
Trinket Trader
of
~~BOGUS~~ Artefacts
CYBERPAPER
S.C.Chan

Trinket Trader of Bogus Artefacts

TTBA Magazine - Michaelmas 2024 (February 2025)

A production of the Cambridge University Science Fiction Society

hereafter CUSFS

TRINKET TRADER OF BOGUS ARTEFACTS

TTBA Volume ??? Issue !!!

COVER ART

Smiley Chan 1

CHAIRBEING AND EDITORS' ADDRESSES

Emily Betts and Sol Dubock 4

ORIGINAL FICTION

The Worm 30

POETRY

Noston / Libation / Piglet / Girl, Woman / Maenadica / Little Hippodameia / Apaturia 17

CHAINWRITING

No Gods. No Masters. No Bedtime 5

My Undying Love: A Letter To Elizabeth 12

Memoire Of A Restless Spirit 19

Túrin Turambar's Batting Average 24

Editor's Address

Coming at you from… the LEFT side of the page? Wait, that can't be right!

It's always nice to see the rest of CUSFS going well, but of course from my humble position as magazine editor it's even nicer-er to see the TTBA going well. This has, as always, been a ridiculous issue with overly silly stories that would never otherwise be written – that is to say, it's perfect!

This term we see ancient fantasy games of rugby, bright green crocs, a gang of commercial-suitable riotous children, and some really rather nice poetic prose in the non-chainwriting department.

We've had several delays to the publication of this issue (as always, I blame the Lizard Men of Anteres IV), but after a busy term of writing it's here! Look forward to reading all that everyone has written, and look even more forward to all there is still to come in the magazines of the future.

In similar news: the past! We've recently been looking back, hearing from CUSFSers of old from WorldCon and this past year marking the 50th anniversary of the Jomsvikings – this society shows resilience like no other and I'm sure will continue for evermore (until the Great Robot Uprising, of course) ((in which I'm certain that CUSFS will be taken over by hyper-intelligent machines like vacuum cleaners and microwaves)).

Until then, have fun and stay creative!

Axes and Alchemy,

Sol Dubock, TTBA Editor 2024-25

Chairbeing's Address

HEAR YE HEAR YE, for once again the Chairbeing's address be upon us, though the Chairbeing underneath their Chairbeingly hat of office has assumed rather a different form from when last you saw them!

Congratulations, you've all survived the strange mix of disorientating-exhilarating that makes up the term of Michaelmas, and what a term it has been! We've frightened freshers at the Freshers' Fair (and even managed to enthrall a few of them to our power!). We have cajoled horror author Jonny Sims into our lecture hall and threatened him with questions about his opinions on Bangor. We have Dungeoned our Dragons with CURTS on film nights, valiantly ventured even beyond the constraints of Cambridge with a trip to Comic Con, and explored the myriad magical worlds of the British Library. We have even, through a combination of exuberance, lyricism and utterly scientific arguments, beaten the dead horse that is the wetness and dryness of various properties until it fully reanimated and now, in a quantum state of dampness and desiccation, roams out beyond Girton braying balefully in the February chill and gloom.

For this coming Lent term, look out for a truly spectacular slate of movies (featuring one which has been *highly* requested), some swaps with other fantastic societies, unendingly more ridiculous discussions, a speaker event which shall remain mysterious, and, of course, the traditional murder of the sun and subsequent wailing and gnashing of teeth (Star Wars marathon), the almighty Jomsaefmalisdagr.

Thanks as always to the weird and wonderful citizens of CUSFS-- I remain eternally delighted by this strange little society and its incredible history. As always, I look forward to the wonders of TTBA and the incredible talent and lurid creativity we have, through cruel stratagem and intense persistence, chained within its pages (*that's how chainwriting works, right?*)

Your Chairbeing chasing the worm as it wriggles onwards on its string, perennially out of reach—

Emily Betts, Chairbeing 2024-2025

No Gods. No Masters. No Bedtime

Sol Dubock, Dr Waverly Weird, Macrophage, Rosalind Mackey, Niamh Tobin, Alex Colesmith, canmom (Bryn Dickinson), and Anon

CW: Guns, Violence Against Children, Strong Language

♫ [Energetic, upbeat music plays.] ♪

NARRATOR:
"Hey kids! Are you ready to be the most radical, *dangerous* kid on the block? Are the bullies at school getting you down, and you think it's time they get put in their place? Introducing… The Bully Blaster 5000!"

[The screen erupts with colours as the Model ST-52 laser gun (a discontinued model as used by the Alliance's armed forces between the years XX24-XX28) appears in its centre.]

NARRATOR:
"Zap your way through boring homework assignments and your mom's *terrible rehydrated lasagna* with REAL supercharged lasers! This gun is guaranteed to leave scorch marks wherever you fire!"

[A scene of 10-year-old CHILD 1 wielding the Model ST-52 laser gun plays. CHILD 2 is seen cowering in the corner as 'CRASH!' and 'ZAP' comic bubbles spin into frame.]

CHILD 1:
"Hahahaha! That's what you get for messing with my drone!"

[The screen freezes on a static image of CHILD 2.]

TORRES [J-CUT]:
So yeah, uh, that's what we've got. Pretty good, right?

[TORRES laughs awkwardly.]

PULL BACK FROM SCREEN

INTERIOR – BOARD ROOM

[TORRES is standing, awkwardly, shuffling her cyber-papers next to the screen. (Cyber-papers are like regular papers, but transparent, and with 'cyber-paper' written at the top.) A battered Model ST-52 laser gun lies on the desk in gaudy packaging. The room is circular, and large green tanks surround the central table, with dimly seen bodies of the EXECUTIVES floating within. The CELESTIAL PRESIDENT stands on a much-too-large throne opposite TORRES; he is a child maybe eight years old, with the mannerisms of a much older man.]

CELESTIAL PRESIDENT
Toes, was it? Yeah, I fucking love it. Marvellous, marvellous. How much do you need?

EXEC 1:
Sir, you can't possibly—

CELESTIAL PRESIDENT
I can possibly and I will. I have the mandate of heaven.

EXEC 2:
It's true, he does.

EXEC 1:
Sir, surely you understand dead kids can't buy toys.

CELESTIAL PRESIDENT
Au contraire, my friend. This is just the thing to shore up our limb replacement line. Shields, life insurance - it's marvellous, gains across the board. What do I always tell you, Jane?

EXEC 1:
[She sighs.] Integrated thinking is wintegrated thinking, sir.

CELESTIAL PRESIDENT
Attagirl.

[He makes a finger-gun gesture at the camera.]

CELESTIAL PRESIDENT
Pew pew.

MATCH CUT; PULL BACK FROM MAGAZINE COVER

EXTERIOR – ABANDONED CHEMICAL PLANT

[The VAT RATS, all children in their early teens or younger, stand in loose formation. They are wearing broken cameras on their heads, and a variety of scrappy armour made from bits of pipe and similar detritus; each one is carrying a ST-52 laser gun. VANESSA SUPPRESSOR, their leader, is standing on an overturned box, wearing an officer's hat that is a bit too large for her. She's holding a magazine in her hands, showing the President doing the finger-guns gesture. As we pull back, she burns the magazine with her laser.]

REVOLUTIONARY COMMANDER VANESSA "THE PROFESSOR" SUPPRESSOR
All right, you skibidi little shits. *[Loud cheer.]* Everyone enjoying our beloved president's little gifts?

[The VAT RATS shout and stamp, firing volleys of lasers into the air, cutting lines through the chemical plant.]

VANESSA SUPPRESSOR
Based. Let's cause some havoc in Heaven!

[More cheers. Shouts of "Vanessa!", "Professor!" and "Suppressor!" and one rogue shout of "Confessor!"]

"Now, you all know the deets, but just to make ten thousand percent clear. We go in. We do the job. We get out. Vat Rats don't get caught in traps."

[Cheers.]

"But like, seriously. His Presidential Babyfacedness will have set a whole shitload of gnarly traps. We gotta be even more low key than usual. This isn't just another game of *capture the swag*. This is life or death. So…"

[She hesitates. Cut to close up shot of VANESSA.]

VANESSA SUPPRESSOR:
[More quietly.] "Come back alive. It's better to survive than to die for victory."

[Cut to over the shoulder shot, VANESSA out of focus in the foreground facing away from the camera, VAT RATS in focus in the background. During the scene, the camera moves around in a smooth curve to end up facing VANESSA from the back of the crowd.]

VANESSA SUPPRESSOR:
[She shouts.] "Vat Rats, it's time. FREEDOM FOR KIDS!"

VAT RATS
[Also shouting.] "FREEDOM FOR KIDS!"

VANESSA SUPPRESSOR
"THE END OF OPPRESSION!"

VAT RATS
"THE END OF OPPRESSION!"

VANESSA SUPPRESSOR
"DOWN WITH THE PRESIDENT!"

VAT RATS
"DOWN WITH THE PRESIDENT!"

VANESSA SUPPRESSOR
[Grimly.] "Let's go."

[VANESSA readies her gun and jumps down from the crate. She sets off at a jog away from the chemical plant, the VAT RATS running after her.]

SCENE CUT BACK TO THE HEADQUARTERS WHERE CELESTIAL PRESIDENT IS BASED

SETTING – INSIDE THE AIR VENTS OF THE HEADQUARTERS
[KEIJI and MILO, two members of the VAT RATS, are undercover inside the vents of the headquarters, waiting for the arrival of VANESSA SUPPRESSOR and the rest of the group. They both huddle in a crouched position, looking down the air vent at the office below them.]

KEIJI

[Annoyed, looking at MILO.] "Will you just stop that?" [Whispered.] "What part of *super important undercover mission that will end the oppression* do you not understand?"

MILO

[Ignoring KEIJI, breathing in and out rapidly.] "We're ok. We **are** ok."

[He looks down the air vent to see a restricted view of the office below, a girl, around ten years old, walks past in a white lab coat, a pile of cyber-papers in hand.]

MILO

[Panicked whisper.] "Oh my god, we are not ok. She is so going to see us and we will get arrested and then our plan will fail and the Vat Rats will get caught and everything will literally go down in flames thanks to" –

KEIJI

"Oh my god, will you just shut the hell up? Why did you come with me if you were going to cause a scene like this?"

[KEIJI looks down at MILO to check if he still has the SONIC BOOMER 3000 on him.]

KEIJI

"Instead of making this much noise, what you *should* be doing is checking to see if that thing is ready for when the Vat Rats get here."

[The SONIC BOOMER 300 is a device used to, in short, cause a sonic boom against totally bad enemies.]

MILO

[Wiping sweat from his temple and taking off the broken camera and headphones off his head.] "I can't do this. I feel like I'm going to faint in here… it's dark, it smells funky and my heart is pounding so hard I might just throw up that dehydrated mint choc chip sundae any sec-"

KEIJI

"Do NOT do that. Do I need to go over the very basic plan all over again?"

MILO

[Eyes widened, still in a state of panic.] "BASIC plan? What part of being trapped in a smelly metal air vent and waiting for the alarm to go off before we dive down and distract the security is *BASIC*? [Closes eyes and sighs.] Like *I* can end the oppression."

KEIJI

[Rolling eyes in annoyance.] "Look. We have made it inside a top-level security head office and made it inside this air vent. Now all we have to do is wait for the Vat Rats. to get here and set off the alarm on arrival, signalling for us to dive down and set off the SonicBoomer 3000 as a distraction while Vanessa Suppressor and the others head to the board room for the Celestial President. It's quite simple actually."

MILO

[Humourless laugh, grabbing the ends of his hair in frustration.] "Yes. Yes, very simple indeed. So very simple. [His whispers now growing louder.] SO SIMPLE THAT"-

[MILO gets cut off with the sound of a loud and distinct alarm blasting across the premises, lights flickering below on the ground, lighting up the air vent in waves of red and illuminating KEIJI and MILO'S faces.]

[KEIJI and MILO'S hands remain still on the vent, looking below at the crowd of workers and teenage security guards running around in confusion, screams and shouts heard in the distance.]

KEIJI

[Looking up at MILO with a smirk on his face, red light on his features as he adjusts the headphones over his ears and slowly reaches for the SONICBOOMER 3000.]
"It's time, my friend."

SCENE CUT TO AN EMPTY HALLWAY, VIEW CENTRED ON A SECURELY CLOSED DOOR LABELLED "LAB"

[All sound is muffled, due to being on the other side of the closed door.]

[A rat (the animal, rather than a Vat Rat) wanders onto screen. It is wearing an appropriately sized business suit, with matching cyber-tie (glowing in neon colours that match the Celestial Presidents' throne.]

[The Business Rat sniffs around the bottom of the securely closed door.]

