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Letters of Comment

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Additional Keywords

Letters

Letters of Comment:

For the benefit of those writers who like to get comments on their writing from all possible perspectives, we include this in MC #22.

MEMO

FROM: Snipesnoobet, Special Infernal Investigator
TO: Distinguished Members of the Infernal Committee to Oversee the Work of the Infernal Committees
RE: Impending Publication of Mythic Circle #22: Grossmouloch's call for Squidgeoodle's removal

I have completed my review of the history of *The Mythic Circle* and the developing imbroglio among valued devils which has disturbed the minds of those Lower Down. I offer the following account and my suggestions for the resolution of this unfortunate conflict.

A new issue of *The Mythic Circle*, #22, is indeed about to come out. Grossmouloch, Chair of the Department of Moderate Vandalism and Scurrilous Graffiti, offers an alarming assessment of the dangers it represents. There is fear that it may, if it continues, make some progress towards its expressed goal, to cultivate and develop writers in that tradition of C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien, and Charles Williams, so uncompromisingly antithetical to Infernal aims. On the other hand, Squidgeoodle, Director of the Office of Infernal Propaganda, defends his own record in this matter, arguing that he has considerably impeded the progress of *The Mythic Circle*, and that the form in which #22 now appears offers us, not a disaster, but a field for opportunities. Consideration of these issues requires that we break down our examination into several categories: production and editorial policies, letters of comment, individual works. Afterwards, I offer my recommendations.

First, as to publishing history, while Grossmouloch is enraged that any MC is coming out, Squidgeoodle points out that the editors of MC had projected two issues, but are only publishing one, and so he should be given credit for cutting their production in half. Grossmouloch is offended that there are lively illustrations, while Squidgeoodle boasts that he has denied the editors the help of all but one illustrator. Grossmouloch is offended that they have a Letters of Comment section, and Squidgeoodle points out that there are only two letters in it, and in these letters lie the seeds of future dissensions among the writers. The distinguished demons clash sharply on the dangers represented by individual stories.

For example, concerning Stepan Chapman's "Down Among the Finger Hags," Grossmouloch points out in disgust that it offers the readers a fast moving story, told in a simple, yet witty style, in which proud, calculating people who desire glory are overthrown, while an innocent protagonist, sincere in her desire to serve the common good, accomplishes the quest and proves victorious. There is no need to review the reasons why stories with such counterinfernal themes should be suppressed whenever possible. Squidgeoodle, however, scoffs at this analysis. Grossmouloch, he claims, fails to appreciate the fact that what a reader can gain from a story is limited by what is already in the reader's heart and mind. Recent campaigns by the Infernal Lower Powers have so completely removed simplicity and

sincerity from American public life that the vast majority of American readers are incapable of recognizing these qualities when they appear in fiction. It is far more important and obvious, Squidgeoodle says, that the protagonist ultimately becomes a Finger Hag. Her victory stems, he says, not from her sincerity, but from the completeness of her surrender to the powers that are oppressing her people; her brothers failed the quest because they thought that they could bargain and retain some independence. The irresistibility of Infernal Powers is a point we wish continually to emphasize, and this story does so admirably.

Grossmouloch also places Kathryn Kennedy's "The Mother Tree," high on the list of subversive stories whose publication should at all costs have been prevented. Not only, he says, does it offer engaging characters, interesting situations, imaginative mythopoeic writing and a surprise ending, but also it conveys, subtly yet compellingly, certain points which we wish, at all costs, to keep from the attention of readers: that patience is a virtue worth cultivating and trust cannot be rushed. It is hard to overestimate the damage it might do the Infernal cause if very large numbers of people develop the virtues of patience and respect for trust. Squidgeoodle responds briefly that from Grossmouloch's words, you would think people read stories deliberately in order to be indoctrinated by counterinfernal ideas. Readers, he says, will be too caught up in the epic battle between Tia and the leaf-eater to notice any of these points. Admittedly, the story may offer readers a few minutes of pleasant escapism, which we would deny them if we could.

