. "Let her be careless."

"I want her to be responsible." I didn't want her to suffer the chaos I was still climbing out of. When you make a mess you make a mess, no matter who comes along and says it's beautiful, you could frame it. I didn't know if I'd have much to show when I lay where Grandma lay, but maybe if I taught her young, Katie would.

"Doesn't matter," Grandma said, lapsing into one of the strange non sequiturs Dad warned me about. "He's coming."

"Who's coming?"

"From the north. One of the Old Ones." She smiled up, her eye twisting and recognizing me again. "Be my good boy," she said, and slept, my hand still within her cold fingers.

***B**e my good boy.*

That morning at Denny's I bickered with Lori about our daughter. Dad had decided to stay home and do his consulting work. He hated coming, and I don't think Mom begrudged him that. In return he tried arranging for a nursing home, and a cemetery. No one tried taking his place.

Katie acted up when her Grandma went to the restroom, smearing her food into colorful patterns, oblivious to our tension. Or maybe reacting to it. A funny mood came over me, and I tried a different tack.

"No, Katie," I said rearranging her eggs. "More like this."

Lori shot me a bewildered look. "What are you doing?"

"I'm trying to show her balanced composition."

"Eggsp," Katie said.

"She's a toddler, Jay, not an art student."

"She's got a good eye for patterns. I want to encourage her."

Lori's a patient person. Or to put it another way, she hoards the patience she might spend on other people so she can lavish it on me. She stirred her coffee, sat her spoon carefully on her napkin, and said, "Jay. This is not the day to brood about your career."

"I'm not brooding about my career. If I were brooding, you'd know."

"Like I said. Jay, you've done well. Everybody thinks so." She hesitated. "Even Gerta."

I said nothing, tried feeding Katie more chopped peaches. She buzzed her lips.

Lori said, "You don't have to save Katie from becoming like you. Because becoming like you would be wonderful."

And I'm damn lucky you're a Silicon Valley guru, I thought, otherwise you couldn't say that. You'd have starved. But that wasn't true, and I knew it. And there wasn't any shame in letting Lori support me while I made my pittance at painting and watched the kid. I didn't have one macho bone otherwise, why did I feel ashamed?

"Just let me feed my daughter, okay? I've got a lot on my mind."

I thought, *It's because if I'd had my act together years ago, I might be one of the top painters in the country, and Lori could've taken jobs just for love, not money.* I knew this deep in my un-macho bones. It wasn't bravado, because I'd felt the chance slowly ebb away, like the tide in my postcard painting of trolls.

Mom returned and looked us over tiredly. "Through fighting?" she said in that ironic voice I remember from forever, half laugh, half bitter sigh, with a hint underneath that her sleeves were rolled up. "We've got a long day ahead of us."

"Gee-Gee," Katie said.

"That's right, darling," Mom said, abruptly pushing her face against her grandkid's as Katie giggled. "We're going to see Gee-Gee."

When Mom suggested we leave, I offered to stay with Grandma. Lori was angry with me for yelling at Katie, who'd lost her somber mood as soon as Grandma fell asleep, started playing with the food tray and knocked the untouched soup to the floor. And I wanted to do something, because I couldn't help in any way from San Francisco. And I wanted to be with her.

Mom drove my wife and daughter back to the house while I wiped milk from a speckled grey floor. St. Peter's felt clean and comfortable, but about as personal as the house interiors in Sunset. I knelt over the puddle of chicken soup, picturing mountains, trolls, and giants on a grand canvas, trying to daydream the rest away.

"So what's the future?"

"What?" I hit my head on the tray table.

"Mm. Sudden insight into one's surroundings." The man in the doorway chuckled. I rubbed my head. Chuckles unblurred into a short, grey-haired man with stretched, weathered skin like a fisherman's. He wore a white coat, carried a clipboard. "Decent fate, if painful."

"What are you talking about?" I said rising.

The man rubbed his chin. "Sorry. Old man's stab at humor. Saw you staring so hard at the chicken bits, I thought of haruspication. You know, a priest tells the future by spilling animal entrails. Never saw much in it."

"It wasn't a priest, it was a toddler," I said, checking irritably to see if Grandma still slept. "Who are you, a doctor?"

He grinned. "Sorry. Dr. Oldson." He held out a wide, yellow-spotted hand. I had a damp, crumpled paper towel in my right; I shook awkwardly with my left, and his grin broadened. He had a twitch in the right eye that reminded me of Grandma's. Strangely enough, it helped put me at ease. "I'm not Gerta's regular doctor," he said, "but I know her. I like to check on her now and then."

Dr. Oldson's now carried a deep drop to the *ow*; his *then* was almost *ten*.

The accent reminded me of old Norwegians at the store near Grandma's old Seattle house before she moved south near my parents' home in Olympia. The sound steadied me with memories of cold air with a hint of salt, weathered working-class homes lining sloped streets, seagulls screeching atop every second electrical pole.

It was a strange feeling, because I'd resented those visits, wanted to escape to Olympia's wide green lawns. But the voice took me away from the controlled cleanliness of the room. Dr. Oldson seemed everything rough and honest.

"There's no need to check the future," I told him, looking toward the bed. Grandma shifted uncomfortably in her sleep, raising her arms sometimes as if in slow-motion battle with something I couldn't see. Black blotches of dead skin recorded the IV entries of her first days in this room.

"Yah," Oldson nodded, "I know what's coming. But it's ourselves we're worried about. Right?"

A thread of anger ran through me. "What do you mean?"

"It's normal at such times," said Oldson as if I'd asked him for comfort. "We don't want to be left behind. Or else the dying one makes us think about work

unfinished. Not until the death can we think clearly about the dying."

I looked away, finished cleaning up the soup, and sat myself in the cushioned chair between bed and window. Grandma had slowly pushed the sheets aside, and the hospital gown was revealing. Embarrassed, I pulled the sheet into place. She began fidgeting it off.

"I suppose I don't do much good here." I tried to laugh a little. "Grandma doesn't care about my modesty. Or my needing to be a hero."

Oldson smiled with yellowed teeth. "Are you being a hero?"

"No, of course not." I leaned back and looked out the window. Patches of blue sliced the cloudscape. "But I want to keep watch. Because I had so little to share with her. What can a good Lutheran farm woman give a grandson who thinks he's Picasso?"

"Trouble."

I laughed for real this time, feeling somehow lighter. The old guy was all right.

"She thought painters were shifty to begin with. Then I got into myth and folklore imagery. Elves and trolls, that sort of thing."

"Mm."

"I think she half-figured that stuff was from the devil. Especially after my junior year at UW. I was a straight arrow till then, and then all the adolescent rebellion I never got sort of burst out snarling."

"Sex, drugs, rock-and-roll?"

"Well, sex, booze, and Bach. I was still snooty. Probably burnt out my best years. Grandma was pretty relieved when I met Lori." I remembered who I was talking to, shook my head. "I'm sorry. You didn't come here to visit me."

"Maybe not. But I'm a nosy old man. I don't mind listening."

Grandma opened her eyes suddenly, with the startled look.

I took her hand. "It's okay, Grandma, it's just me -- Jay. And here's your friend Dr. Oldson."

She looked at him, inhaled sharply. "Oh, sure, right," she muttered. "I know him. What time is it?"

"Early," Dr. Oldson said quietly.

"You shouldn't be here," she told me, her voice a ghost of its old, argumentative self. "You shouldn't watch me."

"Are you sure?" I hated the note of helplessness in my voice. There was something odd between Oldson and Grandma and I felt I should understand it. But even though staying was the one thing I could do for her, she didn't want it.

And I was eager to escape this room, though the thought made me ashamed.

"It's all right, son," Dr. Oldson said as if peering deep into me. "She's all right with me."

I stood slowly, kissed Grandma's forehead. She bore it stoically. "I'll be here tomorrow," I said.

"Yeah, right -- *hasta luego*," she said as I surrendered the chair to Dr. Oldson; and I answered, "*Vaya con Dios*" automatically, a Spanish-class response. I was instantly angry with myself. But Grandma wasn't watching me anymore, she was nodding to Dr. Oldson.

As I left I heard them talking in what I assumed was the strange shorthand of long acquaintance. "I'm a Christian," she said. "But we're still family," he countered.

The mist was thicker Saturday; it wrapped the tallest trees like a wraithly giant's grappling arms. Grandma breathed hard, shifted restlessly left and right. She rarely seemed to sleep, but she rarely seemed aware of us either. Of the four of us, she recognized only Katie and Mom, and only Mom by name.

"Are you a doctor?" she asked me.

"No, I'm your grandson. I'm here to visit."

She thought about it. She seemed to let it go. Fingering the oxygen tube behind one ear she said, "Horns."

"What, Mama?" Mom said.

"Can he do... can I cut off these... horns."

Lori stood by the window, facing out. Katie leaned forward from my lap, reaching for the tube, and I pulled her back. "They're oxygen tubes, Grandma. They help you breathe better. So you can think more clearly."

"What..." She looked over at Mom. "What he says... he doesn't make sense..."

"Try to sleep, Mama."

"...Said... he said he... admired me." A flash of fierceness lit Grandma's ravaged face. "Told him he couldn't have me. Even if... family."

"Who, Mama?" I had never seen Mom this close to losing her composure; yet I somehow knew she wouldn't, not here. "Who said that? Jay?"

"No..." Grandma looked up and her mouth flickered in the shape of a chuckle. "No one. Nothing."

Mom took Grandma's hand, stroked it. "Sleep, Mama. Let it go. Don't fight."

"Said... last fight is to accept... our *word*." She slurred the end of the sentence, letting it ooze across her lips. She half-shut her eyes.

"That's right, Mama. It's okay. You can rest. You can let go."

Grandma breathed quietly, inward and out, and her eyes stayed half-lidded. Except for her slow breath, she stopped moving.

Mom let go of her hand, set it gently onto the mattress. She blinked twice. "She's sleeping," she whispered, surprised.

"What you said," Lori said, blinking as if coming awake, "that was good. I'm sure it helped."

"Maybe."

Katie began singing to herself. "Maybe I should take her outside," I said.

"No," said Lori. "Stay with your Mom."

Mom closed her eyes once, a large concession. "Could you get me some coffee, Lori? How 'bout a latte, a tall one."

Mom and I talked a little, relieved now. We mentioned practical things. What to have for lunch. When Lori and I had to fly home.

"I'm glad her friend Dr. Oldson came yesterday," I said.

"Oldson? Funny name. I don't remember him. Well, she liked having a few secrets." She looked up at me, turned to look at Grandma, saying, "I mean likes, Jay."

"I know. I know," I said, looking at the cold formlessness out the window.

"Is she breathing?" Mom said after a long moment.

She wasn't.

I had trouble believing, even when the nurses failed to find a heartbeat, and took Mom's arm and mine. Grandma looked almost exactly as she had in her last sleep. Her eyes were half-shut, her mouth open wide. It looked like she was almost shouting, but no one shouts with their eyes half-closed.

I kept staring. I felt ghoulish, even as I held Mom, even as the nurses brought Lori and Katie in, because I couldn't stop looking. Grandma's face was horrible. But it wasn't horrifying. It was empty. My grandmother was something other than this.

Lori held Katie up. Katie reached for the dead face. Lori pulled her back for a moment, then let her touch Grandma's cheek. "Gee-Gee," Katie said, with the measuring look.

"Gee-Gee's gone, sweetheart," Lori said.

"But she loves you very much," I said.

The nurses knew the ropes; they were professional and kind, giving us the room next door, making sure we had coffee. How ghoulish again, to want coffee. As if we were out fishing! But I did want it.

"You can go in if you need to," a nurse told me, taking my arm. She was such a dear old friend suddenly; I hugged her. "We're done in there," she said.

I nodded, "I'd like to." I left a subdued Katie with Lori, while Mom began making phone calls.

The door to the room was open a crack; I walked in and pulled it shut behind me.

Grandma's body lay wrapped in white cloth. Dr. Oldson stood beside it.

I'd been watching the hall to intercept visitors. I would have seen him coming.

Feeling a cold, calm acceptance of insanity, I said,

"She meant *wyrd*, didn't she? Our last fight is to accept our *wyrd*. Our fate. You told her that."

Oldson nodded, his Adam's apple twitching a little on his wrinkled neck. Outside a bird shrieked. I flicked my eyes, only half-expecting a seagull, and saw a pair of crows dart by.

"Don't you have helpers for this?"

Oldson's wandering eye flickered to and fro. "You think I could afford a Valkyrie in this day and age?"

"You can't take her, you know." I stepped forward, not brave, just knowing what I had to say. "I respect you. But she wouldn't want to go where you're going."

He waved me off with his yellowed, spotted hand. "*Uff da*, kid," he said, swearing like any old Norwegian guy. "I know that. But when time went by and I refused to kick off, the young upstarts tossed me a bone. I still choose my fighters from my people's dead. I just don't get to keep them. They get an old fart from their storybooks to escort them on their way."

He rested his hand on Grandma's bundled head. "She's waiting on me, and she'll tan my pagan hide if I hold her up too long." He grinned. "But I had to wait for you." His fingers became shadowy, misty, and they passed through the fabric.

He pulled forth his hand, and something tiny shimmered in his fingers like a diamond tear.

"Take it, kid."

I came closer, peering, not understanding. "What is it?"

"Water from the Well. When the world unravelled, I ran quick to get my eye back from the Well of Knowledge. I'm no fool. And I took some water with me." With his other hand he snatched me in an easy bear-grip and pulled me close. His breath was like moss up in the Olympic Mountains, after autumn rain. "I give it out sometimes. I think you could use it."

"What -- what is it for?" I asked, heart pounding.

"To stick in your eye." He leaned close. "I'll tell you something you only get to hear once," he whispered in my

ear. "*Don't turn down the gods.*"

I touched his hand. The droplet spun to my fingertips like quicksilver down a slope.

