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Letters of Comment

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

Albuquerque, New Mexico • Postponed to: July 30 – August 2, 2021



Authors

Angelee Sailer Anderson, Ronald C. Morgan II, Charles de Lint, Katy Anderson, Ernie Anderson, Doug Rossman, Sarah Beach, Frances Garland, Anne Osborn, Alyson Parker, and Mary-Edith Bridges

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

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

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

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

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

"No!"

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

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

"What are you doing?" Ethli cried.

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

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

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



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

LETTERS O' COMMENT

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

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

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

Angelee Sailer Anderson
Huntington Beach, California

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

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

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

Ronald C. Morgan II
Norwalk, California

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

and Mythprint, a monthly newsletter -- subscriptions to either of these confers Society membership. Members get together on a monthly basis in many locations throughout the U.S.A. to discuss books, although membership is international. Every summer we gather together for "MythCon," our annual conference. This year it's in Milwaukee and our guests of honor are Christopher Tolkien and John Bellairs. This is also the 20th anniversary for the Society. We'll try to run an ad somewhere in this issue; maybe we'll tempt you into going.

There were some pretty good stories in The Mythic Circle. "Mohawk" could have been my fav but it 'wimped out' at the end; its lack of a resolution that related to a natural unfolding of events made it become a non-story. That makes my fav for the issue "The Woodsman" --it's poignant, but not mushy.

I like the idea of a special section for young writers -- let's give them all the encouragement we can. But how about some strong editing and discussion on what makes a good story so that it'll be a learning experience for these young writers, rather than just a chance to get their stories in print?

Charles de Lint
Ottawa, Canada

I really have ambivalence about this because most young writers are super-sensitive and I don't want to put them in print with one hand and then 'slap them down' with the other hand. Or are we making them "second-class citizens" by not giving them the same criticism we give to the other writers? --CL

You'll see some other folks have criticisms of our handling of the Mythopoeic Youth section -- what do you all think? We're definitely open to suggestion. In this issue, as I personally know our young writer, I worked with him and we did some pre-publication editing, including removing several blocks of text that relate to the story as a chapter in a longer work but have very little to do with advancing the tale offered to you in these pages. --LM

We wish to convey our best wishes to you on your Editing and Publishing venture! Re: your first issue, "In The House Of Good Fortune" and "The Accuser" were written by Angelee Sailer Anderson (our daughter-in-law) and we are extremely proud of her. We believe she has the magic and many messages for the world in the written word and wish her much success. Thank you!

Katy & Ernie Anderson
Huntington Beach, California

*Wouldn't we all just love to have in-laws like that?! *sigh* They also subscribed...*

Although I realize you are faced with the problem of getting as many stories, poems, and illustrations into each issue as you can manage, the overall "look" would be improved by widening the margins (including top and bottom), and the

readability would be enhanced (for those of us whose eyes aren't what they used to be) by using a slightly larger type. Some of the space thus lost (perhaps most of it) could be regained by reducing some of the artwork in size. The artwork itself might benefit from such a move. For example, the cute illustration of the princess (on pg. 13) would have been more effective had it been smaller; as it is, the picture totally overwhelms the page.

I was a little concerned about the italics being removed from Agnar's musings on pg. 12 lest the reader think Agnar was talking aloud. This is obviously a minor "beef."

I applaud the decision to include some stories by youngsters to encourage them to get more deeply involved in creative writing, and we certainly don't want to discourage them by harsh criticism. Nevertheless, I think we do them no favor by publishing stories that are replete with grammatical and punctuational mistakes. The only way any of us learns to write well (either creative or technical writing) is to have our material criticized -- constructively, of course.

Nonetheless, since the foregoing constitute the sum total of my "negative" reactions, I hope it is obvious to you that my overwhelming reactions to the first issue are extremely positive. You are to be congratulated for bringing it off so impressively.