[Beat]

[The Securely closed door bursts outwards with the power of the SONIC BOOMER 3000, knocking away the Business Rat.]

♫ [The blast of the SONIC BOOMER 3000 sounds remarkably like an epic sick guitar riff, kick-starting a totally rocking musical track.] ♪

[Through the formerly securely closed door we see carnage. Technicolour laser bolts fire from both sides (Vat Rats on the right and the holy bond thralls of the Celestial Emperor on the left) flying over upturned desks, slowly leaking chemicals and sparking electro-tools.]

VANESSA SUPPRESSOR:
[*Offscreen.*] Vat Rats, CHARGE!

[A large group of Vat Rats run down the corridor right to left. Some of them are wearing crude disguises stolen from bond thrall guards, but are still identifiable by their broken camera and speaker headwear.]

[Through the doorway the laser fire from the Vat Rats' side peters out.]

VANESSA SUPPRESSOR:
[*Offscreen, but the other side this time.*]
Vat Rats, RETREEEAAAT!

[The same group of Vat Rats runs back down the corridor left to right. Some are injured and clutching wounds. Amongst them is the Business Rat, with its own tiny broken camera Vat Rat helmet.]

[By this point, the music has morphed into more of a rock-horror style, as the plan spirals out of control. A low rumble grows, before a group of around 10 large, mechanoid suits stomp down the corridor in pursuit of the Vat Rats. Their arms have mounted on them various impractical yet awful weapons, including a large spinning table-saw blade and a huge cannon-like tube with HYPERSONIC BUBBLE BLASTER written in light pink block capitals on the side.]

[Cut to view in front of the lead mech suit, looking into its cabin. The other suits are visible in the background, still stomping along. The slightly tinted cabin glass makes it hard to make out anything inside them. However, in the lead suit we have a close-up on, it is easy enough to make out THE CELESTIAL PRESIDENT inside the mech.]

CELESTIAL PRESIDENT:
[Cackling maniacally.] I SMELL… A RAT!!!!

[The CELESTIAL PRESIDENT stops laughing and a look of horror washes over his face.]

CELESTIAL PRESIDENT:
[Addressing Business Rat.] Lehalashain? [Horror is swiftly replaced by rage.] You would BETRAY ME??

[Cut to the Business Rat, which squeaks in horror before increasing its pace, outrunning several Vat Rats running alongside it. As the Business Rat shrinks, pulling ahead of the camera, we hear the signature Epic Riff of the SONICBOOMER 3000, followed by a deep cry of frustration and anguish from the CELESTIAL PRESIDENT.]

[Cut back to the view of the CELESTIAL PRESIDENT's mech suit. The camera pulls back slowly, revealing that one of the knees of the suit has been bent badly out of shape, as if hit from behind by a huge impact. The CELESTIAL PRESIDENT looks absolutely livid. As the camera moves to one side slightly, it reveals a figure standing some distance behind the group of mech suits.]

[Whip zoom in on the figure. We see that it is KEIJI, the SONICBOOMER 3000 held before him, and a look of total shock and fear on his face. His mouth is a comical “o” shape.]

MILO:
“Keiji!”

VANESSA SUPPRESSOR:
“Keiji?”

KEIJI:
“Fuck.”

[The CELESTIAL PRESIDENT’s mech suit lurches forward, its weapons whirring and glowing back into life.]

CELESTIAL PRESIDENT:
“You think that’s a blast? No, I’ll show you a blast. Let’s see what happens when kids play with FIRE!”

[Before KEIJI can even move or raise his weapon, the CELESTIAL PRESIDENT’s mech suit fires a blinding plasma ray straight into his chest. The force throws KEIJI backwards into a wall, the SONICBOOMER 3000 clattering to the floor beside him.]

[MILO rushes to Keiji’s side.]

MILO:
[Now in a very different tone to before.]
“Keiji!”

KEIJI:
[Clutching his chest, cackling with sparks.]
“Milo… just finish this…”

[The CELESTIAL PRESIDENT, grinning, takes another step forward in his damaged mech.]

[With a roar, MILO charges forward, the SONICBOOMER 3000 in hand, and activates the weapon. The deafening, earth-shaking blast reverberates through the building and strikes the mech suit directly in its core, ejecting the CELESTIAL PRESIDENT from the cockpit in a fountain of sparks. He thuds to the ground in a daze, as MILO stumbles forward, brandishing the SONICBOOMER.]

MILO:
“Give it up. We win.
[He approaches the CELESTIAL PRESIDENT.]
Freedom always wins.”

[The CELESTIAL PRESIDENT, thrown face-down to the ground, staggeringly pushes himself up. He coughs, and wipes a trail of blood from his forehead and nose.]

CELESTIAL PRESIDENT:
“Freedom? Freedom against what? Tell me what… some vague, ill-defined oppression?”

MILO:
“Vague? It’s you! You’re the oppression! You… literally sell guns to children.”

CELESTIAL PRESIDENT:
“Yeah. And you’re using them. Talking about “freedom” - I gave you that “freedom”!
[In a lowered voice.]
You know that I’m not “forcing” anything onto anyone, I’m just giving the people what they want. What you want. Destruction, pain, chaos. You’ve never opposed it! No, you crave it. All of it.

MILO:
“That’s not true. It’s a sacrifice! We… we have no choice.”

CELESTIAL PRESIDENT:
“There’s always a choice.”

VANESSA:
“Yes.” [She points her own gun at the CELESTIAL PRESIDENT.]

VANESSA (cont):
"If I'd had any other choice, I would have made it. Do you think if I'd had the option of asking adults for their help, I'd have rejected them in favour of these children? I'd have rejected competent adult help and used child soldiers?"
[She laughs harshly.]
"What a fucking joke you are."

CELESTIAL PRESIDENT:
"Now, easy there, Vanessa."
[He raises his hands.]
"You can't blame me for *that* one. That was your idea. God forbid – oh, wait, I *didn't* forbid it – that we have hormones on the battlefield."
[The CELESTIAL PRESIDENT crouches down and talks to MILO, conspiratorially.]
"When did you last see an adult, Milo? When did you last feel like you were growing up? When did you lose your parents?"

MILO:
[confused]
"But we don't have parents. We're the Vat Rats."

VANESSA:
"Please – Milo – don't listen to him. Just step away. I'll explain this all later, I promise, but just let us finish this first"

CELESTIAL PRESIDENT:
"You stay out of this, Captain Fucking Hook! Leave the poor little lost boy to me – the one who never grew up because of you!"
[His hand closes on MILO's wrist – it's the size of an eight-year-old's, but with all the hatred of a forty-year-old man compressed into it.]
"I'll tell you what she did. She's the Suppressor. She stopped every child on Earth from growing up. But now it's eternal playtime-"
[He pulls another laser pistol from his pocket, pointing it at Vanessa]
"-and I'm the one who says what the rules are."

VANESSA:
[desperate]
"Let Milo go, you piece of shit!"

CELESTIAL PRESIDENT:
"You grew these children to fight me! You made them in your fucking lab!"
[He hits MILO in the side of the face with the pistol.]
"You raised an army of monsters! And all because you couldn't live with what you'd done, and I was the only one with the strength to see it through-"

[He staggers. A hole the size of a grapefruit, edged in smoking sparks, opens up in his chest.]

KEIJI:
[defiant, still clutching his gun in one hand]
Don't… call my friends… monsters…
[He collapses backwards, dead.]

[The CELESTIAL PRESIDENT's grip loosens on MILO's wrist, and he slumps to the ground. MILO rushes to hug VANESSA. She strokes his hair and just holds him; for the first time, her age seems to sit heavy on her.]

VANESSA:
"I'm sorry… I'm so, so, sorry…"

MILO:
"It's okay. You didn't make the monsters."
[He glances at the CELESTIAL PRESIDENT.]
"They got in by themselves. But monsters are there to be killed."

VANESSA:
"That's right."
[She begins to lead MILO away through the empty, echoing corridors.]
"Once upon a time, there was a dying world, and a very desperate woman."
[Her voice fades slowly as the two of them move out of shot.]

VANESSA (cont):

"And she had a terrible, terrible choice to make. She tried to save the world – to save people – by keeping them as children for longer. Just so they could survive cryogenics-"

MILO:

[interrupting]

"Can't adults survive cryogenics?"

VANESSA:

"We're not tough enough, sweetheart. That's why I needed you."

[She sighs.]

"But the thing about science is that sometimes it goes wrong. Sometimes, people's best isn't good enough."

[We slowly drift out of focus, past the entrails of the company, into the wider world.]

VANESSA:

[narrating in the background]

"And some people went wrong. They didn't stay as children, but they didn't quite develop into adults, either. So I had to try and fix things."

MILO:

"And I helped fix things? And Keiji?"

VANESSA:

"Better than I would have been able to on my own. But still. I'm sorry."

MILO:

"That's okay."

[The BUSINESS RAT appears, sniffing around. It sits up on its hindquarters and begins to talk to the camera.]

BUSINESS RAT:

"As for where I come in… ah, well. That's a different tale."

[It winks.]

"But I don't think Vanessa will mind too much if I try and retell it…"

Editor's Review

This one was a lot of fun, and I think a great example of the kind of thing that can be made in the TTBA but would never otherwise be made! Who'd've expected that what started as an advert for a laser gun would soon involve mech-battles, business rats, and a surprisingly soul-destroying ending? I can only wonder who will star as THE CELESTIAL PRESIDENT when this does get successfully adapted for the stage.

Author Reviews

"I think the choice of telling it like a playscript was an interesting one, and worked surprisingly well - it meant we were never bogged down in description, and had to write characters solely through dialogue, which is a very useful trick!" - Alex Colesmith

"What a wild ride! This was so much fun to read, with well fleshed out characters and a thrilling plot. The antagonist was one of the best parts for me, a hilarious caricature who still managed to be all too realistic. And the chase scenes – in retrospect, there was no way this chain was getting finished without some ridiculous (affectionate) chase scenes." - Rosalind Mackey

My Undying Love: A Letter to Elizabeth

Wayne H, Mystaya Bremaud, Sol Dubock, Tessa Barcelo, Milamber, Alex Colesmith, and Tom Heger

CW: Murder, False Imprisonment

To my most beloved daughter, Elizabeth, regarding the unfortunate circumstance that shall prevent my return home for the holidays this year,

As you well know, I have been on this trading voyage for some months now. I continue to be determined to make a good living for our family, and I just know that all of my quality wares will soon find a loving home. That said, I must admit that the pervasive problem I've been finding is that many do not consider my wares to be "quality" at all.

As of late, I've heard them referred to as "useless trinkets", "nonsensical baubles" and just plain "frippery" and I must say that nothing has ever charged me so offended. Does no one in this day and age care for a good Moustache Warmer? Do people not consider the (notable and varied) benefits that may come from a Teddy Bear Puffer-Upper?

Why, only last week, I found myself upon the doorstep of a manor house in Hereford, upon which I was explaining to a lady all the time that she would save through the deployment of a Mechanikal Bath Sponge (of course with the necessary caveat that it must not get *too* wet, or risk the springs seizing up and the whole thing ceasing to function) when she had the audacity to *laugh* at me. I heard her try to explain that she didn't need something so frivolous and that nothing could possibly beat the scrubbing power of a determined handmaid. Of course, I have heard such things before and so tried to explain that the time saved by this handmaid could be spent on other tasks for the house such as preparing one's clothes for the day and cleaning the neglected rooms of the house (intending to use this as an opportunity to raise the Extending-Grip Mop for hard-to-reach spots), but I was quickly turned away before any of my persuasion could set in.

Encounters such as this are noteworthy only for their commonplace nature; they are not the reason I'm corresponding with you today. In point of fact, I must admit that the main reason I write to you comes from a series of events that led me to vending in the court of the King himself.

I don't know what, or how much, they tell you about the United Kingdom of Southern Britain and Widdershin Faerie in school these days. It is a curious place – not altogether wholesome for the constitution, I suspect, as many people have to spend much of their time at the seaside to recover their health. Of course, this does not apply to peasants and Low Fae, who – from what little I have seen among the countryside before the carriage-driver whipped on the beasts – seem to be hearty, sturdy folk with rustic accents, twinkling blue eyes, and red cheeks. Doubtless such an exposure to the rude health of the Kingdom's countryside is beneficial, perhaps over several generations as the writings of High Wizard Erasmus Darwin suggest. (This I am *sure* they don't tell you in school. I have a copy in my study that you may borrow, if you are interested.)

Be all that as it may, I spent several weeks travelling through the twin cities of London and London Underground when I first got here. It is a strange place for one so used to mechanikal wonder as we are here in the fine United Colonies, but not a particularly dangerous one; most magicks are harmless little things, certainly aboveground, and I consider London itself far safer than some of the outskirts of Saint Lawrence. As far as I know, no wendigo has ever been spotted in London.