I lifted my fingers and pressed the water to my left eye.

You don't have to follow tradition in everything. My sight blurred and cleared.

For a moment Oldson was a towering, bearish man decked in furs and gold, lit by unseen fires. Then he was just a shadow-swift current of laughter, then nothing at all.

My right eye saw a tidy, professional hospital room, with a corpse looking formless in its wrapping of white, with mist robbing the world outside of all color and meaning.

My left eye saw the care with which architects and housekeepers made this room a shelter from fear; the gentleness with which the nurses wrapped the body of a stranger; the eagerness with which the forest outside embraced the fog that gave it life -- and I knew it was a picture you could frame.

We're flying home now. The three of us pack half a row in coach. For once I didn't fight Lori for the window; all the mysterious folk in the cabin are sight enough.

Lori worries about my twitching eye. *Emotional reaction*, the doctor told her. *Should clear up*. She's so beautiful, her courage and love wrapping her like a cloak of firelight. I'll never be able to paint her the way I might have, if I hadn't lost so much time. But I can't mourn when there's so much to see. It'll be fun trying.

Katie smears peas, carrots, squash, in a mishmash on her tray. It's pure chaos. I was pretty affected, calling it an eye for pattern, when it's the randomness, the freedom she wants.

"Not half bad, kid," I whisper, catching a glimpse of old Bifrost broken and rebuilt and broken again under eager, unknowing hands. And loving the sight, because the hands are hers. "Not bad at all."

Chris writes: *Of my grandparents, my maternal grandmother was the only one I ever really knew, and her loss made me think much more than usual about life and death. At the same time, I got to meet my sister's new baby girl, and thoughts of beginnings and endings got mixed together with images from the book I was reading, Stephan Grundy's novel Rhinegold. From there, imagining Grandma confronting a Norse god from her heritage just seemed to fit. I like to think she would have enjoyed this story... or at least indulged it.*

Most of my stories are romantic adventures in exotic settings. This one needed a lighter touch. I tried to use Lisa Goldstein's short stories as a model of how to mix fantasy and honest, everyday emotion; I hope "Light Adapted Eye" is somewhere in the ballpark.

This is the most autobiographical piece I've written. Like the narrator I grew up in Washington State but now live with my wife in the San Francisco Bay Area. However I stole the narrator's name from a friend, I'm a librarian not a painter, and since my wife and I have no children I "borrowed" my youngest niece for that role (got her back in one piece, though, Susan!) Although this last change in particular made the story less true to reality, I thought the bond between the narrator and the baby needed to be stronger for the story to work.

All in all I think I'm more comfortable creating characters and situations from scratch, but even so, telling a story so close to life was very rewarding

THE FAMILIAR STRANGER

by Sheri Gaia Chapin

Between burgeoning black clouds, a full moon peered down upon the Mojave desert. The crooked angles of the San Bernardino mountains resembled those Martian landscapes of science fiction stories. Their majestic slopes meditated in the midst of the night's stormy chaos. On the desert floor, wind anxiously resettled dust and dirt from one position to another, while the usually tolerant Joshua trees winced each time lightning streaked between them. In that desert, surrounded by those mountains, sat the town of Barstow, California. Mr. and Mrs. Harold Gough resided there.

The Goughs had enjoyed twenty-three years of outwardly unaffected marriage. Their friends had wed in their mid-twenties, but Harold and Elizabeth had waited ten years. They made up for this marital tardiness by immediately buying a home -- not a starter home, but a finisher home, boasting a huge house perched upon a vast property. Next, they birthed three children during their first four years of wedlock. Mrs. Gough had thought that because she was "in her thirties," getting pregnant would be difficult. She was wrong. After that, Elizabeth and Harold practiced "safe sex." Of course, they loved their three children, but at that point, the use of a condom did seem safer than the possibility of conceiving a fourth.

Also, they believed that the lengthy single life each had lived before their marriage contributed, in a positive way, to the smooth progression of their cohabitation now. Smooth enough anyway. As long as they didn't dissect it too much, and as long as they didn't view it from certain angles. Some things would always be missing if you made it a point to look for them.

The latest episode of "Murder She Wrote" had just begun, when the telephone rang. As usual, Mrs. Gough reacted in advance of her husband.

"Hello," she greeted merrily. The response on the other end of the telephone line stiffened her posture, and each subsequent response hardened her a little bit more. "But, I don't understand . . . well, I . . . I suppose so . . . right now? . . . I see . . ."

Mr. Gough sent a quick glance past "Page Ten Highlights" toward his wife. "All right, I'll be there as soon as I can. . . . Yes, I know where it is. . . . Good!lbye." In a manner unlike her usual self, Mrs. Gough fumbled with the receiver before hanging it up.

"What was that all about, honey?" inquired Mr.12Gough, with covert concern.

"That was the hospital. They want me to come down to view a patient who says he must speak to me. But I

can't imagine from where I would know him."

"If you don't know this person, I don't see an urgency in your going . . . especially if it makes you so uncomfortable." Mr. Gough said this, but perhaps it was himself who suffered the greater discomfort to witness his usually confident wife suddenly not. "It did seem serious," Mrs. Gough continued, "and the nurse did comment that the patient had given them both our names and correct phone number from memory." She ruminated for a moment, then added as a kind of plea for her husband's encouragement: "They stressed that his condition is critical."

Although uncomfortable in the role of advisor, Mr. Gough replied, "This seems like a crazy request to me, but I can see how concerned you are about it. If you want to go, I'll take you . . . and I'll stay there for you." He got up from his chair and laid his hands on Mrs. Gough's shoulders, all the while scrutinizing her bewildered expression. "What do you say?"

Mrs. Gough squeezed her husband's hands. "I've got to go. I'm not sure why, but I must know what this all means. Do you understand?"

"Yes, I think I do." It was a lie, but a lie Mr. Gough felt compelled to tell. In this instance, his wife's comfort seemed more important than telling her what he really thought. If it were up to him, he would have assured the hospital that: He didn't know the man. They were wrong. Good!lbye. That's it. He would have buried the incident so deeply within himself, that its inkling would have needed multitudinous lifetimes to resurface. But this time, he felt it was not his decision to make. Instead, he respected his wife's desire to investigate the situation the way she saw fit; instead, he took her hand, and they walked toward the front door together, while their fantasies of what the story would be remained separate.

Rain sleeted sideways across the street as Mr. and Mrs. Harold Gough arrived downtown. The sidewalks were vacant, but occasionally a person rushed down one. The unpredictability of their appearance caused Mrs. Gough to wonder about the selection and timing of events -- of that night's particular events: The sudden and furious storm; the unexpected, plans!lchanging phone call. She wondered whether it was predestination or individual choice that designed the map of a lifetime, and if it was choice, what or who determined the assortment of choices offered.

Lightning clipped the top of a tree, wind blew over a mailbox. The flavor of a supper eaten two hours earlier resurfaced in Mrs. Gough's mouth. Mr. Gough said,



"We're here," and turned off their car's engine. Together, they stared through the watery blur of the windshield, toward Barstow General Hospital. It looked like an armed fortress on a deserted battleground. For decades, it had facilitated a full spectrum of dysfunction, disability and tussles with death. With inflated umbrella in hand, Mrs. Gough opened the car door and dashed toward the hospital's front entrance. Mr. Gough watched his wife run through the storm, realizing that his participation no longer was needed. He turned to the news report on the radio and resigned himself to the position of waiting. As Mrs. Gough neared the entrance, a haunting vision crept out from her subconscious: The face of a young girl, with soft red hair and melancholy eyes that seemed to be saying "good-bye." The transmission appeared as a flash, then disappeared. Mrs. Gough took a deep breath, pushed open the front door and marched toward her inevitable meeting with the stranger who claimed that he wasn't. A pacing veteran nurse greeted her. "I'm Nurse Saperstein. We spoke on the telephone. I do hope we haven't brought you down here needlessly."

Mrs. Gough squeezed her lips and followed Nurse Saperstein down the hall. "He's asking for you all right . . . repeatedly. Then suddenly, he'll change." The nurse paused, as if struggling to recall, exactly, the image. "He'll become rigid, as if he's gone into some sort of trance. He'll call out different names and talk gibberish." She frowned and whispered, "At least it's gibberish to me." Then, she straightened her uniform and said, "The doctors won't admit it, but they haven't the slightest idea what to make of this case. My, what a loose jaw I have! Oh well . . . come . . . he's in here."

By now, Mrs. Gough's heart pounded so hard, she felt she might have to grab out in front of her body to pull it back into her chest. An overwhelming rush of anticipation dizzied her. She felt nauseated and weak. Then she saw him. Lying there, he looked so frail. Not at all what she had expected. But then, things weren't usually what one expected them to be anyway, so she wasn't surprised . . . exactly. His eyes were squeezed tight. His pain obvious. But his presence was so compelling that she could certainly understand why the hospital had gone out of their way to contact her. With soft skin and long black hair, he presented the countenance of an Egyptian female, but his physique was that of a young, sinewy man. The room had that antiseptic odor, like the front office of the medical group that she'd managed for eleven years before marrying Harold . . . then for another fifteen while she'd raised a family and assisted her husband in starting up his own contracting business. All at once, she wondered how she'd survived it, why she'd stuck it out for all those years, while allowing it to quietly stifle any desire to explore her own creative yearnings on a canvas, with the colors of her innermost

feelings.

Long ago, she'd crumpled up that idea and tossed it into the trash compactor. But now, as her eyes slid up and down the young stranger's body, that crushed need to express herself abruptly swelled inside of her like a small star bursting into a super nova, and she smiled only slightly wider than the Mona Lisa. Suddenly, his eyes opened. Mrs. Gough expected a reaction from Nurse Saperstein, but noticed none. She squeezed her own eyes shut and re-opened them wide, thinking she must have witnessed a rain-induced illusion. Again, she looked at him. His pupils appeared as opaque as crude oil, and their insides swirled. They stared at her as if they had found what they'd searched for, and she felt captured. Her arms felt pinned against a towering wall . . . a castle . . . the wall surrounding a castle. She was younger . . . with long braided hair. She wore a sky blue, flowing nightgown, and a dazzling veil streamed down her back. She could see the scene distinctly: The young man, wearing chain metal, standing before her. His eyes cornering her, exposing her clandestine desires. She . . . his prisoner. She tried to turn her face away, but he sat up and clasped her cheeks between his hands. His kiss felt tender . . . then passionate . . . then gluttonous. Her lips trembled, her stomach tumbled. She shoved him away, fled to the other side of the room . . . his eyes following.

"There is no escape from what has been already." He spoke, yet it seemed that only Elizabeth heard. She turned toward the bed, but now he stood beside it. She felt dizzy, uncertain how he was doing it, but his presence was evoking memories. Not the simple recollections from a week ago, or even ten years ago, but from lifetimes ago. Then the spell shattered. The room became a torrent of medical anxieties. As nurses skirted around doctors sputtering -isms and -ologies, hoping to stumble upon at least an approximate estimation of what it was they were supposed to be curing, Elizabeth stood still mesmerized by the mysterious stranger. "I can recreate the same form I had at a previous time," he explained, calmly amidst the chaos. "I'd forgotten that during the life in which I inhabited this body, I was sickly. Do you remember? Of course you couldn't. For you, all this is reality." He lifted his arms and moved his eyes over the ceiling and walls. "But I had hoped that maybe in this form, you might remember me. I was in this form when you fell in love with me. But alas . . ." He lowered his eyes. "You died," Elizabeth whispered, recalling the flash of the young girl saying "good-bye." The sad memory acted as a vacuum that sucked her deeper into the stranger's perception. It made her stomach sick. "Let me go," she said. He didn't respond. Instead, he turned away and dropped onto the medically equipped bed. Only briefly did he appear no longer beautiful, but wrinkled and warted, with a bubbled back,

and stringy white hair. As if he knew what she saw, as if he wanted to hide it, he pulled the covers over his head. When he poked his head back up, all was as it had been, and the once again young stranger slapped his pillow and howled hysterically.

A roaring psychopath, Elizabeth thought.

Still no one noticed. The plethora of doctors and nurses seemed to think he was lying there going into cardiac arrest. Their reality was concerned only with an attempt to avert the progress of his death. They could not see him rise from his bed and stand in their midst, nor could they see him peering over their shoulders at the body on the bed. "Don't you see?" Elizabeth cried out. "He's standing beside you. He's not ill at all. It's a lie."

But no one noticed. "They can't see us as we truly are," the stranger said. Elizabeth screamed, "I can't believe any of this."

The stranger's eyes, like black galaxies, fixed on her.

In a blind desperation, Elizabeth grabbed all the animosity and distress she could scrape together and slapped the stranger with them. He closed his eyes and advanced his face toward hers. "Finally you touch me."

She backed away, thinking: From where do you come? She heard the reply in her mind: From a world not here.

Finally satisfied with the young man's stabilized vital signs, doctors and staff calmly rushed down the hall toward their next emergency, leaving Elizabeth and the stranger alone. Gazing at his features, Elizabeth thought: Like an angel. She imagined his portrait how she would paint it, what aspects of his character she would reveal. As before, the stranger's eyes opened. "They forgot you were here," he said, rustling in his bed. "I made them forget."

Elizabeth frowned. "What do you mean, you made them forget?" She could feel his spirit rummaging inside her subconscious, unpacking cartons of memories, searching for that particular moment he wished for her to remember.

At last, he pulled out a scene that appeared as vibrant and active as if it were happening right there in that hospital room. It depicted an old man in a cluttered attic searching for something. Elizabeth watched the old man as he came upon it, as he held it up to the light, and as he smiled. The tender article was a painting -- a portrait of himself as a young man, a portrait that Elizabeth knew she had painted. "I always liked that one," the stranger said, crossing his legs and folding his hands behind his head. "You painted it so long ago. On the island of Atlantis. That place was another world . . . yet still this one, before the continents changed, before your genius art became lost in the rearrangement." "My genius? My art? Lost?" "Yes. Even today that art is refound only barely in the forms of your most gifted painters. The world before the floods revered its artists. That was our world. Where we

created most fully. Elizabeth, your soul has not forgotten how to paint. Only your mind has buried your true love. Only under mountains of regrets, responsibilities, and denials have you lost it. Your family has crushed it. But it still lives."