Doug Rossman
Baton Rouge, LA

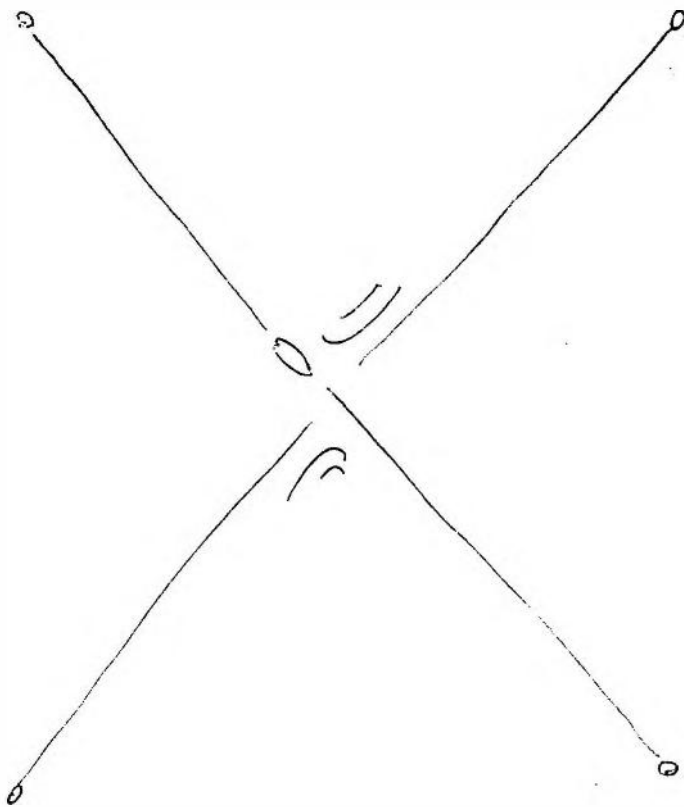
Picky, picky, picky! Actually, this is just the kind of positive criticism we've been hoping to receive. I think you'll find at least some of your excellent suggestions are implemented in this second issue and we'll continue to work on getting better...

How do you suggest we go about dealing with youth stories? Should we correct and edit at will and let the author know about it privately, in correspondence, or should those changes be indicated in print some way? I'll bet lots of you out there have opinions on this -- we'd love to hear them.

In the first edition of Mythic Circle, Spring 1987, we erroneously printed a letter not intended for publication. A revised edition and second print run has been made and the letter has been pulled. Please excuse the blank space.

Thank you,

Lynn Maudlin
Christine Lowentroun



I want to say you've turned out a fine first issue! What a delight it is to encounter material with so much potential. But you asked for comments about the specific tales, so...

I like David Gaston's "Mourning Light," although I was initially a little disconcerted by the tongue-in-cheek tone. But I thought the day/night reversal effective and the ending touching. The reverse angles in "The Troll Boy" and "The Woodsman" are both well handled. Also Angelee Sailer Anderson's "The Accuser" was intriguing. I think she handled the nature of the Accuser quite well.

Charles Rampp's "Mohawk" is interesting, but it felt a little choppy to me. I think it would have been better with a bit more elaboration.

And lastly, to offer my support to the two Mythopoeic Youth selections... Neve Mattaliano's "Empress Blue Meets Pharaoh" is a delightful little gem, and its ending has a nice twist. Anna Maxie's "The Witch And The Lily" shows a lot of promise. Her prose needs more polish, but that will come with practice, I think. One has to start with a good story, and she does have the bones of that -- it simply needs some fleshing out.

Sarah Beach
Los Angeles, California

I quite enjoyed The Mythic Circle, Issue #1, with very few reservations. I had some difficulty with the two Mythopoeic Youth works, but I applaud the spirit in which they were offered -- my most valuable comment to each young author is **READ, READ, READ!** The most pleasant and effective way to learn the fundamentals of good writing is to read voraciously. I also found "The Princess In The Teflon Slipper" to be uneven -- sometimes quite lame and occasionally very funny; I have the feeling that the author tossed it off rather casually.

I found "Mourning Light" thoroughly engaging and I enjoyed the cleverness and light tone so much that I was quite taken aback by the Princess's blinding and rather surprised that Gaston could redeem this horrible event so effectively.

I found "The Woodsman" to be delicious and "The Troll Boy," while not at all what I expected from the opening paragraphs, was a real delight. I also thoroughly enjoyed Lavinger's "In Pursuit Of Precious Things," though the illustration of the radiant princess overpowered the very short story a bit.

I had problems with the logic of "Talking Sword" -- would a wizard really give up immortality for such reasons? I think not. I also had trouble with "Mohawk" stylistically; I felt I had some idea where Rampp wished to take the tale and it required putting me inside his hero's skull -- unfortunately, I was never quite able to fit inside and I was distracted by the profusion of ellipsis. On the other hand I was especially delighted by B. Callahan's illustration of the story.