London Underground, however, is rather different. To begin with it hangs from the ceiling – except that even that isn't quite true. To anything except a living being, London Underground is built on the floor of a vast cavern, in tall stalagmites. At the top of each one lies the townhouse of one of the wealthy families, and

below it, the many carven homes of the Fae that serve them.

To a living being such as myself, of course, it seems the other way up. Water flows upwards here; everything except us falls up until it hits the cavern ceiling, from which the towers of London Underground hang. Fliers, such as the winged Fae, have the greatest advantage here, but I have not yet perfected my Rotary-Winged Ornithopter and so had to stick to the narrow copper bridges that traversed the spans between the stone towers. (Iron, of course, is a mortal insult to half the citizens of the United Kingdom, and is forbidden within its borders. This at a stroke removed many of my wares from being saleable, and I had to abandon them at Customs; I have no doubt that they are now in the Black Market.)

This ordeal with Customs having left my infini-case rather lighter than I would have liked, I headed straight to London Underground (called, for some unbeknownst reason "The Tube" by many of the common folk here) in the hope of finding one of the treasures that the Fae are rumoured to make. Completely without natural light, the Fae of the Underground have developed some of the most fantastical artwork and inventions.

One such device of which I had only heard rumours of was their spectra-glasses. As you may have heard, Fae eyes cannot see visible light like we humans: instead, they have grown to see the infrared and microwave colours that dominated the Underground before the humans colonised it. To adapt to the human influence in their world, it is rumoured the Fae have developed glasses that allow them to see the visible spectrum. Rumour has it also that if a human wears these such glasses, such a change of countenance and character is observed that would astound even the most sceptical of scientists.

I had decided that such an object would be a priceless addition to my wares, so I ventured to the Great Circle market that loops through the whole Underground. This was not the kind of thing to be found amongst the little trinkets and groceries of such a market, but I hoped a few discrete enquiries might get me on the right path. And alas it did: my dear Elizabeth I almost wondered why they are considered so elusive given how easily I found their sellers that day! So, I sought out the stall I had been told about. It was quite an unsuspecting little place, except the colours of the items they were selling were too strange and discordant to possibly be made by a human.

Perhaps my first mistake was to ask the shopkeeper about the spectra-glasses at the front of the stall, instead of asking to look at an item in their store cupboards below the stall (or above, depending on how you look at it). I noticed that as soon as I mentioned the glasses, a strange gentleman in a black hooded cape started paying a little too much attention to the stall. Knowing as I did the rarity and covetous nature of the object I was trying to obtain, I really should have noticed the King's crest embroidered on his cape. But alas, I did not realise his connections until too late.

At that point, however, my trade appeared to be in great progress. The shopkeeper looked unassuming, humble in expression. They suggested to me that I must have been misled and that in-between their wares there is no such thing like the glamorous glasses I've been seeking. Yet, I found all my previous conversations with the local denizens had prepared me well for this occasion. I was able to quickly change the subject and strike a conversation about weather – it is a truly fascinating compulsion that drives the local Fae to similar discussions even in places such like this, where the only source of weather appears to be rising gusts of winds from the cavern's depths. Our conversation eventually circled back to the shop, and the shopkeeper now appeared slightly more open to discussing business matters. That was my second chance to spot the black-clad gentleman, who was still browsing through the stall nearby.

Alas, I've gotten too excited by the idea of a successful deal to notice him. And so, just as the shopkeeper reached under the stand for a regularly looking

wooden box, the strange persona finally walked over to us, solemn and resolute. “I’m afraid I will have to ask you to follow me. Royal orders.” It was at that moment my situation started to look truly dire. The gentleman didn’t utter as much as a word as he was leading me through the underground city. I only had a glimmer of hope that the stories about the King you surely heard as well, were true.

The rumours, as you surely recall, were that the king was magnanimous, and an avid collector of a varied assortment of trinkets, from the most dazzling of Fae artworks to the most exotic of items created by craftsmen in the colonies. At one point, it was said that the King’s vaults so overflowed with items he had collected, whose origin were not entirely clear to him that he commissioned the founding of an entire city to study their invention, process of creation and how best to put them on display. This, of course, was rumored to be how the city Oxenford was founded. An absolutely horrendous place, if I do say so myself, as I had sought out the city to admire its glamour, with the hope that if anyone in the United Kingdom had any interest in my wares, it would be the resident scholars of Oxenford, only to find it filled with pretentious and self-righteous people who did not know the first rules of mechanikal invention and didn’t care to learn, even as I offered to teach them! So I had left Oxenford in search of more enlightened folk elsewhere, ever more convinced that the rumors regarding the King were untrue.

So it was with mounting dread and trepidation that I was led through the labyrinth which was the Underground, up towards the palace which was the King’s residence (the name of which now eludes me but I could swear must have contained the word ham, or I might just have been hungry when I heard it), and into the King’s presence, only to find, to my delight, that the rumors were indeed true. All around the palace, in the courtroom and bedrooms were hung artworks which shimmered as if alive, and the chandeliers emitted an ethereal glow, too otherworldly to be the work of mere human or Fae.

Most importantly were the mechanikal inventions! Fantastical items which I had heard only as silly stories told in bars and during voyages, such as carriages which moved on their own without outside power whenever a black distance was fed into them, ornithopters and wings a thousand times more complex than the ones I were working on, and brilliant jewelry which were said to grant immense powers to the wearer. On and on these items went, and for a moment, I was convinced that the upcoming meeting might not be so terrible after all. The rumors, however, did not tell the full story.

The throne room was just as vibrant as the rest of the palace. The courtiers lining the walls shimmered with their bold fabrics and hats that curled toward the ceiling like antennae. Their chatter could be heard before even entering the room, but the moment I passed through the doors, a hush fell over the crowd. I was marched down a long aisle in silence. If not for the lack of music and smiling faces, I might have felt as if I was approaching the wedding altar instead of the King’s throne!

This, Elizabeth, brings me to the part of my tale I am sure you have been anxiously awaiting: my meeting with the King. He did not match the rest of his room; he wore head-to-toe black, and his mouth was set in a grim line. The only bit of color in his ensemble was the golden crown that rested atop his curls. As I sank into a curtsy, I had the distant thought that the King was meant to be much older and less handsome than the man I was paying my respects to now.

“You may rise,” he said. I obeyed, fighting to keep my expression neutral. I was more sure than ever that if I checked my coin pouch, the face printed on the silver pieces would not match the one in front of me. This man couldn’t have been more than twenty.

“Do you know why I have called you here today?” There was a slight tremor to his voice, as if he hadn’t quite yet figured out how to make it boom with authority.

I shook my head. “No, Your Majesty.”

He arched a brow. “Are you quite sure?”

“Well, I suppose it might have something to do with my quest for the glamorous glasses, but I really don’t see why—”

This time his voice did boom as he declared, “I hereby arrest you for the murder of King Clorobod.”

The surprise you must feel at reading that accusation shouldn’t make you fear for me, although I did tremble.

I started to defend myself, “Despite my past in mechaniks, I have a deep respect for the work of the Fae, whyever would I want harm to come to the king? Your Highness.” I added the honorific as an afterthought, and quickly continued, “I even carry medicines and healing items specifically to help people, never to harm.”

“My father,” his voice lost its sever reverence as a tremble crept in, “was found dead, and my advisors have expertly analyzed the situation; it could only have been done by someone who knows both worlds,” he started to get angry, and I felt so small as his power commanded me in that place. He continued, “Those glasses were not only for Faeries who wished to see the human world, they could be used by people like you,” he jerked a finger at me, “to see those extra colours, whatever you call them, as only someone who could see my father’s condition would be able to damage him so.”

Guards had arrived, but were waiting on further orders, and the king’s emotions left no room for ordering people about. It also left room for my further self-defence. “Yet I have seen neither king nor glasses, and have been here only nearing a sevenday, just when was the murder?”

The man on the throne seemed mildly bemused, his anger deflated, “But the glasses needed to be obtained,” he turned to one of his advisors, “is this not what you told me?”

“Yes Your Highness, of course” replied the advisor – a rather tall but sickly looking fellow “but I believe there may have been some misunderstanding regarding the reasoning behind summoning this fine tradesperson to our court.”

The king arched an eyebrow. “Yes? Do go on.”

“The council’s came to a vote and decided that what we really need in this investigation is an expert in magickal goods at the street level.” The other advisors surrounding the king nodded at unison at this remark. At this point, the tall fellow turned directly towards me and made eye contact “That is to say, we are asking for your help.”

This is the point in my story that I must admit to you, my dear Elizabeth, that strictly speaking I should not be telling you any of this at all. I have been advised that everything that was spoken about and everything that occurred in this courtroom is strictly confidential and should not be shared with anyone. I am taking a grave risk in sending this letter, but I simply could not go on and lie to my own daughter!

With that in mind, please understand that when another advisor, a short woman in large spectacles, went on to say “Of course, you would be paid handsomely for this endeavour, should you succeed.”, my immediate thought was of our family and how much this would mean for us.

“Wait, wait!” bellowed the king. “We can’t just have a man roaming around asking probing questions in a land that he is clearly not native to. People will start getting suspicious.”

“Absolutely, Your Highness” another of the advisors piped up, this one with a nose that looked like it had been put on back-to-front “- which is why we have proposed an entirely new identity for the fellow. We have Fae magicks that can disguise a person’s face, and we can put together paperwork suggesting that he has always lived in these parts.”

“The only problem being-“ the sickly advisor chimed in, briskly cutting off the previous speaker “- that we would have to explain the disappearance of your current person. Of course, the easy solution here is faking your death.”

My heart sank. I knew what this meant, and that I was now in too deep and didn’t have a choice.

“Does this mean I couldn’t see my family again?” I asked with trepidation.

The king was clearly processing this plan at the same time I was. Eventually, he uttered “All in good time. No child deserves to go without a father”. There was a sting in his breath with the last line, swiftly reminding me of what he must be going through.

“For now, let’s get things started.” the king declared, clearly trying not to linger on that thought. “There is much to do, and no time to waste. Let’s get this man some bedding.”

And that brings us to the present. I am writing this letter to you from the desk of an incredibly lavish chamber overlooking the castle’s courtyard. I am told that news of my death will make it back to the mainland within a sevenday, but I urge you not to believe what you are told. I will try to keep in contact with you, but am unsure what my future holds – just know that as of right now I am eagerly awaiting my new name, and I look tremendously forward to the day where I can see you again.

Sincerely, and with great love,
Your Father - The Man Previously Known As “Arthur Haywood”

Editor’s Review

I’m a big fan of the opening of this “letter” suggesting a mystery (being the reason that the writer won’t return home) and how this builds up throughout the story. It gives a really nice sense of anticipation throughout. How will these trinkets play into it? What about the fae market? I was on the edge of my seat all term waiting to find out.

Author Reviews

“I like it! I think it's really fun, a clever blend of science and fantasy. The letter style makes it an interesting read - we know The Man Formerly Known As Arthur isn't going to die, but that doesn't necessarily mean much... “ - Alex Colesmith

Poetry Exerpts

Emika Jae

Nostos (1)

The stream of your being guides me,
Tadpole beneath the lily pads,
Hungry for the bend.
I feast on your bloodstream,
Spiced with salt and bittersweet kisses.
I am idle amidst the current:
I have no hands with which I may grasp the reeds,
Nor Achilles' swift feet.

Your ox-bow tendencies leave me stranded amongst only myself;
A little black hole,
Greedy for the green heaven.

I do not have your little intricacies:
Pure instinct.

Poseidon Earth-Shaker pours his wrath unto you:
A little storm saddling your nerves.
And you spill, you scream,
You upheave my course along the vena cava
Back down to this slimy pit of acid where we once started.

Libation (2)

I am felt.
Wrap me around your wounds, the boils,
The sticky red pads of your fingers;
The webbing, dripping
With Ganymedes' due.

I am polyester.
I curdle behind the knees, clot behind the ears,
And welt beneath the skin when I need you most —
I melt in the dryer,
Curl over with this want
(despite the label).

I am hide.
I can hear them knocking
I think? that the sickle and I can be friends
I think he plays the flute
I remember his tune from the kitchen radio
From the town square?
From the glass that I'm walking on

I am sticky cotton
The carcass of a lamb,
The trepidation
The brimming
Hands
Of the cupbearer

Piglet (3)

I want you
To bask in this basket of blood,
The fat spitting from the wraps of the skeleton – Athena
Will no longer go hungry. The two of you have hurried,
And I have quieted myself. My neck is mangled,

My effusion nicely angled
To pour by my own feet. My brothers and sisters are buried
Between our bodies on the couch – Proserpina
Offers no grave, no ribbons. Just cold wet mud
And drowning.