Elizabeth straightened. Her eyes brightened. "My art. In the meadows. My followers, like children at my feet. Canvases as thick as a carpet of wildflowers. Shapes of the earth. Colors of the universe." She smiled. "I can see it." The stranger walked toward her. "I still treasure our embrace. Our existence was passionate and beautiful . . . and when we kissed!!!!"

As if a wall had jumped up between them, he backed away.

Elizabeth pursued him.

He lowered his head. "We ended badly."

With those words, he concluded her enjoyment of the moment and forced her to remember the pain, the guilt, the not so angelic aspect of his character. Before she could escape, he'd exposed the ancient memory she'd chosen to forget: The lifetime when her own art blossomed, while his devolved into psychotic reverie. She watched her own students flourish, while his diminished, and his anger increased. She felt the fist in her face, the freshly painted canvas breaking her fall. She watched herself walk out the door, away from him, into the arms of the artistic community. She watched his shriveled body sprawled in the square. Heard the cough that grew into a bloody lump. Watched him choke on it and die. Her own fingers wither with arthritis. Her own scream. Her own painting die. Her art take its final breath.

"You had your reasons," the familiar stranger said. "You had your rights. I suppose I deserved it . . . even though I couldn't live without you. Even though it killed me. Even though it killed your art. You did what you could do, at the time. But Elizabeth . . . this time is not last time. What happened to us then, need not happen again.

You can have your art and love Harold too. If only it could have been me. . . ."

Before she realized he had moved behind her, he had slid his arms around her waist. She turned her head, understanding that he didn't really move . . . he simply existed. Tilting up her chin, she knew where his mouth wanted to go, and she let it go there. He'd traveled through time to deliver a great gift. In that stark hospital room, in the middle of a storm, he had endowed her with the knowledge she needed, to leave the darkness of pain and guilt behind. To stand in the light. She felt the past's powerful grip releasing her. Her art, eager for her rediscovery, surging up. For the first time, in a long time, she was able to see what she had lost. And she took it back.

Holding hands, Elizabeth and the familiar stranger strolled around the hospital room, as if it were a meadow. They walked beside people they had known, through places they had lived, reminisced about experiences they had shared in their lifetimes together. It felt like Virtual Reality: Real, but not real. Their minds hypnotized into a realm of sensuous existence, which the body watched detached, yet participatory. Elizabeth placed her palms on his chest, then slipped them around his torso. Once more, she cherished his spirit as flesh, vitalizing herself for the future. Those memories of the lifetimes they had shared would not be as Virtual tomorrow. They would be subtle and easy to disregard.

But, now, she knew better than to disregard them she knew better than to disregard anything. He had taught her that every thing was a piece of some thing else, that the pieces searched for each other until they found each other. That once reunited, their journey continued as a beautiful whole . . . instead of merely pieces. "I'm going to die now," he whispered, "but it's all right."

"I know," she replied.

A tear rolled down his cheek as a coma began his death.

Nurse Saperstein looked depressed. "Mrs. Gough, I'm so sorry you never got to speak with him. I wonder how he came to know so much about you?"

As Elizabeth and the familiar stranger embraced, the line on the EKG monitor flattened. The sound was monotone; his body was dead. She could see his life force leave it, hover over it, then glide over to where she sat. "I must leave now, Elizabeth, but I'll always be close. In here." He pressed his hand between her breasts. "I'll remember," she said.

He smiled. He faded away. She clutched the empty

space. Feeling his flesh.

"What happened?" asked Harold Gough.

His wife stared at him with unfamiliar eyes. "He never spoke words. We're all right now. I'm ready."

She looked back toward the hospital room, then walked outside.

He had barely turned off the radio and come inside before Elizabeth had emerged, looking like Moses after his conversation with God -- Another person, or maybe the same person grown larger. But Harold could grasp only what he could see, what he could hold. He did not possess the capacity to even begin to fathom reasons for the undeniable change in Elizabeth. He always suspected more to that episode between his wife and the stranger, but he never asked, he never investigated, and he wasn't so sure he wanted to know. Still, the marriage of Harold and Elizabeth Gough flourished throughout their lifetime together. That she had changed, that he didn't understand

it, somehow served to enrich their lives, to enhance their flavors, to surround them with a creamy secret recipe: Strange yet familiar.

Critics proclaimed Elizabeth's paintings as remarkable: "Like nothing the world has ever seen," as though they belonged to a forgotten century . . . or one that had not yet been. Their virtuosity breached portals into other worlds . . . yet still this one . . . but in another time. A lost art suddenly remembered one stormy night, when a stranger arrived from beyond black bundles of clouds.



AN INTERVIEW WITH John Marco

John Marco won Barnes and Noble's latest Maiden Voyage award for his novel Jackal of Nar. His second, The Grand Design, is even more ambitious than the first, employing several points of view to give the novel's scope depth and breadth. John Marco is a reader's writer, delving into political intrigue, exploiting the post-WWII reader's fascination with war and pain (not to suggest that these didn't interest the pre-WWII reader as well), and swinging from one emotional high to the next. The interview was conducted through email and originally appeared in a shorter form on SFsite.com.

Apparently, you've been wanting to write the Tyrants and Kings series for some time now. How long has the idea been rolling around your head? What idea or character sparked the series?

It seems like I've wanted to write this series forever, actually. Like a lot of fantasy fans, I had ambitions of writing my own fantasy novel since I was very young. I remember writing in junior high school, then later again in senior high, and a lot of those early ideas have found their way into the series. In the back of my head, I always knew that any book I write would be about subjects that fascinate me, like war and love and politics. It's probably that way for a lot of first time authors. They have these ideas knocking around their heads for years, then they finally decide to take the plunge and commit themselves to writing their story. That's how it was for me, at least. In a lot of ways, it was nice to finally get the story out of my system!

As for characters, the one that really sparked the series was Richius, who is the main character in The Jackal of Nar. In the original version of the book, the whole story was told almost exclusively through his viewpoint; he's really the engine of the story. Later, when the book went through rewrites, the other characters become more fleshed out and prominent, but Richius remained the central focus. It's really his book.

Why did you start with the novel?

I started with a novel because the types of tales that I like to tell simply don't fit into the confines of short story—they're just too big. And I never envisioned myself as a short story writer anyway; I always saw myself writing novels. Not that I don't have respect for the short story. I have tremendous admiration for writers who can write a good short story. But that's a separate skill from writing a good book, and it's not something I think I'm particularly good at. I have tried, but my results have been mixed. For one thing, I don't have a knack for economizing on words. And the truth is, I don't want to. I want to have a huge canvass to paint on.

You've said that All Quiet on the Western Front strongly

influenced the beginning of The Jackal of Nar. Did the inspiration for continuing the novel ever get "bogged down" later on? If not, what do you think prevented it?

Yes, reading All Quiet really did have an impact on me, because up until that time all that I had was a vague idea about the story; it didn't yet have a "voice." Reading Remarque's book changed that. I realized suddenly that I wanted my own story to have a strong central character, a young man caught up in a terrible war, just like the character of Paul Baumer in All Quiet. In a lot of ways, Paul is the model for my character of Richius. Of course, the comparison between the two books really ends there. Even though All Quiet on the Western Front had a lot of influence on me, it's great literature, and certainly more important than The Jackal of Nar could ever be. That's not meant as put-down to fantasy books—I love them and always have. I just like to keep things in perspective. And I still keep a 1930s edition of All Quiet on the Western Front near my desk.

Interestingly, once I finally got going on the book, it never really bogged down. It took a long time for me to write it, but that's not because I didn't have ideas or inspiration. By that point, the whole story had already been worked out. It's just that I was working full time, I was preparing to get married, and all sorts of the normal curve balls of life just got in the way. But the story itself really flowed for me, because there was a lot for me to draw on, like history and mythology, etc.

What kind of detail do you go into with your outlines? How do you keep them fresh each time you sit down to write?

For The Jackal of Nar, I went into extensive detail in the outline. I had hundreds of pages of notes, and the actual outline itself was well over a hundred pages. That seems ridiculous looking back at it, but I think I needed to have that kind of detail. I needed to have the world fully fleshed-out and the story firmly pinned down before I began, probably as a way to boost my confidence. The sad part is that a lot of that outline never even got used. If I had put everything into the book that was in the outline, The Jackal of Nar would have been even bigger than it turned out to be.

Keeping outlines fresh hasn't been a problem for me, at least not so far. I wait until I have a story idea that interests me, and then I begin outlining it. Plus, writing the second and third outlines was much easier, because I already had so much of the world constructed. So these outlines were much smaller than the first one. In fact, all the outlines I've done have gotten progressively smaller as I've gone along. Hopefully that means I'm doing something right. And unlike some writers, I really enjoy the whole outlining process, because it's my first real introduction to the story. It's also an invaluable road map. I'm always fascinated by writers who don't work from outlines, because I don't think I could pull that off. My brain just doesn't seem to work that way.

Of the material left out of your original outlines, how much of it still begs you to return to it later on?

Oh, a lot of it. There's still so much I'd like to explore in the world of Nar that I haven't gotten to yet. I've done three books in Nar so far, but sometimes I feel like I've only scratched the surface. So far the books have only explored two continents, but who's to say there isn't more of the world to be discovered? And the Empire of Nar alone is made up of many different countries that have barely been touched on—I could probably go on writing about these places for a long time. And hopefully I will, if readers want to see more books.

Although reviewers had been excited about your first book, the second, The Grand Design, seems to have generated even more enthusiasm. What do you think brought this about?

Well, I like to think it's because I've gotten a bit better as a writer. As I was writing the second book, I really felt that I was doing a better job. Things just flowed much more smoothly, and I had a lot more confidence. Perhaps that shows in the finished product, and that's what reviewers are seeing.

What line do you think delineates the two books for readers? Did you purposefully intend to outdo your earlier attempt?

I really don't try to outdo myself with each book. I'm not sure that's the best goal for a writer. Instead, I try to give each book my best effort and make it as good as I can. So far, most readers seem to like the second book better than the first one, but there has been a handful of people who have thought the opposite. The lesson seems to be that you can't please everyone, so you should write for yourself, primarily, and tell the story that you really want to tell. For me, that's the best way to keep up my interest and the quality of the books.

Also, each book is thematically different. Where *The Jackal of Nar* was largely about war and its effects on one

person, *The Grand Design* is mostly about revenge and its destructive power. So even though there is a lot of cross-over between the two books, there are also significant differences. The same is true of the third book as well, which will be coming out some time next year. It's not really about war or revenge, but instead has its own distinct theme, as well as a number of new characters.

How do you explain the series' fascination with war? Where do you think the appeal to the average reader lies? How about your fascination with villains like Count Biagio?

The fascination with war is really my own. I've always enjoyed military history, and always knew that any fantasy novel I wrote would have military overtones. War is just such a large-scale occurrence, with all kinds of politicking and intrigue and opportunities to create interesting characters. It's kind of a natural theme for a fantasy series. War and fantasy just fit really well together. For better or worse, war just seems to interest people.

As for villains, that's been another one of my soft spots for years. They're just so much more fun than heroes, at least to me. In fact, if you look at the two books in the series so far, there really aren't any true heroes. There are anti-heroes, like Richius, but there's no one who is truly heroic in the classical sense of the word. Everyone has his flaws. But the flip side of this is that the villains have their good qualities. Even someone as nasty as Count Biagio has good qualities. His are buried and hard to reach, but he has them. And the best part is that readers have really responded to the villains of the books. Biagio, for instance, was never supposed to be the star of the series, yet he gets more fan mail than Richius by far!

You also list the Bible and Greek mythology as influences. In what ways have they layered what is happening in the Tyrants and Kings series?

Both the Bible and Greek mythology are filled with great stories, and that's where the influence really lies. When I was a kid, I used to love reading the Greek myths, and they've really stayed with me. Plus I liked the way that the gods of Olympus were very "human." They were far from perfect, so perhaps that's why I try to make my own heroes flawed and vulnerable. As for the Bible, it's a great and inspiring book, whether you take it literally or not. In the *Tyrants and Kings* novels, there's a whole sub-text about the Naren church, which is somewhat loosely based on Catholicism and the church of the Holy Roman Empire. So you can see where my own Catholic upbringing plays a part in my writing.

How much of a part does mythology play in fantasy and how conscious are you of creating an entire world's mythology?

Some people have told me that they think my books are

highly detailed, but the truth is I don't actually spend all that much time on world-building. That is, I don't consciously set out to create a complex world. The complexities and the mythology of the world seem to grow organically for me while I am writing a book, and by the time I am well into it, the mythology starts to become well established. I've always loved all kinds of mythology, though, and I think it influences me in ways that aren't so apparent to the reader. I don't think people can point to my plots and say that so and so comes from Greek mythology, or that something else is from Egyptian mythology and so on. It's all kind of subtle for me. But mythology is always there when I'm writing, sort of whispering in my ear. I think that's probably true for a lot of fantasy writers.

A lot of your mythology seems to play off the modern world and its roots. How important is this dynamic of modern reality vs. mythology and how do you know when and which to stress?

I think you're right—I'm very influenced by the modern world, and a lot of my plots are more easily identifiable with modern lore than with traditional fantasy. People are often drawing comparisons between my stories and the big wars of the twentieth century, mostly the World Wars and Vietnam. And I don't dispute this at all. The events of the last century are a major influence in my writing, because just like ancient mythology, recent history has its own wonderful stories. It may even be that people will someday talk about the heroes of our time the way we know talk about King Arthur or some mythical Roman deity. For instance, I don't think the people who served so honorably in WWII are any less heroic than the knights of the round table. They just had different dragons to slay.