I enjoyed Christopher's retelling of African myth (I believe something similar appears in Chinese myth but I am no expert) but I noticed it's easier for me to read the non-justified columns; I also found the type a little small.

I preferred Anderson's "In The House Of Good Fortune" to her "Accuser," but perhaps I found the religious symbolism a little heavy for my taste. Conversely, while I expected Charles de Lint to trash the Christian faith after reading his intro, I was pleased with the balance and his portrayal of the priest.

Finally, I found Jomil Mulvey's poem a real gem; why did you hide it on the last page? Even with some quibbles about art and layout I found The Mythic Circle #1 to be an excellent beginning.

Frances Garland
Miles City, Montana

We didn't really hide Jomil's poem on the last page...we were at the end of layout and that's just where it seemed to fit best. We could have left it out, but, hey! that's a good poem.

Congratulations on a fine start on Mythic Circle. I particularly enjoyed "The Princess In The Teflon Slipper," because one of my favorite subgenres is the respectful fairytale parody. To be ideal, an item in this field must be both parody of the standard fairytale and its motifs, and a good example of literary fairytale in its own right. The two finest examples of this in print are Tanith Lee's Dragon Hoard (Ace, \$2.95 pb) and Jane Yolen's Sleeping Ugly (Putnam, \$4.95 pb, 1981). Perhaps not a classic, but very funny and charming, is Chelsea Quinn Yarbro's Baroque Fable (Berkeley, \$3.50 pb, 1986).

Great luck with future issues, and don't neglect to add Christine and Lynn's illustrations to future issues out of false modesty; they are very good and appropriate. Those who enjoyed

Pendred Noyce's "Woodsman" as much as I did may want to listen to another sensitive variation on Little Red Riding Hood on Nancy Schimmel's fine storytelling record, Plum Pudding (Sister's Choice label).

Anne Osborn
Riverside, CA

Anne Osborn is a professional librarian and dedicated specialist in children's literature -- could you tell?! Thanks for the info, Anne!

Hooray for the first issue of Mythic Circle! I think that the idea of having a writers' round-table in print is a splendid one. However, I do feel a little shy about giving criticism when I haven't any manuscripts to offer in return. (I did go through my files hoping to find something, but the only things I've written in the past few years are parodies heavy with in-jokes and personal references. How do the editors feel about criticism from noncontributors?)

Three Blessings - Christopher

This was charming and, happily, no longer than it should have been. The only flaw I see in this kind of thing is that it doesn't make much sense unless the reader knows the baby is J.R.R. Tolkien. But that shouldn't be a problem for the readership of Mythic Circle.

The Woodsman - Noyce

My problem with this story is a philosophical one. Now mind you, I'm not the sort who finds divine retribution every time a character sneezes or stubs his toe. I am supremely comfortable with the concept that bad things sometimes happen to really nice or innocent people. But in this story the author seems to have deliberately presented his protagonist's misfortunes as retribution. Yet there is no clearly presented reason why the woodsman is being punished. I dimly sense that it is connected with the killing of the wolf, but I don't see why. I really feel that the philosophical underpinnings of a story like this should be just a little clearer to the average reader.

On the plus side, I compliment Noyce on his pregnant style and the ominous way the story builds. One small and unconvincing detail: with the approach of winter I would imagine that the price of firewood would be rising, not falling. But then, I'm just a city girl

Talking Sword - Schabel

I really enjoy this sort of story, where the fantastic intrudes upon the mundane. And humor! There's not enough of that in fantasy fiction. I found myself galloping through to the end despite minor flaws.

Criticisms: Don't apologize for a character who doesn't swear. Being obscene is not yet mandatory, either in life or in fiction. Besides, it's better to let readers get to know the characters first hand by what they say and do, rather than by having the author pointing out their characteristics and explaining them. I'd also steer clear of any dialect I wasn't sure I could handle. (I don't mean the sword. The sword is such a unique character that I'll accept almost anything there.) But take the two thugs on page

19. I think they'd be better off speaking standard English. Especially since one moment they're talking like poorly played gangsters in a cheap movie and the next they're saying, "Quiet! Here comes our victim."

I liked Mardrex and I was charmed by his predicament. I also loved the way the story ended.

In Pursuit Of Precious Things - Lavinger

I thought this was wonderfully done. Just the right length, charmingly turned phrases. Maybe not really fantasy, but a good use of the furniture. I hope she'll have another piece in Mythic Circle soon.