Girl, Woman (4)

A nymph in a white dress
Languid and lucid, lapping up a mess
Of dry soil and swallowing rocks in big, fatty fistfuls;

I am looking out
At myself, prised down like Hylas into a great gout
Of cold – curled and crumpled like my bus ticket back home.

I was hoping you'd write me back,
Leaning past the edge with my back to the black
Heaven, so close to my earnest corpse of counsel.

I feel beautiful,
Kissing the stones that split my feet. A silhouette so mutable,
Rigid only for the satisfying spat

Of being torn in two.
A sodden, sorry cue:
Pry or don't.

Atlas would have crumpled where I stand
But I was made for this.

Maenadica (5)

A preacher and his blinking blade,
Once hungry, twice readily afraid;
Looking down
At a lone woman, perched in a pew and dressed in a frown;
One hand laces the jugular, the other graces a faint
Hissing kiss by the temple –
An indignity, really –
Palms pressed together and an earnest pressing pain in the knees;
A clumsy crimson puddle,
Trembling hare;
Kylix,
A white-armed maenad –
Fingers rimmed red,
Ragged robe,
Ecstatic –
And Dionysus himself before the scene:
A command, a plea,
Empty kantharos,
Red wine; a pool of blood;

All the same, sweet.

Little Hippodameia (9)

Sprinting to pace a stroll,
following a man who Disappears behind the bedroom door He's
Pawing at hems and
knotting new threads Streaking
red and blue along the landscape
Thinking of the grass like a rapist And formaldehyde Like
thumbs in the eye sockets
Calluses digging out
innards she can barely
swallow Given the noose wrapped
around her neck Hoping that she might
hang on his words But
he hue-and-cried the sputters He
shovelled the soil and
laid her down He
wept into the wound He
asked
if it was any good?

Apaturia (10)

I sprang from your head
With the lumber of a clean chop,
And the rusty arm of a brute.

Look at me,
With wide wet eyes and clumsy clunky fingers,
Lacing the old bushes with bodies with
Rocky palms and bloody hair,
And little charms like little bottles of liquor.
Each sorry stinking corpse I cradle
While you scrape under my nails,
Digging out the dirt.

Every night I gather all of it,
And I let it sleep under my pillow with a gun.
I always use gum to load it, poking it full of mass,
Pink and sopping, like where I came from like
The boys you don't like and the girls you do.

And I find myself scrambling,
Looking for you in the screw in the pencil sharpener,
Looking again between the dog's jaws,
Looking once more while I pore over the stench in the sink
While your son shovels another head in the freezer.

Eventually I'll find you in a big white van, just down the street.
I'll pay you £15 cash to drive away and I'll never go home again.

Túrin Turambar's Batting Average

Alex Colesmith, The Fatigued, Alex Tickner, Milamber, Joesphine, Aditi Rai Sia, Juliana, and Anon

CW: None

"What if Túrin Turambar was actually a Middle-Order Batsman from 1970s Yorkshire? What if the Fall of Gondolin actually referred to the Fall of the Third Wickét in Australia's First Innings at Adelaide in 1933? What if the Dragon-helm of Dor-lómin was actually a Truefit 3D-Pro E-Line Titanium Cricket Helmet custom -painted for use by Glamorganshire? What if the Oath of Fëanor had actually been sworn by Beoffry Joycott at Craig Gapple during a particularly ill-tempered Test Match at Trent Bridge? And what if "Helcaraxë" was actually Aussie-Qantas-Quenya for "Owzat"?"

[Backdrop of a Starry Firmament]

"There was Deoblegeah Grace, who in Englaland doth be called The Olde Mann, and He firste made the Ainur that were the Ohffspring of his Bát. And He spake to them, eckspoundynge the Bátting Musick, and they Dróve and Pulled before Him and He was Gladde. But the Mightiest of the Ainur began to produce Járring Dischordes. Such as Australia starting to Win the Ashes..."

"Pomdarin blisphimy, Beoffry!" retorted-and-snorted Gil-Galadchrist, Mighty Wickét-Keeping King of the Aussie-Quenya Elves. "You are not the narratar! And the Jarring Discords were all Jugless Dardine… First there was Bradmánvatar, who Down Under in Blessed Arda-sträya was called The Don, and he first made the Eenur that were indeed the Offspring of His Bit... And they sang the Bitting Music before Him, and the Great Fortress of Edgebastonodrim crumbled. But Angry Grumbles began to emerge from a backroom in The Pavilion of the MCC..."

[Widepan shot winding down from the Starry Firmament. Past a winged lightship with "Buy Grey-Nicolls Senior English Willow Bats" plastered on its side. To rolling hills, alive with sheep and outfielders bellowing "Owzaaaat!" at heavily woollen-jumpered Umpires. To a river flowing past a fortress on a hill, and a forest full of Silvan Elves mighty with Bow and Bowling-Arm both! Cut short by a great expanse of smoke and of metal and wheels... Cranks turn, and an endless stream of heavily-laden carts erupt from the surface.]

"BUT I LIKE IT HERE" said the Being of Shadow and Flame, all a-biting the head off an exhausted Pit Pony. "WHAT IS THERE IN IT FOR ME IN GOING TO SUCH A DISTANT LAND? AND WHO ARE YOU TO BID ME SO?"

"Darquness aleaughne is weaughrshipful, and I the Lorde Thereoffe may yet make Other Worldes as Giftes to they as Serve..." replied The Even More Menacing One.

"YOU'VE LOST ME, MATE!"

"Then let Me be Plain. Batsman's Hearts and Wickétkeepers' Jaws are Sweeter Meats than Poor Old Bill in your mouth there..."

"AH!"

"And I have a New Song, called -B-o-d-y-l-i-n-e- Leg Theory, Leg Theory! With which such as you and I shall obtain Plenty of Such..."

Back in the English-Sindarin adaptation, the Golden Sunfruit shines brightly over the Mëlbourne Sky. The Titular Túrin Turambar slightly shifts his stance as the Enormous Dragon runs in to bowl. Túrin taps the

Fizzling Inswinger with his Trademark Black Bat for a Quick Single past Silly Mid-on. Leaving his partner Beleg ‘the Bowler’ Cúthalion to face the next New Ball! By now the Custom-sable Koökaburra-padded Wickedkeeper behind Beleg is no longer bothering to conceal his Tall Spiked Helm under a Matching Black Hood...

"The Ninth Wickét, the Ninth Wickét!" He and the Slip Fielders start to chant in Fell Outback Voices.

"The Ninth Wickét, eh? That can’t be good.” Murmúred Elven-lord Fëanor, the Captain, calling at once for his Assistant, Min. “Tell me, how many Wickéts are there? Is Nine a Lot?”

“Well, sir, Nine is certainly more than Five.”

“Just as I Feared. Those treacherous Orcs, always trying to make Me count past Five. Looks like we’re going to have to get some Wickéts of our own, then. Luckily for us, I have something in Mind.”

As the Elven-lord and his assistant sneak out at dusk (paying no attention to the fact that it had been midday only a moment before), heading vaguely in the direction of the Finést Wickét-Makkérs this side of Helcaraxë, we return our attention to the Cricketéers themselves, who are much more concerned by the sudden disappearance of the Golden Sunfruit and onset of darkness.

As Muttering breaks out about the End of the Age, Túrin Turambar seizes the opportunity to grab a few Wickéts for his own team. Grabbing the Wöödworm-luxury wooden stakes from the ground, he flings them into the net. The umpire, too distracted to focus on the game, merely notes down the extra Wickéts, with no regard for legality.
Whether this move was a blatant disregard of the rules and a Betrayal the honour of Cricketéers, or technically legal under section 4.b of paragraph 71.g of the Rules, is a matter that would continue to be hotly debated by Cricketéerologists for decades to come.

The new Wickéts were planted in the ground, and Cúthalion ran down in anger, staring down Túrin as the ball whipped forward. So entrancéd was he that he saw not that Findíla, the one said to be his hope of success in the inning, was taken off the Field. A Wicked Move, and the Aussie-Quenya Elves would accuse the dragon of magical interference, yet it was too late,

The Dragons’s deception was deep, for Morewin the woman who trained him and Nin, who was as sister to Túrin, had aided in the success of his home team, not the failure. But the truth could never reach him in the field, and so Cúthalion had crystalised Túrin’s resolve. He would leave behind the Elves and return to the land of his father’s house, Door-Loaming.

“Don’t leave, Lord, the match is early and the battle is not yet done.” Captain Fëanor knew yet only more anguish could follow if the orcs had any more advantage.

The Elves threw their whole bodies into the match, hoping to show Túrin that the Golden Sunfruit was not yet cold; that the fight was still in them; that they had energy to play and keep the game.

If only he had stayed with his Trademark Black Bat. Túrin’s mind was a storm of doubt and despair. He saw only the shadows of his lost Wickéts and whispers of broken promises to those who knew him in Door-Loaming. The bat in his head grew heavy, burdened by his memories and the weight of what lay ahead.

“My lord!” Captain Fëanor tried again, this time more urgently.

Túrin frowned further for his doubt was Wicked and Wickéts.

“My lord!” Captain Fëanor cried once more, Golden Sunfruit glittering in his eye. “Door-Loaming will take

no Batter who has not Battered."

Túrin's thoughts wandered to the Constitution of Door-Loaming, article 10, clause 9, section 3, subsection 78 (which was also section 9.8 of paragraph 4 of the Rules):

"No Elven Batter shall return without 100 Wickéts battered to his name. Lest he be bowled over."

Túrin would not be bowled over. His bat raised up in the air with Wickét intent, and Captain Fëanor yelled in triumph, before turning around to make a rude gesture at the most treacherous of dragons.

With one strong strike, Túrin could win this. He need only make the ball turn six hundred and two degrees before it struck the Spiked Helm of the Wicked Kepper, causing him to pitch forward and strike all of the Wickéts as well as all those in reserve behind him. The Corbett manoeuvre had not been seen in three hundred years, but his team was too battered for him not to batter.

And thus it came, the deciding moment. Thou wicked dragon had given up thy position, believing the elves to be lost, to a plucky newcomer called Gúm-Gúm. He picked up his accursed ball, walked 5.2km away (as per the requirements for a new bowler under article 1, clause 1, section 1, subsection 2 "All new bowlers must make thy first pitch from 5.2km away, less they let the opposing batter walk their heart's desire") and let it go. Twirling, bouncing and slicing it came, cutting a deadly shape. Yet Túrin saw true and knew what was required.

And lo he struck, spinning it with a terrifying edge towards the Spiked Helm of the Wicked Keeper. Rotating not six hundred and two degrees, but an impressive twelve hundred and four degrees. The resulting shockwave obliterated the helm, and forced the keep down with a thunderous noise. It was soon noticed that they obliterated not only the required Wickéts, but also a quarter of the stadium behind, and behind that.

Chaos became abound (notable for Drizzt Do'Urden and the rest of his volleyball team in their match against the wicked Akar Kessell and Icingdeath, though that is a tale for another time). Captain Fëanor did yell a "Owwzat" in joy, as all elves celebrated their apparent victory. Alas, Túrin held no joy, merely a grim determination for what was done.

And as such, he was the only one, to notice the fate of poor Beleg. For tho' the Ball had struck true, as ever when Túrin Túrambar Tú-Much-Of-A-Good-Thing was involved, there was some Collateral Damage, and some heavily damaged Collateral. As the Müshrüm Clöüd of dust rose into the sky – and was watched with eager eyes by the filter-feeding Eägles, who like Müshröööms almost as much as hobbits do – not to be confused with the Ëagles, who like singing about Hotels, and were on tour in one of the larger American states at the time – I think it was Texas? – anyway, where was I?

[Cut to the people from three scenes ahead, making helpful Comments such as "Get on with it!" or actually Helpful Comments such as "Beleg was dead!"]

Ah yes. The important thing to remember is that Beleg was dead. As dead as a Door-Loaming-Nail-

[checks notes]

Sorry, wrong story.

[checks notes again]

Yes, the Shockwave came racing towards the Ständs, threatening all the fair Elven maidens sitting there. And also young and somewhat inexperienced Elven men, who were not technically counted among the maidens but had the same general Qualifications, if you get my drift. Beleg hurled himself in front of the Shöckwave (which, as it grew, gained extra ümläüts, a bit like Cäptäïn Fëänör) as if he expected this to do anything to protect the whole stands, which just goes to show that Elves do not understand how Physics works.