Full-time writing is quite a bold step. When did you decide to quit your day job and what gave you this confidence to do so? Has full-time writing actually increased your output?

Full-time writing was always my goal, but it was really only a dream until things started happening with the book overseas. I have a terrific foreign rights agent, and he was able to place the series with publishers in the U.K., Germany, and the Netherlands. That's really when I was able to say good-bye to the day job, because I knew I'd have enough income from all these sources to be able to support myself. Plus there's another important factor—my wife. She works full time and brings in a good salary, and that's our safety net. I never really know when my money is going to arrive, but hers is steady and predictable, and that makes all the difference. I'm really very fortunate to have this situation.

And yes, writing full-time has increased my output tremendously. It's extremely difficult to work a full time job and also write, and there's a world off difference in my

life now. I'm much less stressed-out. I usually don't write at night or on weekends any more, the way I used to while I was working a regular job, yet I'm still able to turn out a good amount of pages every day.

You've said elsewhere that the first novel took two and a half years to write. How long have each of the respective novels taken to write and what accounts for their differences?

Yes, the first novel did take about two and a half years to write, not including all the time it took to outline it and work out the story. But the second and third books went much quicker. I think *The Grand Design* took about a year to write, and the third book took slightly less time than that. As I mentioned earlier, I'm sure this is because the world of *Nar* became so familiar to me over the course of writing the books. Everything just came much more naturally by books two and three. Plus, once I got that first book under my belt, my confidence went up. I knew then that I really could write a book, so those nagging doubts weren't a problem anymore.

The level of engagement for your Tyrants and Kings series is unusually high. How do you manage to keep the plot and emotional pace at such intensity?

Keeping up the pace of the plot is always a challenge, because you don't want the reader to get bored. But the challenge was made a bit easier for me because I was writing about war in the first book, and that's a subject that has a built-in intensity. The same can probably be said about the emotional intensity of the books. War is obviously a difficult time with lots of emotional upheaval, so the characters were forced to experience these kinds of situations and deal with them.

Before I started writing *The Jackal of Nar*, I read a number of thrillers to see how different authors handled this type of writing, and how they create a feeling of tension. Good thriller writers are really masters at this, and it was great fun for me to adapt some of their techniques to my own scenes, like tightening up the action during a particularly tense moment or cutting quickly between different viewpoints. Hopefully it's been effective, and has kept readers involved.

What do you find that's so challenging in creating believable characters? Are there conscious choices you must make?

For me, creating characters is the best part of the process. And they don't always turn out the way I originally intended, which is also kind of interesting. I don't find that my characters have a mind of their own, or that they take the story in a completely different direction. That just hasn't happened to me. Maybe I'm just a real task master with them, but they pretty much do what I intend

them to do. But their personalities change, probably because they have to “cope” with the situations I come up with for them. Some of these poor bastards are really put through the ringer!

As far as making choices regarding the characters, the hardest part is deciding which ones will be important to the plot, and which ones are just sort of “walk ons.” This is tough because I like to give all the characters lot to do, but then the books would be tremendous. So I have to pick the best of them, or the ones that interest me the most, and hold back on the ones that aren’t as important. The bright side of this is that I get to save them for future books. The character of Admiral Nicabar is a good example of this. In the first book he’s not a major character at all, but by the second book he has much more to do, and by the third book he’s a central figure. That’s the beauty of working in a series. If there’s no room for something in one book, then maybe you can do something with it in a future book.

What is the appeal of a multi-layered story over a more straight-forward tale? Why did you choose to complicate the second novel with the addition of other viewpoints and sub-plots?

Straight-forward tales are great, and I’d like to write one someday. But I wanted the *Tyrants and Kings* series to be fairly meaty and complex, with lots of characters and situations, so that’s why I tried to do with each of the books. In *The Grand Design*, I wanted to get away from the Richius character somewhat and expand the world of Nar. There were a lot of things in the first book that were merely touched upon, like the Hundred Isles of Liss, so I wanted to explore these things in the second book. That required new characters and sub-plots.

Also, I like the way sub-plots can be wrapped up in a single book in a way that the overall story simply can’t. This lets me give each book a feeling of standing on its own, without being dependent on the others in the series. Personally, I don’t like getting to the end of a book and not

feeling like it’s over. I like to be rewarded for the time I put into reading.

Can you tell us a little about the third novel in the series?

The third book is called *The Saints of the Sword*, and should be released by Bantam Spectra some time in Spring, 2001. The story opens about a year after the close of *The Grand Design*, and introduces some fresh characters, while still wrapping up the loose ends of the Richius Vantran story. Also, there’s a bit more magic in the third book than there is in the second, and the race of people called the Triin feature much more prominently. I’m hoping that readers will find it all a satisfying conclusion to the *Tyrants and Kings* trilogy. But while it ties everything up nicely, it still leaves room for more books about Nar.

What advice do you have for the beginning writer?

This is always such a tricky question, and I never know how to answer it well. I get a lot of email from young people who want to be published writers, and I always tell them the same thing-I don’t have any good answers for them. Writing and getting published is a very personal thing; there are many paths to success, and each person has to find the method that works best for them. Because of that, I hate to give advice that might be wrong. Just because something works for me doesn’t mean it will work for anyone else.

Of course, there’s always the standby advice that writers constantly give, namely that anyone who wants to be a writer should read as much as possible. And of course they should write. It seems so obvious, yet I think a lot of new writers are afraid of the writing process, so they avoid it. Instead they come up with elaborate maps and other world-building devices, when really they should simply be writing. That’s really the only way I can think of to get better at it.

FRUIT AND CONSEQUENCES

by Lynn Maudlin

Eden was not entirely unlike the images made popular by Bible stories - it was kept lush and green by a mist which wafted gently up from the ground with the evening and morning temperature change. There were many animals and birds, living harmoniously in close proximity with an innate and uncanny, at least to our way of thinking, ability to understand and accommodate each other. There were no carnivores, or rather those animals we've come to know as carnivores were not as yet carnivorous: the lion lay down with the lamb and both ate

European nudes who look quite out of place among the stylized shrubs and ornate apple tree, enwrapped by a python looming large and ominous. No, Adam and Eve, for those were in fact their names, were lithe and furry, not hairy like the popular caveman image, but bearing a rich pelt rather like that of an otter or a mink. Adam was a deep brown going to a russet and finally almost blond at the tip of each strand. Eve, however, was uniformly golden, more like twenty-four karat gold than any animal's coat is colored today, except for an area at the base of her throat which was creamy and luxuriant and slightly curly.

During the day they worked in the garden; Adam had quite an inspired talent for what we now call landscape architecture and he would move various plants and trees into new locations and groupings and thereby achieve an excellent dramatic effect. Eve helped Adam with the bigger tasks but spent most of her time ordering a "kitchen garden," discovering all the various forms of berries and planting them in color-gradated patterns that delighted the eye. She had gone from strawberries to raspberries to blackberries and then to peach and apricot trees and it was while she considered the placement of these entirely wholesome plants that she first met the serpent.

It would be more accurate, of course, to call him a dragon. He was stunning; his scales were large and almost metallic in appearance, with a tremendous iridescent sheen. He had wings, translucent and filmy and almost certainly not functional but striking nonetheless. The length of him was probably thirty feet and his tail fully half of that. Eve was stepping backward to get a better perspective on her day's accomplishments when she stumbled across that tail and plopped onto her nicely-padded furry gold derriere.

"Oh, excuse me!" she gasped, startled but always polite.

"Think nothing of it, nothing-- I dare say it was my fault, hmmm?" the serpent quickly answered. She was fascinated by his eyes, they were so bright and shining - almost like mirrors.

"I say, I don't believe we've met before, have we?" Eve inquired.

"No, we've not been formally introduced. I am the serpent and I usually dwell among the larger trees in the garden but I've been hearing such good reports of the



Adam and Eve were, however, quite unlike the images painted by pious medieval artists, those pale

work you've been doing that I wanted to come and have a peek, hmmm? Really quite fine," the serpent all but gushed.

Eve enjoyed the compliment, a pleasant flush warmed her face, hardly visible to the naked eye but I daresay the serpent knew. "It's not much, really," she demurred, "Adam's doing the truly exceptional work--"

"Nonsense! Bigger isn't better, you know, hmmm?"

"No, I suppose not," she agreed. She was proud of her work and had a healthy sense of accomplishment in a job well-done, but she was very impressed with Adam and his work - not really because it was bigger than hers but because it was his and not hers; it was inherently Adam's work, the work he was meant to do, and so very different than anything she would've come up with. But that was hard to put into so many words and somehow, when the serpent referred to Adam's work as 'bigger,' for a moment his work seemed diminished, as if it were merely her work on a larger, cruder scale.

She couldn't think quite how to express it but she felt somehow as if she'd allowed the wrong impression to stand. "His work is very different from mine, it's not just that it's bigger--"

"Of course not, of course not," the serpent agreed quickly then fell into silence. The two of them stood looking at her rows of strawberries.

"It does seem to me," the serpent said, "that these are very good strawberries. Very good"

"Well, of course they are - what else could they be? They are - strawberries; they are good," Eve responded. She was vaguely troubled by the remark but on the face of it there was nothing wrong.

"I am simply acknowledging your excellent taste. Your choices are exquisite, hmmm?"

Once again Eve found herself warmed by his compliments.

"I mustn't keep you," the serpent continued. "The evening approaches and you must be getting back to your man, hmmm? Perhaps we'll meet another time." And with that he turned and walked toward the wild forest at the edge of the garden, his tail neatly uncoiling from around Eve's ankles.

Eve selected a ripe strawberry and popped it into her mouth. It was, in fact, very good.

When she came upon the area where Adam had been working she was awestruck. He had done such fine work, he had such an artistic sensibility that she stood stock still and drank it in. "Oh Adam," she breathed, "what a wonderful view."

He came bounding up, all grins and teeth, caught her up in his sweaty arms and nuzzled his face into her neck. "It's been a good day, my golden girl, a good day," he

proclaimed, his arm casually around her shoulder as he turned back to surveying the landscape. "I moved that rather large and unruly ficus over by the date palms," his arm dropped away as he gestured in a westerly direction, "and I discovered that..."



Eve could barely hear him as he loped away and for the first time she wondered why it was that she always came to him at the end of day and why he never came to see her work. She stood still as she considered the foreign thought, head half tilted in puzzlement.

"Eve!" Adam called, having at last noticed he was speaking to thin air.

Startled, Eve smiled and ran to catch up with her husband, "Here, my love."

So they walked in the cool of the evening and the Lord walked with them and it was good.

The next day the serpent came to Eve again. She

noticed him watching her from under some fronds. "Hello, serpent!" she called out as she straightened up. His wings dazzled her as he moved into the sunlight.

"Good day to you, Eve," he answered solemnly and eyed her basket of vegetables.

"Would you like some?" she offered.

"Oh no no no - I only eat khresza," he replied.

"Kray-kreh-kressa? What is that?" she asked, the strange word sticking in her throat.

"Khrrrrresza," the serpent said again, trilling and raspy, "it's a fruit, hmmm?"

"Where does it grow?" Eve wondered, intrigued by the thought of an unknown fruit.

"In the middle of the garden, hmmm?"

"Oh!" Eve made a little gasp, "did you say the middle of the garden?"

The serpent's eyes were shining but he looked sideways. "Yes, quite near the middle of the garden, hmmm?"

The very words made her uneasy. She knew there was something forbidden in the middle of the garden and thus far she'd avoided the area altogether. She looked at the serpent; he was so lovely, shining and colorful, radiant in the sunlight - he was exciting to look at, even standing still. Surely it was all right; he wouldn't do anything forbidden...

So they walked along in silence, looking at her strawberries. "These are very good strawberries," the serpent said, echoing the words of the previous day, "very good. But--" He caught himself and didn't finish the thought.

"But what?" Eve asked.

The serpent looked a little sad. "Nothing, nothing--"

"I can tell it is something," Eve insisted, "tell me, please - what is it?"

"Well, hmmm, it's just-- it's just--" the serpent trailed off.

Eve felt a pang of alarm in her chest. "Don't go on that way, it is something. You must tell me--"

"I don't want to upset you, hmmm?"

"I don't understand," Eve cried out, "I don't think you could say anything that would upset me but your not saying it is upsetting me-- Please!"

The serpent sighed - a long, soft hiss of breath.

"Look," he said, indicating a particular strawberry plant with a graceful foot, "these are very good strawberries--"

Eve began to feel exasperated but the serpent continued, "--and so are these," he said, indicating the next plant. "But here--" he raised sad and shining eyes to her, "these are not good."

"Not good? Whatever do you mean?"

"Do you see these little ones?" Eve crouched down beside the serpent so as to see under the leaves, "these little ones are all pale and sickly," he told her.

"No, they're just young. They're new - they haven't grown yet."

Once again the serpent raised his sad and shining eyes to hers and this time there was a tear - a tear! - welling up in the corner of one eye. "No," he said softly, "these will never grow. These are not good. These are bad."

Eve's heart stopped for a moment. Here was a whole new concept: something could be not good, other than good; something could be bad. "Really?" she asked.

The tear fell from the serpent's eye to the ground where it lay like a diamond for a moment before being absorbed by the dark soil. "Yes," he confirmed, "bad."

Eve rocked back on her haunches. Bad. The very thought was beyond her; everything that surrounded her was good - how could it be anything else? She sat staggered and silent.

The serpent withdrew slowly, "I see I have upset you, hmmm?" he whispered and his breath was cold on her neck.

But, being a sensible human being, Eve soon shook off the troubling thoughts and got back to her work, picking ripe berries and transplanting. Every now and then she stopped to look at the plant with the bad berries on it. They certainly were small and pale--

And some distance behind her under the trees the serpent smiled, a smile without any warmth in it, a smile devoid of all compassion, an expression that should not even be called a smile - and then he disappeared into the shadows.