Mourning Light - Gaston

I think this story would really benefit from tighter writing. It's too long. I love his clever, funny phrases, but I think he needs to watch out that he doesn't use too many or use them needlessly. Wasn't it Samuel Johnson who said that when revising his work an author should mark all those phrases which he particularly admires and then cut them out? I don't think I'd go that far. But it's advice I try to keep in mind when I revise my own stuff.

The Troll Boy - Rossman

Well, I've saved the best for the last, so to speak. I think this story is really well written. With many of the stories in the issue, I found myself mentally recasting sentences as I read them. But not with The Troll Boy. I wondered if Rossman might have invented a more trollish word to use instead of "homicidal", but that's a mere quibble. At first, I did have some qualms about the story-within-a-story framework. But it worked. The only thing is, I was expecting the storyteller to turn out to be Rig in disguise. But my familiarity with Norse Mythology is minimal, so it's entirely possible that Dag really is Rig and I was too ignorant to notice.

Alyson Parker
Canoga Park, CA

Wow! Nice long letter that, full of good observations and criticism. Thank you, bless you, and keep writing! As for non-contributor's responding, we feel fine about it -- in fact, we actively encourage it. The skills of writing, editing, and critiquing work don't necessary overlap and it would be dreadful to deny the right to do one simply because a soul didn't do the others...

About "The Woodsman," this is an interesting response on your part, as it's a completely different reading than mine -- I don't see it as retribution nearly so much as a loss of a special kind of resonance that the woodsman shared with the woods and the wild and the wolf. Killing the wolf established once and for all his alignment with his species, as a 'civilized' being and, therefore, no longer in complete harmony with the wild.

I'd like to say, first off, that I'm glad Mythic Circle has come into existence! There seem to be very few places non-professional (pre-professional?) fantasy writers can go to get their material in print, and get any kind of response.

I was prepared for the first issue to contain a few cute-fairy-tales or Tolkien clones.

"The Princess In The Teflon Slipper" kind of fits the first label; though there were good laughs, there was a lot of silliness where there could have been wit.

I was delighted to see a story by Charles de Lint, whose books I enjoy, but I don't think I need to waste space commenting on his work. I thought that "Mourning Light" was nearly as good -- the prose was the best in the magazine, with humor keeping an otherwise straightforward-seeming story firmly this side of cliché. I had some problems with the motivation of characters in the middle of the tale (it seemed to be edging toward farce) but that is a small quibble.

Another story I found very impressive was "The Accuser," whose exquisitely slow pace intensified very little action.

My next favorite was "The Troll Boy." I liked everything about this tale, except it seemed to me that a crucial element was left out: why did Agnar come to be the way he did? (Could it be the author has another story in that?) Tied with that was the short-but-delightful "In Pursuit Of Precious Things."

I felt very ambivalent about "The Woodsman," though I read it with fascination. Like the

movie "Dragonslayer," I find 20th Century lack of morals or lack of *raison d'être*, when cobbled awkwardly into the form of fairy tales, to be just dreary and disappointing. Why bother? There's enough of that in mainstream lit.

"Talking Sword" had a good idea, but needed some heavy editing, I felt. The prose was unnecessarily clumsy. "Mohawk" was fun, at first, but didn't seem to know where it was going.

Lest I sound too critical in this first response, I will stop at that, and add that I read everything here with interest. I was also pleased to see the "Youth" section, and I hope you will continue with it!

Thanks for doing what looks like a LOT of work.

Mary-Edith Bridges
Seattle, WA

How nice to have someone recognize the labor -- it's not all glory days and champagne. In fact, there's been no champagne whatsoever! Waiter, waiter-- Over here!

THE SHATTERED WIZARD

by

Ronald C. Morgan II

Arthur O'Malley, travelling through Ireland to visit his brother, came to a sign near the entrance of a forest. The sign read, "Warning! Haunted Forest."

"Haunted forest," Arthur thought, "what nonsense!"

He passed the sign and entered the forest. After several yards, he saw another sign. "Last warning. Come no further."

He passed the sign and pushed his way

through tall weeds and vines that blocked his path. After some time, he came out into a clearing.

about a hundred feet away was a huge mansion, very old, and starting to sag at one side. It looked like the perfect place for someone to hide a treasure, which was obviously the only reason to try to keep people away, unless you believed in ghosts.

He crossed the field and climbed the