This was the ~~Türinsaga Tùrinsaga Turningsaga Touring the World in Comfort With Saga Cruises~~ The Story With Túrin In, Ye Ken Well What I Mean, and that means Mass Death To As Many As Possible, and so all that happened was that Beleg was obliterated into a cloud of Rapidly Expanding Gas first, before the front three rows of Elven Maidens (and inexperienced Elven Men, etc., etc.).

But it was a very Heroic gesture, and he is remembered fondly for it, and has several commemorative statues and a horse-trough named after him in Wooloomooloo.

And Túrin wept, and rent his hair, and flung his Dragon -Helm upon the Twenty-One-Yard Battlefield, and was generally a bit of a Sore Loser at the same time as Captain Fëänör was letting his hair down and being too much of a Stuck-Up Winner. Which was a rather neat trick, considering that they were on the same team.

Now, forever after the tabloids could no longer ship Türin and Bëlëg Cüthäliön, and this is one of the ships that Fëanor caused to go up in flames.

But what Túrin had forgotten was that there were still three more Balls in this Over. If he had been asked at that moment, he would have wept, and probably smote the Questioner with his cricket bat, because he was Like That, and bewailed the fact that he had nobody to go to these Balls with, and that things were indeed Over.

This was because Túrin was not very bright.

The Dragon – whatshisname, you know, the one with the scales and the teeth and so forth – yes, that one – lined up to take the next bowl. He was visible even 5.2 kilometres away, as the World had not yet been made Un-Flat, with the curious result that Arda-Sträylya was not actually antipodean to anywhere because there wasn't anywhere for it to be Antipodean to-

-sorry, yes, anyway, Dragon-

The Dragon lined up to take the next bowl.

In the stands, Ents and Entwives (who hadn't all gone MIA yet) cried for their Yavanna's Blessing. The game had Gone on for so long even the Ents knew, just about, what was going on.

The Mëlbourne Sky glows luminescent—illuminated by the Golden Sunfruit.

The Golden Sunfruit. Why hadn't Túrin thought of This before?

He crept forward, picking up the Dragon-Helm. There was Old Writing scratched inside, from a Dead language, *English*. "All that is gold does not glitter". Did that mean, all the glittered wasn't gold? Whether that was affirming the Consequent or Denying the antecedent, Túrin didn't care. Túrin, as established, wasn't very bright. Logical Fallacies were unimportant.

In the stands, the elves (completely unprompted) began to sing, all in a cacophony of too Flat and too Sharp (singing lessons became compulsory for them in the 2nd Age). But it was the Thought that counted. Túrin knew he had stumbled upon something big—something Life changing. He understood why he had a kinship for the Glowing Golden Sunfruit. It wasn't Vitaminęn D—

Reaching his hand up, he picked up the Golden Sunfruit from the Sky.

"I understand!" He cried. "It calls on me!"

Gil-Galadchrist, the Mighty Wickét-Keeping King of the Aussie-Quenya Elves roared, "no!"

Túrin didn't care, shouting up to the Mëlbourne Sky. "I'm not Australian, I'm Kiwi!"

The stadium erupted. Many were shocked by the traitor in their midst.

Too late, Túrin realised his mistake of shouting his revelation aloud for all to hear. (but we have already established that Túrin was not very bright). Fearing the punishment due a traitor, Túrin turned tail, and fled.
Túrin ran and ran, passing alternately through dark forests and built-up cities of metal and tarmac until he reached a desert. The desert stretched for leagues, as far as the eye could see. (and remember, the eye could see even further back then, for this was before the earth was made un-flat, when elephants and turtles supported the disc going all the way down to – but I digress)
Where was I? More importantly, where was Túrin? At the edge of the desert, Túrin wept. How to escape? If Captain Fëanor caught him, surely all would be lost.
Then, from nowhere, a metal eagle swooped down, landing on the desert.
Túrin had no idea what this was, and it could have killed him, yet he ran towards it anyway. (As mentioned before, brains were not Túrin's strong point). Fortunately, the metal eagle was what is now known as an äeroplane, so Túrin did not die, but climbed inside.
The äeroplane took flight, and Túrin left Australia for the land of the Kiwis.

Editor's Review

I'm not going to pretend that I understood anything that was happening at any point of this story, between my poor grasp of cricket, limited Middle-Earth knowledge, and the fact that anything could happen at any moment by the authors simply saying it is so. That said, it was an absolute blast to read and I'm sure it was 100% entirely within Tolkien's vision of the world.

Author Reviews

"This is exactly as coherent as I expected. It's good to see that TTBA traditions are being upheld. Now that I think of it, it makes more sense than about fifty percent of **The Book of Lost Tales***, also known as* **The Ravings of Young JRRT***, so perhaps we did a good job after all."* - Alex Colesmith

Memoire of a Restless Spirit

YYR, Tessa Barcelo, Zoë Skoti, Milamber, The Fatigued, Voh, Tom Heger, Dandelion, and Anon

CW: Death, Strong Language

Most people think the spookiest month of the year is October, because it's the month in which Halloween falls. October is fine. It has the vibes, with leaves crunching under foot and the sun shedding light for less and less time every day. But it's January that's the real spookiest month of the year. In the dead of winter, when trees shiver with naked branches, when clouds cover the sky like a heavy blanket, when the days seem to stretch on forever, empty and cold—that's when the ghosts like to come out to play.

Most of them are harmless, but it's the ones who aren't that I'm most interested in. I shouldn't know as much about them as I do, given that I'm a completely normal human: the only kid of an accountant and a history teacher with seventeen years of boring life under my belt. I'm not well-equipped to come out of a confrontation with a malignant ghost sane. But there's a corner of the attic in my mom's house that mysteriously offers me a new book on the subject every time I go up there, and I can't resist reading them.

That's what I was doing on a bitter January afternoon when the sun had come out just enough to make reading outside bearable. The frost-bitten wood of the park bench stung beneath my legs, only protected by a sturdy pair of jeans. But the sun was out, and the cool air seemed to cleanse every breath, so outside I stayed. I had the park to myself. Or at least I did until a stranger sat next to me. Not just on the other end of the bench—right next to me. Definitely an invasion of my personal space bubble.

"Um," I said, "can I help you?"

"Interesting book you're reading." he replied nonchalantly, seemingly focused on the cover instead of me. I used this moment to look over the stranger.

His hair was like old straw, starting to break up and losing its lustre. It framed a gaunt face with sunken eyes that appeared black on first glance. Ill-kept stubble coated their cheeks, highlighting his pointed chin. He wore a drab old suit, like one I'd seen in an old photo of my dad from his 20s, complete with shoulder pads and all. Its burgundy colour seemed darker in patches, notable on the cuffs and ankles, as if something had been sprayed there. His fingernails were tarnished and unkept, almost like claws. Completing their ensemble was a pair of, bright green crocs? They seemed so out of place. As for his age, it was hard to place. He didn't look old as such, but definitely wasn't young. Maybe somewhere in his 40s.

"Where did you find such a curious object? Last I heard that book had been recalled," he continued, seemingly oblivious to my staring.

"I just found it laying around my house." I answered, curtly. "Would you mind moving back a bit? I tend to be a fan of my own personal space."

"Of course, of course. My apologies, I'm not quite used to this kind of thing," they replied cheerfully as they moved. I breathed a little more soundly at this. Conversation was fine and all (and if they were younger, maybe even encouraged), but I needed my space.

"Thank you. Yeah, I must confess I don't tend to go up to strangers much myself."

"Oh no," they said, with a slight chuckle, "that I'm used to. It's being noticed that's new."

A pause.

Like I said before, most ghosts are harmless. Most ghosts can be barely classed as *ghosts*. They're just double-takes, little indents in reality that leave you trying to blink the doubt out of your eyes. Turning to your nearest friend like, *did you see that or okay yeah never mind*, *just haven't been sleeping well I guess.* Just a sound here or a trick of the light there.

The worst I've ever seen has been a cup floating a few feet off the surface, but not much higher than I could reach. The *very* worst, and what led to me running to my mom's books in the first place, was a transparent outline turning to face me, with a stunned sort of look on its face I don't doubt it stole off of my own.

The point is, though, ghosts aren't like this. They don't walk up to people. They don't *talk.* They definitely don't wear green fucking crocs.

The pause stretched on, with the man making absolutely no move to break it. I cleared my throat.

"Okay. Right."

"Is everything alright?" he asked earnestly. Distantly, maybe a little dazed, I noticed that he was running his fingers over the ridges in the bench's wood, like he was testing it was really there. Back, forth, back, forth.

I blinked and shook my head.

"I'll just– cut to the chase. Okay?"

He cocked his head. "That seems like a good place to cut, yes."

"You're a ghost. Or, I mean– are you a ghost? You're a ghost."

I got a smile for that one, brilliant white. How could this guy afford to keep his teeth in such good shape when his nails were practically climbing off his fingers?

"I'm a ghost," he agreed mildly. "And *you*–" he jabbed a finger at the book that was laying, forgotten by now, in my lap, "– are in possession of my diary."

He savored the crispy silence in the air, "You're thinking," he smacked his lips, "of time and the fantastic ages I withhold."

"But," he retreated a bit to the seat while locking his eyes horizontally on some garden creatures at eye level, "I don't quite morph though."

"Basically you are holding my travel log." he corrected himself, "The only problem is," stiffly spreading his hands, "unexpectedly, I forgot where to go."

"So if you can kindly tell me," he gave off a pause, "my possible location," and another pause, "I'm marked by my pink footprint."

I flipped through the pages. Located on a page approaching the end, inadvertently left a fingerprint in neon pink that absolutely did not coordinate with the color of the paper, like the footmark of a strange new flavor of Doritos on the corner of the page.

I put my finger on it, in a flash, I saw myself in my field of vision, pressing the book, staring in mild astonishment at, "me"?

"With no harm, you see," I heard "myself" speaking with a tongue a bit too coarse and too acidic, "that made you stuck with me, but no one's gonna rob you of your reality."

"You see," His eyes sunken so deep, wandering along some rough edges invisible to mine.

My gaze fell back to the line immediately follows,

[You know when you wave a farewell to someone, you also burn their belongings. All those I cared about no more, burnt away with that version of me. I burnt them all.]

"I travel within people's memories."

He said it nonchalantly, as if it was a casual remark on the weather. The words reverberated like the gong of a bell. Again and again…until I heard my own voice repeating those words. *Travel…travel…mem -memories…*

Something else was changing too. I didn't see the old man anymore -- instead my vision was dragging up pictures and scenes in front of my eyes as if I was watching a movie of my life. Here was Mum, dressing me in school uniform for the first time. Here she was, packing my lunch so that I don't have to endure terrible school food. Here's Dad, clapping so enthusiastically it's embarrassing, that one time I won a prize in speech day. Here's Mum again, reading me a story – '*when the days seem to stretch on forever, empty and cold*. *That's when the ghosts like to come out to play. Don't let them toy with you.'*

The image flickered. Mum was still there, but her face was blurred. *'Why are you putting a finger on this book? Let go! Let go!'*

The last time she used that tone on me, it was when she found out I've burned a hole in the rug, and grounded me for a week. Her voice cut through my foggy recollection of memories. Flinching, I jolted back into reality.

The book was strewn face down on the floor. I started, automatically bending down to pick it up –

And hesitated.

The stranger was gone. I looked around carefully, just in case he appeared again. No. The park was as empty as it always was, dead, cold, desolate. Well, I shouldn't have lingered here in the first place. This whole mess wouldn't have happened then. I rubbed my hands, not realizing how badly they were shaking.

With some difficulty I got up from the bench, huffing puffs of fog that swirled in the air like ghosts.

I walked away, leaving the book behind on the ground. I was not going to pick it up, take it with me.

Then I stopped. What if someone else picked the book up, read it? What if the ghost got them, and they didn't realise? Someone less clued up about ghosts could get into serious trouble if they read this book. I turned around.

The book was gone. There was the bench where I'd been sitting, it was empty. The ground by the bench was bare, devoid of plants. And books. I ran back to the bench, and knelt down, checked under the bench. Definitely gone. How could I have been so stupid? Something like that – you don't let it out of your sight. I should have known better.

When I got home, I tramped upstairs, to my room. At the top of the stairs, I found the book. How had it got from the park to my house? That was when I noticed the pink footprints. They meandered across the open page of the book before stepping onto the carpet, growing gradually larger as they headed toward my room.

***

***

There wasn't a whole lot to do in the afterlife. You forgot your name, forgot your age, forgot your personal penchant for the oxford comma. Those lucky enough to hold onto some amount of corporeal manifestation won the grand prize of repeating their last moments for eternity - employed in historical re-enactment scenes that scared old women tottering about Versailles or someplace. For your average low-grade ghostie the post-life only promises the opportunity to shuffle about aimlessly unseen. Maybe muster up the mana to raise a mug a few inches; persuade a pussy or poochie to gaze into the shadows of a dark room for a second too long; or - and this one's a real laugh - breathe a cold sigh right down the back of a child, preferably one who will rouse the whole street, right as they shut their eyes for the night.