It was very subtle, of course, the planting of doubt, as the serpent was by far the most subtle creature in the garden - well, in the whole solar system, if you want to be entirely accurate. Eve did not talk about this new concept with Adam but she pondered it in her heart. Onetime as they walked in the cool of the evening with the Lord she found Him looking at her as if He could see through all the clear water of her soul down to her toes and she nearly asked Him about "bad" but Adam's attention was suddenly caught by a pair of loping kangaroos and he began laughing so hard at their amusing form of locomotion that very soon Eve and the Lord were laughing, too. And after laughing with pure joy at the delightful variety of creation, of color and sound and movement, laughing until her sides hurt, somehow the thought of "bad" was quite gone from out of her head.

But in the following days she found herself obsessing over that particular strawberry plant. She would work for ten or fifteen minutes and then feel drawn to examine the plant again. She found other new, young strawberries and compared their growth to the bad plant and it did seem to her that other plants were growing more quickly while

this one continued to be small and pale. She had never experienced a conflict of this kind before and it was strange and compelling. She began to feel a kind of possessiveness about it: this was hers, her own moral dilemma, and it became part of her self-identity as distinct from Adam. As she grew more fixed in this attitude, she found it easier not to look too deeply into the face of the Lord.

There came a day when she was certain the serpent was right: those strawberries were never going to grow large and ripe and red; they were bad. Suddenly, knowing they were bad, she knew she needed to do something about them, but she didn't know what. As she knelt there, staring at the bad berries and wrestling with her internal agitation, the serpent showed up again. His shining eyes were above her head and she looked up at him, dazzled. He would know what to do. After all, it was the serpent who pointed out their badness in the first place.

"What do I do with these?" she demanded without even saying hello.

The serpent lowered his head and examined the berries. They were still small and white and, what Eve did not know, poisoned by the dragon's tear. He sighed in mock concern.

"It's hard to know," he said. "There are bad things that are so bad they must be destroyed. But there are also bad things that are just, well, different."

This was not the kind of answer Eve expected - to destroy or not to destroy? What would it mean to destroy the plant? What was she to do with it if it wasn't so bad as to require destruction? Were there degrees of badness? Instead of an answer she had a whole flurry of new questions and she felt even more troubled.

"That doesn't help!" she cried, "I don't know anything about bad- I just don't know what to do!"

The serpent sagely nodded his head. "It is a hard thing," he assented, "to know good from bad. In this I have more experience than you." He looked her straight in the eyes, "I am older than both you and Adam - and I live on khresza."

Eve felt a little dizzy from staring in the serpent's eyes and impressed with his boast of greater age and experience (if she only knew how much older and what kind of experience!- but I digress).

"You tell me what to do," she said with sudden certainty.

"It's a dangerous thing to let another tell you what to do," the dragon chastised her.

"No, I do it all the time. Adam tells me what to do. The Lord tells us what to do. Sometimes," she added a little breathlessly, "I even tell Adam what to do!"

The serpent breathed his long hissing sigh, "Well, you are young--" he said, almost to himself, and Eve

waited with the relief that comes of knowing a difficult decision is now out of your hands. Did the dragon feel any remorse, any wavering of resolve, at her naiveté and absolute trust? But this is not his story--

"These," he said, cocking his head as he considered the pale white berries, "are not so bad as to be destroyed. In fact," his voice dropped nearly to a whisper, "these could be eaten even in this condition, hmmm?"

"Really?" Eve's eyes popped wide open - how very complicated it was! These were bad strawberries but not so bad that they couldn't be eaten.

"Hmmm," the dragon assented and he speared a small white berry with a long claw and placed it carefully in his mouth and chewed thoughtfully.

"Well?" Eve demanded.

"It's not bad," the serpent began.

"But you said it was bad! Now you say it's not bad?!"

"Oh, it's a bad strawberry," the serpent assured her, "but it's not entirely bad - it's not bad for food, as long as you're not expecting it to be a strawberry... Here, you try one," and he lifted the leaves to expose the pale little berries.

Eve looked up at him and back down at the berries - he didn't seem any the worse for eating a berry which was not entirely bad. She pulled one off the stem and examined it closely. It smelled sweet and seemed just a little sticky in her fingers; she looked up at the serpent one more time and he nodded his head in encouragement. She popped the poisoned berry into her mouth.

The dragon was right; it didn't taste like a strawberry - in fact, it was sweeter than a strawberry and of a very different flavor, more floral and less fruit. She felt a little tingle of excitement - so that was what a bad strawberry tasted like! She reached for another and popped it into her mouth as the serpent cried out, "No, wait--"

Eve spat the offensive berry out - this was awful! Bitter and mushy and vile. The dragon nearly laughed at the expression of outrage on her face but he smothered the impulse.

"Not that one!" he said.

"But you said they weren't entirely bad," Eve objected after spitting several times.

"The one I chose and the first one you ate, that was the case."

"Do you mean that an entirely bad berry can grow next to a not-entirely-bad berry?" Eve demanded.

The dragon allowed his eyes to become very large and moist, "Yes," he said, "it's very complex. It requires great wisdom and experience--"

"How am I to know that? I am very young; I hardly have any experience. It seems to me that I will have to eat many nasty things before I am wise!"

The hint of a smile creased the serpent's face, "That is quite possible. You would need to be more like the

Lord --or more like me-- to avoid it."

At the mention of the Lord, Eve's troubled spirit calmed. "Yes," she breathed, "I'd love to be more like the Lord. He is so wonderful and so very wise." She looked up and caught a strange, stern expression on the serpent's face.

"I must be going," he said, very stiff and formal, and he all but disappeared, leaving Eve confused by his reaction, confused by the bad berries and the not-so-bad berries, and not sure what to do next.

"I don't know the difference between bad and entirely bad," Eve acknowledged to herself. And so, despite the exotic and delicious taste of the first white berry, she rooted up the plant and tore it into pieces and threw it into her compost pit.

Behind her, hidden in the undergrowth, the dragon's eyes flared with a cold blue rage. She would pay for rejecting his deliciously unpredictable berries; she would pay.

For the remainder of that day, Eve was absorbed with thoughts of the beauty of the Lord, His splendor and holiness and wisdom, and these thoughts pushed aside the memory of her challenging day. She felt such a settled peace and blissful communion with the Lord and with Adam as they walked that evening that the question of "bad" and "not-entirely-bad" never even entered her head.

And, chances are, left to her own devices, it would have been a good long time before she and Adam got around to falling on their own. But the serpent did not leave her to her own devices. The next morning before sunrise he walked stealthily through her part of the garden, skewering a peach here and an apple there, letting a tear fall into the ground and poisoning not just a strawberry plant this time but an entire row of blackberries. Harboring cold malice in his heart, he withdrew to wait, unseen and unsuspected.

He was disappointed that day because Eve's healthy preoccupation with the Lord enabled her to do her work without fretting; she never even checked the compost pit to see what odd vines and leaves had sprung up from the poisoned strawberry. So after she returned to Adam in the evening, the serpent came out and punctured more fruit and shed more tears, just to speed the process up a little.

The following morning Eve was singing and placing perfectly good peaches in a basket of woven leaves when she gave a little yelp of alarm. Her hand was about to close on a peach that looked beautiful on one side and strangely withered and puckered on the other.

"What is this?!" she cried out in alarm. She hadn't thought of bad since ridding herself of the poisoned strawberry plant. She looked through the peaches already

placed in her basket; they were all good. She walked around the base of the tree, looking upward and found three more questionable peaches before stumbling over the apparently-sleeping dragon.

"What are you doing here?" she asked, startled, and for a moment he feared he had overplayed his hand and that she would make an association between badness and his presence. But instead she said, "It's a blessing in any case because, look at this, I've got some bad peaches. Or maybe they're not entirely bad, I don't know which - would you please tell me?"

The serpent expressed suitable dismay and examined the peaches. "No," he said, "I think these are all bad. I don't think you ought to eat any part of these, hmmm?"

"I know what to do with them," Eve said as she plucked them off the tree and carried them over to her compost pit.

The dragon feigned alarm, "I don't think you should do that--" he called out just as Eve reached the area she set aside for that most organic form of recycling.

"Augh!" she yelled and dropped the bad peaches. The poisoned strawberry plant had sent out suckers from its every shredded part and had formed a curious net-like covering over the surface of the compost pit.

"You didn't put the strawberry plant in there, did you?" the dragon asked with mock concern, "you know, the one that wasn't entirely bad?"

"Yes, I did, and just look at it now!" Eve exclaimed.

"Oh, I'm afraid that wasn't a very wise decision, no, it wasn't a good decision at all--"

"What's going to happen?" Eve asked.

The serpent stuck his pointy head over the barrier and peered at the strange growth, first with one eye and then with the other. "I'm not sure even I can tell you that," he said. "Let me go eat some khresza and think about it, all right? I'm sure it will become clear after I've had a little something to inspire me. Just don't put anything more in that pile!" And without waiting for her response, the dragon trotted briskly toward the center of the garden, shuddering with evil laughter as he imagined, quite accurately, her forlorn and puzzled expression.

Eve spent several hours alternating between anxious pacing and brooding in the shade of a tree. Finally, as the sun approached its zenith, she decided her need to share with Adam was greater than her fear the serpent would return and find her gone. Having decided, she sprinted in the direction of Adam's work.

"Come with me," she pleaded, catching his arm in her hands.

"Well, hello! What's up? What's all this agitation?" he asked, good natured but puzzled.

"I have such a problem and I don't know what to do

and the serpent hasn't come back yet and we have to hurry because if he comes back and I'm not there I don't know what will happen--"

"Okay, I'm coming, just explain in small pieces, all right?"

Eve took a big breath and started: "There was a bad strawberry plant--"

"Whoa, too fast, 'bad' - what do you mean, 'bad'?" Adam interrupted her.

"Bad," she answered, "like - not good."

"Not good? How could that be? Strawberries are good; they can't also be not good--"

"Oh, it's really complicated," Eve panted as they hurried along, "it was just one plant and the berries just looked little and white, like baby strawberries, but they didn't grow and they didn't grow and I didn't know what to do with something bad and so the serpent told me that maybe they weren't entirely bad and he ate one and I ate one and it was - well, it was kind of good, it just wasn't like a strawberry, and then I ate another and it was awful! So then I pulled up the plant and put it in that pile of trimmings and things and I thought everything was fine but this morning there were some bad peaches and I went to put them in the pile, too, and the serpent said, 'don't do that!' but I already had and it was all weird, just weird, and it's growing fast and it doesn't look at all like a strawberry anymore and even the serpent didn't know what to do so he's going to go eat something that will inspire him and then come back."

Adam was trotting along beside his golden wife, his jaw slack as he listened to her remarkable tale. "I think I'm still having trouble with 'bad'..."

Eve's brow furrowed and she shrugged as she ran, "I can't explain it, I don't understand how you know when something is entirely bad or just a little bad - and I've been so worried and I, and I keep wanting to talk to you about it but somehow I never do and now I'm really confused--"

Adam put his arm around Eve and pulled her close and made comforting little sounds. She began to relax into his arms but suddenly remembered about the serpent and pulled away. "We have to hurry!" she cried.

Adam watched for a moment as she resumed running and then started after, "Hurry, yeah, hurry -- uh, why are we hurrying?"

Eve turned and called backwards, "The serpent! The serpent, I told you--"

Adam caught up with her, "Right, the serpent - what's he got to do with all this? I haven't seen him since the day I named him. He didn't seem all that friendly."

"Oooh! He's really friendly," Eve objected and then remembered the serpent's earlier comments about Adam, "--at least to me," she finished, her mind now pre-occupied with yet another strange consideration. Was it

possible the serpent liked her and not Adam?

They emerged into the clearing where Eve's garden stood. "Nice work, Eve!" Adam said with genuine enthusiasm and his affirmation, which would have been received with such pure joy, was barely heard or acknowledged as Eve looked desperately around for the serpent.

"He's not here," she said, chewing her lower lip.

"Okay, I see that," Adam said, patting her shoulder, "now explain to me what he has to do with all of this."

"The serpent knows good from bad," Eve said and an alarm bell began to go off in the back of Adam's mind, something about a prohibition the Lord gave him, weeks ago when he was new.

"Eve, we're not supposed to--" he began.

"I know, we're not supposed to touch or eat from the tree in the middle of the garden," Eve rattled off the instruction he gave her, "and I haven't even been to the middle of the garden, so that's not it, I'm good--" she paused unexpectedly, "--I'm just not wise."

"You're young, Eve. We both are. We'll grow wise; the Lord has told us that," Adam assured her.

"But I need wisdom now," Eve said. "Look at this," she added, indicating the compost pit.

Adam had never seen anything like it, either. He started to poke a finger at it.

"Don't touch it!" Eve stopped him.

"Why not?" he asked and she realized she didn't know the answer. He watched her for a moment and then proceeded to examine the strange growth. "It's weird," he said as he rubbed his fingers together, testing the faint stickiness that came from the poisoned plant. He held his fingers up to his nostrils and inhaled. Microscopic spores pulled off his fingertips and shot through his nose, his sinuses, into his lungs, his bloodstream. There had been no gradual introduction to the serpent, as with Eve, no walking, talking, breathing the same air together, so even this tiny amount of dragon-poison, distilled through the strawberry plant, had a noticeable impact on Adam.

"That's sweet," he said, experiencing a little rush.

"The first berry I ate was, too - really sweet; not like a strawberry," Eve agreed.

Adam had been feeling a little trepidation about the serpent and its attentions to his wife but that intuition was now compromised and his thinking just slightly fuzzied.

"Where's the serpent now?" he asked.

"Probably eating kress-kresh-kre, oh, I can't say it!" Eve exclaimed.