With Jennifer Crow's "Dance with the Trickster," Grossmouloch goes on at some length deploring the entertainment this merry yet suspenseful story is likely to give readers, and what a disaster it would be if they should learn courage and adaptability from it. To this, Squidgeoodle only answers that he hopes admiration for Coyote the Trickster will catch on, and many adolescents will learn to admire supernatural beings who mysteriously cause automobile accidents and never own up to it, and who encourage young women to destroy their friends' cell phones.

This is enough summary to give the distinguished committee the flavor of the exchange. We must turn to the question of the letters of comment. Grossmouloch deplores the fact that there are any at all, but Squidgeoodle sees promise in the Letters for much bitterness and dissension among readers of *The Mythic Circle.* The editors publish such letters partly because they are deluded enough to believe that it is helpful for writers to know the frank opinions of their readers, no matter what form they take. But mostly they publish them because they aim to serve "developing writers" in a variety of age groups who wish to improve their craft. Therefore, they especially want constructive criticism, criticism which points out a work's virtues as well as its flaws and suggests improvements. However, in the only letters Squidgeoodle allowed the editors to receive, most of the space is taken up with praise or scornful dismissal, and very little with constructive criticism. Squidgeoodle was particularly tickled with phrases like, "'Pride' was complete High School lit mag formula regurgitation of something we've heard before (and better) many times, something in which the author puts ANGER and FURY in caps. How can you live with yourself?" and "Most of Shannon's drawings in here reeked of cutsieness, generic faerie that any of 20,000 different teen to twenty-something mysticmythics could pull out of their laurel and hemlock."

Instead of complaining about the publication of MC 22, Grossmouloch should have instigated the penning of more such phrases; with any luck lifelong enmities could be created which would outlast the wretched magazine itself.

When Grossmouloch mocks Squidgeboodle's confident prediction that *The Mythic Circle* editors would abandon their resolution to respond individually to each story, the Director of Infernal Propaganda turns the argument back upon him. The editors continue not because of any great fortitude on their part but because of Infernal negligence. Walters and Hood simply have not been harassed enough. Too high a percentage of the writers who submitted work have rewarded their efforts by patiently revising and improving their contributions; some writers have even written thanking them for the individual attention. Only a few have written to argue or complain, and not one as yet has actually been abusive. If Grossmouloch had targeted writers on the days when they received their manuscripts with comments, if he had used the petty nuisances at his command to, say, spill coffee, burn toast, run stockings, stall car-engines, or provoke sneezes at just the wrong moments, he might have provoked some of the more vitriolic ones to take out their anger on the editors *The Mythic Circle,* and we would not still be bothered with this dangerous "response to all" policy. Squidgeboodle declares that the Central Committee should transfer some of Grossmouloch's staff to his own office, if it really wants results.

After reviewing these arguments, I recommend that subcommittee should be appointed to examine whether infernal efforts should concentrate on closing down *The Mythic Circle* or on subverting it. As an interim solution, Squidgeboodle should be given more staff to increase the petty nuisances at his disposal, but none of the new assignees should come from Grossmouloch's staff, lest that valuable devil should be discouraged from continuing in his vigilant scrutiny of Squidgeboodle's office. I add that after reviewing the matter, I have no doubt of the essential correctness of Squidgeboodle's policy, but I think that, like all administrators, he works best under pressure.

Submitted in the Spirit of the Age,

Snipesnoobet, Special Investigator

* * *

First off, thanks for the copy of Mythic Circle. On the envelope, where you kindly wrote "thanks for the poem" I thought at first (& second) glance that it read "thanks for the porn." Of course, now I am obliged to insert some witty comment about poetry can be porn, depending on how you look at it, but I'll save us the embarrassment. My impressions of the magazine: I thought the cover had a cool sort of comic book look to it: I was fearing faeries or a portrait of Tori Amos. I would've put the letter from the co-ed at the front, it sort of looks like space filler, but as far as a letter from an editor, I thought it was nicely crisp and unpretentious and served a specific function: that is, to guard the magazine from being a haven for regenerated, regurgitated, uncreative rehashings of precious little myths. I thought the Searsmith poem was very nice, even though its obscure mythic title threatened to ghettoize it in my head before I read it. I thought the Skin's Silk was extremely ho-hum, you know, the sort of thing that got thrown in because it was short and name dropped a mythic figure. Pride was complete High School lit mag formula regurgitation of something we've heard before (and better) many