"In short, there's fuck all to do," grumbled a grim faced, grey wisp of energy using what had, up until recently, been its stubble framed mouth. "Typical," it thought, assessing recent events, "you have a single day of comic mishaps ending in you borrowing a pair of emergency flip flops and that's when you die."

The ex-body of Mr. Davies was currently flattened under a substantially sized piano, neon green crocs proudly jutting out of one end of its wooden carcass as onlookers gazed helplessly, and the guilty movers sneaked into the safety of the two-Storey piano warehouse.

His newly christened ghost wished the ground would swallow him up, and began to feel some alarm when he felt his form agree: dissipating into the 4th dimension. Memories brushed past in an indistinguishable haze as his petty human desires dissolved. Suddenly it became hard to comprehend the embarrassment of his corpse's footwear, nor fully understand the concept of green as his senses slowly overlapped with those of the greater universe - like a bathtub being introduced to the Atlantic Ocean. The trickle grew into a torrent as sounds and smells leaked out of the orifices on its face, orifices that soon ceased to exist at all. Rapidly flickering through the last emotions Mr. Davies had felt in his abruptly ended life, the collection of molecules, atoms and dust that felt very strongly like a man latched onto one: amidst grief and excruciating physical pain was desire. Desire similarly untethered to any worldly possession, desire that clung to the back of his throat and sat sticky on his nervous palms and itched his scalp; desire that begged to be moulded and used to some purpose, any purpose.

One thing all the hauntings, possessions and apparitions have in common is a strong, strong craving for attention. Just namedrop Beelzebub or some infamous historical figure (if you're feeling political) when you're wrecking someone's house and using their daughter like a karaoke machine, you might just have a blockbuster hit on your undead hands. A cursed object is handy too, usually a doll that would give you nightmares on a sunny afternoon, something to attach oneself to when you're corporeally challenged and in need of a conduit. There are many lying around the world, often squatted in by a passing spectre. But sometimes, they find their own way to you.

And, of course, all this is especially true for books. Start saying 'cursed' in front of a parapsychologist, and 'book' will be their most likely follow-up. Well, except for maybe 'house', but that one wasn't available to Mr. Davies. However, his books available were, and rather easily at that, as they were the reason that led to his green-crocsed demise in the first place. While the incorporeal form of what used to be Mr. Davies meandered through timeless eternity with burning desire in their form, lawyers were categorizing and sorting books from the library of the recently deceased. Some accidents might have happened then, and due to the previous history of the owner, the word 'cursed' started being thrown around. Which is never good for the sales. Hence, when a mysterious person clad in black coat from head to toe turned up and requested that Kerouac's *On the road* and a couple of other books return to their rightful library, nobody raised an eye about it. Nor did anybody question the lack of a name or identifiable features in that person.

It was around this time when what used to be Mr. Davies noticed a change in its non-existence. It seemed a lot more focused. Memories were flushing back, about his travels and his beloved books. The outlines of his personality were now sharper, and honed even further by the one drive his spirit preserved. He *desperately* needed one last look; one final read through that story of his. Perhaps, if reunited with the book, he will get one more shot at being more than a whisper in the aether. And, luckily for this particular determined ghost, one of his old books was currently being read by a reader with a rather perceptive mind.

And so they had found the kid on the bench, and made their presence known, the burning desire to read again allowing the specter to be seen. Mr. Davis had found plenty of energy from memories of the supernatural, yet this seventeen-year-old, with their casual 'finding' of haunted texts, was a feast. In those memories of books, they found the key to their release.

***

I peered into my room, not knowing what to expect. On my bed, smiling and kicking their green-crocsed feet with glee, was the ghost. Looking younger, or perhaps just more energized, engrossed in one of the books I had gotten from the corner in the attic a few weeks ago. He noticed me.

"I hope you will forgive a worn and tired soul the chance to depart." They pointed to a pile of books next to them, "you had more than just my travel log."

I was stumped on what to say. The invasive probe into my memories had felt violating, and now here was the perpetrator casually reading my books, on my bed, in my room. But trying to leave, trying to make peace.

"This is the last book. After this, I promise to leave." They looked genuine, a sad smile creasing their face, eyes looking at me, pleading.

The cold light of sunset broke through the wintery clouds. I released the tightness that had been building in my chest, and took a breath.

"Reading seems like a much better way to go than an exorcism, and much less work than any ritual. Go ahead, return to the memories your books hold, your memories, your life. Then let go, and you won't have to wander the world." I wasn't sure if this was true, or the right thing to say, but hopefully it meant he would leave.

I didn't quite know why he was still looking at me.

His last words: "Thank you."

The rays of the sun went through him, shining slightly green around his crocs. His form incorporeal once more. He opened the book, and faded into a transparent shadow, the book fading with him, glowing in his last light. Turning the page to end his life.

Any resemblance to fictional persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

Notably including frustration at the inefficiency of Crocs ™ at facilitating any reasonable mobility; dismissed curiosity at an unexpected rush of wind; and lastly, the crushing realisation of an oversized instrument falling on his unsuspecting head.

Editor's Review

I think that the most unique honour I can give this story is that it made me spend *far* too long debating the correct adjective for when one is wearing crocs. Crocsed? Croced? Croc-clad? Crocfooted?? Crocified???
Anyway as for the story itself, the concept of a ghost travelling within people's memories is a fascinating one. This story was a nice glimpse at the concept, but there are a lot of places it could be taken and I'd love to see it explored further.

The Worm

Marko Trandafilovski

CW: Death, Decay, Child Endangerment

Spite-words alone do you see in all
but to you only truth can I tell;
the keening gold, the glitter-red fee —
these rings will be your bane.

Fáfnismál 9.

"Reggy, it's rising!"

Laughing on the roof, reaching, beaming for the warmth of the sun. Tell me: can it be held in your hands? Liquid radiance, gleaming breath. Impalpable fingers to mingle with mine, kindliest union: nothing wanting in that embrace – except –

Reggy, sleepy? Naughty Reggy.

I've held my palms
to heaven's cinder:
now hard I'll send them
'gainst hairy paunch.

A stinging clap: a slap to remember. But sink deeper: so soft! Firm but yielding: flecked with fuzz. Ladies, let's knead a little further; we might induce – *hiss*: yes, there it goes – Regin's dawnly rumble. 'Tis a fierce utterance, tinged with a felid's wrath. But see, as the demonstration proceeds: lids flicker, temples knot, limbs jerk free from sleepy rigour. Observe, with what might, menaced by this dread beast, you can muster: a finger, forensically inserted into the ear – "Child, confound you!" – thumbs thrust into flaring nostrils – "Theathe! Dethitht!" – and thus he riseth at uncanny pace, in all pot-bellied terror –

Better retreat. Just a bit.

There he sits: my brother, upright, slumped in stern disarray. O lovely sight! See him lift his hand, dry, calloused, and hide it amid the hair of his drink-shell. Heaving mound, straining bulge; round enough to hide something else that is not the world's to see. Head bowed a little downwards, features, save for the weathered tip of a bulbous nose, lurking behind a morass of matted brown coils. The sun is running her hands through them – look: gold, they're flashing gold, for just an instant –

Beautiful?

Quick to his side. Hands on shoulders: shakey-shake.

"Reggy. Tell me. This morning. Am I lovely?"

Eyes turn slowly to meet mine. He's still not happy, one glued half-shut. Such harsh head-creases. Old-but-young. Unseemly unsymmetried face. But it doesn't, it never takes long. Temples loosen: cleft mouth twists into a grin. Smile. It makes me happy.

He takes a lock of hair, wraps it round his thumb, and holds it up to catch the morning light:

"The serpent's path streams from your scalp-fields:
No sight that I know could be sweeter".

Yes, Fafnir. You are lovely. Lovely as the glowing dawn, as untouched snow, as unreaped pastures of grain. Never change, Fafnir; you are my sun, my moon; my everything is in your arms. Come now. Give your brother a cuddle. Mummy knows: no-one in this world could do it better.

A splendid Sun-Day. Not too warm, not too cold: just right. But all alone. What's a clever little boy to do? Reggy shut up all day in the farm with daddy. He said he would play with me. He said. What can they be doing, that's what I'd like to know. No. Boring. Digging into something dull. I tried to sit. wait. sit. wait, but really. A fellow can only endure so much of such things. So off we went, rifled through daddy's runestones. Don't care, Reggy. I'll read them if I want to. Read and read, but with what result? Already forgotten one half, but remember it was boring well enough. Dull and useless: dead. Just right for da –

Close. Take care skipping through the roots. Where are we, anyway?

Not happy, no. Boring brothers. One busy, the other missing. All the way I walked, past trees and trees. West, always west, to the forest's edge. Peeked at the rock through the undergrowth – if stealth successful, you see, ear-pulling perhaps in the offing – deserted. Well, you think. Devious today. What to do? Wait a bit, naturally. Good things come to those who wait. Fell asleep. Can't be helped; walking makes you sleepy. Shadows longer, too long waiting; peeked again. Still deserted. Piqued. Then it strikes you – seen? With guard down – lying in the leaves – laughing? Can't let that stand, no-no. What then?

Muster courage. Nerves nettled, yes; but steel the senses. Off with tunic and trousers. Stand tall at the river-brink, proclaim readiness to the world. Ignore reflection. Call lessons to mind – count to three, wade in with unwavering speed – cold cold cold

And I even opened my eyes too. Looked round and round and round. Round stupid salmon-eyes everywhere you turn. But no Ot. Big he is, hard to miss. Alone, then, shivering on the stone; chat with the chilly autumn breeze. Do some jumps as it dallies with the trees. But long, too long till dry again.

Please, branch. Bear my weight. Please: I don't weigh much, I won't stay long. Thin and slight I am, like you. We can be friends. Come, why don't we watch for birds together? Yes, it's true, you can't climb any higher. But lift me up and I'll tell you what I see. Haven't you ever wondered? Mulled and mulled and ruminated. How big the world might really be.

Free of the leaves. There it is: sky ablush with evening. See, sun, I've come, I've kept our tryst. Not late, no. Stay awhile. Stay! You and I, aren't we meant to be? Sole companions.

Still you fall away from me.

Late. Dinner soon. Home.

Walk. Traipse. Shuffle. Crush. Hateful forest. I'm hungry. My tummy's rumbling, can't you hear? Insolent path, give ear! Too long, too long and so far I've walked and my legs are getting shorter and still so far to go and and and and

ah. farmhouse.

All alone. All day. But –

"—you'll reign in that reeking voice of yours when speaking to me, boy—"

Still talking. Still! Daddy not happy. Patience thin. Intervention ill-advised. A touch of subtlety? Indeed: reconnaissance required. Slither round the side of the house; snake your way up the old tree; deftly leap from bowed branch to bloody hands on thatch. Then, fingers digging in, crawl your way to roof-hole; cock ear, but, make sure, keep pretty head hidden –

"Knowledge is power, boy! Power! You know how much I know? No?"

No, daddy. Don't be angry. Not again.

"Arcane lore flocks through my mind! You hear me? Flocks! Sorcerous fields, ripe for the picking! If an oaf can take from giants with a hammer then I can damn well do it with magic. Magic, can't you see? Here, now, in front of me! Come closer" – a rush, a stumble – "touch the stones, Regin! Touch them! You can feel it, Regin, feel the magic" –

Thud on the table. Reggy's fist?

"Look here, father! Listen to me. We are farmers. We live from the earth. Do you remember? That is all your children have ever been; all that you have ever been to them. Try, try, I know you'll recall. Honest work, an honest home; the dream of every man. Many winters since that choice was sealed. The letters are beyond you. Long, long the years since last you carved them. I do not wish to be cruel, father, but your mind is failing, and they do not forgive. Mother –"

Nails screech-scratching on the wood of the table. Scratching. Screeching. Broken. Cracked. Yellow. Snapped. Hate, hate it.

"Better! Better! She needs it! The cold air makes her sick, Regin. She coughs next to me at night, she hacks until the morning comes. I can't, I can't stand it. Up there – how they live – all their furniture, golden! It would suit her hair. The finest apples – faces that cheat age and sickness – gold, if only I had, could get…"

Father wants to weep, but his throat is dry. He coughs instead. He rattles like my box of apple pips.

"Father, lift your head. Look here. Mother –"

There's a prickling on my shoulder. Is this the hand of someone older? And the breath that plays upon my ear –

"Naughty boy to eavesdrop here".