Adam inhaled again and this time it seemed to give him back his balance. "Well, let's go find him," he said. So the two of them set off toward the middle of the garden.

The dragon had been watching from the

undergrowth and he was very pleased. Adam was not quite as open and accessible as his wife and the serpent wasn't sure how much damage he could do if he only got to Eve, but this was promising. He rushed ahead of them and pulled a ripe, juicy khresza off the tree; it all but fell into his grasp. He could hear the humans crashing through the brush and he took a big bite, releasing its intoxicating fragrance.

Adam and Eve tumbled to a halt at the sight of him at the base of the tree, their nostrils filled with a strange and attractive fragrance. Adam had forgotten just how impressive the serpent was - all iridescent scales and gossamer wings and shining, silver eyes. "Oh," he exhaled by way of greeting.

"The man himself," the serpent answered and rose to his feet, setting the fruit aside. "I am honored," all wheedling affectation gone from his manner.

"My wife has been telling me about the bad strawberry plant, or the not-entirely-bad plant, or—" Adam paused in a rare moment of confusion, the hyperventilation of their run and the strawberry spores were having an effect on him. He stopped speaking and gathered himself together and put it bluntly, "What do we do about it now?"

"Ah, the eternal question," the serpent said, half to himself, and then faced the couple full on. "I've been eating khresza and I realize - it's not my problem."

"What?!" Eve was stunned. "But you, you're the one who told me it was a bad plant, you told me you could be inspired and figure out what to do—"

"I have been inspired," the serpent agreed, "and it's not my problem. I don't eat strawberries or peaches or any fruit but khresza, which makes me wise, and my wisdom tells me - this is not my problem."

"But what are we supposed to do?" Eve asked in the closest thing to a whine that pristine world had ever heard.

"Do whatever you like, whatever you think best," the dragon replied, very crisp and cool.

Eve deflated. She didn't realize how much she counted upon the serpent to direct her steps in this matter. If he wasn't going to help, who would?

The greatest indictment is that, at that moment, neither Adam nor Eve thought about seeking the will of God. The serpent's poison had already done its work.

Eve looked at Adam and he at her. The ripe, heady smell of the open khresza filled their senses and the moment seemed to draw out a very long time.

With preternatural purpose the dragon spoke: "Did God really say you may not eat of any fruit of the garden?"

Eve's eyes broke away from Adam's; "No, we can eat of all the fruit—" and she looked down at the partially eaten khresza and suddenly she knew what it was, "All

the fruit except that of the tree in the middle of the garden. That one we may not eat of, not even touch, or we will die."

Adam was watching his wife's profile as she spoke to the serpent; the alarm bells were ringing again, this time louder and more insistent, and he felt a sudden pang of guilt at having exaggerated the Lord's instruction when he shared it with Eve.

He began to interrupt to set the record right and then recognized it didn't make any difference - they were going down a path and he didn't know how to turn it around.

The serpent's eyes were shining as he told her, "You will not surely die. For God knows that on the day that you eat of it, you will be like God, knowing the difference between good and evil."

And Eve, seeing that the fruit was good for food and desirable to make her wise, reached out and plucked a khresza from the tree. She considered it a moment and in the back of her head all the sown lies sprang into hideous life: It's a dangerous thing to let another tell you what to do; it's very complex; it requires great wisdom and experience; it seems to me that I will have to eat many nasty things before I am wise; you would need to be more like the Lord—or more like me—to avoid it;

"Yes," she said with certainty, "I need to be more like the Lord," and she bit into the succulent flesh of the khresza.

Fragrance and juice burst out of the taut skin and ran down her chin, staining it a deep crimson. For Adam, it all seemed to happen in slow motion; he felt powerless to stop it or change it; simultaneously horrified and hypnotized, like you or I might, watching a train wreck. His eyes were very large and solemn; he didn't know what it meant, "to die," but he watched Eve carefully. Her eyes widened and she chewed and gulped and swallowed down the deadly fruit.

"Well—?" Adam asked.

Eve nodded her head and took another big bite, chewing quickly, eating voraciously, licking the juice off her fingers and sucking it out of her fur.

"So?" Adam demanded.

Eve whirled back to the tree and pulled off another khresza and handed it to Adam, "See for yourself," she said. She reached up for a third khresza.

Adam considered the fruit. Eve seemed none the worse for wear; in fact, her eyes were bright and shining with a new light and while she seemed abrupt in her response to him, she obviously found it a delicious food because she was midway through her second one when Adam bit into the fruit.

He was not deceived; he knew he was doing what the Lord expressly told him not to do - but it appeared there were no consequences. The flavor burst inside his mouth and in his brain and he thought, "The Lord will never

know.”

He found, as did Eve, that the more khresza you ate, the more you wanted so the two of them ate all the fruit within arm's reach and still longed for the fruit beyond their grasp. Adam jumped up and caught a branch, dragging it down and pulling off several more khresza; Eve reached out to take one and he cradled them possessively into his chest and turned away from her. She was outraged and livid; how dare he keep them to himself; she was the first one to eat it; she handed him one of her fruits—

“Augh!” she cried out and hit him on the back. He spun around and pushed her with his free hand; she went sliding backwards and landed with a thump.

She glared up at him, furious, and he found her expression combined with the red stain down her chin and neck made her look ridiculous. He began to laugh and she leapt up, howling. Suddenly he stopped because there was something awful, terrible, feral and deadly in her countenance. She came at him, arms swinging wildly and he dropped the fruit to protect himself but she lunged down and scabbled for the khresza on the ground and scurried away to the base of another tree where she ate it ravenously, hardly chewing at all.

The madness went out of him at that moment, seeing his beloved Eve forcing down the khresza, juice running down the sides of her face and staining the creamy fur at the base of her throat. He began to step toward her, he wanted to say he was sorry, but she growled at him as she finished the fruit. He leaned against the trunk of the tree and slid down, feeling exhausted and nauseated. He turned away and retched and the khresza smelled foul coming up out of his gorge. He closed his eyes and he could hear Eve sobbing and retching, too.

Finally he felt strong enough to stand up and he went over to Eve and held out his hand. She looked up and gasped. Adam was patchy, his lovely thick brown fur was falling out by the handfuls. He looked down, startled, and back toward the tree. There was such a pile of fur left under the tree that it almost looked like an animal at rest. Eve looked down at her arms and saw the rich gold fur was shedding rapidly off of her, too.

“Oh no,” she whimpered, sounding like herself for the first time since eating the khresza, “oh no—” She looked frantically around for the dragon but he was long gone, having accomplished his evil worst. She still didn't realize he was her enemy and she hoped he might know how to make the fur stop falling out. She felt terrible: her stomach hurt; her mouth was sour; she itched all over; and something more - she felt guilty. She didn't have a vocabulary for it, yet, but she knew she'd done something very wrong and she felt bad about it.

“Oh Adam,” she cried. They both began walking back toward their part of the garden, rubbing their itching

bodies and leaving a trail of russet and gold fur behind them for a very long time.

“Adam, we can't let the Lord see us like this,” she said, ashamed. She looked like the bad strawberries, small and white. She was shivering with unaccustomed cold. Adam put his arm around her shoulder - how odd she felt! Instead of luxuriant warm mink, here was cool human flesh, naked human flesh.

“We have to put something on,” he said, and he began looking for plants with large leaves and gathering up leaves and vines. Eve watched his clever hands and saw what he was doing and joined him in making a poor sort of cape. He draped it over her and began working on one for himself. She felt warmer and they were certainly preoccupied by their task so the Lord had come quite close before they heard His footsteps.

“Children, where are you?” He called out, trying to keep the grief out of His voice.

Their eyes met in panic. What would He think? Surely He would notice. Torn between love's longing and guilt's fear, Adam spoke up.

“We're hiding,” he said.

Eve rolled her eyes. Well, of course they were hiding! That was obvious.

“Why are you hiding?” the Lord asked, giving them every opportunity to be forthcoming.

“Because we're naked!” Eve cried out.

Adam turned angry eyes on her, “Shush!” he said, “why did you tell Him that?!”

“Adam, He's gonna notice—” she whispered back.

“Who told you you were naked?” the Lord asked.

There was a very long pause. He parted the leaves to see the two miserable humans, cold and naked, tear-stained faces, wearing their ridiculous aprons. “Did you eat of the tree of which I told you not to eat?”

Adam glared at Eve and turned back to face the Lord.

“The woman You gave me ate and she gave to me also - and I ate,” he answered, half belligerent and half bravado.

The Lord turned His beautiful, gentle eyes on Eve.

“What is this you have done?” He asked.

Suddenly everything became very clear - the dragon's lies and her gullibility. “The serpent beguiled me - and I ate.”

There was a crackling, sizzling noise and the dragon appeared, writhing against an unseen barrier, fighting to escape but unable to do so. He stopped struggling and glared at the Lord.

“You, I curse because of this evil deed; you are cursed above every tame and every wild animal. You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust for the rest of your life.”

As the Lord spoke these fearsome words the dragon began twisting in a tormented fashion, his legs quickly

grew shorter and shorter and finally disappeared altogether; his scales got smaller and lost almost all their iridescence; his head grew smaller and his eyes turned black and he lost the power of speech so he would not be able to beguile another - at least, not in that form.

"I put enmity between you and the woman, between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman; He will crush your head and you will bruise His heel."

The serpent, no longer a dragon and now truly a snake, hissed and was released to slither away through the undergrowth.

The Lord turned back to His human pair.

"Woman," He said, "your pain in childbirth will increase greatly. You will desire your husband and strive with him to possess and control him - but he will rule over you." He turned His face to Adam and spoke softly but with great intensity, "Because of you the ground is cursed and it will bring forth thorns and thistles and your toil will be painful. By your sweat you will eat your food all the days of your life until you return to the ground; for dust you are and to dust you will return."

Adam and Eve were ashen and silent as the Lord brought a lamb and killed it to make clothing of skin for the humans. "For without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins," He said as he did the grim work. Adam saw the gaping wound and the bright red blood spill out into the earth and he closed his eyes against the memory of Eve with crimson staining her chin and neck after eating the khresza. "Cursed is the ground because of you," he heard the words of the Lord echo through his thoughts.

The Lord put the garments upon them and He kissed each of them on the forehead. "Now you must go," He told them, "you must leave the garden and never return here. For your spirit died this day and you must walk the earth as body and soul, always thirsting for the easy joy and fellowship we shared when your spirit was knit with Mine."



Then Adam and Eve clung to the Lord like the frightened children they were, in so many ways. "Why, why?" Eve asked through her tears and Adam pleaded, "Can't we just stay here in the garden with you? Why do we have to leave?"

"Because there is another tree," the Lord explained gently, "and were you to eat of this one it would set you permanently in this half-dead state; you would live forever but never really live. To protect you from this tree, I must lock you out of the garden." And with those heavy words He began to drive them out, pressing them forward while they fought to cling to Him.

Finally He called angels, cherubim with flaming swords, and He stationed them to block the way in to the garden, and however much Adam and Eve pleaded, the cherubim would not be moved and neither would they be tempted to disobey the Lord and let the humans back into the garden.

For many years Eve walked the perimeter, crying out to the Lord, asking Him to just come and walk with them again. Her children saw her do this, walking with her when they were little - but they worked the hard ground with Adam when they got older.

Eve

after Fifty of her 900 Years

by Joe R. Christopher

After her birthing of Cain, Abel, and Seth,
and daughters never named in Torah's print,
Eve had her menopause: and what it meant,
she knew, was coming of predicted death--
expected since the apple, with words of wrath,
"This day (or this, or this) you'll die." Thus sent
to her, a message carrying its flint--
someday, someday, an end will come to breath.

But strangely slow it came: her belly sagged,
after those births; her breasts, past milk, were flattened;
her face was wrinkled; her hair was streaked with white;
her arms, now flabby. Her husband strutted, bragged;
her children fought, as if on envy battened.
"How long," she cried, "till death will cure my blight?"

Ozymandias Redux

by Devin Brown

"Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!"
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away.
— Percy Shelley

Like a single engine plane about to go into a dive,
Professor Fillingham sputtered and stalled—
a third of the way into his elaborate nine-part distinction
between Comedy and Tragedy, just then realizing
he had given the exact same lecture
to these exact same students
the semester before.

He looked over his rectangular glasses
around the great lecture hall filled with English majors
frantically taking notes for the mid-term exam,
and he nervously cleared his throat.
And then since no one, not even Mitch,
seemed to notice, he prepared to go on.

But just for a moment,
he thought of his sabbatical in Sicily—
how on Sundays he would walk with his daughter
to the Palazzo Del Re.

There they would stand holding hands in the surf,
letting the breakers batter their legs
and knock them backwards.
How for hours they would work
constructing elaborate castles,
intricate turrets and lofty spires
rising from the dark volcanic sand.

When they were hot, how they would retreat
into the shade of the Grande Allée
for a shaved ice, and watch the people pass.
Then how they would gather up their things
and walk together back to the villa.

Even as he launched into the next distinction,
his mind was on the beach at the Palazzo Del Re,
its retreating tide shimmering,
the slant of the setting sun
casting long shadows upon the perfectly leveled sand.

Licking Clean the Bowl:

Four Poems and Prose Poems

by David C. Kopaska-Merkel

Billy Never Noticed

They would lift the loose
tile near the sink, emerging
each midnight to dance
the rhumba, the cha-cha, even
the twist. Darlene mopped away
the black footprints in the morning before Billy
awoke, but one night
she stayed up to watch. Their dances
reminded her of high school and those hot summer
nights. She had to join in,
swinging each time with a new partner, flaring
her nightgown like a pleated skirt. When the sun
bloomed over the trees they hustled her
away to the displaced tile.
"I'll never fit!"
she wailed, but she did, dwindling
to rat size
before slipping down the hole.
One of the others stayed behind to
mop the floor and make breakfast.