times, something in which the author puts ANGER and FURY in caps. How can you live with yourself? My impression of C.S. Thompson's Magnetic Country: I didn't feel the presence of any real insight, just a writer churning out an exercise in writing a mythic poem in meter and rhyme. The first stanza impressed me, and I think if the poet (whoever he or she is) would've just cut it off after the second stanza, I would've had a much more favorable impression. Why? Because the traits that did impress me - some nice imagery, nice control of tone, a rhyme/meter scheme that doesn't seem too heavy handed - (for two stanzas the rhyme/meter schtick/shit works, but it's much too constrictive to support a twelve stanza poem, especially one that is filled with conventions of "poetic" phrasing and "mythic" imagery) - are present in their best form in the first two stanzas. Oh yes, one really bad couplet: "The song that says Now come with me/And I will give you kisses three.". On pgs. 14 & 15, I think Zach blows me away. I really, really liked the Oxford Shirt poem, and in the context of the magazine, I was more impressed by At The Bowling Alley than I had before. I'm not really ashamed by my poem, but it's definitely not one of my best efforts. Some nice imagination and modest flourishes courtesy of a few rewrites, but nothing to wet one's literary panties over. I really should've tacked on the second to last line onto the paragraph above it. Most of Shannon's drawings in here reeked of cutsieness, generic faerie that any of 20,000 different teen to twenty-something mysticmythics could pull out of their laurel and hemlock. I liked her pig on 7. If the modus operandi of the magazine is to appeal to the D & D crowd, don't change a thing. But if you're interested in diverting its focus to more literary aspirations, I think you are wise to encourage and solicit works of a more relevant manner, and to perhaps merely pay lip service to the usual faerie that will always be available and will likely never grow or expand.

-Tony Tost

* * *

I've read my *Mythic Circle* #21 cover to cover. I think a writer always loves to see herself in print, so I can hardly give you an unbiased opinion! My husband (a computer scientist, but a literate one) and I both thought the illustrations for "Witching" were right on the money. And, Squidgeboodle's treatment of the story was a scream.

I am guessing that the review's appearance will improve as you develop a funding base for it. Mine came with the cover stapled on upside down and the last page of "The Stem of the Sun" partially torn out (not that I much regretted the foreshortening of that story). You may be able to do some research on what small, similarly budgeted publications are doing in terms of inner and outer stock, print quality, etc.; gloss is probably beyond what you could cover right now. There may be some other options for making it look more professional, though. Certainly some of the content is getting there.

Of the poetry, I liked Zach Schomburg's best - surprising infusions of the real with the surreal. Re: the fiction, I thought both "The Attic" with its artist's angst-riddled rants and "The Stem of the Sun" with its bizarre Wonderlandish meets *Rats* narrative would never end! They were loosely plotted and melodramatically thematized for my tastes. I liked better Schaefer's "Message to the King" - enjoyed fitting together the themes of the tale told with the previous narrative setting. Of the stories, I must especially say

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I loved "The Tale of the Boggelmann," less for its frame story, although it was amusing, and more for the reworking of the Japanese tale. Humpnal had a spare and elegant style, and told a charming story.

Mythic Circle fills an important and much neglected niche. I'm looking forward to seeing how it evolves.

– Kelly Searsmith

* * *

CO-EDITOR RESPONDS:

The editors apologize for the physical appearance of MC#21. However, although the choice of materials settled upon may not be the loveliest, we do not have the time nor the money for a fancier copy; hence, we deposited the magazine in the hands of Kinko's. Perhaps we expected too much from a professional company. Still, what must be remembered is that A) this is and always will be small press, and B) we are devoted to aiding the budding writer. We want to be around for new writers trying out their newest petals and to encourage them as best we can.