Thrill in the spine. Leap over the hole; turn with a flash to face the voice. But to voice the face?

Hypnotic spectacle. I cannot hold it with my eyes. Pale cheeks, with a dash of red – sweet red, strange apple-blush – soft red, quilted kindness – seething ire, sinking fervour of dusk. Skin of sun-burnt snow, night-bleached sand, sour flesh sickness-flecked; dark hair dancing in the wind, raven-wise, vulture-grim, brimming with the night. Climb not that tapered avian hook, peer not into those gleaming pits; too deep, deep they are to leave again.

An arm extends, half-cloaked in something diaphanous. Talons stretch, ripple with feathers in a gesture of welcome-

"Skittish little thing, hopping here, hopping there. How its face shifted! Only a little quicker than the sky".

Dizzying tones: like edged honey. But it's true – rain is falling. Holes in the clouds, holes in my clothes. Wet holes burnt into my head. Those eyes, close them, turn them away –

"I sense a creature after my own heart". There are scaled fingers on my shoulder. "A changeable thing that grins at sunsets". White claws beneath my chin. "Its skull is rich, but its chest-coffers" – thick nails digging into the chest – "hollow". The claws press, and my neck slowly rises. "Come," he says, "my kin are here, speaking with your own below. We're not wanted, but we'll go".

No. No! I don't want to go.

"Little boys shouldn't lie," he says, as I tumble down the tunnels of his eyes. "You've yet to look within".

Post: pockmarked. Nice and warm. Not wet. What was I…

Ah: forgive me. Weighed down by a long and weary day, beguiled by the heat of the hall – sleep's soft embrace. Reconnoitring? This pillar: marvellous vantage. Quite, and fortune strikes – eyes to add to ears? visitors grace our grimy doorstep. Perhaps – caution – a peek about the post's side –

Yes: this must be how strangers see my father.

There he sits, at the farm's nether end, ogling the entryway. Sits: but it would be hard to picture that seat, that table parted from his shrunken frame. Shrivelled fingers, pale intruders in the muddied boards before him, sink half-hidden into shallow grooves dug by long and ruined nails; little can be seen of body or arms, for hair and beard, uncut now for many months, have grown wildly across all, and found purchase in worm-bitten wood. It is an infestation of white, crawling over floor and wall behind him, mingling in unclean dissonance with recoiling brown. The face's skin is mottled, voluminous; it hangs in dappled folds from brittle protruding bones, drowns empty sockets crusted by rheum.

How much of you is left, daddy?

"It pains us to disturb your home on this inclement eve". Voice to the right, scuttle to the left. "The wind is bitter tonight, farmer. We had hoped for harbour from its cruelty".

Well the man speaks as the gale whistles through the gaps in our walls. He stands before two companions – leader, perhaps? But his face is slack, gaze focussed on something distant from father's knotted brow. These are late visitors.

Yes: watch Reggy still as he considers. And it is he who answers:

"It is not our custom to turn away wanderers at our doors. But know that we have little floor and less straw to offer. A night spent here will be a cold one".

Some seconds of silence as rain drips from the absent man's cloak. Then speaks the man to his right, hooded, head hidden, leant on a dry staff:

"A steading is better though small it be,

Everyone's a man at home".

Daddy tries to ball his fist. Scratching, screeching. Reggy clamps his wrist before something snaps and replies –

"Be that as it may, we've no food to share. The storms have been unkind to our crop; barely enough remains to see us and our livestock through the winter. Had you arrived earlier, we'd have divided the meat we dined on. You are too late".

Dinner? Unsated. Hush; we'll soon feed.

Dark man next, left of the first – shadow in his face: can't quite see it. Strange accent; hard to place.

"Worry not. Well we know how our lateness shames us. I come" – raises a shapeless mass from his back; drops it at his feet – "bearing gifts. Kinsman Haenir, would you bring our catch into the light?"

The middle man turns and lifts the burden wordlessly; he walks the length of the hall and lays it on father's table. "My kinsman had the uncommon luck to slay this beast mid-meal this very morning. He struck it with a stone; we praised his strength. It would be our honour were you to partake as we dined".

Half-free of a mass of formless fabric, a dead otter sprawls across the aged wood. Its skull is shattered, sleek skin brutely torn from the wound's edges. Pallid is its flesh, the complexion of death, or of a boy robbed of his time in the sun.

"But how do you do it, Ot?"

It's a summer evening, long and pregnant with languor. Mayflies drift low over the stream's gentle passage; the horizon's dull red at the drowsing kiss of the sun. I'm sitting hand-in-hand with Ot, pressed against the softness of his side, gold and silver mingling as my hair is lost in his. We're on a flat rock, his favourite; short enough to feel the water lapping at our toes. He laughs, lifts his head to meet a sudden breeze; the light catches his face as he moves, half-hairs shining on smooth sun-touched skin.

"Do what?"

Naughty. Streak for his ear. But he leaps into the water faster than little arms can match. In a few seconds a furred head resurfaces –

"Do this?" he twists, giggling, with inhuman glee, with all an otter's unforced ease. "Could it be that Fafnir wants to learn to swim?"

"Not fair!" Can't follow. Cruel brother. "You know what I mean".

A softer smile on that pointed face. He dives, and grasps the rock's edge with familiar arms, head and hands, furless now, resting by my feet.

"I know what you mean. But I don't think you want to. Not really".

What?

He grins. "See? You're confused. Your forehead's scrunching. Should we really talk about this? It might ruin your complexion". Beast. He's laughing. "Don't pinch me! Apologies, exalted one". A pause; and then he runs a clawed paw down my shin.

"It might look like I'm changing" – won't you meet my eyes? – "but I'm only bringing out what's already inside". Looks up. No, no, I don't get it. His brows knot; creases parting perfect hide. "You know I'm not good at this". Thinking, thinking. Then: "I watch the salmon leave their young to hatch in the stream. They're not much at first, nothing like fish. Tiny orange balls, good and quick to eat. But give them two months hiding under the stones – still small, but they have scales, fins; they move, live. That was in them from the beginning, even if you couldn't see it. And when you spend enough time with them you do see: the promise of what's to come, the memory of what was in what is. It's no different for me. Swimming here one day I realised what was in me. All I do is keep that promise and remember it".

Wipe the water away. Warm, yes, because of the sun, the sun. "There isn't anything inside. I've looked and looked. Everywhere is empty".

"Nothing," taking my hands; warm, warm, his face is swimming, "is empty. I don't know what's in you, my brother, but what I see now," silken palm stroking my cheek, "is lovely, lovely; something that will awe the world in its time. Come now, be at peace; leave off worrying and swim with me".

Dead?

"Mongrel wretches!"

Broken?

"Sightless slavish creatures –"

No, he, he had, there was more –

"Should have kept your eye, shouldn't you? Gangling graceless goose. Pitiless thing, yes, oh-so-pitiful, stumbling on a crumbling stick, decked out in rags like a beggar. I know how you live up there, rag-man, second-rate sorcerer, fib-fattened shape-changing bitch. Halls made of gold, eh? I'll bet you sit on chairs of gold too, hm? Maybe shit in golden toilets too? Or is it yellow cups for perfect piss? No matter. Sons! –"

you're alive, aren't you? pretending – a game like we – hiding under the water, slipping – no, no time for this, get away from me, floor, can't meet you now – streaming-streaking to his side, put your hands over the heart, look-look for something inside –

"The two sons I've got left, that is. What's a weary farmer to do…You, yes, it was you, masked monster, Just-as-High as my arse…"

empty? no rattle – nothing in the skull – shut him up, Reggy, help! – Reggy – why the scythe, you can't –

"Yes, Regin. Useless cripple in the fields, good for nothing but spinning spineless words. But see, All-Father, this son that I've raised! Half a man in every way that counts, but to hold a farming-tool to threaten your lives…"

why?

"The other, though – well. We're wasting time".

"Are we to think" – serrated glee – "that you would spurn our gift?"

"Lackey! Curb that beak of yours. Louts, I'll formalise this. Stand and give ear. See if hoary Hreithmar can't yet string together a spell or two –

The corpse that lies cracked on the table –

That's my son you've slain;

Sordid killers, law do I summon

With all warding witness

To hold you to what right reckons,

To pay me for the treasure that you've taken".

tug-tug on his rotten robe. Daddy can't you save him?

wreathe a song and whisper words –

"Back, worm! Away! Not worth the air he steals from this stuffy hall, no, nor the floor you flatten sprawled like that, limp scarecrow in the dust. Pathetic thing, what does it want? Why? You should know what happened to that fattened hide, you, skipping and prancing in the forests, off at the crack of dawn to watch him catch two-and-a-quarter fish in a day. Could've learnt that meagre much at least, but no-no, sweet little eyeballs too soft to dirty in the river, lank little limbs too feeble to chase lax salmon. Look at it lying there. Look how the firelight gleams on its gilded scalp. The gall it has, to come into the world with her head, her eyes. Take and take it did, and now she's next to me night by night hack-hacking. Enough I've had. Horrid hollow nothing, drinking, drinking, never returning. Wretched beasts these beggars are, but they'll give. Out of my sight. Out, so help me, or I'll stamp you – "

My blood's creeping into the earth. I tripped earlier, you see. Maybe the earth is creeping into me. Not anymore. I've been lifted high, folded over someone's shoulder, drifting closer to the drenching cold. "Stay on the roof" – the familiar tones of a brother – "and away from the tree," wet though it is, wet as can be. Out we go into the needling rain; I am left to pool in the soil.

"Am I lovely this morning, Reggy?"

Winter is coming. There is still a heartbeat to the air, but it is brittle. We're on a walk in the forest, just after sunrise: chill and bracing, as Reggy would say. Merciless file for the mind.

"As lovely as you'll ever be".

Yes. Much lovelier than you. And I'm faster, too. Look at you. Hobble. Hobble. Stumble. Trip. An exclamation: ten tortured seconds of extrication. Don't you know by now that the thorns aren't gentle?

"Hurry up".

"Don't be cruel. There's no sense in hurrying with nowhere to go".

Annoying. "We could be going somewhere".

"Could we?" I can hear your misshapen eyebrows rising. "We never seem to be. Do tell if today's different, though". Mildest of men, master of mockery. Don't murder with words, but without them. Twist 'em round your little finger, keep it hidden all the while –

"Stern silence. Fafnir, are you keeping me in suspense?"

And yet with some he can't stop talking. So smart; so small. "Why don't you play with me any more, Reggy?"

Stern silence, yes. Come, come back from that one. Spin specious words from riven lips.

"You know why". Impassive. Cool, smooth like a cliff-face that has never touched the sea. A face that doesn't exist.

"You love Daddy more than me". Come on. Break, break. Show me a crack in those cold grey stones.

"No. Daddy needs me more than you. He's old now. He doesn't remember things like he used to. He gets angry and confused and has no-one at home for the farm-work. You know all this".

Daddy is loud and cruel but thin and dry. Soon Daddy will wither away. Away. Go away, Daddy, away.

"You're older too, Fafnir. Some years still until you're a man, but you're clever. You can look after yourself".

Look after? Work not play. "I want to help. Mummy said I helped just by being. She said I brought smiles with my face and arms. But he doesn't smile when he looks at me now. I tried reading one of his stones, the one that says *fee*. But he saw me and shouted and I had to run away before I was finished". Angry he looked, like a shrivelled plum.

Quiet. There it is. A crack in the ice. "Don't touch the stones, Fafnir".

"Why? They're magical, aren't they? Couldn't I help if I learnt – "

"No". The break is jagged. "His mind is crumbling. Often it can't remember what was and what is. You reminded him of something that used to be. That's no help. Do you understand?"

Yes: you understand, my child, don't you? Trace the roads that they travel, golden stallions in the sky above; put your finger to the path of the sun. They're busy, Fafnir, and very clever; the world rests on their running. But they are kind; they looked upon us as they ran, and sent gentle gifts to gleam about our brows. See, lovely one, how this tress catches the sun; it was their gift to me, and mine to you. Wear it proudly, and it will never desert you; wear it and I will always be with you.

"But I" – pale shine upon my shoulders. Not what I did; what I am, or what I'm not.

Regin has slipped into a fault. No words are spoken as we wander home.

If you lie for long enough in the rain, you get warm. Did you know that? I didn't. I knew it about snow – when I was five Daddy found me fuzzy in the field when it was dark and the snow was thick enough for me to lie in like a bed. He wasn't happy and he took me inside and put me next to the fire and whispered some words, and suddenly I stopped feeling sleepy. I'm sleepy now and warm. You can't lie in rain like a bed but when you have straw underneath you it's almost the same. I want to sleep, but I can't. I have to wait, wait. For the strangers to go, to go inside again. Can you hear it down below? The air folding, unfolding, spitting out something nameless?