A Voyage To Narulon

Under dawn's bright mist the trees cry out like gulls
searching for a meal. Nothing moves in the upper air save
the boat, drifting southward on the rising wind, the highest
branch-tips grazing its keel. Cottagers drive their herds into
the forest for the letting, anxious to still the hungry voices of
the trees with warm blood. Above, you and I ply the oars,
driving the dinghy south on the rushing air. The hills are
islands crowned with shrubs like shocks of hair, looming
like fiends out of the haze, fiends whose private parts shriek
with the muffled voices of satiation. We pass between the
hills/islands, the current carrying us swiftly towards the
beaches of the nether sea. The groves of hunger behind us,
we come to the vast alluvial plain through which the lower
Ouestry winds, and on whose aerial counterpart we ride.
Nothing of the underworld protrudes from the surface of the
upper Ouestry, but now and again the waters of the air are
disturbed by a flying fish or aerozote, testing the temper of
the interface. Swiftly, now, the current tugs at our little boat

and Ouestry-bas appears, far to the east but winding towards
us like a glittering serpent. Upwards we rush, through the
tidal gap between true aerial islands now, and into the
unquiet lagoon. The waterspout that is its root descends
ponderously to the sea below, pouring the waters of the air
into the waters of the earth. Skillfully, you turn the boat
about, skirting Shipeater's maw, and beach our craft on the
shingle. Out we get, walking awkwardly at first, for the
ground is like jello so close to the lower Earth. South of the
dunes we pause to wipe the gunk from our boots, then stride
firmly into the bush, towards the towers of fabled Narulon,
which floats serene, high above Panthalassa's heart.

We come to the Gates as the Sun reaches its zenith, and
pass within, for the gates are open. The streets are thronged
with folk dressed in diaphanous robes of many colors but all
pastel, all delicate. The inhabitants of the aerial city seem
not to see us, and we are often forced to step aside to avoid
being jostled. Now and again, it seems that one or another
in the hurrying throng glimpses us for just a moment, but
when we speak, does not hear us, and hurries away as if
remembering something momentarily forgotten, or
forgetting something momentarily remembered. We make
our way to the center of the city, where a vast plaza is
surrounded by huge fluted towers. The towers are dotted
with arched windows and graceful balconies, and capped by
domes and cupolas of serpentine, onyx, and chalcedony. The
plaza is floored with a mosaic of painted tiles set with
precious stones, which illustrate the story of the city's
founding. A profusion of fragrant flowers in pots carved
from single gems adorns the plaza in perfect complement to
the tile pattern. At the plaza's center a jade bench is shaded
by a weeping willow, and on the bench sits an ancient
personage, bent and withered. This person looks up as we
approach, and gazes fixedly into our eyes, holding us
spellbound. The figure raises its left hand, and we see
inscribed on its palm the Seven Symbols. A roaring fills my
ears, and above it I hear faintly a harsh, scratchy voice
intoning unknown words in a deadly tongue. Then the aged
figure rises up and hastens forward, its staff raised above its
head. The tip of the staff has the shape of a two-headed
dragon. Its eyes glow carmine. I duck as the oldster swings
the staff; excruciating pain blossoms in my shoulder and I
fall painfully to the tiles. You, struggling with the old one,

fall backward onto the jade bench, cracking it in twain. The coruscating staff falls, sinks through the tiles with a sound like tearing fingernails, and is gone. Now the towers are swaying, cracking, falling in glittering shards through the lazy air. The old one lies broken on the pave under a stick of a dead tree. You, jade-pierced, fountain over the tiles. My shoulder, too, is bleeding. The tiles smoke where our blood touches them. The towers are falling. The tiles are melting. I am falling, falling to the sea far below. You body is limp below me, and I rotate as I plummet towards the Lower Sea. Above me are only wisps of pearly cloud, quickly dispersing in the cold air.

Shark Hunting

I never leave the house. Outside the tall stick people stride stiffly on their wooden legs like commuters arriving early for the train. They are careful not to step on us, but I can't stand to be among them. Hateful things! I was a boy trying desperately to grow when I first encountered them. Shark hunting with the gang I wanted to hang with. Later I found there were no sharks. But while I crouched shivering in a prickly bush at midnight, I watched the stick people. They were building something, I don't know what it was. It reached higher than any of the trees. When it was done the stick people climbed up it and disappeared. I thought they were gone. Turns out they were doing some mysterious stick-people things up there. I was just a kid, trying to grow tall. I thought it would help. So I climbed up their thing. It was a crazy twisted tower of wood and steel. The metal was mostly from cars, I think. The tower was about 30 feet across at the base, narrowing upwards to about 10 feet at something like 50 feet off the ground. There was a stair but I couldn't use it ... the risers were too far apart. I climbed up the framework. Maybe that did it. Anyway, I reached the top of the tower, at least the part I could see, and it seemed to twist into itself and vanish. I tried to follow but the framework got very slick there. Maybe the stairs wouldn't have been so slick. I slipped and fell, *inside the tower*. When I woke up I was lying on the ground. I was like this, and the tower was a half a mile away. I never grew after that, and I never tried any more to follow the stick people where they go when they leave our place. In fact, I never leave the house.

A River's Tale

Many lands feel the river's touch. In the land of the Noceri the river sheds its load of post-apocalyptic debris and takes on a new name. Upstream the river is called Rougerin; after its passage through Nocerland it is the Ouestry.

The Noceri are fisherfolk. This has been their bane. They have a saying that what you eat you become, and certainly what they pull out of the river with their long-

handled hooks and what they strain out with their fantastical nets, is stranger than any tale can tell. Once, struggling man shapes came floating down each spring. They could not have been men, for as the Noceri put it, a river produces fish, and fish is dinner. Nevertheless they were noisy fish, and their lamentations have become some of the best folk songs of the Noceri. The Noceri waste nothing. It is well known that the Noceri speak only truth. The man shapes are gone now, and from July through January the Noceri must live on salt fish, dried fish, pickled fish, hard fish cakes, slippery fish candy, and fish preserves.

It may be the cleansing action of the fisherfolk, or simply the distance from its source, but the river leaves Nocerland in a rarified state, fit for swimming, and those who live where the lazy river winds across the plains of rushes, reeds, horsetails, cattails, lizardtails, goat tails, and mare's tails do just that on a daily basis. They do so, that is, until the river reaches the Plain of Ghoz.

Ghoz was a foolish God. Ghaz angered the river, or so the tale relates, and the river departed his homeland, never to return.

One spring the floods rose until they lapped at the very sill of the hut of Ghaz. On the plains, even a God dwells in a humble hut woven of the strong purple grasses. Ghaz surveyed the devastation wrought on the plain, as even a small god should, and when he returned home his hut was gone, and with it his wife and child. Ghaz was consumed with grief and fury. He tore out his hair, he stabbed himself repeatedly with the sharpened willow stick that was his token, and he cursed the river, forcing it to depart. Some claim that the purification of the river engendered by the fisherfolk of Nocer permits the Ouestry's spirit to leave its body, and they label the tale of Ghaz a falsity. Whatever the case, the river is sundered where it enters Ghazland. The false river remains in the plain, bereft of that life-giving property common to all rivers. Thus the Ghazlings have turned their back on the river, because it is soulless, providing no sustenance, and they graze their cattle far from its desolate banks.

The spirit river rises perilous into the air, and none have dared it, or if they have, they have not returned. Where the two rivers that should be one go after they pass the Land of Ghaz I cannot say. Perhaps one or both still reach the distant sea. Would that our story could tell of the spirit river, its nature, purpose, and destination. If this was a campfire tale of the Noceri, the spirit river's tale would be one of the most truthful. Alas, the Noceri do not know the spirit river. However, one thing is known: the separation between Ouestry above and Ouestry below moves steadily upstream. One day, perhaps, the unravelling of the two rivers will reach Nocerland, and when it does, the Noceri may make tales of its days, its nights, its beginning, and its end. Until then, we must make do with the lies we have.

Only the White Meat

If sharks flew they avoided the mutant forest, where phage-ridden former humans vied with giant pitcher plants for the few morsels that entered there. Out of the forest the red river ran, and you could fish out humanovegetal larvae, drowned and spinose. I spread my nets each morning, seeking not the worthless larvae but the toothsome skipperfish and the rare jack hobblins, highly prized for its medicinal properties. Nevertheless, many a time the loathsome spiny things are stuck in my net when I reel it in at dusk, and are the very devil to get out. I think there is some toxin on the spines, for one evening after a particularly vicious jab, I dreamed I entered the river myself, and swam upstream, into the forest. In my dream I swam to where the river bubbled out of a fuming pit, surrounded by vast pitchers of disturbing hues. I crept silently beneath the giant plants as they swayed in a breeze I could not feel, seeming at times to bend towards me and to strain with open "mouths." I had not gone far when I found a disturbing figure working over a high table. The creature was tall, and seemed at once ungainly and frighteningly graceful, like a preying mantis.

David writes: *I began writing poetry as a holiday tradition started by my mother, though my early efforts were a bit macabre for her taste. I returned to poetry a decade later because I no longer had time to write fiction. Poetry encourages word play and a focus on mood rather than events. This was a challenge for me, because SF and fantasy are often driven by content more than mood. Genre poetry differs from much genre fiction—even when we tell a story, we do it differently.*

Its hair resembled plastic hose, its limbs were shiny like a bug's, and its back was covered with iridescent violet fur. I could hear its breath whistling in and out, accompanied by a faint irregular clicking. Horribly, the creature's odor was the familiar one of wet dog. On the table ... but I could not see what lay on the table. I only saw the hideous creature gouging into something that moved and mewed, and extracting at intervals a struggling larva with wet and reddened spines. The larvae went into a metal basket taller than I am. Occasionally, the creature excavated from what lay on the table a larva limp as a rag; these were thrown over its shoulder into the sullen river. The third time this happened I almost saw what writhed upon the table and I made some small sound. Immediately the creature turned and rushed upon me with scissored limbs. These ... I don't want to call them arms ... fell upon my shoulders, severing my head. The creature picked up my head and tossed it into the basket with the larvae, then turned back to its ghastly harvesting. Somehow my head is still alive but I cannot move. One of the larvae has fastened upon my wounded neck and begun to suck desperately, its spines flailing wildly. I cannot scream. My neck hurts so, I hope that I wake soon.

ON SUNDAY

by David Napolin

There are holes in heaven
When you look through the trees
Especially at morning
When rain in swift descent
Veers from the sky,
When air is asleep
Except for birds,
The murmured drenching of leaves
And rumble
Of a distant train
And articulate six o'clock
With no gold buy grey
And slow heave of foliage.

Why revere a cathedral
When trees in shadow
Spread wider and more varied
Than any church?
And who could not, without an altar
Worship the inscrutable silence of a tree
Or loneliness of early rain?

THE DRAGON TREE

by *Stepan Chapman*

There was once, or there wasn't, or there actually was, I'm not sure, a kingdom by the sea called Orobika.

The Orobeksan mountain range ran along the kingdom's inland border. On the foothills grew the Orobeksan Forest. For as long as anyone could remember, the forest had grown there, tall and dark and plentiful. The evergreens provided the people of Orobika with their winter wood, and the oaks and walnut trees and chestnuts dropped a good part of their winter food.

Orobika was a lucky kingdom. It had forest land and farm land, pasture land and a bay with a for harbor. But it also had a king, and this king was very greedy.

His name was King Opko, and his castle overlooked the harbor town called Orosopesk. King Opko was so greedy that having a kingdom wasn't enough for him. He also wished to be the richest king in the world.

Merchants came to Orosopesk on sailing ships, with golden coins in their purses.

King Opko taxed his subjects to the bone and traded away most of their crops. But no matter how much gold he piled up in his treasury, it was never enough to please him. The King decided that Orobika was a very poor nation. Also, the farmers were becoming arrogant and unruly. Even his loyal army could hardly control the rising tide of complaint and disobedience.

One day in late autumn, it came to King Opko's mind that he should *sell the Orobeksan Forest*, thus to glorify his treasury. He would sell the trees for lumber, and the forest would eventually grow back, or so he assumed. Greatly pleased with this plan, the King summoned his most trusted commander, General Ash, to his throne room.

"I need for you to collect some oxen and carts," said the King. "And axes, plenty of axes. Then you must march the army inland to the hills."

"Are we to camp there this winter?" asked the General.

"No. You are to chop down the forest."

The General frowned. "What *part* of the forest, Your Highness?"

"The whole forest. Every single tree. I don't want one tree left standing. I must have a great lot of wood, so that I can sell it for a great deal of gold."

General Ash was a good soldier, so he didn't try to argue. He clicked the heels of his boots together and departed from the throne room. Then he organized a company of men to find the needful oxen and carts and tools and tents.

Carts and animals, tents and provisions, rope and axes were separated from their previous owners. The General

took his place at the head of his ranks and marched them out of Orosopesk, bound for the hills.

At the edge of the forest, they passed the cottage of a family of charcoal burners. An old woman fell into step beside Ash. "Come to cut some wood?" she asked.

"Worse than that," said Ash. "We've been ordered to lay low the whole forest."

"Are you mad?"

"The king is mad. He told us to spare no tree."

"And you obey? You *mustn't!*" The old woman stood on the road in front of Ash and blocked his way. Ash signaled his soldiers to halt.

"Who will *stop* us?" he asked her.

"The Dragon Tree," she answered, sticking out her chin. "The Dragon Tree will stop you."

"And what, Old Woman, is a Dragon Tree?"

"Such ignorance!" the old woman exclaimed. "The legend of the Dragon Tree is as old as these woods! I learned it from my grandmother. Somewhere in the forest, no one knows just where, grows the Dragon Tree. Beneath its roots is a hidden cavern, and in this cavern, there sleeps a fearsome creature. If a woodsman's ax should ever touch that enchanted tree, then the dragon will arise from its lair, to slay the woodsman and all those who threaten the forest. This enchantment was given to the forest by the Oak Spirits, in the Early Days of the World."