Moreover, every piece printed in the last issue (as well as this issue) were chosen because of some merit. We receive plenty of highly polished material that either didn't suit the spectrum of the magazine, the needs of the form (story or poem), or simply lacked taste. The writers we print experiment with the form. These are the writers who will survive. Or so we hope if we invest in the future of literature.

Just because a piece is rejected here does not mean necessarily that the writer will not go on to higher heights. I myself might have been tempted to reject a few of Stephen King's stories (though *Gwenyth* may have stayed my hand). What I found in his *Bag of Bones* tale, was that the author had perhaps tried too hard for this literary sense that NPR, my local newspaper, and others were trying to give him. What I found was what an editor sometimes finds in a fledgling main character: that the author tried to make himself the main character without first knowing what makes him interesting.

Kirsten Bakis' Bram Stoker winner for First Novel struggles with this too. All the passages with lead female narrator (as the author is) are tepid while the passages narrated by side characters are intensely imagined, fascinating, wonderful.

A writer like William S. Burroughs, or Henry Miller, or Charles Bukowski can write about themselves in book after book because the author lied about his dull self, spiced it up a bit. If a writer wants to stick around, a writer must observe – whether himself or the world – so that readers miles down the road will want to read them too.

Again, it may not be enough to observe. The face of a literary form is constantly changing, reforming. It is a worthwhile practice to experiment with narrative – perhaps with a hyperrealism or an objectivism or whatever-ism have you. The writer must make it new since what he writes is always old and familiar. But familiar is good too, so long as it's casserole and not leftovers.

NOTE:

In addition to an interview, the next issue, the Phillip K. Dick award-winner, *The Troika* by Stepan Chapman (whose story appears in this issue) will be reviewed. If readers enjoyed

Chapman's story, there are a number of its type to be found in his collection, *Dangerous Music*. It's cheap too: \$2.99 + 1.00 shipping. Why do you want to buy this book from the small press? Because small press keeps the lesser known and new writers in print. Sample stories, "The God of Dollars" & "The Heaven of the Animators," are on the web at <http://cent.com/abetting/L5chap.html> & <http://www.mindspring.com/~toones/ministry/Dangertext.html>. Send your hard-earned, half-an-hour-of-minimum-wage dollars to Ministry of Whimsy, PO Box 4248 Tallahassee, FL 32315.

Fooling around on the internet, for those who enjoyed Jacob's story I found she has a set of poems posted at <http://home.earthlink.net/~tannlund/charleejacobpoems.html> and published a novel *This Symbiotic Fascination* put out by Necro Publications (PO Box 540298, Orlando, FL 32854-0298) which was nominated for best first horror novel by the International Horror Guild.

Tony Báez Milán writes that he has a short-story collection *Tales from an Invisible Continent* in English and in Spanish out from his Flying Machine Publishing, PO Box 931221, Los Angeles, CA 90093.

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All writers or readers of Mythic Circle should feel free to submit their publications for review to

Trent Walters

54322 US Hwy 275

Glenwood, Iowa 51534

Letters of comment, suggestions, stories, or poems should be sent here as well (or to MYTHICCIRCLE@HOTMAIL.COM).

FINAL CO-EDITOR NOTE:

Just a reminder that this magazine is devoted to myth, whether it be of the far-flung future or in ruins of our past or in your backyard birdbath. The editors are looking for fresh perspectives on myth (just take a look Milan's wildly imaginative "The One-Eyed Bicyclist with the Amazingly Long Grin" or the subdued poems by Mary Ann Toman) – make them up if you have to! Send them to the address listed above.

If we find your work appealing, we may ask for a number of rewrites; so be sure to include your email address.

Lastly, some readers may wonder: why Robert Reed? If you are wondering this, then you either may not have a) read his work or b) fully understood the implications and possibilities of myth. It can appear to merely examine a leaf, it can swing a sword, it can appear to merely examine a galaxy. Ask yourself: how are myths created?

Special thanks to Shannon Gray whose quick, deft pen saved my ass once again.