"Back I've come, kinsmen! A cruel outing it was. I won't do it next time; I'll refuse absolutely. Dreary fellows, those dark-elves are" –

No-one lets the no-man finish. A stick is rasping on the floor. Dry noise – ash – too dry for this weather; uncanny, something wicked –

"Don't interrupt me, All-Father. I've fished my fish for the day; leave me to my fun with men. Here, farmer; feast your eyes on this, if it doesn't blind you. Up, kinsman Haenir! Stuff with glee, pack with abandon!"

His arms are gleeful, silk-clad worms, dancing between fire and shade. What's that, what work are they directing? Ot is standing up again. Tail first, thick and taut; then fattened feet grip the ground. Stomach swells, bulging tall and proud; arms fill, hang at broken angles. Head last, looking up, up, up; Ot is straining for the sun.

You're looking the wrong way, Ot. It's inside, not out. Not yours, not anyone's to remember, but it's there. Gentle gift.

"Lumpy" – talons raking over skin – "but little do farmers care for art. Heft it closer, Haenir – a moment – now, how likes you our handiwork?"

Father's mouth is thick with spittle. We can't see it, but we can, can't we? Hair-bonds straining at their ties, old eyes alight with pale fire. I hear him, beneath the kindly rustle of the rain, running leather-fingers over stricken silk. "Not enough," he says, rattles through phlegm, pips skipping too fast for his lips; "not enough. I want him out of my sight. Gold must hide him. To the last inch".

A laugh rings out: rake running through ice. "So shall it surely be. Come, Father, work thy sorcery". Forward the staff; gold-shards glimmer, skitter about the hame. The no-man glides about the spell, carving words unheard into the earth: as above, so below. See: mud-fur is swallowed by creeping light. Shattered buckles and sundered rings spin in circles about the corpse, no-man shimmers, half-here, half-there, pilgrim by sluggish shifts in darkness; no need now to remember, Ot. As within, so without.

"It is done". Herein the liar's satisfaction. "Nothing wanting, farmer? We've done much for you this night".

Six seconds of stern silence. Still the falling of the rain; the wind has bated its breath.

Father speaks on the turn of the seventh. No anger; affronted rapture. "Sloppy". Moistened lips. How long since we saw them glisten? "Your work is sloppy – I – pert, disobedient – see there, left of the mouth –" no rain they needed to grow full and wet.

"Where? The light is dim. I look, but I do not see. But so sure you seem. Come closer, good man. Show me".

An irregular clatter, the beginnings of a cry: Reggy's dropped his scythe to intervene. But too late. Cover your ears, I can't; my arms are too comfy. Hear it straining, straining; reach and rip, rend and tear; white hair, stuck tight to the dirt of walls and floor, breaking free from arid scalp-fields. You can imagine it, can't you? Water again, after long last, for dead roots, red and rich. But no pain in this, nor in the cracks, the scrabbles of disused joints below; over the table he crawls, clutches at his son for flesh-holds; the head he takes in a brittle vice, and snaps a nail at the snout.

"Here". Frantic, frantic! "Here! Look, I'm pointing, showing – can't you see it? So fine, so brazen! –"

Quiet. Long, low.

"You would quibble over a single whisker?"

But he would. No-man knows that. His voice is grinning a catlike grin.

“You’ll do it. You’ll cover it, you’ll do what’s due”.

“Yes, I’ll do”. He’ll do with delight. “Come, Father. Complete the work”. The rag-man steps into sight; the stick has fallen from his side. He reaches deep into his pocket, and sets it graceless upon his palm: a little golden ring. He lifts it, and for an instant, it flares in the dull light of the fire; but in another it is gone. Soiled hands caress the hole that it fills, trembling with an ancient delight; they move to no words, but say all in their rustling.

“Gold is now counted, compensation you’ve gained,

Immense measure for my head;

No kindly fate calls for your son;

A bane for you both is coming”.

So he says, and back they fall, fold into the waiting air. Only his long smile remains, to chase me through circular dripping dreams.

Curled in the corner of the hall you’ll learn, sweet boy, to make yourself small. Not small enough for daddy, who snarled when he saw thin arms snaking down his smoke-stained wall; too small for daddy, who forgot them to fawn over gold as they disappeared behind his knotted son into a cranny. Daddy, daddy, sleeping now, sprawled on a bed of bracteates, grasping at a ruptured otter’s skin for warmth.

Warmth. So warm I am. Not wet any longer, drier in here, but there is a fire in my flesh. Flesh like fire, Reggy said, crawled over my brow with calloused knuckles. Rough hands, grating tones. He went away to find help, he said; a healing draught to run cool down the throat. You have a fever, he said; the wind and the rain hugged too tight. Stay here, he said, stay by the fire; keep warm.

Warm. It is much too warm. The fire mutters with resentment; it doesn’t console like the rain. Hateful coals, low-glowing; conniving tongues, tracing taunts in the corners of my eyes; heavy smoke, reaching, creeping when I’m not looking, slipping immovable hands about my throat.

Throat. Smoke-ring taut about my neck. Can’t stay here, hot, dizzy; get up, stumble, look for somewhere cool to lie. Reggy, look, I’m stumbling, slower than you usually do. It’s painful, Reggy, my legs are aching. Can’t you hobble back faster, Reggy?

Legs convulse: trip, crumple. Hit the cheek on something hard: ignore the pain, for it’s cold, cold, cold. Cold old gold. Not soft, but soothing.

Fafnir, Fafnir, with a fire in his flesh.

Now he begins to understand. Aren’t I a wondrous thing? Cold, yes; but a heart that burns for one has not the warmth for all. Am I not tender? A bed for you, for your father, for all the world. Gladly will I embrace digit, arm, or neck; your entirety I’ll welcome, without a word, and grow a mote redder in the taking. I’ll fill you from head to toe, gild every inch of blemished skin; be with you always, cool and kindly, winking comrade in the sun.

Fafnir, Fafnir, feel it girdle your finger: a little golden ring, a generous thing; a gentle blessing. Long is its reach. The sun walks on paths of gold, wolves in envy on its dregs. Golden veins pour through the earth, prick even chill stone to grieving. Land-lords and their honoured names live and die by its law. Know this: the world is girdled by a ring of gold, that itself was its birth, and whose death is itself also. It is father unto all perfection.

Fafnir, Fafnir, remember it, call to mind what you learnt long ago. Keep the promise of what is, remember what will be. See it, dreadful in its scaled grace, streaming with distant splendour in the void; cower before it, regal, terrible, drowning in numberless skins aeon-shed. Stand tall upon its forked tongue, peer into the abyss; shake in fear, shiver in exultation. Fall back, let go, for you know it: you are walking the round road, the only road that is.

In and out and up and down. You are nothing, Fafnir, but these. For the many are one, and the one is not many.

What we’re all missing: a mother’s touch. The tender weight of certainty; something to fill the void.

So flourish, Fafnir, kindly one; stream splendid in the night. Hack and tremble in the dirt as your heart turns in upon itself; scratch at the ground, scrabble and moan; pull at the ring that bites your finger as scales slough from gentle metal. Weep as your tongue splits, bloody your scalp, while still you can, as lovely hair digs solid into its bed; cover your eyes as pupils sharpen, bones crack and body lengthens. You will be lovely, lovely; you will gleam uncanny at times of twilight, feared darling of the sun and moon. You will not reap fields, but all that is; the golden earth will seek its bliss in you. Fafnir, you will embrace the world, and for this win its deathless love.

It is pale night. No clouds occlude the stars; they shine with an unshifting light. In their midst hangs a bloated moon; it has walked strange ways across the sky, but now, at the witching hour, lies still. Yellow radiance bleeds from its face, drips slow to the earth beneath to run and spread across the soil.

There is a clearing in the forest below: small, but it is alone. A house sits in its centre. The eye cannot escape it: a hole to fit the weeping mass above. Like calls to like; moon-spill crawls into the glade, glides up rotten walls. Across the thinning thatch it runs, to the tear in its eastern quarter. Down it comes, and pools upon a scene of still repose.

The old man is sleeping. He wanders somewhere peaceful as he dreams. The light slithers across his brow, sharpens a fraying net of lines, but they are loose; he wanders in dreamful ease. Tender is the night. Only a slight shroud of fading white between weary back and bed of broken metal; but on he sleeps, hair-wisps slack across the silent mound.

Poor man, too old and weak to plug the breach in his roof. The ailing trees demand a breath, rattling inhalation. They claw at their fellows' sides in exertion; strive, strive, and release; sink back at last to fitful rest. Unhappy suspiration, far it errs, reaching blindly for dissipation. Into the hall it creeps, sets a tremor through the gold's snowy pall, parts robe from skin. A contraction – jaw clenches – cold has bled into the joints.

He shivers, lids flicker; the waiting light slides beneath. Sickly luminescence: no friend to slumber. He stirs, moans, mutters; clutches at the otter-skin, shuffles nearer to his hard-won heap. The fire is low, only a few coals yet winking. Where, he wonders, are his sons? Little lingers of the evening: only vague and hateful malcontent. Whence this restlessness, surviving even sleep? Cruel it is, cruel. He cannot remember.

He raises his head and cries softly. It is cold, so cold. A chill eats at his bones. He can hear it without: the hacking of the wind in the trees. He hates, hates it. He clamps his hands to his ears and bends forwards, deaf to the grating of his spine. Into the dying flame he stares, seeks solace in ash.

Too dim; all too dim. Brighter is the night without, brighter the moonlit room about. Too bright, all too bright; not dark nor light, but something merciless between. A nameless pain rends his skull, but there is none, no rest to be had. Back and forth he rocks upon his clinking nest.

Lo – there – a firmer shimmer beyond the fire's edge. Two spheres, pendent in the doorway, pregnant with the moon's unlight. Hreithmar's eyes have lost their way, hieing hither-thither; up and down and round-about they roll, until they meet the watchers. Darkling, gemling things they are; set in something half-acknowledged that twists in the frame at hall's end.

Filigreed contortion. Forward it winds, rippling obscene in the pliant dust. The ash-bed welcomes it, thick and pallid; drowsing ember-tips glow their last as it brushes them in passing. It gathers at the father's feet, coil on ghastly coil, and rises, now left, now right. Hypnotic spectacle, his gaze cannot escape it, even as his body unmoving strains; right, then left, in regular and measured time. Unspeakable bobbing, closer it comes, near-touches his nose; eyes widen, flash in final clarity; cataracts clear, slack confusion breaks; pupils bloom with fear.

No petty terror is this; no thought now in Hreithmar's shrunken skull for false mischiefs and wrongs undone. It is his soul that quails. See the water dousing his sides, night-shirt's wetting disguised by the moon: some things we never forget. Scales unhasp to surround him; his heart is ready to patter its last. And yet – as coils enclose, sliding screen constricts – O, sweetest of shifts: serenity unlocks the jaw, pupils soften into perfect circles; up he peers, into the gaping dark-gap above, and sings within as he sinks from sight. Take me, golden one, press your splendour to my breast; hold me, lovely one, keep me as I seek my rest.

Soon shall it set.

Basking on the roof, sleeping, streaming, shimmering fetter of the farm. Tell me: can you fathom it? Manifest excrescence of the mind, rank beast born of transgression. All is shameful in its sight. Sun-hands recoil wanton from its clutch; the wind thrills to skirt its withering breath. Chimeric thing, impossibly crowned, its tyranny waxes as it feasts: pity us! We lust for it the more as it festers in its noisomeness.

Nothing wanting in that embrace, nothing but everything. How we tremble in our yearning. A touch to muffle every pore, unblinking eyes to peer past the heart; what horrid relief to be known. Take it in, be taken in; the dreamer calls you to his hoard. Drink from his hollow chalice, sup upon the sour air; join him, and eat of yourself.

We know thee, Fafnir, what thou art. Fathomer, we revile thee: everything that we never wanted. Crawl back into the shadow, kindly one, warped involution of night; there alone have we a place for thee. Unmeant thou were for light of day. Worm, see how it swells with the gloaming, shudders as the sun slinks from the sky; it whispers in our blood. Hear us – heed our call –

Fafnir, Fafnir, fly now hither,

Long, too long have we waited,

Helm of terror, heart of darkness,

Marrow-world's meeting wheel.

Before thee, Fafnir, we know ourselves. Bear no ire, serpent; welcome us as thou thyself art welcomed. Bless us, absolve us of our apathy. Receive us, though we deny thee, to the last and to the basest; even to the furtive thing hobbling free now of the forest, bent beneath the hulking sack heaped upon its twisted back.

Trinket Trader of Bogus Artefacts

TTBA Michaelmas 2024