The soldiers began to grumble among themselves.

"A stupid story," General Ash said loudly. "A story for frightening children. But we are fighting men, and not so easily frightened." Ash gave another signal, and the men marched up the road and into the forest.

The old woman hobbled back toward her cottage. "Frightening children," she said to herself. "Frightening children indeed. All of this happened before, long ago. Now it will happen again."

The army hiked deep into the forest and made their camp. That night, they sat around their fires and told jokes about the terrible Dragon Tree. The jokes weren't funny, but the soldiers laughed at them, just the same.

The next morning, they set to their work. Some men did nothing but fell trees. Others chopped branches from trunks all day. The oxen drivers tied the stripped trunks to the yokes of their oxen. The oxen dragged the trees to camp, to be sawed into sections. The work went smoothly. Piles of logs grew tall, as one day followed another.

On the night of the full moon, asleep in his tent, General Ash dreamed of an Oak Spirit. In the dream, he was raising his ax to strike down an oak sapling. A little

children will starve, and the old people will freeze. Is that truly what you want?"

"Soldiers can't do what they *want*," Ash objected. "We do as we're commanded."

"Then I command that you stop," said the little girl made of wood. As she spoke, the general realized that his ax blade, though he struggled to hold it still, was moving, very slowly, toward her neck.

"But you aren't the King," he argued. "So please move out of the way."

"But I'm standing here," said the Oak Spirit. "I can't just walk away. I think you should go and kill that king of yours, if you must be always killing things."

General Ash woke up, just as his ax touched the girl's neck. Tears were running down his face.

At sunrise, a bugler roused the men. They dressed and ate and hiked off to their work sites. Ash sat at a roughhewn table under an elm tree and drew maps of the forest. When the sun was high in the sky, a soldier named Ivor came to him with a report.

"There's a dead oak, Sir, a league or so to the north. We've been trying all morning to bring it down, Sir. Three of us."

"Try harder," said Ash.

"The strange thing is, Sir, we've broken six ax blades on it. And we haven't made a scratch."

"Six axes broken?" Ash stood up. He'd been wanting to stretch his legs. "Show me this tree. I'll cut it down myself."

The great oak stood alone, at the center of a clearing. Birch trees ringed the clearing, and dense pines cast their shadows beyond. The tangled branches of the oak seemed to fill the windy sky. The sun shone down through rattling black twigs. Two soldiers named Vasily and Nikolas were sitting under the tree and trying to mend the broken axes. When they saw Ash approaching, they jumped to their feet and saluted.

Ash took off his bright red jacket with its gold braid and epaulets. "Give me an ax," he said, "and stand back."

He walked slowly around the trunk, feeling the bark. He picked a spot and swung his ax. He swung again and again. Chips of wood went flying.

Vasily turned to Nikolas. "What did we do wrong?"

Nikolas scratched his ear. "It wants to be chopped down by an officer, I suppose. Now if I were a tree..."

"Be silent," snapped Ivor. "The General needs to concentrate."

The crack of breaking wood rang out, high above their heads. A massive limb came crashing down through the dead branches. The four men dashed for the edge of the clearing. A great weight of dry wood smashed to earth, just where Ash had been standing.

Ash brushed the leaves from his shirt. "That tree is trying to kill me," he said.

The three soldiers laughed, but not very happily. Their eyes were wide with fear.

Ash retrieved his ax from beneath the fallen limb. He attacked the dead oak tree as if it were indeed his mortal enemy. He chopped from the left, and he chopped from the right, until sweat ran down his neck and soaked his shirt. The pine woods echoed with the blows of his ax. Before long, he had hacked his way halfway through the trunk.

The oak gave a groan, long and low. The soldiers felt their hair stand on end. The whole forest was groaning, in chorus with the groaning of the oak. The oak leaned west. Its trunk twisted into splinters. The four men ran east. The great tree thundered down through the birches and the pines and smashed a path to the forest floor, where it lay, with brown needles raining down on it.

The three soldiers raised their arms and cheered for General Ash. But still, they didn't turn their backs on the stump at the center of the clearing, for they half expected a dragon to crawl out of it.

Ash tossed down his ax and picked up his red jacket. "Back to work," he said.

Just then, Ivor pointed a trembling finger at the leaves around their feet. "It *moved*," Ivor said hoarsely.

"What moved?" Ash demanded.

"The *ground*."

The earth began to shake and tilt, as though some huge creature were squirming beneath it.

A thick, shaggy root of oak wood burst from the soil and whipped itself angrily to and fro. Chancing to touch Nikolas, the root wrapped itself around his neck, choked him to death, and twisted off his head.

Vasily snatched up a hatchet and ran to Nikolas's aid. Twice, Vasily struck at the root. Then a thick loop of it shoved him to the ground and fell across his waist. The root sank back into the earth, and the soil closed over it like water. Vasily's spine split in two, with a brittle noise, like the snapping of a dry stick. Two dead bodies lay in the leaves, in four pieces.

The oak stump yanked up eight of its crooked, black roots and used them as legs, to push itself free of the ground.

"What do we do?" said Ivor.

"Go get help," said Ash. "Bring torches and some tar. I'll try to keep it here."

Ivor ran off.

The stump of the Dragon Tree, (for that was what it was,) shook the last clumps of sod from its eight long legs. A cold, green eye opened in a bole on the stump. The eye squinted at General Ash. The stump pointed its broken end at him, and the mangled wood split down the middle and opened into a pair of spiked, wooden jaws. The Tree dug its claws into the earth and hissed at Ash—a sound like leaves in a gale.

Moving slowly, Ash crouched down and got hold of an

ax. Always facing the Tree, he gradually circled the clearing. As he circled the Tree, it circled him, glaring down from its pale green eye.

The longest of its devious, twisting roots leapt up and snagged Ash's ankle. Ash fell to the ground. The Tree's jagged black snout drove like two stakes into the soil on either side of Ash's head. Its splintery teeth pressed in on his skull. A shaggy root draped itself across his neck and held him down, like a cat playing with a grasshopper.

General Ash smelled oak leaves. Then he smelled wine. Then smoke. Thick, sour smoke.

All at once, he was free of the wooden jaws. His men were pulling him to his feet and dragging him from the clearing.

The Dragon Tree was writhing in flames. Finally it curled its legs into a dense black ball and crumbled to bits. A moaning wind blew through the pines, and foul, gray smoke clung to the hills like fog. The forest had lost its ancient champion.

When the fire burned low and died, the soldiers poked through the coals and made sure that nothing was left alive. Then they buried Vasily and Nikolas.

The next day, they went on with their work as before. They had faced the Dragon Tree and burnt it to cinders. Now they had nothing to worry about. More logs were cut, and the oxen dragged bundles of them down to the harbor at Orosopesk. The log piles grew tall, as the forest steadily shrank. By November, the hills were a rutted waste of frozen, brown mud and dead stumps.

General Ash sat astride his horse in his fine red jacket. He surveyed the devastation and shook his head sadly.

"The King has given me many foolish commands," he said to himself. "But *this*... This is the *limit*. That girl in my dream had the right idea. I should have killed him long ago."

It seemed very strange to Ash that he and his men could destroy a forest or defeat a monster, yet were incapable of killing one small, fat king.

On their last day in the foothills, the army broke camp and made preparations to drag the last of the logs to Orosopesk. The Orobaskan forest was a thing of the past.

The next morning was cold and rainy. General Ash had been awake for hours. He'd polished his boots and brushed his coat with the gold braid and the epaulets. The tents were folded; the carts, loaded, and the oxen, harnessed. Ash stood at the head of his ranks and signaled the forward march.

They marched across the foothills, all ice and mud and smoldering fires and drifting smoke. General Ash noticed a

twig caught in his hair. He pulled it loose, but more twigs grew in its place; for indeed Ash's head was sprouting twigs. He plucked at them, as he marched along, but his finger had grown clumsy and stiff, and his nails were forming leaves.

Ash turned to Ivor and tried to speak. His tongue had turned to wood. He saw that Ivor's neck had grown very long and very like to the trunk of a birch tree, and he saw that Ivor's legs had taken root in the road. And in fact, the whole army had stopped in its tracks. Every soldier had turned into a tree, right where he stood.

The Oak Spirits had worked an enchantment on the army, and the enchantment didn't end there. From the grove of saplings so suddenly planted in the road, there radiated a system of roots. The roots plowed through the mud and clay, extending themselves to the farthest regions of the ruined forest. In mere hours, a new forest rose up, just as tall and beautiful as the one that the soldiers had cut down.

The new forest was grown from the flesh of General Ash and his army. That is why the Orobeskans sometimes call it the Forest of Soldiers. And that is why on a certain day in November, they send a keg of beer up to the forest and pour it on the ground.

The Orobeskans render this small service to the ghosts of the soldiers, in honor of their sacrifice. In their lives, those men committed a grievous crime. But it can also be said that they paid for the crime with their lives. Many women lost their husbands, that November, long ago. Many children lost their fathers.

For years afterwards, widows would take their children to visit the forest. "See these trees?" they would say. "One of these trees was once your poppa. But no one knows which."

"How did poppa end up as a tree?" the children would ask their mothers.

The widows would sigh, and they would answer. "By doing as he was told."

Sometimes a peculiarly curious child would seek out an old grandmother and ask whether the Dragon Tree had truly been burnt to nothing.

Orobaskan grandmothers have a ready reply for this question: "The *old* Dragon Tree was burnt to nothing. But a new one took its place. Somewhere in the forest is the tree that was once General Ash. And if an ax blade ever touches *that* tree... Well... It wouldn't be pretty."

And perhaps, or perhaps not, or perhaps indeed, the grandmothers are right.

LETTERS:

Dear Jennifer, Tony, Charlotte, Sandy, Stepan, Charlee, Kathryne, Mary Ann, Joy, Father Nikodim, Shannon, Adrienne, Gwentyth and Trent,

Thank-you for another *Mythic Circle*.

Personally, I feel that *Mythic Circle* should be what it is - something that in thirty years time, will be discovered in second-hand bookstores, and the finder will call excitedly 'Look, it's got X in - and Y - and Z - however did they get those three together, and in a hundred years time, collectors of X or Z are going to be bidding huge sums for a *Mythic Circle*, the first place where their created world was mentioned, or first place of publication.

But also, I feel, *Mythic Circle* is there to help those who are never going to be internationally recognized, those of us who write because it is as natural and needful as walking. To be reviewed helps us write, and also to read.

So, conscious that it has been many years since I paid back for my reading by reviewing, here are some comments. I adored Tony Baez Milan's "The One-Eyed Bicyclist with the Amazingly Long Grin." The only thing that snagged at all in the wonderfully flowing story was the Christian reference to stoning. I had a big problem with Charlotte I. Taylor's "Acorn": I didn't believe in the situation: it all seemed too stereotypical. Replace the Oak and Symeli with something creative but unmagical (tea-blending, Corgi- breeding or some such), and you would have a completely barren tale. I keep returning to Mary Ann Toman's "City Garden": so much is going on, out of the picture: I don't know whether I have invented the connection with the courtly(urban)/rural theme of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* - but the connections, like the garden itself, are, paradoxically, only there unseen.

Adrienne Rie's "Sibling Rivalry" is an amazing retelling (just when I think an old tale's been retold enough times, along comes another teller, to prove me wrong. The first section is confusing: who is following the pebbles - I thought Mother at first. I don't think 'glancing' is the right word, in the last stanza of section II: it isn't a natural action for someone 'standing before'. If she were working before the cage - a glance into it

would be fine. But she's standing before it. What is she looking at when she isn't glancing in? It would be wonderful if you could find a food reference for Gretal in the penultimate stanza of section IV, to parallel 'I/grew stale'. Something yeasty? The last stanza of section IV is superfluous. The last stanza of section V, too, adds little. In the final section, do you need to tell us 'Ambition warred ...?': you show us this clearly in the next two stanzas (again, a little food here would have been nice - future feasts? her own kitchen?). And (you will think my review is nothing but 'drop the last stanza from the section!') the last stanza could well finish with 'wine.'

Best wishes to you all,

Pat Reynolds

Gwentyth and Trent--

Thank you for the copy of Issue 22. I was impressed to see so many of your authors had been printed/published in other venues. I was a little disappointed however that my name was incorrect on my poem...I don't mind going by either "Adrienne" or "Rie", but my last name is Sheridan, and I wish that it could have been either Adrienne Sheridan or Rie Sheridan rather than Adrienne Rie. I would greatly appreciate a correction in the next issue if possible, because no one will know who I am this way....

thank you again,
Rie Sheridan

The MC co-editor sincerely apologizes for his mistake.

I just wanted to write and let you know that I received the contributor's copy of *Mythic Circle* which you sent to me. There was a lot of good stuff in the issue—I especially liked Shannon Gray's illustrations, and several of the poems were very good, including Joy Reid's work, and "Sibling Rivalry" by Adrienne Rie. Thanks for letting me be a part of issue #22. . . .

Sincerely,
Jennifer Crow

The Mythic Circle

The Mythic Circle is a small 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 traditions. In the recent past, *The Mythic Circle* has been published irregularly, but starting this year, it has become an annual. The next issue, #24, will be published during the summer of 2001. Copies of previous issues are available through the Mythopoeic Society Orders Department. The price for a sample copy is \$8.00 plus \$2 for handling and mailing costs. Subscription price is \$8 a year (for one issue). Notice that the price has been raised due to increased costs. For subscriptions and sample issues, write to:

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The 32nd Annual Convention of the *Mythopoeic Society* (Mythcon XXXII), will be held August 3-6, 2001, at the Clark Kerr Campus of the University of California. Guests of honor are David Llewellyn Dodds and Peter S. Beagle. Registration is \$35 for Society members, and \$45 for non-members, until March 1, 2001. For information, contact:

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